

Museum Exhibitions Today, 2013

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journal or publication title	Senri Ethnological Reports
volume	125
page range	37-53
year	2015-02-26
URL	http://doi.org/10.15021/00000835

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1 Introduction

This paper reports recent movements that are underway in the field of cultural exhibition in the museum world.

At the turn of the last century and the millennium, major museums throughout the world successively refurbished or newly created their African Galleries within a short period of one and a half years. In September 1999, the Ethnological Museum in Berlin opened its new African Gallery, entitled “Africa: Art and Culture”. In December of the same year, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History renewed the African exhibition hall and opened it under the title of “African Voices”. And in April 2000, a new gallery dedicated to the arts of “Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas” was opened to the public in the Louvre in Paris, with the African exhibition occupying the largest space. And most recently, having incorporated the former Museum of Mankind, the British Museum created the Sainsbury African Galleries in the main building in March 2000.

The approaches adopted by the museums are rather different from each other. The Ethnological Museum in Berlin and the British Museum created their exhibition based on their historical collections. The exhibition of the Smithsonian was based on newly collected materials. The Louvre’s exhibits comprise a part of the collections of the Musée de l’homme and Musée des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie as well as some new national acquisitions. The exhibition of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin and the one at the British Museum are both entitled “Africa: Art and Culture”, and they actually focus on both areas of art and culture. As for the orientation towards art and culture, perhaps the exhibition of the Smithsonian and that of the Louvre are two extremes. While the Smithsonian’s exhibition is deeply ethnographic, the Louvre’s exhibition is purely aesthetic. They are also quite different from each other with regard to the involvement of African people.

The Smithsonian’s new African exhibition is a unique exhibition in that it was developed with substantial input from Africans and African Americans; it was developed in collaboration with a group called the Extended Team that was composed of more than 100 Africans and African-Americans. The new exhibition entitled “African Voices”, which was completed after six years of work, indeed echoes the voices of Africans and African Americans.

By contrast, in the Louvre’s new “Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas” gallery, the “universal” aesthetic standards dominate the space. The gallery was a pre-figuration of the new Musée du quai Branly, which opened in June 2006 as a

museum to display masterpieces of the arts of “Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas”. The Louvre has introduced African or Oceanic arts for the first time. In opening the new exhibition, the Louvre boasted of its achievements by stating “Their beauty is no longer judged solely by the aesthetic standards of the Western and Indo-European world. Arbitrary exclusion is no longer acceptable and what André Malraux called the ‘frame of reference for art’ has been upset”.

It should not be considered just a coincidence that those major museums have renewed or newly established African exhibitions as a part of national projects. Africa, which was once called “primitive”, and whose large population has been incorporated into Western societies, is posing the most challenging question on how best to deal with each others’ cultural difference in the new century/millennium. Representation of Africa in museums is now the central issue especially in the museum world.

In fact, during the last two or three decades, there has been a growing controversy over ethnographic exhibitions in museums. Ethnographic museums throughout the world, including Minpaku, the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan, to which I belong, used to focus on cultures other than their own. They were likely to approach this task from the vantage point of their own culture. Recently, however, the peoples of the world who have been the subjects of ethnographic exhibitions have become more aware of their own cultural heritage and histories, and they have begun protesting against this prevalent one-sided approach to exhibitions of ethnic cultures. Under the circumstances, a variety of new approaches are now being tried by museum curators. My presentation today describes these movements that are underway in the field of ethnographic exhibitions.

2 The show, ‘Primitivism in 20th Century Art’

It was the 1984 exhibition “Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern” at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York that rekindled the controversies surrounding museum practise. As the sub-title suggests, in the exhibition works of modern art and examples of what they call “tribal art” that may have influenced or resembled modern art were juxtaposed so that formal or conceptual similarities — what the curator of the show, William Rubin, called “affinities” — might be evoked. Masterpieces of many modern artists, like Picasso (figure 1), Matisse, Giacometti (figure 2), Moore and Richard Long among others were collected from art museums all over the world. On the other hand, relevant “tribal art works”, that is African, Oceanic, and American masks and sculptures, were brought from various ethnographic museums in Europe and America. The large-scale encounter between modern art and tribal art was supposed to demonstrate the affinity between the two, and thus the universal humanity.

