

Laudatio Rosemary Joyce

It is a great honour to address Prof. Rosemary Joyce on this festive occasion.

Prof. Joyce is both a renowned archeologist, and a respected anthropologist. She is a specialist in pre-colonial Mesoamerican history, with a special focus on Honduras, but is currently also working closely together with colleagues in Mexico to develop a regional project in the hinterland of Classic Maya Palenque. Her work is concerned with questions about the ways people employ things in actively negotiating their place in society, the lives and itineraries of objects, and the reframing of human engagement with the world in terms of things, or materiality. She does this by combining social theories with the analysis of archeological artefacts as well as archival collections.

Prof. Joyce has made great contributions to both disciplines, situating archeology and heritage – heritage making and heritage management – in broader social contexts. She has put gender and power on the agenda of archeology, fighting against ideas that the discussion of these highly relevant topics is ‘ungrounded speculation beyond what we can know archeologically’. She has demonstrated that archeology can shed light on socialization processes and processes of gender identity formation, on – and here I quote the title of one of her many publications – ‘Girling the girl, and boying the boy’. She has done so by connecting research at house-hold scales to broader regional scales. By comparing social histories in Honduras, where inequality was far less extreme than in neighbouring Maya societies, she has been able to shed light on the contribution of archeology to the study of processes of socio-economic differentiation. She also has a keen eye for the relevance of her studies on present-day societal issues, arguing that the findings from this comparison lead her to, and I quote, ‘consider how archaeologists might combat the common assumption that ever-increasing inequality is somehow inevitable.’ Inequality is a central theme in her work, and she is particularly attentive to intersectionality between gender, sexuality, and economic subordination.

Her work is also characterized by a reflection on her own role as a researcher, and the role of our disciplines – linking her work firmly to reflexive anthropology. In a really interesting article entitled ‘Confessions of an archeological tour guide’, which is accessible through our university library, she discusses the connections of archeologists to global tourism economies, where they are believed to offer authoritative voices which lend authenticity to tourist experiences. Even archeologists who might frown on playing the role of a tour guide are implicated in tourism, as their research papers will make their way to tourists and tour guides through a wealth of secondary literature. Prof. Joyce argues that archaeologists, but especially those explicitly engaged with the development of cultural heritage sites will continue to be confronted with contradictions and dilemmas, as the economic contribution made by tourism raises the pressure to sensationalize archaeology to fit the demands of a market, and these pressures are exacerbated by tendencies within the discipline to focus on sensational discoveries. She urges archaeologists to take responsibilities and engage with the interpretations and representations of their finds, as these will influence both the tourist trails and the interpretations of the sites, not only by tourists, but also descendants. In the article she discusses the ways in which archaeological sites and artefacts have been and are used by various groups in societies in projects of nationalism and identity formation, paying attention to how certain elites may steer archaeologists to certain sites – and away from others. Here again we see how she is able to translate her interest in power in the past with keen observations about power in the present. Such connections between the past and the present are also visible in her contributions to the issue of sustainability. Not only in her work on agro-ethno-botany, studying plant use, but also in a recent publication on nuclear waste – What art and archaeology can tell us about securing the world’s most hazardous material. Here I see a clear link with the Liveable Planet programme of Leiden University, in which archaeology and anthropology are well represented.

Looking at Professor Joyce's career, her engagement with societal issues also becomes clear. She has an impressive career trajectory, taking her from Harvard University, through the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology to her current position at Berkeley University. She has won a high number of prestigious awards and was appointed as a Smithsonian Fellow. But, what also stands out from her CV are the prizes she won for teaching and mentoring, and the grants she applied for, not only for research but also specifically for the participation of students in her research. Dedicated to sharing her knowledge outside the walls of academia, she is also engaging in digital projects to render archaeological findings accessible to wider audiences, and to stimulate local discussions on the implications of research findings. It is with great respect for this combination of innovative scholarly contributions, great dedication to teaching, and valuable contributions to societal debates involving actors outside of academia, that the University of Leiden confers upon Prof. Rosemary Joyce an honorary doctorate.

TEKST LAUDATIO VAN MAARTEN JANSEN:

Esteemed Professor Joyce, Dear Rosemary

From the perspective of the Faculty of Archaeology, I too express admiration for your enlightening contributions to archaeology, anthropology and heritage studies, specifically of Mexico and Central America.

Your combination of long-term archaeological practice with critical theoretical, social and ethical reflections is truly inspiring, as it demonstrates the challenges and the great potential of archaeology as a socially relevant discipline.

To that effect you have focused on the agency and resilience of people and on crucial modern questions, which include gender relations, issues of identity and representation, cultural continuity and change, as well as the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the environmental crisis.

You and your husband/co-researcher Russell Sheptak are not strangers in Leiden. Over the years we have had an intensifying contact. You have given your intellectual support to our on-going research projects in the Mixtec region in Mexico, in the Caribbean and in Nicaragua-Honduras, not only through personal conversations but also by participating in our congresses, giving guest lectures to our students, spending a sabbatical here with us, participating in our PhD committees, contributing to diverse volumes edited by our staff members, and particularly collaborating with our Brill series *The Early Americas: History and Culture* as a member of the editorial board and as author of a magnificent monograph on the Painted Pottery of Honduras. Last but not least, you are an active member of the International Science Council of the Faculty of Archaeology. Russell already received his PhD from this University; I am very happy that you are receiving the honorary doctorate at this very special occasion. I now proceed to pronounce the official formula in Latin.

