

WEST NEW GUINEA ON VIEW

**Exhibiting Material Culture in Colonial and Post-colonial
Contexts**



Maria Anna Milioni

Left picture: Van Wengen 1990, 176.

Right picture: Smidt and Pouwer 2003, 10.

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1. Introduction

In this thesis I will discuss the ways of displaying and the changing museum practices in the passage of time concerning a former Dutch colony, West New Guinea. This region remained under Dutch sovereignty from 1824 until 1961.

The goal of this thesis is to trace the way these objects were displayed in colonial and post-colonial contexts, the way people perceived and exhibited “traditional cultures” and how the conceptual academic currents are depicted in the narratives of the exhibitions in the National Museum of Ethnology in the course of time.

My research was conducted in Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden, The Netherlands, one of the oldest of its kind. It was established in 1837 and it is an illustrative example of a 19th century European ethnographic museum with rich ethnographic collections from China, Indonesia, Africa, Oceania, Japan, Korea, Latin America and North America. Due to Dutch language insufficiency it was not feasible to study in depth the museum archives so I based my research on alternative sources of information such as publications of the museum, publications from members of the museum staff, photo archives and general bibliography.

The second chapter of this paper is about how ethnographic museums came into being and how the conceptual academic currents shaped the Western perceptions of the “other” cultures and consequently influenced the museum practices of past times. The third chapter focuses on three former curators of Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Lindor Serrurier, Simon Kooijman and Dirk Smidt, each one representative of his time and describes their activities at the Museum of Ethnology and their general principles that guided their organization of temporary and permanent museum exhibits of West New Guinea material culture.

1.1 Archaeology and Cultural Anthropology

The nineteenth century was a very crucial point for European thought. Western European countries had established themselves as imperial powers and joined the

race to conquer new lands and expand their territory. In their colonies across the globe Europeans encountered people, who were entirely different from them and wondered how the human races can be so unlike.

Nineteenth century scholars in order to explain this diversity depended on the idea of progress of the Enlightenment movement. This notion of progress was based upon the idea of rationality, which allowed people to move towards moral and material indefectibility; human history was perceived as a scale of evolution towards perfection. Archaeology provided the “proof” according to Westerners that they had passed successfully all these stages of the evolutionary scale as their transition from the Stone Ages to Bronze and Iron Ages had demonstrated (Kelly and Thomas 2010, 303).

However, archaeology as a science was lacking at that time all the necessary and effective modes to explain culture change and remained unsure on matters such as social organization, political and legal systems or kinship. Archaeologists had to learn to adopt new methods towards dealing with the past. These kind of uncertainties of the discipline led scholars to use the comparative method as a basis to draw conclusions about past societies. This analogical model claimed that people are different because not all races managed to achieve the same level of progress and that the peoples, who pursued a different lifestyle from the Western one, were thought to be living instances of the past. If scholars wanted to study on how prehistoric people lived, they would only need to find a living native society, which approximated the archaeological culture. The past still existed and was depicted in the life-ways of the indigenous people (Kelly and Thomas 2010, 303-304). “Archaeologists and early ethnologists were closely united intellectually by their shared orientation toward unilinear cultural evolutionism and their common goal of investigating and classifying examples of evolutionary stages.”(Dietler 1996, 73) However, during the early twentieth century, archaeologists, based upon spatial and typological analysis of artifacts, began to turn towards geographically defined cultures in order to reconstruct past environments and interpret cultural phenomena. The emphasis was placed on defining ancient cultural groups

according to their material culture, which was thought to lose any contextual information about past life-ways and societies once became part of the archaeological record (Dietler 1996, 73).

During the 1960s New Archaeology or Processual Archaeology, with David Clarke in United Kingdom and Lewis Binford in United States as its most central figures, emerged in American universities and introduced a new form of archaeological theory as a critique to the culture-historical archaeology of the former period (Dietler 1996, 73). The application of anthropological methods and the extensive studying of ethnographies commenced (Earle 2008, 192). The proponents of processual archaeology argued that the purposes of both disciplines were the same and that “archaeology ought to be an integral part of anthropology because archaeologists and anthropologists shared the same goal: to explain similarities and differences among cultures.” (Erickson and Murphy 2008, 146)

By the 1980s a new form of archaeological theory emerged as a criticism of new archaeology, post-processual archaeology. “The key focus on the criticism lay in what was perceived to be an over-reliance of processual archaeology on a model of explanation derived from the natural science.” (Edgar and Sedgwick 2008, 16) New archaeology with the use of scientific method attempted to understand the past by making hypotheses and testing them. The past was understood through a series of laws, which did not allow diversity. Cultures were thought to be static without taking into account factors as social relations, gender, human agency etc. Post-processual archaeology shifted away from “generalizable hypotheses, and towards accounts for the particularity and distinctiveness of different cultures.” (Edgar and Sedgwick 2008, 16) At the same period, postmodernists in cultural anthropology criticized modern science for many similar reasons (Erickson and Murphy 2008, 147).

Although envisioned differently by different theoretical movements at different periods, “a close relationship exists between archaeology and cultural anthropology. They can be thought of as a part of the same endeavor, creating

complementary evidence and dynamic tensions that enliven each.” (Earle 2008, 199)

Alain Schnapp in his book *The discovery of the past* gives an example of this complementary dynamic of the two disciplines from the region of Melanesia; where the archaeologist becomes the ethnographer aiming to connect the archaeological findings with the cultural tradition of the people of the present (Schnapp 1997, 23).

The French archaeologist Jose Garanger in his research into the colonization of the New Hebrides in Melanesia used the native oral tradition as a fundamental stone. According to the natives, Roy Matta, the first settler, founded chiefdom in the island of Efate, which quickly embraced the whole group. When he died an important burial ceremony took place on the coral islet of Retoka, located north-west of the island of Efate, and representatives of the principal clans were buried alive with the great chief. Retoka islet was clearly an area of potential archaeological interest and excavations there soon disclosed a major funerary complex with features corresponding exactly to the oral legend of Roy Mata. Garanger wrote at his excavation diary:

“The information gathered from oral tradition is confirmed and enhanced by the results obtained via the methods of prehistoric archaeology.” (Schnapp 1997, 23).

Representatives of every clan were buried alive at their leader’s side according to indigenous oral tradition. *“Excavation was unable to verify this, apart from the young woman buried at the feet of Roy Matta. Were the men just drugged with kava, or poisoned? Were the women stunned or strangled before being buried? All we know is that live burial was still being practiced when the first missionaries arrived.”* (Schnapp 1997, 23).

It is fascinating to see how a funerary ceremony “has reached us almost intact from a point in time seven hundred years distant, not just through the testimony of soil, but through the memories of the native storytellers, whose work has never ceased.” (Schnapp 1997, 24)

This example illustrates in a very felicitous way how archaeology and ethnography complement each other in order to achieve the re-construction of history. Furthermore, in this effort to re-enact the past both archaeology and anthropology “treated” indigenous people in many different ways in the course of time. This thesis consists of an effort to trace the shifts in Western perceptions about native cultures by placing its research focus in museum representations of indigenous people.

1.2 Representations

In the Western world, the tradition of museums as institutions both serving and mirroring states or cultural elites has been long established and, in some cases, is still maintained. The museum functioned as a hegemonic device, a storeroom of a colonial power’s loots and treasures and reflected the attitudes and visions of dominant Western cultures and the material “proof” of the imperial achievements of the European cultures in which museums have their origins (Simpson 2001, 1-2). The genesis of national institutions such as art galleries and museums coincided with the rise of imperialism and colonialism, and consequently these institutions were engrained with views of human classification and racial superiority popular in the nineteenth century. Colonialism and its intellectual ramifications shaped museum practices and ideologies in order to establish the superiority of the colonizers over the colonized. Each new object or collection of objects became the representative of lands and people previously unknown to the Europeans. Placed in museums, these cultural items were transformed by their context into exotic curiosities, representing people or places, symbolizing the European sovereignty and their ability to subjugate and obtain control over other worlds beyond their territories (Smith 2005, 424).

Colonialism had a major impact and still remains an enduring sway upon museums and upon public representations of them. Western museums have inherited traditions, collections and practices that are direct consistencies of colonialism. Many of these attitudes of the Western world about cultures and

people are the overtones of colonialism and they can be difficult to identify. The problem begins from the scholars and researchers of the nineteenth century, who operated from a mind-set of superiority and looked down on different cultures, which were considered to be less civilized and significant (Genoways and Ireland 2003, 320).

Yet, despite their colonial history museums are now becoming more and more aware and reflective on their background and they are undergoing a drastic change in their practices and their relationships with the source communities, whose cultures are represented in the museum collections. This radical change reflects shifts in the relationship between Western cultures and those of native, suppressed peoples and introduces new collaborative ways of communicating with the source diaspora communities on more equal terms. There is recognition amongst museum professionals throughout the world that past practices were one-sided as the decision making and the knowledge resided with the Western museums. These attitudes and practices of the past had not been providing sufficiently for the complexity and needs of culturally diverse communities and their deficiency necessitated changes in museum activities and philosophies in order to address these needs. Questions of patrimony and representation, which emerged out of the interactions of European and indigenous peoples in the colonial period, are now asking for answers in the restorations of those past unequal relations in the post-colonial era. It is this colonial inheritance that Western institutions deal with today (Simpson 2001, 1-2).

“The post-colonial world has seen a major re-evaluation, political as well as theoretical, of the institutions and ideologies of colonialism but the impact of the colonialism on the production, consumption and interpretation of material objects is still apparent.” (Barringer and Flynn, 1998, 2) Over the past couple of decades, museums, after the demand of source communities and other critics for the reconsideration of the historical development of ethnographical museums within the context of Western colonialism and how collections were created under conditions of colonialism, had been working in partnership with source

communities. Museum professionals have subjected their practices to a much needed self-criticism. As a result we have a more equal relation between museums and source communities (Kreps 2011b, 458).

There is an increasing presence of native curators and traditional consultants and scholars in Western museums. Native voices are increasingly being heard and challenging conventional practices and attitudes. The joint efforts of source communities and museums and cooperation in the curation of collections have made possible both ways of curating which are more culturally acceptable, “as well as a deeper understanding and respect for the values and meanings museum objects can hold for source communities”. (Kreps 2011a, 78) This shift has led to more collaborative and culturally accurate museological approach, but the truth is that we still come across with colonial issues in ethnographical exhibitions (Kreps 2011b, 458). Ethnographic collections in particular are considered for many people to be an uncomfortable reminder of a “guilty” past.

Nowadays, the advent of mass communication, especially internet and television, or personal experience as a museum visitor signifies that many of the cultural objects displayed in show cases, previously regarded by visitors as symbols of exotic and distant worlds with difficult accessibility, now evoke more familiar and comfortable feelings to their viewers. Increasingly, these objects have become the symbol of a widening appreciation of not only differences, but also similarities among the various cultures around the globe. Some ethnographic museums of the Western world have tried to encourage these new museological attitudes towards indigenous cultures by re-organizing their collections so that the displayed items are presented in a context like illustrations in a book. In some ethnographic museums the aspect of representation of the exhibited collections has been taken much further. Three dimensional environments have been constructed, making use of the modern techniques of film, sound and slide projection. All these developments express a real and qualitative change in the Western approach towards indigenous cultures that has been manifested in a more vital form (Lightfoot 1983, 139-140).

The rejection of past practices and the challenge of introducing new presentational ways have a twofold goal; “to interpret non-Western cultures honestly and sympathetically to European museum audiences. By ‘honestly’ one means without condescension and by ‘sympathetically’, that the interpretation should take into account those distorting internal/external pressures that exist in any culture.” (Lightfoot 1983, 139-140) The aim is simple enough: the museum becomes a meeting place of different cultures. The institution functions as a “contact zone” (Clifford 1997, 188-219) and sets the ground for a re-examination of its role in relation to other cultures. The ultimate goal is to re-establish and challenge a relationship, which is normally perceived as that of one-way colonialist appropriation. The museum can become instead a meeting space which will be beneficial not only for the museum itself but for the exhibited cultures as well.

Educational initiatives, cultural diversity, the environment, international exchange, collection care and repatriation are only several of the many questions that have gained importance over the last twenty to thirty years. This new focus has affected the museum world in such a way that it has raised questions about the need to reinforce or reinvent existing standards of conduct. As museums have opened their doors to a more up-to-date visiting public, they have gained a greater sense of responsibility and therefore they have increased the necessity of sustaining high ethical standards (Edson 1997, 5). The purpose of museum ethics is to create a philosophical frame for a museum's actions; it is a product of the ongoing discussion about the museum's responsibilities towards society. The caretaking of cultural objects is only meaningful if an ethical context of human interaction is provided (Besterman 2011, 431-432).

