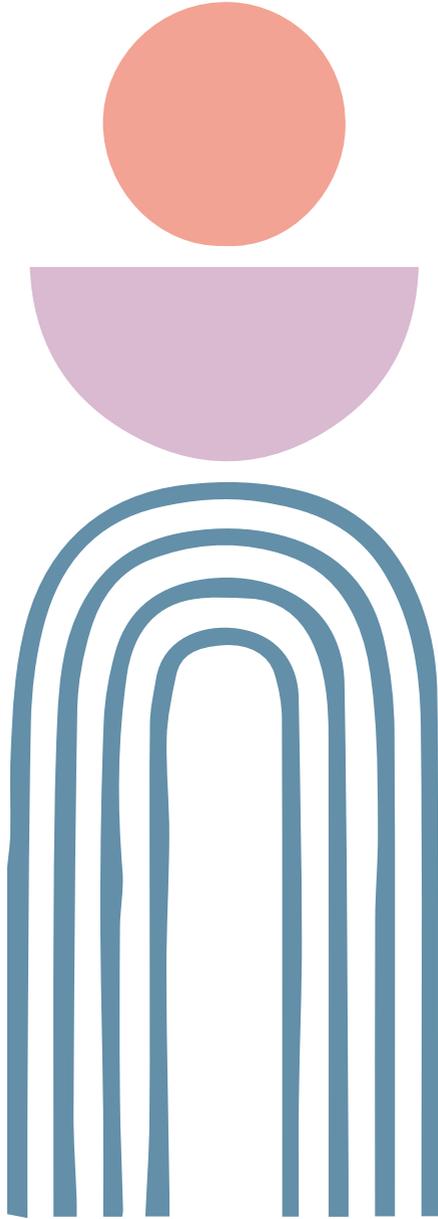


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## Foreword

**Henrietta Lidchi**

Provenance research, of late, has widened its grip on the museological and political imagination. Formerly the methodology of art history, provenance has now become one of the means by which we reckon more systematically with contested histories, and recognise that objects are witnesses to processes that they can help us investigate, and more properly understand.

Provenance in the art historical sense is the attempt to track and trace the history of ownership of an item. In that context it is always allied with authenticity or proof: a point of creation, or ownership, or transfer of title.

The question of provenance with collections formerly deemed ethnographic is different. In part because they were often acquired as assemblages with individual items rarely recorded or distinguished. Because objects were given in relation to place and culture, they were assumed to stand for something, not be allied to someone. The picture is correspondingly more complex and entangled, with questions regarding agency and consent intermixed with understanding of historical transactions and provable destinations.

Provenance, as noted above, often supposes a single origin – an origin point or beginning. However, in English ‘origin’ can also mean ‘the intersection of coordinate axes’. That definition feels more suited to the questions that are posed in this publication. The intersection of histories, objects, personalities and events, the probable linkages between them, and the meanings that arise from these conjunctions.

As will be shown here, what provenance research signifies in the context of world cultures collections is not finding an answer, but clarifying the questions. Provenance research, it might be argued, is a practice of healthy scepticism as regards your institutional ancestors, by re-assessing their documentation, their criteria of value and their purposes. It provides a critical engagement with traditional museological projects of identification, representation and collecting. It aims to give names and dates to people and

processes formerly undistinguished in the archive. Provenance is allied with an optimistic sense of what research and critical museology can give to the interpretation of things, recognising their role as witnesses within complex and entangled histories.

Even if world cultures collections are constituted of assemblages, here individual objects are the focus of the essays. This edition is part of the commitment of the National Museum of World Cultures to think through its collections, using the tools available to us, be this documentation, material research, the objects themselves, social media, communities and artist(s). It aims to make this thinking accessible as ‘work in progress’, and in this way to render our research accountable. Provenance is not only a means to understand past practices and historic collections, but a way of thinking through the legacies we create for the future.

# Introduction

Sarah Johnson and Fanny Wonu Veys

This publication is part of a larger focus by the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) – an umbrella organisation comprising of the Tropenmuseum (Amsterdam), the Museum Volkenkunde (Leiden) and the Afrika Museum (Berg en Dal) – and the Wereldmuseum (Rotterdam) on the provenance of its collections. In March 2019, the museum took an important step to embed provenance into its practice and policy with the publication of *Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process*, which identifies the principles on the basis of which the museum will assess claims for the return of objects of which it is the custodian. As part of this proactive policy, the museum works with countries and communities of origin to assess places for the justifiable return of objects to the original owners. In the summer of 2019, two researchers were hired for the fulltime investigation of the museum collections' provenance.

The purpose of this publication is also proactive – it aims to assess how the museum can better highlight provenance both in the display of existing collections and in the collecting of new objects. This inaugural edition is roughly divided in

two parts. The first section focuses on framing existing collections. It investigates previously unexplored provenance of well-known objects and brings to light objects whose provenance left them underrepresented in exhibitions and ethnographic research. The second section looks at the way new acquisitions can expose the provenance of the museum's history and existing collections.

The first article, by Rosalie Hans, one of the museum's two provenance researchers, presents new research on the early collecting practices of Dutch missionaries for the Afrika Museum. Hans illustrates the importance of investigating the biographies and histories of the missionaries who collected objects in Africa in order to better understand the objects' provenance. Her article brings to light novel information on the source and formation of the Afrika Museum collections.

In his article, Karwin Cheung, Assistant Curator East and Central Asia at National Museums Scotland, traces the provenance of four Buddha heads from the Tianlongshan cave temples in China. He argues that their removal from their original context by Japanese and European traders shifted their position from Buddhist objects and inserted them into the history of trade and imperialism in twentieth-century East Asia. The Tianlongshan Buddhas have received great

international scholarly attention from art historians. As Cheung illustrates, unlike in art museums where the heads are displayed and celebrated as masterpieces of art history, they have historically not found a place in ethnographic contexts like NMVW where the four heads remain in storage.

François Janse van Rensburg, Junior Curator Southern Africa, similarly questions why an object has remained perpetually in NMVW's storage. In his article, Janse van Rensburg uncovers the provenance of an ox-wagon, likely made by a British prisoner of war in South Africa, and argues that its link to white Afrikaans culture and Dutch nationalism led to its perceived unsuitability for an ethnographic context. As a result of its ability to tell the story about the relationship between Europeans and non-Europeans in South Africa, the ox-wagon is now a top piece of the South Africa collections.

Alternatively, Erna Lilje, Junior Curator western New Guinea, considers a large feather headdress that has had a prominent record of display from London to Paris to Leiden. The object was attributed to Yule Island in museum records. As Lilje argues in her article, the source attribution for the headdress was arrived at because Yule Island was the missionary headquarters that transferred the headdress to Europe. Because of its hazy provenance history, the headdress' existence has not been made available to source communities.

Lilje's article provides a model for how more thorough provenance research into the origins of objects can lead to more visibility of museum objects for source communities.

In the first article of the second section, Davey Verhoeven, a Research Associate at the museum focusing on Japan, shows the political entanglements in the depiction of Nagasaki Bay on a nineteenth-century Japanese folding screen, acquired by the NMVW in 2019. The screen, made around 1836, provides a unique view on the bay of Nagasaki, including the Dutch trading post of Deshima and a Chinese compound. While the screen's painter has been called 'the photographer without a camera,' Verhoeven's article reveals the painter's self-censorship in many details of the screen and therefore the danger

in using such objects as archival documents of provenance.

Daan van Dartel, Curator Popular Culture and Fashion, discusses her decision to commission a project on trade and colonialism by Susan Stockwell (1962) with the artist herself. Van Dartel gives Stockwell the space to unravel the links between the museum's provenance and colonialism in her own words. Stockwell's dress combines the language of fashion in the form of a dress with maps of colonial territories, linking the territorial claiming of the female body and the colonial landscape. The project marks a broader initiative by NMVW to commission work by contemporary artists that engages with the provenance of the museum's colonial past.

All translations are by the authors unless otherwise noted.



# The provenance of the missionary collection in the Afrika Museum

**Rosalie Hans**

## Introduction

This article is part of the outcome of provenance research conducted on the collections of the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal, the Netherlands, that were assembled by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, the Catholic missionary society that founded the museum in 1954. During my research, it became clear that there are many untold stories about the museum collections, amassed from various African countries, and about the people who acquired them. The edited volume *Forms of Wonderment* (2002), published by the Afrika Museum in 2002, contains information about the collections. However, it focuses mainly on the objects' art historical value and original use. The exception is Wouter Welling's chapter, which gives an insightful overview of the origins of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and

the earliest beginnings of the museum (Grootaers & Eisenburger 2002: 36-55). To complement this publication, the emphasis here is on the provenance of the collections with a missionary connection and on some of the people who brought them to the museum. It will offer a new perspective on the Afrika Museum's missionary-related collections by elaborating on the provenance of two individual objects and focusing on the collection of one missionary, Henk Govers (1922 -2012), who donated and sold 223 objects to the museum between 1956 and 2007.

The starting point of this research was the documentation held in the database of the National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW), which includes the original inventory cards containing basic information about the objects. The hand-written inventory books provided more information on the movement of collections over time. For detailed historical information, I made use of the records available in the Afrika Museum which consist of annual reports, photo albums, and diaries along with other writings from several of the priests and monks from the missionary society. Albums with newspaper clippings chronicle the reception of the museum in the press from the 1960s to the early 1990s, as well as the changing (or sometimes persistent) perceptions of Africa and Africans. At this point in time, I have not

been able to access the archives of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, located at the Erfgoedcentrum Kloosterleven in Sint-Agatha, but the expectation is that future research there will enrich current information about the museum and its artefacts.

## A Brief History of the Afrika Museum

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit (CHS), which was established in 1703 in Paris, started operating in the Netherlands in 1904. Its purpose as a missionary congregation means it employed activities across the world but mainly in Africa, with Dutch missionaries stationed in Angola, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Tanzania, Gabon and other countries (HING 1860 – 1900).<sup>1</sup> The Afrika Museum was established in 1954 by father Piet Bukkems (1900 – 1970), a retired missionary of the CHS in their villa in Berg en Dal next to Nijmegen. Like previous missionary exhibitions that were regularly organized in different Catholic communities

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1 The countries mentioned above had large Dutch missionary presence. Other countries where Dutch members of the CHS were stationed included Algeria, Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Ethiopia and Uganda (Grootaers & Eisenburger, 2002: 32).

Figure 1. The outside of the museum with the flamingo pond in the foreground and the museum park in the background, 1967, photograph: Eisenburger 1988: 36.



in the Netherlands, the display in the villa was meant to inform people of the importance of the mission in Africa and inspire them to donate or join the congregation. Due to the increasing number of both visitors and objects, the villa soon became too small and a plan was made to set up a purpose-built museum behind the villa (Figure 1). Supported by the Congregation, the new museum opened on 19 April 1958 under director father Piet Verdijk (1915 – 1996). The museum's mission, as

written in 1963, was: 'Through scientific labor, exhibitions, collecting of objects, books and information, loans of books and studies, support the sciences to increase the scientific and religious interest in sub-Saharan Africa for a broad audience.' This aim for a wide appeal was substantiated by the opening of an open-air village with different 'African' houses of which at least one building was obtained

from the controversial international exhibition held in Brussels in 1958.<sup>2</sup>

Under father Gerard Pubben (1909 – 1985), who had worked in Angola from 1937 to 1958, the museum's approach shifted to encouraging visitors to learn about African people and cultures. Influenced by the struggle for decolonization he witnessed in Angola, his writings display a firm belief in the obligation to treat African people with equal respect. In an article for the missionary magazine 'Africa Christo,' Pubben encourages people to visit the museum with an open and fair mind: 'Go and have a look, and let the African speak to inform you what is dear and important to him' (Pubben 1961: 34). In a similar text, he is even more outspoken: 'Why do we put so little effort to truly get to know the African fellow human in his pursuit to solve the mystery of life in the best way? Listen honestly and respectfully to the most intimate desires of the people, also the African.' (Pubben 1961).

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2 The original name of this part of the museum was 'negerdorp' or 'negro village'. From the early seventies the museum used the term 'Afrikaanse dorp' or African village, and currently, it is described as the 'Buitenmuseum' (Outdoor Museum) or museum park, which is in the process of an overhaul. The buildings from the international exhibition called Expo '58 in Brussels no longer exist. Controversy arose over this world exhibition because the Congolese people invited to participate were put on display and mistreated by spectators. They protested against their conditions and the 'Congolese village' closed early (Boffey 2018).

Nevertheless, the museum was a product of a religious organisation at a time when the perception of African people in the Netherlands was still very much that of the 'exotic other', as demonstrated by the title of the exhibition, which opened in 1963: 'The stranger and his religion' (Afrika Museum 1963). In 1965, Pubben moved to the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missie Museum in Tilburg and father Johannes van Croonenburg (1905 – 1975) took over the role of curator. In a newspaper clipping from 1968, he talks of artworks rather than objects, while explaining that he has a chequebook in his pocket and buys in Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris from dealers in ethnographic art (Kunstredactie 1968). This change in approach to collecting would continue to develop over time with a focus on contemporary art from the 1990s onwards.<sup>3</sup> Both long-term directors Maria van Gaal (1928-2009) (director from 1969 to 1989) and Ineke Eisenburger (1946-) (from 1989 to 2008) maintained warm relations with the congregation as well as collectors and dealers in African art, resulting in a diverse collection with an overall focus on the material culture of religion and

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3 This change was partly caused by the increasing difficulty of importing African artefacts from the continent to Europe as a result of the 1970 UNESCO Convention as described in newspaper articles such as 'De Handel en Wandel van de Heilige Geest in Afrika', *NRC Handelsblad*, 18 March 1977.

ritual practices.<sup>4</sup> Today, the stores of the museum contain baskets, musical instruments and tools, but also rare masks, statues and contemporary art made by artists from the African diaspora. Exhibitions throughout the decades generally maintained a strong emphasis on explaining aspects of African cultures to visitors, focusing on themes such as birth and death or specific ethnic groups like the Senufo (Grootaers and Eisenburger 2002: 595).

## Overview of the Collection

After the merger with the Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde in Leiden<sup>5</sup> and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam in 2014, the Afrika Museum became part of the National Museum of World Cultures. As ethnographic museums are increasingly critical of their own collecting practices and subject to a wider public debate about the provenance of their holdings, research into the trajectories of their collections has become a priority. Before the 2014 merger, the Afrika Museum held 9,431 objects from across the African continent. The earliest known acquisition date is 1954, but the date of manufacture of a large number of objects is likely to be between 1900

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4 Ineke Eisenburger worked in the Afrika Museum from 1968 to 2008, starting as secretary for father Van Croonenburg and eventually becoming director in 1989.

5 The Museum Volkenkunde was still called Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde in 2014.

and 1940, a period of expansion for the Dutch Catholic missionaries.<sup>6</sup> Recent scientific analysis of certain objects indicates that at least one is from the twelfth century (a bronze head from the Kingdom of Benin, AM-254-1) but often documentation is not available to confirm the detailed trajectories of the individual pieces and so exact production dates remain imprecise, though they may be ascertained through comparison with other collections.

