

PACIFIC PRESENCES

– VOLUME 2 –

Oceanic Art and European Museums

edited by

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CHAPTER 28

Knowing and not knowing

ALANA JELINEK

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Knowing (2015) is an artwork made as part of the *Pacific Presences* research project into Oceanic Art in European Museums. Working to a brief is an unusual process for me. Research projects are not like site-specific interventions, which are invitations to work in a specific context, my usual and preferred method of working. Nor is contributing to a research project similar to making autonomous artworks that are the result of an independent process of thinking and making. For these reasons, my contribution to the larger research project had to be devised from first principles: what can art say about Oceanic art in European museums?

Knowing was conceptualized in two parts: the live, discursive part with participants, which can be described as a participatory or dialogic art practice, and then the film itself. The needs of the film were considered only after the participatory events were complete. In other words, time spent with participants was privileged over the product of those encounters. This decision was based on the types of ethical considerations that define my art practice, including projects such as *The Field* (2008-2017). In my participatory art practice, a primary goal or value is to attempt to have genuine, honest, open and egalitarian engagements with participants; inviting participants from all backgrounds and esteeming all in our diversity: in short, having ethical engagements with the other as Other.⁷⁸⁴

Unhampered by the technical requirements of the film-making process or the aesthetic considerations of the finished product, the focus was on the many days spent with participants at the collections storage base for the Museum Volkenkunde in S'Gravenzande, Netherlands. The separation between these two aspects of the project was so strong that the material filmed and recorded of the encounters between people and things was treated as *objets trouvés* (found objects) during the editing process. 'Found objects' are those things that have not been designed for an artistic purpose but which exist for another, already established purpose, following Marcel Duchamp's use of a urinal in *Fountain* (1917). In the case of the footage for *Knowing*, this 'other purpose' was a conceit and a way of allowing both for personal and open engagement with people while present and the distance required to make an artwork after the fact. As observed by Grimshaw and Ravetz, a 'critical interrogation of form or medium is central to their [artists'] approach' (2015: 419).⁷⁸⁵ This critical interrogation requires a



Figure 28.1. Recording in location at Museum Volkenkunde stores, Netherlands. Photograph by Katharina Haslwanter.

distance that is inappropriate to relationships of trust and openness, which is why the two modes within the project were conceived and maintained. The fact that encounters between people and things were being recorded was discussed, and participants had the right to delete any of the material they recorded. Participants did not have any rights over the final edit, though.

The original aim of the project was to explore the politics of occupation and colonialism through the objects from West Papua in the Museum Volkenkunde (now part of Werltdculturen Museum) in Leiden (Figure 28.1). In order to do so, people from Papuan backgrounds living in the diaspora (Netherlands and UK), Javanese people living both in Indonesia and the Netherlands, and also Dutch people of white Dutch origin with a personal or family connection to the region were invited to participate. The idea was to ask everyone to select objects to talk about from the museum's collection and to talk about the choices other participants had made. Each participant would engage both with objects from their own culture and with those from the other cultures. Because the museum has not collected objects from Dutch culture, those from a Dutch background were asked to bring objects from home from a similar period to the Papuan collection: things from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

From the outset my sympathies were with the colonized, namely the Papuans, but in attempting an open, and therefore unbiased, engagement with all participants, I aimed at putting aside my sympathies in order to elicit meaningful, strong and sympathetic stories from all participants irrespective of background or culture. Nevertheless, I did maintain a set of assumptions, a hypothesis, until it became clear that the relationships and inter-relationships between people and things were far more complex than I had originally anticipated. The working hypothesis I tested throughout the project was the idea that colonized people know more about the colonizing culture than colonizers know about the cultures they colonize. Calling the project *Knowing* was to highlight

the assumption. This assumption was based on my own experience of being born and raised in Australia.

In my generation and from my background, I was exposed to almost no knowledge of Aboriginal Australia, the history of encounter, their many cultures or nations, or anything positive about contemporary Aboriginal life. This contextual vacuum was filled with news reports at the time of so-called endemic problems, such as glue-sniffing, domestic abuse and alcoholism. Throughout my own history of art-making, I have been exploring racist myth-making and stereotyping by dominant cultures. With this in mind, I believed the *Knowing* project would highlight the asymmetry of colonial relationships. I also assumed stereotypes would emerge through discussion, particularly stereotypes of Papuans by Javanese and Dutch people, and that it would be evident there had been little or no engagement with the actual lives of Papuans in Indonesia or in Dutch New Guinea, as West Papua was known until 1963. I was also interested in attempting to convey some of the Indigenous cultural complexity of the region, a complexity that pre-existed colonial occupation and that continues to exist in different ways within Dutch, and later Indonesian, colonial rule.

