

The Longgu Community Time Capsule: Contemporary Collecting in Solomon Islands for the Australian Museum

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ABSTRACT. The *Longgu Community Time Capsule* was a collaborative project to acquire a contemporary collection from the Longgu community in Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands for the Australian Museum, Sydney. It built upon an earlier engagement of Longgu community representatives, Steward Bungana and Florence Watepura, with the Ian Hogbin collection from Longgu made in 1933. Bungana and Watepura reported back to their community and through the *Longgu Community Time Capsule* project, Longgu people formulated the subject and methodology for the creation of a contemporary collection. This paper describes aspects of their engagement with the Museum, its collections, and researchers, which formed the basis for making ceremonial feasting bowls for the Museum. Through interaction with the historical collection the Longgu decided that carving manifested cultural knowledge but carving skills were endangered. The project provided an example of the process of value production described by Howard Morphy in which museum collections are continually re-contextualised, re-examined, and made relevant in the present. The project also supported the view that museum collections are cultural resources that allow for distinctive collaborative methodologies for interrogating both the past and the present in a process described by Nicholas Thomas as the ‘museum as method.’

Introduction

The *Longgu Community Time Capsule* was an innovative and collaborative research project to acquire contemporary collections in an ethical fashion from Solomon Islands for the Australian Museum, Sydney (Torrence and Bonshek, 2013). Longgu is the name of the language spoken by some 1500 people living on Guadalcanal Island approximately six hours combined trip by car and motorboat from Honiara, the nation’s capital (Fig. 1). I visited Nangali, one of the Longgu villages, between 10 and 24 January 2013, and acquired thirteen items including carved food bowls and woven baskets (Table 1). I also recorded carvers making the bowls using digital video and photographs.

The selection of the objects to make this collection was built upon the response of the Longgu people to the Australian Museum’s existing collection from their villages that was made in 1933 by anthropologist Ian Hogbin (1964).

During his career Hogbin acquired collections from the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (Beckett and Gray, 2007) that are now housed at the Australian Museum in Sydney as part of the University of Sydney Collection. He also deposited an extensive photographic collection with the University of Sydney Archives (Conway, 2012).

Through making objects as part of the *Time Capsule* project the Longgu people recognised aspects of social change in their contemporary practices. Their reflection on the historical collections influenced their decisions about what to make. The project provides an example of the process of value production described by Howard Morphy in which museum collections are continually re-contextualised, re-examined, and made relevant in the present (Morphy, 2020: 32). This research supports the view that museum collections are cultural resources which, while disconnected from contemporary communities by the passage of time (Morphy, 2020: 116), may not be completely disconnected

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