

Name: Jessica Einhorn

Division: Humanities and Social Sciences

Semester: Spring 2014 (4 units of release time was granted)

Project Name: The Australian National University (ANU)

Location: California and Australia

1. A. The purpose of the project was to complete my research for the PhD. B. This objective was met. In addition, I began outlining and writing the dissertation.

2. Outline of Activities:

I completed my fieldwork objectives, and began writing the dissertation under the direction of my committee. More fieldwork may be needed in the future depending upon the direction my dissertation takes as I write it. The writing process has been valuable to tighten up my argument and see if there are any additional areas I need to do reading or research in.

I also took advantage of local cultural events and exhibitions that relate to the field of Anthropology. Events I attended included the Imperial Russian Ballet's Don Quixote, The Magic Flute Opera, and Paco Pena Flamencura. Exhibitions I attended included Old Masters: Australia's Great Bark Artists, Mapping Our World: Terra Incognita to Australia, Gold and the Incas: Lost World's of Peru, Auld Lang Syne: Images of Scottish Australia from First Fleet to Federation, and the Head On Photo Festival.

Other milestones made toward PhD:

-Annual Report

-draft outline of chapter topics

-research and began writing Chapters 2 and 3 (still under revision)

3. Major points of interest and value created from this project:

The process of writing is improving my writing skills. The revision process is valuable and has taught me a lot. I'm working on several papers and articles, processing photographs and film footage, and continue to make connections with leading experts in the field. My contribution to the field will be the connection between fiber art and economic choices influenced by culture change, specifically how making art objects is a re-discovery process. Many of the people I've studied don't remember how their parents or grandparents made traditional items. Through making objects to sell to tourists and the art market, people not only rediscover and reinvent the process of making fibre art, but also becoming closer to their ancestors by keeping their tradition alive.

4. Students will benefit from this project in the following ways:

I have increased my breath of knowledge and experience as an Anthropologist. This allows me to draw on more examples when talking about Anthropology as a discipline, especially personal experiences of those who I have met that have enriched my life. I have also learned about the challenges of research, ethics, cross-cultural comparisons, adaptation/culture change, and struggles of Indigenous populations in the world today due to colonization and globalization. I have updated the content of the courses I teach to show that I understand current developments in the field and challenges, as well as interdisciplinary connections between Anthropology, the Social Sciences, and Humanities.

5. This project was useful in that it directly relates to future teaching assignments (ANTH 110, 125, and 351). It is useful to other faculty in the Anthropology Department. I have been sharing my experiences with David Leitner, Adjunct in Anthropology, who is also finishing writing his PhD through discussions on Skype and email. This has allowed us to discuss our own research and brainstorm ideas to engage students in Anthropology. For our division I have helped make connections for Elizabeth Terzakis and Yolanda Valenzuela for a guest talk on our campus with one of my teachers (informant to my dissertation research) and a field trip out to my research area of Coarsegold.

6. I am sharing the benefits of participation in this project with my students and colleagues. Other benefits will be to the field of Anthropology, as my original contribution to the field is planned for publication in the form of articles.

7. A letter from Dr. Lan Tran, the Graduate Student Officer for the Research School of the Humanities and the Arts, will send the committee a letter stating that I am continuing to make progress on the PhD. Her email: lan.tran@anu.edu.au

Committee members supervising me at the Australian National University:

Dr. Louise Hamby, Dr. Howard Morphy, Dr. Judith MacDougall

8. Tangible Product: Writing Sample

Comparison and contrast of the fibre art made by indigenous weavers in Central California and the Western Desert of Australia reveals how both hunter and gatherer cultures have adapted to global and national economies while maintaining aspects of their tradition and social structure. Fibre artists of both groups value their art as mediums for maintaining country and passing on tradition, but they primarily practice to sell objects in modern art and tourist markets. Although they come from completely different environments and cultural traditions, artists in both groups have come to use similar techniques because the costs of acquiring raw material and making objects for sale are great compared to the return gained from other ways of making a living. As a consequence, fibre artists usually make fibre art only when other avenues of making money are unavailable or incomes from other categories of work must be supplemented to make ends meet. For this reason fibre art is rarely made in either culture unless it is prompted by the outside world. Nonetheless I argue that contemporary fibre

arts of both groups are firmly rooted in tradition, but must respond to different notions of aesthetic and antiquity imposed by modern art and tourist markets.

Fibre artists in both cultures define their work as a traditional practice and explain the meaning of it in traditional terms. However, in Australia those who buy and market the work define the objects as being “contemporary art” because they fail to recognize the traditional roots of the medium, which derives from traditional fibre technologies for making string and head pads but has been modified to make contemporary objects such as baskets and sculptures. Art collectors and museums pay higher prices for other mediums of art, such as canvas painting, in which they recognize links to aboriginal tradition even though the medium of canvas is no less contemporary than basketry. As a consequence, Western Desert Australian fibre artists are compelled by market forces to minimize their investment of labor into their work, and modify traditional themes of color to appeal to western aesthetics.

In contrast, art and tourists markets widely appreciate the deep roots in antiquity and tradition of contemporary fibre practices in Central California, which derives directly from an ancient basketry technology. Because the aesthetics of the western art market recognizes the traditional contexts of the medium, it values only contemporary baskets that approach the quality of workmanship and mimic the traditional themes of antique baskets that were made to service cultural and subsistence, not market needs. The market for traditional California baskets compels fibre artists to invest extraordinary large amounts of labor in a making their baskets, and discourages them from incorporating any contemporary themes into their work. Although a contemporary California basket that satisfies this aesthetic commands a far higher market price than its Australian counterpart, the return for hours of labor invested is actually similar between the two. Demand for tourist items with low production time to keep the cost low has led many Indigenous Central Californians to make baskets in a similar technique to people in the Western Desert of Australia.

Both Californian and Australian operate in the context of modern economies and respond to market forces. Although the two fibre art traditions appear to be responding to such forces in differently- they are actually similar responses to outside notions of “tradition” and “contemporary” imposed by western aesthetics. I argue that fibre artists would be empowered in achieving goals of maintaining country and passing on tradition, if western aesthetics recognized and valued the artists view of the traditional, yet contemporary, context of their fibre art.

Thesis:

Contemporary fibre arts of both groups are firmly rooted in tradition and directed toward maintaining country, but must respond to different notions of aesthetic and antiquity imposed by modern art and tourist markets.

Testable Hypothesis:

The amount of cash return per hour of labor is approximately equal for Western Desert Australian and Central Californian fibre artists despite the disparity in market prices for baskets.

Conclusion:

Western art markets should recognize and value artists view of the traditional, yet contemporary, context of their fibre art if it wants to support goals of maintenance of cultural tradition and country.