However, this exhibition stirred up controversy concerning the Eurocentric

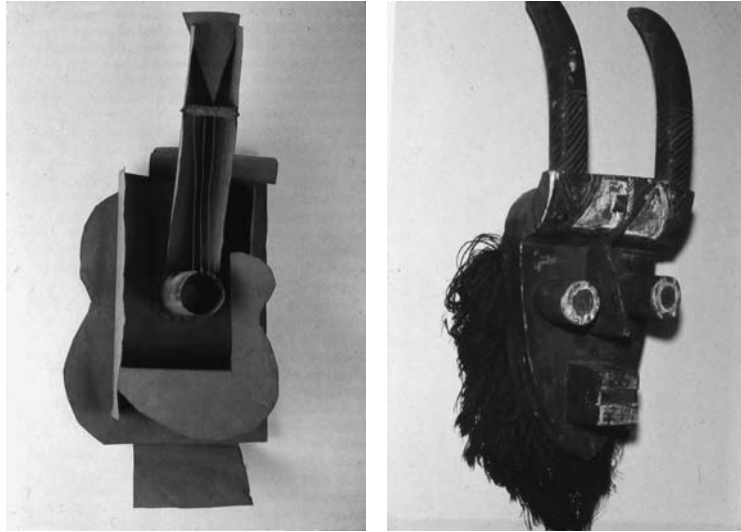


Figure 1 (Left) Pablo Picasso. *Guitar*. 1912 The Museum of Modern Art. (Right) Grebo (Ivory Coast or Liberia). Mask. Musée Picasso.

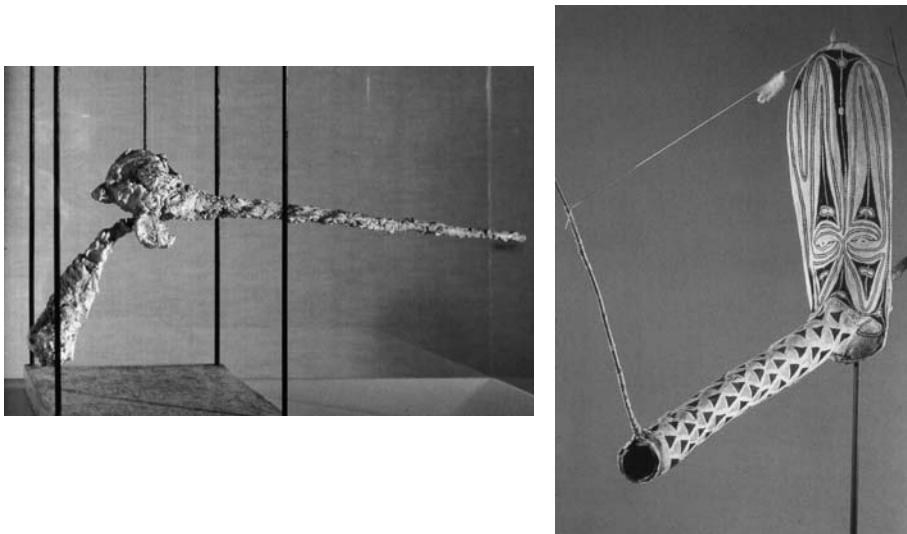


Figure 2 (Left) Alberto Giacometti. *The Nose*. 1947. Kunstmuseum, Basel. (Right) Baining (New Britain). Helmet Mask. Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel.

ideas behind the show. Rubin's purpose was not so much to recreate a detailed account of the influence of one art tradition upon the other as to identify how each European artist was "influenceable", in other words, what potential each artist innately possessed to receive and be affected by the influence of non-Western Art. For example, while Rubin does document the fact that Picasso was directly influenced in his creation of *Guitar* by a Grebo Mask, citing Picasso's own words,

he also quotes Picasso's declaration, "the African sculptures that hang around my studio are more witness than models" [Rubin ed.1984: 17]. Here, African works are identified as legitimizing the reforms of modern art, which were already underway.

