

## Book Review

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**Philipp Schorch with Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu, Sean Mallon, Cristián Moreno Pakarati, Mara Mulrooney, Nina Tonga, and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, *Refocusing Ethnographic Museums through Oceanic Lenses*, Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2020, paperback £25.99, pp. xi+299**

'Imagine how rich life can be, or become, if we dare to take a curious look through such an ethnographic kaleidoscope...' (182). *Refocusing Ethnographic Museums through Oceanic Lenses* develops this metaphor of 'ethnographic kaleidoscope' to demonstrate the multifarious lenses through which ethnographic collections, objects, and museums can be seen and engaged with. Written by Philipp Schorch (professor of museum anthropology at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität) with six co-authors (curators, historians, and anthropologists) from within Oceania, the book is the result of collaborative ethnographic research undertaken between 2014 and 2016 on Indigenous museum practices within the region. Divided into three sections, each focusing on a different museum (Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Hawai'i; Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastián Englert, Rapa Nui; and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Aotearoa New Zealand respectively), the book's chapters alternate between co-authored case studies and those written by Schorch alone. The breadth and depth of knowledge, perspectives, and professional backgrounds of the different authors here make for rich and engaging reading, with each braiding together museological and anthropological expertise with Indigenous Oceanic epistemologies and personal engagements.

The first chapter, written by Schorch and Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu (assistant specialist in American Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa) makes clear – of relevance to any museum with ethnographic holdings – that 'the crucial question is not Indigenous presence, but whether such presence rises to the level of Indigenous agency and authority' (35). Kahanu considers this by tracing the complex and sometimes subtle ways in which a dynamic and ongoing legacy of Hawaiian response, adaptation, adoption, and resistance is embedded in the Museum's history from its inception. This is paired with a chapter in which Schorch invites Bishop Museum cultural resource specialists Kamalu du Preez and Marques Hanalei Marzan to 'have a conversation with a museum piece of their choice' (50), applying a Hawaiian focus to reconsider museum temporalities. Through the lens of the 'past-becoming-present-becoming-future' (60), the Bishop Museum emerges as a dynamic, living entity, as opposed to a static, historical resource.

The second section moves on to Rapa Nui, and in Chapter 3 the Rapanui historian Cristián Moreno Pakarati and Mara Mulrooney, senior project supervisor at Pacific Legacy Inc., discuss the digital repatriation of photographs from the Bishop Museum to Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastián Englert. They interrogate the 'double lives' of photographic collections and how this requires a 'double vision'; 'that is, a way photographic (and other) collections can be reapproached by focusing simultaneously on the historicization of anthropological knowledge and the consideration of contemporary Indigenous realities and their underpinning epistemologies and ontologies' (72). The following chapter outlines the 'heritageisation' (94) of Rapa Nui, a process driven by post-colonial governance, tourism, and academic analyses, but uses the etymological basis of the verb 'curate' (as deriving from the Latin for 'to heal') to examine strategies of reclamation deployed by Rapanui communities.

The fifth chapter discusses the implications of *mana taonga* for museums: overturning the assumption that museums 'own' their collections, the concept articulates Māori authority over museum collections, and has been extended to other Indigenous Oceanic groups, centring Indigenous values, knowledge, and genealogical connections museologically. However, this chapter makes clear that the ways in which the concept is actualized in practice is not without contestation. Written as a dialogue between the authors, the chapter outlines the Materializing German-Sāmoan Colonial Legacies project at Te Papa – conceived by Sean Mallon (senior curator of Pacific Cultures at Te Papa) and directed by Schorch – and elucidates some of the 'ambiguities and limits' and 'challenges and tensions' that arose in 'translating *mana taonga* from theory into practice' (123). The chapter is candidly reflexive as to how these challenges may be 'personally, strategically, and productively negotiated as part of collaborative collecting and curatorial practice' (123). Sean Mallon and Nina Tonga (Te Papa's curator of Contemporary Art) reflect upon and critique the project and Schorch's involvement therein. Tonga questions the idea of the 'double lens' in the project, for which there was no Sāmoan participant on the same level as Schorch, himself a German national. The voices of the co-authors are most discernible here (as the only chapter in which their own words are circumscribed as such), and Mallon and Tonga's incisive criticism make this one of the most compelling in the book. In Chapter 6, Schorch furthers the consideration of the 'fraught nexus of Germany, Sāmoa, and Aotearoa New Zealand' (16) and explores the role of 'anthropology's interlocutors' in the perpetuating but contingent ethnographic condition therein, tracing this from the context of German colonialism in Sāmoa through to engagements with the colonial legacy by contemporary artists today.

Schorch concludes by delineating the 'ethnographic kaleidoscope', argued as instrumental rather than purely metaphorical, as allowing a constant change in positions and perspectives on ethnographic collections to generate 'an infinite variety of patterns' (179). Finally, Ty P. Kāwika Tengan's (associate professor of ethnic studies and anthropology at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa) eloquent Afterword is particularly rewarding to read, in the author's use of the richness of Hawaiian concepts, metaphor, and layered meaning to draw attention to the "generative potency" of museum objects' (185).

One of the book's distinguishing features is its 'layered co-authorship', intended, in theory, to decentre the singular authoritative voice in favour of polyvocality. In practice, however, the voice of Schorch runs continually through the book and, as such, could be said to dominate, so I am not entirely convinced of the success of this approach. Ultimately, however, the model is one with potential and the book successfully provokes further questions for the reader to consider. Furthermore, one of the book's strengths is its reflexivity, particularly so in Chapter 5 and in the Afterword, in which Tengan speaks of his initial wariness at being one of several Indigenous authors listed 'with' Schorch as the primary author.

Throughout the book, current practice is situated against historical context and speaks to the resonances and potentials of these collections into the future, especially the lived, genealogical connections between them and communities throughout Oceania. While the focus is, of course, distinctly Oceanic, there is much that is of wider relevance and application and will be of interest to those working with ethnographic collections more broadly. The book illustrates some of the ways in which Indigenous Oceanic ontologies and epistemologies have transformed museum practice in the region, yet the generative possibilities of applying some of these lessons to collections elsewhere in the world is made apparent.