The Afrika Museum continued to acquire artefacts throughout the decades, although the people from whom they were obtained changed significantly. Initially, most donors and sellers to the museum were, unsurprisingly, missionaries from the CHS. But other congregations such as the Missionaries of Africa, generally known as the 'White Fathers' because of their white habits, and the missionaries of Cadier en Keer (Society for African Missionaries) also donated to the museum. In situ collecting efforts were encouraged, especially related

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6 The period between approximately 1900 and 1940 is described as 'het grote missie-uur' (the great mission hour) because of the broad support for the mission in Dutch Catholic society and the large numbers of missionaries going abroad in that period. Corbey and Weener (2015: 11) state that between 1900 and 1939 some 6000 missionary personnel worked abroad, and Roes (1974: 33) gives a number of 2600 priest-missionaries working worldwide between 1900 and 1940.

to religious practices, but depended on the individual interest and access of missionaries working abroad (Welling 2002: 46). Up until 2008, the Congregation, as a separate entity from the Afrika Museum, regularly funded the acquisition of objects, accepted gifts in their name for the museum, and by this means accumulated a large long-term loan collection of 4,247 pieces. This currently makes up 45% of the total collection, and continues to illustrate how intertwined the museum was, and is, with the congregation's missionary activities.<sup>7</sup>

The first two major collections that entered the museum were received as a batch, and little is known about their provenance because the first inventory book was made in 1967, initiated by director father Matthias 'Ties' Keunen (1928-1995). However, we know that in March 1954 an assortment of utensils was sent from the provincial headquarters of the congregation in Rhenen. These had been used for the missionary exhibitions in the Netherlands of which the first was held in 1919 in Breda (Afrika Museum 1963; Corbey and Weener 2015: 20). A second large collection of 311 objects came in through the Mission Sisters Petrus Claver in Rome in May 1958 and was until recently only known

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7 Most of the loan collection was acquired between 1956 and the early seventies, with one large acquisition in 2005 of 308 Ethiopian artefacts (series AM-656).

as 'collectie Rome'. Contact with the mission sisters in Maastricht and Rome has recently clarified that the sisters dedicate themselves to financial and practical support for missionaries. In thanks, they have often received artefacts from abroad, these were displayed in a museum in Rome that closed in the early 1950s. While some of these collections were transferred to another museum of the sisters in Zug, Switzerland, a significant portion was sold.<sup>8</sup> It is highly likely that the 'collectie Rome' in Berg en Dal originally came from this Roman missionary museum.

Although the majority of objects arrived with missionaries in the early years of the Afrika Museum, private collectors and dealers also played a role from the beginning. For example, Bodes & Bode Jewellers in The Hague, who acted as collectors and dealers, sold 66 objects to the CHS between 1956 and 1970. The balance tipped towards non-religious contributors in the early seventies, although the last donation from missionary Henk Govers took place as recently as 2007. Collecting trips were also undertaken by, for example father Pubben to Tanzania (series AM-226, 77 objects) and father Van Croonenburg around 1970 to several West African countries (series AM-220, 42 objects). A detailed audit of the whole collection of the museum

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8 Email correspondence with sister Jeanine of the Sister Petrus Claver convent in Maastricht and sister Assunta Giertych in Rome (2020).

would yield additional insights into these activities. In the remainder of this article, I will select some short histories to illustrate the nature and provenance of the mission-related objects in the Afrika Museum.

## Stories of Missionaries and Objects

There are a few well-known missionary collectors related to the collection, such as father Jan Vissers (1916 – 1989), and his brother father Frans Vissers (1918 – 1994).<sup>9</sup> However, analysing their collections would require more exhaustive treatment, so here the focus will be on a lesser-known missionary, father Govers, who, having donated 223 objects to the loan collection of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, ranks among the most prolific contributors to the museum's collection.

### *Father Henk Govers, CSSp. (1922 – 2012)*

While the information on father Govers is limited, some anecdotes in newspaper articles and the collections

database give a glimpse into his life.<sup>10</sup> Like many missionaries of the CHS, he spent most of his working life in one area. He was stationed at several missions in the Casamance region in Senegal, from December 1950 to 1993 (Congregatie van de Heilige Geest 2015). While working as a priest, Govers was allowed to assist with child deliveries once he had been introduced in the women's secret society named Ehunya (De Ruiters 1974). In 1991, artist Tiong Ang met Govers while staying in the region and described him in his 'Dutch Diary' as 'a missionary of the old type, merged with his life's work a self-made church in the bush' (Tiong Ang 1991). After returning from Senegal, Govers retired at the Villa Meerwijk next to the Afrika Museum and wrote several texts and books.

The first set of objects from Govers came into the museum in July 1956 with little information. We know that the second set, series AM-23, was brought from Senegal by Henk Govers' mother who visited her son in 1963. Several other object series refer to Govers' notes in letters but series AM-573, donated in 1996, is accompanied by the missionary's personal descriptions so more is known about the location and context of their acquisition. One example of a set of items that were

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9 The brothers Vissers contributed 413 objects to the collections of the Afrika Museum, mainly from Angola. The amount of information and photographs that Jan Vissers in particular supplied with his collections is unique in the museum's history and allows the journeys of many of his objects to be traced to villages in Cabinda and surroundings.

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10 More information on Henk Govers is present in the archives of the CHS in the *Erfgoedcentrum Kloosterleven* in Sint-Agatha but this has not yet been accessible.



Figure 2. Medicine bag of a traditional healer, 1965, diverse materials including leather, horns and cotton, National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands, AM-63-38.

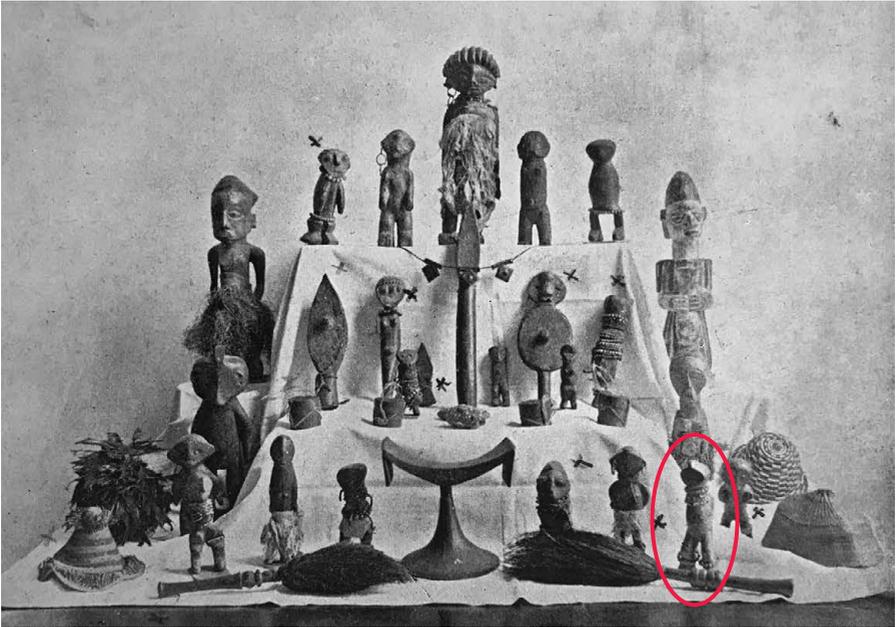
collected by Govers in 1965 is the medicine bag of a traditional healer (Figure 2). The description of this complete equipment of a 'chef feticheur' is taken directly from a letter by Govers from 4 May 1965. He wrote that the healer was a smith and lepra doctor of around eighty years of age who passed away in spring 1965. Because the man was 'baptised' (Govers' quotation marks) the family sold Govers the entire outfit

instead of burning it or burying it with the deceased.

### *Yanda figure*

The provenance of this small statue (AM-17-2073, Figure 3, circled in red) demonstrates the complexity of the museum's mission-related collection. Information about the private donor does not immediately reveal the missionary connections involved in its

Figure 3. The Mission Museum in the monastery in St.-Agatha in Cuyk, photograph: Andriessen 1925. The circle indicates AM-17-2073.



history but is evidence that missionary objects also circulate as part of the ethnographic art market. The figure was sold to the museum by the collector Willem Minderman (1910-1985) in The Hague in May 1965.<sup>11</sup> However, he bought it from another collector named K. van der Horst sometime after 1962, who in turn acquired it from the Crosiers, a congregation with a mission

in the Vicariate Bondo in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (BursSENS 1962: 193).<sup>12</sup> Missionaries are likely to have collected this object between the establishment of their mission in 1920 and its arrival in the mission museum in Sint-Agatha in 1925. The evidence for this is provided by the photograph in a missionary booklet from 1925 titled 'Gima: de Yenda-man' by Petrus

11 The purchase was funded by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and is thus part of the loan collection of the Afrika Museum, and now the NMVW.

12 The Dutch term for Crosiers is *Kruisheren*, the official name is the *Orde van het Heilig Kruis* (Canons Regular of the Order of the Holy Cross). The Latin name is *Ordo Sanctae Crucis*.

Andriessen, a missionary in Northwest Uele in the DRC (Figure 3).

*Power figure, also called nkisi*

One of the more iconic objects of the Afrika Museum also has one of the most intricate provenance histories. This power figure, also known as *nkisi nkondi*, is a 93 cm high human figure with two cavities in its abdomen, closed off by mirrors. Nails and iron pieces have been hammered into its body, head and arms, of which one is raised up. In this way the figure is activated, as the *nkisi* used to protect and support the community, helping to identify and punish enemies and wrongdoers. Not all the puzzle pieces of this object's biography have been found yet, but what is known suggests that its trajectory connects with the history of missionary collecting in multiple ways. The *nkisi* (AM-172-1) was bought from the CHS seminary in Saverne in north-eastern France on 2 November 1968 and is the only object that was acquired from them. Saverne is the birthplace of one of the founders of the congregation, François Libermann (1802-1852). A handwritten note on the inventory card states that the *nkisi* was displayed at the Vatican Mission Exhibition in 1925, a year designated by Pope Pius XI as a holy year. The exhibition was a major success: 'Over one million people came to Rome to view the exposition, held from December 21, 1924, to January

10, 1926.' (Dries 2016: 120). Around ten years before the exhibition took place, a postcard was published with the *nkisi* on it (Figure 4). By analysing the typography and the stamp, the postcard could be dated between 1910 and 1917, while the description states that the so-called 'fétiche du Congo Portugais' was in the collection of M. Bisch from Marlenheim, France. No information is available about the period between 1917 and 1925, nor is it

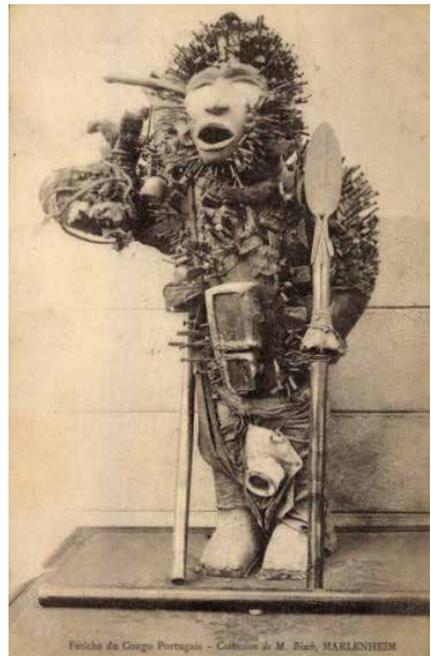


Figure 4. E. Tutkovits, Postcard showing the power figure (AM-172-1) that is currently in the Afrika Museum, c. 1910 – 1917. The spear in its left hand is no longer present.

clear when the object left the Cabinda region and arrived in France. However, Saverne and Marlenheim are close to each other and a relation between the two previous owners is not unlikely. The history of the CHS missionaries in the Congo region, who arrived there in 1866, and the knowledge that most of these larger nkisi are estimated to have been made between 1850 and 1900 might be avenues for future research (Congregation of the Holy Spirit n.d.; Faber 2016: 15).

## Conclusion

The search for the trajectories of these and many other objects in the NMVW collection, illustrates both the complexity and potential of provenance research in connection with the missionary-related collections of the museum. As investigations into objects and the people connected to them continue, they will shed light on the history of the Afrika Museum, the Dutch missionaries in different parts of Africa, and the circumstances in which this African heritage was acquired. Hopefully more collection analyses such as these can be shared in the future to expand the knowledge of this significant part of ethnographic collecting in Dutch museums.

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# Moving the immovable: Four Buddha heads from Tianlongshan

**Karwin Cheung**

## Introduction

In 1937 the Japanese businessman and politician Nezu Kaichirō<sup>1</sup> (1860 – 1940) offered as a gift of international goodwill nineteen Buddha heads from the Chinese cave temples of Tianlongshan to the governments of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Consequently, nineteen fragments of these once immovable sculptures, dating from the Northern Qi (550 – 577) and Tang (618 – 907) dynasties, were scattered into museums across the world. The four Buddha heads offered to the Netherlands are today in the collection of Museum Volkenkunde, a constituent museum of the National Museum of World Cultures. The Tianlongshan caves held some of the finest examples of Tang dynasty Buddhist sculpture and gained

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1 In this article Japanese names are written with the family name first in adherence to Japanese government policy.

international attention when their existence was published by Japanese archaeologist Sekino Tadashi (or Tei, 1868 – 1935) in 1918. Over the course of the following decade sculptures were removed, either in part or fully, and sold on the international art market. The dispersal of statues from Tianlongshan happened with a remarkable speed, and it took only two decades for the Tianlongshan sculptures to arrive in Leiden, in the process going through the hands of some of the best-known dealers, collectors, and historians of Asian art at the time.

In European and North American museums, Buddha heads are commonly displayed as singular objects, with little notion of their original context (Grasskamp and Loeseke 2015). By tracing the provenance of these four heads, I aim to historicize the contexts through which these sculptural fragments moved. The acquisition of these heads is entangled with cultural and international politics, global art trade, and art history. These movements made it possible for religious statuary to transform from art to market commodity to diplomatic gift and finally to a museum object.

## The sculptures of Tianlongshan and their dispersal

The cave temple complex of Tianlongshan (heavenly dragon

mountain) was built from the sixth to the ninth century at a site west of the city of Jinyang (modern day Taiyuan) in Shanxi province, northern China. During the Eastern Wei (534 – 550) and Northern Qi (550 – 577) dynasties, Jinyang was the secondary capital, and the city remained an important metropolitan centre during the subsequent Sui (581 – 618) and Tang (619 – 907) dynasties, due to its location along trade routes to Central Asia and India.

Tianlongshan consists of 25 caves and numerous small niches cut into the sandstone cliffs of two opposing peaks. These manmade caves vary in size, with the largest cave, number nine, holding a Buddha sculpture measuring 7.5 meters in height. The sculptures, likewise cut into the sandstone cliffs, were beautifully carved and stand in natural relaxed poses. The size of the site and the fine quality of the sculptures suggest patronage from the highest level of society (Howard et al. 2006: 309).

When the Japanese archaeologist Sekino Tadashi published his findings about Tianlongshan in 1918, the site was no longer in use. Sekino, a professor at the University of Tokyo, had visited Tianlongshan as part of a survey of archaeological remains in China sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Education (Saito 2008). Such surveys in East Asia by Japanese archaeologists were common at the

time. Sekino himself had in the previous years already done fieldwork for the Japanese government in Korea and China. Victories in the Sino-Japanese war (1894 – 1895) and the Russo-Japanese war (1904 – 1905) had led to the expansion of the Japanese Empire into the mainland of East Asia. Newly acquired territories and their hinterlands were to be mapped through excavations and archaeological surveys.