The "Primitivism" show tried to describe the history of modern art that is a process of discovery of the affinity between the modern and the tribal. For Rubin, to describe such a history was conceived to demonstrate a creative artistic potential common to all humanity, and thus to overcome the Eurocentric disposition. Therefore, when he wrote in his catalogue the following sentences, he was not aware of the one-sided power relations existing in his view.

That many today consider tribal sculpture to represent a major aspect of world art, that Fine Art Museums are increasingly devoting galleries, even entire wings to it, is a function of the triumph of vanguard art itself.

We owe to the voyagers, colonials, and ethnologists the arrival of these objects in the West. But we owe primarily to the convictions of the pioneer modern artists their promotion from the rank of curiosities and artifacts to that of major art, indeed, to the status of art at all. [Rubin ed. 1984: 7]

The act of creating new culture by incorporating foreign products into your own can be found everywhere in the world. Should we call it "a triumph"? It is not surprising that many authors criticized Rubin's assertion. Among them was James Clifford.

According to Clifford, when the history of modern art is depicted as a process of rescuing the products of tribal art, the historical fact that most tribal societies were quickly brought under European political, economic and religious domination, and the creation of those societies were seized and appropriated by the West, is obscured.

Art is not universal, but a changing cultural category. The fact that rather abruptly, in the space of a few decades, a large class of non-Western artifacts came to be redefined as art is a taxonomic shift that requires critical historical discussion, not celebration. [Clifford 1988: 196]

Without having recognized this,

The exhibition and the catalogue succeeds in demonstrating, no essential affinity between the tribal and the modern or even a coherent modernist attitude towards the primitive, but rather the restless desire and power of the modern West to collect the world. [Clifford 1988: 196]

This was the final judgement that Clifford made of Rubin's "Primitivism" show. After Clifford, many other authors joined the debate.

Perhaps the most important achievement of the exhibition was to assemble so many works of Western and non-Western art, from various art and ethnographic museums, thereby expanding the discussion of primitivism, which until then had been treated only within the art world, to include anthropologists and historians, and elevating the discussion to a reconsideration of modernism itself. In fact, one of the most important contributions that can be attributed to the show is that it fuelled the positive process of coming to clear terms with the preconceived framework that was inherent in the distinction made between art museums and ethnographic museums. Why is it that, while the creators of the works displayed in art museums are regarded as individual geniuses, the individuality of those who created the works in an ethnographic museum is completely ignored, and only the tribe and locality are written on the label beneath the work? Why has one always talked of modernism in the West, while Third World modernism, which coincidentally developed in the Third World, has been diminished by focusing only on traditional aspects of non-Western cultures? The strategy of the "Primitivism" show was to juxtapose Western and non-Western works of art, in other words, works from art museums and artifacts from ethnographic museums. In doing so, the exhibition revealed the up to then silent and hollowed assumptions about the civilized and the primitive, the self and the other – that the self is too complex to be generalized, while the other is simple and can be generalized.

As a result, the "Primitivism" show promoted a more self-conscious use of language in exhibitions. Since then, various alternative display agendas have been presented. In the sense that it led to these new movements, the "Primitivism in 20th Century Art" show was more than an art exhibition. Indeed it was an important event in the final decades of the century.

3 Exhibitions on Global Modernism

Among the various alternative display strategies promoted by the "Primitivism" show is revisionist representation that focuses on Third World modernism, or more precisely global modernism. The 1989 exhibition, "Magiciens de la terre", held at the Pompidou Center in Paris can be called a pioneering exhibition in this field (figure 3). Jean-Hubert Martin, the curator of the exhibition, said to me that he planned the exhibition as an answer to the issues raised by the "Primitivism" show.

In "Magiciens de la terre" exhibition, 100 artists were selected from all over the world. Together with works of British artist Richard Long, and American artist Barbara Cruger, a *gerede* dancing mask by Dossou Amidou from Benin, coffins in the form of Mercedes by Kane Kwei from Ghana, and bark paintings made by Nera Jambruk from Papua New Guinea were on display. From Japan, four artists, named

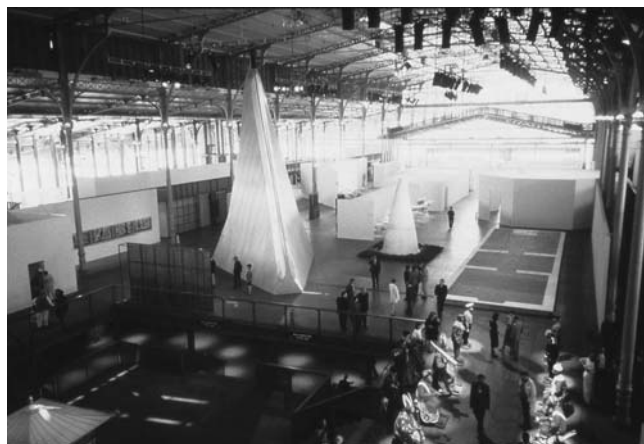


Figure 3 (Above) The entrance of "Magiciens de la terre" show at the Pompidou Center in Paris, 1989., (Middle and below) "Magiciens de la terre" exhibition. Pompidou Center 1989.

Tatsuo Kawaguchi, On Kawara, Tatsuo Miyajima and Hiroshi Teshigawara participated.

Here regardless of whether he/she is Western or non-Western, the creator of each work is treated as an individual with his/her own name. Artifacts from ethnographic museums and art works from art museums are treated in the same way. The fact that Martin used the term “magicians” instead of “artists” suggests his intention to relativize the concept of “art”.

“Magiciens de la terre” was an epoch-making exhibition of contemporary arts co-ordinated from a global perspective. However, a drawback occurred even in this exhibition. While many works from the West show the artists’ interest in exotic cultures, most of the works of non-Western artists are closely connected with their own traditional culture and religion. Of course, there are many paintings and sculptures that are connected with traditional culture and religion in Europe. But such works were not included. On the other hand, for example, works of African artists who were trained in Western art schools and academies were not on display in the exhibition. By and large, the composition of 100 artists disclosed the stereotyped distinction between the vanguard West and the traditional non-West, the open self and the closed other. By pointing out these shortcomings, some writers criticized this exhibition as a form of neo-colonialism that re-labelled non-Western arts as “primitive”. In spite of these critiques, however, “Magiciens de la terre” created growing interest in contemporary art in the Third World. Since then, a good number of Exhibitions of African Contemporary Art has been held in Europe and America. The 1995 exhibition “An Inside Story: African Art of our Time” held at Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo was the first exhibition of this kind in Japan. The opening of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in 1999 can also be mentioned in this context.

Ethnographic museums are also trying new approaches to global modernism. The 1993 exhibition “Paradise: portraying the New Guinea Highlands” which was held at the Museum of Mankind in London should be noted in this context. It reconstructed a Highland trade store with a corrugated iron roof. Goods on display on the shelves in the store clearly show how firmly the New Guinea highlands, one of the remotest areas from the West, are incorporated in the modern world system. Shields with modern design also tell us the same story.

Alfred Gell appreciated the exhibition by saying, “‘Paradise’ is an ethno-historical exhibition with a clear narrative thread, rather than a display of Art” [Gell 1993: 9]. James Clifford also commented, “Here, change in the New Guinea Highlands is not portrayed on a before/after axis, with a traditional baseline preceding the arrival of outside influences. Rather we are thrown into the midst of transformations” [Clifford 1997:154].

The major problem of this exhibition was that though the exhibition focuses on

a particular people there is no channel for the people to represent themselves. Wahgi people were not involved in the exhibition program at all. Clifford also pointed out this problem by saying that one was struck by the absence of Wahgi input, direct or indirect. Needless to say, one exhibition cannot fulfil all requirements. At the very least the Paradise exhibition was an important step in historicizing ethnographic exhibitions.