This ethical framework is multidimensional and it concerns many aspects of museological attitude. For instance, the worldwide desecration of archaeological sites destroys our evidence of past times: a museum which procures items which have been gathered in this manner is a party to the damaging of people; thus the understanding of human origins is hampered. Or a museum which commits itself to sustaining and improving its collections, as well as making them as widely

accessible as possible, but which in the process of doing so displays artifacts of sacred importance to a living community in such a way that it is deeply offensive (Besterman 2011, 431-432).

Such controversial claims on the actions of the museum, along with the militant attitude and activism of source communities, remind the museum of the necessity to identify those to whom it is morally responsible and bear the responsibility for what it does and how it behaves as an institution (Besterman 2011, 431-432). Debates regarding repatriation, illicit trade, ownership or treatment of sacred cultural objects have motivated the international museum community to re-examine their codes of ethics and provide useful guidelines for museum professionals to follow (Kreps 2011a, 79). The interpretation and possession of cultural heritage raise highly delicate issues regarding stewardship, representation and patrimony, in which ethical values come into play and call for our attention (Besterman 2011, 431-432).

Over the past forty years or so, there has been an increasing blooming of cultural expression amongst native source communities and other ethnic minority groups, as the outcome of a growing awareness of the significance of cultural heritage and the wish for free expression, equality and civil rights. The post-colonial situation has brought a radical change in the previously unequal relationship between Western nations and those who had ruled and exploited during the colonial period. The struggle to end centuries of colonial sovereignty and exploitation in these countries was echoed by the political and social awakening of the native people and cultural minority groups in the Western world (Simpson 2001, 7).

The post-colonial criticism of museums and their practices from indigenous source communities have resulted in new models of museological modes. Great progress has been made over that past years “in decolonizing museums and cultivating a greater sense of ethical responsibility toward source communities.”(Kreps 2011a, 80) Many museum professionals still insist though on their failure to represent accurately the exhibited cultures and to strengthen the

contributions and presence of peoples of indigenous cultures. Many museum professionals and native people feel that their histories remain untold in label texts, and the modern images of the native cultures are absent from the accompanying documentary material. Several approaches have been made to bring out more debatable issues in museum-community relationships and the process of representations making in which both curators and indigenous artists are involved. Aspects of this new attitude can be seen in exhibitions which seek to restore the biases of history and liberate from a “guilty” colonial past by addressing the activities of dominant Western nations in their early encounters with native people (Simpson 2001, 15).

At this point I would like to describe the collecting practices of past times and the historical background of the research subject. Collecting and exhibiting are closely related concepts. Most of the times, a collector assembles objects in order to display his collection, so display becomes an essential part of the collecting process as collecting manners have an impact on the resulting collection and the way it is represented.

1.3 Collecting

Collecting as such a hybrid and multi-faceted activity is something difficult to define. By and large, it is the gathering of chosen objects for purposes regarded as special according to the aspirations of the collector. It is the collector who decides upon the significance of the collected items. “Our relationship with the material world of things is crucial to our lives because without them our lives could not happen, thus collecting is a fundamentally significant aspect of this fascinating and complex relationship.” (Pearce 1995, 3)

“Although on face value, museum collections are largely perceived as static entities hidden away in storerooms or trapped behind glass cases, new research shows that over time and across space interactions between objects and a wide range of people have generated a wide assemblage of material and social networks.” (Byrne *et al.* 2011, 3) Comprehending the historical development and

nature of collecting is really important as it provides you with the context within which to see museum collections. It gives an insight to the collector's thoughts and decisions and the historical background of the collecting process (Ambrose and Paine 2006, 136).

Objects bear meanings and can depict an inner set of social and material agencies that have been contributory in reworking and forming museum collections. Objects were taken away from other lands, times and cultures and were interpreted, re-contextualized and exhibited. These internal processes by which museum collections were created still remain incomprehensible to curators, museum visitors or indigenous communities. These complex and multifaceted processes by which objects were collected during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to form museums were not prearranged or natural developments. Instead, they stemmed from compound and varied cultural practices which unified wide reaching networks of varied places, things and persons. The procedures by which museum collections were formed are still present and active in the present-day world and in establishing social relationships between varied groups and the museum. (Byrne *et al.* 2011, 3- 4)

Collecting is about preserving, gathering and keeping. People have collected items of natural and cultural history as long as there was a concern in conserving cultural memory. The instinct of collecting appears throughout the history of mankind and it used to be mostly concern of private, wealthy individuals, ecclesiastical institutions and royal houses (Ellis 2004, 454). The ancient world owned public collections of items valued for their artistic, religious and historic significance. In ancient Rome, prosperous Romans were interested in Asian and Greek art and kept collecting various objects, whereas in the Middle Ages in Europe collecting became mainly activity of the Church, royals and few affluent individuals. The real "explosion" in mass collecting in Europe as well as China and Japan arose in the 16th and 17th centuries and corresponded with rapid economic development due either to international or internal trade. Another also significant motivation for European collectors was the acquaintance with material

culture from the New World as well as from trade with Asia (Alexander & Alexander 2008, 5).

Explorations outside the European continent led to encounters with exotic lands and peoples. Unfamiliar lands, climates, unidentified species of animals and plants, local inhabitants with a different physical appearance who often behaved themselves unusually and practiced peculiar customs. Westerners not only desired to communicate their exploration and colonization of new worlds in books. They wished for a solid document, as material proof that their reports were not fictional, but also as representation of the peculiarity of the lands, and the peoples they had come across. Expeditors amassed collections of specimens of ethnology and natural history during scientific expeditions. All these items were generally transferred to their masters, commercial entrepreneurs or royal patrons. Hence began the collection of geologic specimens, plants and animals in these far-off places, and of objects manufactured by the “bizarre”, to the Western eyes, peoples inhabiting the newly contacted lands. Their strangeness and uncommonness were stimulus for their collection (Hovens 1992, 1).

Collecting in colonial context is full of contradictions. Early collecting was often prompted by curiosity on behalf of scholars based on objective principles that originated in eighteenth century rationalism. Simultaneously the collecting practices were usually determined by accidental and unintended circumstances. A good relationship with the local inhabitants was often missing, and as a consequence collectors were often reliant on whatever came their way by accident, or what was given by the native population. Cultural objects were usually obtained in conditions that were controlled not in the slightest by the collector. The attempt to select items in a rational, “objective” manner was, in most cases, impossible. As a result the information on the cultural importance of the object was often untrustworthy. Consequently, the chaotic way of accumulating material culture in the nineteenth century often had more in common with Romanticism, with the lack of an order of things as one of its most distinctive values along with its viewpoints on the “other” and the “primitive”,

than with the eighteenth century movement of Enlightenment. The Western colonizer dominated the power relationship between him as the authority and the local inhabitants, but usually there was no physical violence involved (Ter Keurs 2007, 1, 5).

Colonialism is intertwined with the development of museums and the growing of the collections. Particularly at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century the museums were bursting with extensive collections from the colonized lands (Ter Keurs 2007, 4). In the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden, the Indonesian collection is undoubtedly the largest. “After the first Dutch voyage to the former East Indies in 1595-1596, as part of an effort to compete with Portugal in their monopoly of the spice routes, the Dutch slowly succeeded in gaining control over the area by means of economic, political and military activities.” (Ter Keurs 1999, 69)

Dr Pieter ter Keurs, while working on the *Shared Cultural Heritage* project for the National Museum in Jakarta in 2005, distinguished five ways of collecting in the colonial context (Ter Keurs 1999, 69-72):

- 1) Scientific expedition: The Dutch king William I encouraged scientific research in the Dutch East Indies at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The expedition members who were sent on these far-off lands were for the most part natural scientists. Anthropology was not yet acknowledged as an independent academic discipline, and it was usually the physician of the expeditors' group who was considered the anthropologist of the team and accumulated ethnographic objects. These expeditions also had a political purpose. The authorities were very keen on discovering, exploring and mapping new lands, claiming supremacy over the area (especially in the latter nineteenth century), and finding new potentials for economic exploitation. Under such circumstances, politics and science were closely associated.

- 2) Individual collectors: Among individual collectors one can find missionaries, civil servants, and medical doctors. This personal way of collecting also took place in the context of colonialism. All of the collectors were somehow linked to the colonial authorities, although some of them succeeded in developing a good relationship with the indigenous inhabitants due to the fact that they remained for long-lasting periods in one particular area.
- 3) Colonial exhibitions: A major source of acquiring objects for museums was the colonial exhibitions. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the ideological movement of European nationalism developed into a strong driving force for expansion outside Europe and by the end of the century the non-Western world had been distributed among the imperial powers of Europe. Colonized areas were seen as sources of raw material and as new markets offered plenty economic opportunities, which were explored and publicized in the western world. Colonial Exhibitions and World Exhibitions were in fact demonstrations for the new economic prospects the colonies offered. A very renowned example is the Colonial Exhibition in Amsterdam in 1883.
- 4) Military expeditions: At the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, numerous military expeditions were taking place in the Dutch East Indies. The most significant ones were to Aceh (a long lasting war), Bali (1906-1908) and Lombok (1894). In this day and age, these colonial wars are considered to be black pages in Dutch history, but at that point people generally had a different understanding of these matters. It is however very interesting to mention that most of the “sensitive” objects in the collection were in truth gifts from Indonesian aristocracy to the Dutch sovereigns, and not war loot contrary to popular belief which had it that thirty percent of the Indonesian collection in the National Museum of Ethnology was collected during colonial warfare. In

reality, when one looks at the three main colonial combats in Indonesia, less than three percent of the collection is involved.

- 5) Gifts and minor purchases: Lastly, there have always been gifts and minor acquisitions from individuals, people who have worked and lived in the colonies themselves, people who inherited cultural property from relatives who once resided in the colonized lands, and people who acquired objects through other means such as auction houses, open market and so on.

1.4 West New Guinea and Colonialism

The island of New Guinea is positioned just above the Queensland Australia to the east of the Philippine Islands in a region called Melanesia. It is the second largest island in the world after Greenland at approximately 900.000 square kilometers with a population just over four million people. It complements a group of tropical islands that spread out from the Asian mainland to Pacific Ocean, and south to New Caledonia and Fiji. The central part of the island rises into a wide range of mountains known as Highlands, a territory with dense forests and so topographically forbidding that the island's local residents remained remote and isolated from each other for ages. The mountains divide the island in half, north and south. The climate is hot and wet and varies accordingly to the breadth and height of the island. Nearly 85% of the island is carpeted with tropical rain forest. These natural barriers and the big size of the island itself have created the most culturally diverse area in the world with more than 700 distinct languages belong to the Austronesian and Papuan groups spoken on New Guinea (D' Alleva 1998, 32).

Portugal was the first European country to have contact with the island. The first certain European spotting of the New Guinea Island was in 1512, when Portuguese sailor Antonio d' Abreu long sighted the coast. However, it was not before 1526 when another Portuguese Jorge de Menezes, became the first European to actually set foot on the main island; he named the newly discovered land, *Ilhas dos Papuas*. But New Guinea was regarded as a huge, frightening

place with no obvious wealth potentials to exploit and very unfriendly inhabitants, so it was mostly left alone while European colonists focused on the Americas. The interior of the New Guinea Island remained unknown until relatively late in the nineteenth century (McKinnon *et al.* 2008, 23).

The island, when referring to its history of colonization and European settlement, is divided either by linguists, historians, geographers, or archaeologists in half, concentrating on the British-German-Australian and now independent east part and on the Dutch-Indonesian west part (Moore 2003, ix).

The first two centuries of Dutch presence in the Indonesian archipelago, from 1600 to 1800, marked the age of mercantilism monopolized by the VOC, the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hellwig and Tagliacozzo 2009, 8-9). The VOC after establishing the Dutch presence in Maluku islands became also interested in the economic exploitation, spice trade particularly, of their northern neighbor, New Guinea (Moore 2003, 80). During the second half of the eighteenth century due to corruption, smuggling and mismanagement the VOC was lead to economic failure and its colonial possessions in the Indonesian archipelago were nationalized under the Dutch Republic as the Dutch East Indies. This became the commencement of a state colonialism phase (Hellwig and Tagliacozzo 2009, 8-9).

