

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

R e p o r t

D i a n e M o o n - 2002 C h u r c h i l l F e l l o w

**‘To study Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island material culture
collections in US European and UK museums’**

(Photos with hard copy held at Trust)

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Signed

Diane Dirrpu Moon

Dated **18.12.02**

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I n t r o d u c t i o n

The Fellowship allowed me to meet curators, view and examine collections and record information on specific aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material culture held in sixteen museums in US, Europe and UK. My focus was on basketry, fibrecraft and related objects, an often neglected area of research, though vital to a fuller understanding and appreciation of Indigenous Australian ritual and domestic life.

I also visited both ethnographic and art museum displays to gain insight into contemporary gallery design and methods for exhibiting works and to explore my interest in integrating antiquities with fine art, a practice which is more developed overseas than in Australia.

I noted pieces which were similar to some in Australian collections and located objects which were uniquely different from any I had previously seen. In interacting with curators I learned much about current attitudes to collections of Indigenous Australian material culture held in overseas museums and approaches to the management and display of objects. In some cases I was able to discuss possible future exhibitions and curating contemporary additions to collections. An important aspect of my program was to be able to correct or add to existing documentation through my knowledge of weaving and fibrework and this has led to ongoing communication with curators and a desire to further my contribution wherever possible.

I will disseminate information through speaking on my experiences in public institutions, adding to documentation of Australian museum collections, sharing my discoveries with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and using my increased knowledge base to continue to curate contemporary exhibitions which celebrate the ongoing creativity of Australia's Indigenous artists.

I hope that my 'pilgrimage' to visit these precious, infrequently-visited objects made from materials gathered from the Australian environment and the information I have gained will help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to further explore their heritage.

Introduction contd.

People who made time in their busy schedules to ensure the successful completion of my Fellowship include:

- Melissa Chiu** Curator
Linden E Chubin Assistant Director of Public Programs
Asia Society Galleries New York NY
- Dr. Eric P. Kjellgren** Assistant Curator for Oceanic Art Evelyn A.J. Hall and John A. Friede
The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York NY
- Athena Latoka** Curator National Museum of the American Indian (NY based)
- Dr Fred Myers** Professor and Chair Department of Anthropology
New York University NY
- Dr. Adrienne Kaeppler** Curator Smithsonian Institution Washington DC
- Margo Smith Boles** Curators the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection
Julia Stephens May University of Virginia
- Dr Philippe Peltier** Curator Oceanic collection Musee des Arts d’Afrique / Oceanie Paris
- Dr Alain Nicholas** Head Curator Executive Director
Museum for African, Oceanic and Amerindien Arts Marseille France
- Dr Christian Kaufmann** Curator Oceanic collection Museum der Kulturen Basel Switzerland
- Dr Burkhard Fenner** Curator Oceanic collection Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum fur Volkerkunde
Cologne Germany
- Dr Ingrid Heermann** Curator Linden Museum Stuttgart Germany
- Dr Marion Melk-Koch** Curators Museum fur Volkerkunde zu Leipzig Germany
Birgit Scheps
- Dr Markus Schindlbeck** Curator Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Preussischer Kulturbesitz
Berlin Germany
- Dr Janis Jefferies** Head of Fine Arts Department Goldsmith College London
- Dr Jill Hassall** Curator
Jenny Newell Assistant curator
Pacific and Australian collections Department of Ethnography
British Museum London
- Dr Julie Graves** Curator Bristol Museum and Art Gallery UK
- Dr A C Herle** Curator for Anthropology Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and
Anthropology Cambridge UK
- Michael O’Hanlon** Director
Dr Laura Peers Curator and Lecturer
Dr Jeremy Coote Curator Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford UK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Project Description

The Fellowship enabled me to examine objects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material culture held in 16 overseas Museum collections and speak on my work in this field where appropriate. My interest was primarily in fibre-craft and related pieces, with an emphasis on Queensland and northern Australian areas. Where possible I was able to broaden my professional experience to include a study of Museum and Art Gallery design, storage facilities, exhibition installation and contemporary museological approaches.

Project Highlights

There were many professional opportunities made available to me which I could never experience in Australia and I am most grateful to the people listed above who made them possible.

Attending the opening of 'The Native Born' exhibition of Aboriginal art at the Asia Society Galleries in New York and my inclusion in the public forum with curator Djon Mundine and Aboriginal artists Neville Gulay Gulay and Richard Birrin Birrin from Ramingining, Arnhem Land, which was organised by curator Melissa Chiu, was an important introduction to a section of New York society interested to learn more of Indigenous Australian culture.