4 Reflexive Representation

Another option is reflexive representation that problematizes the politics of representation itself. In 1989, the Center for African Art in New York sponsored a challenging exhibition, “Art/artifacts: African Art in Anthropology Collections”. The exhibition presented a series of galleries depicting different ways of displaying African Art: 18th Century Curiosity Room (figure 4), Natural History Museum’s ethnographic display and Diorama (figure 5), Art Museum (figure 6) and Contemporary Art Gallery (figure 7). It showed how Kenyan Mijikenda grave posts were differently exhibited in the ethnographic diorama, in ethnographic typological display and in an art gallery setting. The audience saw how a bundle of hunting nets became an art object in the setting of an art gallery. This exhibition demonstrated that an exhibition is not a means of objective representation, but a means of creating meaning or attaching new meaning to objects.

The 1997 exhibition at the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan, “Images of Other Cultures”, which I curated, is another example of reflexive exhibition (figure 8). By means of this exhibition, which presented a number of objects mainly from the British Museum and the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan, we tried to trace the ‘entanglement of gazes’ as it has occurred in modern times, by which I mean

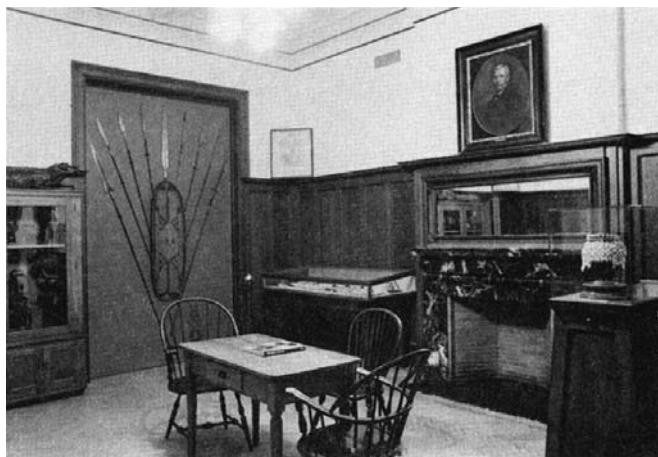


Figure 4 Display of “Curiosity Room”. “Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections”. Center for African Art. 1989.



Figure 5 Display of "Ethnographic Diorama". "Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections". Center for African Art. 1989.



Figure 6 Display of "Art Museum". "Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections". Center for African Art. 1989.

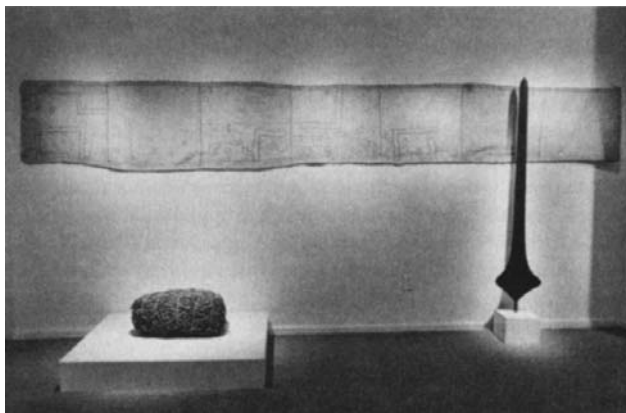


Figure 7 Display of "Contemporary Art Gallery". "Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections". Center for African Art. 1989.



Figure 8 (Above) Reconstruction of Ethnographical gallery of the British Museum c.1910. "Images of Other Cultures" exhibition. National Museum of Ethnology, Japan. 1997.
 (Below) The "Border Crossing Cultures Today" section of the "Images of Other Cultures" exhibition. National Museum of Ethnology, Japan. 1997.

how the West, Africa, Oceania, and Japan have viewed one another. To most people, this may have seemed an unusual combination. Africa and Oceania have often been described in terms of two contrasting images – as Wilderness and Paradise. Cultures in these two areas have been regarded as ‘alien’. And are the farthest removed from the culture of the West. It is from these regions that, commonly, ethnologists, anthropologists, and ethnographic museums have collected objects and information.

