Journal of the History of Collections 5 no 1 (1993) pp 1–11

EUROPEAN COLLECTING OF AMERICAN INDIAN ARTEFACTS AND ART

CHRISTIAN F FEEST

During the past 500 years, European collecting of artefacts produced by the native peoples of the Americas has been affected by changes in the conceptualization of the inhabitants of the New World (from archetypal 'other' to 'American Indians' to specific peoples) and of their products (from potentially useful artefacts to cultural documents to 'primitive art') as well as by growing specialization of the collections. Since these changes were closely interrelated, a better understanding of their relationships is necessary for an evaluation of the various meanings attributed to these artefacts in Europe

THE collecting, or rather, assembling of the unfamiliar products of distant lands and little-known peoples can be exemplified by the study of the history of European collecting of American – and especially North American – Indian artefacts Early collectors gathered native products for purposes of informing their patrons, or compatriots, or the Church, of the types of civilizations with which they were concerned. The various distinct tribes of North America were not distinguished one from another; the vague concept of American Indians was established, and their craft works were placed in *Kunst-* or *Wunderkammern*. Appreciated in the seventeenth century on account of their strangeness, such decontextualized objects were usually classified by their constituent material rather than by origin. In the eighteenth century European interest veered towards representation of the cultures of the various peoples, following the interest in the objects brought back from Captain James Cook's expeditions. Both the significant public interest in the collections of North American Indian material, which since the late nineteenth century have been housed in ethnographic museums, and the creation of large private collections of such artefacts are in part a reflection of the specific European interest in American Indians at large [1]

'Indians' and 'art': two words of caution

Half a millennium after the event, we should not only recognize that the populations encountered by Columbus were not the inhabitants of India or its vicinity, but we should also accept that the hundreds of different indigenous peoples of the Americas had no reason to think of themselves as being related to one another. It is only the shared experience of five centuries of colonial domination that has given the erroneous collective label a certain amount of subjective meaning. The notion of 'American Indians' is thus primarily a European construct, and I shall subsequently use it only in this generalized sense as opposed to the plurality and diversity of indigenous American peoples and their cultures.[2]

At the time of Columbus, few (if any) of the aboriginal languages of the Americas had a word designating the domain we think of as 'art'.[3] We conceptualize 'art' as in some way separable from the rest of our material and non-material possessions. For the native peoples of the Americas, however, every shaped object not only had a form that was appreciated in terms of being 'appropriate' or 'well formed', but also had one or more functions Under such circumstances, useless beauty was generally as incomprehensible as ugly usefulness, whereas in European 'art' aesthetic form is considered apart from functional considerations.[4]

This conceptual difference is ultimately related to the degree of specialization in the production of goods in different societies, and we should take note of the wide variety of cultural premises among the indigenous peoples of the Americas Many of them knew no such specialization beyond a basic division of labour by gender; for example, baskets were made by women, whereas work in stone was done by men. Others had part-time specialists for some of the crafts, or restricted the production of certain types of objects on the basis of the ritual knowledge of their makers. Full-time or professional craftsmen were

rare outside the civilizations of Mesoamerica and the Andean highlands, and even there – much as in medieval Europe – no specialized distinction had developed between craftsmen and artists.[5]

Thus, if the idea of 'art' must be considered foreign to the cultural constructs of indigenous Americans, whose identity as 'American Indians' was meaningful only to European minds, it should be clear that the collecting of 'American Indian art' had to be a peculiarly European habit.

The origins of collecting

In this connection one must also note the historical relationship between the practice of collecting and the origin of 'art' in a modern sense. In essence, collecting always removes specimens from their meaningful and functional context in order to preserve them under artificial conditions in a different context.[6] Forms are saved at the expense of function. In looking at specimens, the observer's attention is necessarily focused on their shape, while their meaning and function can be confirmed only on the basis of real or assumed knowledge. By making them non-functional, objects not made as 'art' are associated with works produced only for appreciation of their formal properties.

Collecting, as the systematic preservation of specimens, is by no means a universal practice Indeed, only a handful of cultures in history have found it expedient to burden themselves with the accumulation of useless objects by placing a value on the admiration of rare or unusual things. Among indigenous American populations, the Aztecs of Mexico are the major candidate for inclusion in this exclusive club. Modern Europe since the Renaissance is another example, and in this case the role of collecting in the origin of 'art' can be reasonably well documented. The history of collecting 'American Indian art' thus reflects both changes in the perception of 'Indians' and in the conceptual development of 'art'.

Those European explorers and conquerors of the trans-Atlantic lands who obtained works of native manufacture, of course, did not do so in order to become patrons of either artists or museums. Field collecting was generally done in order to procure evidence for what had been discovered and conquered, to illustrate the usefulness of exploration, and to promote continued interest in such activities at home Exchanges of goods between travellers and the natives in the beginning were generally of a haphazard or of a badly understood ceremonial nature.

On his first day in the New World, for example, Columbus – wishing to impress the inhabitants of Guanahaní – distributed 'some red caps and some glass beads . . . and many other things of little value' In return, the natives brought presents of 'parrots and cotton thread in balls, and spears and many other things'.[7] Similar exchanges occurred throughout the first voyage, and in the end the Spanish ships must have had the air of curiosity shops.[8] At one point, however, Columbus plainly forbade the trade in trifles 'in order that they might know that the admiral sought nothing except gold among them', and indeed he later succeeded in obtaining a variety of golden artefacts such as ear and nose ornaments, 'pieces of gold worked into a thin leaf', 'a great plate of gold', 'a great mask of gold', and more.[9] In addition, Columbus also brought back to Spain a group of Indians as an example of their human nature and potential usefulness to the crown.

