

# Woodcarvings exhibited in Fine Arts Gallery

By Caroline Leong

Primitive Asmat woodcarvings symbolizing a lifestyle of worship and headhunting are currently on display in the Fine Arts Gallery.

Located in Fine Arts 212, "The Asmat: Redefining Culture" exhibition will be on display until Nov. 4.

The artwork belongs to the Crosier Missions in Hastings, Neb. Creighton has gained access to the artwork with the help of three fine arts affiliates.

The three coordinators are Dr. Roger Aikin, art history professor; Dr. John Thein, printmaking professor, and Marcia Winter fine arts admissions assistant.

## "Tree people"

Asmat, which means both "we the three people" and "we the tree people," conveys the belief that spirits reside in trees, Aikin said.

Because the Asmats believe that wood and people are alike, their woodcarvings are created to control the spirits, he said.

Unlike "superfluous, pretty Western artwork," the Asmat display features "different kinds of art absolutely essential to be culture," Aikin said.

Although the Asmat people no longer practice headhunting rituals, their art reflects their beliefs toward the deceased.

"They live in constant dread of not having properly appeased the spirits of their ancestors or recently deceased kinsmen," said the Rev. Jerome W. Rausch of the Cro-

sier Missions, "Much of their art representing ancestor figures is thus used for ceremonies of appeasement."

Displayed are representative ceremonial objects used by the primitive society: a soulship, an ancestor pole, drums, arrows and spears.

The soulship, resembling a dug-out canoe without a bottom, carries occupants with human and animal qualities combined. The ship is used for "expelling the spirits of the dead during the initiation into manhood and the victims of headhunters," Aikin said.

The Asmats believe the spirits from their ancestors and headhunted victims remain with them, Aikin said.

Fearing an endless cycle of revenge, ancestor poles representing victims and ancestors are made to "hopefully put their spirits to rest," he said.

## Skull pillows

The skulls displayed come from headhunting victims and ancestors. The skulls serve two purposes: to control the spirits of the dead and to be used as pillows, he said.

Discovered in 1953, the Asmat tribe is located in Irian Jaya, New Guinea. The tribe is currently controlled by the Indonesian government.

The Asmat people are being exploited by the Indonesian government, Aikin said. They are herded into villages, poorly educated and plagued by diseases.