On reflection, Japan is similar to Africa and Oceania in having been seen by the West as an ‘alien’ culture. However, the Japanese have come to see themselves as part of the Western World and they have adopted a Western viewpoint toward other cultures, regarding them as exotic or alien. The exhibition was an attempt to shed some light on the Japanese view of ‘other cultures,’ as well as to gain

awareness of the gaze we direct at others.

The point of departure of this investigative exhibition was a reproduction of the ethnographic gallery of the British Museum as it was in 1910, represented with artifacts from Africa, Oceania and Japan. While the initial room showed how the West looked at other cultures, the second room presented aspects of other cultures from which the West deliberately averted its eyes. Presented here were the new cultures created in Africa, Oceania and Japan by incorporating Western elements.

These two rooms represented an attempt to reassess the culture of Africa, Oceania, and Japan as cultures that have both observed the West and been observed by it. In the third room, we traced how Japan has adopted a Western view of African and Oceanic cultures as its own, through a variety of media such as newspaper reporting, books, cartoons, films, and television productions. The last room, Room 4, was entitled 'Border Crossing Cultures Today.' While the peoples of the world share many of the same cultural elements, at the same time they are creating individualized cultures. This is an essential characteristic of the present era. In the last room, we introduced hybrid art forms to represent this. Kiosks from Africa, Oceania, Europe and Japan were also displayed as symbols of globally shared cultural elements. As a whole, we tried to make ourselves more fully aware that we all co-exist in the present world, and that we have a shared future.

5 Dialogical approach

Attempts to reconsider the politics of representation promoted a dialogical approach that may take the form of joint exhibitions organized by those exhibiting and those being exhibited. It is now common for museums to have a close collaborative relationship with the people who are represented in exhibitions.

One of the pioneering exhibitions of this sort is the 1985 exhibition "Te Maori: Art from New Zealand Collection", which opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and travelled to several cities in the States (figure 9). To export Maori cultural properties, the organizers consulted Maori communities. Maori people agreed, and their representatives attended each opening ceremony and performed traditional rituals in front of their ancestors' treasures that they call *taonga*. Paora Tapsel said "through those rituals, Maori arts were inspired with new life and once again became Maori *taonga*" [Tapsel 1996:31-33]. It was an occasion when we clearly realized that the collections of a museum do not solely belong to the museum, but are still in the hands of the original owners.

In Australia, a number of artists and curators jointly created the guidelines for forging relationships between museums and aboriginal peoples, titled "Previous Possessions, New Obligations: Policies for Museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples", for the International Year of the World's Aboriginal People in 1993.



Figure 9 "Te Maori" exhibition which returned to New Zealand and held at the Auckland City Art Gallery, 1987.

The policies specify that Aboriginal peoples have the right to decide how their cultural properties now owned by museums should be treated. The chief obligation placed on museums is to consult, seek permission from and engage with indigenous people in displaying the materials. Another obligation has been the implementation of a program for the return of human remains from museum collections. The guidelines also mention that artifacts that have been used in esoteric ceremonies must be separated from other items, and should be handled according to the characteristics of the artifacts. Since these guidelines clearly and specifically regulate the relationship between museums and Aboriginal peoples, they are now becoming something that cannot be ignored for not only museums in Australia, but also for those in the rest of the world.

Participation of the peoples who are the subjects of ethnographic exhibitions in exhibition projects is becoming a trend not only among temporary exhibitions, but also among permanent exhibitions of major museums. The newly opened African permanent exhibition Hall of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History is an example of the latter.

In the late 80s, the museum's previous "Hall of African Cultures", which opened in 1967 and remained on view till 1992, faced a strong criticism that they presented Africa in a timeless ethnographic present with little discussion of African modernity. In response to the criticism, the museum decided to develop a new exhibition in collaboration with a team called the Extended Team that was composed of more than 100 Africans and African-Americans. The new exhibition with the title "African Voices", which was completed after six years of work, indeed resounds the voices of Africans and African Americans.

As for this exhibition, in 2001 we held a symposium by inviting the chief curator of the exhibition, Mary Jo Arnoldi, and 11 African artists/curators to our museum, the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan, and held a series of discussions.

