

# SIMA

## SIMA 2024 Symposium *Q?rius Theater, NMNH*

July 19, 2024

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**Session One**  
**9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.**

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### PRESENTERS

**María José Pelaez, PhD candidate, Anthropology, CCAS-Columbian Distinguished Fellow, George Washington University**

Thinking Like a State, Owning the Document: Chief Nigdibippi Draws San Blas

The Guna Rebellion of 1925 marked a pivotal moment in Panama's indigenous history. My SIMA project examines an artifact from this period: a map drawn by Chief Igwa Nigdibippi as part of the Darien-Marsh Expedition (1923-1925). Housed at the Smithsonian alongside one of the largest collections of Darien Indigenous material culture, this map could serve as a lens through which to understand territorial and political tensions preceding the events of 1925 and the ongoing resistances and victories of the Guna people in response to territorial exploitation and violence.

**Bethany Palkovitz, PhD student, Art History and American Indian Studies, University of Washington**

DUCK, DUCK, GOAT HAIR: APPLYING LUSHOOTSEED LANGUAGE RESEARCH TO COAST SALISH TEXTILE COLLECTIONS AT NMNH

My research focuses on Coast Salish protein-fiber weaving and around *x̣wəlc̣*, the saltwater body known to many today as Puget Sound. In my presentation, I explain how Lushootseed language research may offer insights into geographic attribution for textiles that were previously described in the literature as "misfit;" blankets which do not fit easily within previously delineated blanket typologies. I share insights drawn from collections visits with bird down and mountain goat blankets as to the visual effects of these blankets, not easily gleaned without in-person relational interaction with them, and situate them within a larger continuum of weaving across time and place around the Salish Sea.

**Chunfen Zhou, PhD student Folklore Studies, Indiana University Bloomington**

AN ARMOR FROM THE FRIENDLY LOLOS—DAVID CROCKETT GRAHAM'S 1928 EXPEDITION AND ETHNOGRAPHIC "PARTIAL TRUTH"

David Crockett Graham (1884–1961), an American Baptist missionary, originally became involved with the then United States National Museum (USNM) as a zoological collector in Sichuan, China. As his interests in anthropology grew, Graham's collecting efforts also enriched the ethnological collection of the USNM. My presentation will start with a brief introduction to his life and achievements. Then, by focusing on his 1928 expedition that helped form the Yi collection currently under the stewardship of the National Museum of Natural History, I will discuss what image of the Yi, an ethnic minority group in southwest China, was portrayed in the collecting process through the lens of an armor and a helmet, and how Graham's cultural representation of the Yi people corresponds to James Clifford's idea of "Partial Truth."

DISCUSSANTS

CANDACE GREENE (SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION)

PASCALE BOUCICAUT (UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY)

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**Session Two**  
**10:45 a.m. – 12:10 p.m.**

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PRESENTERS

**Lydia Curliss, PhD candidate, Information Studies, University of Maryland**

"CULTURE: NOT GIVEN:" EXPLORING SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND PRESENCE AND ABSENCE IN THE NMNH AND NAA COLLECTIONS

Presence and absence of Indigenous knowledges in museums and archives often reflect the practices and beliefs of western Cultural Heritage Memory Institutions (CHMIs). Central to understanding how Indigenous knowledges extractions come to be part of these collections offers insight about the underlying principles, practices, and priorities of CHMIs. Building upon my own knowledge as a Nipmuc Tribal member and Information Studies PhD Candidate, this presentation seeks to understand how collections from Southern New England communities reveal narratives around how Indigenous identity in this region is understood in the broader landscape. Drawing upon collection materials across the museum and archive, I demonstrate how these objects and documents provide and leave out key information to understand these realities.

