Introduction: Studies in Museum Ethnography in Honor of Daniel C. Swan

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Abstract
This brief editorial introduces the special double issue of Museum Anthropology Review titled Studies in Museum Ethnography in Honor of Daniel C. Swan.

Keywords
art museums; cultural anthropology; ethnohistory; ethnological museums; exhibitions; festschriften; indigenous peoples; natural history museums; regional ethnology.

Competing Interests
The authors declare no competing interests.

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Abstract: This brief editorial introduces the special double issue of Museum Anthropology Review titled Studies in Museum Ethnography in Honor of Daniel C. Swan.

This special double issue of Museum Anthropology Review is published in honor of our mentor, colleague, and friend Daniel C. Swan in the wake of his retirement from the University of Oklahoma in the summer of 2020 (Figure 1). At the time of his retirement, Dan (as he is most often known) was Curator of Ethnology and Interim Director of the university’s Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History (a.k.a. Sam Noble Museum) as well as Professor of Anthropology in its Department of Anthropology. When he joined the University of Oklahoma faculty in 2007, he was coming full circle, returning to the campus where he had earned his master’s degree in anthropology in 1982 and his doctorate in anthropology in 1990. At the Sam Noble Museum, he again proved himself an experienced and impactful curator and museum administrator. In the Department of Anthropology, he was a gifted undergraduate and graduate teacher and also a supportive and generous mentor. Bridging museums and academic departments, he played an outsized role in training several generations of North American museum anthropologists and museum professionals more broadly. The papers gathered in this special double issue reflect some of his enduring concerns as a museum anthropologist and they represent a small number of the individuals connected within a much larger professional network in which he is a key node. In this, the collected papers are just a tithe of the larger body of scholarship that Swan’s work has inspired and of the larger group of colleagues who ideally could have been drawn into what might have been a vast collection of scholarly works in his honor. We know that many colleagues far and wide join the authors in congratulating Dan on his retirement and thanking him for his many contributions to the field and to the communities with which he has engaged and partnered.
As a sign that his work continues fruitfully into retirement, we call attention first to the project report that is included in this special double issue. Dan authored this report with his former student Aleksandr Y. Chudak and they submitted it to *Museum Anthropology Review* not knowing that a collection in Dan’s honor was in the works. As the editors of this special issue, we are thrilled to include this most recent of Dan’s collaborative writings here alongside those that were expressly written in honor of him and his work. It is meaningful to reflect in this context on the substance of that project report. The coauthors report on a different commemoration, the centennial of the Native American Church State of Oklahoma (a.k.a. Native American Church of Oklahoma), held in 2018. They describe a specific project that illustrates practices of community collaboration that have been at the heart of Dan’s work throughout his career (Swan and Jordan 2015). The project illustrates the ways that museums can partner to pursue work that is in service to, and in relations with, specific communities, particularly Indigenous ones. The contribution also points to the history of the Native American Church (NAC) as a reoccurring concern that links Dan to several generations of NAC leaders and Native community-based scholars and culture workers (Swan 1990, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2015b, 2016; Swan and Big Bow 1995; Swan and Simons 2014). It also illustrates his mature practice of regularly coauthoring with current and former students (Jordan and Swan 2011; Swan and Simons 2014: Swan and Jordan 2010, 2015).

A second fortuitous addition to this special issue is Fiona P. McDonald’s review of *Wedding Clothes and the Osage Community: A Giving Heritage*, which Dan coauthored with Jim Cooley (Swan and Cooley 2019). The reviewer does not know the
coauthors but, as her review reveals, she admires this outstanding book and she situates it well within the current landscape of Native American studies and collaborative museum anthropology. Review of this recent book allows us to point to the ways that Dan has partnered with Osage tradition bearers and community leaders since the earliest days of his career, when he served as Director of the White Hair Memorial (a.k.a. Osage Cultural Resource Center) (1984–1990) and undertook initial ethnographically-informed studies of Osage ethnohistory (Swan 1987, 1990; Swan and Campbell 1989; Thompson, Vehik, and Swan 1984). Later in his career, this work expanded to a wider and wider range of topics, from ethnobotany (Swan and Simons 2014) and traditional foodways (Swan 2010b) to the full expanse of Osage traditional art and material culture in its social, ceremonial, and historical contexts (Bailey and Swan 2004; Swan and Cooley 2019; Jackson 2008). For those new to this work, his coauthored books on Osage expressive life have been award winners. *Wedding Clothes and the Osage Community* received the annual book award of the Council for Museum Anthropology in 2020. In the same year, it was also the honorable mention title for the American Folklore Society’s Wayland D. Hand Prize, which is given for the best book combining historical and folkloristic methods and materials. Earlier, *Art of the Osage*, coauthored with Garrick Bailey, was recognized in 2004 as the Outstanding Book on Oklahoma History by the Oklahoma Historical Society (Bailey and Swan 2004). While he has undertaken important projects with members of the NAC from diverse nations, with the Kiowa, with the Navajo, and with other peoples, his contributions to the study of, and appreciation of, Osage cultural heritage and social history have been uniquely broad and impactful.

