

The Indonesian Collection

The Indonesian Collection of the Vatican Ethnological Museum consists of more than one thousand objects representing the people, cultures and religions of this vast geographical area.

The selection of artefacts presented here allows us to appreciate and learn about the rich artistic heritage of Indonesia, through ancient and contemporary objects.

The oldest collection, donated by Bishop Eugène Tisserant (1884-1972), consists of 40 fine bronze statues, dating from the 8th to the 14th century representing Buddhist and Hindu divinities. From Java comes the richest and most complete collection featuring a group of 30 puppets for the wayang shadow theatre, and a screen with three panels.

The Islamic world is represented by a unique miniature Qur'an, dating from the late 19th century with characters so small it requires a magnifying glass to read. Christianity is represented by several works in Indonesian styles: of particular interest is a crucifix decorated with the motifs of the Asmat people, an indigenous group of Papua.

Other indigenous Indonesian cultures are also documented by many objects that skilfully illustrate their ancient traditions: from Kalimantan there are over 300 items, mostly representing everyday and ritual use; from Sumatra and the island of Nias there are 50 artefacts, including the prominent ancestor statues. Many other ethnic groups are represented in the Museum: Aceh, Batak, Bugis, Makassar, Toraja, and the Kenyah, who are the creators of fine woven fabric and beautiful shields with magical patterns.

Finally from Bali there are elegant pictorial representations on palm leaves, narrating a popular love story, and a statue of Singa, the legendary winged dragon-lion.



*Threefold screen with figures of wayang theatre
Java, Indonesia
late 19th - early 20th century
leather; pigments, 225 x 268 cm
Inv. 121358*