Dutch, British and German all laid claim to the various parts of the New Guinea Island in order to exploit the natural resources and the inhabitants of the island. “The British East India Company explored parts of western New Guinea in 1793 and even made a tentative claim on the island but, in 1824, Britain and The Netherlands agreed the latter’s colonial claim to the western half of the New Guinea Island should stand. A series of British claims followed which were repudiated each time by Queen Victoria’s government.” (McKinnon *et al.* 2008, 25)

During the early twentieth century, Indonesia had sought an independent country based on all Dutch colonized possessions in the Indies, including the western part of New Guinea. In 1949, The Netherlands formally accepted that its colonies in

the East Indies would be ceded to Indonesia (in 1945 Indonesia declared its independence from the Dutch). But it made a strong point of excluding Papua from this deal. Dutch administration encouraged decolonizing politics and supported the emergence of a small, educated group of indigenous leaders. In 1961, the Raad, a national council was elected. However, there were various opinions on the future relationships with Indonesia and the length of time of the Dutch presence in the island. Indonesia tried to get United Nations ratification regarding its claim over the west part of New Guinea and in 1962 The Netherlands transferred to United Nations Temporary Executive Authority, leading to a handover to Indonesia in 1963. The handover condition was that Papuans should choose on their own whether they wanted to be part of Indonesia or become an independent country. Eventually, west Papua became the 26th province of Indonesia (Moore 2003, 199).

Cultural treasures from all the colonized lands found their way to the Dutch museums. Researchers and scientific institutions were keen and enthusiastic in their efforts as the colonial administration. Unknown languages, customs and cultures were documented and archaeological sites were restored. Of all Dutch colonies in the East, New Guinea Island was the last to be explored. The Dutch were pre-occupied enough with many other parts of the Netherlands East Indies to enable them to actively engage with this huge, unwelcoming and heavily wooded island. The western half of the island had been Dutch territory since the nineteenth century and the Dutch did not know exactly how to handle this colonial possession. Early settlers were plagued by diseases and attacks from the hostile Papuans and abandoned the island in 1836. Only a small number of coastal regions were explored. The situation altered during the twentieth century when military units entered the island to put New Guinea on the topographical map. These expeditions provided many cultural objects for the Dutch ethnographic collections, as the expedition members had collected many attractive things to trade with the locals such as pieces of cotton cloth, iron axe blades, knives, tobacco, mirrors, and colorful beads. In return, they were able to obtain nearly all

of the native cultural material available. All these cultural items spoke directly to the Western imagination regarding the indigenous life and were distributed among the ethnographic museums in The Netherlands, which built up extensive museum collections with them (Van Duuren 2011, 98-99).

2. Western Perceptions of the Other

In the second chapter I am going to discuss about the most fundamental movements and concepts, which had shaped the Western perceptions about the indigenous people and in what ways they influenced the course of anthropology and by extension museum practices regarding indigenous peoples.

2.1 An Unknown non-Western World

Anthropology arose as a formal discipline in Europe and in America in the late nineteenth century, during the prime of colonialism (1870s-1950s) when many anthropologists conducted field-work and focused on the study of native societies and their cultures in the colonies around the globe. For instance, French anthropologists did most of their research in Southeast Asia and in West and North Africa; British anthropologists in East and Southern Africa; Dutch anthropologists in Suriname, Western New Guinea and Indonesia whereas Belgian anthropologists in Congo of Africa (Haviland *et al.* 2011, 48).

A popular practice of that time was to compare native peoples still following traditional life-styles based on fishing, gathering, hunting, herding or farming with the prehistoric ancestors of Europeans and to characterize such cultures of those native societies as “primitive”. “This misconception helped state societies, commercial enterprises, and other powerful outside groups justify expanding their activities and invading the lands belonging to those peoples, often exerting overwhelming pressure on them to change their ancestral ways.” (Haviland *et al.* 2011, 48) Colonialism and its aftermaths such as occupation of foreign lands, exploitation of the indigenous peoples, genocides, slavery, and violence brought many traditional societies to physical extinction. Those who accomplished to survive were forced to surrender their lands or adjust to the “correct” Western way of life. Anthropologists while experiencing this fast changing reality tumbled to the necessity of making a record of those cultural groups before it is too late.

European influence was pervading the whole world and salvage collecting became an imperious need. This feverish tendency of urgent collecting gripped every ethnological museum in the Western world. By the late 1800s, many North American and European museums were organizing and funding anthropological and scientific expeditions to “save” the cultural material remains of those rapidly vanishing societies. Ceremonial objects, weaponry, human remains such as skulls and bones, clothing, household apparatuses and other relevant cultural data were eagerly collected from the expeditors. By the 1890s ethnographic photographs, documentary films, recordings of the songs, music and speech of those so-called disappearing native peoples were also used in order to rescue the culture before it dies away or deteriorates due to the European invasion in all facets of indigenous life (Haviland *et al.* 2011, 48).

Western museums “in close association with archaeological excavations of progressively deeper pasts extended their time horizons beyond the medieval period and the classical antiquities of Greece and Rome to encompass the remnants of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations.” (Bennett 1995, 76) The collected ethnographical material was perceived to be the absent data, the missing link between the past and the present in the archaeological record. It was thought that what was missing in the archaeological record due to the perishable nature of certain materials could be found in modern ethnographic material instead (Sally 2010, 96). Big ethnographic collections were amassed and formed for this aim and in order to study what were thought to be prehistoric and frozen in time indigenous cultures.

Early anthropologists inhabited the secluded and tropical island of New Guinea and conducted research among its population. Natives were perceived as “primitive” and their culture and society was thought to be on the verge of extinction; so the collecting and documentation of their savage life-ways became a dire necessity as they were believed to represent man’s evolutionary past. Native cultures were seen as static and captured in ancient times and thus gradually vanishing. That notion had much to do with the European prevalent line of

thought about cultural superiority over native cultures. Charles Robert Darwin, the English naturalist and his ideas about evolution “validated” Western beliefs regarding European superiority over native cultures and were the main theoretical incentive to the late nineteenth century salvage collecting activities in the non-Western world (Hovens 1992, 3).

One of the most controversial issues in Darwin’s book *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* revolves around the probability of survival of the various cultural groups. In both the first and second editions of his book, Darwin developed a theory according to which human races that were more well-appointed by nature in comparison to others, less privileged in straight competition had better possibilities to subsist. “Two interlinked developments characterize the appropriation of Darwinism to the 19th-century view of cultural imperialism. First is the belief in the characteristics of the primitive mentality, and second is the resulting belief in the duty of more advanced cultures to harness and control the primitive.” (Bhatia 2009, 116) Darwin’s theory of evolution set the ground for establishing linkages between culture, biology and mental progress and also created a new psychological frame for the reconfiguration of the developmental capabilities of the indigenous (Bhatia 2009, 116).

It is a fallacy, of course, to believe that his book, *The Descent*, was a hymn of racism, but Darwin’s ideas and theory was misinterpreted and deteriorated by the European elite in order to “ paint a rounded picture of the evolution of life from the “primitive” mollusk and amoeba to the highly evolved middle-class Victorians” (Mitter 2011, 59) During the late-19th century, it was something usual for European intellectuals to compare European children with indigenous adults on common similarities such as “inability to control the emotions, animistic thinking, inability to reason out cause or plan for future, conservatism, love of analogy, symbolism, and so on.” (Cole 1996, 16)

The colonization of the non-Western world provided the handle for the Europeans to mold a cultural “Otherness” that not only underlined the incapacities of the

indigenous people regarding intelligence but also provided the convenient justification of the necessity of more “advanced” cultures to educate, civilize and control native people by initiating them into the Western life-ways, thinking and religion. Common belief among Europeans was that “primitive” societies were on the verge of extinction and that indigenous people would not be able to sustain themselves by only fishing and hunting; it did not occur to the colonizers that these people managed to survive by pursuing this very specific, traditional life-style for thousands of years. For Westerners those native societies were about to die away and wanted to collect and document “proofs” of their existence before their “wild” life-ways would no longer exist.

For all these items that constituted the study subjects of ethnography and needed to be placed within a context of an ethnographic museum or department, necessitated the advent of a human science that would give them an identity and that would also form different systems of classification and collecting motives. The development of anthropology as an academic discipline was narrowly linked to the establishment of ethnographic museums or their evolvement through previously existing collections in museums (Lidchi 1997, 161). This newly emerging discipline needed to integrate these exotic cultural objects into a scientific and systematic framework. Museums were jam-packed with a vast amount of material culture, coming from the all colonies of the non-Western world; sometimes it was too much to handle. (Ter Keurs 2007, 4) The nineteenth century Western colonialism, following upon the eighteenth century rationalism, made classifying and documenting material culture and studying native societies necessary, and therefore set the ground for the formation of both the ethnographic museum and the academic discipline of anthropology.

At this point, I would like to discuss about the classification schemes in museum collections in the late-nineteenth century in order to illustrate how cultural objects were classified and represented.

2.2 Biological Hierarchy

The multi-faceted interest of Europeans in the manifestation of material culture of exotic lands and native people occasioned initially from the exhibition and inclusion of non-Western objects in royal cabinets of curiosities, which are proven to be the direct forerunners of our present museums of anthropology, natural history, modern art. There were a number of cases where affluent, private individuals created their own collections, which later found their way into ethnographical museums, which evolved out of those private, previously existing collections. This transition from *cabinets de curiosités* to museums of ethnology happened progressively in the course of the nineteenth century (Hovens 1992, 1-2). The present National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden is, with the opening to the public of the Japanese ethnographical collection of Philipp Franz von Siebold in the year 1837, one of the oldest ethnographical museums in Europe, if not the oldest (Ave 1980, 11).

This development was the aftermath of the rapid increase of the worldwide expansion of European colonial enterprise, the intercontinental trade, and the increased diversification of scientific disciplines. The European interaction with the non-Western was performed under various circumstances such as trade, colonization, missionaries, international travel, exploration, scientific expeditions. Some collections came together without a plan as the result of gifts, which were given to traders, missionaries and colonial officers. In most cases though, the apiece collector purposely brought together ethnographical collections by carefully accumulating cultural objects in order to show the material manifestations of indigenous societies to the interested European audience (Hovens 1992, 1-2).

The sixteenth and seventeenth century *cabinet de curiosités* jumbled everything together; no specific classification schemes were followed, with each individual object representing a whole region or cultural group. “The collections were a microcosm, a summary of the universe” (Clifford 1988, 227) that mirrored the

recently colonized lands or newly contacted exotic worlds. These collections of curiosities included a disorderly assemblage of items, the *naturalia* and *artificialia*; in other words, items from the natural world along with man-made objects. “The notion was to create a *theatrum mundi*, a theater of the world that would intermingle harmoniously the natural and the artificial, the real and the imaginary, the ordinary with the extraordinary.” (Findlen 2004, 33) The Creator-God was on the top, with man, flora and fauna below him. The function of these Wunderkammern (wonder rooms) was dual: firstly, to collect objects in such a setting where they could represent every single element of reality; and secondly, after amassing a representative collection of objects, to display these so that the ordering represented as well as showed an understanding of the world (Greenhill 1992, 82). All the parts of the earth-born world came together to create the “Great Chain of Being”.

The eighteenth century is characterized by a more serious concern for taxonomy and for the embellishment of complete series. Collecting became progressively the concern of scientific naturalists, and cultural objects were appreciated because they typified a range of systematic categories such as clothing, food, building materials, weaponry, agricultural tools, and so forth (Clifford 1988, 227). Western museums started to grow away from simplistic classifications; yet many still believed that they were about to discover some sort of divine plan, which would bring them closer in revealing something of God. It was as if this divine plan was the ultimate truth and could be pieced together from a plurality of smaller truths that composed it. Swedish zoologist, botanist and physician Carl Linneaus, who is often regarded as the “father” of modern biological taxonomy perfected the natural schemes of classification (Kneil 2007, 10). “His hierarchical taxonomy tree had five levels: class, order, genus, species and variety and it was based on Aristotle’s Great Chain of Being.” (Von Sydow 2012, 89) His ideas consisted the foundation of the modern scheme of binomial nomenclature, a system for naming plants and animals, which included in its mechanisms a medium to represent the relations and the order of the natural world. The museum was able to bring this

order into effect with examples from the natural world but it was also involved in collecting examples upholding the differentiating interests of science “including variants and freaks, reproductive and growth stages, biological dependences and geographical distributions. Collections of natural objects became multidimensional embodiments of the real ordered by contemporary knowledge, which for many favored the hand of God.” (Kneel 2007, 10)

By the end of the century Darwin’s evolutionism had come to dominate the museum systems of classification. “Whether objects were represented as antiquities, arranged geographically or by society, spread in panoplies or arranged in realistic life groups and dioramas, a story of human development was told.” (Clifford 1988, 227-228) The object, which was perceived primarily as curiosity, became eventually a source of information of scientific importance, entirely integrated though in the Western line of thought. Exotic objects were perceived as the cultural data that would be used to bear witness to the actual reality of an earlier phase of human culture, “a common past confirming Europe’s triumphant past.” (Clifford 1988, 228) The ethnographical material culture collections were classified, according to prevailing ethnological theory, on an evolutionary order (Ave 1980, 11).

