



MARGARET MEAD

ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL REFLECTIONS



Photo: Library of Congress

Margaret Mead in college at DePauw, 1920

Curated
by
Silvia Vassileva-Ivanova





Photo: Library of Congress

Margaret Mead with children in Manus, 1928

In 1925, at the age of 23, Margaret Mead set sail for the exotic and unknown world of American Samoa, a small Island in the South Pacific. Never before had she been abroad or on a ship, or in a hotel by herself. Never before had she spoken a foreign language. Her equipment consisted of a small Kodak camera and a typewriter. For nine months she was going to study the adolescent girl, a new subject for anthropologists, for which there were no guidelines. Three years later *Coming of Age in Samoa* became Margaret Mead's first publication and first anthropological bestseller.

Following the role models for educated women set by her grandmother and mother, Margaret Mead became one of the foremost fieldworkers of her day. Trained by Franz Boas to be prepared for the unexpected, she spent years doing field work in the South Pacific, on the islands of Samoa, New Guinea, Bali and the Admiralty Islands, recording their native culture. In her notebooks and photographs from the field she tried to preserve in words and pictures unknown ways of life rapidly vanishing through exposure to modern civilization. Mead was not only observer, but also a participant, in important events of the societies she studied. Whether studying the adolescent girl in Samoa, or the developmental stages and the relationships between them, or sex and temperament in New Guinea, or childbearing and adult life in Bali, she always tried to accumulate exact knowledge about the world by respecting her informants.





In *With a Daughter's Eye*, Mary Catherine Bateson remembered her mother: "... Margaret taught me to perceive and value differences and accentuate them as interesting in themselves, rather than as deviations from the ideal."

Margaret Mead's field notes made a major contribution to anthropology by reflecting the interconnection of all aspects of human experience. This holistic approach to the study of human beings allowed Mead to speak out on a very wide range of issues. Whether living among primitive nations or visiting the White House to meet the Queen of Denmark as a guest of the President, Mead always had one goal: "advancing knowledge of various people and nations." Her influence has been felt in the activities of various institutions. In 1944 she established the Institute for Intercultural Studies in New York. For more than four decades she was a curator at the American Museum of Natural History. She was also an active member of the New York Academy of Sciences, the Society of Applied Anthropology, the American Academy of Arts and Science, the Association of American Women and a number of other science bodies. Her writings include the best seller *Coming of Age in Samoa*, as well as *Growing Up in New Guinea*, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, *The Mountain Arapesh*, *Kinship in the Admiralty Islands*, and many articles, books, videos and tape recordings. The Library World Catalog today lists 728 publications, among them books, lectures, videos and sound recordings, created or co-authored by Margaret Mead, translated worldwide.



Photo: Library of Congress

Margaret Mead in the mosquito room, Tambunam,
New Guinea, 1938





Photo: Library of Congress

*Margaret Mead on a field visit in Kenakatem,
New Guinea, 1971*

Today, 100 years after her birth, we remember Margaret Mead as the first anthropologist to study infants, a pioneer in application of anthropological techniques to the study of contemporary cultures, the first anthropologist to look at human development in a cross-cultural perspective. But perhaps her most valuable achievement was her affirmation of the possibility of learning from other groups, above all by applying the knowledge she brought back from the field to issues of modern life. She enlivened the science of anthropology, and her fierce intelligence and insatiable curiosity, her life and work, are great inspiration to women in science.

In commemoration of the centennial of Margaret Mead's birth, this exhibition was organized by Silvia Vassileva-Ivanova of the Binghamton University Art Museum, with encouragement and kind advice from Constance Sutton, professor of anthropology at New York University. The photographs were provided by Ken Heyman and the Margaret Mead/Gregory Bateson Archive at the Library of Congress.



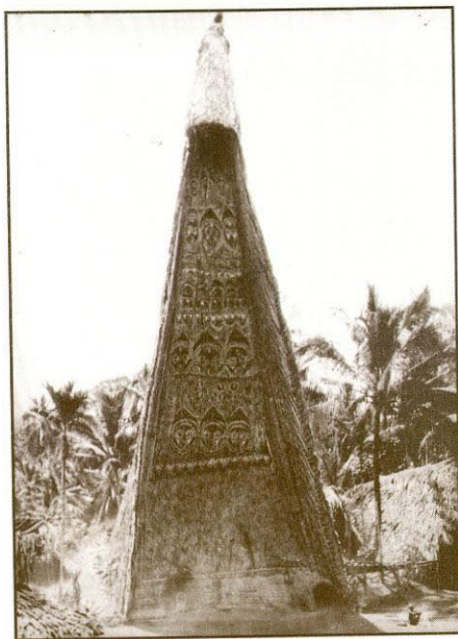


Photo: Library of Congress

Thatched construction, Bali

"I wanted to make a contribution. It seemed to me then — as it still does — that science is an activity in which there is room for many degrees, as well as many kinds of giftedness. It is an activity in which any individual, by finding his own level, can make a true contribution."

M. Mead, Blackberry Winter





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