In the years after Sekino's publication, Tianlongshan would draw attention from all over the world. The site had the misfortune of being 'discovered' at a time when both demand in Chinese antiquities was high and the capability of Chinese governments to protect cultural heritage was low. Despite repeated attempts, the Chinese government was not able to implement effective export controls until 1930.

By 1930, however, a large number of heads, torsos, and complete sculptures had already been removed from the caves. That year, just 12 years after the first publication of Tianlongshan, the historian of Chinese art, Osvald Siren (1879-1966) wrote: 'The most important ensemble of cave sculptures of the Northern Chi period is – or rather was, before the recent destructions – to be found in the earliest caves at T'ien lung shan in central Shansi' (Siren 1930: 36).

The removal of sculptures and sculptural fragments from Tianlongshan were acts of violence.

The sculptures themselves are quite literally immovable, being cut into the sandstone cliffs. Any removal of constituent parts such as heads or torsos thus depended on breaking it off from the whole sculpture. The latter activity was widely mourned by curators and art historians. Herman Visser (1890-1965), curator of the Dutch Society for Asian art, wrote in 1936 about the Tianlongshan sculpture in his own collection:

It is well known to what extent the scandalous destruction of Chinese Buddhist cave temples has progressed. A few decades ago the caves of Yungang and Longmen [...] had fallen victim to it. Around 1922 the figures of Tianlongshan were relieved of their heads, while a decade later complete figures were removed, such as the beautiful torso in our museum (Visser 1936: 128).

It is important to note that with the removal of heads and sculptures not only the integrity of the sculptures was harmed but also the integrity of the entire temple cave. Sculptures in cave temples were not considered as individual objects but were rather part of a complete visual programme in which the combination of statues and painted and carved walls and ceilings created religious meaning (Figure 1).

Today most Tianlongshan sculptures are found outside of China. The most recent and complete



Figure 1. Ceiling of the southern part of Cave 2 (*Tenryūzan Sekkutsu* 天龍山石窟, 1922, plate 12).

inventory of sculptures removed from Tianlongshan is the Tianlongshan Caves Project (TCP) initiated by the University of Chicago in 2013. The TCP identified 162 sculptures. Forty-one of these objects were either in private collections or in otherwise unknown locations. Three sculptures were in collections in the People's Republic of China. The remaining 119 sculptures were in museums in Japan, Europe, and North America.

## Nezu's collection

The Japanese businessman Nezu Kaichirō (1860-1940) acquired a great fortune through stock investments and the railways. Turning his attention to politics, he was elected a member of the house of representatives in 1904 and selected as a member of the house of peers in 1926. Nezu was also an enthusiastic collector of Asian art, with a collection that spanned paintings, ceramics, ancient bronzes, and sculptures. The Nezu Museum in Tokyo, which was established after his death, is today one of the most prominent

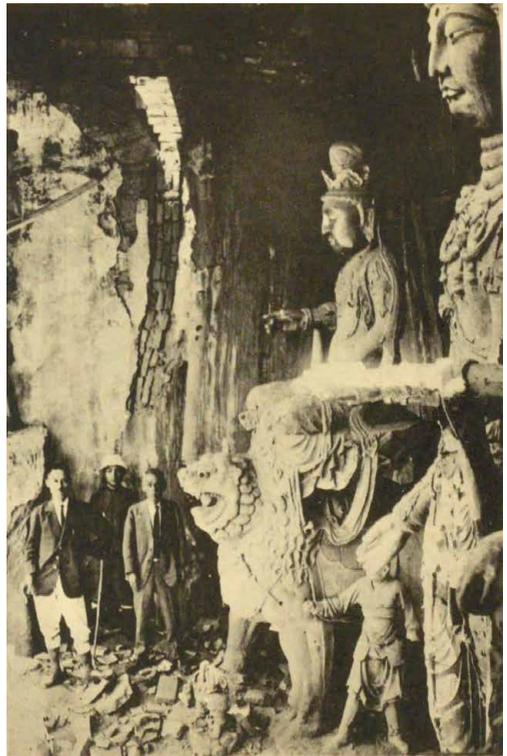
Figure 2. Yamanaka Sadajirō standing on the right in one of the caves of Tianlongshan, 1939, photograph (*Biography of Yamanaka Sadajirō* 山中定次郎伝, 1939, plate facing p.28).

private museums in Japan. Seven sculptures from Tianlongshan are still on display at the museum today.

Nezu bought his collection of Tianlongshan sculptures in 1928 from the Japanese art dealer Yamanaka Sadajirō (1866 – 1936). It would not be an exaggeration to call Yamanaka the single most important dealer of Chinese artworks in the early twentieth century, selling works to almost all important museums and collectors in the United States and Europe. At its height Yamanaka and co. had branches in Beijing, Shanghai, Osaka, Kyoto, London, Paris, Chicago, Boston, and New York.

Yamanaka had travelled to the cave temples of Tianlongshan twice, in 1924 and 1926 (Figure 2). In 1928, a sales exhibition of Tianlongshan sculptures was held at the Yamanaka and co. branch in Osaka. The accompanying catalogue *Tenryūsan sekibutsushū* (Collection of stone Buddhas from Tianlongshan), includes his personal account of his journeys to Tianlongshan and a preface by Sekino Tadashi, who had written the first accounts of the site in 1918.

In the preface Sekino (1928) provides a description of how the



sculptures came into Yamanaka's possession:

When [the Tianlongshan sculptures] were made public, scholars, domestic and foreign, suddenly began to pay a visit to them in ever-increasing numbers. The beauty of the carvings executed in the caves immensely astonished them, so that the highest admiration came to be expressed louder and louder. Seizing advantage of it, the ignorant natives got a bad habit of taking off the heads of Buddha and Bodhisattva and selling them to foreigners. Therefore, hundreds of these heads



Figure 3. The northern wall of cave 2 (*Tenryūzan Sekkutsu* 天龍山石窟, 1922, plate 6).

formerly found in the inside and outside of the caves have forever disappeared.

Sekino continues that Yamanaka had now bought these sculptures, whenever they were offered to him, in order to safeguard these objects for future generations. Although such straightforward motivations of preservation were already questioned at the time, Sekino's words are indicative of the contradictory attitudes

held by Japanese intellectuals in this era – an admiration of classical culture but disdain for the contemporary people (Xu 2016).

### The identity of the Tianlongshan sculptures

The 1928 sales exhibition at the Yamanaka and co. branch in Osaka was advertised as being wholly focused on Tianlongshan sculptures. Although many of the heads shown

at this exhibition can be traced back to Tianlongshan, there were also statues that possibly had a different provenance. What follows is a short overview of the four statues that would eventually be acquired by the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde as the museum was called at that time.

RV-2334-1, number 29 in Yamanaka's catalogue, has been identified as the head of the right seated bodhisattva statue of the north wall in cave 18. The cave measures about 2.2 meters in width and 2 meters in length. It is considered to be one of the finest Tang period caves at Tianlongshan, though many of its sculptures have been removed (Vanderstappen and Rhie 1965: 204-207).

RV-2334-2, number 21 in the Yamanaka catalogue, is the head of a Buddha. It has been stylistically dated to the Tang period. However, it is unknown from which precise cave this head was removed. The Tianlongshan Caves project lists this head as being possibly from one of the smaller caves of Tianlongshan.

RV-2334-3 has been identified as the head of the main Buddha on the northern wall of cave 2 (Vanderstappen and Rhie 1965: 192). The pair of caves 2 and 3 were the first caves to be carved at Tianlongshan during the Eastern Wei period. Cave 2 is 2.5 meters wide and 2.6 meters long. The main figure sat in a curtained

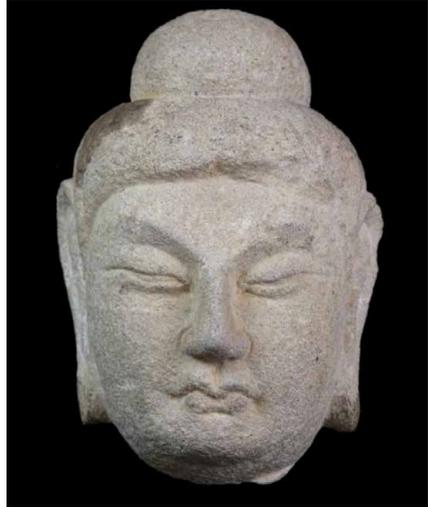


Figure 4. Head of a Buddha, Eastern Wei period (534 – 550), Sandstone, 24.1 x 15.5 cm. National Museum of World Cultures, RV-2334-3.

niche, with two standing Bodhisattvas flanking him (Figures 3 and 4).

RV-2334-4, number 25 in the Yamanaka catalogue, is the sandstone head of a Bodhisattva. It shows a slight red tone, unlike the uniform grey sandstone of other sculptures from Tianlongshan. In addition, its style of carving, with a slightly elongated head and flat facial features, differs from other sculptures from Tianlongshan. The difference in style of RV-2334-4 from the rest of the statues raises the possibility that the sculptures sold by Yamanaka in 1928 were put together from a variety of sources, rather than being solely from Tianlongshan.

## Nezu's donation

On 10 March 1937, Jean Charles Pabst (1873 – 1942), the Dutch diplomatic envoy stationed in Tokyo, sent a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Pabst 1937). He informed the minister that the prominent Japanese businessman and politician Nezu Kaichirō would like to present a gift of four Chinese Tang dynasty Buddha heads to a Dutch museum.

This gift to the Dutch government was in fact part of a larger present to four European governments to create international goodwill. Besides the Netherlands, Nezu also offered Tianlongshan sculptures to Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. The five sculptures given to the United Kingdom are now in the collections of the British Museum in London. The five sculptures given to Italy are today in the collections of Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome. Of the five sculptures given to Germany only two are still in Germany at the Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst in Cologne.<sup>2</sup>

International goodwill was in short supply in that period. In the preceding years Japan had intensified its military operations in China, culminating in the installation of a puppet government

in Manchuria in 1931. Japan's activities led to such widespread international criticism that two years later in 1933 the Japanese government withdrew from the League of Nations in protest. The situation had deteriorated to such an extent that in 1936 Pabst mistakenly interpreted Japanese military exercises as an upcoming Japanese attack on the Dutch East Indies.

Considering the political circumstances of the time, it is probably no coincidence that the four countries to which Nezu offered gifts, all had considerable interests in Asia. However, diplomacy alone does not explain the choice of Chinese works of art for Nezu's gift. After all, it would perhaps have been more fitting to present Japanese objects as a gift, if the objective was to improve relations between Japan and European governments.

An explanation for the choice of Chinese objects is found in the cultural politics of the time. Sekino Tadashi, who was a vocal proponent for the protection of Chinese cultural heritage, is again an illustrative example. Sekino urged Japanese museums and collectors to gather as many Chinese relics from all historical times as possible. In addition, he encouraged these wealthy Japanese collectors to donate their holdings to public collections. The removal of Chinese objects to Japan in order to safeguard them might seem paradoxical but such proposals must

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2 The three other sculptures are thought to have been taken to Russia. It has, however, not been confirmed whether these are still in the country.

be seen in context of the ideology of Pan-Asianism, which was en vogue in Japan at the time and in which Japan was considered the natural leader of a unified Asia (Xu 2016). Through the presentation of Chinese cultural objects, Nezu was not just aiming to improve international goodwill, but he was also, consciously or unconsciously, making a case for Japan as the caretaker of East Asian material culture.

It is safe to say that the implications of these cultural politics were completely lost on the Dutch diplomats and politicians who had to make a decision whether to accept Nezu's gift. There was a great deal of confusion about the historical and financial value of these statues. Pabst (1937) remarked in his first letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs that considering the Japanese regulations on the export of important antiquities, the sculptures might not be of much value at all.

In order to ascertain the value of the sculptures, the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Sciences sent a letter to the Board of Curators of the University of Leiden to ask for their opinion. The Board of Curators forwarded this question to Willem Rassers (1877-1973), the director of Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde. Rassers and Carel Krieger (1884-1970), the curator of Asian Art, immediately recognized the heads for what they were. Rassers wrote back that the four sculptures were of exceptional value and would be a tremendous

addition to the collections of the museum (Rassers 1937). Urged on by the acceptance of Nezu's gift by other European governments and the advice from Rassers, a decision was made. On 23 April 1937, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a telegram to the Dutch legation in Tokyo, informing them that the Dutch government accepted Nezu's gift on behalf of Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde (Foreign Affairs 1937).

On 24 June 1937, Nezu presented the sculptures to acting envoy Jan Herman van Roijen (1905 – 1991) at the Dutch legation in Tokyo. The sculptures were then transported to Yokohama where they were shipped to Rotterdam. By October 1937, the statues had arrived at the museum in Leiden, where they were registered as series 2334. For his gift, Nezu was awarded the royal distinction of a *Museumpenning in goud* (a golden museum medal).

## The Tianlongshan sculptures at the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde

On 30 November 1937, Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde celebrated the official opening of its new building, the former academic hospital at the Steenstraat in Leiden. This was a joyous affair, as the museum's former accommodations had not always been ideal. The Tianlongshan heads were put on display in a gallery in the left wing of the building together with other Buddha

heads from Thailand. The heads were immediately recognized as belonging to the top pieces of the museum. In a review of the newly reopened museum, Herman Visser (1890 – 1965), the curator of the Dutch Society for Asian Art, hailed the heads as the best pieces of Chinese art in the museum (Visser 1938: 82).

The Tianlongshan heads were mounted on square bases, a mode of display that showed little of their former context but was in line with European museum practice of the day (Grasskamp and Loeseke 2015). This was a manner of display analogous to the one of busts and heads made in the Greco-Roman tradition. Continuities with the Greco-Roman tradition had not only informed the display of the statues but also their appreciation. The next year three of the Tianlongshan heads (RV-2334-1, RV-2334-3, and RV-2334-4) were lent to the exhibition *Uit de Schatkamers van de Oudheid* (From the Treasure Chambers of Antiquity). This exhibition, held from 3 September to 16 October 1938 at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, had been organized to celebrate the 40 year jubilee of Queen Wilhelmina's reign. For the show, the cut-off point for Chinese art was the end of the Tang dynasty, as works from later dynasties were considered to clash too much stylistically with works from ancient Egypt and Greece (Visser 1937: 384).

Today the statues are not on display in the China gallery of Museum

Volkenkunde but the Tianlongshan heads are still subject to active research. Between 2014 and 2016, the Tianlongshan Caves Project of the University of Chicago made 3D scans of known removed Tianlongshan sculptures. The four heads in the collection of Museum Volkenkunde were included in this project. The results of this three-year project were on view at the exhibition *Sites and Images* held at the OCAT Institute Beijing from 16 September to 31 December 2017. The exhibition included a digital reconstruction of cave 2 which the Chicago researchers obtained by combining a 3D model of Tianlongshan cave 2 and the 3D scans of fragments removed from the cave, such as RV-2334-3 (Wu 2017).

## Conclusion

The removal and acquisition of the Tianlongshan heads depended on a series of conceptual transformations, in which fixed religious images were transformed respectively into art historical objects, moveable market commodities, collectables, diplomatic gifts, and, lastly, museum objects. In this case, the four heads became part of an ethnographic museum collection, whereas the majority of removed Tianlongshan sculptures are today in museums of fine art.