The situation was broadly similar everywhere during the period following first contact, although there were obvious differences with respect to the kinds of artefacts procured, depending upon the sophistication of the cultures encountered In addition to artefacts illustrating the presence of certain natural resources, objects of native worship were brought to Europe to document the need for missionary work.[10] Native arms epitomized either the military technology to be reckoned with, or, ultimately, the subjection of the indigenous inhabitants. As a sideline to the increasingly warlike encounters between natives and newcomers, looting became more and more common as a method of – so to speak – 'field collecting'.[11] Both soldiers and missionaries in the long run may have destroyed more native works of craftsmanship than they preserved. Obviously, the collecting of American Indian art had its limits, even for Europeans.

Of the thousands of American artefacts carried to Europe before the eighteenth century, fewer than 300 have survived to the present day. The major reason for these losses is that perhaps as little as only one per cent of these objects ever entered the collections which began to be assembled in sixteenth-century Europe by both princes and scholars, and later also by educational institutions and religious bodies. These *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammern*, cabinets of art and curiosity, were usually based on the idea of universal representation of the works of man and nature,

with rarity in terms of execution or availability as the primary criterion of selection.[12]

In short, it may be said that the two major systematic principles involved in the setting-up of a collection were material and subject matter. Ferdinand of Tyrol's *Kunstkammer* in Schloss Ambras was displayed according to the material of the items, such as wood, glass, or precious metals: most of his Americana were in the feather cabinet, which included a variety of Mexican featherwork, but there was also a case with lapidary work, in which some Aztec pendants may have had their place. Next to the *Kunstkammer* there was an armoury, which featured Brazilian clubs and battle axes.[13] Ole Worm's museum in Copenhagen, the collection of a scholar, was likewise organized according to the material of the artefacts,[14] and in this respect followed the example provided by Ulisse Aldrovandi of Bologna, in whose collection the artificial rarities were included among the minerals, plants, and animals from which they had been made (Fig. 1).[15]

The other principle of organization may be illustrated by referring to the collection of John Tradescant, whose indigenous American artefacts, some of which survive in the Ashmolean and in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford,[16] were featured under five different headings: 'Mechanick artificiall Works in Carvings, Turnings, Sowings, and Paintings', 'Variety of Rarities' (a category which foreshadowed Sir Hans Sloane's 'Miscellanies' section as the appropriate place for ethnographic material),[17] 'Warlike Instruments', 'Garments, Vestures, Habits, Ornaments', and 'Utensils'.[18] The Royal *Kunstkammer* in Copenhagen, into which Worm's collection was ultimately absorbed, after 1680 was divided into such entities as the 'Heroic Cabinet' (featuring kings and great men), the 'Cabinet of Natural Objects', and the 'Cabinet of Medals', with most of the Americana in the 'Indian Cabinet', where 'India' stood for exotic places in general.[19]

Despite the implication of such terms as 'Indian Cabinet', the place of origin was hardly a criterion in the display of exotic artefacts. Scholarly collections, such as Aldrovandi's, sometimes had an index by area,[20] but in most cases attributions to locations were hazy and often as ambiguous as the term 'Indian' suggests. The inventory of the 'Treasures of the Indies' of Charles V in Siamancas listed material from America and Asia with little or no discrimination.[21] 'Moorish' was another term by which especially Mexican objects could be referred to. It is hardly surprising, then, that visitors faced by the works of various peoples hardly ever heard of before and now all displayed in the same museum case, were left with the message that all those far-away folks were pretty much the same. Renward Cysat of Lucerne, who in 1613 visited the famous cabinet of Felix Platter in Basle, was clearly overwhelmed by the sight of all those 'Heathen, Turkish, Moorish, Canibal, Indian, Japanese things ex antipodibus and from the New World, of their idols, habits, armour, arms, and suchlike, so that one is thereof smitten and forgets to shut the mouth'.[22] Despite the recognizable European interest in the Americas, the vision of the

FIG. 1. 'Regina Insulae Floridae' wearing a feather wig illustrating the chapter on parrots in Ulisse Aldrovandi's *Ornithologia* (1599). The image shown in the woodcut, based on a tempera drawing by Aldrovandi, is derived in part from depictions of native people of coastal North Carolina and of Florida published in the first two volumes of Theodore de Bry's *America* (1590–1). The specific provenance given by Aldrovandi notwithstanding, the feather wig may be Brazilian. Photo: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

New World was rather blurred, especially in the earlier *Kunstkammer* collections.

The quest for rarity frequently manifested itself in the presumed association of objects with notable events or persons. With regard to native American artefacts, however, certain limitations were imposed by the small number of famous, named individuals. Yet designations, most of them spurious, such as 'Pohatan, King of Virginia's habit' in the Tradescant collection, 'the sword of Quoniambec' (the club of a Tupinambá chief from Brazil) among the treasures of André Thevet, the French cosmographer, and 'the mighty king Muttazuma of Mexico's battle axe' or the 'habit of the king of Cuba in India' in Schloss Ambras, raised at least a few select items above the sea of aboriginal American anonymity.[23]

