

RECOVERING VOICES

Seminar Series in Endangered Languages and Indigenous Knowledge



Dr. Ingrid Ahlgren, PhD
Postdoctoral Fellow,
Department of Anthropology,
NMNH

presents:

Marshallese weaving patterns:
Encoding class, clan and change
through design

Thursday May 11, 2017, 12:00-1:00pm
Cooper Room (Room E207-A), NMNH

This presentation introduces the aims, approaches, and early considerations for my current Postdoctoral Fellowship at the NMNH examining form and pattern in the borders of Marshallese woven mats as a way of understanding how sociality and identity are expressed in material objects. Early ethnographic documentation suggests the carefully worked designs encode layers of social meaning and identity, whereby each band, constrained to a finite number and set of motifs, are symbolic abstractions of membership to matrilineal clans and totems. There has been no study devoted to the designs of mats from the Marshall Islands, or their overarching aesthetic system, and this project aims to do just that – to systematically examine, document, and analyse design elements in Marshallese mats, and to consider how they may, or may not, be visual expressions of authority and belonging. Drawing on research elsewhere in Oceania, I will seek to answer three questions: 1) Are clan membership and social status encoded within these designs?; 2) What elements comprise a Marshallese stylistic system?; 3) What kind of motifs are being employed in modern works, and what do they communicate about historical shifts in purpose and preference?

For more information or to request a visitor badge contact RecoveringVoices@si.edu or call 202-633-5039



An initiative by the National Museum of Natural History,
in collaboration with the National Museum of the American Indian
and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Recovering Voices
Department of Anthropology
National Museum of Natural History
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
www.RecoveringVoices.si.edu