Current ethnographic museum practice favours the contextualization of

objects and dialogue with communities of origin (Modest 2019). In such a paradigm, the fragmentary nature of the Tianlongshan heads becomes a liability. In order to illustrate the practice of Buddhism, an intact Buddha sculpture is more suitable than a sculptural fragment. In addition, the display of a sculptural fragment may even be seen as inimical to Buddhism, as it is predicated on the destruction of a sacred sculpture. Such concerns explain to an extent why the Tianlongshan heads are currently not on display at Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, whereas the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, a museum of fine art, shows several Buddhist sculptural fragments in its Asian pavilion.

The importance of these statues however urges us to grapple with them. One avenue is the creation of digital reconstructions as has been done by the University of Chicago, another avenue would be to seek new stories to tell. As this article has shown, these statues have been endowed with new meanings since their removal from Tianlongshan. As such, the Tianlongshan heads are no longer just Buddhist objects. Histories of the twentieth century art trade and imperialism in East Asia have become part of their story as well.

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# Large feather headdress RV-1999-550

**Erna Lilje**

In many parts of New Guinea feather headdresses were, and continue to be, worn for dancing on important ceremonial occasions. This headdress (Figure 1) is a century old, and though its place of origin has been recorded in museum records as Yule Island, further investigation suggests that this attribution was made because it was the location of the Sacred Heart Missionaries headquarters rather than the location of the source community. There are good reasons, which are described below, to think it is actually from the nearby mainland.

New Guinea is famously linguistically diverse – within a 15 km radius of Yule Island there are four language families, each with many dialects (Figure 2). Despite this, the peoples within this area share many similarities in material culture and practices, for example the production and use of large feather headdresses.



Figure 1. Feather headdress (above) and detail (below), purchased 1920, feathers, bird of paradise skin, turtle-shell, shells (melo, cowrie, nassa), coix seeds, cane, plant-fibre cord, glass beads, 240 x 200 x 30 cm. National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands, RV-1990-550.

## Clan objects

Large feather headdresses were only worn by more prominent people and were an important part of large festive occasions. The shape and composition of the headdress was reserved for the use of clan members, as a form of clan 'badge' (Seligman 1910: 210). Historic photographs show that within a community dressed for dancing, only a small number wear the large headdresses with others donning smaller feather headdresses and ornaments. Although primarily associated with men, these images also show that, though uncommon, women could wear large headdresses (Figure 3).

This headdress is 200 x 240 x 30 cm, and the radiating struts were once covered in feathers, that were fastened into place with the string binding that remains visible. Weighted with shells near their tips, the struts would have swayed with a stately grace, the weight and size of the construction requiring the wearer to dance with an upright bearing and poise.

Large feather headdresses are a composite of feather and shell components, themselves valuables that could be used for socially significant transactions such as the paying of a bride-price. The 23 rondels of bailer shell (*Melo sp.*) and fretworked turtle-shell, commonly called *kapkap* (in Tok Pisin), can be worn by men and women.

In addition to being prized finery, they are deployed in diverse social contexts to confer prestige and protection. For example, promised brides wore them on their arms. Some of the bird species used would have been sourced from inland trade partners, which also added to the overall value of the headdress (Cohen 2018).<sup>1</sup>

The wearer of a large headdress would not necessarily, or even been likely to have, owned all of the valuables. Many would have been borrowed from family or clan members for use during the special occasion and then returned. This practice demonstrated the cohesiveness and wealth of the group and how well connected the wearer was. These factors mean that it is hard to imagine the circumstances in which they are given away or sold. No one person would have had the authority to relinquish all the component parts from which the headdress is made, so it must have been a matter of discussion amongst the clan members. That said, there is no reason to think that the headdress was taken without permission. Being a very large and awkward object, it could not have been transported without the agreement, and cooperation, of the owners. Moreover,

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1 The following bird species have been identified on headdress RV-1999-550: *Gallus gallus*, *Charmosyna papou*, *Charmosyna placensis*, *Ptilinopus rivolii*, *Cacatua galerita*, *Parotia wahnesi*, *Charmosyna pulchella*, and *Aprosmictus species*.



Figure 2. Map showing the location of Yule Island and mainland areas discussed in this article (map adapted from Mori 2019).

further research might reveal that to secure such a treasure was the measure of the regard in which the Belgian Father Henri Van Neck who collected it, was held.

One response to a Facebook post about the headdress suggests that the carrying of awkward loads are among the memories that people have of him:

...Attached here is the picture of the Church at Vanamai. I think it was later refurbished by Father

Max Gremaud in the 60's; Father Van Neck is still remembered in the stories pass [sic] on by the old people in the village. There are stories of how he got the villages to carry all the steel structures from Rena up to Vanamai (2-3 hours walk). At the back of the church is a school and the whole area is still been [sic] called "Nao Vanua" (Europeans Village) (Nemesiala Oa 2020).<sup>2</sup>

2 Extracted from a Facebook post made by James Nemesiala Oa on 26 May 2020: [https://www.facebook.com/groups/262009843878600/?multi\\_permalinks=2990441511035406&notif\\_id=1590292967347953&notif\\_t=feedback\\_reaction\\_generic&ref=notif](https://www.facebook.com/groups/262009843878600/?multi_permalinks=2990441511035406&notif_id=1590292967347953&notif_t=feedback_reaction_generic&ref=notif).

Figure 3. Detail of 'Dance, Waima', before 1902, photograph. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, P.2126.ACH1. Image courtesy of Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.



Father Henri Van Neck (1874 – 1929), had his first stint as a Sacred Heart Missionary in New Guinea from 1902 until 1913. During this period, he was responsible for establishing a church and school at Vanamai, one of the five villages of the Lala language group, on the mainland approximately 15 km from Yule Island.<sup>3</sup> He was forced to return

to Belgium in 1913 due to exhaustion from his living conditions. At around this time, he arranged for the collection he had made to be transported to Europe. In a letter to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum in Leiden he stated that he had intended to use the collection to promote the mission's work in Europe (Van Neck 1920). Bringing back artefacts from mission sites in order to increase awareness and support of overseas

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3 Also known as Nara or Nala.

missions was a popular practice at this time. He wrote that he had been preparing to return to New Guinea when the war broke out in 1914 (Van Neck 1920). The changed world and personal circumstances eventually led to him offering the collection for sale in 1920.<sup>4</sup>

He mentions that initially he approached the Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde, the present-day Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam, however it appeared to want only a selection. Van Neck, however, was adamant that the collection should stay together. Eventually the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum made an offer of 500 guilder for the entire collection of 656 objects (Juynboll 1921: 5), which Van Neck accepted. Presumably these funds were destined for the use of the chronically underfunded mission (Langmore 1989: 202).

In addition to wanting the collection to remain together, Van Neck expressed a hope that the headdress would be displayed together with other accoutrements that might have been worn with a feather headdress (Van Neck 1920). This has never happened, and neither was a record made of which objects these would be. However, it is possible to see many appropriate candidates (men's bark cloth decorations, and arm, leg and chest bling are all well represented in the collection). Van Neck also notes that, as

result of the six years that had elapsed, he no longer remembered the names of the items in the collection.

## Clues about the source community

Another missionary, Rev. Harry Moore Dauncey (1863 – 1932), offers a clue in relation to the origin of the large headdress. As was the practice in many colonial situations, the government administration allocated areas within which the missionary organisations of various Christian denominations could carry out their work of saving of souls. The London Missionary Society (protestant) had been the first missionary group on the southeast coast of New Guinea and had already established themselves on much of the coast and inland areas for almost a decade before the Sacred Heart Missionaries set up their headquarters on Yule Island and so there was a mixture of Catholic and Protestant missionaries active during Van Neck's first stint in New Guinea. The LMS missionary Dauncey was based at the nearby village of Delena. Though this is a village of the Waima language group, he recounts attending an event at the Lala village of Oroï.<sup>5</sup>

The invitation had been sent by 'queen' Koloko who is perhaps the only

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4 In 1914 Van Neck voluntarily enlisted in the Belgian Army as a chaplain, for which he received an honour (Langmore 1989: 308).

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5 Also referred to as Roro, though Roro is one dialect of the Waima language.

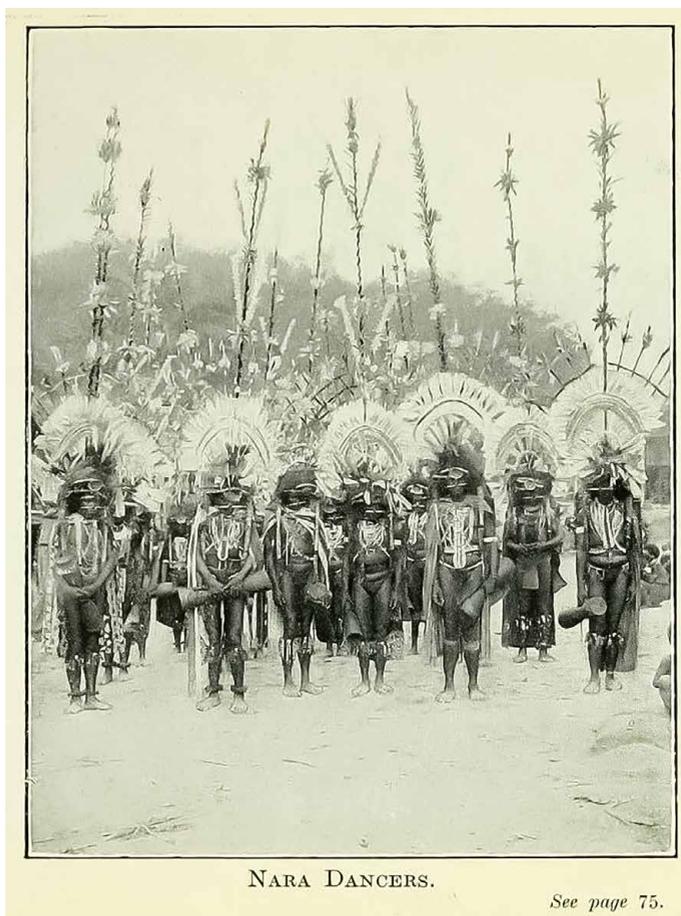


Figure 4. 'Nara Dancers', opposite page 84, in Dauncey's *Papuan Pictures*.

woman who appears in the historical record over a period of thirty years. The foundational LMS missionary Rev. William George Lawes (1839 – 1907) wrote of her as a leader and as a person of standing, influencing the extensive indigenous trade networks that connected the peoples of the coast and interior. Among the items that she was keen to trade, were 'fine netted bags' and 'women's petticoats'

(Lawes 1876-1884: 23rd July 1881). Some decades later, Van Neck collected examples of such fibre skirts and fine string bags that continued to be made and traded through the regional networks of which Koloko was a part.

Dauncey, Van Neck's contemporary, wrote that Koloko had decided to organise a big dance and word had been sent out to all the neighbouring villages (Dauncey 1913: 72). He notes

the Waima and Lala people attended the event and, fortunately for us, described and photographed the large headdresses (Figure 4) of the Lala people:

The village club house was like a theatrical property shop. Feather head dresses eight and ten feet high were standing round the walls, hanging from the rafters, and one even on the roof. We hardly recognized some of our friends under the paint and feathers (Dauncey 1913: 76).

## The broader context

If we stick with the individual recollections and biographical details of missionaries, we miss the bigger picture. Van Neck was not acting in isolation, there is a whole context that should be a part of the picture when thinking about how things end up where they do and what consequences or responsibilities may result because of them. Missionaries played an important role in colonial projects. In the New Guinea context, the colonial administration and missionaries shared the common rhetoric of ‘protection’ of native people. At the outset, protection was connected to indigenous ownership of lands and personal liberty, in the sense of defence of indigenous persons from unsanctioned interference (Jinks

et al 1973: 37).<sup>6</sup> Though the rhetoric of ‘protection’ continued to be used by the administration and missionaries for several decades, the types of actions deployed in its name changed over time. During the early years of the colonial period (1884 – 1887) the administration exercised a high level of control over the types of foreigners that could access indigenous people and on the kinds of engagements it was possible for them to have (Lewis 1996: 20). Some of the earliest regulations were those that prohibited the sale of liquor, fire arms, and explosives (Oram 1976: 21). In addition, employers were required to obtain permits if they wished to move indigenous workers from their home areas, and the coast was closed to ships without permits in order to control European migration (Lewis 1996: 20).

From 1900 to 1920, there was an increased focus on industrial mission and individual self-sufficiency (Fife 2001: 260). The welfare of indigenous people

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6 ‘Have noted that the statement given on November 1885 by Commodore James Elphinstone Erskine, onboard the HMS *Nelson* has frequently been quoted as an expression of the basic British policy in New Guinea. His intention was to explain the meaning of the official proclamation that the assembled chiefs would witness the next day. In it he said that they would fall under the protection of Her Majesty’s Government and that this would mean that ‘evil-disposed men will not be able to occupy your country, to seize your lands, or to take you away from your homes’ (Lyne 1885 quoted in Jinks et al 1973: 38).

became linked to economic interests. Alongside church and school, industrial work was thought by missionaries to be an education in itself, because they believed that it could inculcate new work habits for a new Christian morality (Fife 2001: 266). The belief in 'civilising industry' was not unique to the London Missionary Society, the earliest and most prominent missionary organisation at the time. It was an idea that had general currency in those days: J.H.P. Murray (1861-1940), the Lieutenant-Governor of the Australian Territory of Papua from 1908-40, expressed similar views during this period (Murray 1912: 346-7, 363).<sup>7</sup> Drill, based on the Boy's Brigade model, was adopted in schools by many mission stations as a means of disciplining individuals, and an increase in the number of examinations underlined the importance of mental discipline (Fife 2001: 266).<sup>8</sup>

It has been observed that colonization tends to bring with it pressures for a new kind of person (Taussig 1992: 84). Missionaries, such as Van Neck, by building churches, schools and vocational schools were an essential part of the colonial processes that

helped to develop in Papuans a habitus that was relatively friendly toward the organisational forms promoted firstly by the British (1884 – 1906) and then the Australian colonial governments (1906 – 1974), and was tuned to modernity and concomitant economic requirements of nation states.<sup>9</sup>

## Next steps

This headdress has had a sterling career of late, featuring in major exhibitions in London, Paris, and Leiden.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, in Leiden, it was presented in the context of the spectacular festival traditions of Oceania, the headdress being an iconic Papua New Guinean object.<sup>11</sup> The museum benefits from being the possessor of a masterpiece but what about the people from whom the headdress was collected, or at least their descendants? Retracing some of the biographic history has opened up a further, and perhaps more likely, people of origin – it could be from the Waima

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7 Britain passed control of the colony to Australia in 1906. British New Guinea became the Australian Territory of Papua.

8 The Boys' Brigade was founded in Glasgow by Sir William Alexander Smith on 4 October 1883 to develop Christian manliness by the use of a semi-military discipline and order, gymnastics, summer camps and religious services and classes.

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9 In 1972, the name of the territory was changed to Papua New Guinea and self-government was adopted. The Territory became the Independent State of Papua New Guinea on 16 September 1975.

10 <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibition/oceania>; <http://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/exhibitions-and-events/at-the-museum/exhibitions/event-details/e/oceanie-38063/>; <https://www.volkenkunde.nl/nl/eenzeevaneilanden>

11 The author worked on this exhibition, as assistant curator, together with Wonu Veys, as lead curator.

language group (of which Roro is a dialect) or Lala language group. Though pinning it to a specific place would take more research including more in-depth inquiry in Papua New Guinea.

