

# PRIMITIVE PIECES

## The Newsletter of The Museum of Primitive Art and Culture

1058 Kingstown Road, Room 5  
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[www.primitiveartmuseum.org](http://www.primitiveartmuseum.org)

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### ***"A spectacular dance . . . for the entertainment of the onlooker."***

**The Ladies of the Rolling Pin will show us their well-seasoned steps on April 7th**

In the medieval performance art known as morris dancing, the dancers almost always are men. One of the few women's teams is based here in South County. On April 7th, the Ladies of the Rolling Pin will visit the Museum to share their unique version of this entertaining ritual dance.

Organized in 1998, the Ladies have appeared at Waterfire; at First Night in Providence; at the Peasants' Feast, part of the Chorus of Westerly's Twelfth Night performances; at the New England Folk Festival, and at weddings and festivals, sometimes teaming up with the Westerly Morris Men, Rhode Island's other morris dance team.

Generally known in England and less well known in the United States, morris dancing was identified as a distinct type of English folk dance at least as early as the late 15th Century. Some claim it is a remnant of a pre-Christian Celtic fertility dance.

Traditionally, dancers dressed in white shirts and colored knickers to which bells and ribbons were sewn, and executed simple choreographed

figures while wielding sticks, swords, or handkerchief. A fiddle, accordion, drum, pipe and tabor (a three-hole



*The Ladies performing at the Chorus of Westerly's Twelfth Night celebration in January.*

*Photograph by Erin Barrette Goodman*

pipe played with one hand, and a portable drum played with the other), or a concertina (a free-reed musical instrument that looks like a small, simple accordion) provided the accompanying music.

Morris dancing was popular in rural England until the industrial revolution. On the brink of extinction, it

was revived by late 19th Century folklorists.

Cecil Sharp, one of those responsible for the revival, described it this way: "The morris is not a social dance—one, that is, which is danced chiefly for pleasure. It is, primarily, a spectacular dance; its purpose is, or was, to provide an exhibition or pageant at holiday time for the entertainment of the onlooker."

Modern morris dancers generally recognize six predominant styles of dancing, each originating in a different region of England. Within each style there are many variations.

The Ladies of the Rolling Pin perform in a style known as border morris. It originated in Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Worcestershire, counties along the border of England and Wales, and has been described as a simpler, wilder, more vigorous style of morris dancing.

The costumes (or "kits") are decorated with rags instead of ribbons, and the dances feature a lot of clashing of sticks.

*continued on page 3*

***Our Spring Lecture Series Begins on April 7th!***

Thursday, May 6th at 7 p.m.

# Ancient Egyptian Gods and Goddesses

For Ancient Egyptians, the gods were present in every aspect of the natural world and the affairs of humans. In household shrines and in temples, the gods received the prayers and offerings of mortals. Ancient Egyptian spiritual beliefs were complex and changed throughout the centuries and dynasties. A multitude of gods, with complex interactions and overlapping identities, assumed different roles in different contexts. But two beliefs consistently anchored this religion during more than 3,000 years—the divinity of the pharaoh and the existence of the afterlife. The complex burial practices of this culture were intended to insure that the souls of the deceased would spend the afterlife in comfort and happiness.

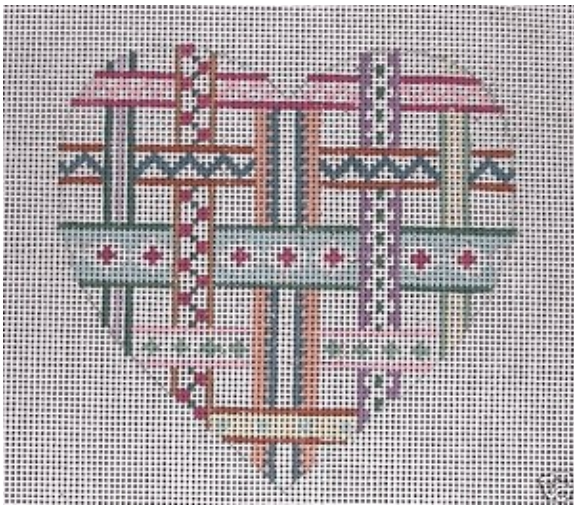
Ruth Shilling, who spoke to us last year about Egyptian temples and pyramids, will present an illustrated lecture on Ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses and the eternal concepts they represent. Her presentation will take place on Thursday, May 6th at 7 p.m. in the Museum Gallery.

Ruth has introduced hundreds of people to the mysteries of Egypt as the operator of All One World Tours. She has led more than forty tours of Egypt. A popular lecturer, Ruth is a specialist in hieroglyphics, ancient Egyptian symbolism, and the gods and goddesses. When she is not traveling, Ruth lives in South Kingstown.



