

## SKULLMARKS

SKULLMARKS was performed by *Common Objects* in 2016 inside the cavernous Pitt Rivers Museum, home to a mysterious ethnographic collection of over half a million items.

I chose these four objects to display to the musicians and the audience, setting a special focus and atmosphere for the music. They are made of wood, bone and clay, evoking consideration of water, air, earth, spirit, ritual and utility.

The score orchestrated different combinations of the players, distributed inside the very large central space and the upper galleries. The Museum building itself should be thought of as a fifth object, intrinsically evocative and enabling rich sonic perspectives - from acoustic sounds in extreme resonance to hermetic electronics.

**John Butcher**

### Raven's Mask



© Pitt Rivers Museum.

**From Haida Gwaii, an island in British Columbia, Canada.**

Worn by Haida shamen, attached to the forehead. Possibly pre-1680.

*Raven's head mask used by medicine man at dances etc of Raven tribe, also in obtaining information from ravens* is written on the mask (1891).

In 2009 Haida visitors to Pitt Rivers thought that this mask would have had a seal fur on the top - and they discussed the practice of conversing with ravens.

## Painted Bear Skull



© Pitt Rivers Museum.

### **Collected in Nepal in 1936.**

The painted mythical scenes relate to a now obsolete 'Dance of the Bear'.

*Bear ceremonialism has occurred in the northern parts of Eurasia and North America for thousands of years. It is not surprising that the slaying of a large-bodied predator, yielding a feast of meat, would become ritualised in these traditionally hunter-gatherer societies. Even in Celtic Britain, two goddesses took the form of the bear, as bears were native to this country until their extinction in the Middle Ages.*

**Helen Hales.**

## Ceramic Water Vase & Painted Wooden Bear Mask



© Pitt Rivers Museum.

**The Water Vase** is from New Mexico, collected from the Keres Pueblo around 1880. It is made in the form of a bird, with fish and bird painted decoration.

**The Bear Mask** is from the Skeena River area, British Columbia, Canada and was collected from the Tsimshian around 1880.

*Used in play with skin of bear, imitating the bear in his movements. Used after initiating young men and women into different degrees before they can become chiefs.*

**(Museum note).**

## Common Objects

I formed *Common Objects* in 2005 for a series of concerts at the LMC Festival. At first the group had a fluid membership, but in recent years the line up has settled to:

**John Butcher / Angharad Davies / Rhodri Davies / Lina Lapelyte  
Lee Patterson & Pat Thomas.**

I have wanted to use objects as stimuli for improvisation ever since I began the group. During the last thirteen years, we have worked with semi-structured pieces, graphic notation and free improvisation, but this is the first time we have used objects as a score. I am also interested in the relationship an improviser has with the object that is their instrument as well as the preparations they use. Musicians form unique connections with their instruments and often end up anthropomorphizing them. I get attached to my preparations for different reasons: some were given to me as gifts, some remind me of people I've played with. Over time, the instrument and objects, like our bodies, carry scars and knocks and different memories.

In 2016, the group made a tour called *Sonorous Matter*, co-produced with *Sound and Music* with a grant from the *Arts Council England* and sponsored by *Resonance Extra*. Each musician spent time engaging with the collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, The Manchester Museum and The Oriental Museum, Durham University - all of which, of course, have their own relationship to Britain's colonial histories. They identified items to form the basis of new object scores to be performed by the group. This resulted in six new pieces, one by each group member:

Lee Patterson - *Five Objects*

Angharad Davies - *Sounds Outwith Objects*

Rhodri Davies - *JADE*

Lina Lapelyte - *Gold & Mirrors*

Pat Thomas - *FOR GEORGE SALIBA*

John Butcher - *Skullmarks*.

**Rhodri Davies**