By adding the broader context in which the collection was made, we not only get a fuller picture of where things came from but also catch sight of lines of action that a museum interested in addressing complex, sometimes difficult, histories, may take. For Papuans, being brought into work-readiness, as defined by western measures, and in which missionaries, like Van Neck, played an essential role, was not cost free. One century, of radical social change brought about and shaped through colonialism, missionisation and war in the Pacific, is enough time for people in Central Province to be on the edge of not knowing what they have lost and may yet be of value to them. One need not fall into the trope of bemoaning the 'dying out' of culture to think that there is real value to be had in seeing and knowing of the accomplished works of one's ancestors.

To test the waters, I have recently posted about two spectacular headdresses (one of which was RV-1999-550) to a Central Province history and heritage Facebook group (see footnote 15). People loved the headdresses and though they are familiar with contemporary versions no one had seen one quite as grand as

this, as well crafted, or as laden with valuables. There were varied levels of knowledge and some people shared interesting recollections. Though it was a pleasure to be party to these discussions, and I did obtain some information, my objective in making the post was not an extractive one. It was to put it out there and see if people were interested.

And actually, from the museum-worker's perspective it is not possible to know the impact and value that knowledge of one's material culture heritage might have. There is, however, a responsibility to make it available so that whatever potentialities they hold are made realisable. In the midst of the museum world, it is easy to forget that knowledge about the material in the collections is often not wide spread in the countries of origin. Though the Facebook posts are a small action, and the 'evidence' is anecdotal, they suggest that there are now more opportunities for the museum to meet its responsibilities with regard to letting people know where their things are.

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# Model ox-wagon: Prisoner of war art and pro-Boer propaganda

**François Janse van Rensburg**

## Introduction

The model ox-wagon (RV-2584-169a-b) in the collection of the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) was found unnumbered in an attic of Museum Volkenkunde in 1995. It has been part of the permanent display at Museum Volkenkunde since 2011. The ox-wagon, or *ossewa* as it is called in Afrikaans, was one of the most prominent symbols of white Afrikaner nationalism. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this humble means of long-distance transportation was elevated and mythologized as a symbol of the European settlement of South Africa.

Objects made by white South Africans are rare in Dutch ethnographic collections. In the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, Dutch nationalism emphasized *stamverwantschap* or kinship with the Afrikaners who at that time

were better known as *Boers*.<sup>1</sup> Because they were seen as related to the Dutch, objects by Boers were often deemed unsuitable for inclusion in Dutch ethnographic museums, which were supposed to showcase the non-European world.

Afrikaners are predominantly descended from Dutch settlers who first arrived in South Africa following the establishment of an outpost at the Cape of Good Hope by the Dutch East India Company in 1652. Some of these settlers adopted a mobile, pastoralist life-style similar to the indigenous Khoikhoi peoples whom they drove out and displaced. These settlers continuously expanded the frontier of the colony, leading to conflicts with other Southern African peoples such as the Xhosa (Ross 2010: 168-210). The British conquered the Cape Colony in 1806, and began to encourage the immigration of British settlers in 1820. A segment of the Dutch speaking settlers, particularly those at the frontiers of the colony resented British rule, and after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834, began to migrate in large numbers into the interior of Southern Africa, beyond British control and restrictions on the

Boer's ability to seize land and enslave labour (Ross 2008: 22-58; Leggasick and Ross 2010: 253-318).

This migration was known as the 'Great Trek'. The Boer migrants travelled in ox-wagons, which served as mobile homes, and could be arranged in a circular formation, lashed together to form a temporary fortification known as a *laager*. Equipped with guns, horses, and ox-wagons, the Boers were able to acquire a substantial territory in the interior of South Africa. This resulted in the establishment of several independent Boer republics that eventually merged into two larger Dutch-speaking Boer states: the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (ZAR) and the *Oranje Vrijstaat* (OVS). Following the discovery of gold and diamonds in the Boer republics, the two states came into conflict with the British Empire. The First South African War (1880 – 1881) secured the brief independence of the Boer republics, but the Second South African War, also known as the Second Boer War (1899 – 1902), culminated with a British victory and the creation of the modern state of South Africa (Ross 2008: 22-58).

Due to the perceived kinship between the Dutch and the Boers, the Boer cause was wildly popular in the Netherlands during the Second South African War, so much so that the public's support of the Boers is sometimes described as 'Boermania'

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1 For simplicity's sake, I will predominantly use the term *Boer* as the term was more widely used during the timeframe of this article. I will use *Afrikaner* only when referring to the present.



Figure 1. Model ox-wagon, 1901, wood, textile, metal. National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands, RV-2584-169a-b.

(Kuitenbrouwer 2017: 237-238). Much of the museum's Southern African holdings was collected by a small community of Dutch men with strong political, economic, or kinship ties with the Boers.

In this article, I will describe the provenance of this model ox-wagon from its creation to the present. It is remarkable that this object, which was found without number or provenance, is now one of the best documented objects in the museum's Southern African collection. In the article, I will focus on two stories. The first is the narrative of one of its (likely) creators James Smith, a prisoner of war during the Second South African War. The second is the story of its collector, Dr. Hendrik Muller and how objects like this one were used for propaganda by the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands.

## James Smith

The model ox-wagon is partially covered with canvas, and has a small wooden

chest on the front. Six model oxen are yoked to the wagon. The object is almost entirely made from wood, with a high level of skill and detail suggesting that its maker (or makers) was (or were) accomplished woodworkers and familiar with the design of ox-wagons. On the side of each of the six oxen is a pencil inscription, which was likely added by the maker of the model. The inscription reads as follows in Dutch, with English translation provided where needed in brackets.<sup>2</sup>

J. Smith, Krijgsgevangene  
 Paardeberg [Prisoner of war,  
 Paardeberg], 27-2-1900, SS  
 Armenian, 15-4-1901, Simonsbaj  
 [Simon's Town]

The inscription seems to indicate that J. Smith was a prisoner of war captured at the Battle of Paardeberg (18-27 February 1900) during the Second South

<sup>2</sup> First noted by NMWW curator for the Africa department, Annette Schmidt, who documented the object in 2010.

African War. The battle concluded with a Boer surrender, resulting in the British taking over 4,000 Boer prisoners of war. The large number of prisoners of war captured by the British through the course of the war imposed a significant logistical challenge. Boer prisoners of war were initially kept in prisoner of war camps in South Africa at places like Simon's Town, a town and naval base near Cape Town. Due to overcrowding and disease outbreaks, prisoners were also kept onboard ships in nearby harbours (Changuion 2000: 1-13), one of which was the SS *Armenian* mentioned in the inscription (Benbow 1962).

There is also a second inscription on the wooden chest on the front of the wagon. It is difficult to make out, but it appears to read [sic]:<sup>3</sup>

*Armenian* [?]  
*P. Veljoen* [?]  
*Krijgsgevangen*

Viljoen was an extremely common surname among the Boer prisoners of war and even narrowing it down to names starting with P leaves numerous potential candidates – and this is assuming the nearly illegible inscription does in fact read 'P. Viljoen'. Without additional information, I am unable to identify this person.

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3 The second inscription was discovered by Leiden University historian Hans Wilbrink in 2018 during a tour of the museum. He has also provided me with invaluable assistance during my research on this object.

The British encouraged the prisoners to take up various hobbies such as arts and crafts, which included making model ox-wagons like this one (Changuion 2000: 56). It seems plausible that Smith and Viljoen made this model ox-wagon while prisoners of war onboard the *Armenian* when the ship was still anchored at Simon's Town. The British eventually decided to ship many prisoners of war to various outposts of the British Empire most notably Bermuda, St. Helena, Ceylon, and India. A month after the inscription is dated, the *Armenian* departed for Bermuda with nearly 1,000 prisoners of war onboard (Benbow 1962; Biggins 2004-2020a).

There were several people named J. Smith who were captured at the Battle of Paardeberg. It is possible that this ox-wagon was made by any one of them, but the biographical details of one of these prisoners stand out as the most plausible candidate to have made this particular object. Prisoner of war records (Biggins 2004-2020b)<sup>4</sup> list a James Smith, aged 42, address Dieplaagte, that had been captured at the Battle of Paardeberg and sent to Bermuda. He is the only J. Smith sent to Bermuda, and given that this was the

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4 These records are available on an online database at <https://www.angloboerwar.com/>, that entry in turn is derived from the database of Anglo-Boer War Museum in Bloemfontein, South Africa (Biggins 2004-2020b).

destination of the *Armenian*, he is the most likely candidate. Smith must have made this ox-wagon on the *Armenian* but before being sent to Bermuda. It is plausible that P. Viljoen was sent to the same destination – a Piet Viljoen is listed as being sent there, though Viljoen may also have been sent to India as we will see later.

But who was James Smith? An article by Johann Tempelhoff (1994: 9-14) describes a James Smith (1858 – 1934) as one of the most important figures in the development of furniture made from indigenous South African woods. The same James Smith is discussed on a website run by his descendants (James Smith 2012). Neither the biography of Smith in Tempelhoff's article, nor the family website makes any mention of Smith having been a prisoner of war. However, this James Smith is almost certainly the maker of the ox-wagon as his prisoner of war record, including his age and address, match the biographical details provided by Tempelhoff and the Smith family website. After the war, the prisoner of war camps closed, and Smith would have been sent back to South Africa around 1902.

Tempelhoff (1994: 9-10) lists a number of theories regarding James Smith's background. One theory is that Smith was born in the United Kingdom, but it is most likely that he was born in the town of Dordrecht in the British Cape Colony. If this is the case, then Smith



Figure 2. Photo of a young James Smith, probably late 19<sup>th</sup> century, from Tempelhoff (1994: 1).

is possibly descendant from the British 1820 settlers. It appears Smith may have settled in the ZAR some time in 1870s or 1880s. He may have fought for the British in 1878 during one of the Anglo-Pedi Wars (1876 – 1879) and then either deserted or resigned from the army. Smith eventually settled himself in the Magoebaskloof area in the north of the present-day South Africa, which is known for its abundant and high-quality wood.

Here Smith established himself as a woodworker. The discovery of gold and diamonds led to the rapid settlement and development of the interior of South Africa. Wood was always in demand for use in mines, furniture, or the making of ox-wagons, the primary means of transporting goods and settlers to

and from the interior of the country. Smith was trained in wagon-making by his father in law (Tempelhoff 1994: 11-12). Could he have been a maker of ox-wagons? This could explain why Smith chose specifically to make a model ox-wagon while a prisoner of war.

Tempelhoff notes that Smith appears to have started producing furniture only after the end of the Second South African War, and that Smith's furniture is made in a distinctive 'Smith style' with influences from the first phase (1870-1890) of the British Arts and Crafts movement (Tempelhoff 1994: 12). Tempelhoff is uncertain as to how Smith was influenced by that trend and speculates that this may have been to satisfy the request of his customers, some of whom would have been settlers originating from the United Kingdom. However, it is possible that Smith's style was influenced by the Arts and Crafts inspired hobby art that the British encouraged Boer prisoners of war to make. This could explain both his switch to furniture making after the war, and the Arts and Crafts influences on his furniture. Smith achieved some renown for his furniture that is still sometimes sold today.<sup>5</sup> James Smith died in 1934 and is buried at his farm Dieplaagte.

## Hendrik Muller and pro-Boer propaganda

It is not known exactly how the model ox-wagon came to the Netherlands. In 1938 – 1939, an exhibition commemorating the centennial of the Great Trek was held in Amsterdam (December 1938) and in The Hague (January 1939). The model ox-wagon is clearly depicted on photographs of both the Amsterdam (Zuid-Afrikahuis 2020) and The Hague (Haagsche Courant 1939) exhibitions. The newspapers covering the exhibition as well as the exhibition catalogue state that the ox-wagon was sent in by Dr. H.P.N. Muller (Oudschans Dentz 1939: 1-3).

Curiously, these sources also state that the ox-wagon had been made by Boer prisoners of war interred in Mumbai, India and gifted to Muller. This contradicts the inscriptions on the object itself, which seem to indicate it was made in Simon's Town. Since we don't know how the object came to the Netherlands, it is possible that a prisoner of war from Simon's Town, maybe P. Viljoen or another prisoner later took the model to India. No J. Smith captured at Paardeberg appears in records of prisoner of war camps in India. There were several people named P. Viljoen, though I have not been able to link any of them to a camp near Mumbai. It is possible that the object has some connection to the

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5 A South African antique store, Riaan Bolt Antiques, lists two Smith armchairs as recently sold on their website (Riaan Bolt 2015-2020).



Boer prisoner of war camps in India that I have been unable to discover, but it is also conceivable that Muller's attribution is incorrect. The attribution by Muller is given nearly 40 years after the object was made, and Muller's own collection contained thousands of objects.

One may speculate as to why the ox-wagon was sent to the Netherlands and how it was used by looking at the life of Muller and the fate of similar objects and locating the ox-wagon within the larger theme of Dutch nationalism and pro-Boer propaganda.

Hendrik P.N. Muller (1859 – 1941) was the son of a wealthy Rotterdam merchant with extensive trading

Figure 3. The model ox-wagon at the Groote Trek Exhibition in Amsterdam, 1938. Fotoarchief Zuid-Afrikahuis Nederland, photo no. 40.

interests in Africa.<sup>6</sup> As a young man, Muller visited Southern Africa to oversee his father's interests in Mozambique, and he also visited South Africa where he became attracted to the Boer cause. During this trip, Muller began to collect ethnographic objects in Mozambique, and was appointed consul to the OVS.<sup>7</sup> After his return, Muller

6 Hendrik Muller is the subject of a new biography 'Wereldreiziger voor het Vaderland' by Dik van der Meulen (2020).

7 This collection formed the basis of the influential book *Industrie des Cafres*. The majority of his ethnographic collection today is in NMW in the RV-2211-\* and RV-2584-\* series.

became one of the leading members of the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands.

Following the loss of the Cape Colony to the British in 1806, there was relatively little public interest in the Boer cause in the Netherlands where the Great Trek was largely unknown (Kuitenbrouwer 2012: 38). However, after the First South African War (1880 – 1881), a sudden popular interest in the Boer cause emerged. This pro-Boer sentiment was harnessed and developed into a well-organized pro-Boer movement. During the Second South African War (1899 – 1902), this movement was funded by the governments of the Boer Republics as part of a concerted propaganda effort in Europe, which attempted to enlist allies in the war against the British.

Photographs, drawings, and objects related to the Second South African War featured prominently in pro-Boer propaganda efforts (Bossenbroek 1996: 307-309). During and immediately after the Second South African War, fundraising efforts were held across the Netherlands to raise donations for Boer prisoners of war, and the Boer women and children held in British concentration camps. Objects made by Boers, particularly prisoner of war art, were often displayed and sometimes sold in charity auctions. Shortly after the end of the Second South African War, the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Museum* was established in Dordrecht



Figure 4. Bust of H.P.N. Muller by Gra Reub, 1938, bronze, 68 x 57 x 41 cm. National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands, RV-5934-1.

in the Netherlands, and its collection included many of these propaganda objects (Kuitenbrouwer 2012: 275-279). Some years later a legal dispute arose relating to the ownership of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Museum* collection and the most important objects were sent to South Africa. However, the prisoner of war art was not sent to South Africa and instead auctioned off in the Netherlands.