**Paige Brianna Gavin, Master's candidate, Anthropology, George Washington University**

THE PROCESS OF PROVENANCE AND EXCHANGE: A LOOK INTO THE MICRONESIAN OBJECTS RELATED TO WELLBEING

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) has long been affected by American colonialism and imperialism. From nuclear testing to public health initiatives, FSM has faced a multitude of health concerns at the hands of the United States Government. The question that has driven my SIMA work has been “what does wellbeing mean?” How can we see wellbeing in the collection of Micronesian objects related to health, and in the treatment of them through exchange amongst curators and people. I will focus on two Micronesian collections that were collected by John Henry Brandt, a public health official in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands in 1957-1960. Through correspondence between Brandt and Dr. Saul Riesenbergs regarding the Micronesian objects, we can see a concrete example of how objects are negotiated and exchanged and how that affects the wellbeing of objects themselves.

**Andrea Richardson, PhD student, African and African Diaspora Studies (AADS), University of Texas at Austin**

CARING OBJECTS: MIDWIFERY, HEALTH, AND BLACKNESS IN THE NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

This discussion is an investigation of the materiality of Black healing and midwifery. Seeking knowledge from archival fragments and material engagement, I trace modes of care, relationality, and health within the vast assemblages of African objects stored by the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Anchored by a consideration of Body, Land, and Home as sites of materiality engaged with and/or acted upon by birth workers, I think through Black midwives’ material and epistemic worlds using a Black feminist methodology.

DISCUSSANTS

GAYE SCULTHORPE (DEAKIN UNIVERSITY MELBOURNE)

TARISI VUNIDILO (CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY LOS ANGELES)

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**Session Three**  
**1:00 p.m. – 2:10 p.m.**

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**Urna Mukherjee, PhD candidate, History of Technology, Johns Hopkins University**

A TALE OF TWO BOATS (THREE?): THE MANY LIVES OF NINETEENTH CENTURY BOAT MODELS FROM COLONIAL BOMBAY

Sometime around the early 1880s, a group of model fishing boats from colonial South Asia were added to the collections of the erstwhile United States National Museum. Six of them are currently in the collections of the Department of Anthropology at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. My SIMA research project speculates on the journeys of these boat models and the many lives they may have lived by studying one of the boat models, the model fishing canoe “Tony,” exploring its materiality and tracing its history. I am interested not only in how it came to be in the current collection but also its significance to the different contexts it has occupied at different points in its existence. Examining this boat model at the convergence of all the different networks of meaning it is tied to helps

highlight the complicated history of the acquisition of objects such as these and the tensions around their collection and display.

**Aaron LaMaskin, Master's candidate, Anthropology, University of British Columbia**

T̕ILHQOT'IN BASKETS: RESEARCH FOR REPATRIATION

The Tsilhqot'in First Nation, and Tsilhqot'in National Government represent the communities of Tl'etinqox, ʔEsdilagh, Yunešit'in, T̕ideldel, Tl'esqox and Xení Gwet'in. Drawing from their ancestral connections to the land and environment, members of these six communities have woven baskets for use in their daily lives since time immemorial. Following the colonization of the countries now known as the United States and Canada, non-Indigenous collectors took possession of many of these baskets, of which eight are now known to be in the collections of the National Museum of Natural History. My research is conducted in partnership with the Tsilhqot'in National Government's Heritage Department, who are currently working to identify, document, and repatriate Tsilhqot'in heritage held in museums. I focus on researching archival documentation, photography, artistic motifs, and the construction of the baskets themselves, in order to reconstruct their histories and attempt to identify if there are other Tsilhqot'in baskets present in the collection that are not identified as Tsilhqot'in.

DISCUSSANTS

GWYN ISAAC (SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, NMNH)

JAMON HALVAKSZ (UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT SAN ANTONIO)

**2024 SIMA FACULTY FELLOWS**

**Jamon Alex Halvaksz II, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Texas, San Antonio**

Finding Places in Museums: Watut and Bulolo Rivers in the Smithsonian

**Tarisi Vunidilo, Assistant Professor, College of Ethnic Studies, California State University - Los Angeles**

The Wilkes Expedition 1838-1842. Crossing Paths with Ro Veidovi: Our Fijian Chief of Burebasaga, Rewa Province