‘A Distributed Collection: Australian Aboriginal Ethnographica in European Museums’

This paper will summarise the current state of knowledge regarding collections of Aboriginal artefacts in Europe in terms of regional representation, material culture categories and collector profiles. I will present the results of my 2001 European-wide survey of nine museums, resulting in a digital database of 2,000 artefacts. The case will be made for a systematic survey of the ‘distributed collection’ of Australian artefacts in Europe and for Australia’s recognition of this collection and the network of collectors which brought it to Europe, as integral elements of the country’s cultural heritage. More particularly, the digital record offers greatly enhanced potential for Aboriginal communities in Australia to obtain access to data concerning their past traditions and heritage, leading in turn to new partnerships and collaborations with European museums.