

UC Santa Cruz

Pacific Arts: The Journal of the Pacific Arts Association

Title

Special Section on Pacific Arts Association— Europe’s Annual Meeting: “Gendered Objects in Oceania,” Part 2

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7nc613kp>

Journal

Pacific Arts: The Journal of the Pacific Arts Association, 23(2)

ISSN

1018-4252

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Publication Date

2023

DOI

10.5070/PC223263046

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FANNY WONU VEYS

Special Section on Pacific Arts Association— Europe’s Annual Meeting: “Gendered Objects in Oceania,” Part 2

Abstract

Fanny Wonu Vey, president of the Pacific Arts Association—Europe, describes the 2022 annual meeting held at the Musée du quai Branly—Jacques Chirac in Paris. She introduces five essays based on papers presented at the meeting, focused on the theme “Gendered Objects in Oceania.”

Keywords: *Pacific Arts Association, Pacific Arts Association—Europe, gender, Oceania, art, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Marquesas Islands, barkcloth, art conservation, Aitape, shell rings, Tonga, tattoo*

In September 2022, the Musée du quai Branly—Jacques Chirac (MQB) hosted the annual meeting of the Pacific Arts Association—Europe (PAA-E) in Paris. Stéphanie Leclerc-Caffarel, curator of Oceania at the MQB and I, president of the PAA-Europe and curator of Oceania at the Wereldmuseum in the Netherlands, hoped to explore whether and how objects are being gendered in Oceania. If one accepts that things are an intrinsic part of being human and shaping the world, objects also take an essential role in gendering bodies, social relations, and ways of being. It can, therefore, be argued that objects are important vehicles for realisation of individual and group identities. With this idea in mind, we launched a call for papers on the theme “Gendered Objects in Oceania,” focusing on material culture as an expression of gendered collecting, gender identities, gendered objects and art practices, and access to collections along gender lines. This PAA-E meeting encouraged cross-fertilisation between the ever-evolving fields of material culture and gender studies—disciplines that have not seemed natural allies to this point.¹

The collection of five papers presented in this special section of *Pacific Arts* augment the three that were presented in the previous issue of this journal. As Tarisi Vunidilo looks at objects made by the male chiefly clan of *mataisau* in Fiji, consisting mainly of carpenters and woodworkers, she stays most closely to the initial idea for organising the PAA-E meeting in Paris. *Mataisau* objects were

gathered by mostly male collectors and ended up in museums around the world, and Vunidilo presents Indigenous Fijian and museum-professional perspectives on roles and responsibilities. Two other papers explore what a close reading of objects can offer: through careful analysis of the typology of ear ornaments from the Marquesas, Caroline van Santen proposes a gendered reading of the wearers of these ornaments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Nicolas Moret takes a conservator's approach to a restoration project of a barkcloth in the Musée Cantonal d'Archéologie et d'Histoire in Lausanne, Switzerland. Maria Wronska-Friend explores the central role of women in the economic and social life of Papua New Guinea by looking at the female production of shell rings. In her article she examines how gender dynamics in a small group of coral islands near the northern coast of Papua New Guinea and the town of Aitape were disrupted by European colonisation and missionisation in the late 1880s. Finally, my article looks at the evidence in historical sources for tattooing of Tongan women in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, debunking some of the myths that allege the nonexistence of tattooing in Tonga.

The eight papers presented in the two special sections of *Pacific Arts* (vol. 23, issues 1 and 2) that are devoted to the PAA-E conference capture some of the diversity of the PAA-E 2022 meeting and provide a glimpse of some of the current thinking around objects and gender in the Pacific.

Fanny Wonu Veys is curator of Oceania at the National Museum of World Cultures (Tropenmuseum, Afrika Museum and Museum Volkenkunde), recently renamed the Wereldmuseum, the Netherlands. She previously worked at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge, UK, and has held postdoctoral fellowships at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Musée du quai Branly—Jacques Chirac, Paris. Veys curated the exhibitions What a Genderful World, first presented at the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, in 2019 and then at the Wereldmuseum in 2020; A Sea of Islands: Masterpieces from Oceania at the Volkenkunde, Leiden, in 2021; and Mana Māori (2010–11) at the Volkenkunde, Leiden, for which she published a book with the same title. She co-curated Australian Art with Dr. Georges Petitjean and a barkcloth exhibition, Tapa, étoffes cosmiques d'Océanie, in Cahors in 2009 with Laurent Guillaut. Veys's research interests are Pacific art and material culture, museums and cultures of collecting, Pacific musical instruments, Pacific textiles, and the significance of historical objects in a contemporary setting.

Notes

¹ For a more detailed description of the PAA-E annual meeting and conference theme, see Fanny Wonu Veys, “Special Section on Pacific Arts Association–Europe’s Annual Meeting: ‘Gendered Objects in Oceania,’ Part 1,” *Pacific Arts* 23 (1), 2023. Some of the description presented here is also included in the introduction to that special section.