

Dr Maria Wronska-Friend

Adjunct Senior Research Fellow

College of Arts, Society and Education
Division of Tropical Environments and Societies
James Cook University, Cairns, Australia

Contact details

- Email
maria.friend@jcu.edu.au
- Postal address
Room D3, Language and Culture Research Centre, Cairns Campus
James Cook University
PO Box 6811, Cairns, QLD 4870 AUSTRALIA

Background

Maria Wronska Friend is an anthropologist and museum curator with a particular interest in people's relationship to their material culture. She has been associated with James Cook University since 1992, initially as a Lecturer at the Material Culture Unit in Townsville and currently as an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at the College of Arts, Society and Education at Cairns Campus.

Born in Poland, in 1978 she received an MA in Anthropology from the University of Lodz and in 1987 a PhD from the Institute of Arts, Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, for the thesis 'Javanese batik and European art in the late 19th and early 20th centuries'.

Research interests

Her research is primarily object-based, using material evidence to investigate the social and historical process of contact, change and continuity in Papua New Guinea and Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Laos). In particular she is interested in the cross-cultural transfer of objects, textile technology and aesthetics, as an outcome of colonial trade, appropriation or artistic encounters. Museum anthropology is another of her interests, especially issues related to the interpretation of objects and the role of the curator in negotiating their meanings. She has conducted extensive research in Papua New Guinea (material culture and maritime traditions in the Aitape area), Indonesia (Javanese batik textiles) as well as in Australia, among the Hmong refugees from Laos (anthropology of dress) and Polish migrants (folk art and diasporic identity).

Research Projects

- **Material culture of Papua New Guinea societies: the dynamics of change**

Between 1982-1992 extensive fieldwork in the Sandaun (West Sepik) Province was conducted focussing on documenting the dynamics of material culture transformation. Research was conducted at two locations: in the Aitape area (PNG north coast) and in the Telefomin area (Min people).

In the Aitape area, three aspects were researched:

1. The significance of objects and raw materials in inter-group trade and customary exchange
2. The impact of colonial trade on the local economy, in particular the introduction of industrial replicas of locally produced shell and bone goods.
3. Documentation of voyaging and canoe construction (in littoral and island communities)

One of the outcomes of this research was the construction of seven full-size watercrafts (three sea-going vessels, three lagoon/river canoes and a raft) which were subsequently deposited at the ethnographical museums in London, Dresden, Berlin and Szczecin (Poland).

In Telefomin, the impact of the nearby Ok Tedi mine on the rapidly changing material culture inventory was investigated and documented in two collections, organised for the Museum of Mankind in London (nowadays a section of the British Museum) and Museum der Kulturen in Basel.

- **Batik of Java in cross-cultural perspective**

From the end of the 19th century onwards, textiles of Indonesia, especially batik of Java, are an important source of inspiration for artists and craftsmen in several parts of the world. This investigation is focused on the cross-cultural transfer of technique, technology and aesthetics, with three streams being currently investigated:

1. Javanese batik as a global inspiration: the influence of the Javanese textile technique and aesthetics on the decorative arts of Europe (Art Nouveau & Art Deco), printed textiles of West Africa, Australian Aboriginal art of the central desert, textiles of West Bengal (India) and Japan.
2. The impact of Indonesian textile designs on the works of European artists and designers such as Henri Matisse, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Paul Poiret and Henry van de Velde.
3. Industrial imitations of Javanese batik in 19-20th century Europe (UK, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland), followed by the transfer of Javanese motifs and aesthetics to West African printed textiles.

- **Globalisation of the ethnic dress of the Hmong diaspora (refugees from Laos)**

The ethnic costumes of the Hmong (Miao) refugees who settled in North Queensland are important documents of embodied knowledge and personal experience. Ritual

garments, festive costumes, materials and dress accessories are used in trans-national exchange and provide tangible evidence of the globalisation of the Hmong diasporic culture. While nowadays China is the major supplier of the festive costumes of the Australian Hmong people, in some cases parts of their garments are traded or obtained as gifts from relatives in Laos, Thailand, USA or France. The research was conducted among the Cairns and Innisfail Hmong community groups (north Queensland, Australia).

Curatorial projects

Four major touring exhibitions presented at museums and art galleries in Australia that showcased cultural heritage of Indonesian people as well as Australian migrants (the Hmong, Polish and Chinese):

2010-2011 *Batik of Java: Politics and Poetics* (with Caloundra Regional Gallery)

2009-2011 *Queensland Dragon. Chinese in the North* (with Queensland Museum)

1999-2001 *Roses and Red Earth. Polish Folk Art in Australia* (with Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, 'Visions of Australia' program)

1995-1997 *Migrants from the Mountains. The Costume Art of the Hmong People of Southeast Asia and Australia* (with the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, James Cook University, Townsville, 'Visions of Australia' program).