Originally I wanted to invite people from both Java and Sulawesi because the majority of 'transmigrants' to Papua are from those two Indonesian islands. Transmigration is the term used to describe the movement of people from the western islands of Indonesia to Papua. Understood by Indonesian patriots as a way of developing and sustaining meaningful relationships across the scores of islands and territories that comprise 'Indonesia', it is understood by others as a strategy to populate the region with non-Papuan Indonesians. One hypothesis is that when a referendum regarding the future of Papua is held one day, as a gesture of compliance to international demands for democracy, there will be significant numbers of non-Papuan Indonesians living in the region who tip the balance against Papuan independence. For some Papuan independence activists, transmigration is understood as a policy of forced miscegenation in order to breed out the Papuans from Papua.

Indonesians were the most difficult group to recruit for this project. In the end, I only found people from Java to participate and not those from transmigration communities. I understood the suspicion any Indonesian person might have of me and of this project, given that few are naïve of world opprobrium regarding regimes of colonialism more generally, and Indonesia's deplorable human rights record. I am therefore especially grateful to those Indonesian people who gave me their time and confidence. I took their gift in a spirit of respect and hoped to do them justice. For similar reasons, I want to honour the contributions of Dutch people. I understand it is especially difficult to be an informant when one comes from the culture of the perpetrator.

To make *Knowing*, I made repeated visits to the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, and its collection stores located more than an hour's drive away in S'Gravenzande with a variety of people between 3 October and 20 November 2014. Most people were interviewed for half a day and some had multiple trips to the collection stores. In the first instance, participants were found via relationships with the museum. Gershon Kaigere from Lake Sentani, Papua, and Silvy Puntowati from Java had been employed by the museum as docents. Silvy then invited both Sudarno and Ignatius Supriyanto, both from Java, where Sudarno, an historian, currently lives. Ignatius currently lives in

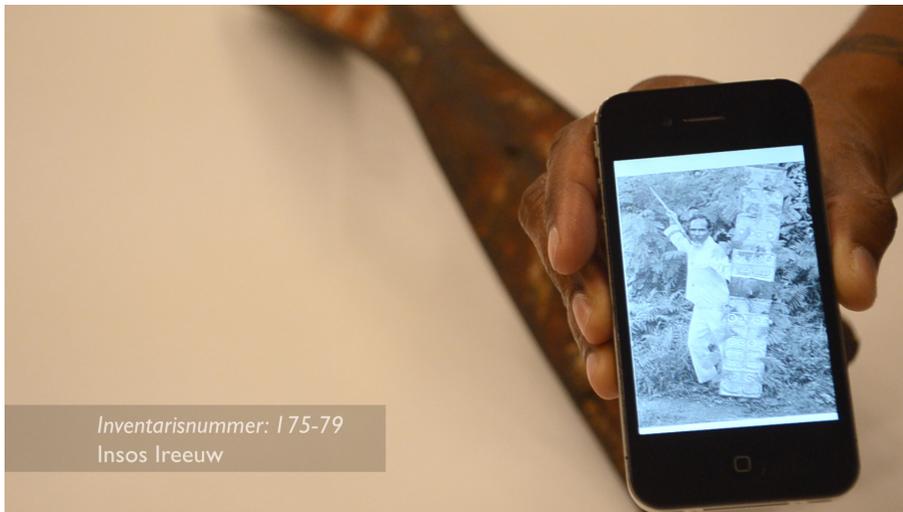


Figure 28.2. Film still (*Insos Ireeuw*). Screen shot *Knowing*. Camera Ulrike Folie and Ali Clark.

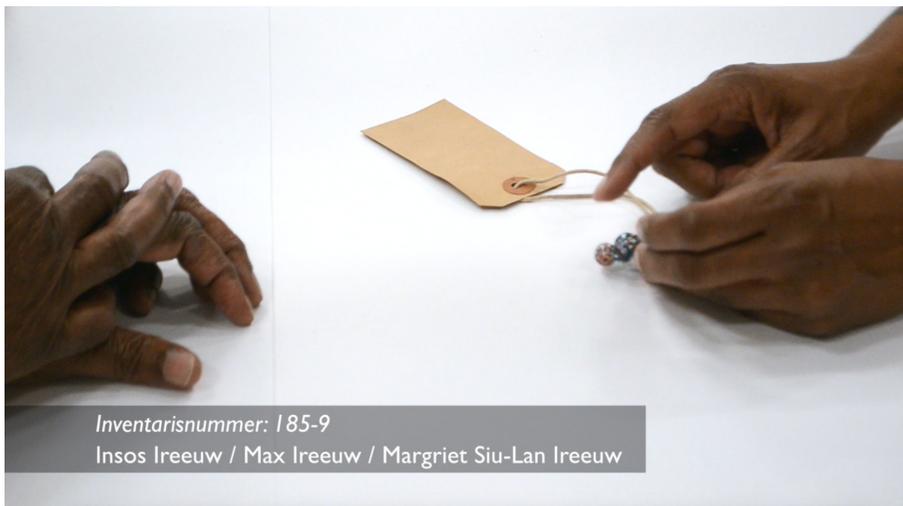


Figure 28.3. Film still (*Max and Insos Ireeuw*). Screen shot *Knowing*. Camera Ulrike Folie and Ali Clark.

the Netherlands. Niek van Rijkswijk, a Dutch collector of Papuan material culture had volunteered for the museum, and Annette Schmidt, an archaeologist, is the museum curator for Africa. Benny Wenda from the Dani people in the Highlands of West Papua had worked on a previous project with the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, and he brought with him Oridek Ap and Martin Derey who are involved with the Free West Papua movement in the UK and the Netherlands. Insos Ireeuw (Figure 28.2) was known to the Volkenkunde museum as a caterer and events organizer for many previous Pacific projects. She later brought her family (Figure 28.3),



Figure 28.4. Film still (Silvy Puntowati). Screen shot *Knowing*. Camera Ulrike Folie and Ali Clark.

which included her mother and father, Betty Ireeuw-Kaisiëpo from Biak and Max Ireeuw from Tobati, both of whom are Papuan-born under Dutch colonial rule and currently in exile since Indonesian occupation. The family group also included her daughter, Oriana Pentury, born in the Netherlands, and her father's cousins, Fin Maya Hay and Margriet Siu-Lan Ireeuw, visiting the Netherlands from Papua. Peter Waal was known to the museum via his anthropological interest in Papua and Eric Venbrux, an anthropologist with experience in the Tiwi Islands, Australia, was thereby known to the Oceania curator, Fanny Wonu Veys, and also willing to participate. Finally, Marie-Christine Engels, an historian, was invited via a friend of a friend of mine.

Gershon accompanied Insos on the first day's filming of the project, which was the only day we filmed within the museum itself. All other interviews were conducted at the museum's stores. In addition to the visit with Insos, Gershon participated with Peter Waal as his interlocutor on another occasion and he also accompanied Benny Wenda, Oridek Ap and Martin Derey on our final day of filming. Niek van Rijswijk was interviewed on the same day as Eric Venbrux. Silvy (Figure 28.4) was first interviewed with Annette Schmidt and she later accompanied Sudarno in order to translate for him. Marie-Christine Engels attended the day Sudarno was interviewed. Silvy also invited Ignatius Supriyanto, who came alone one afternoon in November. I recorded conversations on a hand-held Edirol sound recorder and proceedings were filmed either by fellow *Pacific Presences* researcher Ali Clark or Ulrike Folie, an intern on the project. Ulrike has a great deal of previous experience in Papua working as a visual anthropologist and she speaks fluent Indonesian. She has also spent time in Java. Though not recorded, she also became an informant, filling in some background information and nuancing my understanding of the contemporary situation in both Papua and Indonesia. Her sympathies lie with both Javanese and Papuan cultures. Translation from Dutch and much logistical work was undertaken by Fanny Wonu

Veys, curator for Oceania at Museum Volkenkunde. Groups ranged from three to eight people on filming days including us. I asked questions while someone else filmed.

Where anthropologists have ‘methodology’, artists could be said to have ‘rules’, and particularly those artists working with the legacy of 1960s Conceptual Art, as I do. The most important aspect of the participatory part of the project therefore were the ‘rules of the engagement’. The rules were that everyone had to talk about at least one object from their own culture. Papuans and Javanese people were asked to select up to five objects from the museum stores. Dutch people were asked to bring items from home from a similar period. All participants, regardless of background, could also choose objects from the collections of Papuan material to talk about, this being the emphasis of the project. Having made their selections, each participant was then asked to talk about the objects that other people chose, in addition to their own. Each was asked about things from Papuan, Javanese and Dutch cultures. As Dutch people generally took their objects home with them, the majority of Dutch objects were only available to those groups that came together on the same day. The exception was the clog, which was left behind by Eric Venbrux for comment by future participants. Because of the constraints of working within the stores, objects were not always consistent over the duration. Sometimes ‘similar-looking’ objects were brought out for comment instead of the ones originally chosen by participants. At the time, ‘similar-looking’ seemed unproblematic to me, a person with little or no knowledge of any of the cultures from which participants spoke. I easily exchanged one object for another on the basis of morphology. Since listening to the stories that emanated from the exchange, the idea of ‘similar-looking’ is now problematic. Two objects can appear similar to my eye (and as described by the collections catalogue) but be completely different. This turned out to be a ‘happy accident’, as artists like to call it, which is when an accident that could have been fatal to an artwork turns out to be to its benefit (named after the crack in the glass that emerged by accident in Marcel Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, 1915-23).

The following details are provided, given the inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of the *Pacific Presences* research project, for those who may find it ethnographically or art historically relevant. Ordinarily I would not record, much less write about, this type of detail, but it is in the nature of working across disciplines to alter one’s ordinary practice. I include the catalogue numbers because the museum’s collections are online and accessible. During the first session, Insos Ireeuw chose a prow ornament (museum catalogue number 53-73), trumpet (1482-1), korwar ancestor figure (2119-27), two necklaces (16-531 and 53-101), beads (185-9), an armband or bracelet (16-501) and an earring (929-110). For the second session, when it was Silvy Puntowati and Annette Schmidt’s chance to choose, Silvy opted for a model rice basket (370-1061), a parasol stand (370-1765) and a costume crown (3600-2964) from the Javanese collection. Annette brought from home a framed 1950s magazine picture of Louis Armstrong in profile, a 1902 copy of the Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* and a sapphire and diamond engagement ring from her family. In addition, Silvy and Annette were offered my versions of Insos’s choices: a different small seated wooden korwar figure (3600-6452), different beads (B99-17), different woven armbands (3600-7295) and another prow ornament (370-3848). From the Papuan collections, Silvy chose a longer korwar

sculpture (5990-60?) and Annette a flat korwar prow ornament (3600-6455) with what appeared to be Dutch Delftware ‘mosaic’ for decoration. For the third session with Peter Waal and Gershon Kaigere, Peter brought his father’s watch and chose from the Volkenkunde collection a penis sheath (Figure 28.5) (4949-24). Both he and Gershon Kaigere chose a chalk holder (1528-118) and Gershon chose a sago bowl (5875-16). They were offered the same korwar (3600-6452) as Silvy and Annette to talk about, and the same armbands (3600-7295), beads (B99-17) and prow ornament (370-3848). They were offered for discussion the longer korwar sculpture that Silvy chose for comment. The session with Peter Waal and Gershon Kaigere was followed by one with Eric Venbrux and Niek van Rijswijk. Eric brought an array of items from home, including a single childhood clog, some batik cloth, a late nineteenth or early twentieth century corrugated tin wash board, a painted metal collection box for the Catholic missions and a set of four pottery cannisters in white and delft blue. The cannisters, two large and two small, each had one of four words painted on its side to indicate its contents: Rijst (rice), Nageleon (cloves), Nootmuscaat (nutmeg) and Sago. Niek chose an Asmat shield (3070-164) and an Asmat bone dagger (B239-127) from the Volkenkunde collections and together they chose a fish-shaped prow ornament (929-766). They were offered to comment on a carved wooden serving dish (5990-19?) in place of Gershon’s choice of sago bowl (5875-16) and a different chalk holder (3600-7629). Eric also chose a magic stone (2467-1504). Sudarno and Marie-Christine were offered for discussion the same shield that Niek had chosen (3070-164), the same korowa figure given to Silvy and Annette, replacing the one Insos chose originally (5990-60?) and the same beads (B99-17) that replaced the ones Insos originally chose (185-9). Sudarno and Marie-Christine were offered the same chalk holder that Niek and Eric discussed (3600-7629) which replaced the one Gershon had chosen originally (1528-118). They were also offered the model rice basket (370-1061), the parasol stand (370-1765) and the costume crown (3600-2964) that Silvy had chosen and the clog

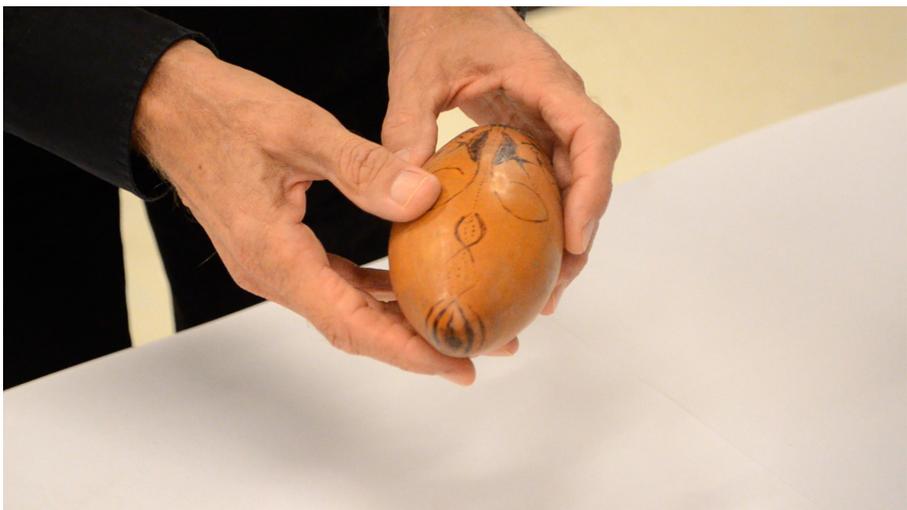


Figure 28.5. Film still (Peter Waal). Screen shot *Knowing*. Camera Ulrike Folie and Ali Clark.

that Eric had left behind. Sudarno also chose from the Javanese collection to discuss a fish trap (300-1013), a perforated spoon (3600-3143), a wooden slit gong (370-1813?) and a single-tiered painted parasol (370-1709). Marie-Christine declined to choose additional objects from the Volkenkunde stores, explaining that she knew nothing about the objects in the collection and so she could not choose.

When Insos's extended family visited the museum stores, they were offered the fish trap (300-1013), the slit gong (370-1813?), and the perforated spoon or ladle (3600-3143) that Sudarno had chosen. They were also offered for comment the bone dagger that Niek had chosen (B239-127) and the clog that Eric left behind. They chose from the museum collection to talk about a fish prow ornament (929-766), a crocodile prow ornament (300-1126), a fishing net from Sentani (1904-826), an ancient prow from Sentani (300-1122), and a parry shield from Biak (175-79). In addition, they viewed the second set of beads (B99-17).

Insos brought with her four plates (Figure 28.6) which she had discussed on her first visit at the beginning of the project. She stated that the plates are the 'biggest currency' (a currency greater than beads) and that they are not part of the museum collection. Her father brought with him a scholarly book about beads⁷⁸⁶ and his personal collections of money and objects of wealth and status. His collection included two strings of beads, one with an amber bracelet attached, strung rosary-fashion in a ring. The other was strung simply in a line. Both sets included blue and yellow beads, some opaque and others transparent. Max also brought with him three perspex boxed mint-condition collections of coins, which included a set of coins from Papua New Guinea. He used the coin collections to demonstrate how collections are more valuable when complete. The comparison with the sets of coins also demonstrated that, like coins,



Figure 28.6. Insos Ireeuw's collection of plates, with her family. Photograph by Ulrike Folie.

beads can have incrementally increasing values, and also that value is symbolically attributed to colour, just as happens in Europe with bronze or copper, silver and gold coloured coins. For Max, beads should be strung in order of increasing value, which is the correct aesthetic for beads. He observed that this order is rarely kept today even in Papua and it seems to be absent from the museum's collections of beads from Papua. The collection included a shell bracelet from Insos that, when added to the beads, increases their value and Max also brought with him his personal chiefly stone bound with rattan to its wooden mount or handle to form a hand axe.

Ignatius Supriyanto was offered for comment the crocodile prow ornament (300-1126), fish prow ornament (929-766) and the fishing net (1904-826) that the Ireeuw family had chosen. He was also offered the fish trap (300-1013) and perforated spoon (3600-3143) that Sudarno had chosen and the parasol stand that Silvy had chosen (370-1765). He was offered a different parasol to replace the one that Sudarno had chosen: one with three-tiers and painted gold on one side with birds on the underside (370-1798) instead of the less elaborate painted single-tiered parasol (370-1709). Ignatius chose a kris (5573-1), which is a type of dagger, and a basket (1647-106) from the Javanese collections to talk about, a cloth hanger (1904-588) and part of a loom (3219-1M). He also chose a prow (3092-66) from the Papuan collections. Finally, Benny Wenda, Oridek Ap and Martin Derey chose drums or 'tifa' (300-541 and 3790-2), an axe (1971-871B) and a bow for shooting arrows (5778-12). These three objects, they said, symbolize the Free West Papua movement. In addition, they were offered for comment the fish trap that Sudarno had chosen from the Javanese collections (300-1013) and the basket that Ignatius had chosen from the Javanese collections (1647-106). They were also offered the three tier parasol that replaced the one Sudarno had chosen (370-1798) from the Javanese collections. From the Papuan collections, Benny, Oridek and Martin were offered the fishing net that Max chose (1904-826), the crocodile prow ornament that Insos chose (300-1126) and the piece of the loom that Ignatius chose (3219-1M). This 'methodology' created all the mis-attunement that a game of 'Chinese whispers' is meant to illustrate. In the end, this process informed the structure for the film.

Throughout each encounter, I asked participants to describe what things were made of, how they were made, who made them and what any symbolism might be in the iconography or materials used. As an artist, I believe these are the primary questions to ask of an object or artwork. It is from the material and how it's worked that meaning can be extracted. Artists believe that objects are not mute, but instead that they speak using visual languages that we believe to be decipherable. Over and above this 'inherent' meaning, there is the specific cultural meaning: the meaning that only those from within a culture can describe and those from outside that culture can only guess at or approximate. In addition, I asked participants about the (apparent) use of the object and, sometimes, what an object meant to them personally. I was interested in the interpretation of objects, and not particularly in the actual 'biographies', histories or facts of the objects.

For this project, I was interested in harvesting the stories that arise from new encounters with objects previously unseen, as distinct from those stories already embedded in the objects as part of continuing relationships with that object. I was less

interested in knowledge or stories about the specificities of a known object and I was least interested in stories about those objects from personal collections. I nevertheless encouraged participants to speak about their personal collections specifically in order to create an atmosphere of openness to, and genuine engagement with, the Volkenkunde collection.

This process of exploring the more distant type of relationship between person and object was important for two reasons, one far more important and complex than the other. The simpler reason is because most people most of the time encounter artworks at this more distanced level, as an encounter with an object that has no personal relationship to the viewer but that nevertheless evokes deep emotional and intellectual responses. The other and more important reason was because I wanted to create parity across the encounters between people and things, so that all the objects were in a similar relationship to the participants. I hoped this would equate to a parity across the stories that emerged from the encounters with the objects. I wanted to avoid the type of privileged, or particular, knowledge and story-telling that comes from intimacy with an object. For this project, I wanted to emphasize the aspect of the encounters that I anticipated would be different across the different groups of participant, namely, the interpretations, knowledge and story-telling that emerges as a consequence of the different cultural frameworks of the participants. In some sense, therefore, the objects were 'symbols of objects' and so I hoped they would inspire stories about relationships, feelings and stories more generally: the type of stories and knowledge that might emerge on reflection or as inspiration. I wanted to evoke the type of stories that emerge from experiences with art in an art gallery or in public spaces and bring these types of stories together.

In addition to setting out to form true, honest, genuine relationships, however transitory, with participants, I set out to make a good artwork according to ideals or values to which I subscribe. As such I set out to create a nuanced artwork that explored the complexity of knowledge. I did not set out to explain colonial relationships of the region or its history, as a documentary or a piece of journalism might. Nor did I intend to create knowledge within the field of anthropology. As it happens, though, some new anthropological knowledge did emerge.

The most dazzling example of new knowledge was when Insos Ireeuw described how plates were the largest currency on Biak, larger than beads or anything else with currency, and even today they are used as brides' money both in Biak and in the diaspora. Plates from Biak have never been collected by Volkenkunde, or possibly any other museum. There are at least two reasons for this. First, perhaps collectors did not know about plates because they were kept hidden from outsiders and, since they retain their high value, they were not readily given away. Insos had to convince her mother to allow her to bring her own collection of plates to the museum for us to see. For safety, they are stored at her mother's home and not with Insos who has growing children. Her mother, Betty Ireeuw-Kaisiëpo, did not show us her own collection of plates. Insos said the reason she told us about the plates is because, being Dutch-born, she has a different attitude to the continuation of her culture. For Insos, the Papuan cultures she inherited will continue if she shares the knowledge. Her mother, on the other hand, believes that it is secrecy that helps to preserve a culture.

