



# ETHNIC ARTS COUNCIL

## Newsletter

Summer 2005



### CHAIR'S MESSAGE - Feelie Lee, Ph.D.

**Summer Interlude** – It has been another full year of innovative programs, enthusiastic new members, growing reserves, and a dedicated Board that fine-tuned our policies and operations. Now the Board looks forward to this summer respite before we begin planning the Annual Meeting that typically caps our year's activities.

Please reserve September 25, 2005 for the next Annual Dinner/Silent Auction, an event that promises to match or exceed the success of our last festivities at Barbara Goldenberg's home. Although the final place has not been determined, you will be receiving early calls for auction items, so please start looking among your treasures for tax-deductible donations to EAC.

The EAC is running smoothly with a convivial group of dedicated board members. Membership has stabilized (180+ including couples) under the dynamic leadership of Co-Chairs Christine Gregory and Julie Heifetz. Their outstanding ability to recruit (the charm initiative) and renew members (the latter no easy task) with artful nudging has resulted in a steady growth of new members, including the Japanese American National Museum, which joined us as a corporate member. Our unflappable Program Chair, Jean Concoff, juggled multiple tasks and was joined this year by the savvy Julie Dubrow who oversaw the new Conversations series. Greg Grinnell, our Treasurer, has

assured us that we are indeed solvent and should be able to make substantial awards next year when the grant cycle begins! And, of course, you have received the improved Newsletters, thanks to the editorial efforts of Peter Sifton and Susan Lerer and their assorted contributors.

Our EAC relationship with local museums has flourished, not only because of our increased grant support but also because of our participation in their programs and/or support groups. Our members continue to make substantial donations of artifacts to the museums' collections. It is a relationship we need to sustain and be knowledgeable about, given the ongoing changes in leadership and foci of museums today. We live in a city where leadership challenges at museums are constant: two of five major museum directorships nationally are open (the Getty and LACMA); the Pacific Asia and the Craft and Folk Art museums have new leaders this past year. Issues of mission, funding, appropriate exhibits, and the international repatriation of cultural goods have reached beyond the museum walls. As collectors, dealers, ethnic arts enthusiasts, and museum donors, we need to be aware of these challenges in order to remain relevant supporters.

Enjoy your summer and we will reconnoiter this Fall!

*Feelie*



# Toraja Land

by Greg Grinnell

Toraja land is like a modern day Shangri-la with its pristine nature setting, other worldly architecture and a culture lost in time, still consumed with the continuation of its ritual existence. Set in the southern mountain highlands of Suliwesi, Indonesia, an 8-9 hour drive from the port town of Makassar, Toraja land is the home to the Tana Toraja people, descended from the Proto Malayas, and related to the Dayaks of Kalimantan and the Batak of Sumatra. The Torajans believe that their ancestors arrived on divine ships and continue to use this theme in the design of their unique style of ritual houses, tonakans, and in their funeral rites.

In June of this year, EAC members, Alan Grinnell and Feelie Lee, Greg and Mechas Grinnell, along with Bill Lanz of the Bowers Collectors Council and friend Mai met in Makassar to begin their journey to the gates of Toraja land and the Tana Toraja people. Fortunately for us, the French built a 5-star hotel outside of the capital of Toraja land, which since has passed hands to an Indonesian hotel group and provides an island of unexpected luxury at 2-star price in an otherwise still primitive setting.

From the Torajan point of view, the worlds of the living and the dead are closely related and in mutual need of each other. Funeral ceremonies are the most important ritual for the Torajans, and it often takes years before the funeral can take place. The immediate family of the deceased must get commitments from the extended family members to contribute to the ceremony, usually by contributing water buffalo and pigs. The funerals for the highest level of Torajan

society will last six days and involve the ritual sacrifice of at least 20 water buffalo and over 100 pigs. The elaborate funeral is necessary to ensure that the deceased can be ensured entry into the next world and maintain his or her status. The horns from the slaughtered buffalos are later used as frontal decorations on the tonakan, signifying the wealth and tradition of that family.



*Tanakan houses*

Water buffalo are considered a prized commodity in the culture due to their importance in the funeral ceremony. Water buffalo have the run of the rice paddies, and the most desirable, buffalo with blue eyes and white hair with gray patches, are accompanied daily by a keeper. Due to their sacred status water buffalo are not used to provide labor in the fields.

