



Museum Ethnographers Group Annual General Meeting. Horniman Museum in London,

Reviewed by Jeremy Coote

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A conference entitled *Museum Ethnographers Group Annual General Meeting* was held recently at the Horniman Museum in London where a new permanent display, "African Worlds," has been opened. Jointly organized by the Horniman and the UK Museums Ethnographers Group it was held at the Horniman Museum and Gardens, Forest Hill, London, from Tuesday 25th to Thursday 27th March 1999. The conference was well-attended, with 78 people enrolled (though not everyone stayed for all three days). I'm afraid it did not occur to me to suggest to the organizers that they should post a note about it on this list in advance; it only occurred to me during the conference that I should have done so. If and when the conference proceedings are published, I shall post a note on the list with details. Any enquiries, however, should not be addressed to me but to the conference organizer, Anthony Shelton, at the Horniman.

According to the conference literature: 'The conference seeks to explore Western images of Africa and their impact on museum displays. Anthropology has provided different lenses to picture African cultures but each, in quick succession, has been dissolved under critical scrutiny, leaving anthropology a suspect science in the eyes of many of those it historically reduced to subjects. The mass media have played a particularly influential role in establishing the popular consciousness of Africa. Adventure writers-Edgar Rice Burroughs, Rider Haggard and Joseph Conrad-have created powerful and con-

torting stereotypes which, together with television and news reportage, have moved Western discourses from a crude ecological determinism to racial stereotypes and negative national images. These issues, along with art history's critical intervention, have strongly affected the way museums have represented Africa. Moreover, many museums organized African displays using ideologically constructed notions of "tribe" and ethnicity, which denied history and ignore the contemporary political conditions of peoples. Elsewhere, anthropological approaches have been completely ignored in favour of aesthetic display. Anthropologists, artists, museum professionals, and other interested parties are invited to attend this close-of-the-millennium assessment of the museum's contribution to the popular understanding and images of Africa.'

There was a full programme of twenty-minute talks and discussions. The following list is taken from the published programme. Of the advertised speakers, only Annie Coombes was not able to speak.

On Day One the Museum Ethnographers Group Annual General Meeting was followed by a 'Welcome' by Janet Vitmayner (Director, Horniman Museum), an 'Opening Statement' by Anthony Shelton (Head of Collections, Research and Development, Horniman Museum), and a 'Keynote Address' by Emmanuel Arinze (Chairman, West African Museums Programme). These were followed by a session on 'Museums, Scholarship and Collecting': 'Museum Representations and Africa's Cultural Legacy:

Classical and Living Traditions' by Femi Biko (Goldsmiths' College, London), 'Collecting Voices' by Patricia Peach (ex Horniman Museum), 'Colonialism as Popular Culture: The Case of the African Museum at Namur' by Karel Arnaut (University of Ghent, Belgium), and 'Leon Underwood Collecting of African Art' by Celina Jeffrey (University of Essex). <p> On Day Two there were two sessions. The first was entitled 'Museums and Exhibitions' and consisted in eight papers: 'The Other Side of Empire: Ipswich, Suffolk, and Black History' by David Jones (Ipswich Museum), 'Brussels and Namur: Two Colonial Collections in Belgium' Bambi Ceuppens (University of Ghent), 'Their Culture Suits Us Well: Exhibiting the Museum for the Sake of the Third Portuguese Empire' by Nuno Porto (University of Coimbra), 'From Evolution to Celebration: Displaying the Material Culture of Africa at the Pitt Rivers Museum' Jeremy Coote and Chris Morton (Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford), 'Looking for Lobi: Three Museums in Ghana' by Michael Pennie (Bath Spa University College), 'Owen Logan's Home of Sign and Wonders' by Elizabeth Edwards (Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford), 'Museums and the Concept of "Community": What Future the Past in a Democratic South Africa' by Annie Coombes (Birkbeck College, London), and 'Flick Shows and the Skin Trade: Some Idea Behind "African Worlds."' by Anthony Shelton. <p> The second session was entitled 'Cultural Encounters and Education' and consisted in six papers: 'Cultural Encounters: Representing Otherness' by Brian Street (King's College, London) and Elizabeth Hallam (University of Aberdeen), 'Artefacts, Representation, and the Curriculum' by Paul Dash (Goldsmiths College, London), 'Employing Feminist Hermeneutics to Re-Read and Write a Benin Collection' by Vivien Golding (Horniman Museum), 'Towards Museum Education in a Multi-Cultural Context: Indigenous Voices, Cognition, and the Reinterpretation of Benin Art' by Joseph Eboreime (Benin City Museum), 'Whose Story Is It Anyway? Language and Museum Exhibitions' by Helen Coxall (University

of Westminster), and 'Community Education: Eliciting a Response' by Carolyn Roberts (Horniman Museum). <p> On Day Three there were also two sessions. The first was entitled 'African Visual Culture' and consisted in eight papers: 'Stating the Obvious: Freetown Floats as Popular Art' by Jenny Oram (School of Oriental And African Studies, University of London), 'When Gelede Met Barbie: Syncretism in Haitian Voudou Imagery' by Phil Cope (independent scholar), 'Looking at Looking: Glancing at Yoruba Masquerade' by William Rea (Goldsmiths' College, London), 'Imagery of the Body and Artefacts' by Mich=E8le Coquet (CNRS, Paris), 'Mamiwata in the "Drilling Fields" of Ogoniland' by Jill Salmons (Winchester College of Art and Design), 'Observers and Worried (Ato Delaquis, 1991): But Is It Art or Ethnography?' by John Picton (School of Oriental And African Studies, University of London), 'Appropriate Appropriation: The Art of Collecting in West Africa by Keith Nicklin (Horniman Museum), and 'Saving Our Skins: Long-Term Care of Masks from the Cross River Region' by Sophie Julien (Horniman Museum). <p> The second session was entitled 'Cultural Property: Identity, Trusteeship, and Restitution' and consisted in five papers: 'Restitution or Re-Circulation: Benin and Ife' by Frank Willett (University of Glasgow), 'Questions of Cultural Rights: Cultural Patrimony and the Nation in Mali by Michael Rowlands (University College London), 'The King, the Brit, the Bronze, and the Cartoon by Michael Bowles (Horniman Museum), 'War Booty: Changing Contexts, Changing Displays' by Antonia Lovelace (Leeds Museum), and 'Inappropriate Appropriation: The Collecting of West African Art' by Keith Nicklin (Horniman Museum). <p>

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at [#uninitialized#](#)

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