## Conclusion

It seems probable that the model ox-wagon arrived in the Netherlands during or shortly after the Second South

African War, though it is not known exactly how or when this happened. It was likely featured in one or more of the pro-Boer exhibitions at the time. It may well have been a part of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Museum's* collection if it was not gifted to Muller directly.

Muller died in 1941 and bequeathed his enormous collection of ethnographic and other objects, as well as photos, to various Dutch museums most notably Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. Due to Muller dying during the Second World War, it was not immediately possible to execute his will, and at least some of his collection may have been lost or damaged following the bombing of the Hague in 1945 in which his house in Bezuidenhout was also damaged (Loder 1946).

As a result, the objects were only registered in the museums in 1946, and at this time, numerous registration errors were made. This could explain why the ox-wagon was never registered at all and is not mentioned in Museum Volkenkunde's inventory books. It is also possible that the ox-wagon, which was associated with European settlers, was not deemed suitable for the collection of an ethnographic museum such as Museum Volkenkunde and that the museum instead kept it as a prop. Objects by white South Africans are rare in Dutch ethnographic collections

precisely because they were used in Dutch nationalist and anti-British myth-making, and as a result, were more often than not deemed unsuitable for ethnographic museums, which preferred to focus on non-European cultures.

In the decades after the Second World War, the pro-Boer/Afrikaner cause in the Netherlands fell out of fashion following the international condemnation of apartheid. As a result, South African objects were no longer exhibited by Dutch museums as often as they once had been and many unregistered objects, like this ox-wagon, were forgotten in the depot. In any case, it was not rediscovered until 1995 when it was issued a temporary number.

As a result of the research detailed in this article, the ox-wagon was formally acquisitioned into the collection of the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures in 2020, and placed in the series of Muller's 1946 bequest (RV-2584-\*). Because objects by white South Africans are rare in the National Museum of World Cultures collection, and because it can speak about settler colonialism, the Second South African War, and Dutch nationalism, this humble model likely made by a prisoner of war in 1901, is now one of the top pieces in the museum's Southern African collection.

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# Kawahara Keiga's folding screen of Nagasaki Bay as a window on the world

**Davey Verhoeven**

## Introduction

Nagasaki was a surprisingly international city within the otherwise rather secluded Japan of the Edo period (1603 – 1868). The scene depicted on the monumental eight-panel folding screen painted by Kawahara Keiga (1786 – c.1860), as well as the commission, form, style, execution, materials, and even the screen's innards are testaments to the unique intersection of various Asian and European cultures occurring in Nagasaki in the early nineteenth century. Only this town in Edo-period Japan could have produced an artwork combining so many material and immaterial aspects with such an international provenance. Figure 1 portrays the Keiga folding screen in its unrestored state as it was acquired by the National Museum of World Cultures in 2018. The most prominent features in the bay are the fan-shaped Dutch



Figure 1. Kawahara Keiga, *Deshima in the Bay of Nagasaki*, c. 1836, folding screen with painting on silk, 171.7 × 464 cm. National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands, 7141-1.

trading post Deshima with the Dutch frigate *Marij en Hillegonda* to the right of it. Another noticeable element is the Chinese compound 'Tōjin yashiki' to the left of the square island.

The extraordinary features of the folding screen, *View of Deshima in Nagasaki Bay* (c. 1836), gives viewers a unique insight into various aspects of early nineteenth-century Nagasaki. Kawahara Keiga was born and raised in that southern Japanese city, and therefore, frequently not only witnessed

but also interacted with foreign cultures. Throughout his life, he often came into contact with Chinese, Dutch and Korean traders. The Dutch presence was particularly significant for him, because in the early 1810s, he became the designated painter of the Dutch trading post of Deshima.<sup>1</sup> These foreign influences shaped Keiga as an artist and also affected many aspects of his largest painting known to date. It is through

<sup>1</sup> Deshima was the name of the small artificial fan-shaped island in the harbour of Nagasaki on which the sole Dutch trading post in Japan was situated between 1639 and 1859. The Dutch were the only Europeans that were allowed to trade under strict regulations in Japan. Dutch traders were not allowed to leave this island, nor were Japanese citizens allowed to enter, beside some exceptions.



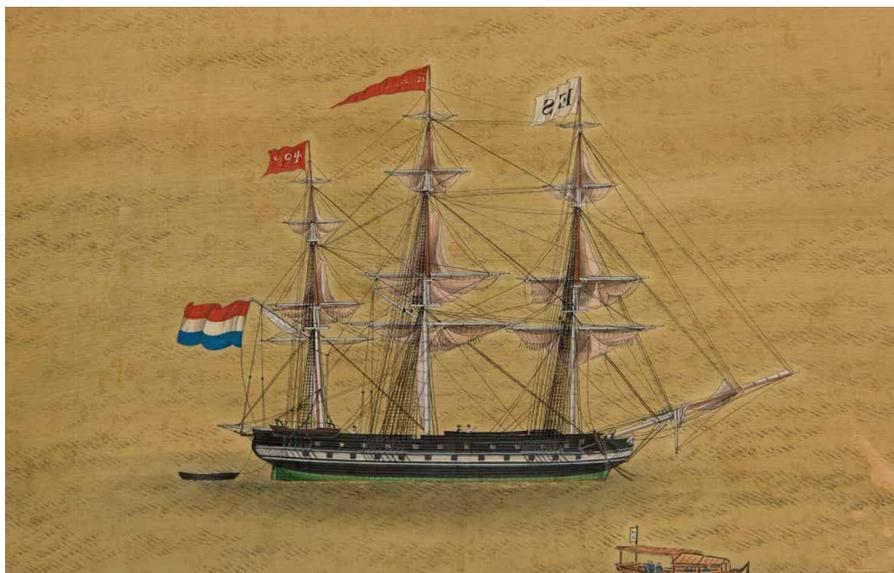
these foreign influences that the Keiga folding screen can be perceived as an essentially Japanese contemporaneous window on the world.

This article explores the provenance of the folding screen through an interdisciplinary examination of four distinct characteristics resulting in a reconstruction of how the early nineteenth-century international situation of Nagasaki impacted the creation of the screen. The first angle taken is an historic approach to study how commissions for Keiga and his studio were influenced by international connections in Nagasaki. The second angle will be an examination of how foreign contacts influenced the materials used in the Keiga folding

screen. The next aspect is how the composition of the painting on the folding screen was shaped by Keiga's meetings with the Dutch. Finally, this article will investigate how Japan's international situation led to censorship that in turn influenced decisions about what to include and – more conspicuously – what to leave out of the folding screen's depiction of Nagasaki Bay.

### Commissioning paintings from Keiga's workshop

While Keiga was famous for a large collection of botanical, zoological, ethnological, and genre paintings made at the request of Philipp Franz



von Siebold, these were not the only kind of paintings he made (Browne 1979: 3).<sup>2</sup> There is also a plenitude of variously-sized landscape paintings of the bay of Nagasaki known within his oeuvre. These panoramas share many features with the folding screen, including perhaps the reason why the latter was commissioned. The bay panoramas were likely memorabilia that ship captains and traders ordered from Keiga and his studio to take home with them. A clue for this is the great precision with which Dutch trading vessels are generally painted prominently in the centre of these paintings. Particularly striking are the details in their flags

Figure 2. The Dutch frigate the *Marij & Hillegonda*, which visited Japan only once in 1836. Kawahara Keiga, Deshima in the Bay of Nagasaki, c. 1836, folding screen with painting on silk, 171.7 × 464 cm. National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands, 7141-1.

and banners featuring corresponding captains' numbers and their respective *zeemanscollege* (see Figure 2 for the detailed rigging in the folding screen).<sup>3</sup> The panoramas always display a collection of set pieces, including two to five Chinese trading junks, one to five guard ships from samurai clans from surrounding domains, some smaller Tokugawa patrol ships and

2 Browne (1979) is the only substantial general publication.

3 The literal translation is 'seaman's college', Dutch associations for council and social security for captains and their family.

more modest vessels used by citizens of the city. Yet, the way the Dutch trade ships and Deshima are depicted on these paintings show a large amount of variety in their details compared to these other set pieces. They offer the possibility to pinpoint a relatively precise timeframe for the creation of the paintings, including the folding screen. With the information on the captain, we can also determine which ship we are dealing with, when it visited Japan, and the wider historical context.

As the Dutch trade in the port of Nagasaki is the focal point of these paintings, it is not unlikely that they were created as a form of 'souvenir' for Dutch ship captains or perhaps for the chief trader, 'opperhoofd', of Deshima. Nowadays we would take a picture if we travel to faraway destinations. In the early nineteenth century, this was not yet an option. Instead, a captain or wealthy trader occasionally chose to commission a painting of their destination, including their ship and the correct ship flags. There are only two commissioned panoramas from Keiga's studio that are fully documented. They might give some insight into why the other panoramas of the Nagasaki Bay were created.

The first case depicts the Dutch frigate *The Dordenaar* that visited Japan once in 1834 (Nationaal Archief 1834). This ship has also been captured on a similar Keiga panorama which, together with other genre paintings, was brought

back by its captain Hendrik Philip Visser as a souvenir and still resides in the private collection of the family to this day. Likewise, the panorama featuring the *Cornelia en Henriette* of captain Petrus Bruining (1840 in Japan) seems to have been painted for a comparable reason and found its way to the Netherlands as a commemorative token (Roëll 2017: 36-37).

The fact that captains took paintings of their ships in foreign harbours back with them to Europe is also shown through the Chinese export paintings. These occasionally feature broadside views of ships in one of the few open trading ports in China, like Canton – present-day Guangzhou – and Macau, that in China fulfilled a similar function to what Nagasaki was in Japan. The trend of Chinese export paintings of identifiable ships also occurred in the early nineteenth century, around the same time that paintings, including Dutch ships, made by Keiga and his studio, were exported from Japan. Van der Poel, who did extensive research into the nature of Chinese export paintings, notes about these paintings: 'To those who were in a position to buy an export painting, the picture would commemorate an arduous sea journey to Asia, a major commercial enterprise with immense rewards, or contact with the great empire of China, either personally or via friends who were there' (2012: 73). If ship captains were in an equivalent position in Japan,

it is likely that they ordered similar commemorative paintings from Keiga and his studio when they had the chance.

The Dutch ship on the folding screen also has meticulously detailed rigging and four flags. Most notable of these is one of the flags that reads the 'captain's number' 294, belonging to captain Dirk Arie de Jong. Another red pennant reads (faded) 'Mary Hillegonda'. These details helped establish that the ship depicted only visited Japan on one occasion in 1836.<sup>4</sup> When comparing this way of representation with the *Dordtenaar* and *Cornelia en Henriette* paintings, many parallels between these 'export paintings' and the folding screen are observed. It is thus very likely that the folding screen has been created with a similar goal: to showcase the Dutch trade in Nagasaki for an eager commissioner, though on a much larger scale than usual.

It is also not very surprising that the Keiga folding screen looks similar in its composition to these other Nagasaki Bay paintings. Most paintings of the bay of Nagasaki seem to have been rendered from the same perspective: a bird's-eye view from above Tateyama mountain looking

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4 The first dating of the screen was carried out by Prof. Dr. Matthi Forrer, senior research associate at the Research Center for Material Culture (part of the National Museum of World Cultures), based on information on the *Marij & Hillegonda*. See also Forrer (2018).

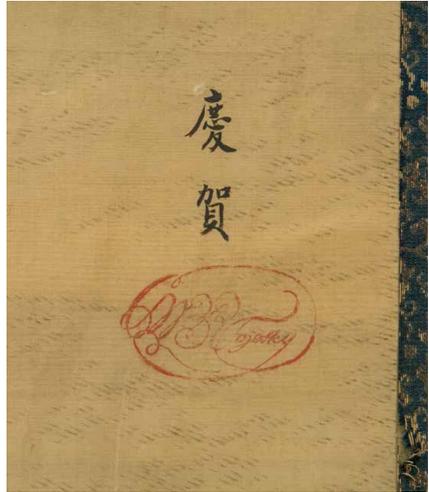


Figure 3. Detail of the first panel, counting from the right as per usual in Japan. Kawahara Keiga, *Deshima in the Bay of Nagasaki*, c. 1836, folding screen with painting on silk, 171.7 × 464 cm. National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands, 7141-1.

towards the southwest, with a slice of Nagasaki City in the foreground and the entrance of the bay nearer the horizon.<sup>5</sup> From this point of view, Keiga could depict the entire stretch of the bay, its trading posts and the bustling scenes

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5 There are a few exceptions to these bird's-eye views from a virtual point above *Tateyama*, e.g. the four-leaf panorama 'Kawahara Keiga: Panoramic View of Nagasaki City and Bay' (RV-360-7885 ~ RV-360-7888), with a bird's-eye view from approximately *Hikoyama* and the three-leaf panorama 'View of Deshima in Nagasaki Bay' (RV-360-7889 ~ RV-360-7891), with a bird's-eye view from approximately *Inasayama*, both in National Museum of World Cultures.

of a trading port during the summer season. Yet, a difference between the folding screen and these panoramas is that the folding screen prominently features a seal and signature on the right side reading 'Tojosuky', Keiga's common name in Latin alphabet possibly because he was signing his work for a Western audience (Figure 3). Both the seal and signature are often seen on the paintings he made for von Siebold, but never on his panoramas. Why the folding screen has the seal and signature compared to other bay panoramas is not entirely clear, as these are also likely for a Western audience. Nonetheless, the presence of this signature and seal greatly assisted with attributing the screen to Keiga.

## Foreign material influences

Japanese folding screens were typically lined with old paper, recycled from obsolete administrative documents, or sheets on which people had practised calligraphy. Generally, the paper was around ten years old, enough out of date to be reused. The paper in the folding screen fits this timeframe perfectly as the latest date found so far is 1829.<sup>6</sup> Japanese folding screens are traditionally remounted once a century in order to preserve

the paintings better.<sup>7</sup> However, preliminary investigations revealed that this screen by Keiga was never remounted throughout its more than 180 years existence, which would mean that it has presumably been in the Netherlands for most of its lifespan, thus evading traditional Japanese maintenance. It is also during this long period in the Netherlands that the reverse side was covered with an 1870s-style European wallpaper. The original Japanese decorative paper is still found in a layer below the European wallpaper. Even though the wallpaper was added at least forty years after the folding screen's creation, it has become a unique, characteristic Dutch/European aspect of the Keiga folding screen because it has been on the reverse side for over a century now.

When the folding screen was dismantled for restoration, the old paper revealed a wealth of information that covers a wide array of topics ranging from calligraphy training, listings of items bought for a household, and references to preparations for the traditional

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6 Mentioned in personal conversations with Andrew and Sydney Thomson of restoration studio *Restorient* (Leiden), based on experience with a number of remountings

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of previously unrestored Japanese folding screens, and Dr. Daan Kok (curator East-Asia, National Museum of World Cultures).  
7 Ibid.

Nagasaki *Kunchi* festival.<sup>8</sup> When documents were no longer necessary for their respective handlers, they could be recycled for other purposes such as folding screens' linings. In sharp contrast to officially published sources, these records (mostly) evaded the scrutiny of writer censorship as they were never meant for publication. Because of the sheer amount of paper in the folding screen its investigation is still ongoing.

