

SIMA

SIMA 2023 Symposium *Q?rius Theater, NMNH*

July 13-14, 2023

Session One
Thursday, July 13, 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

PRESENTERS

Michael Hopper, MA student, Public Archaeology Graduate Studies, University of New Mexico, enrolled member of the Oklahoma Osage and Choctaw Nations

OSAGE SHIELDS: BEYOND FUNCTIONALITY

In examining the Osage shields in collections at the Smithsonian Institution I want to explore, from the perspective of an Osage, questions beyond their functionality. Do shields hold spiritual and religious importance to the Osage warrior it was made for? By examining a shield collected by Francis La Flesche and acquired by the U.S. National Museum in 1916, I found that the materials, symbols, and objects drawn on and attached to the shield hold a range of meanings - from personal connection to spiritual importance for both protection and directing energy. A full examination of this specific shield will help in determining whether shields like this should be considered for repatriation under NAGPRA

Andrea Marañón Laguna, PhD Student, Anthropology, Indiana University

BECOMING MAYA: THE POLITICS OF INDIGENEITY IN U. S. COLLECTIONS

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, a group of archaeologists from the United States conducted excavations in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula and dubbed it the "Maya Area". Simultaneously, they categorized the inhabitants of the regions under the "Maya Indian" umbrella with the purpose of advancing US national commercial and scientific interests in the face of rising European archaeological discoveries. As a consequence, this led to the creation of a Pan-Maya identity and the neglect of each cultural group's particularities. The aim of this project to trace the social dynamics of the acquisition of the collections of Louis H. Aymé and Arthur P. Rice, two of the largest of their kind at the National Museum of Natural History. Additionally, this project will explore how the collectors produced interpretations of Indigenous, mestizo, and national identities within their industrial and historical contexts.

Elaine D. Alexie, PhD Student, Faculty of Native Studies University of Alberta

“SHI’KHAIHTAK GIK’YAANILJII, I AM LEARNING”: GWICH’IN SEWING TRADITIONS & SKILL REPATRIATION THROUGH COLLECTIONS BASED RESEARCH

Museum collections can serve as powerful tools for Indigenous peoples to reconnect with their ancestors; and provide space to access knowledge that is embedded within their material culture. Through the process of *making*, museum collections can also serve as a place to remember deep connections to place and culture. My SIMA project served to explore how visiting with Gwich'in objects can help provide space for knowledge exploration of sewing traditions through my act of making. Through my 'close looking' engagement of visiting with my Gwich'in ancestors in the Smithsonian ethnology collection, I share my process of applying experiential and embodied knowledge of beadwork and quilling sewing traditions. As well, how viewing archival material objects evoked memories of land, family and cultural practices in my Gwich'in homelands. Through the sharing of my SIMA experience, this presentation focuses on how museum collections can be utilized as a tool for reconnection; and pathways for healing through cultural knowledge and skill repatriation of Gwich'in sewing, beading and quilling traditions

DISCUSSANTS

JILDA ANDREWS (National Museum of Australia, Australian National University)
CANDACE GREENE (SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION)

Session Two
Thursday, July 13, 10:45 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

PRESENTERS

Tiako Djomatchoua Murielle Sandra, PhD Student, French and Italian Studies, Princeton University

BEYOND BEAUTY: SCARIFICATIONS AS TESTAMENTS OF LIFE AND DEATH

Scarifications can be defined as permanent modifications of the body that inscribes on the skin indelible marks, symbols, or designs. From the perspective of Quint (1958), scarifications are an important stylistic element, and an essential aspect of beauty. This overgeneralized conception of scarifications as beautiful is simplistic and overshadows other essential properties and transactions that inform individual's and community's relation to the past and to the present, to the living and to the dead, to the visible and to the invisible. Conceiving of scarifications as testaments of life and of death is what motivates comparative studies of Baule and Bamana female masks which display similarity in style, in practices, and in distribution. The first hypothesis of this presentation is : does the meaning of scarifications on female masks take precedence over the scarifications on female faces? Secondly, what politics of memory and remembering can scarification unravel? Lastly, can scarification define and shape worldviews?

Samantha Manz, PhD Student, University of British Columbia, Member Cherokee Nation

WOVEN THROUGH TIME

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act that forcibly removed the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Seminole, Choctaw, and Msvkoke to move to Indian Territory (what is currently Oklahoma). As a result of early colonization, assimilation, and violent dispossession, many tsalagi traditions and customs have been lost or interwoven with Euro-American practices. However, tsalagi basketry is an ongoing and contemporary cultural practice, even when faced with environmental and political adversities. Once relocated to Indian Territory, designs stayed consistent with pre-removal, but basket sizes and shapes changed. Handles were added to appeal to white settlers. Weavers began to use an invasive species, honeysuckle root, and weave the vines over a framework of stiff white oak to create baskets. Objects play a key role in storytelling as links between past, present, and future, while reactivating memories and retrieving histories from community members. More than static and inactive objects, these belongings reveal their processes for making and Indigenous ways of knowing through storytelling.

Yingchun Xu, PhD Student, Media Studies, Rutgers University

THE RUBBER WAY: REVEALING THE UNSEEN DISCONNECTION OF HANI/AKHA CULTURAL ROOTS

Through an engagement with every day and ceremonial objects from the Akha people in northern Thailand, a cultural landscape emerges of the Akha hill tribe that links back to the Hani people in China. Pivotal to revealing this landscape is a “noisy” object that disconnects and dis-positions the components of the cultural roots of these Indigenous people. The rubber tree, an invasive species of the Akha/Hani's eco-environment representing a symbolic system of materiality and immateriality, helps delve further into the meaning system of the Akha/Hani cultural revival movement.

David Gowey, PhD Student, Sociocultural Anthropology, Arizona State University

ATTRIBUTION AND INDIGENIZATION IN LATE 19TH/EARLY 20TH CENTURY SOUTHERN PHILIPPINE METAL WEAPONS

Between 1902 and 1946, American military officers collected and contributed many objects including weapons, household goods, and clothing from various Philippine peoples to what was then the U.S. National Museum. Among these objects are metal armor pieces and cannons collected from Muslim-majority Moro peoples of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago that were misidentified by their American collectors as Spanish. This project aims to better understand how these objects may have come to be misidentified and the implications of proper identification for the study of trade, conflict, and indigenous manufacturing in a region of the Southern Philippines that was largely not colonized by Spain.

DISCUSSANTS

MARY JO ARNOLDI (CURATOR EMERITUS, DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, NMNH, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION)

CHRISTINA KREPS (UNIVERSITY OF DENVER)

Session Three
Thursday, July 13, 1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

2023 Faculty Fellows

Christina Kreps (University of Denver)

THE DYAK RUMAH HANTU (“SPIRIT HOUSE”) FROM BORNEO (KALIMANTAN)

In this presentation, I describe my engagement with the Dyak [sic] *rumah hantu* (“spirit house”) in the NMNH ethnographic collections as an exercise in “speculative” research and museology. According to the card catalog entry, the spirit house was “found” by the American naturalist/explorer W. L. Abbott in 1908 on a riverbank on the edge of the forest in southeast Borneo. The house was said to have been made by Dyaks to place offerings for appeasing forest-dwelling spirits. However, the wooden house appears newly made despite its age and the climatic conditions in which it was found. Nor is there evidence of use such as residue from offerings. Based on the object’s condition, my knowledge of the ephemeral nature of *pataho* (offering platforms) and the climate of Borneo, I speculate that the house was specially made for Abbott and not just “found” in the forest. Also noted on the catalog card is that the house was displayed in a Smithsonian exhibit at the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. I imagine the house’s origin story, its journey as a “diasporic” and “ambassadorial” object, and the “matrix of relationships” embedded in its materiality.

Jessica Marie Falcone (Kansas State University)

FROM KANNON TO BENZAITEN: AN OBJECT REPORT EXERCISE

As a cultural anthropologist with little experience doing hands-on work in a museum context, I came to SIMA to consider how I might utilize my university’s ethnographic collections in an upcoming museum anthropology course. Drawing on an “Object Report” assignment included in SIMA’s pedagogy collection (on D-Space), from Catherine Nichols of Loyola University Chicago, I engaged with a single object (catalogue item “E154272,” labeled as a “shrine to Kannon”) in the process of testing out this specific assignment on myself. In this presentation, I will both discuss my “object report” findings regarding the *zushi* (portable shrine)—which include conclusive evidence that the inner figure is not actually a Kannon, but rather a statue of Benzaiten—as well as a reflection on ways that the Nichols’ assignment might be adapted for my own upcoming course.