The aim of the symposium, entitled “African Arts and Cultures: a review through African Eyes”, was to evaluate the Smithsonian’s new exhibition through African viewpoints.

Most of the African artists/curators present at the symposium appreciated the Smithsonian’s dialogical procedure, but at the same time, they unanimously questioned the “wholesale” approach, that is, to house the whole continent under one roof, and the selection of exhibits by the members of the Extended Team. A commentator underlined that the voices of African Americans or Africanists do not often represent the current opinion of those who still live and practice within the continent. Another commentator asked why a tent of the nomadic Somali was selected, while the Great Zimbabwe was scarcely mentioned in the exhibition. In fact, the Somali tent called an *agal* was on display to show that the tent is a central symbol of family life, history, and cultural identity for Somalis in Somalia and in the diasporas. Through a life size video display placed next to the tent, two Somali Americans speak directly to the visitor and promote the importance of the tent as a central object of cultural memory. The planners of the exhibition tried to shift the interpretive perspective of the display from an emphasis on the technology of the house to one of cultural memory. However, this shift was not fully understood nor appreciated by the participants in the 2001 symposium.

“African Voices” is a unique exhibition in that it was developed with substantial input from Africans and African Americans. If the approach of this exhibition is not sufficient, how can we organize exhibitions on Africa outside of Africa? As a non-African curator who has opportunities to be engaged in African exhibitions, frankly speaking, I was more or less shocked to realize how difficult it is to embody “African Voices” in African exhibitions. However, what this case demonstrates is that input from the people who are represented in the exhibition is not the goal, but a start. It shows that the involvement of the people is a prerequisite, not something that can be appreciated on its own [Yoshida and Mack 2008:164-165].

6 Self-representation

The involvement of the peoples who are the subjects of ethnographic exhibitions has promoted the people’s awareness of their own cultures and histories, and now there is a vigorous movement in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Oceania to build ethnographic museums to present their own cultures rather than some sort of exotic culture. This is a movement that aims to give the right of cultural representation back to the owner of the culture.

A typical example is the museum of New Zealand. After the Te Maori exhibition, Maori people recognized the importance of their cultural properties and became more and more interested in the way they were represented in museums. Since then, they have been seeking methods of controlling their own cultural

properties by themselves. The Museum of New Zealand /Te Papa Tongarewa is the result of these movements.

The museum is said to be a “bicultural museum”, jointly run by both the people of European origin and the Maori. By establishing this museum, Maori people have finally obtained the right to maintain and control their cultural legacy on their own. All of the curators who are in charge of the Maori collection are of Maori descent. The museum, however, exemplifies “biculturalism” more perfectly than what was mentioned above. One of the two directors at the museum is of European origin, while the other is a Maori. And all explanations for the exhibits are written both in English and in the Maori language. The Te Papa was, and still is, the only national museum that provides aboriginal people with rights and opportunities of self representation to this extent. This sort of movement has challenged ethnographic museums to incorporate the voices of aboriginal peoples into their exhibitions. On the wave of the movement, there is a growing trend among major ethnographic museums around the world to provide them with opportunities to exhibit their own culture as well as to hold exhibitions through collaborative efforts with representatives of the subject culture.

This movement of self-representation is welcome, and ought to be promoted further. However, it should be noted here that self-representation does not settle the question of “Who has the right to represent a culture that is not their own?”. Not one group of human beings is uniform. There are a variety of images of their own culture according to age, sex, social status and region. Which view can represent the whole community? Usually images of their own culture held by elite people or curators are on display. Then, the question of ‘Who has the right to represent a culture?’ has not yet been solved. As Jan Pieterse pointed out, the attempt of self representation only shifts the question from the inter-cultural to the intra-cultural sphere [Pieterse 1997]. After all we cannot be free from the issue of power and politics of representation as long as we are engaged in an exhibition.