By the early eighteenth century, indigenous American artificial curiosities were found in various collections in western and central Europe. For obvious reasons, in countries active in colonizing or otherwise exploiting the New World the respective spheres of interest were better represented than other regions, but much of the Mexican material had filtered out from Spain, especially to northern Italy and southern Germany, to the extent that ultimately no object of a pre-Columbian tradition remained on the Iberian peninsula. Brazil was widely represented all over Europe (probably mostly from French and Dutch, rather than Portuguese sources), and even Eskimo artefacts could be found from Sweden to Italy and from Scotland to Bohemia. Clearly, the rise of collecting had led to the emergence of both a market and a network of exchange for *Kunstkammer* specimens, including exotic rarities, as few collectors (John Tradescant the younger being an exception) ventured into the New World themselves. Certain fashionable collector's items were procured by agents for their patrons from local sources.[24]

Both the surviving artefacts and old inventories suggest a certain amount of stylization in the representation of American populations in the collections. Despite their size and the consequent difficulties in shipping them, Eskimo kayaks, for example, were particularly favoured by collectors. For eastern North America, ball-headed clubs, tobacco pipes, and articles made of wampum shell beads became type specimens (Fig. 2).[25] Mexico was mostly illustrated by featherwork, especially by those delicate pictures made of feathers by Tarascan craftsmen during the colonial period, but also by various works encrusted with turquoise mosaic, and by stone carvings. Of the few Taino 'idols' from the West Indies that had survived, most were no longer identified as such in the records. Representation of Peru was surprisingly poor, and that of the rest of Spanish-America even poorer. From Brazil, featherwork of different kinds was displayed alongside the long paddle-shaped clubs of the Tupinambá, leg rattles made of fruit shells, lip plugs, and hammocks.[26]

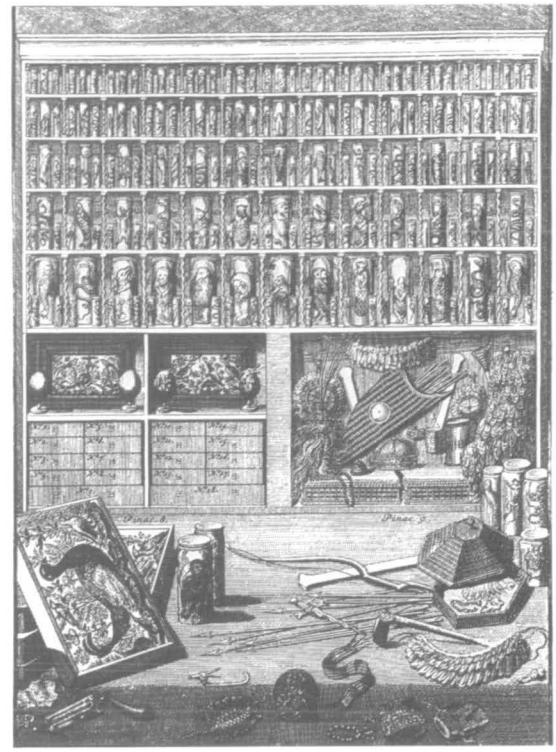

FIG. 2. Zoological and ethnographic objects, including a wampum belt from north-eastern North America, in the Haarlem collection of Levinus Vincent as shown on pl. 5 of Vincent's *Elenchus Tabularum, pinacothecarum, atque nonnullarum cimeliorum in gazophylacio Levini Vincent* (1719). Photo: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

Appreciation

One should not take the inclusion of indigenous American objects in *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer*-type collections to indicate an adequate aesthetic appreciation or even understanding of the exotic forms. When Hernán Cortés was on his way from the coast of Vera Cruz to Tenochtitlán, messengers from Moctezuma delivered a group of objects whose symbolic significance as items to be used in Aztec ritual

we now can at least partly glean from sixteenth-century Aztec sources. For the Spanish, they were simply precious presents illustrating the lavish riches of the newly found land. Those that were sent to Charles V as part of the royal fifth were displayed first in Spain and later in Brussels, and were described by numerous interested observers, including Bartolomeo de las Casas, Peter Martyr, and Albrecht Durer. It is interesting to note that the two most prominent items, a huge golden and a somewhat smaller silver disk representing the sun and the moon, were differently interpreted by the various viewers who bothered to record their observations [27]

Beyond that, the observers agreed on their 'artificiality' and 'ingenuity' or incomprehensible technical skill. The outstanding quality of the craftsmanship of something that had never been seen before was generally expressed in terms of 'subtlety', 'richness', and even 'beauty'. Yet the most common reaction was a gasping speechlessness in front of works that defied the accustomed categories of classification and appreciation. For Dürer and his contemporaries it was impossible to judge the artistic merit of these works apart from other considerations, because the separation of the domain of 'art' had not yet been completely achieved. Seemingly aesthetic qualifications should be compared to the descriptions of the physical beauty of native American people of the time, which were clearly based on a moral-physiognomic theory of beauty: according to this assumption, ugliness was an expression of moral deficiency and mental inferiority, whereas beauty was correlated with goodness and reason. The noble savages encountered by Columbus and others were described as being of exemplary beauty, whereas Peter Martyr remarked of the cannibals seen in Spain that 'there is no man able to behowlde them, but he shall feele his bowelles grate with soo terrible menacynge, and cruel aspecte.'[28]

