



Council for Museum Anthropology ***2013 Report from the CMA President***

Contributed by Howard Morphy

Thanks are given to the CMA Treasurer and Secretary, and to the *Museum Anthropology* Editors for their excellent service and reports. Thanks are especially given to President-elect Patricia Capone for her remarkable work in organizing CMA-sponsored sessions for this year's meeting. I will not repeat what they have said, but bring up some key points that we need to address out of what they conclude.

The positives are that we are in a stable financial position, that this year's program is an excellent one and that museum anthropology is more visible. As a Board, we work very effectively as a team, thanks to the ease of electronic communications. In addition, Kathleen Adams has done a fantastic organizational job designing the upcoming CMA Member Reception at the Loyola University Museum of Art, and we encourage you all to join us there for refreshment and conversation, as we prepare to raise a toast to the first recipient of our Lifetime Achievement/Distinguished Service Award later this evening.

That being said, there are however a few worrying things to report.

- Our membership numbers are down. The reduction of student fees to only \$5 per year does not seem to have resulted in more student members thus far; please help us get the word out.
- We have excellent awards to offer, and we have ensured the financial stability that allows us to continue offering them, but we receive too few nominees.
- We need more submissions for the CMA column in *Anthropology News*, and more information sent to the Museum Anthropology blog. Changes are also underway in journal publishing, and we need to pro-actively address these to ensure our continued visibility and relevance.
- Museum anthropology does not have the presence in anthropology that we believe we should have.

How do we address these issues? The first three cases, to an extent, are in our own hands; as board members, we need to reach out more to our community and solicit more involvement from our constituency. We need to get more students and volunteers to sign up as members. I also think we need to engage more with anthropology in Europe, where I can sense a much more positive engagement developing between anthropology and museums than is happening in the USA. Museums are one of the most important portals for anthropological engagement with the public. We need to use our positions to better advantage, and to get our colleagues to understand that. We have, for example, formed strong collaborations with that other embattled area and sometimes overlooked field of visual anthropology. For next year, we should consider creating a joint session on materiality, led by CMA and SVA, to turn intellectual discourse in more intriguing directions.

American anthropology seems to be going down a series of theoretical dead-ends which, on the surface, engage with the material world, with visuality, and with agency, but which run the risk of ending up as metaphysical navel gazing. We need to engage more with that discourse from the perspective of museum, scholars, and communities who actually know a great deal about material culture, and who engage with these issues in tangible ways through various collections and initiatives.

We also need to have a stronger engagement with source communities. Some are beginning to get fed up with the critical perspective that positioned museum anthropology at the forefront of colonialism, as institutions separated people off from their material heritage. This simplistic view of the past history of museum anthropology is an oft repeated trope. Yet, experiences in Australia, Europe, and Canada are beginning to show a very different kind of engagement between museum anthropology and indigenous communities. CMA needs to be part of that as a portal for the positive engagement of indigenous communities with the resources from anthropologies past. That should be one of our greatest strengths.

Finally we do need to think about office holders and designating responsibility for chairing various subcommittees. We will be holding elections next year for several CMA Board positions, most notably a new Student Board Member. I think we also need to have more CMA members assisting in planning the reception. Next year, we hope to meet at the Smithsonian!