Thursday, May 27th at 7 p.m.

## ANTIQUE AND CONTEMPORARY NEEDLEPOINT



Do you needlepoint? Or do you have a lovely needlepointed furnishing in your home that you have often wondered about? Jan Bertwell, of Richmond, has been finishing, framing, and repairing textile treasures full time since 1981 and there is little that she has not encountered along the way. On Thursday, May 27th, Jan will have lots of samples and pictures for inspiration and tips on achieving the best presentation for your needlepoint, as well as pictures and discussion of some of her most interesting projects.

For the information of the uninitiated, needlepoint is a form of embroidery on canvas or fabric in which yarn or thread is stitched in a design or pattern. Finished needlepoint often is used to make pillows or upholstery, framed or unframed wall displays, or rugs.

## The Museum of Primitive Art and Culture

1058 Kingstown Road, Suite 5 • Peace Dale, Rhode Island 02879 • (401) 783-5711

www.primitiveartmuseum.org • mpaac@verizon.net

*Beth Hogan, Museum Administrator*

*Louise Weaver, Administrative Assistant • Mary Brown, Educator*

The Museum Gallery is open Wednesdays 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and by appointment.

### Board of Trustees

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*Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh, Curator & Director Emerita • Wallace Campbell 3rd, President Emeritus*

### “Trash or Treasure?”

scheduled for September 19

*Our next “Trash or Treasure?” event is scheduled for Sunday, September 19th at the Dunes Club. We thank Skinner, Inc. of Boston for their continued generous support of our Museum.*

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Join our electronic mailing list and go paperless! Please send your e-mail address to our Museum Administrator, Beth Hogan, at mpaac@verizon.net.

### “A spectacular dance . . .”

*Continued from page one.* In an adaptation of border morris to their “baking” theme, the Ladies of the Rolling Pin wear white aprons decorated with rags and wield rolling pins instead of the traditional sticks. They boast that they offer just the right mix of leavening and levity, and never fail to get a rise out of audiences with their well-seasoned style.

On Wednesday, April 7th at 7 p.m., the Ladies will give us a little history, dance for us, and invite us to try a few steps.

Leave those backless clogs at home!

### From our collection:

## Acorn Caps

*by Sarah P. Turnbaugh, Founding Director Emerita*

Northern California is known for its rugged mountains and red-woods and “big trees.” Here, for many generations, Native groups like the Karuk, Yurok, and Hupa have been using bits of plant fibers, grasses, and hazel, willow, and pine roots to fashion some of the most interesting twined baskets made on this continent, a number of which are exhibited in our gallery. Among my favorites are two picturesque twined basketry caps worn by women.



These caps closely resemble the tiny “caps” or seed cups of live-oak acorns that these same Native people relied on for food. The shapes of post oak and maul oak acorn cups are the most similar to the shapes of these Indian women’s caps.

The association has long

been important to Native peoples. According to a Karuk myth, which ethnologist J. P. Harrington transcribed in 1932 (“The Acorn Maidens,” Karuk Indian Myths, Smithsonian BAE Bulletin 107:6), acorns were once animate beings like people, Ikkareyavs, before humans came into existence.

Here is part of the myth:

*“Once acorns were Ikkareyavs. Then they told them: ‘Ye are going to go, ye must all have nice hats, ye must weave them.’ Then they started in to weave their hats. . . . Post Oak Acorn finished her hat out good. She cleaned it. Then Tan Oak Acorn said: ‘Would that I be the best acorn soup, though my hat is not cleaned [rough inside].’ Then they went. They spilled [from the heavens] into Human’s place. Then they said: ‘Human will spoon us up [as acorn soup].’ They were Ikkareyavs too, they were Heavenly Ikkareyavs. They shut their eyes and then they turned their faces into their hats when they came to this earth here. . . . And nowadays acorns still have their faces inside their hats.”*



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Return Service Requested

*Mrs. Wojciechowski's class at Gingerbread House Nursery School in Wakefield visited our Gallery for one of our educational programs led by Mary Brown. Here are some of their thank-you notes.*



This is a picture of the triceratops and Mrs Brown. I liked the questions. I had the funny question "Which one do you like to hug?" Rian



At the museum, I liked getting a volcano stamp. I learned about dinosaurs. I liked the museum ladies!  
- Andrew



At the museum, I loved everything! I saw a boat on the ceiling. I hung up my coat. I made a necklace from pieces of straws and beads. Thank You for the trip!  
-Amy



This is my necklace. I made it at the 'Museum of Culture'. We used beads. There was a little zebra statue on a shelf. Thank You!  
-Nyah