Similarly, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans describing the material products of the peoples of North America were wholly convinced of the superiority of their own way of life, yet were willing to accept that native Americans had found acceptable, and even admirable solutions in dealing with the resources and technologies at their disposal. The contemporaneous folk cultures of Europe or of other known Old World populations were frequently used to describe and evaluate native products. Thomas Hariot, for example, writing in the 1580s about the Algonquian groups of Sir Walter Raleigh's Virginia colony, reported: 'Their women know how to make earthen vessells with speciall cunninge and that so large and fine, that our potters with their wheles can make no better'.[29] Half a century later, William Wood observed that New England Indian tobacco pipes were held in high esteem by the 'English Tobaconists, for their rarity, strength, handsomnesse, and coolnesse'.[30] Similar passages could be quoted to document European praise for native American woodcarving, basketry weaving, mat making, and other craft arts. For techniques that were unknown or only rudimentarily developed in Europe, such as featherwork, travellers to the New World found even stronger words of praise. Even the otherwise scarcely pro-Indian Captain John Smith thought the feather mantles of the Virginia Algonquians 'so prettily wrought and woven with threads that nothing could be discerned but the feathers'.[31]

The two major exceptions to the generally favourable evaluation of native North American arts by whites in the seventeenth century relate to body painting and religious sculpture. From the colony of New Sweden, for example, Peter Lindeström voiced his unqualified disapproval of facial decoration: 'They paint themselves in all kinds of ways in the face with all kinds of colours, so that they look inexpressibly horrible, when they think themselves adorned in the best manner'.[32] Religious sculpture fared even worse. After investigating the native temples of coastal Virginia, John Smith remarked that the images of the powerful deity 'Oke' were 'evill favouredly carved, and then painted and adorned with chaines, copper & beades, and covered with a skin, in such a manner as the deformity may well suit such a God'.[33] The Revd Alexander Whitaker, who had baptized Pocahontas, also felt compelled to join the ranks of the art critics when it came to the representations of Oke: 'I have sent one image of their god to the Counsell in England, which is painted upon one side of a toad-stoole, much like unto a deformed monster'.[34] Obviously, the Virginians' idol was judged by its European meaning, rather than by its form, and the same is true for body decoration. Yet these moral judgements were generally expressed in aesthetic terms.

The general sense of the Euro-American appreciation of native arts in the early period was that – if you could strip the Indians of their savage idolatry and body painting – their talents could ultimately make them useful members of the colonial society. As Lindeström observed, concluding his discussion of the Delaware's 'artistic manufactures': 'In fine, if they were trained and kept at it, they would become very

expert, for they are by nature capable to grasp and comprehend immediately what they see'.[35]

A change of paradigms

By the eighteenth century, however, a certain disappointment over the failure to Europeanize the indigenous Americans is very noticeable. The period, in which Father Lafitau's work on the *Customs of the American Indians* unwittingly laid one of the foundations of modern anthropology,[36] and in which the word 'ethnography' was coined, also expressed some understanding of the cultural origins of the differences in the arts. Forms no longer were measured purely by comparison to similar forms in Europe. Differences were appreciated and explained in terms of their function in the other culture. The increasing reluctance of the eighteenth century to make aesthetic judgements of native American craft arts extended to body decoration and religious sculpture. Even missionaries no longer felt compelled to express their disgust when reporting on face painting or describing images of indigenous deities If judgements of technical skill were offered at all, they were rarely phrased in aesthetic terms: 'skilled', 'careful', 'surprising dispatch', or 'dexterously' were words now commonly used instead. Carved Nootka masks, for example, were described by various members of Cook's expedition in terms of the quality of their execution: 'well designed and executed' (Cook), 'not badly carved' (Samwell), or 'not contemptibly done' (King).[37]

The eighteenth century also saw a major paradigmatic change in the nature of collecting. The increasing separation of the domain of 'art' and the rise of new taxonomic systems of nature spelled the doom of the old *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer* and led to the establishment of separate natural history cabinets. The great voyages in the Age of Enlightenment, most notable those of James Cook and others in their wake (such as Vancouver, Malaspina, or Krusenstern), offered naturalists an opportunity to fill the shelves of their cabinets according to the new system with specimens from around the world The association of exotic artefacts and natural history persisted from the previous period, but the naturalists who now also became collectors of ethnographic material took a different approach to the questions of representation and order In the absence of an explicit taxonomic system of culture(s), the collectors used peoples (or 'races', as they were often called) as the focus of their collecting activities. Artefacts were, of course, still removed from their indigenous context, but no longer were considered as single items remarkable for their individual properties, more as samples of the whole body of the material possessions of a population. Accompanied by writings and illustrations recording and depicting the circumstances of those peoples' ways of life, the objects were intended to represent other cultures.

This new approach was clearly discernible in the principles according to which museums were set up. Sir Ashton Lever's museum, the major recipient of the 'official' Cook voyage material, for example, illustrates the transition to the new order. In 1790, the museum's entrance hall still displayed exotic weapons and horse-shoes according to artefact type and without regard to provenance. The same is true of the weapons and garments brought by Cook from the Pacific and the North-west Coast of America, which were exhibited in an arched passage leading to the Sandwich Room, where the objects were grouped in cases according to their place of origin. Other than for the artefacts in the entrance hall, the printed *Companion to the Museum* offered (sometimes extensive) contextual information on the displays in the Sandwich Room.[38]

The Leverian Museum also illustrates a shift from a presumed association of objects with noted native persons, such as in an unlikely 'Similitude of *Pondiac* the Indian Chief, cut in stone with his own hands',[39] to an association with a famous collector, such as Cook. The fame of Cook, and the importance of the material he collected, caused buyers from all over Europe to attend the auction sale of the Leverian Museum in 1806. The ethnographic objects obtained on this occasion for the Austrian emperor together with a larger body of natural history specimens provided the basis for the establishment of a separate ethnographic collection in the Imperial Natural History Cabinet in Vienna.[40] In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, similar collections were started elsewhere in Europe on the basis of Cook voyage material [41]

The presence of collections devoted specifically to the material cultures of exotic peoples provided a model for other collectors. Within two decades of the purchase of its Cook material, the ethnographic collection in Vienna received gifts of two extensive groups of objects illustrating specific peoples. One, consisting of artefacts used by the Plains Ojibwa, was donated to the emperor by an Austrian fur trader (Fig. 3). The second, devoted to the Eskimos of Greenland, had been collected by Karl Ludwig

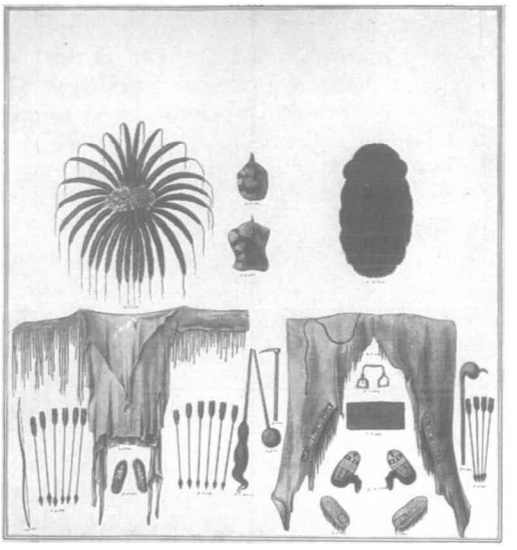

FIG. 3. The Plains Ojibwa collection of Austrian fur trader Joseph Klinger as displayed in the 'Kaiserhaus' in Vienna, 1838–40. Watercolour drawing attributed to Thomas Ender. Archives of the Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna. Photo: Gerhard Vesely.

Giesecke, a German student of law turned actor, who had come to Vienna in the 1780s, had performed as the 'First Slave' on the first night of Mozart's *Magic Flute* (the libretto for which he later claimed to have written as well), and had become a collector of and subsequently a dealer in minerals.[42]

At about the same time, an Austrian expedition was sent to Brazil in connection with the marriage of the daughter of the Austrian emperor to Dom Pedro of Brazil. The resulting huge collection of natural history and ethnographic specimens formed the basis for what was known as the 'Brazilian Museum' in Vienna.[43] An even earlier Brazilian collection had been brought to Germany by Maximilian, Prince of Wied, who in the 1830s also assembled a landmark collection documenting the native peoples of the upper Missouri River region.[44] Ethnographic material from Russian North America not only enriched the museum in St. Petersburg, but also those in Finland, Denmark, and Germany,[45] while substantial Canadian collections continued to be sent to Great Britain.

The importance of these and similar collections elsewhere should not divert attention from the fact that anecdotal and unsystematic collecting still remained the general practice. Sailors and soldiers, traders and travellers continued to return from abroad with souvenirs, now often made specifically for the purpose of sale by clever native craftsmen. Eventually these often badly documented and de-contextualized items ended up in existing public ethnographic collections and contributed to an increasing unwillingness of natural history curators to let such bulky artefacts take up space badly needed for material closer to their hearts and interests.

Institutions and competition

The high tide of ethnographic material from all over the world, harvested in connection with the second wave of European colonialism in the nineteenth century, combined with the rise of anthropology as an academic discipline to promote the establishment of separate ethnographic museums. With some exceptions, such as the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, which had grown out of a department of the Prussian royal art collection, many of these new institutions retained a close association with natural history museums. In this context, the products of primitive man represented – at least in theory – the upper end of the evolution of the natural order, indicating at the same time their humble position in the evolution of civilization. In general practice, from which the typological approach of the Pitt Rivers Museum provided an important and innovative exception,[46] the organization of the new museums followed the established pattern of representing peoples and their cultures.

When compared to Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, the Americas (and more especially North America) were deriving little or no benefit from the late nineteenth-century colonial enterprise. Priority was often given to supplementing the older ethnographic collections, now culled from the remains of the *Kunstkammern* and from the natural history cabinets, with heretofore rarely represented prehistoric material from the New World. Loads of lithic artefacts and some pottery, mostly from surface finds and insufficiently documented, were bought from American collectors or received in exchange from recently established American museums.[47]

North American institutions also seemed to have virtually unlimited funds when it came to scooping up the material culture of native peoples recently placed on reservations and subjected to policies of forced acculturation. No museum in Europe was in the end willing or able to compete effectively in this market. Major European collecting trips to North

America, such as those of Adrian Jacobsen to the North-west Coast, Léon de Cessac to California, or Gustaf Nordenskiöld to the South-west remained the exception. American collectors sometimes offered duplicate collections to European museums, but prices were relatively high, and only well-endowed institutions, like the museum in Berlin, were able to make use of such opportunities.

As far as the aesthetic appreciation of American artefacts was concerned, the nineteenth century returned to the business of comparison and judgement, but from an even stronger sense of superiority than the seventeenth century had done. Indian tribes were rapidly transformed into what seemed to be a 'vanishing race' by a superior Euro-American civilization. Evolutionary theories replaced earlier theories about developmental stages, and put Indians near the bottom of the sequence on what were thought to be scientific grounds.[48] At the same time, 'art' was being more narrowly defined and judged by what were considered to be the standards of European perfection.