While proud of his writings, Dan is always quick to observe that his primary duty has been the production of diverse museum exhibitions. In reflecting briefly on this part of his practice, we begin by noting that we are not presently even able to enumerate all of the exhibitions that he has curated, co-curated, or facilitated as a project manager or as a senior administrator. There just are too many of them spread across too many institutions. At mind boggling frequency, these exhibitions have been executed at every scale from the monumental to the intimate. Watching Dan work at close range in museum environments, we have both often thought that he was probably the most gifted general contractor that the discipline of anthropology has ever produced. Having once proudly worked as a union roofer, he is equally at home talking to dry wall contractors, graphic designers, museum board members, and Native American elders. The importance of such skills for collaborative exhibition work cannot be overstated.

It helps in this connection to track the institutions in which he has worked and contributed in important ways. His museum work began with three roles within the Oklahoma Historical Society. He worked first as a Curatorial Assistant at the State Museum of History (1980–1982) then continued in the role of Ethnologist for the Division of Museums and Sites (1982–1984). Finally, he was the Director of the White Hair Memorial (1984–1990). Thus, he began work as a museum anthropologist with a decade of work in a large history museum and in a historical house museum that was also a cultural resource center for the Osage people. From there he moved to the role of Curator of Anthropology for Ethnology at the Science Museum of Minnesota in Saint Paul. He thus then gained further curatorial experience in a massive urban science center (1990–1993). From there he returned to Oklahoma to serve for more than a decade as Senior Curator of the Gilcrease Museum (1993–2003). While at Gilcrease, he also taught museum anthropology courses for the University of Tulsa, building up a relationship that would, later (in 2008), lead
to the University taking responsibility for running the museum on behalf of the City of Tulsa. Having served as Interim Director in 2003 at this large municipal museum of art, history, ethnography, and archaeology, he moved then to a university-based museum focused primarily on the interpretation of an single archaeological site: the C.H. Nash Museum of Anthropology and Chucalissa Archaeological Park (a.k.a. Chucalissa) at the University of Memphis (2003–2006). In this director role, he was also on the faculty of the University of Memphis’ Department of Anthropology. It was from this role that he returned to Oklahoma again, joining the Sam Noble Museum and the University of Oklahoma’s faculty (2007–2020).

Across these varied and valuable roles, he has amassed deep experience leading, developing, and facilitating exhibitions and collaborations at museums of science, natural history, history, archaeology, art, and ethnography and he has worked at nearly every scale from the small historical house museum to the giant urban science museum. The earliest of his exhibition projects that we know about is “Ageless We Dance” from 1982–1983 (Swan and Palmer 1982). This project was a collaboration between the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Historical Society. Among his recent Sam Noble Museum exhibition projects are: (with Lauren M. Simons) “Warrior Spirits: Indigenous Arts from New Guinea,” (February 4 to May 13, 2012), “Collision & Creation: Indigenous Arts of the Americas 1890–2015” (August 29, 2015 to February 21, 2016), “Fluent Generations: The Art of Anita, Tom and Yatika Fields” (January 20 to May 6, 2018) (see Swan 2018), and (with Saidy Orellana and Manuel Ajquejay) “Guatemalan Textiles: Heart of the Maya World” (September 14 to December 6, 2021). A longer term sample of the major projects for which he was a curator or curatorial team member includes: “Peyote Religious Art: Symbols of Faith and Belief” (a traveling exhibition originating at the Gilcrease Museum, ca. 1998–2003) (see Swan 1999a, 1999b), “Art of the Osage” (a special exhibition of the Saint Louis Art Museum, March 12 to August 8, 2004) (see Bailey and Swan 2004), “One Hundred Summers: A Calendar Record of the Kiowa” (a special exhibition of the Sam Noble Museum, May 1 to August 23, 2009) (see Greene 2009) and, most recently, “A Giving Heritage: Wedding Clothes and the Osage Community” (a traveling exhibition organized by the Sam Noble Museum, 2017–2019) (see Swan and Cooley 2019). This is just a part of Dan’s exhibition work.

