

## Material World community in the news

**Date :** October 10, 2008

*Haidy Geismar, NYU*

Two key figures for, and indeed, founders of, Material World Blog have recently been awarded prestigious prizes for their contributions, through their work on material culture, to the field of anthropology. Both Fred Myers and Danny Miller would be too modest to draw attention to this themselves, and I'm posting this without letting them know in advance! Congratulations!

[Fred R. Myers](#) was named winner of the 2008 J. I. Staley Prize for his book, *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art* (Duke University Press, 2002). Fred Myers was recommended for the prize by a distinguished panel of anthropologists, who reviewed a total of 43 nominated books. The J. I. Staley is awarded annually by the School for Advanced Research to a living author in honor of a book that exemplifies outstanding scholarship in anthropology.

In their award citation, the J. I. Staley Review Panel stated, "Through a sustained thirty-year engagement with a single ethnographic community, Fred Myers reveals a critical historical depth to cultural processes. As he follows the trajectory of Pintubi painting from a remote village in the Australian Outback to Sydney, New York, and Paris, we see how these paintings exist as sacred ritual stories and as high-priced commodities on the art market. While sharing his intellectual journey, Myers reveals his command of the subject and his sweeping vision. This lucidly written book speaks to anyone with an interest in Indigenous arts, material culture, and rich ethnography." *Painting Culture* tells the complex story of how, over the past three decades, the acrylic "dot" paintings of central Australia were transformed into objects of international high art, eagerly sought by upscale galleries and collectors. Since the early 1970s, Fred R. Myers has studied the Pintupi, one of several Aboriginal groups who paint the famous acrylic works. Describing their paintings and the complicated cultural issues they raise, Myers looks at how the paintings represent Aboriginal people and their culture and how their heritage is translated into exchangeable values. He tracks the way these paintings have become high art as they move outward from indigenous communities through and among other social institutions—the world of dealers, museums, and critics. At the same time, he shows how this change in the status of acrylic paintings relates to the initiative of the painters themselves and their hopes for greater levels of recognition.

The book has been widely acclaimed by reviewers such as Françoise Dussart, who describes it as "a landmark contribution to the subject of Aboriginal art" (*Anthropological Forum*, July 2004). In a review appearing in the June 2004 issue of the *American Anthropologist*, Sally Price writes:

"Theoretically, the book is state-of-the-field, engaging frequently with prominent analysts of cultural dynamics... bringing art historical/art considerations into play, and giving serious attention to both the politics and the economics of the art scene(s) he describes." In conclusion, she states, "*Painting Culture* makes a monumental contribution to understandings of the cultural, political, and economic dimensions of an increasingly globalized art world."

AND

On Thursday 25th September the Royal Anthropological Institute awarded the Rivers Memorial Medal to Professor Daniel Miller. Previously recipients of this medal have included Malinowski,

## **Material World**

A Global Hub for Thinking About Things

<http://www.materialworldblog.com>

---

Evans-Pritchard, Darryl Forde and Mary Douglas. Danny Miller was also elected to be a Fellow of the British Academy this year.

Congratulations to both Fred and Danny