Maximilian, Prince of Wied, for example, clearly distinguished 'art' from crafts in his evaluation of the quality of native products: 'The women of the Crow', he observed, 'are very skilful in several different crafts, and their shirts and suits of bighorn leather, decorated and embroidered with dyed porcupine quills, are especially beautiful'. But as soon as anything resembled painting, it was compared to European painting and found wanting. When Maximilian's camp on the Upper Missouri was visited on several occasions by Sih-chi-dä, a Mandan, it was remarked that 'drawing was his favourite pastime, in which he was certainly talented, even though his figures were nothing better than those of our small children'. In more general terms, Maximilian spoke of 'the peculiar kind of their painting, which is still in a stage of infancy'.[49] Similar pronouncements can be found in the prefatory chapters on the origin of art in 'universalist' art histories of the late nineteenth century.

During the same period, however, the enormous success of popular literature with American Indian subject matter and of 'Indian shows' of the Buffalo Bill-type, attests to the presence of a strong romantic undercurrent of primitivist sentiments among Europeans struggling with the burden of their elevated civilization.[50] It is the continuing presence of such sentiments, which explains the persistent public interest in American Indian exhibitions.

It is also related to the constitution of several important collections of American Indian material in twentieth-century Europe. One of the major success stories in the museum world is that of the Karl May Museum in Radebeul near Dresden, named after the German author of dozens of volumes of both best- and long-selling Indian fiction (Fig. 4). In the 1890s, one of May's youthful readers, a boy from Vienna named Ernst Tobis, ran away from home to join Buffalo Bill's show in order to be close to his Indian idols. Later he became an independent variety-show artist, took the name of Patty Frank, and began to collect American Indian things, first in the United States and later in Europe. In 1925 he offered his collection to May's widow, in exchange for being named curator for life at a museum which would bear Karl May's name. At the time, it was the only museum in Europe exclusively devoted to North American Indians, and until the demise of the German Democratic Republic it was also, for its small size, the museum with the largest number of visitors, some 250,000 per year.[51]

That superb collections of American Indian material could be collected in Europe, simply by going to junk shops and by striking favourable bargains with museums happy to trade old collections for new ones, is also illustrated by collections such as those of Gottfried Hotz[52] (now the Indian Museum of the city of Zürich), Arthur Speyer,[53] or June Bedford.[54] (The Speyer collection has since been 'repatriated' to Ottawa and the Bedford collection to Providence and Toronto).

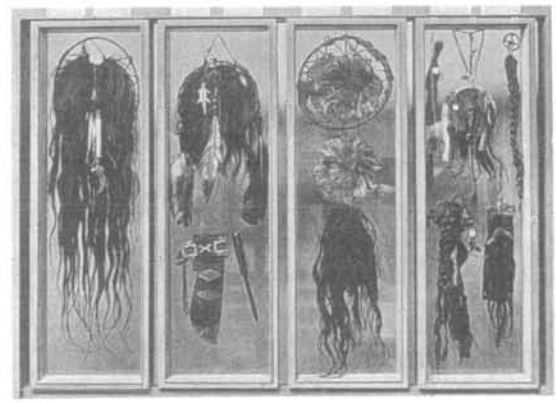

FIG. 4. The 'scalp case' of the Karl-May-Museum, Radebeul, *c.*1930: 'The first scalp on the left is of an Arapaho chief and represents one of the most precious pieces of this kind. In the third section one can see two scalps of whites.' The fascination with scalps was typical for the popular European interest in American Indians.

The discovery of 'primitive art' as a source of inspiration by the modern art movement was somewhat marginally related to American Indian traditions of visual expression, although the surrealists, in particular, discovered what they regarded as an affinity to North-west Coast, Eskimo, and to some extent also Pueblo art.[55] This development affected ethnographic museums only much later, when in an effort to improve their lowly status and their equally miserable budgets they made efforts to reinterpret themselves as museums of 'primitive art'. By focusing on exceptional works minimally labelled and dimly lit in stark museum galleries, they effectively returned to the decontextualized appreciation of the old *Wunderkammer*.

No longer vanishing

The redefinition of American Indian ethnographic material as American Indian art has also had the effect of raising the market value of such things beyond the reach of most museums' budgets.

Despite earlier predictions that they were a 'vanishing race' and despite all the largely antiquarian interest shown in American Indian art and culture in Europe, Native American peoples are still very much alive today. Of course, their ways of life have changed from the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, but so have ours, and few people blame us for it. Contemporary Native Americans have in many respects retained distinctive identities and life-styles, and they continue to produce distinctive 'traditional' crafts as well as works of 'art' in a modern Western sense. If collecting American Indian art is really a European habit, European museums should waste no time and effort to collect contemporary American Indian material actively and systematically.

The public interest in exhibitions of such material is clearly shown by the success of recent shows such as the 'Living Arctic' at the Museum of Mankind in London,[56] or of a semi-permanent exhibition on 'North American Indians – Today and Yesterday' in Vienna.[57] Collections of this kind can today be assembled with even a modest budget. Their purchase supports the work of living artists and craftsmen. And if we do not do it now, we will in the future have to spend much more money in order to be able to show how native American peoples were doing in the late twentieth century.

