“More Than Commodities: Repatriation of “Art Objects” in the Cambodian Cultural Context “

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In recent years, stolen ancient Buddhist and Hindu sculptures have been repatriated to Cambodia. However, the repatriation of these “art objects” is mostly investigated and analyzed through the lens of legality; art objects are viewed as commodities within the supply and demands of the art market. This paper seeks to understand local definitions and ontological understandings of “object” and “art” in the Cambodian cultural and religious contexts. I argue that art objects need to be culturally contextualized and shaded with nuance, especially given the repatriation of stolen art objects to the morally shattered society and culture of post-Khmer Rouge genocide Cambodia. Drawing upon thick descriptions from different disciplines and media, I argue that the repatriation of these fragmented art objects contributes to the process of restoring the broken body of the Cambodian Nation, traumatized by wars and genocide.

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**Abstract**

Raffles in Southeast Asia: A Missed Opportunity to Decolonize Display at the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore

Along with the advent of decolonial thinking and the repatriation of objects, the practices of art curators and museum directors have vastly changed over the years. However, there are still museums and exhibitions that root their practices in colonial thinking, either intentionally or unintentionally, that valorizes the individuals and entities that were responsible for cultural exploitation. A case in point is a 2019 exhibition, *Raffles in Southeast Asia: Revisiting the Scholar and Statesman*at the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was a colonizer who was responsible for historical trauma in Southeast Asia, and this exhibit fails to represent his violent legacy. The goal of this paper is two-fold: First, I discuss the failings of this particular exhibit. Second, I propose a much-needed post-colonial approach to displaying objects that not only dismantle official narratives but also would have provided an opportunity for the Asian Civilizations Museum to decolonize their exhibition space and ultimately Raffle’s legacy.

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“The Reclamation of Power, Self, Image and Diginity in Carrie Mae Weems, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried”*

In March 2019, Tamara Lanier filed a lawsuit against Harvard University. The institution currently owns and profits off of well known daguerreotypes of Lanier’s ancestors. Originally taken in 1850, these images were created to support “race scientist” Louis Agassiz in his Harvard-funded, eugenicist project. Currently, these images are used by educators to illustrate some of the horrors of chattel slavery in the United States. Harvard uses copyright law to continues to accumulate wealth from the suffering of the people photographed. A notable example of this is Harvard’s legal threats against artist Carrie Mae Weems who repurposed the images in her 1995-1996 series, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*. The artist was threatened with legal action for so-called unauthorized use of the images. Ultimately, in an attempt to retain control, Harvard purchased a copy of the work from Weems. This presentation is centered around the power of the aforementioned daguerreotypes. There was white supremacist power exercised in their creation and subsequent possession. A true call for return of these images involves the relinquishing of that power.

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“The Ironics of Display in Rocky Cajigan’s 2016 Exhibition, *Museumified*”

Filipino artist Rocky Cajigan ironizes the museum display of artifacts from the Cordillera in his exhibition *Museumified* (2016) to reveal the continuation and instability of the American imperial project in cultural institutions. Through assemblage, Cajigan shows an empowered indigeneity that cannot be confined behind museum glass. The multiplicity of conflicting objects disrupts the narrative of the sexual, mystical, and wild native Filipino that is used to justify the extraction and looting of objects during American colonization.

The Philippine collections held by many American museums and archives are comprised of ethnographic materials and cultural artifacts that were obtained through coercion, manipulation, or without consent. American scientists, government officials, and foreign businessmen capaciously collected objects from the new colony after winning the Spanish American War in 1898 thereby acquiring the archipelago. To this day these objects remain on display in these museums and outside the scope of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. These objects are often displayed as a celebration of scientific discovery thereby affirming stereotypes of indigenous peoples. Contemporary artists like Cajigan use art as a decolonial gesture in lieu of acts of repatriation. I argue that Cajigan’s *Museumified* can be viewed as an act of artistic repatriation that gives agency back to the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera.