

The George Washington University Department of Anthropology Presents

as part of our Fall Colloquium Series

Professor Joshua Bell

George Washington University – Anthropology Department

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History

The Veracity of Form: Transforming Knowledges and Their Mediation in the Purari Delta of Papua New Guinea

Please bring a **brown-bag lunch** and join us for an **informal talk** on Prof. Bell's work.

During this presentation, Prof. Bell will consider the forms that knowledge takes as a result of ethnographic entanglements, their archival traces and the results of bringing these materials back into communities from which they originated.

Doing so raises issues about the veracity of these forms, their translation and how these transformations are locally understood as part of the larger politics of recognition. Focusing primarily on the generative qualities of photographs, texts and drawings made by F.E. Williams in 1922, Prof. Bell considers how the properties of these different forms of knowledge were understood by Purari communities as we worked together understand their legacies. Transformed, as they are by iconoclasm and more recently the politics and effects of resource extraction, communities were divided in their reactions to these materials. Discussing these differences, and understandings of what constitutes evidence, raises the problems and possibilities of engaging communities around archival materials, and endeavors to answer not only what it is that these materials want from us, but also what their return does to communities, researchers and the material itself.

Monday, November 5, 2012 from 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Hortense Amsterdam House, Room 202
2110 G. St., NW, Washington, DC 20052

Professor Joshua Bell is a Professorial Lecturer in Anthropology and Curator of Globalization in the National Museum of Natural History. Dr. Bell has conducted fieldwork since 2000 with communities in the Purari Delta, an ecologically diverse tidal estuary on Papua New Guinea's south coast, examining the social, economic and environmental transformations in the wake of regional resource extraction. He is also collaborating with I'ai communities to document aspects of their heritage and traditions. This work is complemented with on-going archival and museum-based research in Australia, Europe, Papua New Guinea, and the United States.