Pitt Rivers Museum Members Magazine

Winter 2024
Issue 112

£3
Free to
PRM
members

Pitt Rivers Museum

SOUTH PARKS ROAD, OXFORD, OX1 3PP

IN THIS ISSUE

Cover image: Maasai Cultural Visit. Photo © Ian Wallman

Lantern made from the skin of a puffer fish, 1909, 1909.32.10

Museum Musings

Bird (Storm Petrel; Procellaria pelagica) with a tarred wick through its body, used as a candle. 1932.88.160

Photo © Anthony Flemming

Carbon filament light-bulb, 1900, 1952.4.17

Photos: © PRM

As I write this the days have shortened, the clocks have changed, and the evenings are plunged back into darkness for the winter. Except, of course, we are not in darkness: we simply switch on the lights. The abundance of artificial light now makes it easy to overlook its contribution to human culture. I once saw palaeolithic art in a cave near Ronda in Spain and was struck by how deep the paintings were, such that they could only have been created and observed under artificial light.

As well as allowing cave art, the light produced by prehistoric humans and their descendants has extended the time available for all endeavours, for human productivity in general. How much of the PRM's content was made or used under artificial light I wonder?

In the 1990s the American economist William Nordhaus became interested in the cost of light production down the ages. He made measurements of the light produced by a wood fire, a Roman oil lamp and so on, and estimated the labour required for its production – to acquire wood, sesame oil for the lamp, a candle, a lightbulb etc. He showed that the labour cost of light production had declined 500,000-fold from the wood fire of Peking Man to the fluorescent lightbulb of 1991. No wonder the lightbulb is an innovation icon.

The PRM has an extraordinary record of the materials of light production across culture and time. There are oil lamps from the ancient world, a resin torch used by the Azende of South Sudan, rushlights from the Cotswolds and a remarkable Japanese lantern fashioned from the skin of a puffer fish. Strangest of all is a candle made from an unfortunate Storm Petrel bird stuck through with a tarred wick, collected from Shetland in 1892 - about the same date as an early carbon-filament lightbulb also in the collection.

Anthony Flemming, *Member of the Museum Liaison Committee*

Editorial

Photo © Dawn Osborne

Our Museum has always been a monument to material culture and how it reflects the ways in which humans make sense of themselves and the world around them. A magazine is not just print on a page, but a way that we share our knowledge and appreciation and record the importance of culture. Our articles this time really underline how objects help people beyond functional reasons. Anthony's article above highlights how deeply we are prepared to invest in making things because we understand their importance. Coiled basketry is not only the art of making functional and beautiful things, or even satisfaction in completing a complex object, but can be imbued with symbolism that has far more profound meaning. Object handling can increase self esteem. The care that the indigenous Canadian artists and Maasai have for their ancestral artefacts illustrates how things imbue us with a sense of history, family and value. Ben Edge shows how making and looking at paintings that record human culture can help to place ourselves in the world. Symbolism on objects such as Krampus greetings cards remind us to behave well. Lead divination is an example of how humans have even gone as far as to let objects guide us forward in an uncertain world. Thank you everybody for helping me to record all this and more in our Magazine. We all contribute to creation of a community that is the reason our Museum exists in the first place.

Dawn Osborne, *Editor*

From the Museum

Autumn is now very much upon us, marked by the October half-term activities at the Museum. This year, more families than ever joined in the Hawaiian pattern-making sessions hosted by Michele, Molly and our wonderful volunteers, and in a full day of activities for the Festival of Social Sciences organised by Ashley.

The Museum tends to have a different feel at this time of year as the weather outside becomes blustery. The lights inside are warm, perfect for a late-morning or afternoon visit and a wonderful chance, if you haven't yet been, to see the Hawaiian exhibition of some truly beautiful Hula and water-related quilts from the Poakalini Quilters. Please visit the shop which has had a refresh, and is full of new collections including jewellery from Hawaii, and Evenki beadwork from Siberia specially made for the Museum. Any of these pieces would make a very special and unique Christmas or birthday present.

Kapa Jewellery from Hawaii

It is that time of year when we look ahead, and we have had great fun planning the 2025 calendar of events for members. Our research coffee mornings have been a wonderful success this year so do look out for further ones across 2025 and please book for the wonderful Kenneth Kirkwood Day on 29th March on the theme of '*Who owns Museum Collections? What should we do with them?*' providing, as always, a stimulating group of speakers. To celebrate Spring, we will be hosting a members' reception with the Director. This is a great way for us all to get together and for us to say a special thank you to our members for helping to support the Museum. There will also be more of our popular Behind-the-scenes visits as well as some new late-night openings. The year ahead promises to be exciting!

For now, wrap up warm and have a wonderful autumn!

Karrine Sanders, *PRM Senior Administrator*

From the Director

In September, we received a women-led delegation of nine Maasai. This was the final stage of a longstanding project with the Maasai, with their women leadership reflecting their role as cultural custodians. After a week of working with five objects, the delegates, who had been specifically selected as cultural knowledge keepers by their families, decided that, because the objects were being well cared for, they should remain in the Pitt Rivers Museum.

