



SESSION ABSTRACT

Transforming intersections between art and environment in Oceania

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Abstract: What is art in Oceania? The interpretation of what constitutes art, its legitimacy and the sources of inspiration are and always have been subject to transformations. Concepts of art evolve, traditional art is being reinterpreted and new sources of inspiration contribute to the materialisation of objects and thoughts that represent the past, the present and the future as an ever-transforming continuity.

In this session, participants will have the opportunity to discuss their ideas of Oceanic art with artist George Nuku, whose exhibition "Oceans. Collections. Reflections." is currently on display at the Weltmuseum Wien. A special focus will be on one source of inspiration, which is "the environment", often considered as something that is not part of us humans. However, for example George Nuku's art shows how intertwined humans are with their environment and how this intersection creates space for mutual feedback.

Inspired from this session, we expect our participants to contribute afterwards with a paper to the peer-reviewed journal [Pacific Geographies](#), which will dedicate an issue (that will also be labelled as "[Pazifik Dossier](#)" in the Österreichisch-Südpazifische Gesellschaft (OSPG) publication series) to this topic.

We invite experienced scholars as well as postgraduate students to contribute to this session.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Thursday, September 29, 2022 | Slot 1 | Room 4

The act of creation:

Marion Struck-Garbe: Visualising Environmental Destruction in Papua New Guinea

Stephanie Walda-Mandel: Between Environmentalism and Cultural Heritage: Ghostnet Art by Torres Strait Islanders and Australian Aboriginals

Matteo Gallo: Music over Water. Tiga island and the story of the nynewaco

Nicolas Garnier: The landscape outside

Thursday, September 29, 2022 | Slot 2 | Room 4

The museum setting:

Erna Lilje: Contemporary art from Oceania in world culture museum settings

Wonu Veys: The art of relating: a Raja Ampat altar and a waka

Discussion with George Nuku: perspectives on the presentations of the session, ideas about how to find a common thread for contributions for a special issue of the Journal Pacific Geographies

SESSION PAPERS

Visualising Environmental Destruction in Papua New Guinea

Marion Struck-Garbe

My contribution presents ways in which two contemporary artists in Papua New Guinea (PNG) are dealing with issues of climate change and the destruction of nature in PNG and the Pacific at large through their art. Laben Sakale John and Gazellah Bruder are two well-known PNG artists who visualise their feelings and thoughts about environmental degradation and the impact of climate change in intense and expressive ways. Laben Sakale John addresses tropical storms and Australian bushfires, while Gazellah Bruder is concerned about ocean pollution, deforestation in PNG, and the extinction of wildlife. Both are aware that the lifestyles of Indigenous peoples and their traditional livelihoods are also threatened. Their works of art evoke a sense of loss and sadness but also of urgency, that something effective must be done - by all of us - to combat climate change on a global scale.

Between Environmentalism and Cultural Heritage: Ghostnet Art by Torres Strait Islanders and Australian Aboriginals

Stephanie Walda-Mandel

Ghostnet art is a relatively new art movement that centres on art as a form of environmental activism for the protection of the oceans. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people see themselves in this context as advocates of the oceans and, with their fascinating sculptures created from old fishing nets stranded on their coasts, are campaigning against the danger of abandoned fishing nets, which each year become

a deadly trap for countless marine animals, in which they die in agony.

Their art is now highly regarded on the art market worldwide and is at the same time an expression of their identity and culture, in which they refer to their totem animals and use traditional techniques for their works. In this way, they consciously link the past and their cultural heritage with the present and current environmental concerns.

They appear as self-confident artists with agency who want to draw attention to the threat with their art works, without lapsing into negativity.

In 2018, works by Ghostnet artists were shown for the first time in Germany in a small special exhibition at the Übersee-Museum Bremen. The paper will look at the environmental and cultural background of Ghostnet art, the artist communities and their message behind the works, as well as the design of the exhibition.

Music over Water. Tiga island and the story of the nynewaco

Matteo Gallo

This paper focuses on the connections between art and environment in the Tiga Island of New Caledonia. A place where music production is intimately connected to the ecological environment that surrounds it. More precisely, I will trace the trajectories of a mythical chat, the nynewaco, connected to the island's identity. I will discuss the myth surrounding this traditional chant and I will question the process of artistic creation carried out by contemporary musicians on the island. The paper will address these issues by presenting the preliminary results of a recent research project in New Caledonia.

The landscape outside

NICOLAS GARNIER

Since the early 2000s, male Papua New Guinean prisoners are embroidering bags during their time in prison. With an extreme sophistication, they depict visual themes that are rather specific to prisoners' bags. Two types of images are particularly common: as symbolic representation of a prisoner locked in his jail and, often on the other side of the same bag, an ideal tropical landscape. Unlike most type of PNG artistic productions, embroidered bags belongs to a very limited range of visual creations that are not made (and noticed by) foreign clients. This paper examines the construction of a new imaginary of the landscape in contemporary Melanesia and searches for visual sources and signification of the various components of this idealized and stereotypical representation of a tropical environment.

Contemporary art from Oceania in world culture museum settings

Erna Lilje

Over the past few decades it has become more widely accepted that it is not enough to only 'tell about' others in the context of ethnographic museum displays. One response to this has been to include elements of self-representation. In many instances this has been achieved by incorporating contemporary artworks. This can be a powerful way to achieve multiple museum objectives – to have people of a particular ethnic identity representing themselves; to counter the older museum

tradition of presenting cultures as unchanging or as having been authentic only in the past; to offer critical reflections on race in ethnographic museum & anthropology practice. This paper will discuss the deployment of contemporary art works in world cultures museums that go beyond these scripts, in which artists provide perspectives on wider concerns, such as ecological issues and environment justice.

The art of relating: a Raja Ampat altar and a waka

Wonu Veys,

Through two case studies, the display of an altar from the Raja Ampat Island and the long-term loan of a *waka*, a Māori canoe, I will explore what caring for artful objects from the Pacific can contribute to the art of building relationships between people and people and their environment. I will start by focusing on the relationships that made these objects travel to the Netherlands. In the paper the activation and rekindling of relationships with land and people through the altar and the *waka* will then be explored.