A second reason the plates are unknown and uncollected may be because the plates do not appear to be authentically Biak. To my eyes, which are wholly uneducated in these matters, they all appeared 'foreign' and some quite old. One was decorated in blue and white, with apparently fake Chinese characters and may be an example of Delftware and another had, in red, a crescent and star painted on the base and flowers with foliage in green. A third had geometric patterns, like Greek key pattern tiles, painted in a deep ochre and the fourth was Majolica-like and multi-coloured. All the plates are the large size of serving plates, not dinner plates.

In bringing the scholarly book about beads, Max wanted to demonstrate and emphasize the history of trade in beads. He says that some of the beads found in Papua originate from all over the world and that this is not a recent phenomenon with colonialism (either Dutch or Indonesian), but that the distribution of beads, perhaps from as far away as Western Asia, embodies a deep history of contact and trade. I believe a similar sentiment is felt about the plates.

Other new anthropological or curatorial knowledge may have emerged in the details of the various things that were discussed. As I have been asked to share the information provided about prows with a researcher in anthropology, I believe this must be the case. The person with the most knowledge of Papuan iconography was Gershon Kaigere (Figure 28.7) who could explain what various details represent. He is from Lake Sentani and, during Dutch rule, became a dental assistant travelling throughout Papua as part of his job, thereby coming into contact with a wide variety of the Indigenous cultures. Once in exile in Netherlands, after Indonesia took over Papua, he became involved with the Museum Volkenkunde and so learned about various cultures including 'home' cultures through the museum. His knowledge is the product of studies in the museum, from encounters with cultures different from his own within Papua, and also from back home, understanding gained from his childhood milieu.



Figure 28.7. Film still (Gershon Kaigere). Screen shot *Knowing*. Camera Ulrike Folie and Ali Clark.

The following is an abridged and simulated transcript of Gershon's contributions. It is faithful to the things that he and others said. The information he and his interlocutors provide is juxtaposed with the information the Volkenkunde online catalogue which is translated.

Item 1

Volkenkunde catalogue (abridged): [1482-1] Trumpet from Lake Sentani 47x10cm wood. Over the entire piece, there are spirals, herringbone pattern, squares and triangles. Sande... collected wood flutes which look like this one but he did not write anything. [Sande, G.A.J. van der (1907) 'Ethnography and Anthropology' in 'Nova Guinea' III]

Insos Ireeuw (II): Looking at the trumpet with drawings of two fish 'In iconography, there are always two, maybe like yin and yang?' My father [Max Ireeuw] continues to draw the symbolic shapes and images from home but hasn't passed on the meaning to me. I recognize 'my' things – things from my homeland – by the symbols and 'drawings'

Gershon Kaigere (GK): The circles on the trumpet is unity of going and coming back: the rings made in water from a paddle.

Item 2

Volkenkunde catalogue (abridged): [53-73] Prow decoration, Dorey Bay (now Manokwari area), 80 cm, wood. (translated from Dutch) The prows ... are adorned with various carvings, usually of birds, other animals or humans. In Humbolt Bay the canoe decorations were usually attached to the stern. People attributed supernatural powers to the canoe decoration and believed that they helped the crew to steer in the right direction, such as to schools of fish or home.

GK: Coral imagery is carved into prow for ocean-going people, unlike circles on trumpet, which symbolize the quieter water of the Lake (Sentani)

Item 3

Volkenkunde catalogue (abridged): [2119-27] Statue, Biak, place of origin Manokwari, 21.3cm wood 1927. (translated from Dutch) Korwar housed a resident spirit and his help was called in times of tension and danger. ... In the Indigenous communities of northwestern New Guinea korwars are rarely found today. The transition to Christianity has, in many cases been accompanied by a massive destruction of these 'pagan' images.

GK: Korwar is a God figure. This one is from Biak placed on prow for protection. All gods are for protection, not to bring things, to protect for safe travels. [(This is a new understanding for Insos.)] The korwar is also to protect in war.

Item 4

Volkenkunde catalogue: [16-501] Bracelet, fibre, bamboo fibre, circumference 7.3cm, Papuan culture. No contextual information.

GK: Nose rings are not just for decoration but to make the nose into an instrument to attract birds. This [bracelet] is from Asmat, which Gershon can tell from the pattern.