This decision was reached after much discussion and deliberation and followed advice from Mokompo, one of the paramount Maasai spiritual leaders. From a Maasai perspective, these hereditary objects would never have been given away or sold voluntarily, and so must have been taken by killing. They should therefore be regarded as dead warriors who would be buried on the battlefield. Hence, the delegates decided that, given that the objects are being well cared for, they should be kept in the care of the Museum. This was deemed comparable to a soldier, having been killed overseas, being buried in a Commonwealth cemetery. Having reached this decision, family members gave cultural guidance on how the Museum should care for their objects. It was also agreed that the Maasai nation, families and individuals will have lifetime access to the ornaments, which can be facilitated online.

Pitt Rivers Maasai Cultural Visit

Repatriation ceremony for a Badeng Sunhat

Also, at the end of October, we sat with colleagues from the National Museum in Uganda to discuss a Bunyoro royal throne in the Museum's collections and agreed to do more provenance research, aiming to do this alongside Bunyoro researchers.

On November 4th, we and 25 delegates from Sarawak held a repatriation ceremony for a Badeng Sunhat that was looted from Sarawak.

In some cases, communities want things to return home: in others, they want us to continue to steward their objects. This is why we adopt a sensitive case-by-case approach to possible repatriations.

Laura Van Broekhoven, *Director*

Photos: © PRM

Inspired Talks

Most people come to the PRM to learn about other cultures, past and present, and to enjoy just looking at its wonderful artifacts from across the world. Less attention has been paid to another important role that it fills: inspiring writers, particularly those from Oxford, to stretch their imagination. This is the interest of Kieran Brooks who now takes tours around the museum, appropriately named *'Inspired! Literary, Film and TV Connections'*, which focus on key pieces that have stimulated writers and directors.

Kieran comes to the museum with a degree in anthropology and a career in the Oxford police force. After retirement, he first became a PRM volunteer and then a member of the gallery staff. We recently met up and he told me about his research as he showed me round the Museum.

What got you interested in the link between the PRM and writers?

The *'Daughters of Cain'*, Colin Dexter's eleventh book in the Morse series, takes place in the Museum. The plot revolves around a staff member who uses a Lozi knife from Zambia for murder (Fig. 1a). Not only could I see the knife, but I had had a connection to the TV series when I was in the police.

Which writers have included the PRM as a backdrop for their books?

Penelope Lively and Philip Pullman have placed part of one of their novels in the Museum. In *'The House of Norman Gardens'* (1974), PL's teenage heroine, Clare Mayfield, visits the PRM to try to find carvings from New Guinea similar to those of her great-grandfather's. In Philip Pullman's *'Northern Lights'* (1995), heroine meets villain when Lyra has an uncomfortable meeting with Charles Latrom at the PRM. The fur & seal-gut coats and the sled on display were the inspiration for Pullman in this first novel.

Who else has been inspired by pieces in the Museum?

Several authors have included pieces from the PRM in their books. Two examples are the Fijian whale-tooth necklace (Fig. 1b) that P.D. James mentions in *'The Children of Men'* (1992) and, more recently, the Cimaruta charms (Fig. 1c) that fascinated Daisy Mason in Cara Hunter's *'Close to Home'* (2017).

What other pieces do you show visitors on your tours?

Too many to mention here because items from other cultures have always excited authors and film directors. In the Star Wars series, for example, the helmets of Darth Vader were based on Samurai helmets (Fig. 1d), while the weapons of the Tuskan riders are copies of Fijian totokia (beaked battle clubs; Fig, 1e,f). Visitors also like being shown the semi-automatic handguns that James Bond carried, initially a Baretta M9 and later a Walther pistol.

Why is sympathetic magic important here?

Many cultures represented in the PRM use representative objects for protection from or power over whatever they wish to control that they resemble. This is known as sympathetic magic and a good example is a voodoo doll which resembles a person and includes something from that person, such as a button or strands of hair. Even J.K.Rowling uses the principles of sympathetic magic in her Harry Potter novels in the form of the *'Horcruxes'* (an object created by black magic that contains part of a dark sorcerer or witch's soul) which become so important in the story.

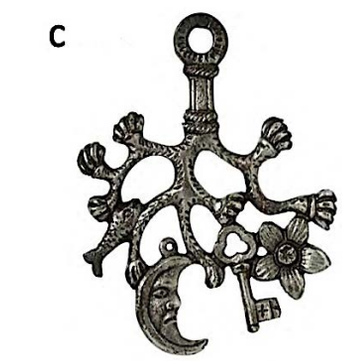
Kieran tells me that his research on how the PRM has inspired the arts world is still work in progress and there is more to come. If you go on his tour 1, you will see everything mentioned here with a lot more. You will also hear about how the Tolkien's *'The Lord of the Rings'* similarly uses sympathetic magic beliefs as a foundation for the story.

Jonathan Bard, *Member of The PRM*

Guided Tours every friday at the PRM
3 to 4 pm Free to members.

