

Euroseas conference 2010

Panel: Material Culture and Memory

Convenor: Fiona Kerlogue, Horniman Museum

Presenters in order of presentation:

1. **Barbara Bohle, University of Vienna, Austria** [Bohle@gmx.at].

Title: Material Inspirations in Javanese Contemporary Arts: A Sculptor's Case

Abstract: In Central Java history persists petrified in the many candi (Hindu-Buddhist temples) of the area, preserved by the Indonesian state as key sites of memory. As identity symbols they are multiply reproduced, in miniature forms, as iconographic fragments, and through various media, to circulate their originally stone-fixed messages via tourism and artefact markets and engrave them as ancient root in the local, national, and global imagery. Their petrified appearance, suggesting that the stories of the past are unbendable and reliably engraved into stone, embodies, of course, a disseminating strategy of monolithic politics of various sorts and is anchor in a vastly changing and unstable presence. As such they appeal to historical and anthropological analysts and contemporary artists alike, who critically comment from without and within such constraining socio-cultural processes.

This paper explores how a contemporary sculptor from Central Java takes part in the flourishing industry of materializing memory in objects of stone as he draws upon the aesthetic tradition of Javanese Hindu-Buddhist monuments, thereby associating with the memory canon of the nation, while at the same time inserting post/modern ideas drawn from the 'other', more recent, and contemporary cultural storage of Java, Indonesia, and beyond, thereby invoking new visions of identity. Taking inspirations for his stone-work from a wide and open cultural and religious continuum, he elaborates a vision of a globalizing Javanese art pool that integrates Javanism and Cosmopolitanism as creative resource to suggest an unrestricted identity formation that remains within transforming local practice nevertheless. Fluidly situating the production of his sculpture beyond spatio-temporal limits, he also identifies an artistic source, structure, and dynamic specific to Central Java: artistic material media cross boundaries between object, space, and body to unite artists of all fields – sculptors, dancers, musicians, etc. – in one common source of (mystical) inspiration, the human heart-beat.

2. **Gabriele Weichart, University of Vienna, Austria.** (gabriele.weichart@univie.ac.at).

Title: Remembering the Past and Representing the Future: Monuments in North Sulawesi (Indonesia)

Abstract: Over the past few decades, a growing number of stone and wooden monuments have been erected as visible signs in public places in the region of Minahasa located at the northern tip of the island of Sulawesi. Many of these sculptures represent historical or mythical, and often heroic, figures and/or events. They are prominent markers of Minahasa public self-representation in which the

boundaries between history, religion and mythology become blurred. The paper will inquire about the role of these monuments as sites and objects of memory and identity in contemporary Minahasa society.

3. Nicolas Césard, EHESS-IRIS, Paris, France. [ncesard@ehess.fr]

Title: Jars as heritage of the past and cultural memory of the present among a former nomadic group of Borneo

Abstract: Stoneware and porcelain jars of Chinese, Vietnamese or Thai origin have been traded for centuries among the ethnic groups living in the interior of Borneo. For more than a century now the Punan, former nomads of the Tubu River (East-Kalimantan, Indonesia), have exchanged various forest products (resins, gums, rattans) for jars, first through their farming neighbours, and then directly with the downstream traders. Punan families identify about fifty types of jars that they organise into various categories according to their origin, their look and their value in exchanges.

What kinds of relations do the Punan maintain with their jars? Why are certain jars kept whereas others are exchanged or sold? After having discussed the importance of outside goods and the process by which former nomads have gradually transformed them into prestige goods and heirlooms, my presentation will address the actual role of jars and their substitutes in matrimonial payments (bridewealth payments), and more specifically, their function as memory goods and as local heritage of the Punan's complex cultural and historical situation.

4. Willemijn de Jong, University of Zurich. (w.de.jong@access.uzh.ch)

Title: *ikat* textiles as mobile objects of (trans)local memory.

Abstract: In this paper the focus is on *ikat* textiles manufactured in home industry by women in the southern Lio area of Central Flores, Indonesia. The *ikat* textiles represent prestigious artefacts of the Lio clothing repertoire, as they are worn at important public events, exchanged as gifts, and sold to locals and tourists, including museums. Thus, these textiles can be considered as highly mobile objects. The goal of the project is to get a deeper understanding of the design patterns and motifs, departing from the weavers' conceptions of the world, of modernity and tradition and placing their conceptions in a wider context. Of particular interest are older *patola* designs (*motif sémba*) and rather recent, fashionable figurative designs (*motif gamba*) of women's sarongs and men's shoulder cloths.

The main question to be addressed is: What do the weavers make understandable in important non-figurative and figurative designs of their weavings? It is suggested that recent *ikat* art in Central Flores is not about the creation of a coherent vision of the world and the weaver's place in it but it shows the relationships of the weavers and perceivers in a complex social and cultural space. This space is locally, translocally, globally and historically informed, particularly with reference to early colonialism with the exchange of trade cloths, postcolonial religious influences, and recent *adat* revivalism in Indonesia. Crucial social and cultural aspects of these life

worlds are continuously re-created and re-configured, through the agency of the weavers and through the agency of their textiles as mobile objects of (trans)local memory. A new reading of the iconography, ethnicization and gendering of Eastern Indonesian *ikat* textiles is envisaged, referring to recent work on the materiality of clothing and its patterns in the Pacific, work on the globalization of Asian dress and work on social memory. This project is a continuation of an earlier project that included longer periods of fieldwork in 1987/88 and 1990/91 in this area on economic and social aspects of „cloth wealth“ and gender relationships.

5. Fiona Kerlogue, Horniman Museum, London, UK. (FKerlogue@horniman.ac.uk):
Title: Memory and materiality in a Malay village in Sumatra.

Material items operate as repositories of memories, both for individuals and collectively, and are often preserved for this purpose. In many societies material objects are of key importance in the establishment and maintenance of kin and cultural identity.

This paper takes as an example material used in a Malay community in Jambi in Sumatra, and considers the multi-faceted nature of the relationships between people, time and objects, exploring the importance of objects in the preservation of cultural memory.

Field research has revealed the centrality of material culture in the development and maintenance of identity and tradition. Material has the capacity to act as signifier of intangible aspects of human life and culture and to represent symbolically not only memories of individuals for family members and friends, but also of local knowledge, values and beliefs central to a community. The transmission of these core aspects of culture to each generation is often achieved through the persistence and transfer of material and material forms.

In this paper I consider to what extent the types of material used and preserved in Jambi represent or evoke values and ideas which are passed to the next generation. What does the importance of imported material suggest about local conceptions of identity? What material is inherited by succeeding generations and what is not? How does this relate to the identification of family and of belonging?

6. Awang Azman Awang Pawi, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.
[awangazman@gmail.com]

Title: Sarawak Malay Material Culture: Between Collective Memory and Primordial.

Abstract: Why should the Malay Sarawak culture be associated with the Sarawak Malay Culture? How to differentiate Sarawak Malay material culture from other ethnic cultures in Sarawak ? How is the Minangkabau diaspora representative of Sarawak Malay Culture? To what extent do the collective memories and primordial of 'nusantara culture' exist in Sarawak Material culture? This paper will explore the antecedent of Malay material culture to contemporary Sarawak material Malay culture. The study themes are related to heritage, tradition and modernity in term of material culture. Recently, the politics and poetics of displaying the indigenous

material culture have made their presence felt in the late capitalism era. Now the *keringkam, gajah olen, tar, kek lapis Sarawak* to name a few are part of 'display culture' of the ethnic and show the identity and artistic attributes through the of Sarawak Malay identity. This paper also analyzes the latest trend of this 'display culture' from the perspective politic of survival in an 'incredulity toward metanarratives' in the postmodern era.

7. **Erika C. Robis and Ana Maria Theresa P. Labrador** [eka.robis@gmail.com] Title: Death, material culture and memory in a former Spanish colonial town in the Philippines.

Abstract: *Cementerio para los indios* of Tayabas, a former Spanish *cabecera*, was established in 1887, intended as a place for interring the Catholic converts of the local population. It stands today as one of the oldest cemeteries in the southern Tagalog region of the Philippines, both withstanding and adjusting through colonial, political and sociocultural changes made since its establishment. *Los Indios* was later designated as Tayabas Roman Catholic Cemetery, and at about the same time, the municipal cemetery and a private memorial park were established along its sides. Using data from observed burial and commemoration practices and documentation and mapping of memorials, this paper explores the representation of Tayabasin heritage, tradition and identity through mortuary material culture and the cemetery as a place. This will also unravel similar practices in Southeast Asian death memorials and locations that signify the context of endurance of funeral traditions, remembrances of departed kin and belief in the afterlife.

8. **Sri Kuhnt-Saptodewo, Museum of Ethnology, Vienna.** [sri.kuhnt@ethno-museum.ac.at] **Dagmar Pospisilova, Naprstek Museum, Prague, and Philip Hesser, Museum of Ethnology, Vienna.**

Title: Sharing cultural Memory. The Collection of Czurda.

In 1883 Dr. Frantisek Czurda, a Bohemian physician, sold large parts of his Indonesian collection to the Vienna-based Natural History Museum and gave the other parts to his friend Vojta Náprstek's museum in Prague. Dr. Czurda had been in the service of the Dutch colonial army since 1876 which brought him from Java to the battle-fields of Aceh and to Sulawesi. He spent his free time collecting material artefacts of everyday life and conducting research on the customs of the local populations and publishing his findings in travel accounts in a Prague-based newspaper.

Today his collection of South Sulawesi especially stands out as one of the most comprehensive single collections of Bugis and Macassarese material culture from the end of the 19th century. The printed catalogue, which documents the Vienna based part of the collection, not only describes the collection in a way unusual for those days, but also illustrates Dr. Czurda's desire for proper scientific enquiry and representation and thus depicts his in some accounts naive, but nevertheless avant-garde, approach to the emerging field of ethnography.

Together the curators Jani Kuhnt-Saptodewo and Dagmar Pospíšilová of the two ethnographic Museums in Vienna (Museum für Völkerkunde Wien) and Prague (Náprstek Museum Prague) are conducting a one year research project (Sharing cultural Memory) financed by the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research (ForMuse).

In May and June it is planned to go to Indonesia to present and discuss Czurda's collection with curators of local museums. In this panel we would like to speak about the insights and results of this research project.

9. **Susan Conway, SOAS, University of London, UK.** (sc66@soas.ac.uk).

Title: Material Culture and Memory: The Shan States of Burma (Myanmar).

Abstract: Following Burmese military invasion of the Shan States from the 1960s to present, local sponsorship of Shan cultural activities and monastic literary and ritual practice, has been minimal. Many monks have fled to northern Thailand where they serve Shan communities living in exile, and Shan people cross the border to attend the ceremonies they hold.

Of prime importance to these communities both in country and in exile is the conservation and preservation of manuscripts and ritual material, considered symbols of Shan heritage and cultural identity. Money has been raised both locally and in communities living abroad to buy land for a library where manuscripts can be conserved and catalogued. However, this is a race against time as in certain specialist areas the material is being rapidly consumed by antique dealers.

This paper focuses on one specialism, Shan manuscripts and ritual material associated with apotropaic practices, warding off evil, generating good luck and bringing protection. There are monks and lay experts on both sides of the border who have studied in this field. In the current climate of poverty and insecurity, they have adapted supernatural formulae and rituals to meet the needs of recent migrants while attending to the requirements of more prosperous long-term settlers.

10. **Helen Mears, Brighton Museum, UK.** [Helen.Mears@brighton-hove.gov.uk] Title: The Materiality of Loss: Shan textiles in exile

Abstract: This paper will present a unique body of court regalia from the Shan States, Burma (Myanmar), held in the World Art Collection at Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove. Most items were donated by individual members of former Shan elites who now live in exile in the UK. The paper will provide an opportunity to reflect on the role of material culture in mediating loss, trauma and memory and to consider how these aspects are 'managed' within the museum collection. Can such precious artefacts ever be considered outside of their traumatic historical, political and personal contexts?

11. **Michael S. Falser, Heidelberg University, Germany.** Falser, Michael [falser@asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de].

Title: Models, moulds and memory: a transcultural perspective on material culture in the case of the reproduction of Angkor Vat, Cambodia.

Angkor Vat temple from the 12th c. in Cambodia is the largest religious stone monument in the world. Despite its massive architectural structure in situ, Angkor Vat is one of the most "travelled" objects in Southeast Asia through its reproduction in models and moulds. This phenomenon is tightly linked with the modern notion of

national building, the invention of the concept of cultural heritage and the increasingly commercialised cultures of display. In the 19th and early 20th century, Angkor Vat served not only as a model for the initiation of Thai nationalism inside the Bangkok Royal Palace but became the most important monument and archaeological fetish in the French *mission civilisatrice* of the Indo-Chinese Protectorate: its surface was copied via the technique of moulding and transferred for scientific study and display inside the new-found Parisian *Musée Indochinois* and after being partially reconstructed for earlier World Exhibitions, it reached its most spectacular transcultural translation in the 1:1-scale model for the state-propagandistic Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931. Apart from these state-run instrumentalizations, Angkor Vat serves ever since as an object of vernacular reproduction in Cambodia itself: its rebuilt model in small scale can not only be seen today in local artistic workshops and tourist hotels but also in cremation ceremonies of the local Buddhist community.

This paper aims to formulate a transcultural perspective on material culture studies. It uses the case-study of the different forms of reproductions of the Angkor Vat temple in Cambodia to analyse material flows between political representations, religious practise, scientific display, vernacular art production and touristic consumption.

12 . **Angela Chiu, SOAS, University of London, UK.** [chiu_angela_s@yahoo.com] Title: Memories Are Made of This: Northern Thai Buddha Images, Material and Temporality

This paper focuses on the ideological processes that have given social and institutional value and structure to Buddha images in northern Thai culture. Buddha statues have often been defined as memorials to the Buddha, but local inscriptions and monastic chronicles indicate how such statues have had other temporal and historical meanings for the people who made and venerated them. When taken together, the patronage, multi-temporal agency and "biography" of the images gave meaning to individual devotees as well as to monastic and royal lineages throughout northern Thai territories. The image is a site of constant exchange between image and devotees, as well as between devotee and devotee of different time periods. Indeed, the distinctive and complex role in personal and institutional memory of Buddha images may begin to explain their enduring power in Thai society.