Our group had the chance to attend a funeral of a noble wife. Out of respect we wore sarongs and the customary conical straw hats for the ceremony. A temporary village was constructed so that the one thousand or so attendees would have shelters from which to view the ceremony.



*Procession of the coffin*

The ceremony consists of:

- Removal of the deceased from the ritual house, tonakan, to the ceremonial village.
- Entrance of the guest with their





water buffalo and pig offerings

- Procession of the coffin of the deceased onto the viewing platform.
- Procession of the immediate family to acknowledge the gifts brought by the guest.
- Ritual slaughter of the water buffalo and pigs and dividing of the meat to the guest
- Feeding of the guest.
- Ceremonial dances and singing

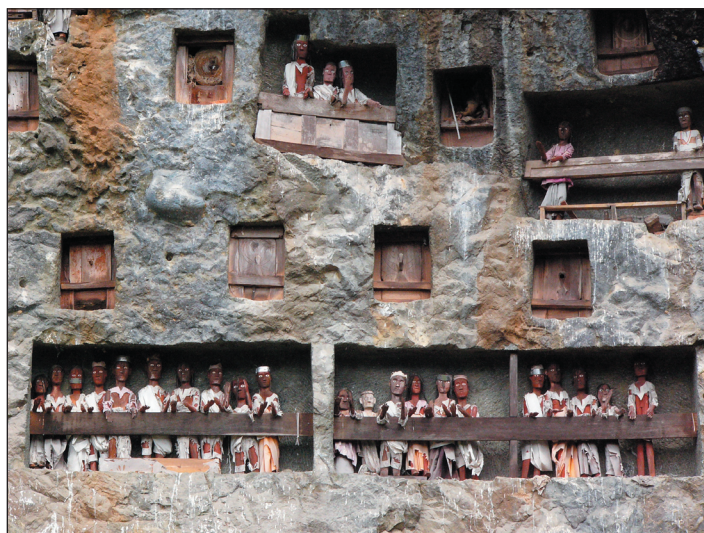
At the end of the first or second day, to the amusement of the crowd, bullfighting takes place in one of the rice fields, with pairs of water buffalo placed together to fight. After a short butting of heads one of the water buffalo takes flight while the other gives chase. This often entails the water buffalo running through the quickly dispersing crowds, causing much laughter and cheering, except for the EAC members who were the first to scatter up the hills and into the forest.

Needless to say, after watching the ritual slaughter of a



*Tanakan house adorned with buffalo horns*

water buffalo and that of many pigs, our group decided to forgo pork and beef for the remainder of the trip and spend the remaining days visiting Toraja land!



*Tau taus at cliff gravesite*

Part of the Toraja-land tour involves visiting old burial sites placed in grottos and caves, where old carved wooden coffins and carved wooden statues, tau taus, are placed. The tau taus represent the likeness of the deceased. At the royal burial sites, burial tombs are carved into the rock cliffs into which the coffins are placed. Carved rock terraces are also constructed, onto which the tau taus are located to look down over the land. Each village has a special Jackfruit tree in which are buried infants who die before a tooth has emerged. It is believed that this "living" or "baby tree" will absorb the soul of the deceased infant.

Although most of the once animistic Torajans have now been converted to Christianity, the funeral ceremonies have been little affected. The spirit of the Torajan culture persists and it is one of the great places in the world to visit, not only to observe its cultural traditions but also to collect examples of their fine carvings and weavings.

### Membership Memo - Membership Renewals Due!

Do you know that the majority of your membership dues support our museum grants program? That combined with our other fundraising efforts make the EAC a vital support organizations for ethnic arts. RENEW YOURSELF....with a revitalizing makeover for EAC.

Be sure you are an active Member before the September 25, 2005 Annual Meeting where good food, great art, and museum directors mix with old and new members. Contact Julie (310) 472-7661 if you have questions.



## Armand Labbe - A Farewell

Armand Labbe, Chief Curator and Director of Research and Collections at the Bowers Museum, passed away on April 2, 2005. At a recent memorial service at the Bowers, a wing of the museum was dedicated in his honor. He was eulogized as a brilliant scholar, an insatiable intellectual, a gifted teacher, and a remarkable friend. A stalwart friend and collaborator with key EAC members on their collections, Armand mounted original exhibitions on pre-Columbian ceramics from Panama and Colombia, Ban Chiang ceramics from SE Asia as well as authored numerous books in the subject area.

