

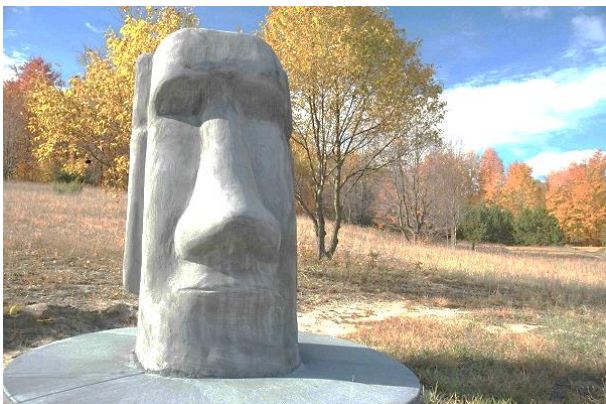
WHERE SCIENCE HISTORY AND ART CONNECT

To: Raven Hill friends
From: Cheri
Date: February 17, 2024
Re: *Secret* whispers!

In “The Little Prince” Antoine de Saint-Exupery, writes “And now here is my *secret*, a very simple *secret*: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; **what is essential is invisible to the eye.**” Looking beyond surface appearances helps us connect to the deeper essence of things. I was reading an article recently about the written language of Easter Island, known as Rongorongo. It consists of glyphs or symbols that were carved into wooden tablets. These glyphs are usually arranged in rows, read from left to right, then top to bottom, just like our written language. Rongorongo uses animals, plants and abstract symbols like we use letters. Even today this language remains undeciphered. Its meaning is a matter of debate and speculation. What those symbols are saying to us is the “essence” of those wooden tablets full of glyphs and their *secrets* continue to be fascinating for us to contemplate.



The massive stone Moai statues of Easter Island are similar. They are considered sacred cultural artifacts and have become symbolic of Easter Island, but their exact purpose is debatable. Many think they have ceremonial or religious meaning to the Rapa Nui people who created them. They may have been built as protectors from invaders and yet another theory is that they mark spots with underground water, but there is no real evidence of that.



*The Moai stands silently at Raven Hill encouraging visitors to imagine the 900 statues on Easter Island and wonder about the Polynesians who created them so long ago. What *secrets* do those heads hold that are yet to be discovered?*

Easter Island, also known as Rapa Nui, is an island off the coast of Chili, about 5100 miles south of us here in Michigan. The moai (meaning statues) were carved by the native Polynesian inhabitants between 1400 and 1650 CE (formerly AD). The heads vary in size and shape and some have bodies that were intentionally buried. Their construction and transportation are amazing feats, as they were carved from volcanic rock and transported long distances across the island.



Covered with chicken wire, the Moai is ready for cement!



Getting down and dirty with the first coat of cement, middle girls learn some practical chemistry.



Summer staffer, Susan Howard puts the finishing touches on Raven Hill's Easter Island head. "Dum Dum" is very popular. Once, we found "gum" in his mouth! Someone had attached a pink balloon to look like he was blowing a bubble!

But Easter Island is not the only place to have a Moai. In the movie, "Night at the Museum", there was the Moai character "Dum Dum", who was always asking visitors for "Gum Gum". The movie was released in 2006 and Dum Dum remains a popular icon, both in the movies and here at Raven Hill.

Our Moai, Dum Dum, is a big presence in Raven Hill's Ancient World exhibit. In 2005, our Moai was created by artist Lori Hough. She carved it out of a specially poured ten-foot piece of Styrofoam. Lori said it caused quite a stir in the back of her pickup truck as she drove it up to Raven Hill from Fremont, Michigan! Middle school girls helped to complete the sculpture. They covered the Styrofoam with chicken wire and 5 coats of cement, learning the chemistry of cement and the physics of simple machines in the process—an example of STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) in action!

In fact, Raven Hill's Moai attracts all kinds of visitors, including feathered ones. In January and February of 2006, Dum Dum became the hangout for a juvenile snowy owl. The owl was a fixture in the Ancient World for about 3 weeks, before it moved on to better hunting grounds. How many other places would one expect to see a connection between northern Michigan and Easter Island?! In February, the weather is usually cold and snowy here, but February on Rapa Nui is the hottest month of the year!



Look closely and you can see a snowy owl sitting on top of the Moai. It used the statue as its hunting perch, a rather incongruous image!

Both the Rongorongo language and the Moai of Rapa Nui, capture the imagination. As Roger Cardinal said in his book, **Figures of Reality: A Perspective on the Poetic Imagination**, “There is no single thing... that is so cut and dried that one cannot attend to its *secret* whisper which says, 'I am more than just my appearance'.” There is always something under the surface to catch your fancy and engage you in making connections that help you better understand the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of things. Next time you visit Raven Hill, slow down and take time to listen to those ‘*secret whispers*’. Who knows what mysteries you might discover beneath the exterior of some artifact or exhibit at Raven Hill?

Come see us soon. Raven Hill is open weekends—noon to 4pm on Saturdays; 2pm to 4pm on Sundays, as well as holidays and other times by appointment. That includes President’s Day this coming Monday. Families and field trip groups can visit and explore both indoors and outside or book a science, history or art class for all ages and abilities. The Center is also a perfect place for scout and 4H activities, birthday parties for youngsters & adults, retreats, weddings and other gatherings.

Cheri



Dum Dum has lots of fans!

	
<p><i>2024 supporters of Raven Hill</i></p>	



Our Easter Island head invites all myriad of groups to take a break and sit a bit.



Visitors are not allowed to touch the real Moai, but Dum Dum welcomes the hands-on approach!