My visit to the Kluge.Ruhe collection and study centre of Aboriginal Art at Virginia and lecture to members was organised by Margo Smith Boles and written up in the local newspaper.

Visit to the Smithsonian Museum collection in Washington was organised by Dr Adrienne Kaeppler. I saw there a rare, perfectly preserved possum skin cloak collected from the Hunter River area in New South Wales and objects, photographs and records from the legendary National Geographic Australian/American Scientific expedition to Arnhem Land.

Attending the Pacific Arts Association Europe meeting at the Museum für Völkerkunde, Dresden with some of the world's leading anthropologists and experts in this field, socialising with the group and visiting the Museum's newly-completed state-of-the-art storage facilities.

Spending three days at the Cambridge University Archaeological and Anthropology Museum which holds both the A.C. Haddon collection from the Torres Strait Islands and a significant collection of North Queensland material collected and documented by anthropologist Dr Donald Thomson in the 1930's.

My major insight relates to the collections and how, despite often having been made in earlier times in unfortunate circumstances, they continue to connect people across the globe who care for and study them. I have become aware of how little is known about many of the Aboriginal pieces in collections and was honoured to be able to more-fully document works when I was visiting some Museums. I am inspired to further my work in this field and continue to develop relationships with curators I met. Viewing, handling and recording museum pieces from earlier generations enables me to develop a framework on which to curate exhibitions and by taking these images and ideas to Indigenous Australian artists I can commission works from them. The knowledge I have gained will be disseminated through future exhibitions in public institutions and supporting catalogues. To date I have approached local organisations – Queensland University of Technology Art Museum, Queensland Art Gallery and Queensland Museum and Redland Museum to speak to interested groups on my experiences and I will be relating appropriate information to individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

Programme

My aim was to familiarise myself with collections which I knew to contain material related to my area of study. Choices of venue were largely based on advice and guidance provided by colleagues, particularly Djon Mundine Aboriginal curator and researcher at the Centre for Cross Cultural Studies, Canberra, Lindy Allen curator of the Museum of Victoria and Dr Phillip Jones senior curator South Australian Museum. In addition I studied published records on US and European collections and followed up on contacts I had made with overseas curators. I was also interested where possible to study patterns of collecting by individuals some of whom have contributed also to Australian museum collections. Information gained complements a similar project undertaken by me in Australian museums in 1996.

I wrote, telephoned or e.mailed curators and when I received replies I was able to develop an intense, though manageable, schedule which also allowed time and space to explore suggestions and possibilities as they arose whilst travelling. I offered to speak and show slides on my curatorial work and this was taken up by institutions when suitable to their situation and schedules. For advance publicity I provided an image and a brief description of my talk which I entitled *The Elegant Solution – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Fibrecraft*. I carried with me fifteen sets of two catalogues of collections I have made *Carried Lightly* and *Spinifex Runner* and exchanged these for local publications (some of which unfortunately require translation to be accessible). Whilst travelling I continued to check and refine arrangements with curators.

Working methods were dictated by availability of staff, specific museum storage conditions, local protocols and the extent of the collection. I was variously shown and was able to handle objects which were taken individually from storage by the curator; allowed to view the works on open storage shelving; view pieces in exhibitions and at times given free rein to unpack boxes and spend unconstrained time examining the contents which, of course, was the ideal situation. Records were available through attached tags, computer data bases, card indexes, early correspondence and historic photographs. In some cases there were published catalogues which I noted for future possible purchase. I recorded photographic images which would be available on request for future publications.

Whilst viewing collections I either photo-copied or hand-recorded information available, made notes for continuing research and clarification and drew objects and details to identify pieces of particular interest. In some cases I recorded my own observations and opinions for the host organisation or discussed pieces with the attendant curator. Earlier theft of my lap-top computer gave me no choice, however I found this method perfectly adequate to my needs.

An important aspect of the project was to view exhibitions of ethnographic collections, which sometimes included Indigenous Australian material. Though these spectacular exhibitions were largely of African, Oceanic or Melanesian material there was much to be learned from various curatorial approaches to display which, overall, provided an historic survey of presentation styles. I also gained insight and inspiration from noting similarities between Aboriginal material culture and that of other nations eg of South American and Native American peoples. There were identical weaves, stitches and techniques of preparation and in some cases fibres of similar species to those in use by Aboriginal Australian artists.