7 Conclusion

We have seen several new approaches in the field of cultural exhibitions since the 1980s. Among them are revisionist representation that focuses on global modernism, and reflexive representation that problematizes the politics of representation itself. Self-representation, which is representation by the owners of the culture themselves, is also an option. A further option is a dialogical approach that may take the form of a joint exhibition organized by those exhibiting and those being exhibited.

It goes without saying that our acts of exhibiting “other” cultures cannot be freed from the bonds of our own way of thinking. What is crucial for ethnographic exhibitions today is to look into the stereotypes that govern our images of others as well as to develop a dialogical relationship with those who are being exhibited.

Since the activity in which ethnographic museums are engaged is the communication between different cultures, we can model it only on the most basic mode of communication; that is, the personal communication through which we can grasp the other and the self at the same time and change each other based on mutual understanding.

According to an art historian Duncan Cameron, museums have two choices open to them, to become either a temple or a forum. The museum as temple is a place where people come to worship “treasures” with pre-established value. The museum as a forum is a place where people can have encounters with the unknown that generates discussion and debate [Cameron 1974: 199]. Cameron also writes, “The forum is where the battles are fought. The temple is where the victors rest. The former is process, the latter is product”. The notion of the museum as a ‘contact zone’ recently pointed out by James Clifford refers to a similar aspect of the museum [Clifford 1997]. Museums throughout the world are now increasingly required to play the forum role: a role in which participants are not only the exhibitor and the audience, but also representatives of the culture that is being exhibited.

Before closing my talk, let me briefly introduce to you the refurbishing project of our Museum’s permanent exhibition. Our Museum, Minpaku, the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan opened to the public in 1977. More than 30 years have passed since then. During this period, the world has changed greatly. Academic paradigms as well as exhibition paradigms have also undergone major shifts, as we saw today. Under the circumstances, we, the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan, decided to refurbish the entire permanent exhibition at our museum, beginning with the Africa and West Asia Galleries, which opened in March 2009. Following the two galleries, we have been refurbishing basically two galleries every year; Music and Language galleries in 2010, Oceania and the Americas galleries in 2011, Europe gallery and Information Zone in 2012, and we completed the renewal of most of the Japanese gallery in March this year. The refurbishment will continue for several years to come so that all of our permanent exhibition galleries will be renewed.

In realizing the new exhibition, we clarified the basic or key concepts:

- While making much of cultural diversity, the exhibition should demonstrate the connection between the respective region and the other parts of the world, including Japan.
- The exhibition should demonstrate the contemporary situation as a result of historical development, rather than being based on the tradition/modernity, before/after axis.
- The exhibition is to portray the contemporary life of people and to create empathy that we all are living together in the same era.
- The exhibition should be realized through collaboration with those who are being

exhibited (=owners of the culture represented).

As for the exhibition of the Africa Gallery, of which I was in charge, we invited museum professionals from 7 African countries to be advisors to our projects. While visiting those countries together and conducting on-site surveys of their cultural heritage, we gathered in Japan every year and planned together the exhibition over a period of the 3 years between 2005 and 2008. The new exhibition can be considered as a platform of the academic network created through the Project (figure 10).

Our new Africa exhibition is composed of five major sections: Excavating History, Work, Rest, Adornment, and Prayer with an additional section called Africa Today. Among these exhibits, I put particular energy into realizing the “Work” section. In the past African exhibition at Minpaku, Africa was represented according to the type of subsistence economy of the societies such as hunters-and-gathers, pastoralists, and agricultural peoples. However, in contemporary Africa, even in the so-called agricultural society, most men go to town after the harvest and are engaged in wage labour for the sake of cash income. Otherwise they cannot sustain their family’s needs. Can we really call their society simply an “agricultural society”? In the new exhibition, therefore, we focused on individuals with their names, and installed life-size panels that display each individual’s portrait, the tool with which



Figure 10 The new Africa Gallery at the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan. “History” section (Above), and “Work” section (Below).

he/she works, and a video or text message that tells us what he/she thinks about his/her occupation. The exhibits are to demonstrate the lifestyles of the people who live together with us in the same era. I am inwardly confident that this method of display can suggest a new direction for ethnographic exhibition that promotes empathy as we are all contemporaries.

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