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## Ghostnet Busters

From endangered ocean species to the seeds of ancient cultures, Stéphane Jacobs looks at what is being swept away in the trawlers' nets

By  
Stéphane Jacobs

An environmental disaster has been unfolding for several years now in the Timor and Arafura Seas to the northeast of Australia. The root of the crisis: abandoned fishing nets, known as *ghostnets*, left by the fishing boats that maraud these waters. Flying Korean, Thai, Vietnamese or Chinese flags, they use drift nets spreading up to 40 km wide. Such outrageous dimensions are strictly forbidden in these waters, but when the coastguards approach, ships simply throw the nets overboard; they are also known to cut the nets of their rivals. On top of that, worn-out nets are commonly dumped at sea due to the high cost of repairs and recycling.

Dragged by current and trade winds, these nets become lodged in a bottleneck caused by the Gulf of Carpentaria and Torres



Strait Islands, not far from the Great Barrier Reef and Papua New Guinea's shores. In places, these natural paradises have become open-air rubbish tips where tons of ghostnets and plastic waste accumulate. For thousands of years, this region's unusual hydrodynamics enabled a very rich ecosystem of aquatic fauna to develop, attracted by phytoplankton profusion. Amongst this fauna are numerous endangered species including certain species of turtles, sharks, rays, sawfish and many more. For years now, these non-biodegradable ghostnets have been trapping and killing this already depleted fauna, and damaging

the seabed and coral reef, like anti-personnel mines still injuring civilians, long after the conflict has ended.

Thanks to its semi-tropical climate, abundant vegetation has also enabled people to settle permanently on North Australia's coasts and islands. Let us remember that Australia is home to numerous indigenous peoples who can be classified into two main groups: Aboriginals, mostly living on the mainland, and Torres Strait Islanders, living on small islands. The latter group, of Melanesian culture, are a settled people, whereas Aboriginals are traditionally nomadic. What they share is a very precise knowledge of their environment and its resources, the cornerstone of their ancestral beliefs. The vegetable and animal species inhabiting the region are the protagonists of their founding myths and legends, and are often artistically represented. Some animal spe-

cies have totemic value and therefore embody a person or whole group.

While ghostnets have obvious, harmful consequences for this population's means of subsistence, we should not ignore a more insidious side effect: putting millennia-old cultures in jeopardy.

Since the species being decimated are the protagonists of their mythical histories, the zoomorphic ancestors they inspired not only defined their territory, but their entire world: human, vegetable and animal identities, rules of life and kinship, social status, language, and so on. In other words, if these species disappear, the very foundations of these cultures will vanish with them.

Perturbed by this ecological and human drama, GhostNets Australia, an association comprising research-

ers, coastguards and artists, has been in action since 2004. Together, they work to identify, remove and add value to ghostnets. Notably, their efforts have translated into the creation of sculptures, the starting point of a real artistic movement of sculptures formed from ghostnets.

Australian art, known until now for the pictorial movement born in the 1970s in the heart of the Central Desert, has uncovered this new facet in its identity through three-dimensional artworks linked to the ocean world. While promoting defence of the environment and local cultures, these artworks inspire just as much through their own poetry and impressive stature. In 2016, Monaco Oceanographic Museum welcomed a monumental installation of ghost-net

artworks on a Stéphane Jacobs proposal. The first of its kind in Europe, the exhibit encouraged reflection and promoted dialogue on a devastating global phenomenon. Further to the success of *Taba Naba: Australia, Oceania, Arts of the Sea People*, Paris Aquarium will host its own exhibi-

tion from April to August, 2017. The collection comprises about thirty sculptures, highlighting the most endangered species. This project, *Australia: Defence of the Oceans*, is the result of a collaboration between Pompu-raaw artistic cooperative, the Arts d'Australie • Stéphane Jacob Gallery (Paris), and the Suzanne O'Connell Gallery (Brisbane). It has received the full support of the Australian government and the State of Queensland.

After Paris, the installation will be presented at the United Nations' headquarters in Geneva from 1st to 30th September, 2017, then at Geneva University from October to December, 2017. It will complement *The Boomerang Effect - The Aboriginal Arts in Australia* exhibition, hosted by the Geneva Ethnography Museum (MEG) from 19th May, 2017 until 7th January, 2018.

In June 2017, a selection of these artworks will be presented at the United Nations' headquarters in New York as part of World Oceans Day, during the general assembly meeting. In 2018, they are likely to be presented at London's Royal Museums, Greenwich. ■

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## Business

## Paradis fi

Chez les Toilai de Nou  
Il échoue sur une plagePar  
Elisabeth Verhey

À l'occasion de nombre de mes aventures néo-guinéennes avec mon ami Loed, nous fûmes invités à assister à des captivantes cérémonies par les Tolai, qui vivent sur la péninsule de Gazelle, en Nouvelle-Bretagne orientale.

Un des aspects les plus fascinants de la vie des Tolai est l'usage qu'ils font d'impressionnants cerceaux de *monnaie coquillage*. Cette devise est utilisée, entre autres choses, pour payer les parents, les amis proches et les personnes importantes qui font office de témoins pendant les funérailles.

La monnaie coquillage constitue l'un des sujets les plus intéressants du monde de l'art dit *tribal*, et joue un rôle prépondérant dans la vie quotidienne de ces populations, de leur naissance à leur mort.

Il serait évidemment trop facile de se rendre sur une plage, d'y ramasser des coquillages de porcelaine et de déclarer qu'il s'agit de monnaie. Toute personne qui vit au bord de la mer serait millionnaire! Ce n'est bien sûr pas si simple. Pour pouvoir servir de devise, la ressource doit être difficile à obtenir.

Par exemple, les coquilles en nacre d'huîtres à lèvres dorées, qu'on trouve le long des côtes de Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée, sont acheminées vers les hauteurs, dans le centre de l'île, où elles sont transformées en pendentifs en demi-lune appelés *kina* - qui se trouve également être le nom de la devise nationale. Les coquillages de porcelaine prennent aussi temporairement le nom de la devise nationale. Les coquillages de porcelaine prennent aussi temporairement le nom de la devise nationale. Les coquillages de porcelaine prennent aussi temporairement le nom de la devise nationale.

Les *tridacna gigas* ou tridacnes géants, connus en France sous le nom de *bénitiers*, sont extrêmement difficiles à aller récupérer en eaux profondes et sont utilisés pour la confection de bracelets, pendentifs et autres. Elles ont beaucoup de valeur d'un bout à l'autre des îles mélanésiennes, et servent également de monnaie.

Battre monnaie  
les pieds dans l'eau

Au cours de l'un de nos voyages en Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée, nous sommes tombés sur la

## Insurance

In 2017, Edouard Bern  
& ASSURANCEInterview  
by Les Filles for Gus Adler

Edouard, Hadrien, here we meet again for the Bourgogne Tribal Show second event. What's new?

**E. B.** First of all, we can't wait for this second event! I remember I told Julie Arnoux and Olivier Auquier right after last May's first event that they could count us in for the second one. It was very important for us to build a long-term partnership with Gus Adler & Filles on the Bourgogne Tribal Show.

**E. B.** In a single year, many changes took place. Since May 2016, we developed new products for galleries to offer always more flexible solutions. We also put together a new contract for individuals with very competitive rates, in order for artworks insurance to be more accessible. Finally, an important change occurred: in January, we changed our insurance company's name to APPIA Art & Assurance.

**Before going back to these new products, why APPIA?**  
**E. B.** In December 2016, Hadrien and I purchased all the shares of the company. Changing name

## Law versus morality: returning works of art

Should artworks be returned to their native land?

Interview with Didier Claes  
And Yves-Bernard Debie

In 2016, a Tsogo statuette which had been stolen from the Trocadero Ethnography Museum was returned to the Quai Branly. Around the same time, the Benin government requested that Dahomey Kingdom royal treasures be returned to them. The French government recently denied the request. The debate around the restitution of works of art challenges the concept of ownership, which often dominates the discussion of cultural heritage. In France, works of art which form part of the national collections are subject to the legal principles of imprescriptibility and inalienability. However, some countries are, like Benin, claiming back their own historical objects in order to promote and propagate their cultural heritage. Should the decision to return or retain these objects be based on legal principles, or ethics?

**Didier Claes:** The Benin claim raises an important moral question, not only because it concerns a country's cultural heritage, but also because it brings us back to the turbulent history between colonised countries and their colonisers. This is the first time that an African democracy has made such a request. As such, I applaud the Benin government's brave initiative, asking not only for the restitution, but also for an explanation.

In the same way that Greece has been asking England to return the Parthenon Frieze for years, Benin's request - an African country's request - must be respected, studied and discussed. The circumstances under which some objects entered European collections must be determined. Although it is clear that many pieces were purchased legally and in good faith, others were acquired through pillaging and theft. When it comes to the objects claimed back by Benin, it is indisputably a case of pillaging, committed by the French army during the 1892 looting of King Béhanzin's court.

When there is clear evidence that a work of art was obtained illegally, should we not at least discuss the claim?

**Yves-Bernard Debie:** One can always enter into debate around moral or historical questions! That said, when it comes to the law, there is no leeway. The Tsogo artwork restitution was governed by Franco-French law, as it clearly fell under France's legal jurisdiction. For Benin's request, restitution can be amicably discussed at a diplomatic level, between States, but there is no obligation. Many people mistakenly believe that laws are practically designed to be circumvented. This is not the case! Law re-

presents security for everyone. And what about morality? Morality is one source of law and often ends up inspiring its development by capillary action, but morality cannot replace the law. The sole fact that, today, some governments or organisations consider that some works of art should be returned does not mean that this is the case. In a democratic state that respects the Rule of Law, the only way to be right is to respect the law. Throughout history, many objects have been stolen under tragic circumstances - often in line with the prevailing morality of the time - but in no case can morality of the present day preempt the application of the law. The principle of legality must be safeguarded.

**D. C.:** I can at least hope that morality will one day become the basis of law! I'm fighting for African museums to be subject to the same rules and benefit from the same rights as museums such as the Branly or Tervuren.

**"About 99% of the artistic heritage of most African civilisations resides outside the continent"**  
I don't propose that all objects be returned; they are history. All civilisations should be represented the world over, and I think that Western museums are - the Branly museum alone demonstrates this - a great and beautiful showcase for Africa. On the other hand, the reality is that only a tiny portion of the Afri-

can population has access to their own cultural heritage. About 99% of this artistic heritage is abroad.

I am campaigning for the restitution of the royal treasures and other objects stolen from African museums, as was the case with the Tsogo piece.

**Y. B. D.:** Obviously in this day and age no one could condone colonisation or the violent expeditions that enabled the theft of works of art. But they belong to history and it is the law that guarantees tranquillity and order and there is no room for naive optimism and wishful thinking.

If the French government were to accede to Benin's request, the same should be done for every other country. Museums and collections would be emptied based on arbitrary and fluctuating criteria (what would tomorrow's morality look like?). If we return to the example of the Parthenon Frieze, which has been debated for a long time now, let us not forget that this frieze was not stolen, but sold to Lord Elgin, then British ambassador, by the Ottoman authorities (he spent a fortune on it). He then ceded it to the United Kingdom.

Let us also not forget that Athens had been part of the Ottoman Empire since 1458, and that its government, even if

it was an occupying one, was legitimate for 400 years. Modern Greece only became independent in 1832.

With this in mind, when modern Benin asks for a restitution, is it a historically legitimate claim? This question has still not been answered.

**"For the African people, the litigation channels should be abandoned, as it will only create further frustration"**

**What could be the limits to demands for restitution? What solutions could be considered?**

**D. C.:** Morally, should the legal standard be applied to objects acquired through bloodshed? When a colonial administration launched an expedition that resulted in the assassination of Lusinga, the Tabwa King? When Lieutenant-General Émile Storms killed, stole objects, brought them home and gave them to the Tervuren Museum, what can we say to the King's grandson, who wants to retrieve the royal treasures he ought by rights to have inherited?

Why is it that a robbery of the Branly Museum, the Louvre or the British Museum triggers a massive mobilisation, yet no one in the realm of the so-called primitive arts will even entertain a discussion on the matter when it relates to an African museum?

**Y. B. D.:** Let's take the demonstration a step further. In Rome, the Arch of Titus - who ordered the destruction and pillaging of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD - depicts legions bringing the treasure of the Temple to Rome. Today, 2,000 years after those events, should Rome return this ill-gotten treasure? And if so, on what legal basis, and to whom? Of course, the modern State of Israel didn't exist at the time.

So, let's ask ourselves this question: how far can we go back in time in order to correct our ancestors' misdeeds?

All States that follow the Rule of Law have a statute that answers this question, including Benin, whose constitution states, as the French one does, the non-retroactivity of criminal law. As a reminder, this statute is a general legal principle that defines the time limit beyond which civil or criminal proceedings are not admissible. This principle was not designed to disadvantage victims, but to ensure legal security for all over the course of time. In civil law, for instance, the limitation is 30 years. We cannot go beyond

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The Allure of  
Saône-et-Loire

When Cluny III was built (1088-1130) under Hugh of Cluny, the great Abbey was at the cutting edge of Burgundy Romanesque sculpture. The *Farinier's* capitals are a perfect illustration of this; it is not difficult to understand the impact these carved sceneries had on Perrecy-les-Forges, Saulieu and Vézelay.

This influence is obvious even in the Autun Cathedral (1119-1130). Gislebertus created a highly original plan of extraordinary proportions, with one of the most beautiful tympana in Romanesque art, and a magnificent set of decorated capitals.

The artist's style is defined by the elongation of the human form, a sense of movement, and

a vivid expressiveness. Gislebertus' *The Temptation of Eve* - a must-see at Rolin Museum - "a strange artwork, whose naked body's strange and disturbing sensuality, and feline posture," should definitely convince anyone of the artist's genius.

We could continue ad infinitum on the subject of Saône-et-Loire's Romanesque art. Let us just mention two important monuments on which Cluny left its mark: the Basilica of Paray-le-Monial, a faithful illustration of what Cluny III must have been like; and the Chapel of Berzé-la-Ville, with its admirable fresco, giving an idea of the great painted decoration that once existed at Cluny Abbey.

From Louis XIII  
to La Vie des formes

Before concluding, let us make a quick detour through Cormatin

- nine kilometres away from Besaceuil - whose Chateau boasts one of the finest Louis XIII interiors in all France. Remarkably refurbished by its owners - who offer lively and erudite guided tours - the chateau is surrounded by eleven hectares of gardens.

It is also home to the unique *golden rooms*, painted and carved in 1627 and 1628, evoking the past grandeur of Le Marais neighbourhood in Paris, with their decorative embellishments, fine carvings and painted coffer ceilings. One can also admire the Marchioness of Huxelles' apartment, with its antechamber and bedroom, as well as that of her husband, Jacques du Blé, with its mirrored room and Sainte-Cécile cabinet.

Finally, let us highlight the unique experience of *La Vie des formes*, symbolic of contempo-