I was impressed with the respect afforded to ethnographic collections in the US, Europe and the UK and dedication of curatorial staff. A number of collections have been carefully stored awaiting new or refurbished buildings showing reassuring commitment to cultural material.

Attending the Pacific Arts Association-Europe meeting in Dresden provided a unique opportunity to make contact with new colleagues and to observe a range of approaches to working with Indigenous cultures. In comparison, I believe Australian curators and scholars are privileged to be able to contribute to our vital Indigenous art and craft movement, working towards eventual management and control by Indigenous Australian artists and curators.

Images

New York

Asia Society Galleries

Artist: Tony Danyala

Nyoka (mud crabs) circa 1984

Exhibition *The Native Born* of bark paintings, carvings and weavings representing ecological systems as they exist and are interpreted by Aboriginal artists of Ramingining and Milingimbi area, Arnhem Land.

Works were displayed to reflect six local environments identified by the artists.

Eg *Gulunbuy* – from the water-hole and

Diltjipuy – from the forests.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Has on semi-permanent display a spectacular 18th century example of an intricately-wrought turtle-shell mask from Mabuag Island in the Torres Strait Queensland.

Washington DC

Smithsonian Institution

Intricately decorated rug 57 x 58.5 inches composed of 23 opossum and one kangaroo skin regarded as the 'most important object collected' by Horatio Hale during the Exploring Expedition of 1842 near the Hunter River in NSW.

Virginia

Kluge-Ruhe Collection

Wogbara *Six Mimis* c 1960's

Basel

Museum der Kulturen

Bi-cornual lawyer vine basket
Cairns 1920's

Leipzig

Museum fur Volkerkunde

Pandanus dog sculpture
Kurrindin Maningrida Arnhem Land

Dresden

Museum fur Volkerkunde

Warup ceremonial drum
Torres Strait Islands

Oxford

Pitt Rivers Museum

Grass Basket – Moreton Bay Queensland
said to have been collected from scene
of Nagoa massacre 1861

Coil-woven rush basket from
Warrego River South Queensland

New York NY

Asia Society Galleries

The exhibition *The Native Born* was installed and opened during my first week in New York. Curator **Melissa Chiu** arranged my attendance at the opening event and at the Asia Society reception for 200 members. **Linden E Chubin** Assistant Director of Public Programs invited me to speak as a member of the panel in a public forum. Other speakers were Aboriginal curator Djon Mundine and Aboriginal artists from Ramingining Arnhem Land - Richard Birrin Birrin and Neville Gulay Gulay. I had contributed to curating the fibre content of the exhibition whilst living in Ramingining in 1983/84 and spoke on this aspect of the exhibition with accompanying slides.

The works were commissioned and collected by the curator Djon Mundine to represent ecological systems as they exist and were interpreted by the artists. This was an innovative hang in that the walls of the three galleries were painted in varying shades of green representing the environments from which the works had evolved. Woven pieces were freely suspended to 'surround' the viewer. The artists had painted one of the walls in ochre 'stripes' and created a sand sculpture on one of the gallery floors. The exhibition provided a unique opportunity to meet New York academics, curators and interested viewers which have led to important ongoing contacts.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Assistant Curator for Oceanic Art **Dr Eric P Kjellgren** showed me through the collection which was stored on open shelves. In addition to fibre works and wooden artefacts Dr Kjellgren showed me a superb collection of paintings from the Kimberley area which he had collected when conducting research there. The outstanding item in the collection is a fine mask from the Torres Strait Islands from the 18th century, a gift of Nelson A Rockefeller. It is made of turtle shell, clamshell, wood, feathers, resin, paint and fibre. Dr Kjellgren escorted me through the permanent collections of African and Pacific material which are elegantly displayed in modern, spacious glass vitrines.

There is a temporary exhibition space, however the program doesn't allow for proposals in the foreseeable future.

Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian

Athena Latocha a native American curator, has spent a period of time at the Australian National Museum. She is very interested in possible connections between Australian Aboriginal and north west coast native American material culture; I had noted these similarities myself during a visit to the **Museum of Natural History** in New York. Athena is currently responsible for organising the packing and removal of the huge collection (one million pieces) which is being relocated from New York to the new building in Washington DC. We looked at many objects in storage, particularly those that had a fibre base or content. The new National Museum of the American Indian is expected to open in 2003.

