

Practical Course:

“Experiencing Organic Ethnographica” (together with Igor Eberhard, Vienna/Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology)

Subject: As long as this discipline exists, archaeologist primarily had to do with remains, robust enough to withstand withering effects (stone, metal, pottery, pearl shell). This makes the finding of the organic remains so exceptional (wooden tools, textiles, mummies etc.).

With the current turn way from the pure form of the artefact to its performance (from microscopic analyses to environmental archaeology), always more prehistorians at one point of their life test replicas of installations and tools.

The lacking organic parts are furnished by Experimental Archaeology, which is basically a “fast-forward” of hundreds of years of improvement undertaken by the single researcher.

Though often prehistorians borrow initially from ethnographic objects (drawings, photos, museum showcases), they are rarely given the opportunity of actually touching them and perceiving the (physical/sensory/technical/stylistic) details of wooden handles, knitted baskets, feathered arrows, leather boots and so forth.

Special accent will be placed especially on the realization of the spell-binding design characteristic of the organic parts that spring from the focus and experimentation of large collectives over hundreds of years.

Didactics

During an excursion to Vienna (30 of April 2019), students get direct access to the muster collection of the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology /University of Vienna.

- i) In the actual storing facility (cellar of the NIG) students will be received by the responsible curator (I. Eberhard), who explains the provenance & history of the collection (approx. 50 ys old)
- ii) Students are then suggested to choose their favourite combined collection object.
- iii) By making a record card for the object-of-choice (measuring, material description, form description, drawing, photographing) the detail vision & detail verbalization is trained short-term.
- iv) After being familiar with the physicality of the object, students are encouraged to browse the Institute’s vast library to find out more, about social, economic and ritual meaning of their object (practicing the handling of different types of ethnographic literature).
- v) In a finishing round each students will present her/his lead object for the collective (from tech to symbolism)

Made with restraint, and yet highly functional and attractive, the resulting organic/anorganic arrays belong to mankind’s finest. Both in the sense of the “form-follows-function” as well as symbolic

depth. Other Humanities students will also profit from the direct encounter with these special museal objects.

Practice Application

- Prehistorians-in-training will be brought to actual work with partly organic ethnographic objects.
- Experiencing the heuristic power of primary ethno objects & books.
- Practising how to “build” from the purely physical characteristics of the combined object (organic/anorganic) towards its wider economical-social-transcendental significance.
- Realizing the huge haphazardness of the information that comes along with ethnographic objects.
- Becoming familiar with some of the specific problems of the museal storing of ethnographica (ethic handling & display, reclaiming etc.)
- Introduction to special conservational problematic of combined organic/anorganic museal objects.

M.W & I.E.

https://bibliothek.univie.ac.at/sammlungen/sammlung_des_instituts_fur_kultur_und_sozialanthropologie.html