



RECOVERING VOICES

Seminar Series
in Endangered Languages
and Indigenous Knowledge

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Thursday 20 September 2012

3:30 PM

NMNH, Rose Room

***Not Your Mama's Bilum: the Aesthetics of
Innovation in Papua New Guinea Highlands String
Bag Production***

Bilum, looped string bags indigenous to the island of New Guinea, are more popular than ever among citizens of the rapidly urbanizing and globalizing nation of Papua New Guinea. As sites for the expression of personal style, regional origin, gender, and class status, *bilum* are worn by everyone but produced exclusively by women. Indeed, in many parts of the Highlands region, the ability to make *bilum* is considered the sine qua non of a positive, productive female identity. This paper will examine the ways in which young women, in particular, are at the forefront of technical and aesthetic innovations and the promotion of style trends in bilum production and consumption. Indeed, stylistic differences in bilum are one of the ways in which generational distinctions—and “youth” as an increasingly important category of identity—are created and expressed. This presentation will include images and objects collected in the eastern and central Highlands of Papua New Guinea in 2010-12 for the National Museum of Natural History.



A collaborative initiative of National Museum of Natural History,
National Museum of the American Indian and the
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