

RECOVERING VOICES

Seminar Series in Endangered Languages and Indigenous Knowledge



Chris Patrello

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presents:

Indigenous Accounts: Local Exchange and Global Circulation along the Northwest Coast

Monday October 17, 2016 12:00pm -1:00pm
Cooper Room (Room E207-A), NMNH

The display of ethnographic objects in museum exhibitions, whether in the context of a fine arts gallery or a natural history museum, privileges the representative examples of ceremonial regalia and other ritually-significant objects. Despite their immense aesthetic and didactic value, such objects represent a mere fraction of a given collection. This paper argues for a more holistic understanding of ethnographic collections – one that includes more quotidian objects such as daily tools, botanical samples, and deteriorated or partial objects – to gain better understanding of both the material culture of everyday life and the idiosyncratic habits of individual collectors.

I focus on James Gilchrist Swan's collection of Haida and Tlingit material culture from the Northwest Coast of North America. Swan, who collected on behalf of the United States National Museum for the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition and the 1883 London International Fisheries Exhibition, amassed a large collection of Northwest Coast material culture. He also kept detailed invoices for every collecting trip and maintained a daily journal for his most of his adult life. What might the breadth of this collection reveal about the ways in which indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast negotiated the uncertain terrain of colonial encounters? Likewise, what does the material record produced by Swan tell us about the institutional and infrastructural changes occurring along the Northwest Coast?

Bio: Chris Patrello is a PhD candidate in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester. His research explores the ways in which indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast interact with global commodity flows during the nineteenth century. Currently, he is a Peter Buck Predoctoral Fellow at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.

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An initiative by the National Museum of Natural History,
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