We do not know of any museum professional who has been central to as many successfully exhibitions as Dan. His exhibitions work regularly extended beyond those institutions where he worked. He partnered or consulted with museums such as the Brooklyn Museum, Musée du Quai Branly, the Saint Louis Art Museum, and the Cahokia Mounds Museum. More crucially, he collaborated with communities and Native American nations, including the Osage Nation, the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, the Wyandotte Nation, and the Seneca–Cayuga Nation. The exhibition “Warrior Spirits: Indigenous Arts from Papua New Guinea” was recognized by the Oklahoma Museum Association as its outstanding exhibition of the year in 2012. This was Dan’s second time co-winning this award, as the permanent exhibition “Las Artes de México,” which opened in 1996 at the Gilcrease Museum, was also so recognized.

We could continue in a similar way recounting Dan’s remarkable work in ethically building museum collections through direct work commissioning works from named artists and traditional craftspeople. We know of no colleague who has built larger or more useful contemporary art and craft collections related to Native American peoples. Those collections—especially those built for the Gilcrease Museum and the Sam Noble Museum—will be a durable resource for communities, makers, and
Worthy of special attention as well is Dan’s work on numerous collaborative media productions in both audio and video formats for community-serving as well as public-facing purposes. Similarly, we could detail his diverse service to his students and colleagues, to communities, to the museums where he has worked, to his academic departments, and to the field of museum anthropology. As with his exhibitions list, the enumeration of his impactful activities is just too daunting a task. We can only mention it here, but we do wish to highlight the ways that he has proven adept at raising funds through donation and grant writing that both support institutional (museum) goals and also community ones. Some sense of this vast endeavor can be gained in small measure by considering just the co-authored project reports that he and colleagues have contributed to the pages of *Museum Anthropology Review* (Swan and Minnis 2014; Swan and Linn 2021; Swan and Chudak this issue).

We, and our collaborators in this issue, admire Dan because of all of these many contributions and the many others that we leave unmentioned, but we also admire Dan because he has been a great friend and mentor and supporter to so many people. We feel great fortune to be among those who have benefitted so consistently from his kindness, his good will, and his good counsel. We note that he has been a friend not only to people, but to Native nations and institutions as well. As a museum leader, he is rare in being not only a convener and a builder but also a sustainer and what he works to build and sustain is not just a group or an institution treated in isolation but a group or an institution or a person in relationship with other groups, institutions, and persons. As befits his identity as an ethnobotanist and natural history museum leader, his is an ecosystem perspective. These are rare and wonderful commitments and our fields and our networks and communities are stronger because of Dan’s efforts and ethos.