In addition to viewing the above exhibitions and collections I visited the following Museums.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Whitney Museum of American Art Studio Museum, Harlem
Museum for African Art, Queens Brooklyn Museum of Art PSI Contemporary Art Centre
Isamu Noguchi Museum Museum of Natural History American Craft Museum and
DIA Centre for the Arts as well as private galleries in Chelsea and Soho

I was invited by Suzun Bennet Director Australian Aboriginal Fine Art Gallery New York to open an exhibition of Aboriginal art prints.

I had a valuable meeting with **Dr Fred Myers** Professor and Chair Department of Anthropology New York University. He gave me the book he had edited for the School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series *Empire of Things – Regimes of Value and Material Culture*

Washington DC

Smithsonian Institution

Dr Adrienne Kaeppler who was responsible for the original listings of Aboriginal holdings in collections in Canadian and United States Museums was on leave. We met later in Dresden. Assistance was provided by curator Felicia Pickering.

I was able to view almost all of the Australian collection and print out documentation on works of special interest. It is a very exciting collection containing many works from the 1948 Australian American Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land and the 1898 Alfred Cort Haddon expedition to the Torres Strait Islands. There are also important fibre pieces from Moreton Bay and north Queensland. An intricately-patterned opossum skin cloak in perfect condition was collected by Horatio Hale from coastal NSW during the US Exploring Expedition of 1842. Several Aboriginal people have travelled to Washington to view this piece.

Lists of works are available online.

I also looked at manuscripts, photographs and other records which gave valuable insights into the history of the Smithsonian collection and made many notes for future reference and possible research.

Whilst in Washington, in addition to viewing the collections in storage, I visited the following Museums: Museum of Natural History Hirshorn Museum National Art Museum

Virginia

Kluge-Ruhe collection University of Virginia

Margo Smith Boles and Julia Stephens May care for this collection and arrange exhibitions and educational events and facilities for scholars. I was able to view the collection in storage, displayed in the building and through photographic records. I identified fibre works without provenance including a stitched bark canoe by Maningrida artist John Bulun Bulun. Discussions were held about possible areas of study and future contributions I may make to the collection.

I gave a public talk and slide presentation in the evening which had been advertised in the local press.

Paris

Musee des Artes Africains et Oceanique

Access to the collection was limited in preparation for the move to the new Museum Quai Branly in conjunction with the Musee de l'Homme in 2004. I spent time with curator **Dr Philippe Peltier** who showed me available works. These were bark paintings from the historic Karel Kupka collection and bark paintings and sculptures by artists from Maningrida and Ramingining in Arnhem Land where I had lived for many years. I was able to discuss the collection with Dr Peltier and also the plans for the new museum considered innovative and quite controversial.

Meeting with **Roberta Rivin** Director of Gallery Urubamba. She works with tribal Brazilian artists and recently curated an exhibition to critical acclaim of ceremonial feathered items at the Mona Bismarck Gallery which I visited. We planned to have ongoing communication.

Meeting with linguist Jacques Montredant of the Bressancon University who will be returning to Australia to continue linguistic work with Arrernte people in Central Australia

Museums I visited included: Musee du Louvre Centre Pompidou Musee d'Orsay Musee Rodin Musee Picasso Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume Musee Dapper (African Art) Musee Guimet (Asian antiquities)

Marseilles

Museum for African, Oceanic, Amerindian Arts

Meeting with **Dr Alain Nicolas** who is curating an Aboriginal art exhibition for 2004 for the Museum. The building dates from the 17th century. I showed him slides of works which he had copied and discussed pieces I had collected for galleries which he may be interested in borrowing. Dr Nicolas showed me current installations which include high-tech materials, dark coloured walls, painted arc mesh and directional halogen lights.

Venice

I spent two days at **next** Architectural Biennale of Venice which was held at two locations Arsenale and Giardini di Castello. It was important for me to see the site of the Venice Biennale and the arrangement of buildings representative of many nationalities (though the Australian pavilion was closed). There were many interesting displays but most exciting were the detailed plans and models of 22 proposed museums designed by the world's leading architects.

I visited The Peggy Guggenheim Collection which is housed in the former home of the great collector and is maintained as a memorial to her life and celebrates her support of artists and the arts.