Session Four
Friday, July 14, 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

PRESENTERS

Cathy McNeese, MA Student, Historical Studies, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

ANISHINAABE TWINED BAGS: CORRELATION OF GEOMETRIC ELEMENTS WITH ANISHINAABE COSMOLOGY

Following insights developed by Ruth Phillips' (1989), Alan Corbiere and Crystal Migwans (2012) and Cory Willmott (2021), this study explores whether basic geometric elements found in Anishinaabe twined bags have consistent correlations with the Upper, Middle and Lower World regions of Anishinaabe cosmology. Due to their use of recognizable cosmological persons, such as Thunderbirds and Underwater Panthers, vertically oriented bags, believed to be the older style provide the basis for associating geometric elements with cosmological regions. By creating lexicon and design field codebooks of geometric elements with cosmological associations, and using quantitative software, this research will test the frequency with which geometric elements occur in predicable relations. I hypothesize that analysis will show horizontally oriented bags, which tend to be purely geometric and believed to have emerged in the mid to late nineteenth century, will frequently employ the elements identified in the lexicon codebook in predictable relations in design fields that represent cosmological regions.

Amanda Althoff, PhD Student, Anthropology, Columbia University

HOW TO CARE FOR MAGGOTS - TRACING HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONS IN 19TH CENTURY NW ALASKA

The center of this talk is a small ivory button, lovingly carved and worn in a Yup'ik or Iñupiaq community in nineteenth century Western Alaska. The item was collected around 1880 by Edward W. Nelson for the Smithsonian, along with thousands of other artifacts and specimens. Less than an inch long, the fastening in the shape of a larva is one among many ivory buttons in the collection and has not drawn particular attention. However, as this research seeks to explore, this button carries references to the wider assemblage of objects collected at the time in Western Alaska. Drawing on the rich oral archive of Yup'ik and Iñupiaq communities allows us to trace the ripples of nested relations from this small button - relations between flies, caribou, humans, and walrus. It enables us to ask, how do we care for maggots?

Tariq Adely, PhD Student, Anthropology, George Washington University

MAKING LANGUAGE MATERIAL: AN ANALYSIS OF 19TH C. ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE LEVANT

This presentation asks how engagement with objects offers a way to theorize writing as a material entity. By focusing on Arabic-language engravings and inscriptive devices, such as those collected in Palestine and Syria by reverend, writer, and bible archaeologist George W. Samson during the mid-19th century, I

consider how writing is shaped by the properties of the object on which it is affixed and how written language animates objects. In doing so, I dwell on questions related to form and content as well as writing as a craft, sign, and citation. I then turn attention to the bodies of text in which these objects are embedded—including exhibition catalogs, collection databases, and bible archaeology scholarship—to trace what kinds of representational work these engravings and writing devices have been called upon to carry out. Through this dual line of inquiry, I aim to show how collections might serve as a site from which to think about language as inextricably material and representational.

Madeline Strait, PhD Student, Linguistics, University of California Berkeley

THINKING THROUGH LINGUISTIC HERITAGE MATERIALS IN MUSEUMS

In 1899, the United States National Museum accessioned a collection of material from California gathered by John W. Hudson consisting of over 300 ethnological items as well as ancillary materials in the form of his field notes, catalogs, and correspondence. In addition to collecting physical objects, Hudson had a keen interest in the local Indigenous languages he was encountering, and his notes contain words for certain plant types, basketry styles, and other linguistic miscellanea. Thus, this collection offers a unique opportunity to explore the significance of linguistic heritage materials in museum collections. Using frameworks developed by visual anthropologists, critical heritage scholars, and the decolonization movement, I seek to recognize the ways in which this particular iteration of intangible heritage can be understood through contemporary museological theory and praxis, while also demonstrating the ways in which it offers critical interventions into these frameworks.

DISCUSSANTS

JILDA ANDREWS (National Museum of Australia, Australian National University)

JESSICA FALCONE (KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY)