

## Council for Museum Anthropology President's Report 2017

The Council for Museum Anthropology had one of its most successful and exciting years in recent memory. CMA's inaugural conference, thriving journal and social media presence, and dedicated board of directors and membership demonstrate that CMA is vibrant, engaged, impassioned, and looking toward the future. We have much to celebrate.

In May, CMA sponsored its inaugural Museum Anthropology Futures conference, generously hosted by Concordia University in Montreal. The conference ably fulfilled its goals — “to spark critical reflection and discussion on the state of museum anthropology as an academic discipline; innovative methods for the use of collections; exhibition experiments that engage with anthropological research; and museums as significant sites for grappling with pressing social concerns such as immigration, inequality, racism, colonial legacies, heritage preservation, cultural identities, representation, and creativity as productive responses to these.” Concordia University provided an inviting location for the keynotes, roundtables, lightning sessions, workshops, posters, and pop-up exhibits, as well as a convivial setting for lively, sustained dialog. The event was thoughtfully conceived, smartly executed, and in the eyes of everyone I spoke with, one of the most enjoyable professional events ever attended. Many began asking about CMA's plans for the *next* iteration of the conference before the present one had barely begun.

Attendance exceeded the conference organizers' expectations, a strong indication that subsequent Museum Anthropology Futures conferences will be equally well-attended. As the organizers recognized, there is considerable interest in holding a sustained gathering of museum professionals beyond the predictable format of the AAA annual meeting. Now, the CMA Board is actively exploring how best to profit from this experience, recognizing that holding subsequent conferences on a regular basis will require the Board's long-range commitment, the membership's continuing interest, and predictable funding. Stay tuned. A heartfelt thank-you to board members Erica Lehrer, Jen Shannon, Joshua A. Bell, and John P. Lukavic for their vision and leadership in conceiving the conference, their initiative in raising the necessary funding, and for establishing such an inspiring precedent for future CMA conferences, and thanks as well to Emily Cain, Haley Bryant, and Lillia McEnaney for serving as conference ethnographers and providing a thoughtful follow-up report.

Successful public engagement was another CMA highlight this year. I thank the Board for drafting the advocacy statements that appeared on the CMA webpage in March — “Council for Museum Anthropology Calls for Immediate Reversal of Executive Order Banning Immigrants”; “Council for Museum Anthropology Statement on Cultural Heritage and the New Presidential Administration”; “Council for Museum Anthropology Stands with Tribal Nations Opposing Dakota Access Pipeline” — and thank Diana Marsh and Gwendolyn Saul for responding to the AAA's call for late-breaking topical sessions for the Annual Meeting with their roundtable discussion, “In Whose Honor? On Monuments, Public Spaces, Historical Narratives, and Memory.” Cory Kratz has done a marvelous job maintaining a thoughtful and lively presence for the Council on Facebook, with more than 1,200 followers in 45 countries. Cara Krmptich's daily tweets @MuseumAnth have raised CMA's profile in at least two significant ways: globally, in that more than 60% of Twitter followers reside outside the United States, and among individuals between the ages of 25–34, who comprise two-thirds of our followers. “Twitter is an important tool,” in her words, “for attracting, retaining and engaging new and younger members of the Council. Hopefully this can translate into council membership, activity, recognition, and commitment among the next generation of museum anthropologists.” Kudos to Lillia McEnaney for making the Museum Anthropology blog an attractive and lively resource for members and many more. Last, but certainly not least, CMA's journal, *Museum Anthropology*, continues to be a robust, engaging publication under the leadership of editor Lea McChesney and the authors who contribute their work. According to the latest report from Wiley, *Museum Anthropology* averaged a greater number of downloads per article than that of all the anthropology journals it published in 2016 (166 vs 150 downloads). More than 4,039 institutions now offer access to *Museum Anthropology*, and Wiley also extends low-cost or free access to current content to 6,943 developing world institutions. It's gratifying to learn that 56% of the 30,000+ *Museum Anthropology* article downloads last year were from international readers.

CMA President-elect Carrie Heitman has developed a superb program for this year's annual meeting. In addition to our three invited sessions (of which two are co-sponsored by the Association for Africanist

Anthropology and the Society for Visual Anthropology), the program features at least a dozen additional panels that specifically address or reflect upon the work of museum anthropology, demonstrating once again the relevance of our work beyond a narrow circle of interest. While our membership levels will continue to determine the number of invited sessions that CMA may sponsor, panels of interest to our members are increasingly included in the general program. This trend is bound to continue as the annual meetings move from hotel venues to larger conference centers (this will be the association's final meeting in the Marriot Wardman Park, which can no longer accommodate our numbers). While many regret their institutional environment, there's a clear pay-off in the boundless space available for programming (as we saw last year in Minneapolis).

Despite the gradual decline in CMA membership over the past decade, membership has remained relatively stable this past year. September-to-September membership decreased from 289 to 282, or just 2%. CMA's membership figures also appear stable relative to other AAA sections (in which membership declined by an average 6%) and compared to AAA interest groups (where membership declined 15% on average). CMA is also in a rather advantageous position in that our membership dues and other fees play a relatively minor role in the overall health of our budget. Still, even slight annual declines in membership levels that are cumulative (as ours have been) are unsustainable over the long term. Developing a strategy for increasing membership, particularly student memberships, has been the stated goal of every CMA president and board in recent memory, but I know of no successful models for doing so. For example: there is no obvious relationship between journal publication and section membership (the section with the greatest membership increase this year does not publish a journal, while the section with one of the most highly-regarded journals saw its membership *decline* by an identical percentage). Nor is there an apparent relationship between increasing/decreasing membership and the continued publication of a journal in printed format.

Our publishing agreement with Wiley continues to reap financial benefits that far outweigh revenue from membership dues. As past CMA president Alex Barker noted several years ago, "CMA is in a particularly strong position because of strategic decisions taken several years ago to invest resources to digitize back issues of *Museum Anthropology*, which had the effect of significantly increasing CMA's share of overall shared publication revenues." CMA's net assets increased \$21,612 between January and September 2017. The figure includes \$12,504 in revenue from Wiley as well as a one-time, \$4,353 rebate from the Strategic Publishing Fund, which AAA developed in anticipation of a potential new publishing agreement, but did not entirely use because the association ultimately re-signed an agreement with Wiley. CMA had total net assets of \$63,357 as of September 2017. Additionally, the two quasi-endowments for the Ames Award and Student Travel grants have a combined balance of \$39,223. CMA's strong financial footing is nonetheless precarious (as Alex also noted) in that it is largely dependent upon bundled, subscription-based income from museum and university libraries which perpetually face increasingly greater budget cuts.

CMA members showed strong interest in running for advisory board positions this year, with seven individuals running for three open positions on the board and four members running for one open student seat. I am pleased to report that the CMA membership has elected Adrian Van Allan and re-elected Joshua A. Bell and Erica Lehrer for CMA At-Large Member seats. Sowparnika Balaswaminathan will become the board's student representative, the second individual to serve in this vital capacity.

It is with great sadness that Council members acknowledge the passing of Nancy Oestreich Lurie, who passed away on May 13th. Nancy's scholarship, service as expert witness before the U.S. Indian Claims Commission, leadership of the association, and the vital role she played within the museum anthropology community are well known to us all. She was also a fierce advocate for preserving anthropological field materials and the professional legacy of her colleagues. Nancy was a generous colleague to the museum anthropology community and a great deal of fun as well. We will miss her.

It's been an honor to serve as your president this year. I thank the CMA board and *Museum Anthropology* editor for your leadership, and CMA members for your generous contributions, practical support, and enthusiasm for our mission.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Leopold, President  
Council for Museum Anthropology