Basle

Museum der Kulturen

Curator **Dr Christian Kaufmann** has been a leader for many years in the field of ethnographic research; well-known for his field work, publications and recently for his consultative role with the Indigenous people of Noumea on the development and building of the Tjibaou cultural centre. Dr Kaufmann accompanied me through the existing exhibitions and discussed features of particular interest to me. The displays have been in place for some years and though a little over-crowded by current standards and in need of modernisation of the lighting system, it was very inspiring in the dramatic design and use of colour. The textile component was of great interest with charts illustrating weaving stitches, techniques and processes. I noted several books on textiles which would be a valuable addition to my professional library.

Assistant Nicola guided me through the collection in storage. Karel Kupka's collection of the 50's and early 60's is known mostly for bark paintings but here includes an interesting selection of fibre objects notable for painterly features eg ochre-patterned pandanus bags and a fibre-bound paperbark parcel heavily coated with white clay. Mandchin's 1931 pieces from Melville Island include several fine *tunga* ochre-patterned bark buckets. These works are complemented by pieces collected by the Rev T Webb on Milingimbi Island circa 1934 which include fibre-based ritual regalia.

In addition to the Museum der Kulturen I visited the wonderful Fondation Beyeler art gallery which was designed by architect Renzo Piano who also designed the Tjibaou Centre in Noumea. The elegant and intelligent design of the building and the display of works from the permanent collection and temporary exhibitions made my visit a total pleasure. Surprisingly there was a simple Torres Strait Island turtle-shell mask displayed alongside a small Paul Klee painting and other African masks and carvings displayed with sympathetic two dimensional artworks.

Cologne

Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum fur Volkerkunde

Dr Burkhard Fenner accompanied me through the stored collection while his assistant curator provided supporting documentation and made notes as I examined and commented on pieces of interest. The collection contains some rare examples of woven pandanus bags and I was able to add to existing documentation and will continue to provide information to Dr Fenner on the collection.

Whilst in Cologne I visited the Cologne Art Fair attended the launch of the art film festival at the Ludwig Museum and travelled to the city of Neuss to see the fantastic Inselm Humbroich Museum of antiquities and contemporary art.

Dresden

Pacific Arts Association International Meeting

The meeting, held at the Museum fur Volkerkunde in Dresden, was attended by international delegates with field and museological experience in the Arts of the Pacific. It was a packed program over 2 ½ days with presentations covering field experiences, issues relating to both contemporary and historic collections, working with Indigenous people to develop, document and exhibit their material culture, protocols and politics. I had already met many of the delegates on my trip or was due to visit them in the coming few weeks, so it was a unique opportunity to experience a broad overview of opinions and attitudes and make comparisons with the Australian scene. Because of the packed schedule I was unable to give a presentation to the group but could show slides and share my curatorial experiences informally and found there is great interest in our unique Australian blend of fine art and ethnography.

Special exhibitions were mounted which were relevant to the interests of the group:

The Art of New Guinea Living Traditions in New Guinea Islands of Yearning - Palau

The program included a visit to the newly constructed storage area at Klotzsche some distance from the museum. There it was possible to view sections of the collection as well as study special features of the storage design. There were woven baskets from Victoria collected by botanist Ferdinand von Mueller in the 1870's and rare pieces from Mapoon and Aurukun in north Queensland.

Leipzig

Museum fur Volkerkunde zu Leipzig

This collection is in storage pending relocation to new premises. However, Dr Marion Melk-Koch and Birgit Scheps took time from their busy schedules to discuss the collection and future plans as well as giving me a guided tour of a representative exhibition on display. I was particularly interested in the pieces which were collected from Queensland in the latter half of the nineteenth century by Amalie Dietrich and have developed an ongoing communication with the curator Birgit Scheps who has been to Australia several times. She is writing a PhD thesis on the Goddefroy Shipping Company which sponsored Amalie Dietrich and also brought German settlers to south east Queensland. I curated an exhibition and catalogue on this subject in 1999 so I am able to contribute to her studies and learn from her findings.

Though I wasn't able to physically view the collection I was given a catalogue and developed a good basis for a future working relationship.