Address for correspondence

Professor Christian F Feest, Institut für Historische Ethnologie, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universitat, Liebigstraße 41, D-6000 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Notes and references

The text of this paper was delivered as the Beatrice Blackwood Lecture at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, in 1991

1 Some answers to this question may be found in C F Feest (ed), *Indians and Europe An interdisciplinary collection of essays* (Aachen, 1987)
2 For example, R F Berkhofer, Jnr , *The White Man's Indian* (New York, 1978)
3 W.C Sturtevant, 'The meanings of Native American art', in E L Wade (ed), *The Arts of the North American Indian* (New York, 1986), pp 23–44
4 C F Feest, 'The pervasive world of arts', in A M Josephy, Jnr (ed), *America in 1492* (New York, 1992), pp 405–28
5 C F Feest, 'From CAT to RAT Common and rare art traditions in Native North America', in V A Tishkov (ed), *Amerikanskie indieitsy Novye otkrytkia i interpretatsii* (Moscow, in preparation)
6 J Alsop, *The Rare Art Traditions* (New Haven and London, 1982)
7 L A Vigneras, *The Journal of Christoph Columbus*, Hakluyt Society, extra ser 38 (London, 1960), p 23
8 Vigneras, op cit (note 7), pp 26, 41, 116, 118
9 Vigneras, op cit (note 7), pp 50, 100, 102, 111, 116, 129
10 The Jesuits' *Museum Kircherianum* in Rome, for example, included a section on 'Idols and sacrificial instruments of the people awaiting salvation' See P Bonanni, *Musaeum Kircherianum sive Musaeum a P Athanasio Kirchero incoeptum* (Rome, 1709)
11 That collecting by soldiers did not necessarily entail looting, but could be based on an amiable relationship among allies in the colonial wars is illustrated by M G Johnson, 'Great Lakes material culture from 18th-century British military sources', *Whispering Wind* (Summer–Fall 1983), pp. 6–11 See also Wanda Burch, 'Sir William Johnson's cabinet of curiosities', *New York History* 71 (1990), pp 261–82
12 C F Feest, 'The collecting of American Indian artifacts in Europe, 1493–1750', in K O Kupperman (ed), *America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750* (Chapel Hill, N C , in preparation), and C F Feest, 'North America in the European *Wunderkammer*', *Archiv fur Volkerkunde* 46 (1992), pp 61–109
13 E Scheicher, *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Habsburger* (Vienna, 1979), pp 81, 85–115
14 T Lundbæk and B Dam-Mikkelsen, *Etnografiske genstande i Det kongelige danske Kunstkammer 1650–1800 Ethnographic Objects in the Royal Danish Kunstkammer 1650–1800*, National-museets skrifter, Etnografisk række 17 (Copenhagen, 1980), p xx
15 L Laurencich Minelli, 'Oggetti studiati da Ulisse Aldrovandi', *Archivio per l'antropologia e la etnologia* 113 (1983), pp 187–206
16 See A MacGregor (ed), *Tradescant's Rarities Essays on the foundation of the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford, 1983)
17 H J Braunholtz, *Sir Hans Sloane and Ethnography* (London, 1970), J C H King, 'North American ethnography in the

collection of Sir Hans Sloane', in O Impey and A. MacGregor (eds) *The Origins of Museums The cabinet of curiosities in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe* (Oxford, 1985), pp 232–6

18 J Tradescant, *Musæum Tradescantianum or, A Collection of Rarities Preserved at South-Lambeth neer London* (London, 1656)

19 B Gundestrup, *Det kongelige danske Kunstkammer 1737 The Royal Danish Kunstkammer 1737* (Copenhagen, 1991)

20 Laurencich Minelli, op cit (note 15), pp 188–9

21 R Beer (ed), 'Acten, Regesten und Inventare aus dem Archivo General zu Simancas', *Jahrbuch der Kunstsammlungen des allerhochsten Kaiserhauses* 12 (1891), pp clxx–ccxxiii

22 E. Landoldt, 'Materialien zu Felix Platter als Sammler und Kunstfreund', *Basler Zeitschrift zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 72 (1972), pp 245–306

23 Tradescant, op cit (note 18), p 47, A Parent *et al* (eds), *La Renaissance et le Nouveau Monde* (Quebec, 1984), p 102, D von Schonherr, 'Urkunden und Regesten aus dem k u k Statthalterei-Archiv in Innsbruck', *Jahrbuch der Kunstsammlungen des allerhochsten Kaiserhauses* 14 (1893), p clxvii, M Zeiller, *Itinerarium Germaniae Nov Antiquae Teutsches Reyssbuch durch Hoch und Nieder Teutschland* (Strasbourg, 1632), p 356

24 C F Feest, 'Mexico and South America in the European *Wunderkammer*', in Impey and MacGregor, op cit (note 17), pp 237–4, C F Feest, 'Spanisch-Amerika in außerspanischen Kunstkammern', *Kritische Berichte* 20 (1992), pp 43–58, Feest, op cit (note 12, both titles)

25 Feest, op cit (note 12), 'North America'

26 Feest, op cit (note 12), 'Collecting'

27 C F Feest, 'Vienna's Mexican treasures Aztec, Mixtec, and Tarascan works from sixteenth-century Austrian collections', *Archiv fur Volkerkunde* 44 (1990), pp 33, 41

28 P Martyr de Angleria, *De Orbe Nouo* (Alcalá, 1530), fol vi^{r}; P Martyr of Angleria, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India* trans R Eden, (London, 1555), fol 7^{r} See also C F Feest, '"Selzam ding von gold da von vill ze schreiben were" Bewertungen amerikanischer Handwerkskunst im Europa des fruhen 16 Jahrhunderts', *Jahrbuch der Willibald-Pirckheimer-Gesellschaft* (1992), pp 105–26

29 D B Quinn (ed), *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584–1590*, Works issued by the Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser 104–5 (London, 1955), p 437

30 W Wood, *New Englands Prospect* (London, 1634), p 69

31 P L Barbour (ed), *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1580–1631)* (Chapel Hill, N C and London, 1986), i, p 161

