

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Wamo, D'Entrecasteaux Islands, New Guinea: Photographs by Diamond Jenness, 1911-1912, Oxford: Pitt Rivers Museum, 1 June 1991–23 May 1992.

This is something of a model exhibition. It includes sixty of the pictures taken by Diamond Jenness, better known for his work in the Arctic, but whose apprentice field experience was in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands three years before Malinowski's Trobriand work. The photographs are displayed alongside a selection of items collected by Jenness and some of the bureaucratic apparatus necessary to get him equipped in the field: correspondence from his supervisor Marrett regarding funding and a phonograph sold Jenness by Mrs James Frazer. The recordings made subsequently by Jenness feature as an exhibition soundtrack, and some technical details concerning the photographic materials he employed are also provided. The whole is then further contextualized by pictures taken by Michael Young who, as part of his own long-term fieldwork in the area, has recently taken photographs back to the islands as part of a collaborative exercise in building a visual history. With great economy the exhibition thus brings to light the neglected resource of Jenness's photographs, sketches the circumstances and technologies of their production, and re-engages with their subjects.

The photographs themselves include village views, portraits, groups, material culture and mission scenes (Jenness's entrée to the islands was through his Methodist missionary brother-in-law, the Revd A. Ballantyne). In addition, the pictures show harvesting and food preparation—though the islands, in which food is of momentous symbolic importance, were in the throes of a famine during the period of Jenness's stay. Photographically, the pictures are remarkable: sharp, full of detail even in the shadows, with subjects often unobtrusively arrested in mid-action. (Oddly, a recent article in *JASO* (Terence Wright, 'The Fieldwork Photographs of Jenness and Malinowski and the Beginnings of Modern Anthropology', Vol. XXII, no. 1, pp. 41-58) refers to Jenness's photographs as 'dull and uninspired' and treats him as purely a photographer in the physical specimens mode.) Technically, Jenness's pictures *are* in one way depressing, illustrating as they do the durability and capacity for enlargement that early black-and-white photographs possess, in comparison to the easy seduction of colour most often used by more recent generations of anthropologists.

Jenness later wrote to Marrett of his dissatisfaction with this early fieldwork, of the 'hundreds and thousands of interesting things I saw everyday...not recorded'. Perhaps; but his photographs mean that they were not entirely missed; nor should this exhibition.

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