Berlin

Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Preussischer Kulturbesitz

My main reason for visiting Berlin was to view pieces collected in Queensland by Amalie Dietrich (1869-1872) particularly those from around Bowen in north Queensland, as this area is rarely represented in Museum collections. In his paper for *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1993 / no 2 author Ray Sumner describes his search for pieces from the dispersed Dietrich collection. He writes 'One of the major purchasers of Dietrich's Museum Godeffroy ethnographic material was made by the Berlin Museum fur Volkerkunde, whose director at the time was the famous and much-travelled Adolph Bastian, with whom Schmeltz had initiated correspondence in October 1877 by sending him a list of duplicates with prices. Bastian purchased a complete fishing outfit, consisting of bark canoe, paddle, spear with line attached, two harpoons and a forked stick for the line, as well as two other fishing nets, a kangaroo net and a basket (Berlin Museum fur Volkerkunde, Abteilung Sudsee, Archiv number 546/77). Sumner goes on to describe having seen the bark canoe included in a display of Pacific boats in 1980 noting that a similar set acquired by Leipzig was lost in the war. However, the curator had no record of any Dietrich material being in the Berlin collection. I was shown a stitched bark canoe hanging with Pacific marine craft but there was no record of its provenance. I was very disappointed as I was most interested to see the canoe and related objects mentioned by Sumner. I saw interesting examples of fibrecraft from Lockhardt River and Endeavour River, Qld and an unusual metal dance mask from Port Hedland WA.

The Museum fur Volkerkunde had magnificent collections on display from Africa, ancient America and the South Pacific. I also visited the Museum fur Ostasiatische Kunst (eastern Asian art from the early Stone Age to present day) Museum fur Indische Kunst Stiftung Judisches Museum Neue Nationalgalerie Hamburger Bahnhof Deutsche Guggenheim and Bauhaus-Archiv I learnt a lot in Berlin about contemporary museum and exhibition design and the elegant recycling of existing buildings as museums.

London

Goldsmiths College

I was invited to speak on my curatorial work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to students and lecturers from the College by Dr Janis Jefferies, Head of the Fine Arts Department. I felt that this was very successful with lots of probing questions and a reception held afterwards which provided a forum for further discussions.

British Museum

I met Dr Jill Hassall at Dresden and confirmed my visit to the collection and transport arrangements. She had checked records and located pieces of interest before my arrival. I saw two large, perfectly-preserved hunting nets collected from the Murray-Darling area presented by C.D. Fortnum in 1853. One fishing net made from finely-spun eucalyptus bark fibre and the other net made from thick twined cord, knotted at intervals of 20mm, for hunting kangaroo. These nets are not often found in Australian collections. There was also a rare and interesting collection of pieces from the 'Dieri tribe' of Cooper's Creek collected by a missionary, Mr Hillier. This included a neck piece, ritual caps and an unusual bag, all made of fibre and incorporating human hair into the weave and construction. There was a wooden bowl from Moreton Bay area lined with resin which appeared to have had a string handle. The British Museum also hold spectacular masks and objects from the Torres Strait Islands, some of which were accessible. A mask collected from Cape York during the 1849 HMS Rattlesnake voyage appeared to share some characteristics with Torres Strait masks. I was able to see several fine examples of shields from various locations in Queensland which assisted me in research I am currently undertaking for an exhibition in 2003.

London (contd)

I had meetings with curators from the Whitechapel and Serpentine galleries to discuss possible future projects.

Whilst in London I was able to visit the Victoria and Albert Museum Royal Academy ICA National Gallery Tate Modern and Sir John Soane's Museum

Bristol

Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

Curator Julie Graves had located pieces which would be of interest and brought them out of the shelves and boxes where they were stored for me to handle and take notes. Though it was quite a small collection there were some very unusual pieces. However, as provenance was not confirmed it seemed that a couple of red-ochred string bags with a flowing 'apron' of string hanging from the rim may have come from Papua New Guinea. I will continue to follow up the possible source. I discovered the first example I had seen of a plied yellow-coloured rope made from spinifex grass. I later found other examples in Cambridge and Oxford and will contact an Aboriginal artist I work with who will find this information valuable and may have some family knowledge of its making.

Cambridge

Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Dr A.C. Herle is the curator of this collection of over 25,000 pieces. Through checking the data base I was able to locate the parts of the collection of most interest to me and find where they were stored. An assistant brought out the appropriate boxes to a large table where I was able to work to examine them and make notes and drawings and photograph some pieces. Aboriginal and Torres Strait pieces made of or including fibre were from the whole of Australia. Two strongly-represented areas were north Queensland and the Torres Strait Islands. Dr Donald Thomson had collected widely in NQ and also Arnhem Land and these pieces were accompanied by substantial documentation. It was interesting to view the fibre-based aspect of the A.C. Haddon collection and note similarities and differences with pieces being made today. Eg a basket from Saibai Island collected in 1898 identical to one I bought there in 1997. Pieces of wool and velvet cloth were woven into some baskets reflecting the trade and occupation by people of other nations in the Torres Strait at the time of the Haddon expedition. Very unusual were fibre pieces from N.E. Lake Eyre. South Australia, collected by a doctor. These included a very long (rolled) netted-knotted fishing net of a soft 'bush cotton' like fibre, finely spun, with clear stripes along the length of red and yellow ochre. I had time also to look at the fine collection of Queensland shields and made drawings of different patterns which I am able to compare with examples here in Australia.