As a Jesuit seminarian in his early years, Armand transformed that rigorous training into prodigious scholarly efforts. Over twenty years ago, Armand improved on the work of Fewkes and Ruth Bundy, two prominent archaeologists, in deciphering the iconography and symbolism on the ceramics left by the Anazasi, the ancient people of the SW. He interpreted the iconography as examples of recorded prayers to the gods, e.g., for rain in an arid climate; he saw their worldview evidenced in its most common denominator, the male and female principle, which oppose and complement each other, and are responsible for the fecundity and the abundance of the earth.

He extended this analysis to pre-Columbian cultures, writing **Colombia Before Columbus; Shamans, Gods, and Mythic Beast**; and **Guardians of the Lifespring**, which directly dealt with shamanism and the transformations of energy and matter based upon the pre-Columbian cultures of Columbia and Panama. Coincidentally, this former seminary student's last name, Labbe, meant abbot priest. Perhaps this explains, in part, his preoccupation with priestly peoples of other cultures and his profound interest in shamanism.

Armand's scholarly pursuit also included ancient Thailand and SE Asia. He wrote two books on the ceramics of Ban Chiang. A third on the metallurgy of Ban Chiang, connecting this culture with the great early metal

center of Dong Son in Vietnam, was interrupted by his untimely death.

As the sole curator for the past several years at the Bowers, he mastered not only these cultures but also those of Africa, Oceania, Indonesia, and India. He had studied Oceania in depth for years and planned to write on the cultures of that region. Simultaneously, he was working on the history and arts of China and teaching himself Chinese.

Armand far transcended the traditional image of a museum curator. His fluency in six languages, his encyclopedic knowledge and enormous breadth of interests, and his ability to synthesize many disciplines – including music in all forms and from all countries as well as a passion for films – infused his exhibits and publications with a special depth. Not only did Armand curate dozens of exhibitions at the Bowers, but he also guest-curated at the Mingei Museum in San Diego. He lectured regularly at museums throughout the U.S. and taught at various colleges and universities in southern California.

The Armand most of us knew was a complex, compassionate, caring person, a social being but uniquely individualistic. As his closest friend, Susan Lerer, so aptly described: "Armand loved to dance but was hard to follow because in dancing, as in everything else, he danced to the beat of his own drummer." When this gentle, even priestly man died, Susan declared "he died serenely and peacefully, freed from political turmoil and environmental abuses and decadence that so affected him when he was alive. He was without any pain, twenty minutes earlier having had a massage....During his final days, he must have received over 200 cards and letters expressing love for him and sorrow over his condition." Susan concludes as aptly for the EAC as for herself:

"The Armand that I knew was a rich man, not rich in money but rich in love, compassion, joy, knowledge, and understanding of the world, rich in family and friends. He will be sorely missed by all of us..."



On March 20th our 6th program offering, *Fakes and Forgeries: Issues of Definition and Detection*, took place at the Fowler Museum. The two hour lecture-demonstration was moderated by Dr. Marla Berns, Director of the Fowler Museum, who presided over a distinguished panel consisting of Doran Ross, Director Emeritus of the Fowler Museum, Herbert Cole, Professor Emeritus of Art History at UCSB, Virginia Fields, Curator of Pre-Columbian Art at LACMA, Jerry Podnay, Head of Antiquities Conservation for the J. Paul Getty Museum, and Jo Hill, Director of Conservation at the Fowler Museum. All are recognized experts and scholars in their fields.

Each expert provided fascinating descriptions as well as examples of detective work done to expose forgeries from ancient to modern in various forms on sculpture, masks, pottery, and other materials. In one example a workshop was discovered industriously manufacturing old pieces meant to deceive the buyers. Another example exposed the forgery of a jar when the top and bottom pieces came from two different pots.

Scientific approaches like carbon dating and thermoluminescence were presented as tools towards authentication but their limitations were also discussed. It appears that good forgers are often very sophisticated, knowing virtually all techniques to fool the unknowing eye. Jerry Podney indicated that even a sophisticated, scientific analysis may yield the wrong conclusion. Thus, experience, judgment, and expertise are also required, including that intuitive "gut" feeling of the knowledgeable person. Buying from a reputable person is important, even though many reputable dealers, connoisseurs, and museum officials have been fooled.