The histories of Western civilizations and nations were connected to those of indigenous peoples, but only by splitting the two in allowing for an interrupted continuousness in the order of races and people. A line of progression in which indigenous people were dropped out of history completely in order to sit in a dim zone between culture and nature. This purpose had been satisfied earlier in the century “by the museological display of anatomical peculiarities which seemed to confirm polygenetic conceptions of mankind’s origins.” (Bennett 1995, 77) Native people were thought to be the living proof of an earlier stage of human development which Western civilizations had long ago surpassed. Indeed indigenous people were typically represented as the evidence of this earliest stage of species development, “the point of transition between nature and culture, between ape and man, the missing link necessary to account for the transition

between animal and human history, the point at which human history emerges from nature, but has not yet properly begun its course.” (Bennett 1995, 78) This typological and genetic scheme of classification pieced together all objects of similar nature such as tools, weapons etc. without regard to their ethnographic groupings, in an evolutionary basis leading from the most plain forms to the most sophisticated ones (Van Keuren 1989 in Bennett 1995, 79). “The exhibition of the other peoples served as a vehicle for the edification of a national public and the confirmation of its imperial superiority.” (Stallybrass and White 1986 in Bennett 1995,79)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, along with the evolutionary scheme of classification, there was also the geographical one. Many museum collections at that time were also arranged according to place of origin of the cultural objects. This kind of systematic classification was followed in the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. I am going to discuss in detail on this type of categorization and the case of the National Museum of Ethnology in the following chapter.

“As Europeans increasingly came to think of themselves during the nineteenth century as essentially and characteristically secular, rational, civilized and technologically advanced, they almost generated an imagined Other that was savage, ignorant, and uncivilized.” (Errington 1998, 16) The notion that human civilization had evolved and passed through several phases of development according to Social Darwinism dominated both the popular and scientific beliefs till the turn of the twentieth century. This particular line of thought and view of progress set apart colonized indigenous peoples at the low, initial stages of humankind’s scale of evolution to its high peak, represented by the superior European civilization. Nature itself was not underestimated, but its native inhabitants were seen as the ideal subjects to be “civilized” by European colonizers (Errington 1998, 16).

Near the end of the twentieth century, Western perceptions of the Other began to slowly change. Nature came to be no longer inhabited by uncivilized and hostile indigenous living in dark and perilous lands but by innocent hunters and gatherers living in tropical rainforests that assisted the air of the planet and provided Westerners with the essentials for miracle treatment cures (Errington 1998, 16). This shift in popular and scientific thinking brought radical changes for how cultural artifacts and images of the indigenous people were conceptualized and displayed as will note later on with the example of the National Museum of Ethnology in the third chapter.

This reversal in popular culture regarding the representation of native societies could be mirrored in the ideas and innovations of Franz Boas, who suggested studying cultures in their own terms and sheering off from the prevailing classification schemes of that time. He is considered to be one of the most important scholars in the field of twentieth century cultural anthropology and his ideas were greatly influential for the next generation of museum professionals as I will discuss in the following chapter by using the example of Simon Kooijman, curator of Oceania at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden.

2.3 Cultural Diversity

The central figure of the twentieth century cultural anthropology is the German-American, Franz Boas (1858-1942). “Contemporary ideas such as multiculturalism, pluralism, respect for other cultures, and belief in the importance of tradition and history are all significant themes in Franz Boas’ work.” (Malik 1996, 151-152) He entered the field of anthropology in the period of what is often called today as the “Museum Age”, from 1880 till 1920 (Sturtevant 1969, 622). His major influence was in redefining anthropological thought and in demonstrating culture as the key study subject of the anthropological discipline. He played an important role in replacing the racial theories of human diversity with cultural theories, and thus helped to undermine the influence of scientific racism greatly (Malik 1996, 151-152).

Franz Boas, who was born in Germany and was originally qualified in physics and geography, came to be known as one of the world's first professional anthropologists. During the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany, the Jewish Boas decided to try his own luck and moved in America, since he knew that the opportunities in his native land would be very few. He was first hired as a geographical editor by G. Stanley Hall at Clark University, and after that he worked at the Field Museum in Chicago where he helped in arranging the anthropological displays at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, which was organized in order to celebrate half a millennium of progress since Columbus came to the New World (Sackman 2010, 65). Boas did no collecting for the Exposition, and much of his attention was drawn to the task of organizing fieldwork in physical anthropology. He was also the supervisor of a large team of local experts in gathering a considerable ensemble of Northwest Coast specimens. The exhibits of the Columbian Exposition formed the basis for the collections of the Field Museum in Chicago and when the exhibition was over Boas continued working at the museum. In 1896 he was appointed as Assistant Curator of Ethnology and Somatology for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He also became professor at Columbia University in New York, where he taught for more than forty years and in 1896 he became the founder of the first academic department of anthropology. By May 1905 he had resigned from the Museum, as he felt that the kind of anthropology he was interested in would be better suited to a research environment (Jacknis 1985, 76-77).

Although Boas had very innovative ideas for that time and he stood in many ways among his peers, he still belonged in the Victorian period (1837-1901) during which he built up his academic education. While on the early phases of his career, he participated in now disreputable, according to today's standards, research, such as attempting to estimate a person's intelligence based on their average size of the skull. A common censure of Boas' work is that he placed focus on the recording and gathering of ethnographic data over its analysis. To a certain degree, this focus can be explained as an effort to reserve and catalogue for future generations

what Franz Boas and his contemporaries characterized as vanishing cultures (Johansen and Pritzker 2008, 665).

When Boas began his museum vocation, material culture was commonly arranged in groupings of items of similar nature such as weaponry, household apparatuses, pottery, and tools. Typically, the items also were arranged in such way in order to create the impression of evolutionary escalation and development. For instance, the museum visitor would have seen objects of similar nature placed next to each other such as a stone arrowhead from North America, placed next to a Viking age iron spear point, lied next to a steel Bowie knife, and so on. Boas reformed this type of arrangement by reorganizing the exhibits, piecing together objects from a single tribe and placing them next to other ones of similar nature coming from neighboring tribes in close vicinity; he placed his focus on culture areas. This new, innovative style of displaying eventually altered museum representations around the world (Johansen and Pritzker 2008, 665).

Boas posed his own theory and opposed to the typological evolutionary schemes that were dominating the scientific line of thought of that time. The notion that ethnological phenomena could be classified as biological specimens and could be divided into genera, families and species was based on the hypothesis that there was some kind of linking between cultural phenomena of people around the globe (Jacknis 1985, 79). “But in the human sphere, where every invention was the product of a complex historical development, unlike causes could produce like effects. The outward appearance might be identical, yet their immanent qualities may be altogether different, so groupings based on analogies of outward appearance were therefore bound to be deceptive.” (Jacknis 1985, 79)

Boas argued that we should switch our focal attention and anthropological interest from the external characteristics to the inner meaning of the particular artifact. Boas’ theory raised some questions. If one could not piece together cultural objects by their external characteristics, how could the curator know which items fairly belonged together and create groupings? “Boas argued that art and the

characteristic style of a people can only be understood by studying its productions as a whole, so more generally the meaning of the artifact could not be understood outside of its surroundings.”(Jacknis 1985, 79) The answer to the classification problem was thus a collection that would represent only the life of one cultural group. Boas considered the tribal arrangement of a collection as the most ideal and accurate classification scheme for an ethnographical museum. However, within less than a decade, the National Museum began to organize its material culture according to the geographical scheme (Jacknis 1985, 79-80).

Franz Boas, as mentioned above, introduced the display of artifacts by cultural group instead of by regional or evolutionary schemes, with a special focus on the “life group”, or set of mannequins in native costumes (fig 1) “engaged in some sort of work or art process.” (Rony 2001, 243) He based the innovative model of representation on his own field-work experience in the Northwest Pacific coast among the Kwakiutl Indians and among the Baffin Island Eskimos in 1886 and 1883, respectively (McGee *et al.* 1996, 128). Boas exhibited artifacts in specially made settings that simulated the “original” cultural environment of a tribe. Cultural objects were grouped together in a regional arrangement to depict the lifestyle of a certain group of people. In the 1890s he was confronted with the task to design “life groups” of northwestern Native Americans for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Boas designed moldings of body parts of indigenous people using the Native Americans, who performed in circuses visiting New York, and students of the Charlisle Indian School. Because of the museum's educational role, objects representing natives' lives would be represented as a kind of three-dimensional family album, thus preserving their place in the past (Willinsky 1998, 65). Dioramas, three-dimensional, original-like constructions, were an innovation around that time and Boas used them to create allegedly realistic enactments of the daily life of the Indians (Schildkrout 2006, 124).



Figure 1 Life Group (Stocking 1985)

Boas applied the scientific experience he had acquired while studying physics to the study of human societies. This led him to turn down the Western perception of racial hierarchy and instead to argue that similarities and differences among various cultural groups did not indicate that that one society was superior or more capable to another, but rather that each group was uniquely well equipped by nature to cope with its members' needs and ensure their corporate survival. "Boas' scholarship and ideas were widely disseminated and came eventually to affect the views of the larger society, ultimately helping to break the monolithic Victorian worldview into the separate concepts of race, culture, language that characterize how we view the world today." (Johansen and Pritzker 2008, 665)

Franz Boas wanted the visiting public to stop reading the big texts on the labels at the exhibits (Jacknis 1985, 100). He was also concerned about the pedagogical role of the museum. He was anxious on how the architectural structure of the museum could heighten or defeat the desire of entering another, unknown world or the fully understanding of the diversity of the native life-style that museum images were representing (Willinsky 1998, 65-66). His main concern was to depict cultures in the most accurate way possible. He perceived culture as a living

organism that could not fit into sealed up typologies and evolutionary progressions; culture could only be understood in its own terms.

2.4 Art and Ethnography

“With the consolidation of twentieth-century anthropology, artifacts contextualized ethnographically were valued because they served as objective “witnesses” to the total multidimensional life of a culture.” (Clifford 1988, 228) However, at the same period a new category of art was discovered by European artists and writers, who were hanging out at flea markets and the Ethnographic Museum of the Trocadéro, in Paris; the “primitive” art (Errington 1998, 1). The Museum of the Trocadéro, established in coupling with the third Paris World's Fair, the Exposition Universelle of 1878, “developed the natural science project in evolutionary terms. The thinking of the time consolidated a hierarchy with savages at the bottom.” (Siegel 2011, 120)

Early twentieth-century modernists, such as Picasso and other intellectuals began to visit the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro to confer its tribal displays a non-ethnographic value and admiration; some of these displays were even seen as universal masterpieces (Clifford 1988, 228). The proper treatment of tribal objects became a burning issue. Primitivism became more than just a conceptual movement of intellectuals; it was rather “a pervasive notion that has played a crucial role in the development of twentieth-century art and modern thinking generally.” (Flam 2003, xiii) In 1982, with the opening of the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing of Primitive Art at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, tribal art won recognition from a more general public and reached its peak (Errington 1998, 1).

“The process by which this occurred was inbred and circular; while anthropologists relied on the criteria and classifications established by nineteenth-century aestheticians and art historians, artists and critics used the writings of anthropologists to select art from the spectrum of made objects.” (Phillips 1999, 98) Curators and academics from both disciplines impudently employed western

criteria in the assessment of quality and style, which was characterized by very inadequate knowledge of the tribal art. “Yet their validations of tribal objects as art were significant because the ability to produce true sculpture or painting was generally accepted as a sign of peoples’ overall level of cultural achievement.” (Phillips 1999, 98)

Figures formerly entitled as exotic or *curiosités* became works of art. The separation between the anthropological and the artistic was soon institutionally reinforced. “In art galleries, non-Western objects were displayed for their formal and aesthetic qualities; in ethnographic museums they were represented in a cultural context (Clifford 1988, 199). In the latter, a cultural object would belong to a distinct cultural group and would be displayed along with extensive information regarding its fabrication, use, function and symbolism. Tribal objects found a new home either at museums of modern art and art galleries or at ethnographical museums. The two domains of art and anthropology “have excluded and confirmed each other, inventively disputing the right to contextualize, to represent these objects.” (Clifford 1988, 199)

The roots of the dispute between art and ethnography can be traced back in the seventeenth century from the separation of *cabinets de curiosités* from the art galleries. There was a distinction among the cultural objects, which were considered of scientific value and another kind of objects, which were appreciated aesthetically. Aesthetics was even considered to be something hazardous for a museum collection since switching the focal attention to the beauty of the singular object could mean neglecting the collection of every day cultural items useful for the categorization of the life-ways of a culture. The ethnographic institution by placing its focus on the aesthetic would put its predominantly scientific orientation at stake (Siegel 2011, 120).

