

Confronting Cultures: the complexity of the world around us

'Confronting Cultures' at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology is about looking at different cultures around the world through objects that defy easy categorisation and understanding. Through human history, people have interacted with the world around them through the things they make. These things reflect all kinds of aspects of people's lives: the materials they could access, their religious ideas, and their views about what was important to them. These objects can be scary or funny, familiar or unsettling. They are a look at loss, humour, conflict, hunger and love. Sometimes we may not understand these objects – but they are all part of our shared story of humanity.

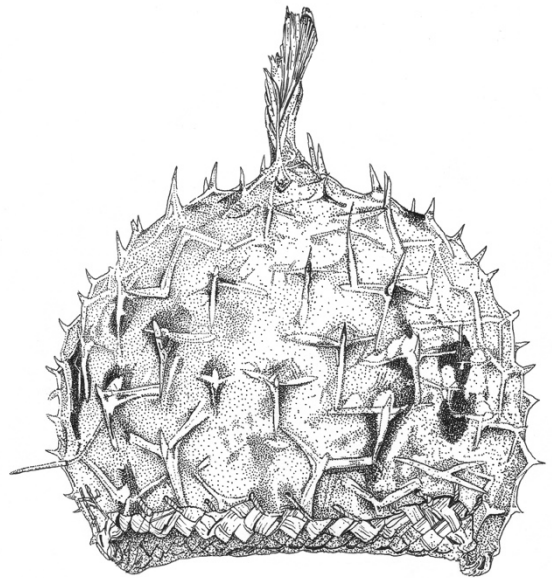


Roman Penis Pot, Essex (Z 30141) Ground Floor

This vessel was made by the Romans and most likely excavated from the site of a Roman camp. It has rude scenes all around it, and Roman soldiers probably used it at drinking parties as a naughty joke.

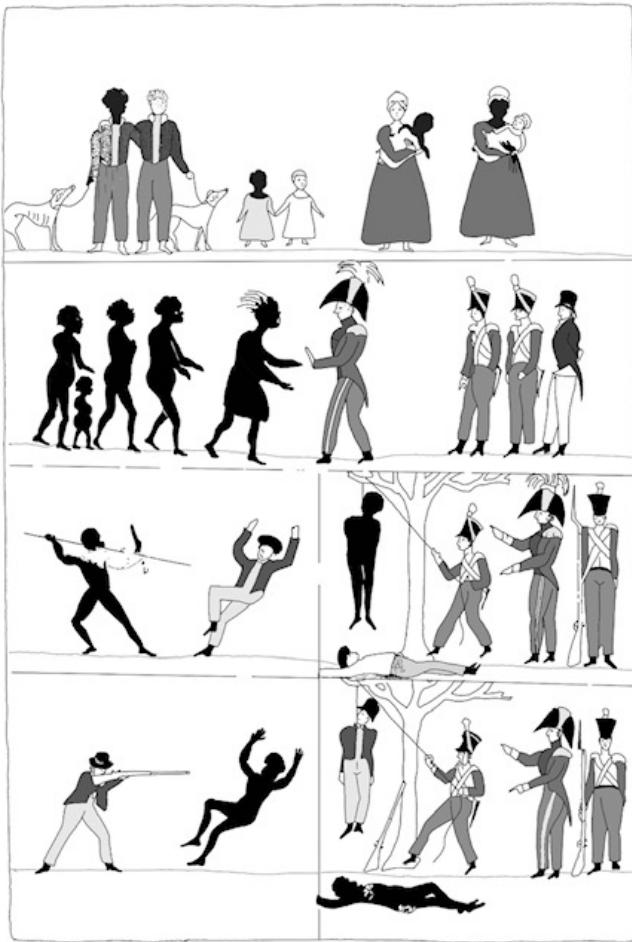
Puffer Fish Helmet, Kiribati (2017. 15) First Floor

This helmet shows spectacular use of local resources. Although it may look like it wouldn't provide enough protection, warriors did not fight to kill. The aim of combat was to wound, and if they killed someone they had to make a gift of land - priceless in a small island nation.



Bugandan Royal Drum, Uganda (1920. 316) First Floor

These royal drums were played in sets, with each drum having a different tone. In 1966 the palace drums were destroyed in an attack, and the music was not played for decades. Today Ugandan musicians are training under the surviving royal drummer to bring back the traditional drumming - and innovate it.



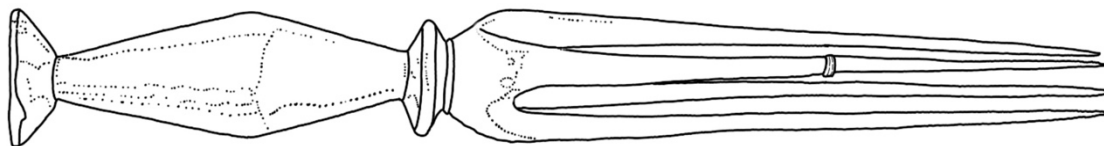
Colonial Proclamation Board, Australia (Z 15346) First Floor

These boards were issued as propaganda during a period of prolonged violence by colonial settlers against Aboriginal Tasmanians. Although they attempted to curb resistance and convince the Aboriginal population of the 'justice' of colonial law, the settlers simultaneously perpetuated what we would call ethnic cleansing.



Leaf-shaped Glass Spearhead, Australia (E 1914.70.18) First Floor

This spearhead, from Western Australia, was made by an Indigenous Australian using recycled glass from things such as telegraph pole power lines or other domestic glass products.



Flesh / 'Cannibal' Fork, Fiji (1925. 562) First Floor

Stories of cannibalism in the Pacific shaped Western ideas about islands like Fiji. Flesh forks were traditionally used by assistants to feed priests and other sanctified people who should not touch cooked food. While this may have included human flesh, it is now thought that reports of cannibalism were exaggerated by missionaries. Many so-called flesh forks were made as tourist souvenirs.