The fact that these sheets of paper made their way into the folding screen must mean that at least its assembly happened in Nagasaki.<sup>9</sup> The documents notably offer a wealth of information on and attest to the numerous journeys that Chinese traders made into the trading port of Nagasaki. They record movements of ships, people, and goods in and out of the Chinese Quarters, *Tōjin yashiki*, noting the names of the Chinese captains who visited that year. These captain

numbers can be further traced to the official Nagasaki records of arrivals and departures. While comparing the year numbers, it showed that none of the voyages of these Chinese captains were later than 1829, corresponding to the approximate ten-year window for lining paper (Ōba 1974). It is not yet clear why no similar Dutch documents are included in the screen. During the Edo-period, Chinese trade in Japan was only allowed in Nagasaki, which makes it unlikely for paper to have travelled outside of the city.

## A composite composition

While the materiality of the Keiga folding screen points to a creation in Nagasaki, the composition of the painting is also a result of foreign contacts in this city. Keiga's landscape painting style – as with his work in general – is characterised by a masterful and playful grasp of depth and linear perspective, without sacrificing details (Vos & Forrer 1987). While Keiga already showed a mastering of that technique in his early bay paintings (c. 1820), it is often assumed that he further perfected the linear perspective technique while working with the Dutch draftsman Carl Hubert de Villeneuve (1800 – 1874) (Plutschow 2007: 9).

De Villeneuve travelled to Japan on the request of Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796 – 1866) in 1825

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8 With many thanks to Emeritus Prof. Hiroji Harada, Naoharu Usami (restoration specialist and head of conservation studio Shūtōkudō from Kyoto) and Dr. Daan Kok (curator East-Asia, Museum of World Cultures) for their translations of the old papers within the screen. The *Kunchi* festival was a traditional festival to celebrate the autumn harvest in Nagasaki, but with a double purpose of investigating potential hidden Christianity throughout the city.

9 It is important to note that Keiga only created the painting on the front of the folding screen. Building the lattice framework and assembling the folding screen have been done by other people.

to assist the latter's endeavours in documenting Japan in all its details. Keiga often fulfilled a similar position for von Siebold. As a result, both artists worked together on the very same botanical drawings. De Villeneuve eventually ended up staying much longer on Deshima than von Siebold, only permanently leaving Japan on the portrayed *Marij & Hillegonda* in 1836, the same year of the presumed creation of the Keiga folding screen.<sup>10</sup> Keiga likely learned most of his European drawing techniques from De Villeneuve between 1825 and 1836. The composition of the folding screen was thus probably heavily influenced by his foreign contacts on Deshima. This gives the work another distinctively Western aspect besides its assumed Dutch commissioner.

## Rising international tensions in Japan

Keiga has been called the 'Photographer without a camera' because of his immaculate attention to detail (Vos & Forrer 1987). However, the bay paintings – including the folding screen – demonstrate that the 'realistic photograph' he presented is more a depiction of what Keiga was allowed to show than an actual

presentation of reality. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Japan was struggling with foreign nations, especially Russia, the United States of America, and Great Britain, to force open Japan's port cities for trade.<sup>11</sup> As a result, Japan also exceedingly clamped down on anything that could put the national safety of the country at risk. Examples of this are the 1825 edict to 'Repel Foreign Vessels', which ordered the arrest or death of all unwanted foreigners, and the banishment of von Siebold when he was caught smuggling maps of Japan's northern shores in 1828 (Plutschow 2007: 21).<sup>12</sup>

These measures were so strict that even Keiga got permanently banished from Nagasaki in 1842 because of certain paintings he made for the Dutch. The official record reads that Keiga stood accused of depicting the official 'family crests' (*kamon* in Japanese) of samurai clans, which were regarded as sensitive military information, on paintings that were

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10 The name of De Villeneuve appears on the passenger part of the '*muster roll*' of the ship (Nationaal Archief 1836).

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11 Japan had closed its ports for most of foreign trade in 1633 to counteract the spread of Western influences of religion in particular. Only the Dutch were allowed to stay and traded under strict regulations in Nagasaki. This self-imposed regulated isolation was broken in 1854, when the American Commodore Perry forced Japan to open its ports.

12 Even Keiga was punished and imprisoned or put under house arrest for three months as a result of von Siebold's smuggling activities, because authorities claimed he should have noticed the activities.

exported by the Dutch.<sup>13</sup> The Japanese took these measures very seriously. Yet, it is curious that on many Keiga paintings from the 1820s and 1830s family crests are depicted quite regularly. While the folding screen does not show any crests of clans, the single patrol boat in the bottom right shows a bright colour scheme that clearly matches the Kuroda-clan of the Fukuoka domain. These very distinguishable colours could easily be deemed similar sensitive military information. Yet, by only showing one patrol boat that is reminiscent of the defences in the city, Keiga portrays Nagasaki bay as much more peaceful than it would have been. In reality, the bay of Nagasaki would have been filled with samurai ships and coastal fortifications throughout the hills (Wilson 2015: 171-212). An example of this can be seen in figure 4. This anonymous painting depicts Nagasaki Bay as seen from the entrance and looking inward on the city in the distance. A Chinese junk and a Dutch ship can be seen anchored in front of the city, while another Chinese junk is piloted into the bay by small rowing boats. Contrary to the Keiga folding screen, this painting shows stone

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13 Keiga's name is mentioned in two different instances in the *Nagasaki Criminal Record Book* (Morinaga et al. 1962). First in 1828 (Bunsei 11 by Japanese year count) for the Siebold Incident and a second time in 1842 (Tempo 13) for his banishment for painting family crests. An original version of this book rests in the Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture.

platforms on both the left and right in the hills, along with two anchored patrol boats. These platforms were used as lookouts and often armed with cannons.

This is not the only form of (self-) censorship that can be observed on the screen. While the bay itself teems with life, very few foreigners are in sight. Only three Dutch persons and a similar amount of Chinese and Koreans are walking around in their respective areas.<sup>14</sup> There is also a striking absence of enslaved southeast Asians on Deshima, who were forced to carry out labour on the island, ranging from day-to-day chores to heavy work in the warehouses, and were likely (at least) as numerous as the Dutch residents (Tanaka-van Daalen 2015: 87-90). That Keiga and his studio did not include such details in the bay panoramas is even more noticeable because he normally is very precise in depicting his subjects. Just looking at the *Marij & Hillegonda* shows how he tried to capture the ship as close to reality as he could. There is a discrepancy between the impeccable details in certain set pieces, like the Dutch trade ships and Deshima, on one hand, and the absence of other details, like harbour defences and slavery, on the other. This censorship also matches what Johannes

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14 Shipwrecked Koreans had to go through Nagasaki before they could be repatriated, even though there was no Korean trade compound in the city.



van Overmeer Fisscher reported after he returned from Japan.<sup>15</sup> In his *Bijdrage tot de kennis van het Japansche Rijk* (1833: 130) he wrote that the designated painter of Deshima (Keiga) was only allowed to have his paintings exported if the local authorities

Figure 4. Unknown artist, Harbour in the bay of Nagasaki, c.1820, watercolour painting on paper, 31 x 47.3 cm. National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands, TM-A-7984d.

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15 Johannes van Overmeer Fisscher was an agent for the Dutch government in Batavia, current Jakarta in Indonesia. He fulfilled the positions of clerk and later 'pakhuismeester' (warehouse master) between 1820 and 1829 on Deshima. When he returned from Japan, he published a large encyclopedia on Japan, which was complemented with various ethnological objects he gathered during his time there. The Fisscher collection now resides in the National Museum of World Cultures, Leiden.

approved of what was depicted on the painting. Keiga thus had to incorporate a degree of self-censorship in his 'realistic' paintings to get approval from the local Japanese authorities because of strict laws to protect the national safety of Japan.

## Conclusion

Due to the many international influences in various aspects of the Keiga folding screen, it could only have been created in the unique circumstances that occurred in the trading port of Nagasaki, the sole city in Japan that allowed foreign trade with a European nation – the Netherlands – and China. Inside of the folding screen, there are many references to the Chinese trade, while the outside shows just as many references to the Nagasaki trading scene. While the Dutch patron is to this date still unknown, the provenance of the screen is also the culmination of experiences that Keiga had during his time as the designated painter of Deshima and that led to its creation around 1836. Almost every part of the creation of his folding screen seems to have been influenced by the international connections that were present in Nagasaki. Even the censorship from the Japanese authorities, instigated by international tensions with foreign nations, shaped the final form of the folding screen. This folding screen shows just how intertwined Nagasaki was with its international trade. Because of all of this, few other objects can claim to tell as many ‘Nagasaki-stories’ as this work by Kawahara Keiga.

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# Susan Stockwell's Territory Dress: Contemporary art and fashion in a Dutch ethnographic museum

**Daan van Dartel**

## Introduction

In 2015, the National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) approached British artist Susan Stockwell (1962) for a commission based on her previous work of paper dresses. Stockwell had exhibited several art works in different spaces at that time, such as the impressive flotilla of small boats with sails from banknotes in *Sail Away* at the Tate Modern in 2013, which “explores the idea of ‘connections’ in travel, trade, mapping and personal and social histories” ([www.susanstockwell.co.uk](http://www.susanstockwell.co.uk)), and which was recreated in 2015 and 2016 in two other museums. Stockwell's dress sculptures, addressing the reclaiming of her own body and related issues of territory, became

renowned internationally. She started with *Coffee Dress* (1999), followed by several other dresses such as *Colonial Dress* (2008), *Highland Dress* (2009) and *Money Dress* (2010). Other works comprise *A Chinese Dream*, a large money paper quilt work that is now in the Victoria & Albert Museum collection and deals with the importance of China to the global trade network; *Flood*, a site-specific installation in thirteenth-century St. Mary's church in York, referring to York's flooding problems and to floods of information and technology; and one of her latest works *Rumpelstiltskin* (2019), which comments

on the international trade of clothing and textiles.

Stockwell's *Territory Dress* is based on a larger understanding of the determining role of trade and colonialism in shaping today's world. It aims to support the broader process of decolonisation of the museum and its collections and to create a larger awareness among visitors and society at large about the ways in which colonialism still shapes contemporary life. The artwork was commissioned because of its power to address strong and often violent histories. *Territory Dress* uses the language of fashion, through the form of a dress, to make



Figure 1. Susan Stockwell, *Territory Dress*, 2018, paper, wood, glue, printed textile, and computer thread. National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands, 7175-1a.

the narratives of colonialism accessible to a diverse range of visitors.

The NMVW, which had just appointed a curator of fashion in 2015, unusual for an ethnographic museum, saw fashion (and art) as a new lens onto the colonial past of the Netherlands and its afterlives. 'Fashion' is often defined from a 'western' perspective, set by globalized capitalism (see Roach, Musa & Hollander 1980, Wilson 2007, Entwistle 2015). However, the NMVW wants to examine fashion from a multicultural perspective, broadening the concept of fashion to outside of 'the West' (see Craik 2009, Jansen & Craik 2016, Niessen, Leshkovich & Jones 2003; for Fashion Theory see Barnard 2007: 2-4, Welters & Lillethun 2014).

In 2016, Stockwell visited the museum for a month to research the collections and to use the museum's library. She conducted interviews with different curators at the museum, who specialise in the history of imperialism, colonialism, and material culture from the various former colonies of the Netherlands. Dutch presence in Indonesia started with the establishment of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie – hereafter VOC) at the beginning of the seventeenth century and ended with the Indonesian Republic calling for its independence in 1945. In the Netherlands, this date was not acknowledged until 2004 when the then minister of Foreign Affairs stated that it

was time to understand the importance of recognizing that date. The Dutch government had all those years held on to 1949 as the date of sovereignty. Finally the Dutch had to give in to international pressure, after fighting a violent war with Indonesian nationalists under the lead of Sukarno, who became Indonesia's first President. During a recent visit to Indonesia, on 10 March 2020, the Dutch King Willem Alexander apologized for the atrocities carried out by the Dutch army during Indonesia's war of Independence (1945 – 1949). Colonial and political decisions continue to strongly shape diplomatic relationships between the Netherlands and Indonesia today.

For the last decade, the history of slavery in the former colony of Surinam and the Dutch Caribbean have been increasingly present in contemporary Dutch society and memory. The national feast of Sinterklaas on the evening of 5 December, when parents give presents to their children in his name, and adults exchange presents amongst themselves, accompanied by little home-written poems, is a moment where the Dutch are confronted with their entanglement in the history of slavery through the figure of Black Pete. He is a caricature black minstrel who is the servant of the white Sinterklaas. Each year, a few months before their arrival in December, debates and sometimes violent protests against the racialised representation of this black

character appear in the media and on the streets. Pro-Pete demonstrators, arguing that Black Pete is an innocent children's feast personality, reply in similar ways. These demonstrations have shed light onto the unease the Netherlands has with the slavery legacy resulting from what it terms its 'Golden Age' (seventeenth century) and the ensuing centuries.

Heritage institutions, including libraries, archives, and museums, in the Netherlands with the exception of ethnographic museums, which addressed these issues earlier, are finally looking at the heritage of colonialism and slavery, mostly concerning the Dutch involvement in the Transatlantic slave trade. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam is organising a large exhibition on slavery in 2021, and de Nieuwe Kerk on Dam Square put together a large exhibition on Surinam in 2019. Smaller museums, such as Museum van Loon, located in a canal house still owned by the family van Loon, who were heavily involved in the VOC and were also implicated in the Dutch slave trade, have also organized exhibitions on colonialism and slavery. Many objects in these exhibitions come from the collections of the NMVW.

## Making *Territory Dress*

This article is a summary of an interview in August 2018, during which Susan Stockwell (SSt) spoke with me, Daan

van Dartel (DvD), about her work, her background, and the *Territory Dress* that is now in the collection of the NMVW. The dress will be part of a large exhibition that is planned for 2022 on the afterlife of colonialism in the Netherlands.

DvD: Can you introduce us to your work in general?

SSt: I work across sculpture, installation, collage and film. I am concerned with examining social and colonial histories and engaging with questions of social justice, international trade, cultural mapping and feminism. As a sculptor, I'm really interested in materials, their inherent content and history, their material culture, the ideas that are held within the materials; materials such as rubber, tea, coffee, computer components, maps and money, the humble every day and industrial products that pervade our lives. In seeking to reconnect an object's past, its related history and materiality with contemporary issues, my practice underscores these materials' urgent interconnection to collective memories, desires and ecological shortfalls; aspects that evoke, expose and challenge social, racial and gender inequality and injustice.

In general, I work with a combination of materials, ideas and processes, in equal measure. When these are combined, a dialogue ensues, leading to stronger work. The repetitive

processes I use, such as sewing, quilting and construction create a meditative state and then unexpected and surprising new directions arise in the work, which leads to richer and more interesting results.

The underlying content in my work is social history and social justice. My father was a historian and a socialist, and I grew up in Manchester in a political household. Manchester is a city with a legacy of the textile industry, Industrial Revolution, and a big colonial history. Marx and Engels were there for a while. Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto there, which was based on the terrible working and living conditions of the workers in the textile industry. This industry grew rapidly, the infrastructure couldn't keep up. And the mill owners were ruthlessly focused on profits, workers were tied to looms for 16 hours a day and child labour was rife. Recently I was at Manchester's Royal Exchange theatre, which is in the original cotton exchange trading building and a woman I got talking to, quoted: 'Britain's bread hung from Lancashire's thread.' Meaning that Britain's economy was totally dependent on Lancashire's cotton industry.