It was a most productive three days due to the generous support of the curator and staff and spacious working conditions. I was able to make notes and comments on available documentation on specially printed forms and anticipate that there will be ongoing communication and possible curatorial opportunities with the collection.

Whilst in Cambridge I was able to see the exhibits on display from the Cambridge collection and also found time to visit the small Kettle's Yard Museum which I found very interesting.

Oxford

Pitt Rivers Museum

This was the last official day of my study tour. I had arranged with Dr Laura Peers to speak to staff students, and interested members of the public as part of the Museum's regular lecture series. The session was well attended and there were many interesting questions. I was then able to see the Aboriginal exhibits which were on display in the Museum. Pieces are exhibited in categories, mixed with examples from other nations. This provides an opportunity to make comparisons across cultures. There were interesting examples of Australian Aboriginal basketry and a significant collection of Queensland shields. I had requested to see pieces from the Moreton Bay, Queensland, area and Dr Jeremy Coote had these available with accompanying printed catalogue sheets.

One of these pieces, amongst the last I viewed, was a basket collected from the scene of the 'Nagoa' massacre in 1861. Through research and speaking with local Aboriginal people I hope to find out more information on this sad event.

Conclusions

If the Architectural Biennale in Venice *next* is an indication there is a growing interest world-wide in new museums both general and very specific. Through working with curators I gained a general impression that there is more generous support for museums and cultural heritage overseas than there is in Australia, though some individuals were affected by uncertainty due to re-structuring and cost-cutting exercises. The curators that I met were dedicated and hard-working, often having responsibility for ethnographic collections from many countries. Curators working with Indigenous Australian material have a deeply-felt regard for their collections, though often having had limited direct experience with Australia or its people. This restricts their knowledge-base, resulting in a lack of confidence to curate exhibitions that are comprehensive and meaningful which go beyond the token gesture. As a result there were collections which one felt would rarely if ever leave their storage location, though I saw fine examples of exhibitions and catalogues that had been produced by curators who had traveled to Australia, met curators and artists and collaborated with Indigenous people. I was able to observe a range of experiences and attitudes presented by leading curators at the Pacific Arts Association-Europe meeting in Dresden .

Vast collections from Papua New Guinea, the Pacific, Africa, Asia and America are spectacular and well-documented and seem to take precedence over the Australian collections in terms of specific exhibitions. However, some curators have traveled in recent years and have commissioned or bought contemporary pieces from artists living both in remote locations and more urbanised situations to develop collections and exhibition programmes of Indigenous Australian material.

I didn't attempt to record every object that I saw, depending on hand-written notes and drawings of exceptional pieces, however these records are held by the institutions. The knowledge and inspiration that I gained will inform my work primarily through exhibitions and supporting catalogues and also directly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and their families.

Recommendations

Several museums in Europe and the United States have recently issued a landmark declaration that they oppose repatriation of cultural artefacts seized in earlier times, regarding their value in promoting cultures to outweigh the desire by individual countries or racial groups for their return. It seems at this point that there is more possibility for the return of human remains, though this requires long periods of very emotional consultation and negotiation.

It is important to develop networks for communication between Australians working in this field and their overseas counter-parts. Already attempts have been made to begin to record these overseas collections and this should continue in conjunction with the relevant institutions and curators. Support and expertise could be made available by relevant overseas institutions and funding assistance given to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies to co-ordinate such a project and archive the records. Opportunities for residencies to work with overseas collections can be developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are increasingly taking control of the management of their material culture as museum professionals. Some older people have been able to travel to visit collections of which they have knowledge and expertise and this is a very valuable contribution which should be supported and encouraged wherever possible.

The VII International Symposium of the Pacific Arts Association is to be held in June 2003 entitled 'Repositioning Pacific Arts: Artists Objects Histories'. It would seem to be the ideal forum for discussing the above issues and I hope to be able to attend.