1a Lozi knife from Zambia

1b Fijian whale-tooth necklace



1c Cimaruta charm

1d Samurai helmet

1e Fijian battle club

1f Photograph of Tuskan rider doll taken by author

Photos © PRM

Folklore Rising

Going through a particularly dark period in my life, I found myself stuck in a downward negative spiral, suffering with chronic depression. Little did I know that everything was about to change, and a healing and exciting new chapter of my life was about to begin. It was a spring day and at that time I had begun taking long walks through the streets of London, in an attempt to reconnect myself with the outside world and to inspire new paintings. On this particular spring day, I had set off to the Tower of London to approach the Raven Master to see whether he would allow me to paint his portrait. For those of you not familiar with the Raven Master and the legend of the ravens, it is said that there must be at least six ravens kept within the walls of the Tower at all times, or the Crown would fall and the Kingdom with it. It is the Raven Master's job to ensure that this doesn't come to pass.

As I came out of Tower Hill station, I noticed in the distance a line of people processing in white gowns, as they passed a red phone box and a KFC, before assembling into a circle outside the All Hallows by the Tower Church. Here, they began performing what appeared to be some kind of ancient ritual. Not only did I have no idea exactly what it was that I was witnessing, but I also wasn't aware that it was the day of the Spring Equinox, the time of year when night and day are of equal length: moving forward the dark nights of winter would become shorter and the long days of summer were now on their way. Later, this would feel like a metaphor for my own life, as the dark days of my depression began to pass, and a bright optimistic future presented itself.

As I listened in from the outside of the circle, there was talk of the spiritual harvest, William Blake once being a member of the group, and that London would one day be reclaimed by nature. This excited and enthralled me and it was like a switch had been flicked within me. Up until that point I had felt fully urbanised, completely disconnected from the outside world, and I had forgotten my own connection to nature as well.

The Burryman

The Padstow Obby Oss

The Green man of Bankside

Instead of approaching the Raven Master that day, full of excitement and joy — something that I hadn't felt for quite some time — I rushed home and began researching exactly what it was that I had just witnessed. It turned out to be London's very own Druid Order who were soon approaching their 300th birthday, and whilst initially researching them, I soon found a whole magical world completely unbeknown to me of seasonal folk customs taking place throughout Britain. From that point on, I was compelled to get out and to visit as many as I possibly could. Travelling by train, bus and foot, I began travelling extensively, witnessing contemporary rituals with origins lost to antiquity. Whether it was the large cylinder shaped, tribal looking, Obby Oss of Padstow who comes out swirling through the streets to welcome in the summer on May Day morning, or the Burryman of South Queensferry, a man covered to head to toe in Sticky Burdock seeds, who must endure a 9 mile walk, where locals bring him whisky to ease his burden, whilst taking a burr for good luck for the coming year — I was completely captivated and inspired. I began documenting my experiences obsessively and the stories surrounding each tradition in my paintings.

Now, ten years on, and with an extensive body of work around the subject, it has all come together into my debut book *'Folklore Rising,'* that not only includes my paintings and photographs, but also written accounts of my experiences as well as sharing the stories straight from the locals' mouths who keep their cherished traditions alive.

Ben Edge, *Artist*

Images © Ben Edge

Coiled Basketry

Basketry is widely considered to be the most ancient of craft technologies, although as it is typically made from organic matter which rots, early evidence is scarce, most being found as imprints on early ceramics, or preserved fragments in dry sandy areas, e.g. in the Middle East.

Coiled basketry, found worldwide, is a unique method of making basketry in that it is stitched, not woven. It is formed by wrapping and stitching around a core element, which can be a single length of material (e.g., a length of rope, several strands of material e.g., long slender willow rods, or a bundle of materials e.g., raffia, grasses or mid-ribs of palm leaves) which spirals outwards and upwards from a central point to create a basket, mat or other basketry form.

There are many variations within the category of coiled basketry: materials used for core and stitching, single or bundle cores, ways of starting, stitch variations, surface pattern, texture and decoration, form and function often influenced by factors such as available materials, function and traditions often passed on orally over centuries. Sometimes the core is exposed, other times the core is completely covered by the stitching.

It's hard to know for sure whether close similarities in ways of working evolved independently through makers arriving at similar approaches and solutions, or whether trade, migration, and basketry moving around the world which was observed, copied and adapted for locally available materials, contributed to close similarities within the technique worldwide.

Coiled basketry can be relatively 'roughly' made - for example coiled straw bee skeps, used by bee keepers for moving swarms of bees, where a bundle of straw is stitched together with strands of split bramble - the stitches are widely spaced and the bundle core exposed. There are several similar roughly made straw baskets on display in the PRM which are roughly made from straw.

On the other hand, coiled basketry can be incredibly finely made, some so finely made the structures are watertight: in part the reason for this is because plant materials - themselves water resistant - swell when in contact with water reducing leakage to very slow seepage, if any.