This new approach of representation of material culture introduced also a new taxonomic system with new possibilities. In the late nineteenth century tribal objects, as we noted in the second chapter, were still fallen under the

“Renaissance tradition of verisimilitude and naturalism.” (Flam 2003, 3) By 1920 the same cultural objects acquired new identity and were perceived as universal masterpieces. “The boundaries of art and science, the aesthetic and the anthropological, are not permanently fixed. Indeed anthropology and fine arts museums have shown signs of interpenetration.” (Clifford 1988, 228) Science was aestheticized and art was seen through an anthropological prism.

Art is also facet of a culture and its goes beyond the personal, emotional response we experience from only looking at an object. Most of times we want to know its creator, its symbolism, its function, the process of its making, in other words we want to know the cultural context of the exhibited art piece.

Nowadays, many artists of contemporary art incorporate pieces of ethnography on their exhibitions or ethnographic museums present cultural objects as works of art, which are not being accompanied with all the needed contextual information. This sort of representation has sparked many conflicts since it carries a definite implication of monetary value and it draws away the attention from the ethnographic value. “The continuum from ethnographic object to object d’art is clearly associated in people’s minds with a scale of increasing monetary value and a shift from function (broadly defined) to aesthetics as an evolutionary basis; in terms of display all this correlates with an increasingly cryptic written contextualization.” (Price 1991, 84)

After discussing the most important movements and concepts that affected the representation of ethnographic objects in the course of cultural anthropology, I am going to present in the following chapter how these currents were depicted in the museum collection of the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden.

3. Displaying West New Guinea in Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden

3.1 History of the collections

The National Museum of Ethnology is considered to be the first scientific ethnological museum in the world. The museum has its origins in two national collections: the first one was the *Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden*, the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague, founded in 1816 by King Willem I and the second collection purchased by the State in the nineteenth century was that created in Deshima, Japan by Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866), which became accessible to the public in the 1837 in Leiden (Van Dongen *et al.* 1987, 11).

The Royal Cabinet in The Hague was founded by King William I in 1816 and it was part of a series of institutions, established by the king after the foundation of the kingdom of The Netherlands in 1815. Other institutions continued or founded by King William I were the Cabinet of Engravings, the Royal Cabinet of Paintings, the Royal Library, the Royal Cabinet of Coins and Medals, the National Museum of Antiquities, the National Museum of Natural History and the Royal Herbarium. The Royal Cabinet of Curiosities started on the basis of a collection of Chinese curiosities, donated by J. TH. Royer, a private collector, whose spare time engagements included the study of sciences, philosophical quests and fine arts (Effert 2011, 6-7). Royer had contact with several East India Company officials and he managed to build up a large collection of mainly Chinese artifacts, prints, books. In 1821, the Royal Cabinet of Chinese Rarities engendered the Royal Cabinet of Rarities in The Hague. Over the course of years, curiosities of all kinds were added to the collection, but ethnographic collections remained the most important, especially once the Japanese collections of J. Cock Blomhoff and J.R. van Overmeer Fisscher were purchased in 1826 and 1832 (RMV history of the collection website). In 1883 the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague was split up and its collections were distributed among a number of museums; the

artistic objects were transferred to the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum and those of a more ethnographic interest went to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum in Leiden (Effert 2011, 9).

3.2 A General Ethnographic Museum

The National Museum of Ethnology collection arose from the state's economic interests. Besides the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague, there was also another national collection of ethnographic nature; the Von Siebold's collection. This collection was originally planned to become part of the Royal Cabinet collection but for political and economic reasons it remained in Leiden and it gradually evolved into an ethnographic museum in its own right (Effert 2008, 128, 131-135, 151-153).

The physician Phillip Franz von Siebold (1796-1866) amassed his own private collection in the Dutch trading-post of Deshima in Japan, near Nagasaki between 1823 and 1830 with the task to collect information on the islands of Japan and its political and social structures and to investigate the potentials of expanding the existing trade (Sieboldhuis Siebold website). At that time The Netherlands had already had exclusive right regarding trade with Japan for two hundred years. This assignment can be seen as part of the government's efforts to be first to the post before Japan eventually opened up to diplomatic affiliations and trade with the rest of the Western world (Vos 2001, 40).

Von Siebold first started his ethnographical collection in 1826, when he reached to Edo leaving Nagasaki, to offer his services as a medical doctor and surgeon to Japanese people. Siebold refused any payment for his services and his patients would instead give him various other items as gifts; he received many everyday household goods, handcrafted objects, tools and woodblock prints (Sieboldhuis Siebold website). The opening to the public of the Siebold collection of around 5.000 objects took place in 1831 in his private residence, at No. 19 on the Rapenburg street in Leiden (which today again houses his collection in the Sieboldhuis museum) and before that his collection had been preserved in several

other cities of The Netherlands. That year marked off the beginning of the history of his Japanese collection functioning as an ethnological museum (Van Gulik 1989, 386). Chinese and Japanese objects had long been singled out for their beautiful appearance, but Siebold went one step further. He brought with him raw materials, tools, techniques and objects of daily use. He wanted to give an idea of the daily life of non-Western people. In the *Kort begrip en ontwikkeling van de doelmatigheid en van het nut van een Ethnographisch Museum in Nederland* (Short statement and argumentation concerning the relevance and usefulness of an Ethnographical Museum in The Netherlands) Von Siebold writes: “Man, in the many forms in which he has developed under different climates, is thus the principal subject of an ethnographic museum. It is entertaining and instructive and therefore useful for those at home to learn about the inhabitants of distant countries and to study their customs. It is even a moral, religious deed to occupy oneself with one’s fellow man in this way, to learn to see his good qualities and to come closer to him by becoming more familiar with that unknown exterior which often repels us without our knowing why.” (Van Dongen *et al.* 1987, 11) Today it can be argued that Von Siebold’s collection was the world’s earliest collection to be arranged ethnographically (Vos 2001, 41).

As I mentioned above, the Royal Cabinet of Rarities closed down in 1883 and its collections were transferred to both the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum and the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum in Leiden. At that time the museum was mainly concerned with Japan and China. At the turn of the century though, the collections were greatly expanded because of the embodiment of the collection from the Royal Cabinet of Rarities and a large part of cultural objects displayed at the International Colonial Exhibition in Amsterdam in 1883. During the first decade of this century, more attention was given on non-Western areas that were less well-represented in the museum. These new acquisitions included material culture from America, Africa, the Pacific, and from more distant places like Siberia and Tibet (Van Dongen *et al.* 1987, 13).

Two early systems of display and classification were introduced in the 1830s and 1840s, around the time that the National Museum of Ethnology was established; those of the German physician Philipp Franz von Siebold and the French geographer Edme François Jomard (Shelton 2011, 66). Jomard placed focus on the functionalistic nature of the objects and rejected the aesthetic approaches: “there is no question of beauty in these arts...but only of objects considered in relation to practical and social utility.” (Shelton 2011, 66) Jomard believed that ethnographic objects had nothing of the beautiful about them and should only be represented according to their function; that ethnographical collections were intended only to enlighten (Williams 1985, 147). “He favored a comparative scheme of “classes”, “orders”, “espèces”, “varietes”- the first including ten functional categories such as clothing, food etc., the next two were divided by type of activity such as agricultural tools, weapons etc. and only the last introduced a geographical criterion.” (Chapman 1985, 25) His functional classification was disputed by Von Siebold, who thought that objects should first arranged and displayed according to geographical order and then by function (Shelton 2011, 66). “This geographical system, according to Siebold, gave the best impression of a people’s relative progress, the condition of their arts, and the nature of past exchanges with other peoples.” (Chapman 1985, 24) Jomard and von Siebold are today considered to be “the forefathers of scientific museum ethnography and the precursors to evolutionary and geographical-cultural approaches to ethnographical collections.” (Shelton 2011, 66) The classificatory schemes and the ideas of von Siebold formed the base upon which the posterior directors worked and evolved the museum collections as we will note later on.

In 1859, von Siebold left The Netherlands and headed to Japan and his collection came under the directorship of Conrad Leemans, who succeeded Siebold from 1859 till 1880. Leemans focused on creating a museum with a general ethnographic character thus he expanded the Von Siebold collection by acquiring material culture from regions considered to be poorly represented, especially from the Dutch East Indies. In 1864, Leemans realized that collections had grown

remarkably and diversified and that the focus could not be as geographically-oriented as it used to be; the *Japansch Museum* was renamed the *Rijks Ethnographisch Museum*. In 1880, during his tenure, the entire collection amounted to 15000 objects (Effert 2011, 12).

In accordance with the prevalent line of thought of the nineteenth century concerning the progress of civilization, Leemans placed the European peoples on the top step of the civilization scale. He marked in reference to other regions, such as Africa, “the collection needs considerable expansion to be considered complete with respect to all of the different uncivilized or non-European peoples”. (Effert 2008, 197) There is no indication that the museum arrangement depicted his way of thinking, although we can certainly claim that Leemans regarded human development as a process of gradual evolution.

All the above mentioned directors of the National Museum of Ethnology subscribed to the nineteenth century line of thought (evolutionism) and emphasized the Western superiority by placing other cultures at the very end of the evolutionary scale. “Of equal importance to all of them were the application of strict geographical principles to the collections and the notion of the comparative nature of the study of the ethnography.” (Effert 2011, 13) In the National Museum of Ethnology there was a continuation of these principles among its museum professionals.

Further on, I will discuss about three, posterior curators; Lindor Serrurier, Simon Kooijman and Dirk Smidt of the National Museum of Ethnology, each one following the line of thought of his time in order to illustrate how the museum practices, exhibition modes and narratives changed in the passage of time, heeling major conceptual currents.

3.3 Lindor Serrurier

Conrad Leemans resigned and Management was transferred to Lindor Serrurier, who served as a director between 1880 and 1896. Serrurier was a trained lawyer and expert in Japanese; he was the only curator so far that had studied physical

anthropology, Japanology and ethnography. During his tenure and due to his success in soliciting acquisitions in order to illustrate the stages of development in human civilization, the museum collections grew five times as big (Mehos 2008, 184). His directorship initiated a period where museum curators were expected to have an academic background, “a development that ran more or less parallel to the institutionalization of ethnography as an academic discipline.” (Effert 2011, 13) The following picture shows an example of a museum exhibition as it would have looked when Serrurier’s term as director started (fig 2).



Figure 2 Museum Display in Approximately 1880 (Van Wengen 1990)

Serrurier had his own ideas regarding the allotment and description of objects, acquired his trips throughout Europe visiting collections and museums in London, Paris, Rotterdam. He attempted to create the most complete museum possible in which all the human races, to the degree that they had not been “upgraded” by the penetration and influence of Western civilization, would be presented. According to Serrurier an ethnographic museum could only be a purely scientific institution if its only goal was to make possible the study of human races, in all their diversity, in the broader sense, by means of visible exhibition. His study trips led him to the conclusion that an ethnographical display which did not offer a sight of the lives of each community was pointless. Moreover, he regarded it as an

unscientific attitude to only collect such objects that are exceptional in beauty. Ethnography as a discipline was still in its formative years according to Serrurier (Effert 2008, 207-208). He expanded the collection with over 45000 objects, especially from the South Sea, the Eastern part of the Malay Archipelago, the Americas, India, Africa and Central Asia, in order to fill in all the “lacunas” in existing collections, which he thought to be incomplete and fragmentary (Effert 2011, 14). Furthermore, he founded a department of physical anthropology, considering the study of races as “a necessary complement of the study of ethnography.” (Serrurier 1888, 9 in Effert 2011, 14)

From the very beginning the museum had to cope with the problem of insufficient and unsatisfactory accommodation. The collections were growing impressively and sometimes they had to be moved from one private dwelling to another. These private houses did not provide the most ideal environment for a comprehensible and attractive display of the exhibits. In spite of this problematic situation, Dr L. Serrurier, managed to make the museum collections more understandable and appealing to the visiting public (Van Wengen 1990, 175).