Indeed, it is *caveat emper!*

Alongside the more public programs offered was the newly inaugurated and more intimate programs found in the CONVERSATIONS series. Dubbed CONVERSATIONS, each gathering of about 20 new and established

members provided a more personal setting in which to gather informally at a passionate EAC collector's home. Guests experienced the host's collection and fields of interest, were easily able to ask questions, meet other members, and share interests. With the EAC's growth this past year, CONVERSATIONS successfully offered a perfect new option for one-on-one interaction.

The evenings quickly became popular and our hosts graciously opened their homes and provided not only great art, but also delicious food and drink. **Greg and Mechas Grinnell** held the first event on April 21st; guests were encouraged to ask questions and wander through their beautiful home, while referring to prepared information sheets on the art. The Grinnells' collection focuses on South American/Pre-Columbian ceramics, tribal textiles, and Amazonian feather work. Those who stayed past the witching hour were treated to some special textiles and a talk on shamanism, a favorite subject of theirs.

The second event was hosted on May 12th by **Dr. Bonnie Sturmer** and **Peter Silton** at their art-laden home which showcases their vast interests: antique fabrics, carvings, beadwork, clothing and photographs from across the globe; it also included contemporary and limited edition prints (20th century and Renaissance). Many of these prints will be donated to UCLA and LACMA at the appropriate time. Videos from personal trips to Africa and Uzbekistan were available to view in various rooms of the house.

**Mark Johnson** and **Julie Du Brow** hosted the final event on June 2nd. The collection focuses on the tribal arts of Southeast Asia (especially Borneo, Indonesia and Nagaland), and includes sculpture, masks, textiles and beadwork. Having studied his passion for 30 years, Mark highlighted the evening with a very educational presentation about different iconography and symbolism, individual pieces and cultural/political history.

We All Enjoyed a Good CONVERSATION.





## Time to make the **ANNUAL SACRIFICE**

### SILENT AUCTION ITEMS WANTED -- NOW!!

Check out your closets, warehouse, and house for **tax-deductible** contributions to the EAC. No garage items, please. If no items found, you can donate a "service," e.g., massage, dinner for 4, theater tickets, a date, etc...Be Imaginative!

Support the museum grants program and the on-going importance of ethnic arts.

Call the Silent Auction Team for pick-up or drop-off:

Jean Concoff: (310) 459-3787  
Richard Baum: (323) 936-0012  
Fred Krieger: (310) 390-8889

Drop-off Site: The Jan Baum Gallery, 170 South La Brea LA, CA 90036  
or The Kriegers, 12135 Stanwood Drive, LA, CA 90066

## Endnotes

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### In Memoriam

- Saul Stanoff, long-standing member of EAC, recently passed away. One of a distinguished group of collectors associated with EAC's founding years, Saul was a passionate and knowledgeable collector of museum-quality, small carvings from Africa, particularly from the Congo. His fine eye and sharp mind will be sorely missed.

### Don't Miss

- The **Elemental Art of the Indonesian Archipelago** at the Mingei International Museum (San Diego) which ends August but may be extended through September. On view are more than 100 objects from the Museum's collection including textiles, jewelry, puppets, baskets, beaded objects, ritual dance masks, architectural ornaments, household objects and ancestor figures and shrines.

The Mingei Indonesian collection includes, it is believed, the world's largest collection of monumental ancestor shrines from Borneo (Kalimantan). Catalog available.

- The 22nd annual **Ethnographic Art Show** will take place on August 12-14 in Santa Fe at the Sweeny Center. Over 170 booths feature Oceanic, pre-Columbian, Spanish Colonial, Mexican, Indonesian and other ethnographic arts from around the world. A parallel show will also take place at the College of Santa Fe at the Shellabarger Tennis Center. [tribalantiqueshow.com](http://tribalantiqueshow.com) The Antique Indian Art Show follows at the Sweeny on August 15-17th.

- **Vanishing Worlds: Art & Ritual in Amazonia**, through August 21, 2005, Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University.

- Editors for Summer Issue: Peter Silton and Feelie Lee.