Other exhibitions:

2006-2010 a series of exhibitions promoting various aspects of Papua New Guinea culture (joint project with Cairns PNG community groups), James Cook University, Cairns

2009 *From Laos to Australia: the Hmong community of Cairns*, James Cook University Cairns

2007 *Niezwykłe Spotkania. Jawajski batik w Krakowie. Unusual Encounters. Javanese Batik in Kraków*, Manggha Muzeum Sztuki i Techniki Japonskiej, Krakow, Poland

2006 *Woskiem Malowane. Batik Jawajski i Polski. Painted with Wax. Javanese and Polish Batik*, State Ethnographical Museum, Warsaw, Poland

2005 *PNG in Focus*, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville (to commemorate 40th anniversary of PNG independence)

2004 *Batik and Kris. Duality of Javanese Cosmos*, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville

Publications

Below is a selection of major publications. To see a detailed profile of all publications stored at James Cook University, visit ResearchOnline@JCU.

Papua New Guinea

- 'From Shells to Ceramic: Colonial Replicas of Indigenous Valuables', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 28, 2015, pp. 50–69 (UK).
- 'Wyprawa po sago – tradycje wymiany handlowej na północnym wybrzeżu Nowej Gwinei' [Sago expeditions: trade exchange on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea], in B. Kopydłowska-Kaczorowska and F.M. Rosiński (eds), *Ludy i Kultury Australii i Oceanii [People and Cultures of Australia and Oceania]*, Wrocław (Poland): Katedra Etnologii Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1998, pp. 75-80.
- 'System inicjacji ludności Telefolmin z Papui Nowej Gwinei' [Initiation system of Telefolmin people, Papua New Guinea], in B. Kopydłowska-Kaczorowska and F.M. Rosiński (eds), *Ludy i Kultury Australii i Oceanii [People and Cultures of Australia and Oceania]*, Wrocław (Poland): Katedra Etnologii Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1996, pp.149-169.
- 'Kulturelle Wandel an der Lagune – Sissano im 20. Jahrhundert [Cultural change at the Lagoon: Sissano in the 20th century]', in M. Schindlbeck (ed), *Von Kokos zu Plastik. Südseekulturen im Wandel [From Coconut to Plastic. The Transformation of Pacific Cultures]*, Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1993, pp.149-181.
- Trobriandy w 60 lat po Malinowskim [Trobriand Islands 60 years after Malinowski], *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, Wrocław University Press, 1983, pp. 79-81.

Indonesian textiles

BOOKS

- *Batik Jawa bagi Dunia. Javanese Batik to the World*, Jakarta: Komunitas Lintas Budaya Indonesia, 2016.
- *Balinese Textiles for Gods and People from The Krzysztof Musiał Balinese Art Collection. Balijskie Tkaniny dla Bogow i Ludzi z Kolekcji Sztuki Balijskiej Krzysztofa Musiała*, Łódź (Poland): Central Museum of Textiles, 2015.
- *Sztuka Woskiem pisana. Batik w Indonezji i w Polsce [Art drawn with wax: Batik in Indonesia and Poland]*, Warszawa: Gondwana, 2008.

CHAPTERS IN BOOKS

- 'The early production of Javanese batik imitations in Europe (1813-1840)', in R. D. Jenny (ed.), *Glärner Tuch Gespräche, Comptoir von Daniel Jenny & Cie*, Glarus (Switzerland), vol. 10-11, 2017, pp. 49-58.

- 'Fernöstliche Faszination: Henry van de Velde und die javanische Batik / Oriental fascination: Henry van de Velde and Javanese batik', in T. Föhl and A. Neumann (eds), *Henry van de Velde – Raumkunst und Kunsthandwerk / Interior Design and Decorative Arts – Ein Werkverzeichnis in sechs Bänden / A catalogue raisonné in six volumes*, vol. 2 *Textilien / Textiles*, Leipzig: Seemann Verlag, 2014, pp. 369-397.
- 'Batik dress of Java', in J. Dhamija (ed.), *The Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, vol. 4: *South and South East Asia*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2010, pp. 441-447.
- 'Javanese batik for European artists. Experiments at the Koloniaal Laboratorium in Haarlem', in I. van Hout (ed.), *Batik – Drawn in wax. 200 years of batik art from Indonesia at the Tropenmuseum collection*, Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 2001, pp.106–123.

Costume of the Hmong people

- 'Dress and Personal Narrative' in *Clothes Tell Stories: Working with Costume in Museum*. Online resource hosted by the International Committee for Costume, International Council of Museums (ICOM), 2013. Available from: www.clothestellstories.com/index.php/working-with-clothes/dress-and-personal-narrative
- 'The Hmong/Miao in Australia', in J. Dhamija (ed.), *The Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, vol. 4: *South and South East Asia*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2010, pp. 459-465.
- 'Globalised Threads. Costumes of the Hmong Community in North Queensland', in N. Tapp and G. Lee (eds), *The Hmong of Australia: Culture and Diaspora*, Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004, pp. 97-122.

Museum Studies

- 'Przedmiot szczególnej troski: obiekty *sacrum* w muzeum [Subject of special concern: sacral objects in museum work], *ZWAM (Zbiór Wiadomości do Antropologii Muzealnej)*, no. 2, 2015, pp. 55-78 (online-journal of the Polish Ethnological Society). Available from <http://www.ptl.info.pl/zwam/?p=101>
- 'Why Haven't We Been Taught All That At School? Crosscultural Community Projects in North Queensland, Australia', *Curator. The Museum Journal*, vol. 55, no.1, 2012, pp. 3-20.