DvD: This area has a lot of links to Britain's colonial history, especially India. All these interactions between the rest of the world and cotton from England, and also sumptuary laws



Figure 2. Susan Stockwell in her studio with *Territory Dress*. © Susan Stockwell, 2018.

that prevented local industries in the colonies from growing because one had to take the products from the 'mother' country.

SSt: Yes, there was a very powerful British monopoly globally and Manchester was part of that. Remnants of the textile industry remain, old cotton mills and so on, though the city has a strong identity and constantly reinvents itself. When I was growing up there in the 60s and 70s it was crumbling and had a lot of deprivation.

Injustice and inequality upset and anger me and this drives the content in

my work. Growing up in Manchester, a tough northern city with that industrial legacy and in a socialist household where we made all our own clothes and recycled everything, formed me, and my practice.

DvD: When did you make the first dress sculpture?

SSt: I knew how to read dressmaking patterns from an early age and sewing

was my first language. When I was 16, I won a prize for the best-made dress in my school, I have been making dresses all my life. The first sculptural dress I made, *Coffee Dress* in 1999 was an extension of this, but it was an artwork, not to be worn. I was subverting clothing. *Coffee Dress* had a train made from coffee filters and stained paper portion cups. At this time I also began working with maps.



Figure 3. Susan Stockwell's *Coffee Dress* in Pinset Masons. © Susan Stockwell, 2020.

DvD: How did you go from coffee to maps?

SSt: In the late nineties I was teaching in America and reading about the history of tea and coffee. I drank tea and most Americans drank coffee. I read that caffeine is in rat poison, it's poisonous and the poison produces adrenalins in the liver, which make you hyper, so the Americans were buzzing around like bees, and I thought that was funny. I read a lot about tea, and about the Opium Wars between Britain and China that made Britain incredibly wealthy and meant that half of China was addicted to opium, but the Brits weren't concerned about that. It paid well, and that huge amount of money went into the economy and made the Industrial Revolution happen when and where it did. This big story and powerful history for tea, a seemingly humble and domestic product, made me think. I began making maps out of tea and coffee and other materials with fascinating trading histories such as rubber, wool and tobacco. These materials have become my personal vocabulary, giving me a language that I am more articulate with than written or spoken words. Over years I have mastered many materials through manipulating and transforming them into artworks that articulate what I have to say. In the 1990s, I began to make associations between countries and the materials they trade with. South

America for me was recycled rubber inner tubes, since rubber originally comes from Brazil; India and Britain were made of tea. I collected and surrounded myself with maps and one day realised that if you make a dress with a map, it becomes a feminist piece, a statement about female territory, demarcating and claiming female territory. Cartography to me is a male language; I didn't understand it for a long while, but that maleness connected to what maps are as political and historical accounts, and as means to gain ownership and power.

DvD: Because the world is mapped by men?

SSt: It is and men historically claim territory. For example, why is the interior of Australia so well mapped when it's so sparsely populated? Because it's full of minerals and therefore very valuable. Mapping is not simply about finding your way from A to B, it is much more complex and political. My work, *Pattern of the World* [now in the collection of the V&A – DvD] is a world map, a Mercator projection, in which I combined this colonial projection of the world with tea and coffee and dress making patterns, which are maps of the body and have darts and arrows that look like shipping lanes and mapping references to create a crossover of languages. I enjoy mixing languages via materials and ideas and this is also what led me to make the

map in a dress shape, which in turn led to the money dress, which has led me to make *Territory Dress*. It is more complex than my other dress sculptures. Making *Territory Dress* has pushed this series of work on a stretch, and now it's finished I'm ready to make more surreal dress sculptures.

DvD: I remember when we first met, for this commission, and I sort of explicitly asked for a dress, for you it was still not sure if you would want to make a dress.

SSt: Well, I didn't want to close it down too much. I needed to feel free but at the same time it's good to have a framework. I had ideas of the content, of her dragging history in a heavy ball behind her, and then, it could be a train being pulled behind, which hasn't turned out as I envisioned it, but it works and feels, with the computer wires and rubber and batik flowers, as if it's both being left behind and pulling onto the dress. The train creates a kind of movement, as if passing through time, pulling a weight.

You approaching me was interesting and flattering, and once I visited and developed the idea, I was very inspired. The museum is impressive, I felt like a kid in a sweet shop surrounded by incredible visual stuff, histories and stories, in all their good and bad associations. The way the museum is working, with artists and taking on other people's views, bringing all that together as a way of reframing

the collection, and decolonising the museum is fascinating and inspiring. This commission offered me a great opportunity, while also pushing and challenging my practice. It has been challenging in lots of ways, the process has been slow, evolving and gradually gathering, reading, researching, reflecting, discussing with you, which has incorporated a collaborative element, plus trying to get my head around the meanings.

DvD: Does that happen a lot in your practice, that the entity who gives the commission is involved in the development of a piece?

SSt: Not always, it depends, sometimes a commissioner is specific, or you agree on an idea and then they change their mind, or want what you make, but in green! Then I say, 'Perhaps *you* should make it!'. Sometimes they say make what you want, but ideally it works like it has with you.

DvD: I always thought it would be more like that, to give full freedom to an artist.

SSt: With this it is complex, it's related to an ethnographic museum's collections and there are a lot of questions, it is about questioning rather than giving answers, and it was really important to get clarity on certain issues, such as cultural appropriation and the material, how things would be read, what the historic relevance of things are now.

This was a collaborative effort, and I don't feel this work is a compromise at all. It has given me a framework to make something meaningful within. Commissions usually take longer than you think, that's partly because I'm not a briefcase artist. I don't have an idea, design a work and then give it to someone else to make. I make it myself, it's a process of trial and error – gathering, reading, thinking, discussing and remaking. This is how I learn and it is the process that most engages me.

DvD: How would that have been if this dress were about British colonialism?

SSt: I think that would have been more difficult. I had some distance here, though I didn't have my finger on the pulse, or the Zeitgeist at hand. This is where the museum came in. Your directions and suggestions of things to read and look at when I visited gave me a framework to work with, rather than a completely open space, where I could have got lost. This piece has led in new directions, for example printing maps and images onto material, cutting a hole in the abdomen, adding contemporary references such as the bar codes and computer wires and combining these languages. For an artist, often working in isolation, encouragement is important. The art world can be very critical and competitive with people scrambling over each other for power and recognition.

There are different art worlds. The art market is one art world and there are other worlds that we artists find and make. You make work that comes from *here* [points to the heart], intimate, and people in the outside world will then tread on you, literally dissing you. I remember Robert Rauschenberg [American artist] said that when he dies he'll go to his studio, and I thought when I die, if I go to heaven, I'll go to my studio, and if I go to hell, I'll be in the art world! Working with a museum in a different context, that of an ethnographic museum, and whose agenda is to welcome other views, felt very positive and beneficial.

DvD: It could be on display now (2018) tackling all these discussions that are currently so important in Dutch society and The Hague, the Dutch political centre. The Hague is also the place where many people of Dutch and/or Indonesian descent went back to after they left Indonesia.

SSt: I learned a lot about that relationship between Holland and Indonesia. In Britain we don't have that kind of relationship with our former colonies. It is different, though with similarities. Food comes into culture. Assimilation takes place and people like to think it is a two-way process. Many different people have colonized India at different times, Britain is just one layer in Indian history, albeit a very exploitative one.

DvD: In Indonesia apparently, there appears to be not much interest in the Dutch colonial past, whereas in the Netherlands we are trying to deal with the often-confronting aspects of that past.

SSSt: In the end the results of colonialism are the same: occupation, taking possession of, colonizing, repression, bloodshed, and repression for the colonised and power for the coloniser. It was challenging to make work more concerned with Dutch rather than British history. I had to keep asking myself 'What am I doing?' and check in with the museum but I read and learnt a lot and sometimes the distance was useful. And as British Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare stated, an artist needs to be able to use and do whatever they need to do, otherwise your hands are tied, but at the same time you have a social responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

DvD: As far as I understand cultural appropriation now, if you acknowledge where you got your information, your material, and give credit, it needs not be a problematic thing.

SSSt: Artists have always taken, looked, been inspired by many influences. Dutch painting has influenced me a lot though I'm not a painter.

DvD: But problems arise when there is power imbalance.

SSSt: Yes, as with a traditional costume for example and designers using it directly because it looks funky and makes money for them, but they don't credit or share profits. Loads of people have copied my work, which is annoying. My practice has scaffolding, which has built up over many years – one work leads to another and it evolves, it is an evolving dialogue. Whereas a copy is a one-off, it doesn't last – the copier doesn't have the scaffolding.

I think it is important to have a text with the work to fully reference what's in the piece, for instance the boat in the stomach, people may not see that it is made from an Antillean Guilder and the train has an influence from Afro-Surinamese *angisas*, head wraps. At the same time, I don't want to be too prescriptive; I think it's good if people can have the space to be imaginative and bring their own stories and insights, that would be more interesting for them.

DvD: What can you tell us about Territory Dress?

SSSt: My initial idea in the proposal was to make a map dress, that would contain, or be pulling the history of Dutch colonialism, as a weight behind it, and it's the female that pulls the weight of history behind her. Somehow

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1 Yinka Shonibare made the statement at a public event entitled 'Provocations in Art: Cultural Appropriation', held at the Royal Academy in London on 29 September 2017.

portraying the idea that history repeats itself.

DvD: Why a woman?

SS: The map dress serves as a device to demarcate female territory and to tell 'her' story. The colonial 'trophy wives' were repressed and had to work within the confines of their containment and in turn they repressed others – a common trait of humanity. I want it to be contemporary as well as historic.

The maps on the dress and parts of the train show old maps of the colonies of The Netherlands and other places. The jacket uses contemporary maps of the Netherlands; it was based on the style of what was called a 'Man Jacket' worn around the 1870s but the style didn't last long as it was seen as too masculine, with big shoulders, sleeves, no neckline etc.

DvD: So you are addressing gender history as well?



Figure 4. Susan Stockwell, *Territory Dress* (detail), 2018, paper, wood, glue, printed textile, and computer thread. National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands, 7175-1a.

SSt: To a degree, for me it serves as a metaphor to hang ideas on. The old and the new; the outer and the inner space, the stomach – Holland with a boat made with an Antillean Guilder sail, sailing across it, coming from the inside looking out. On the chest is Surinam; a now much talked about but formerly neglected part of Dutch colonial history, which I repeated in the train. The train evolves from maps and beautiful gathering and stitching at the top into a mass of computer wires, and rubber inner tube and batik flowers [that once were] symbolic of certain motifs that only royalty could wear. It evolves into the contemporary, a collection of stuff that tells stories. The bustle of the train is based on *angisa* folding techniques. It is not an *angisa*, but is based on *angisa* techniques, a combination of different styles. The way I hope it works is that people see it and start thinking for themselves, what can it mean? There were a few *angisa* titles that I really liked, such as *follow me, you are not as you seem, anger, and let them talk*, which could have been a title for the dress, whatever people read into it – let them talk. We tried actual *angisas*<sup>2</sup> but they looked like hats stuck on, and since *angisas* are constantly changing and evolving I took the reference and changed it.

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2 *Angisas* are headcloths that contain hidden messages, often derived from sayings or social events.

I wanted the dress to be really seductive and tactile, to draw the audience in to engage with it, and then have a big kick or shock when they realise the darker content.

DvD: Why the computer wire?

SSt: At the base of the sleeves are red road arteries, which I've used in my work before, and here they come out of a contemporary road map of the Netherlands. On the jacket the roads look like veins and arteries and when I cut the maps, they looked like hanging veins, as if blood is dripping. Contemporary Netherlands is built on the blood of the colonies and there is pain in that. The arteries are very red, very bloody. I made a series of Red Road Artery works in the past, for example, *River of Blood* for INIVA [the Institute of International Visual Arts in London], which was made of red road that looked like arteries in shape of the River Thames. The title referred to Enoch Powell's (a British politician) 1960's fascist *Rivers of Blood*, anti-immigration speech. Churchill called the river Thames the *Silver Thread of Empire*, because it brought massive wealth to England, but there was huge bloodshed in obtaining that wealth, blood that continues to flow. Similarly, these dress sleeves refer to that bloodshed in history.

The computer wires in the train are a contemporary material, they form boundaries, look like hair extensions and were formerly used in computers –

a means of communication, here they reference and visually connect to the red roads in the jacket.

DvD: When you look at the work, you see all this sea, did you address pollution as well, climate change?

SSt: Yes! That was my dilemma with finishing the train, there was so much else I could have put into it – many things are catching up with us, we can't pollute the earth, mine, colonize and not expect this to come back to us – it's karma. The train also references the ocean, coral and shells, plastic and pollution, with materials and debris spilling out of the train and it can be read as caught up in the train and adding to the weight.

*Territory Dress* has turned out to be more than I thought it would be, subtler, stronger and more developed than the ideas I began with. This often happens, I write a proposal, make plans but I can't simply recreate plans. The processes of making change the ideas, they evolve and that's what's exciting and when I surprise myself, I can't plan for that and the peculiarity of meaning and richness of multi-layered readings in visual art works come from that evolving and surprising process. I had planned to put other materials and references into the piece, such as embroidery and tobacco leaves but they didn't work.

DvD: Those materials, like inner tubes, and buttons. Why buttons?

SSt: They were supposed to go onto the jacket, but they were a distraction so I put them in the train, where they worked. Buttons hold things together and I like that association. I also added old Dutch coins, which I hadn't planned. And the staining of the slave ship prints in the train with tea, is not necessarily visible. I thought about staining with tobacco as well.

DvD: An immersion into the materiality of colonisation?

SSt: Absolutely. One of my works was called *Stains of Existence*, because history is a stain, and all these materials are stained with our history, money is stained with oil from our hands. The title of *Territory Dress* took a while to come, I thought of *Memory Dress*, *De-colonial Dress*, *Map Dress*, *A Stitch in Time* and more, however, none worked, they seemed to fix it in one idea, titles often fix and limit readings. *Territory Dress* keeps it open and is a continuum of my other dress titles, such as *Colonial Dress*, *Highland Dress* and so on.

DvD: Batik is a stained technique actually, isn't it? It adds layers.

SSt: Yes it is. And on the frills of the dress I added barcodes. I was trying to invent my own barcode that would have a meaning, but I would have to buy a machine that cost 4,000 pounds

to do that! We could say that There is a language in barcodes – *Language Dress, Text-ile Dress?* But The barcodes are texts, another language, and it is contemporary, it categorizes and demarcates and puts prices on things, and it is international, so a contemporary international language.

DvD: What was problematic when making this dress?

SSt: Well, the flipside of all that was good, *i.e.* not being in the Netherlands. Not knowing so much about your colonial history, the museum, current social debates and discussions, meant I felt a bit removed, but at the same time this gave me a useful distance. The slow pace of the whole process was frustrating at times but has been really good, it has given me a lot more space and time to develop my ideas, try and fail and remake.

DvD: Will you use this experience in future commissions?

SSt: The museum influenced the work through the time I had and through discussions, it has been a two-way dialogue. The dress sculptures are popular, and accessible, which has led to interest from non-art museums as well as art museums. The dress is a good metaphor, but I don't want to be classified as a dress artist, or a map artist. Such categorisation tends to happen, when I worked with rubber inner-tubes I was called 'the Rubber

Queen' and when I made work with toilet paper, my friends called me 'tissue Sue'!

DvD: Isn't this what this work is also about, being framed and mapped all the time?

SSt: Yes, we are being categorised and mapped all the time. Here let me barcode you!

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