Amy E. Chan. Pictorial Engraving on Carved Ivory

While carved ivories unearthed during archaeological excavations are some of the most widely discussed items from the Arctic, historic ivory carvings such as bow drills have not been fully considered as objects of acculturation with multivocal narratives. There are over two hundred ivory bows engraved with successful hunts and myth-time stories stored at the Smithsonian Museum Support Center. The majority of bows were made and/or collected throughout the nineteenth century when Native peoples in the Arctic were experiencing a period of rapid change and transition. As they passed from carvers’ hands, bow drills experienced social lives of shifting contexts and meanings. In this presentation, I will explore some of the narratives embedded in ivory bows and discuss how their current context as bicultural artifacts can expose intersections between indigenous cultural values and Western aesthetics which can be utilized to reengage communities with museum objects.

Holly Coleman. Natanaela Emesona: Understanding Nathaniel Emerson’s Hawaiian Artifacts through Indigenous Epistemologies

Nathaniel Emerson is an important figure in Hawai‘i, well-known for his collection of translations and essays that have preserved many aspects of Native Hawaiian history, culture, language and identity. Emerson was also an avid collector of Hawaiian material objects; in 1909, Emerson’s collection of over 300 Hawaiian artifacts was purchased by the Smithsonian Institution following the close of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition held in Seattle. By emphasizing the importance of indigenous epistemologies in this presentation, I will demonstrate that this selection of Hawaiian material culture affords scholars with an opportunity to evaluate Emerson as an expert of Hawaiian ethnographic history and to explore the primacy of object histories as important aspects of cultural transmission. Furthermore, I will argue that artifacts remain a critical yet largely unexplored source for Hawaiian cultural scholarship, particularly in terms of reevaluating indigenous agency within the disciplines of Museum Anthropology and History.

Hō‘ulu‘ulu Mana‘o:

He kanaka ko‘iko‘i ‘o Natanaela Emesona ma Hawai‘i nei, a kaulana ‘o ia no kāna ‘ohi a unuhi ‘ana o nā mo‘olelo Hawai‘i. Mālama ‘ia nā mo‘olelo, nā ‘ike a me nā hana, a me ka ‘ōlelo makuahine o nā kānaka ‘ōiwi o Hawai‘i ma kāna mau hana. Na Emesona i ‘ohi i nā mea Hawai‘i. Ma ka makahiki o 1909, kū‘ai ‘ia he ‘ekolu haneli o kāna mea Hawai‘i e ka hui ‘o Smithsonian, ma hope o ka hopena o ka Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. Ma ko‘u hō‘ike, e ‘imi ana wau i nā mea na‘auao mai nā mea i ‘ohi ‘ia e Emesona, a hiki i kekahi kanaka e ‘ike ke ‘ano o kā Emesona na‘auao Hawai‘i a me ke ‘ano o nā mea i ‘ohi ‘ia, no ke ho‘omau ‘ana i nā hana a me nā ‘ike Hawai‘i. He mea hou, e hō‘ike ana wau i ke ko‘iko‘i o ua mea nei no ke a‘o ‘ana mai o nā mo‘olelo huna i mea e ho‘omaopopo ai nā hana o nā kānaka ‘ōiwi i loko o ka pae ‘āina ‘o Hawai‘i.

Nicole Goude. Hybrid Intentions and Shifting Values: The Photographs of Harry Sampson, Northern Paiute

Harry Sampson (1890-1975) photographed his people during the first quarter of the twentieth century, capturing a transitional period between traditional native lifeways and the rapid
modernization of the American West. His images provide a glimpse into tribal history without the typical romanticization and nostalgia that often accompanies photographs of the American Indians. For this reason, the photographs were collected for use in the Handbook of North American Indians. This presentation will look at how the photographs carry meaning and a specific set of values for the temporal context in which they were made, and how these meanings and values shift over time. The goal is to demonstrate that Sampson’s photographs are not just representations of past events, but material objects that are dependent on a myriad of intentions for their use-value.

Suzanne Godby Ingalsbe. Examining Multiple Layers of Curation in the Berwick and Bunting Rugs

Meaning is made multiple times in the life of a museum object, particularly when the item is created, collected, and curated. Yet the authority of the museum display typically serves to foreground, and thus establish as truth, only one portion of the object’s social meaning. The museum’s position of social authority makes it possible to drown out all voices but its own, intentionally or not, so it is particularly important to attend to the multiple layers of curation. In order to better understand this process, my research focuses on NMNH prayer rugs that were donated contemporaneously and subsequently displayed in notably different ways. These historic examples will demonstrate how the context of collection and attribution of meanings by donors can impact the context of display. The studies also show how the context of creation can become invisible in the museum setting when the object is separated from its cultural milieu.

KeunYoung Kim. Comparative Analysis in Museum Classification: The Case of Chinese Collection in the US and China

Although museums are regarded as institutions that classify and disseminate knowledge through objects, the subject of how the classification is organized and whether the same object is categorized differently by different cultures are hardly examined. In this presentation I will analyze how Chinese cultural objects (in the field of ethnological, archaeological, and art objects) are categorized in the databases and the naming system of National Museum of National History, Anthropology Department and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian Institution. Further, this result will be compared with the classification system of the Chinese museums, in order to examine the relationship of objects in the culture where the object originates and in the culture where the object is newly introduced. This paper will demonstrate how the knowledge used in museum classification is culturally organized.