32 P Lindestrom, *Geographia Americae with an Account of the Delaware Indians* (Philadelphia, 1925), p 196

33. Barbour, op. cit (note 31), i, pp 169, 173–4; ii, pp 122, 126

34 S Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or, Purchas His Pilgrimes*, Works issued by the Hakluyt Society, extra ser 14–33 (Glasgow, 1905–7), xix, p 110

35 Lindestrom, op cit (note 32), p 222

36 J-F. Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages ameriquains, comparées aux moeurs des premiers temps* (Paris, 1724)

37 J C Beaglehole (ed), *The Voyage of the Resolution and the Discovery 1776–1780*, Hakluyt Society, extra ser 36 (Cambridge, 1967), pp 314, 1089, 1396

38 *A Companion to the Museum (Late Sir Ashton Lever's)* (London, 1790), pp 1–25

39 *Catalogue of the Leverian Museum* (London, 1806), p 71

40 C F Feest, 'Das Museum für Volkerkunde Ethnographische Sammlungen in Österreich vor 1876, Die Anthropologisch-Ethnographische Abteilung des Naturhistorischen Museums, Das Museum für Volkerkunde', in *Das Museum fur Volkerkunde* (Salzburg, 1980), pp 13–34

41 A Kaeppler, *'Artificial Curiosities' An exposition of native manufactures collected on the three Pacific voyages of Captain James Cook, R.N.* (Honolulu, 1978); S Augustin, *Kunstsachen von Cook Reisen. Eine ethnographische Sammlung im Volkerkundemuseum Herrnhut* (Herrnhut, 1990)

42 C F Feest (ed), *Am Nordrand der Welt Eskimo Schwerpunkt Gronland* (Vienna, 1991), pp 151–4

43 H Scholler and E Becker-Donner, *'Brasilianisches Museum'* (Vienna, 1954)

44 W Krickeberg, 'Altere Ethnographica aus Nordamerika im Berliner Museum für Volkerkunde', *Baessler Archiv*, new ser 2 (1954), pp 1–280, A Schulze-Thulin, *Indianer der Prarien und Plains* (Stuttgart, 1976)

45 For collections in Russia, see E Siebert and W Forman, *North American Indian Art* (London, 1967) and G I Dzenis-kevitch, 'La collection Tlingite dans le Musée d'Anthropologie et d'Ethnographie de l'Académie des Sciences de l'URSS', in A -M Hocquenghem *et al* (eds), *Pre-Columbian Collections in European Museums* (Budapest, 1987), pp 181–90 For Finland see P Varjola, *The Etholén Collection The Ethnographic Collection of Adolf Etholén and his Contemporaries in the National Museum of Finland* (Helsinki, 1990)

46 W R Chapman, 'Arranging ethnology A H L F Pitt Rivers and the typological tradition', in G W Stocking, Jnr. (ed), *Objects and Others Essays on museums and material culture* (Madison, 1985), pp 15–48

47 See, e g, J.C H King, 'The North American archaeology and ethnography at the Museum of Mankind, London', and E A Okladnikova, 'Archaeological collections from North America in museums in the Soviet Union', in Hocquenghem *et al*, op cit (note 45), pp 61–70, 203–8, E S Tiberini, 'Plains Indian artifacts in the E H Giglioli collection of the Pigorini Museum in Rome', *European Review of Native American Studies* 4·2 (1990), pp 41–4

48 R Bieder, *Science Encounters the Indian, 1820–1880* (Norman, OK, and London, 1986) discusses American attitudes, those of European scholars were generally similar

49 M Prinz zu Wied, *Reise in das Innere Nord-America in den Jahren 1832 bis 1834* (Coblenz, 1841–3), i, p 399, ii, p. 253

50 J C H King, 'A century of Indian shows Canadian and United States exhibitions in London', *European Review of Native American Studies* 5 1 (1991), pp 35–42, C F Feest, 'Buffalo Bill und sein "Wild West"', in H Lomosits and Paul Harbaugh, *Lakol Wokiksuye Zur Geschichte der Plains von Little Bighorn bis Wounded Knee* (Vienna, 1990), pp [133–40]

51 P Frank, *Ein Leben im Banne Karl May's Erlebnisse und kleine Erzahlungen* (Radebeul, 1935), P Neumann, '50 Jahre Indianermuseum Radebeul', *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums fur Volkerkunde Dresden* 38 (1980), pp 154–64

52 G Hotz, *Indianer Nordamerikas* (Zurich, 1975)

53 H Benndorf and A Speyer, *Indianer Nordamerikas 1760–1860* (Offenbach am Main, 1968), T J Brasser, *Bo'jou Neejee Profiles of Canadian Indian Art* (Ottawa, 1976)

54 J Bedford, *Mohawk Micmac Maliseet and other Indian Souvenir Art from Victorian Canada* (London, 1985), see also B Hail and K Duncan, *Out of the North The subarctic collection of the Haffenreffer Museum* (Bristol, RI, 1989)

55 See W Rubin (ed), *Primitivism in 20th Century Art* (New York, 1984); C F Feest, 'Identitaten und Irrtumer', in J Hofleitner and E Madlener (eds), *Kulturen – Verwandtschaft in Geist und Form* (Vienna, 1991), pp 131–48

56 J C H. King (ed), *Living Arctic Report & catalogue* (Ottawa and London, 1989)

57 C F. Feest, *Indianer Nordamerikas – Heute und Gestern* (Vienna, 1986)