Paddles From Mentawai Islands, Indonesia

Recognizing the contribution art has had in the Mayo Clinic environment since the original Mayo Clinic Building was finished in 1914, Mayo Clinic Proceedings features some of the numerous works of art displayed throughout the buildings and grounds on Mayo Clinic campuses as interpreted by the author.

Commonly used items often reveal a craftsmanship and artistry in their design and function. Such is the case with Paddles from Mentawai Islands, Indonesia. Hand-carved from a single piece of wood, and commonly referred to as “Tuku” (descriptive plaque) both paddles are elegant and austere.

The paddles are artifacts of a primeval culture whose livelihood and means of travel depended heavily on waterways. Based on the rugged makeup of the islands shaped by volcanic activity and the volatility of the waves from the Indian Ocean, such travel would have been difficult. The larger of the two paddles was likely intended for ocean-based travel while the smaller was for inland river usage (descriptive plaque). Half-moon handles and leaf-shaped blades give these paddles a distinct tropical flair.

Paddles are 57 inches long and from the 19th century (descriptive plaque). They are located in the elevator alcove on the 6th floor of the Gonda Building, Rochester, Minnesota Campus.

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