Coiled basket start - single core (rope), stitching wool

Watertight coiled basket, Colombia, Choco, Waunana. Core and Stitching - Palm

Traditional UK beeskep made by Martin Buckle (deceased) bundle core is straw and stitching is split bramble

Navajo Wedding Basket

Many coiled baskets have been made for ceremonial use - an interesting example of this in PRM is the Navajo 'Wedding Basket', an important part of Navajo weddings. The colours used and pattern motifs are highly symbolic; in particular the "pathway" leading from the centre of the basket outwards to the edge. This ensured the pathway was aligned to the East during ceremonies; likewise the completion point of the final coil is always placed above the pathway ensuring the basket can be held towards the East through touch in the dark.

In early 2024 I taught a two-day introductory workshop at the PRM looking at how colour patterns are worked into coiled basketry. The PRM has many beautiful and varied examples of coiled basketry on display which students were able to look at, alongside a few examples removed from display for closer observation. I was also able to bring basketry from my own collection together with samples and coiled baskets I've made myself.

It was a fun and successful workshop with varied outcomes achieved by all students. I'm hoping to teach a follow-up two-day introductory workshop in mid-2025 looking at twined basketry techniques.

My work has been exhibited widely throughout the UK and in 2025 I will be doing a residency at the Museum of European Culture in Berlin in conjunction with their current exhibition '*All Hands On : Basketry*' which runs until mid 2026.

Polly Pollock, *Maker, Tutor and member of the Basketmakers' Association, Oxfordshire Basketmakers and the Textile Study Group*

Examples of coiled baskets showing stitched pattern variations

Photos: © Polly Pollock

Object Handling and Well Being

Object handling is a growing aspect of museum in-house and outreach programmes due to increased research into the positive impacts of the biopsychological and neuroscientific components of touch. Broadly, research indicates that object handling is particularly effective for three reasons: it aids with reminiscence and memory-based activities, it engages multiple senses, and it impacts participant's self-worth. However, across this research, a key obstacle has been unaddressed, the quality of, and level of, engagement permitted with museum handling collections

In 2019 I held two object handling sessions with five 20-year-old university-educated participants and objects from the Pitt Rivers Museum Education Collection to explore the central role of objects themselves in the wellbeing benefits offered by such sessions. In each session, four objects were laid out on the table for the participants to pick up, handle, and discuss amongst themselves. At the end of each session, participants were invited to produce response art, reflecting on their experience of the session, particularly on their experience of handling the various objects.

This research drew on a Material Engagement Theory (MET) perspective, which has been developed by Professor Lambros Malafouris at the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Oxford (see, Malafouris (2013) '*How Things Shape the Mind*'. MIT Press). This perspective argues that cognition is not contained within the skull, but emerges through interactions between the body and the wider environment. Thus, if material engagement is deeply entangled with our cognitive states, this necessarily extends to our experiences of wellbeing and mental health. By adopting this perspective we can better understand how the objects used for such handling sessions are central to the wellbeing impacts generated.

This research found that object preference, combined with increased interactivity, and the removal of gloves during the second session (which allowed for unmediated tactile engagements with the materials) contributed to the increased positive wellbeing impact experienced by participants during the second session compared to the first.

Figure 1: Art produced by a participant in response to handling a sample of Mouflon sheep fur. She discussed how it evoked memories of childhood trips to the Welsh countryside.

Figure 2: Art produced by participant in response to handling a Japanese Noh mask.

This points to an interesting challenge, as a greater wellbeing impact was experienced when gloves were not worn and high-quality objects were used, however, this is far from the standard practice of museum handling.

Object handling collections, broadly, tend to be low-quality. Collections designed for handling will be of poorer quality than museums' general collections. They will be objects not of interest to academics, deemed unworthy of strong conservation efforts, and very often replicas. Such objects, as my study has shown, still generate wellbeing impacts, but were met with disappointment by my participants, and the session utilising objects perceived to be of greater cultural value elicited higher wellbeing impacts.

Museums' prioritise the conservation of objects over their potential use for engaging the public, and this simple fact limits the success of museum interventions based on object handling. This leads us to question, what is the role of museums in communities, and whether this current prioritisation might shift as museums face new challenges today.

To read more about this study, please see: O'Brien, C. (2022) '*Materiality and the Mind: The Impact of Object Handling Sessions on the Wellbeing of Young Adults*'. In Prezioso, E. and Giobbe, M. (eds.) '*Innovative Approaches to Archaeology: Proceedings of the Graduate Archaeology At Oxford Conference*' 2020. Oxford: BAR Publishing, pp. 17–27.