II: With us everything is red or black

Item 5

Volkenkunde catalogue: [16-531] Necklace, rope, seed *Andenantha rosea*, 56cm, Mimika (Kamoro) region [Sandal bead tree seed?] No contextual information

GK: Necklace from seeds from watermelon from Asmat. Necklaces are worn for the sounds they produce while dancing.

Item 6

Volkenkunde catalogue:[53-101] Necklace, seeds, shell, bead, fibre, rope fibre, stone, 38cm double, Yos Sudarso [Humbolt Bay] No contextual information

II: I know these beads are part of the heritage from my dad's side

GK: The beads are from Manokwari and are made from honey. He explains it like this: when the birds can't get to the nectar, the flowers dry out and the nectar dries out. People wash the dead flowers and the beads are found. In Sentani, greenstone is for chief's arm decoration but these are from Manokwari so it's not the same, also for Biak people (who live in Manokwari).

Item 7

Volkenkunde catalogue: [185-9] Beads,1cm, Yos Sudarso Baai [Humbolt Bay] No contextual information

II: Beads have different values and in the old days beads were money. Different values from the different colours.

GK: These beads are from Manokwari. In Sentani we also have the beads especially for the bride's price.

The film

A great deal was left out in the editing process. Twenty-two hours were recorded which left me with the choice to use all the material, thereby allowing access to all the intricacies and nuances of the relationships with the objects as they emerged, or to edit the film down to a watchable length. I believed that if I wanted anyone to watch the film the whole way through, it would have to be a length that audiences have learned to expect (even art audiences) of a film or documentary, that is, between 30 and 150 minutes. Possibly because audiences have become accustomed to the shortness of TED talks and YouTube videos, even art audiences happily walk in and out of lengthier

art films when shown in gallery exhibitions, so I believed it would be difficult to hold people's attention even for an hour. Before I started the process of editing I did not know how long the film would be but I knew it would be much shorter than 22 hours and that there would be valuable and even beautiful stories and knowledge left on the cutting room floor.

One of the great losses to the final film was the absence of the most unexpectedly emotional encounters with objects. For most of the participants, there were many emotions evoked by the encounters with museum objects. There were moments of pride, nostalgia, curiosity and even anger. What I had not anticipated was the evocation of a childhood feeling of real loss, as distinct from nostalgia. Most surprising for me was the fact that the two people who were moved to tears were Silvy Puntowati and Peter Waal, both of whom had fathers connected with Irian Jaya, Netherlands Nieuw Guinea. At the other end of the emotional spectrum, sheer joy was expressed by Max Ireeuw when he picked up the fishing net and started to play, simulating fishing, oblivious to the horror on the faces of the collections manager and curator at his energetic handling of an object from the collection. His whole stance transformed from that of an old man to one of a young boy in a way that could have been understood as magical.

Hilary Mantel describes the act of making art for the 2017 Reith Lectures. She said that art is a process of editing from truth, *operating self scrutiny and finding discrimination*, discriminating between 'truth and the whole truth'.⁷⁸⁷ This relatively lengthy piece, which catalogues some, though not yet all, of the details that happened in truth, in reality, some of which are recorded, others not, and all of which remain absent in the finished artwork, demonstrates her point. I have chosen to include them here because I understand that it is these details that are important to those working in other disciplines. I include them here to demonstrate the very different, not incompatible, truths that can be achieved and the difference between art and art history, between art and ethnography or museums practice, and between art and history. *Knowing* (2015), the 48-minute film, pursues another way of knowing.

Knowing is available on vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/133133132>.

PACIFIC PRESENCES – VOLUME 2

Hundreds of thousands of works of art and artefacts from many parts of the Pacific are dispersed across European museums. They range from seemingly quotidian things such as fish-hooks and baskets to great sculptures of divinities, architectural forms and canoes. These collections constitute a remarkable resource for understanding history and society across Oceania, cross-cultural encounters since the voyages of Captain Cook, and the colonial transformations that have taken place since. They are also collections of profound importance for Islanders today, who have varied responses to their displaced heritage, and renewed interest in ancestral forms and practices.

This two-volume book enlarges understandings of Oceanic art and enables new reflection upon museums and ways of working in and around them. In dialogue with Islanders' perspectives, It exemplifies a growing commitment on the part of scholars and curators to work collaboratively and responsively.

Volume II illustrates the sheer variety of Pacific artefacts and histories in museums, and similarly the heterogeneity of the issues and opportunities that they raise. Over thirty essays explore materialities, collection histories, legacies of empire, and contemporary projects.



PACIFIC PRESENCES 4B

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