We close this opening by noting that the five articles gathered in this collection touch on just a few key themes reoccurring in Dan’s work and career. They do not cover the whole by a longshot, but these themes are relevant and we flag them for the sake of interested readers. In keeping with a professional and methodological commitment that they share, Candance Greene’s article works at the heart of museum anthropology’s engagement with collections as rich “databanks” that call for careful use and reuse (Greene 2015, 6). The article jointly authored by Michael Paul Jordan, Emma Richburg, and F. Blair Armstrong focuses not only on the regions (the Southwest and Great Plains) where Dan’s work has been most extensive but it, more generally, illustrates the research advantages and ethical necessity of consulting carefully with knowledgeable members of federally recognized Native American tribes and nations to both better interpret the ethnohistorical and archaeological record and to generate more responsible and inclusive public programs and exhibition within museums, parks, and historical sites (Swan and Jordan 2015). Looking to regional and Indigenous contexts beyond North America, Carrie Hertz’ article relates to issues—including those raised by national dress and its display—that are also very resonate for Native North American societies. The article also links to issues of individual and community consultation in exhibition development, a theme that is again reoccurring in Dan’s work and practice (Hertz 2017, 2021). Issues of consultation and collaboration linking museums and communities in the context of museum exhibition projects is also a theme central to John Lukavic and Chris Petrello’s article on the recent work of the Denver Art Museum in relationship with First Nations individuals and communities of the Northwest Coast. We note in this context that—in keeping with our comments above—Dan has himself been swept into participation in other of the Denver Art Museum’s efforts to interpret its Native North American collections in fresh and more
multivocal ways (see Swan 2016). Finally, the paper by Wuerxiya, Jason Baird Jackson, C. Kurt Dewhurst, and Zhang Cuixia, also connects to Swan’s work in research collaboration across difference, but it also represents a different set of themes in his work. Two of these are the use of regional survey techniques as well as the fruitfulness of making and documenting museum collections in the course of survey fieldwork (Swan 2008a; Dewhurst, N’Diaye and MacDowell 2014; Dewhurst and MacDowell 2015).

We hope that readers profit from all of the works gathered in this special double issue of Museum Anthropology Review. We end by thanking the peer-reviewers, Indiana University Press production staff and leadership, and all others who have helped facilitate this collection and the work on which the authors gathered herein report.

Notes

1. This brief introduction just touches on some key highpoints from Daniel C. Swan’s career. A professional biography or biographical article and one or more biographical interviews are very much warranted and would provide valuable lessons for the history of museum anthropology, for the history of museums in Oklahoma, and for the changing contours of collaborative projects pursued with Native American nations in Oklahoma and more broadly. Prior to his graduate degrees at the University of Oklahoma, Swan earned his bachelor’s degree in anthropology at the State University of New York at Binghampton (now known as Binghampton University) in 1978. A brief autobiographical sketch is in Swan (2015a).


3. McDonald's review was commissioned separately from this special issue but it was finished as the issue was being assembled. After it had been accepted for publication, she was given the opportunity to include it (or not include it) in this particular issue and she agreed to share it here in this special context.

4. Symbols of Faith and Belief: Art of the Native American Church (Swan 1999b) was a finalist for the Oklahoma Center for the Book’s Nonfiction Book Award in 2000.

5. When thinking about Dan’s service at the Science Museum of Minnesota, consider the following three historical facts. He worked there during the time in which the institution was then planning for (and needing) a totally new facility. All such planning projects both enliven and hinder the museums in which they unfold. He was also serving at the museum during the year (1992) of the so-called Columbus Quincentenary when many museums, including the Science Museum of Minnesota, faced important calls to change the nature of their relationships to Native American history, including colonization, and their relationships with Native American nations and with Native American urban communities. His time at the Science Museum of Minnesota also co-occurred with the enactment of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (a.k.a. NAGPRA). In these contexts, he sought as a new curator to shape the responses of a gigantic museum in which only a tiny number of
staff members had meaningful experience engaging with Native American concerns. His ability to negotiate such a complex museum environment clearly prepared him for the leadership roles that he would next take up in his career.

6. For a review of one of the collaborative media projects that Dan helped produce, see Ellis (2010).

7. For a general treatment of museum-community collaboration, see Swan and Jordan (2015) which builds on ideas developed as far back as Swan and Palmer (1982). See also Jackson (2000), which draws on work that Dan led while at Gilcrease Museum.

8. We note here that Dan has been a stalwart supporter of *Museum Anthropology Review*, contributing to it regularly, peer-reviewing for it regularly, and serving on its editorial board. Swan (2010a) is the journal’s most oft downloaded contribution.

**References Cited**


Jason Baird Jackson is Ruth N. Halls Professor of Folklore and Anthropology at Indiana University. He edits the Material Vernaculars book series published by Indiana University Press. While still a doctoral student at Indiana University, he began working part-time at the Gilcrease Museum where he was mentored by Daniel C. Swan. He would eventually serve as that museum’s Curator of Anthropology during Swan’s tenure as Senior Curator. Those early experiences shaped their ongoing collaborations.

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