

EMPIRES: SCIENCE, TRAVEL, ART

HILL CENTER LECTURE

AT

AMHERST COLLEGE

4:30 WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 2009



Bishop Museum, Honolulu; photograph Lou Ratté

Using Museum Collections to Understand Cultural Diversity in Papua New Guinea

By

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American Museum of Natural History, NY; photograph L. Ratté

Anthropologists have been collecting material culture from New Guinea for more than a century, but only in recent decades have we begun to use these exotic objects as tools for understanding the complex network of cultural diversity found on this vast island. This lecture explores three case studies about how these

museum collections can help us probe the patterns of how different

indigenous cultures vary, the kinds of contact between different communities, and the history of acculturation and contact with Western societies during the colonial period. The three case studies include (1) variations in the significance and use of art across the Papuan Gulf, (2) What variations in material culture can tell us about interaction between different cultural groups on the Sepik Coast, and (3) how museum collections can help us document the expansion of colonial control and the penetration of Western forces on indigenous communities.