All the former directors of the National Museum of Ethnography, I stated above, shared the same principles; the strict geographical order of the museum collections and the comparative nature of the ethnography. Lindor Serrurier followed the tradition of geographical classification but went also one step further regarding the arrangement of objects. The ethnography of each geographical area and group of peoples was divided into twelve categories, with each category including a theme of ethnographic interest, under the general heading “Ethnography”. (Willink 2007, 259) This concept followed the ideas of Leemans, who towards the end of his tenure designed a two-way separation of the collection, with geography of countries and peoples in one section and ethnography of each region and its people in the other section. Both sections were subdivided into seventeen categories of objects under integrative headings, according to their utilization and intention, aiming also to offer a glimpse of their customs, morals, type of civilization and lifestyle of the apiece inhabitants. This

system was unfortunately never introduced due to limitations of space and time (Effert 2011, 13).

Serrurier's model of systematic classification was much more systematic and detailed and it first appeared in the *Aardrijkskundig Weekblad* in 1881, in an announcement of the National Museum of Ethnography regarding collecting (Effert 2008, 208). Each category included several themes, all divided again into smaller groupings of related objects. Everything concerning the basic needs of people and their everyday life was exhibited (Willink 2007, 259). In the *Korte gids voor den bezoeker van het Rijks Ethnographisch Museum Hoogewoerd No 108-Rapenburg No 69* (Short Guide for the visitor to the National Ethnographic Museum in Leiden) dated in 1883, Serrurier divided up the collections according to geography, between eight areas of the world; I) Australia and Islands of the Pacific, II) East and West New Guinea, Timor Island and Islands east of Lombok, III) Celebes and Moluccas Islands, IV) Borneo, Bangka, Billiton and Riouw Islands, V) Sumatra and other islands in western Indonesia, VI) Java, Madura, Bali and Lombok, VII) Japan, VIII) China. The objects related to these geographical areas were arranged in twelve categories; I) food, drink, stimulants, medicines, II) clothes, accessories, jewelry, toilet necessities, III) engineering and furniture, IV) hunting and fishing, V) agriculture, VII) trade, VIII) local products, IX) weapons, X) insignia and tokens, XI) dance and music, XII) religion and education. In the guide Serrurier explains:

“In each section, consisting of several different islands or regions, the objects relating to these are...arranged in twelve categories, beginning with the objects serving to fulfill the most primary needs, such as food, and generally speaking everything intended for external use, after which appears clothing and dwellings, then the means for obtaining these things, for transporting them, for selling them and also for processing them, after which everything for assuring the possession and ownership of these objects, namely warfare, the maintenance of authority and the economy of the state, finishing with the matters concerning mankind's noblest requirements, those of his spirit” (Serrurier 1883 in Willink 2007, 262)

West Guinea material culture was displayed along with objects from East New Guinea, Timor Island and Islands east of Lombok and has strong presence in all the above mentioned twelve categories. In the visitor's guide, mentioned above, Serrurier cites a catalogue of objects, found in each category, for example spoons, forks, plates, gourds for the first category of food, drink, stimulants, medicines or combs, nose jewelry, earrings representing the second category of clothes, accessories, jewelry, toilet necessities. All the displayed objects were of daily use and the aesthetics did not seem to be a concern, something that changed at the beginning of the twentieth century as I will discuss later on. At that time, the museum was a scientific institution before everything else, meant particularly for scholars and collectors.

Serrurier followed the geographical-cultural classificatory scheme instead of the typological, evolutionary scheme. A very well-known example, where the typological, evolutionary principle of organization was followed, is the Pitt Rivers museum, which was established in 1884 and also possesses a rich collection of Pacific island objects. The museum collection, under the impact of Darwinism, which I described in the second chapter, was organized in a very certain way to illustrate the course of human cultural evolution. Weapons and tools were gradually displayed in an incessant continuity from the most simple and natural forms to the most elaborate and sophisticated ones. "Each weapon could be shown to have a history of its own, independent of the intentions of its makers, and reflected in its formal development." (Chapman 1985, 31) Serrurier as we noted from his guide followed a more geographical system of classification, aiming also to show the social and cultural aspects of the exhibited cultures. Moreover, even if it is not apparent from the layout of the collection, Serrurier embraced the nineteenth century views of gradual evolution and European superiority. In the *Gids voor den Bezoeker van het Ethnographisch Museum* in 1888 he writes:

"In addition to the general, permanent collection classified on the basis of geography, special temporary exhibitions provide the means for assembling, in one perspective, all kinds of phenomena in the physical lives of the people. (...)

Thus the Museum, while maintaining its scholarly character, becomes a school for anyone to know how wild, barbaric and half-civilized peoples have tried to realize their ideas in tangible forms.” (Serrurier 1888 in Willink 2007, 267)

Serrurier’s model of systematic classification was very innovative for that period; for the first time in the history of both the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities and the National Museum of Ethnology the visiting public could now comprehend in a larger extent the basic information of the exhibited collections and the meaning of the objects. “The objects were removed from the arena of curiosities and rarities, which redirected the ethnography museum towards science.” (Effert 2008, 209)

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century there was still focus on the geographical order of the museum collections, but also in one particular aspect of the culture. In 1907 there was a display under the title *Northern New Guinea ornaments and musical instruments*, where ornaments and musical instruments from Northern New Guinea were exhibited together. The museum placed its focus on a particular cultural area and general, broad aspects of the culture that the Dutch visitor could more easily become acquainted with, like music in this case (Ave 1980, 13).

In the first half of the twentieth century, as I noted in the second chapter, some appreciation for the aesthetic aspects of the cultural items, something that was not considered a primacy before, was becoming more and more perceptible due to the influence of many artists of the Western world, who were impressed by tribal art forms. In the National Museum of Ethnology there were two trends regarding presentation. There were presentations of ethnographic objects, which aimed to highlight the beauty and the aesthetic qualities of the displays themselves and strictly symmetrical arrangements that emphasized more on the aesthetics of the placement of the objects than of the aesthetic value of the objects themselves. These kinds of arrangements were called “mantelpiece” presentations and they looked like decorations from traditional Dutch living rooms. This type of arrangement continued up until long after the Second World War (Van Wengen

1990, 177). Below, we can see an example of this symmetrical style. Three mannequins of Papuans (fig 3), one woman and two men are standing in front of a series of spears, which are placed in a strictly symmetrical order.



Figure 3 A "Mantelpiece" Representation of 1940 (Kooijman 1958)

To conclude, there was great interest among museum curators in the aesthetic aspect of the objects, something which is also apparent from collecting. Although there were collecting expeditions, such as the 1939 one in the Highlands of West New Guinea, organized by Charles C.F.M. Le Roux, director of the museum, all the new acquisitions were mostly coming from art dealers (Van Wengen 1990, 177). However, the museum continued to hold on to its scientific orientation and in some cases these mantelpiece arrangements left untouched for years (Staal and De Rijk 2003, 35).

3.4 Simon Kooijman

After decolonization, many western museums had to cope with the new socio-political situation and changes in government and administration, which impacted

the museum displays and the presentation of cultures. “Far from providing the state with a sustained, coherent, and consolidated legitimating narrative for its colonial and neo-colonial adventures, colonial museums mirrored their historical shifts replete with uncertainties, bad faith, and contradictions well into the post-colonial period.” (Shelton 2011, 73) The museum started to loosen up its links with notions as national prestige and empire building and was confronted with the task to articulate new anti-colonial identities.

As I mentioned above the founder of the National Museum of Ethnography Dr. Ph. F. von Siebold introduced the geographical-cultural classification scheme and argued that objects should first be arranged and displayed according to geographical order and then by function (Shelton 2011, 66). Collections should be ordered in such a way that “the first glance makes the People knowable, and their characteristics are presented by a selection of their products.” (Von Siebold 1973 in Smidt 1995, 55) Leemans, Serrurier and the posterior curators also shared the same views; within the context of geographical allotment, the cultural objects were divided according to themes regarding the use of the particular item.

Over the course of time and especially after the Second World War, the need for changing the permanent display became apparent to the museum staff. The New Guinea room was arranged geographically, with presentations concerning the cultures of 1) the Indonesian-Melanesian cultural region of the western and northern coastal areas, 2) the Central Highlands, 3) the Papuan cultures of the southern lowlands (Smidt 1995, 58). However, the guided tours resulted in difficulties for the visiting public to see an overarching theme in the tour commentaries because of the vast amount of material culture on display as museum spaces and show cases were jam packed with objects and even more because of the differences among the exhibited cultures (for example between the south and the north coasts), which within this kind of arrangement (the geographical) were not so obvious (Van Wengen 1995, 27). Moreover, the geographical arrangement of the exhibition was strongly repetitive and monotonous. The geographical order could only make sense to museum

professionals, who already had a picture of the geographical pattern of those areas in their minds. The individual visitor could only see an immense quantity of cultural objects crammed in cabinets, evoking a messy, funny-looking and exotic atmosphere. The rearrangement of the New Guinea room became a necessity in order to provide something different to the visitor that could serve as a counterbalance against this feeling of awkwardness, untidiness and curiosity (Kooijman 1958, 97).

After the Second World War the first curator of the Australia and the South Seas department, Simon Kooijman, brought this need for change into effect. At this point I would like to provide some information about his background as museum professional because his field research and collecting activities gave a new insight to the entrenched at that time museum practices.

Simon Kooijman studied social geography at Utrecht University. He started his museum career on August 1943. He joined the museum as research assistant and was responsible for the Australia and the South Seas collections. In the period from 1944 to 1945 the Indonesia and the South Seas department was divided into two split departments with the latter including the large West New Guinea collection. The new department had no curator so it fell under the responsibility of the research assistant, Simon Kooijman, who finally became a curator in 1946 (Smidt 1995, 51). In the period from 1945 from 1950 he had to cease his museum career in order to join the army due to the war with Indonesia. During that time as a reserve officer attached to The Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service, he had the opportunity to make brief visits to New Guinea, an area that would absorb much of his attention later on (Van Wengen 1995, 25).

Kooijman returned to The Netherlands in 1950 and in 1952 he left the country for a second time in order to conduct a two-years research on population among the Marind-anim of South New Guinea, an experience that gave him the opportunity to gain personal contact with the cultures, which up to that point only knew through museum collections and literature (Van Wengen 1995, 26).

The New Guinea section attracted much of the visiting public's interest, but as I stated above it had many serious drawbacks that made difficult for the visitor to understand the presentations. "After Serrurier in 1882-1883, Kooijman was the first curator responsible for the content of displays to express, in a publication, his basic principles and concept for a new permanent arrangement" (Smidt 1995, 56) as he did in the *Nederlands Nieuw Guinea in Leiden: De Presentatie van de culturen van westelijk Nieuw Guinea in het Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in 1958* (Dutch New Guinea in Leiden: The Presentation of the cultures of western New Guinea in the National Museum of Ethnology in 1958).

Kooijman, while on fieldwork in the Marind-anim area of South New Guinea in 1953 and 1954, managed to collect ethnographical material for the museum collection. He collected objects of everyday use, body ornaments, weaponry and woodcarvings of high aesthetic quality, such as a spirit pole (mbitoro) around seven meters tall from the Mimika culture and an assembly of Asmat statues and shields. These new acquisitions of high aesthetic standard made the complete revision of the New Guinea room a necessity. Kooijman finally carried out the rearrangement of the New Guinea section in 1958 (Smidt 1995, 57).

The starting point was the wish to link the display with the special requirements of school education, and the abilities of the educational department. After the war the number of visitors grew impressively and the educational department was taken on to satisfy their demands (Pott 1959, 11 in Smidt 1995, 58). The new classification was no longer geographical but solely thematic. Seven themes were presented: 1) sago extraction and horticulture, 2) hunting and fishing (fig 4), 3) raw materials and techniques, 4) objects of everyday use, 5) the feast of masks, 6) religion, 7) war, trade and headhunting. The aim was to illustrate the diversity of the New Guinea cultures and draw attention to various aspects of life of different nature such as ceremonial, ecological, religious, artistic, and technological. The principle underlying this new arrangement was the idea of the various aspects of culture used by social anthropologists in studying a community (Kooijman 1985, 99).

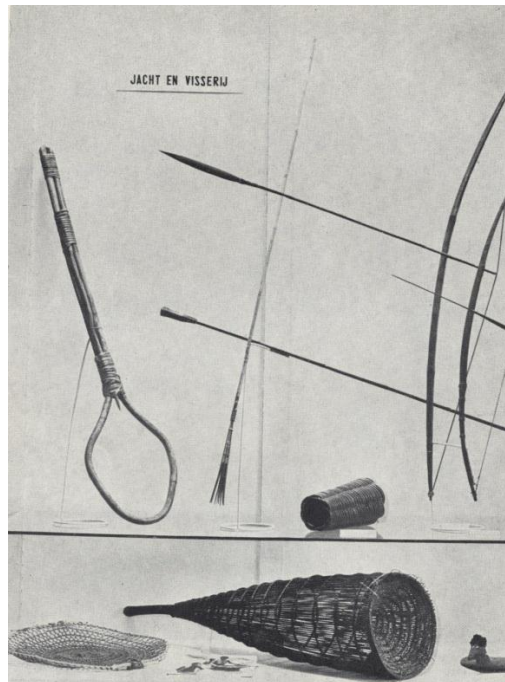


Figure 4 The Newly Installed Showcase on "Hunting and Fishing" (Smidt 1995)

The description of the displayed objects was not limited to physical characteristics such as colors, dimensions etc. but included also information about the meaning and the role of the object in the native society. Detailed information through films, drawings, photographs, were given to the visitor regarding the techniques used to manufacture the apiece object, the people involved in the process of making, the purpose and the context in which it was created, and its use. Kooijman wanted to show the society behind the objects and disseminate the message, that the ultimate objective of an ethnographical exhibition is not the objects themselves. The objects should be conceived as a handle to discover the real people behind them. Through this combination of the objects and the auditory and visual documentation in the form of films, photographs, recordings, the cultural item was no longer just an object standing there but was placed within a more comprehensible and clear context (Kooijman 1985, 99).

An apt example to illustrate these new, innovative representation modes was the use of scenes, along with the displays, from the very popular film at that time *Matjemosh* made by Adrian Gerbrands in 1963. That film was about the wood-

carving process in the Asmat area of New Guinea. The museum displayed a drum from that area along with a scene from the *Matjemosh* film (fig 5), where a Papuan from the Amanamkai village is carving a drum. Through this method of representation, the Dutch visitor could see the process of making so the object itself did not look as something “alien” nor the Papuan carver as a savage, but a real personality, a person with flesh and blood, living with his family in Amanamkai village, carrying out a daily task. It was easier for the Western visitors to identify to a certain extent with the villager by watching the context within the object was made and its maker (Van Wengen 1990, 181-182). The exhibits were also intentionally thinned as to help the visitors to see the individual displays more clearly and the public display was also accompanied by 50 slides, which gave a general introduction of the two distinct Papuan cultures and geographical areas that pertained to the collection (Kooijman 1958, 99).

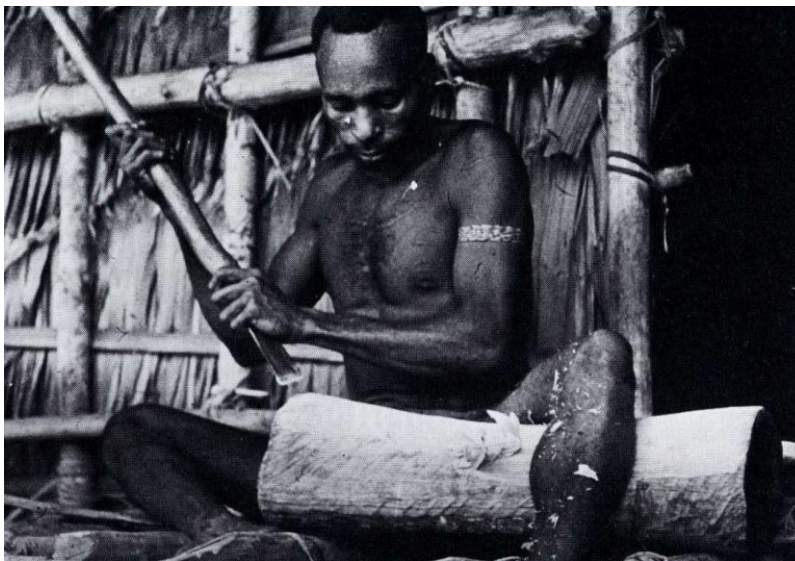


Figure 5 Matjemosh Making a Drum (Van Wengen 1990)

Kooijman strongly believed that a museum collection does not represent fully a culture as it is in reality and he also wanted to clarify that the museum presentation of New Guinea depicted the cultures as they were in the past. Photographs of the modern life of New Guinea in order to show the continuity of the culture were also on display along with the objects.

“Papuan driving a farm tractor, and Papuan students from the Mission technical school at Kota Radja in Hollandia with their school leaving certificates. In the showcase devoted to “Religion”, the modern aspect is presented by a crucifix in the Mimika in the form of an ancestor image, and a photograph of the Van Hasselt Church at Biak, both shown against the background of the old religious life.” (Kooijman 1958, 103 in Smidt 1995, 59)

As I mentioned in the second chapter, Franz Boas, the central figure of the twentieth century cultural anthropology, pioneered the display of artifacts by culture groups, with an emphasis on the “life group”, a setting that simulated the original cultural environment of a native society, consisted of the relative props and human-like figures, dressed in native costumes, which seemed like they were in the middle of some sort of work process. Dioramas were an innovation in museums around this time and Franz Boas utilized them in order to create realistic scenes of the daily life-style of the natives. His aim was that the visiting public would detach from only reading the texts of the labels and thus he used new means and innovative methods that supported visitors in better understanding the exhibited indigenous cultures.

Under the influence of Franz Boas and his innovative methods along with the new order of things, consistent with the situation of decolonization, another major change in the display policy of the National Museum of Ethnology was introduced: the use of three-dimensional environments. This way of displaying ethnographical objects in original-like reconstructions helped the visitor to understand better the actual use of the apiece cultural object in every-day situations and thus provided a better understanding of the exhibited cultures. These three-dimensional re-enactments aimed to depict the daily life of the non-Western people in such a way that Dutch visitors could feel involved to a certain extent and thus identify with the every-day situations depicted (Van Wengen 1990, 179).

An apt example of this new approach regarding representation was the temporary exhibition, held between 29 May 1974 and 12 January 1975, with the title *Zuidzee uit de doeken* (The South Seas unveiled) curated by Simon Kooijman.

Unfortunately I could not find an exhibition about New Guinea that such three-dimensional constructions were in use so I will use instead the above mentioned exhibition about the island of Moce, in Fiji's Lau archipelago (Kooijman 1980, 52).



Figure 6 Interior of a House on Moce (Kooijman 1980)

In the picture above, we can see a room from that exhibition (fig 6). This is an interior space of a house on Moce; the reed walls, the beam and solid construction, the traditional, plaited baskets, the bed with the mosquito netting above, the mat-covered floor, the family photographs, every prop and detail imitates the original setting of a real house in Fiji. The presentation had three main aims; the didactic, the evocative and the artistic. The visitors were offered the opportunity not only to see beautiful and artistic ethnographical objects and to become acquainted with the customs of the ethnical group to whose culture the

displays belonged to, but also to participate in the community life through these replicas and thus acquire a complete picture of the culture and the different facets of the material culture as possible. Photographs, wall paintings and texts were used along these original-like replicas in order to present in the most accurate way the village life (Kooijman 1980, 61-69).

3.5 Dirk Smidt

During the nineteenth century the distinction between art and artifact was very crucial in safeguarding the status of anthropology as a serious scientific field. “Many ethnographers argued that their materials had nothing beautiful about them and that ethnographical collections were intended only to enlighten.” (Williams 1985, 147) In the course of time and especially in the early 1980s there was a trend for re-examining “the museum’s endemic crises proliferated, and this became part of an impetus for anthropologists to turn their attention to the museum once again.” (Shelton 2011, 74) A re-examination of the methods and purposes employed by the western museums became a necessity. Western museums were seen as looters, thieves, holding collections of objects and sometimes even human remains from other non-Western cultures. Cultural patrimony suddenly became the most controversial topic for discussion and foremost in the thoughts of museum professionals. Museums were asked to document their collections and in some cases repatriate cultural materials. The indigenous peoples’ voice was becoming increasingly strong and demanding; it was the first voice of authority.

“A different response to the milieu of intellectual uncertainty has been the increased adoption of aestheticized or “art-type” displays.” (Shelton 2011, 74) The re-classification of artifact as art and the notion that ethnography has something universal that belonged to everyone tried to bridge the gap between museums and the “Other”. The non-Western object went from a curiosité, to ethnographic object and finally to piece of art. In the following lines I will discuss how the National Museum of Ethnology underwent this change.

Dirk Smidt was curator of the Department of Oceania at the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden from 1981 till 2007. He studied Anthropology at the University of Leiden and specialized in the art of New Guinea. His museum career can be divided in two phases: 1) from 1970 to 1980 he had several positions at the National Museum and Art Gallery in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and from 1981 to 2007 he was curator at the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden. He had the chance to conduct fieldwork in various parts of New Guinea and he developed an expertise regarding the tribal art of Melanesian art (Corbey 200, 201).

Unfortunately, the period I conducted my research in the Volkenkunde Museum the museum archives were not accessible due to renovation so I was not able to find information about the permanent display of New Guinea. Another reason also was that the curator himself did not really favor museum catalogues. For the above mentioned reasons, I decided to use a temporary exhibition, which in my opinion shows clearly the ideas of Smidt and the museum practices that prevail today.

The temporary exhibition opened on 14th of February in 2003 and was named *Papua leeft! Ontmoet de Kamoro (Papua Lives! Meet the Kamoro)* and it was announced as the world's first exhibition about Kamoro art and peoples. Kamoro are people living along the southwest coast of Papua and were brought in the spotlight for the first time in 1984, when Simon Kooijman presented exceptional Kamoro pieces from the Leiden collection in his book *Art, Art Objects and Ritual in the Mimika Culture* (Smidt and Pouwer 2003, 11).

The exhibition was divided up into three broad topics; 1) expeditions, 2) large ceremonial celebrations, 3) new developments in Kamoro art. Each room had its own theme heading on the wall along with a brief explanatory text. The visitor was invited to watch an introductory film before entering the exhibition, which was about the Kamoro Arts Festival, a four day event, during which canoe races, ceremonial dances and art auction were held. The Kamoro Arts Festival was

organized annually from 1998 till 2005. The first theme, called “Expeditions”, was about the early encounters between Kamoro peoples and western expedition members, who brought to The Netherlands many important pieces. Brief texts informed the visitor about the colonial context within the collecting activities took place. Audio-visual material showing the woodcarving of a spirit pole and a drum along with interviews with their makers was also on display. The second topic, named “Large Ceremonial Celebrations”, focused on a range of big Kamoro festivities. A series of old photographs of the actual festivities was shown during a slide show and complemented the objects on display. The third and last theme was about the Kamoro Arts Festival. Objects collected during the festival were exhibited along with a short film with scenes from the actual festival. The film informed the visitor about the museum’s collecting activities and about the whole process of how the cultural objects found their way in the museum collection. The labels accompanying the objects were short and not so detailed (Jacobs 2012, 200).

The purpose of this temporary exhibition was to show that Kamoro art is not something dead and finite, but an essential part of the modern life of the Papuans. Old and new art objects selected for their high quality and rarity had been assembled to revive the Kamoro art and by extension the culture itself (Smidt and Pouwer 2003, 9-10).



Figure 7 View of the Kamoro Exhibition (Smidt and Pouwer 2003)

The exhibition, as you can see from the picture (fig 7), presented the cultural objects in the form of an open display. There were also a few low, glass, show-cases from small items. The ethnographic objects were obviously presented as art pieces and were accompanied by rich audio-visual material, such as short films and old photographs. This way of displaying fitted the new philosophy of the renovated museum, in which emphasis was put on artistic design and information through audio-visual material and installations rather than on texts (Jacobs 2012, 200). There were no descriptions at all of objects to be found in the displays, only general inscriptions, typographed on the glass panes of the show-cases, sometimes even combined with lines from literature and poetry. No text was allowed behind the glass in order to not draw the attention away from the displays. More information about objects could be easily found on touch screens. The glass-cases were as transparent as possible, cutting down the physical barrier between the object and the viewer. The designing team stuck to an atmosphere of minimalism (Staal and De Rijk 2003, 123, 125). The contextual information was given mostly through films and photographs rather than through labels and the aim was to show the colonial context without removing attention from the artistic character of the exhibition and the significance of these items in culture of Kamoro. The objects were left to speak for themselves (Jacobs 2012, 200).

In the book *Redesigning the National Museum of Ethnology Leiden, The Netherlands* of the designers, responsible for the renovation of the museum and the organization of this permanent exhibition we read the following quote “The museum’s steering group used three basic touchstones for the selection process: beauty, interest and uniqueness.” (Staal and De Rijk 2003, 121) The word beauty is used first in this hierarchy of words and later goes on “While the fundamental *raison d’être* is to trace the history and development of non-Western cultures, the museum also clearly states that its presentations should appeal to visitors who wish to see beautiful objects. During much of the post-colonial era, the traditional ethnographic museum was virtually paralyzed by the conflict inherent in those two goals. Yet in the new presentation, both attitudes can be seen in the exhibition

design, often within the same rooms.” (Staal and De Rijk 2003, 144) It is obvious through these quotes that the designers attempted to combine these two heterogeneous presentation modes; presenting objects as ethnography and as art, by giving priority to the artistic value of the displayed items.