Eugenia Kisin. Collecting Chilkat Blankets: Materiality, Gender, and Translation on the Northwest Coast

The textiles known as “Chilkat blankets” are some of the most beautiful and complex weavings produced by Tlingit, Tsimshian and Haida peoples living on the Northwest Coast of North America. Since the nineteenth century, they have been objects of value for collectors and Native communities, and canonical artifacts in forming anthropological understandings of Northwest Coast arts and techniques. However, in spite of their inconographic familiarity, little is known about their meanings in social and intercultural mediations, both within Native
communities and in encounters between collectors, anthropologists, and Native peoples. In this paper, I will discuss Chilkat weavings in the NMNH’s collections, focusing on those obtained by James G. Swan, an early systematic collector of Northwest Coast objects. Framing the shifting signification of these textiles as processes of “translation,” I suggest that collections-oriented research can uncover promising valences of artifacts, particularly in relation to women’s arts and issues of cultural attribution.

Stacey Loyer. Building Biographies: The Social Lives of Seneca Cornhusk Dolls

Seneca cornhusk dolls have been understood by anthropologists and collectors in a number of ways: as an artistic tradition, as tourist art, and as material manifestations of the cultural heritage of their makers. My project will draw upon a variety of sources, including documentary evidence, photographs, and a close analysis of the dolls themselves, to begin a reconstruction of the routes traveled by several Seneca cornhusk dolls, all presumably made in the late 19th and 20th centuries, and subsequently donated to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History. I will explore how this comparative biographical approach, which takes into account the dolls’ material attributes, might add to or complicate existing interpretations of Seneca cornhusk dolls. Furthermore, I am interested in what the dolls’ biographies might tell us about Seneca history, the history of anthropology, Euro-American history, and relationships among them.

Bryce Peake. On the Semiotic Construction of a Sioux Elk Whistle

Anthropologists have frequently asserted that important features of social and cultural life are reflected in music, but have often ignored the semiotic role of the musical instrument. Consequently, we must begin to contemplate how to look beyond a musical instrument’s acoustelogical properties to discover the interface between image and image acoustique. Using an approach similar to the cultural geographers Yates, Lawrence, and Donley-Reid, this project examines the raw materials of a Siouan Elk whistle for deeper structural affinities with the “universe of discourse,” that is the instrument in its social context. While the selection of materials may become trivial to the maker through a process of naturalization, I suggest that materials are not at all accidental. Using theoretical frameworks from symbolic-interpretive and philosophical-literary anthropology to bear on the study of material culture collectively, I ask: "Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts?"

Jodine Perkins. Exploring Similarity and Difference in Ethnographic Museum Collections

Reacting to older models that treated particular American Indian peoples as discrete groups living in artificial isolation, recent work in the historical ethnohistory of Eastern North America has focused on problems of social and cultural complexity and on better understanding the relationships among native groups over space and time. Building on scholarship exploring regional patterning in Eastern North American music, dance, ritual, and verbal art, I have begun to investigate what objects held in ethnographic collections can reveal about similarity and difference among Woodlands peoples by focusing on the Caddo and Shawnee items held in the Smithsonian’s NMNH. I will also discuss the challenges of working with museum collections of items from Southeastern American Indian peoples, compare and contrast the two primary collectors of these particular items, and explore future possibilities for adding additional
contextual information to these and other Southeastern American Indian items held in museum collections.

Clark Sage. *Recovering a Symbol of the American Indian: The Ethnohistorical Method and Plains Bonnets of the Smithsonian Collections*

With the rise of Western museums and large ethnographic collections from around the globe it became necessary to develop taxonomies to facilitate the organization and ethnological study of material culture. Established typologies were arbitrarily created within Western frameworks and failed to account for the nuanced indigenous conceptualization of their own material traditions. As a result a narrow cannon of classificatory terms has been reproduced through the generations that has failed to account for a large number of materials which do not conveniently fit into these recognized terms. Using a sampling of nineteenth century plains headdresses I propose that using an ethnohistorical approach a new indigenously informed typological framework may be established which both scholars and source communities may use for a richer understanding of material culture collections and their place through time and space.

Kristi Scott. *Material Culture in Boarding Schools*

Objects and photographic records will be used to examine life at Indian boarding schools on the Plains in the late 1900s. Industrial arts, domestic arts, animal husbandry, crafts, music, and other curricula were often encouraged in schools, as is evident in various material culture collections. From wood and leather carvings, to textiles and doll making, historical data will be utilized to examine possible experiences of Plains Indian children away from home for school. By focusing on the material culture produced by students, as well as those collected and imported from outside influences at boarding schools, this project employs data in museum collections not previously considered. Preliminary research and documentation are main focuses for this project.

Jessica Watson. *“An Embarrassment of Conditions”: Selective Knowledge Production Through Two Collections of Pomo Baskets*

During the Pomo “basket craze” (1890-1930), two collectors avidly sought to acquire pieces from the same master weavers in Northern California Pomo villages, but approached their collection strategies in markedly different ways. My project analyzes the ways that the class, gender and ambitions of the collectors influenced the interpretations of these collections by Smithsonian curators. Dr. John Hudson was a medical doctor and aspiring anthropologist living near the Pomo who sold his collection to the Museum in 1899; Ella F. Hubby was a wealthy collector who valued the baskets as fine art and gave her collection to the Smithsonian in 1920 with “an embarrassment of conditions” for their display and storage. In this paper, I will demonstrate that the Pomo material in each collection is similar in type and quality, show differences in curatorial interpretation as seen in their respective exhibition labels, and hypothesize reasons for this difference.