Catherine O'Brien, *Research Fellow in Human Computer Interaction (qualitative), University College London.*

Images reproduced with kind permission from Catherine O'Brien and participants

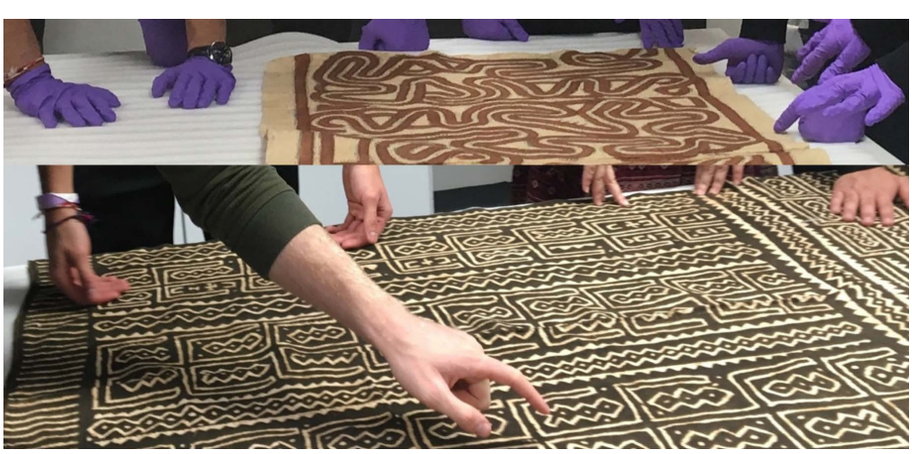


Photo: © Catherine O'Brien

Figure 3: Session One photograph of first instance of interaction with barkcloth (above) and Session Two photography of first instance of interaction with mudcloth (below)

Indigenous Artists from North West Canada

'Dim Luuk'iltdinhl' Goodin - To Think Good Thoughts'

Our artist collective, Northwest Coast Creatives, was graciously awarded a YVRAF travel grant to visit the PRM in 2024. Beginning from Terrace, a small town in northwestern British Columbia, our team of two travelled to Oxford, a travel distance of over 9,000 kms. We originate from the Tsimshian region, Veronica from the Gitxsan nation, community of Gitanmaax, and Angelo from the Nisga'a nation, community of Gitlaxt'aamiks. We both studied at a small woodcarving school in Terrace 10 years ago, and have continued our practices, education, and research, visiting museums in Vancouver, Ottawa, New York, and now the UK. Our study focuses on Pacific Northwest indigenous sculptures, carvings, and tools as these are our main methods of artistic creation.

Photo: © PRM

Northwest Coast Creatives team visiting the PRM

We were asked by the PRM team if there were any actions we would appreciate the team taking while they prepared our research visit, which includes moving the ancestor belongings from storage. A museum had never asked us this question: it was a beautiful gesture. We asked the team to simply think good thoughts, as we believe that thought, energy, and feeling is transferred physically. When we arrived, the pieces felt cared for.

Photo: © PRM

Horn duck bowl (Haida) under the magnifying glass in the PRM

Speaking our languages to the masks and other carvings is an action of care and connection that we do at every museum. *"Ha'miyaa, 'Wehlin gigyet"* (thank you, ancestors) I say in Gitsenimx, while Angelo usually whispers a traditional Nisga'a prayer. These are the languages the masks heard hundreds of years ago while they were created, used, stored, and traded. Almost all First Nations languages are severely or critically endangered in British Columbia, nonetheless we have learned enough to be able to speak with the ancestor belongings on our museum visits.

Photo: © NWC Creatives

Robin bowl in progress by Veronica, in backyard Terrace, BC, Canada

Traditionally, masks and dance regalia were wrapped in bark or cloth when not in use, so as to protect the spirits they hold, an action some still practice. The ancestor belongings on public display do not have this way of resting, but they do live next to cultural energy from around the world. They may be tired, but they may also have an unexpected community to balance out with. Also, the kind energy from the PRM staff seemed to blanket the pieces like a warm veil.

Our private visit with pieces we pre-selected were labelled as from Gitxsan, Tsimshian, Haida, and the lower coast (Kwakwaka'wakw) areas. For three days we looked at, held, sketched, and read stories with these ancestral creations. It was incredibly enriching to spend quiet moments with two bentwood boxes, two grease dishes, a horn bowl, a carved spoon, two bark-woven pieces, a stone maul, and a hide scraper. There were pieces that we have studied online and in books for many years. To see them in person, the textures, tones and curvatures of each work, and how large they are in comparison to our arms, hands, and faces, was unforgettable. Each piece holds energy of the maker, time, place, and conditions it was made in, something we have come to know after years of putting our own energy into wood.

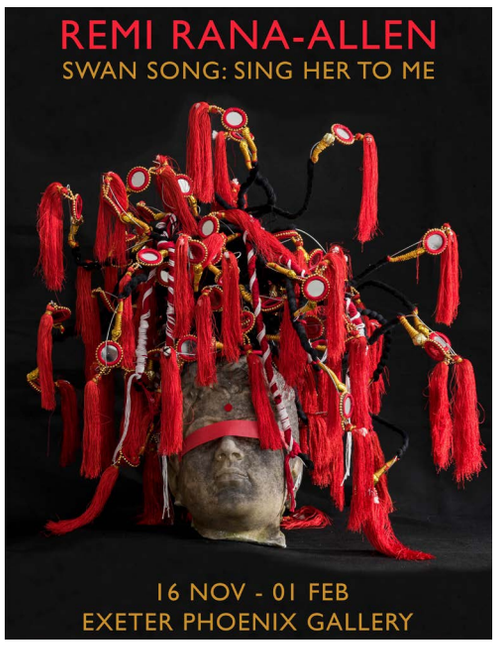
Already sketching out forms and beings for new projects on the way home, we appreciate that this trip had made a big impact on our vision for future work. Veronica had gained an understanding for the transitioning ridges in a bird sculpture bowl, while Angelo had examples of ways to better seal and secure a bentwood chest. We felt incredibly privileged to have had the access, time, and means to do this research. '*Ha'miyaa*' (thanks) to the PRM team, the ancestor belongings may also be thinking good thoughts.

Veronica Waechter & Angelo Cavagnaro,
Artists, Northwest Coast Creatives

Swansong: Sing her to me

'Swansong: Sing her to me' presents a series of richly coloured and textured sculptural installations, video and soundscapes that address the impacts of colonialism, migration and patriarchy. Together they respond to the powerful and tragic story of Rana-Allen's Great Aunt - the first Indian woman sentenced to be hanged in British colonial Kenya in 1949.

Commissioned by Exeter Phoenix and Phoenix Art Space (Brighton), the exhibition is inspired by detailed records of the case that were unearthed during the artist's extensive research into a maternal family history - spanning from India in 1914, to 1940s East Africa, and on to contemporary Britain - that illuminated what had previously been only family hearsay and gossip.



Killer Queen, 2024, Steel, stone, Indian Hair extensions, tape, bindi

Central to Rana-Allen's research was an academic paper regarding the law case of her great aunt written by Professor Stacey Hynd (University of Exeter) who subsequently helped her to piece together what had happened. A story emerged of a woman who claimed to have accidentally shot her father-in-law, while trying to protect herself from his abusive behaviour, using a weapon given to her by her husband for precisely that purpose. At the time of her arrest however no other women or family members stepped forward to confirm her version of events, despite stories circulating about his behaviour towards other women.


Whispering Heads, 2021-24

'He said *"I will sleep with you by force because you have no child"*

.... "Kaur became the first Indian woman in Kenya to be sentenced to death. In the face of public disquiet and colonial misgivings about the execution of women, her sentence was subsequently commuted to ten years imprisonment. Some 18 months later, her husband, Singh, proclaimed that the family had perjured themselves to cover his father's sexual deviance and protect 'family honour', sparking a campaign for his wife's release by the Indian community and the settler-led East African Women's League.


Svain (Swan), 2024, mixed media and Indian human hair

Courtrooms formed an arena in which social, political, and ideological contests played themselves out; in which not only particular litigants and defendants struggled, but the contradictions of British law were exposed and the Empire itself put on trial". (Hynd. 2015, p.226)

Full of complexity and misunderstanding, it is a story which continues to reveal its many layers, but at its surface lies the impact of colonial law in Kenya - on women's rights, the patriarchal control of Brown women, pervasive racism and the hierarchical three-tier structure created by the European colonialists in East Africa.

Copies of the original court records are presented alongside artworks which relate to knitting, string making, weaving and soap making - the 'women's work' that Kaur conducted in prison. Specific materials such as human hair, saris, and turbans have been selected in relation to the belief that for colonialism to succeed it forcefully alters indigenous hair, dress, faith and language. Alongside these, a soundscape melds audio from South Asian female performers, '*Gurdwara Granthis*' (priests) & the coastal tribes of Mombasa, Kenya, where the first indentured Indian labourers arrived in the late 1800s. Rana-Allen's latest film *'Sing Her to Me'* brings together new footage shot on location in Kenya, with found footage collected from Kenyan family archives dating from the 1930s, that provide a rich, sometimes brutal, historical context.

Addressing these issues of gender and race, honour and shame, colonialism and migration, the exhibition invites you to re-evaluate the entangled pasts that both connect and uncouple communities.

This is the exhibition's second iteration, following a successful presentation at Brighton's Phoenix Art Space in summer 2024, and is produced in partnership between the two organisations.

Further information at: https://exeterphoenix.org.uk/events/remi-rana-allen/ https://www.remiranaallen.com/ @remi_rana_allen

Remi Rana-Allen, *Artist*

Photos: © Remi Rana-Allen, 2024

Krampus: The Dark Companion of Saint Nicholas

With Christmas here again, we eagerly think about the visitation of jolly Saint Nicholas and his generous distribution of wonderful presents. However, in the folklore of Central Europe, there exists a belief in a much darker counterpart to Saint Nicholas: Krampus.

This horned, devil-like figure is as terrifying as Saint Nicholas is kind, and his story is as fascinating as it is eerie.

Origins

Although the true origin of Krampus remains a mystery, the belief in him dates to pre-Christian times. The name Krampus stems from the German word '*krampen*', which translates to claw. He is often depicted as a demon, a figure with horns, fangs, and a long, snake-like tongue. In some representations, he carries a set of heavy chains, a symbol of the binding of the Devil. He also carries birch branches, so-called '*ruten*', which he uses to punish ill-behaved children.

Krampus is believed to be the son of the Norse god of the underworld, Hel, which ties him to pagan rituals. Earlier traditions used Krampus to frighten away evil spirits during the Yule season, but with the spread of Christianity, they adapted him into the Christian tradition as a counterpart to Saint Nicholas.

Krampusnacht on December 5th

Krampus Night is celebrated on December 5th, which is the night before the Feast of Saint Nicholas. On this night, Krampus roams the Central European streets with Saint Nicholas, and together they visit people's homes.

While Saint Nicholas rewards well-behaved children with presents and sweets, Krampus' job is to punish the naughty ones. The methods of punishment vary from a simple swipe with his birch branches to more severe ones, like kidnapping children and taking them with him to the underworld.

Parades known as Krampuslauf, where young men dress up as Krampus and parade through the streets, mark Krampusnacht in many Alpine towns. These parades are truly a unique experience for participants and audience alike.

Significance and Role in Popular Culture

Krampus has become more popular over the past decades. An increased interest in folklore and the darker aspects of seasonal traditions have contributed to this popularity. Krampus has become a symbol of the balance between good and evil, a reminder that the festive season is not just about joy and generosity but also about embracing our fears and darker impulses.

Krampus 1900s postcards

Various media, including movies, television series, and printed books feature Krampus in popular culture. This modern portrayal often emphasises his role as a punisher of the wicked, but often also adds elements of dark humour.

The 2015 horror-comedy film '*Krampus*', for example, brought the legend to a wider audience with its mix of traditional folklore and modern storytelling.

Krampus is one of the most popular festive mythical creatures, and his presence in folklore serves as a reminder of the duality of human nature and the importance of balance. As a dark companion of Saint Nicholas, Krampus adds a thrilling and slightly terrifying edge to the season and reminds us that the spirit of Christmas is not just about light and joy but also about accepting the darkness in the shadows of our celebrations.

So, the next time you hear the joyful sound of bells at Christmas, keep in mind that Krampus might be lurking in the shadows, ready to remind us all of the importance of being on our best behaviour.

Lena Schattenherz Heide-Brennand, *M.A. (English Language, Creative writing and Literature), B.A. (German, Norwegian and Spanish Language and Literature), B.A. (Social Science, Pedagogy and Culture).*

Scan these QR-codes for more Krampus postcards and a fabulous documentary full of outstanding facts:

More Vintage Krampus-Karten

Krampus: The Christmas Demon, Full documentary

Short Video on Krampus by National Geographic

Images: Open Source

Lead Divination

According to folk tradition, there are many techniques for reading the future. One of them is melting and quickly casting lead into cold water. This should be done on New Year's Eve, according to the traditional belief in Finland. It is done by studying the shape of the cast lead when it hits the water or by holding it up in a strong lamp light and by interpreting the shadows cast on the wall. The divination is based on its shape: lumpy indicates money; a smooth surface luck; a boat means travel; a bird happiness; hips travelling; keys career advancement, and a flower or a crown an admirer, marriage or an engagement. There are also bad signs. The shape of a skull is worrying and refers to death or illness, and if the branches are small it will be a bad year.

Photo: © Mona Djerf, Nordiska museet

An interesting example of divination results

Photo: © Zingoalla Rosenqvist

A divination kit before use

Does this sound like an old tradition? It is, and it isn't. Similar practices are found in many countries on the European continent – '*Molybdomancy*' is the fancy Greek word for it. Among the Nordic countries, the custom is only preserved in Finland, but used to be practiced in Sweden as late as the early 20th century. Lead divination seems to have become popular during the 19th century, when people became more attentive of the calendar and observant of a certain date for the new year. In the Folklore archive in Uppsala, more than one hundred records describe this technique. But it was never as prevalent as it became in Finland, where basically every Finn knows about it as a fun new year activity.

In 2018, the casting of lead was prohibited in Finland because the component is toxic, but the casting of pure tin is still allowed: bars made of beeswax and sugar are recommended by the government. Since the late 20th century, shops sell kits with a spoon and small bars of pure tin in the shape of a horseshoe for this purpose called *'uudenvuodentina'* "new year's tin" in Finnish, or *'nyårslycka'* "New Year's Luck" in Swedish.

Lead divination is thought to have been introduced in Finland from Sweden sometime in the 17th or early 18th century (Finland was a part of Sweden then). According to one scholar, it can be traced back to the military. However, we can find the practice among folk healers in Sweden as far back as the 17th century. Smelting lead was expensive. Lead was mostly used for windows and bullets. How it became associated with the supernatural and to divination is hard to pin down. There used to be many different divination methods and lead divination is just one of them.

Casting lead was used for more than divination. It was a common technique among the cunning folk: *'kloka'* in Swedish and *'tietäjä'* in Finnish. In Sweden, some specialized in casting lead for curing diseases as well as divination. Some were called *'smältkäringar'* or *'blygummor'*, words referring to women who cast and interpret the shapes of lead in cold water. The cunning folk used the method of casting lead at any time during the year. Sometimes the folk healers used more complicated methods than simply casting the lead in cold water e.g. it should be poured through the scissor handle or through a hole in a round loaf.

Nowadays, lead or tin divination is no longer taken seriously, it has become a playful ritual associated with new year. It is a way of preparing for the upcoming year, just like new year's resolutions.

Dr Tommy Kuusela, *PhD in History of Religions, and Folklorist at The Institute for Language and Folklore in Uppsala.*

Pitt Rivers Museum Winter 2024

INFORMATION SHEET

The Members' Magazine is published three times a year

INFORMATION

Members

www.prm.ox.ac.uk/members
General Information: Jessica Kong membership@prm.ox.ac.uk
Programme: membership@prm.ox.ac.uk
President of Members of Pitt Rivers: Professor Chris Gosden
Patrons of Members of Pitt Rivers: Alexander Armstrong, Danby Bloch, Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe, Dame Penelope Lively, Layla Moran MP, Sir Michael Palin, Sir Philip Pullman.

Museum

Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PP
01865 613000
www.prm.ox.ac.uk/members
Email: prm@prm.ox.ac.uk
Open: Tuesday-Sunday 10.00 - 17.00
Monday 12.00- 17.00
Admission FREE.
For details of all current & forthcoming events & exhibitions, see www.prm.ox.ac.uk/events
Refreshments. The Horsebox Coffee Company on the lawn is open from 9.00 - 17.00 daily, serving hot and cold drinks and homemade cakes. With delicious locally roasted coffee, scrumptious brownies, flapjacks and cookies, the Horsebox Café is the perfect place for a coffee break!
All museum events: **www.prm.ox.ac.uk/events**

Magazine

Editor: Dawn Osborne
dawnosborne@btopenworld.com
Design: Juliet Eccles
Printer: Parchments
Kingston Business Park, H4&H5, Kingston Bagpuize, Abingdon OX13 5FB
www.parchmentuk.com
The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Museum. All contributors to the Magazine are Members unless otherwise stated.

Membership

Membership: 01865 613000 membership@prm.ox.ac.uk
Annual Subscription: £36 (Joint: £50); Student: £20 (18-25, in full time education). Life £500 (Joint £750) Benefits: Priority booking for Museum events and courses, Private views, Behind the scenes visits. Members only: Shop 10% discounts, Members' Magazine posted to you three times a year, Members' lecture series.

MUSEUM DIARY DATES

We look forward to welcoming you to the galleries, exhibitions and events.

Exhibitions and case displays

Ground floor case until 30 June 2025

Photo: © PRM

A detail of the Ahu 'ula (feather cloaks) on display behind the curtain

You can see the beautiful Ahu'ula, a feather cloak from Hawaii on display on the ground floor, in a case that has a curtain covering the glass. Draw back the curtain to see the striking feather cloaks of yellow, red and black design worked in tiny feathers. Read the interpretation to learn how these Ahu 'ula (cloaks) were used to reinforce political and diplomatic transactions, solidify relationships, and engender obligations.

Archive case display until 30 June 2025

Image: © Solomon Enos

Detail of Solomon Enos graphic illustrations in the 'Revisiting Robert Louis Stevenson' display at the PRM

Visit the first floor to view artists Simon Grennan and Soloman Enos re-examine the work of nineteenth century author Robert Louis Stevenson through dynamic graphic storytelling. Stevenson travelled to several Pacific islands before settling in Sāmoa in 1890. Referencing this time in Sāmoa, as well as Hawai'i and Europe, related items are brought together from the Museum's Pacific collections and displayed alongside historical publications of Stevenson's Pacific stories, set within new graphic remediations of these stories as comics by British and Hawaiian artists.

MEMBERS' DIARY DATES

2025

Wednesday 29 January
10.00 to 19.30
Curator Tour of 'Hawaii: Ma uka to Ma kai Quilting the Hawaiian Landscape'
Members Exclusive. Free entry.
Talk in Pitt Rivers Lecture Theatre. Entry via Robinson Close, off South Parks Road. Explore the fascinating and multi-faceted *'HAWAII Ma uka to Ma kai: Quilting the Hawaiian Landscape'* exhibition with Research Curator Marenka Thompson-Odlum. This unique collaborative exhibition incorporates installations showcasing the contemporary works of the Honolulu-based Poakalani Quilters, the London School of Hula and 'Ori, the innovative designs of the fashion icon Manaola Yap and the visionary planetary futurism of Solomon Enos.

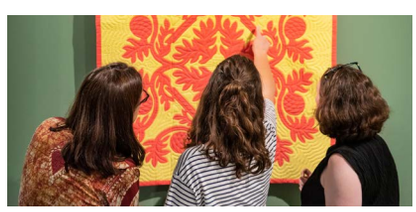


Photo: © PRM

Wednesday 5 February
10.00 to 11.00
Artist Talk: What the Seal Concealed
Lecture Room
Artist/researcher Saba Qizilbash describes the fascinating journey of an 18th-century messenger bag to the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum and its link with the artist's contemporary practice.

Photo: © PRM

Save the date

Saturday 29 March
10.00 to 16.00
Kenneth Kirkwood Day
'Who Owns Museum Collections? What should we do with them?'
The Kenneth Kirkwood Day returns with stimulating talks from speakers who specialise in their field of interest.

Wednesday 9 July
11.00-11.45 & 12.00-12.45
Exclusive members event Behind the Scenes with the Collection Team