At this point I would like to cite some quotes from an interview with the curator Dirk Smidt, taken from the Raymond Corbey’s book *Tribal Art Traffic*, which provide an idea of his personal perspective regarding this shift of attention to the aesthetic and artistic value of the tribal objects. Unfortunately, due to Mr. Smidt’s serious health problems I was not able to conduct interview with him.

“I approach an object first of all as a piece of culture, (...) But I am also interested aesthetically; that is how I initially got involved with tribal art in the first place. An anthropological, contextualizing approach doesn’t mean that you can’t look at it aesthetically at the same time, and I will certainly allow aesthetic consideration to play part in the new permanent exhibition that we are now setting up in Leiden. But as far as I am concerned, the unconditional rejection of market-oriented carvings by many collectors and most dealers takes things too far. There are remarkable pieces among them!” (Corbey 2000, 209)

To sum, I would like to make an overall comparison between the three, above mentioned, curators and underline the differences regarding representation modes.

As I already noted, in the previous chapters, in the late nineteenth century there were two main classification schemes, the geographical and the typological or evolutionary one. The National Museum of Ethnology collections were arranged according to their place of origin, even if that system in von Siebold’s hand, as we noted earlier, “it was less an organizational tool than a means of reconstructing man’s past.” (Chapman 1985, 24)

Serrurier and his predecessors von Siebold and Leemans, all shared the same principles, the strict geographical order of the museum collections. Serrurier though, went one step further regarding the presentation and arrangement of objects. He clung to the geographical classification like his predecessors but with

his twelve categories model, with each category comprising a theme of ethnographical interest, such as food, drink, hunting, fishing etc. managed to arrange collections in a more comprehensible way for the visitor who could understand to a larger degree the basic information of the exhibited culture and meaning of the objects. Besides the geographical division between eight areas of the world, Serrurier also wanted to show the social and cultural aspects of displayed cultures. He also believed that an ethnographical museum should only be a purely scientific institution, meant particularly for scholars and interested lay collectors. "Collecting and studying ethnographical material was the principal aim of the museum at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century." (Van Wengen 1990, 177) Due to this purely scientific orientation of the museum we note that aesthetics was not considered to be a major concern for the museum staff. By looking at the Short Guide for the visitor to the National Ethnographic Museum in Leiden, dated in 1883, in the West New Guinea section, all the displayed objects were very simplistic and of daily use such as plates, spoons, forks etc. This trend in my opinion had a dual meaning. Firstly the museum was thought to be a predominantly scientific institution mainly addressing to academics and collectors and not so much on the general public. The absence of aesthetically beautiful cultural objects is justifiable since the focus was not placed in the public, which would be enticed by impressive objects but on an academic elite, who were more interested in the scientific value of the objects for ethnology. Another reason could also be the misconception, consistent with the late nineteenth century views of the evolution of species and European superiority, which placed indigenous peoples at the earlier stages of the evolutionary scale. Native societies were not thought to be mentally capable enough to create something worthwhile. These two factors in combination with the accommodation problem of the museum resulted in a certain exotic bias in the way ethnographic objects were presented. The strictly geographical arrangement of collection of West New Guinea continued up to 1958, when Simon Kooijman decided to reorganize the permanent collection.

Simon Kooijman decided to switch the geographical order of the collection into a solely thematic one. With his new representation model of seven themes he attempted to show the diversity of the New Guinea cultures and to draw attention to various aspects of the exhibited culture such as the artistic, ceremonial, religious, technological etc. He presented the cultural objects in their anthropological context, grouped with other artifacts of similar nature, along with extensive information that was not confined only to the external characteristics of the object but contrarily extensive explanation was provided to the visitor regarding the function, fabrication and esoteric meaning of the given object. The aesthetics were also present in the representation if we consider that the acquisition of high artistic quality objects, such as the spirit pole from the Mimika area and the assembly of Asmat statues and shields, necessitated the complete revision of the New Guinea exhibition room. However, the presentation of objects as ethnography, was the main primacy for the curator. Simon Kooijman included beautifully-looking objects in the collection but his aims were primarily didactic and to a lesser extent artistic. That is outward from the modes of presentation, where extensive information is provided to the visitor in order to comprehend as much as possible the culture in its own terms.

Dirk Smidt followed a different approach regarding presentation; the art-type display, in consistency with the new philosophy of the renovated museum, in which emphasis was put on artistic design and minimalistic atmosphere. The cultural objects were displayed in the form of open display, with only few low show-cases for small in size items. The contextual information was provided mostly through audio-visual documentation in the form of photographs, short films, and touch screens rather than on texts. The object was given its own pedestal placed in a minimalistic, neutral environment without overemphasizing its anthropological context, and was free to “speak for itself”. The ethnographic objects were presented as masterpieces celebrating Kamoro’s craft skills. Furthermore, both Simon Kooijman and Dirk Smidt had actual contact with the Papuans and experienced the daily life of the community due to field-work

research so they were more capable of transferring a more accurate image of the culture to the public. Lindor Serrurier, on the other hand, who never visited the island of New Guinea, could not have provided an image of equal cultural value, since he never actually associated with the natives.

4. Conclusion

As we saw from the second and the third chapter, in the course of time the museums of the Western world have come to terms with the new order of things and with a changing world view in terms of presenting ethnographic collections and by extension presenting non-Western cultures.

Ethnographic museums had and have to confront a difficult task; to represent “other” cultures. “Although the meaning museums attribute their collections are historically specific, variations and differences are always found within any one period.” (Shelton 2009, 480) As constructs of the Western civilization on the heels of Colonialism, holding material culture from indigenous peoples all around the world, were seen as a medium to “tell the story” of “other” cultures; this story was never the same and altered according to the different perceptions and agendas of the apiece historical era, something that led to a complex and problematic relationship between the western “self” and the indigenous “other”.

The aim of this thesis was to explore the mode of exhibiting objects in a colonial and post-colonial context and how the conceptual, academic currents are depicted in the narrative of the exhibitions of West New Guinea in the passage of time.

My research was focused around three curators of the National Museum of Ethnology, each one following the line of thought of his time; Lindor Serrurier, Simon Kooijman and Dirk Smidt. Lindor Serrurier followed the geographical order of the museum collections, which was, along with the typological, evolutionary one, the prevailing classification schemes in the late nineteenth century. Serrurier, besides the geographical division of the collection, also introduced a twelve categories system that went one step further from his predecessor, which aimed to show the social and cultural aspects of the exhibited cultures. Simon Kooijman switched the focal attention from geography and arranged the permanent collection of New Guinea in broad cultural themes. His aim was to illustrate the cultural diversity and the various aspects of the life of the Papuans. He presented the material culture in its anthropological context by

providing information about the manufacture and the function of the objects, their religious and social meaning, and their role in the traditional life of the community. The accurate representation meant great deal to him. His museum activities were greatly influenced by Franz Boas and his ideas about cultural diversity. He used evocative and didactic methods of representation by using three-dimensional constructions within the museum space that simulated the original cultural environment in order to provide an articulate image of the exhibited culture to the visiting public. Dirk Smidt followed a different approach regarding representation, resembling more to modern art museums as he tried not just to equate the ethnographical with the aesthetical aspect, but to highlight the artistic value of the displayed items.

In the late nineteenth century the ethnographic museum functioned as a monument of colonial and imperial tropes. Indigenous peoples were believed to be on the verge of extinction so the collecting and documenting of native societies became a necessity. The collected material culture held the significance of not only originating from exotic places that evoked a mysterious and magical atmosphere to the European audience but was also believed to represent man's evolutionary past. Colonial power relations gave cultural objects new sets of contexts and identities. Museum collections were organized and classified on the themes of evolution and race as Europeans were trying to understand the native peoples they had contact with. Imperial hierarchies with ranging from the lowest to the highest cultural development were used to underline the European superiority over all the other non-Western cultures, which proved unable to reach the same level of progress and it was only a matter of time before they would disappear.

In the course of their history, ethnographical museums had to cope with a new reality; loss of colonial possessions and newly emerging nation states. Post-coloniality and multi-culturalism brought substantial changes in the way ethnographic museums represented cultures. "Over the past couple of decades, representatives of source communities, along with other critics, have called for the

re-examination of the historical development of museums and ethnographical collections within the context of Western colonialism and how collections brought together under conditions of colonialism are embedded in power relationships.” (Kreps 2011b, 458) In archaeology and anthropology, where most attention is given in material culture, the post-colonial critique has not passed unnoticed. In response museums have subjected their practices to a much needed self-reflection.

In both archaeology and anthropology, the controversial topic of colonialism has long remained and to continues to be a burning issue. “Multiculturalism has brought the natives home in the post-imperial countries, occasioning a need for the redefinition of citizenship” (Pieterse 2005, 164), source communities resurrected the issue of cultural patrimony and demanded the repatriation of their cultural materials and asked for a more active role in the representation, display and interpretation of their heritage in Western museums.

After the 1980s, as we noted from the second chapter and the third chapter, the exhibiting strategy to display ethnographic objects as art became prevalent. “Treatment of artifacts as fine art in currently one of the most effective ways to communicate cross-culturally a sense of quality, meaning, and importance.” (Clifford 1997, 121) Ethnographic museums resemble more and more modern art museums regarding the ways of representation.

The relationship between the western “self” and the indigenous “other” has been undergoing many transformations over the time. “The identities that framed the age of the museum, from about 1840 to 1930, were rational, imperial and modern. Globalization in the twentieth century gradually opened up these identity frames. The high modern or postmodern turn de-centered the Universalist Enlightenment subject and introduced the multiplicity of identity. ” (Pieterse 2005, 169-170) New identities are constructed and more stakeholders are brought into play. Just as the ideas of artistic and ethnographic make sense for Westerners, the notions of traditional and contemporary must be also embraced from the source community. The museum becomes a “contact zone” as James Clifford called it.

I do not believe that there is a completely accurate exhibition strategy. As Sally Price explains in *Objects D'Art and Ethnographic Artifacts* presenting objects as ethnography comes often along with an immense amount of information about its social and religious meaning, its technical function and so on, “thus erasing the notion that the aesthetic quality of the work is able “to speak for itself” or rather erasing the entire notion that the object possesses any aesthetic quality worthy for transmission.” (Price 1991, 83) The viewer is forming an opinion based on the contextual explanation given rather than to “respond through a perceptual, emotional absorption of its formal qualities.” (Price 1991, 83)

Presenting cultural objects as art can also be to a certain extent problematic since it addresses an elite group of people that have the educational background to appreciate the ethnographic objects on the basis of its pure aesthetic attributes. The criteria of what is aesthetic are mainly western and thus one-sided. “Although scholars occasionally put native aesthetic criteria under a microscope for social scientific study, African villagers are rarely asked to advise exhibit organizers about what masks merit the epithet of masterpiece, and South American Indians do not generally serve as consultants about which feather headdresses deserve center stage in museums.” (Price 1991, 87) Also the underlining of the artistic value of a cultural object and the decrement of its contextual information equates with an attribution of pecuniary value to the object that draws away the attention from its ethnographical importance. The transition from ethnography to art “is clearly associated in people’s minds with a scale of increasing monetary value and a shift from function to aesthetics as an evaluator basis.” (Price 1991, 84)

The legacy of the nineteenth-century museology, which underpinned the disagreement between instruction and beauty and was restated as a dispute between functional or interpretive display and aestheticized has yet to be resolved (Williams 1985, 164). In my view, the most accurate representation can arise from the close cooperation of the museum curator and indigenous peoples and today many museums of the Western world seem to follow this cross-cultural path.

There is still much to discover in the continuously evolving relationship between the indigenous peoples and the Western museums. Museum professionals must be aware of their own subjectivity and try to bring out the native voice and help it to be heard. There are still many imperfections but “if the museum community continues to explore this multicultural and intercultural terrain consciously and deliberately, it can play a role in reflecting and mediating the claims of various groups, and perhaps help construct a new idea of ourselves” as Westerners. (Karp and Lavine 1991, 8)

Abstract

In the museum world, Western perceptions regarding indigenous peoples have often changed in the past and are still changing continually today. This thesis consists of an effort to trace these past changes in representations of native peoples from the first museums to modern times, taking the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden as a case study. This case study turns out to be an illustrative example of how these changes occurred in ethnographical museums as results of the changes in the political and academic climate at the time, as well as the changing awareness indigenous peoples had of their own culture. By being aware of these past changes, it is better possible to plan ahead for the future.

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