begins with units defined ethnically rather than larger geographic, historical or economic contexts. If anthropology can offer insights into the effects of increasing violence this volume indicates, then it is less likely to be the social theory represented in this book than a consciously historical symbolic anthropology.

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JAMES C. McCANN

ART FOR SALE


Despite its modest length and tone, African Art in Transit is one of the most important works published in African studies in recent years; it is a work to be celebrated. The great significance of Christopher Steiner’s text lies not in its various and sundry symbolic readings of objects of African art, but in its situating African art in the various and sundry flows of trans-national economies. Indeed, the multi-directional flows of African art objects, the famous Ivorien ‘colon’ among others, link African producers, European consumers, and an increasing assortment of mostly Muslim middlemen and middlewomen. Referring to the popularity of the ‘colon’ figures that mimic European form and dress, Steiner writes elsewhere: ‘Once created in the spirit of repulsing the invasion of Western colonizers, colonial statues are now produced in the hope of attracting an invasion of Western consumers.’

In African Art in Transit, however, Steiner generates strong historical and economic currents in the diverse streams that transport African art through the global system. African objects like the Ivorien ‘colon’, Steiner demonstrates, are no longer simply produced to attract an ‘invasion of Western consumers’, but are carved en masse for export to such burgeoning western markets as New York City. To his great credit, Steiner has produced an historically and economically informed ethnography of trans-national art merchants in the Ivory Coast.

Just as African art moves easily from locale to locale, continent to continent, so the traders have for generations moved across the porous international boundaries of West African states. They have for a generation worked in Europe and have more recently moved into North American markets throughout the United States and Canada. The publication of Steiner’s book underscores the ever-present reality that scholarship in African art or any other domain of African Studies can no longer be limited to Africa.

The book consists of six chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. In the introduction, Steiner immediately extends his study of African art beyond art history to anthropology and trans-national economics. In this text, African art is considered through the lens of local, national and international commerce. Steiner suggests quite powerfully that ‘in their commercial pursuits art traders are not mindlessly moving goods from one place to another, they are also mediating between art producers and art consumers – adding economic value to what they sell by interpreting and capitalizing on the cultural values and desires from two different worlds’ (pp. 13–14).

After describing the history of the trade in African art, Steiner analyzes the structure, the division of labor, and the production of value in the multi-ethnic Ivorien art market. He then uses a case study in which an art merchant violated the unwritten rules of the trade. The case underscores powerfully the multi-ethnic and negotiated nature of art dealings between Muslim traders and non-Muslim producers.
Steiner's largely ethnographic and historical chapters on the Ivorien art market set the context for his discussion of the development of the notion of authenticity and cultural brokerage in the history of the African art trade. He argues here that authenticity is a purely western concept based upon culturally hegemonic principles that have powerful economic and social repercussions. He also demonstrates how art traders have become economically inspired mediators of knowledge. 'While traders relate to artists some of the preferences and desires of the Western clientele, they also communicate to the clientele a particular image of African art and culture' (p. 15). Steiner concludes the book with a discussion on the competing discourses on value, on how '...the Western (e)valuation of African art builds itself in direct opposition to both use value and exchange value' (p. 15).

The importance of African Art in Transit is that it defies academic classification. It is not a work of African historiography, though Steiner includes much historical material in his text. It is not an analysis of African artistic forms, though Steiner draws upon the literature of art history. It is not a work of economic analysis, though Steiner utilizes some Marxist concepts to reinforce his argument. It is also not a book of tried and true anthropological analysis, though Steiner's is much influenced by current trends in social anthropology. Steiner's book is a wonderful work of historically informed ethnography that describes simply and elegantly the complex trans-national contours of contemporary Africa. Africanists will need to follow Steiner's example of mobile positioning if we are to do anything more than stare dumbfounded at the dazzling, multi-layered complexities that comprise contemporary life in Africa.

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ART, HISTORY AND MATERIALISM


Violence is a permanent feature of the contemporary history of Zaïre. People's lives were, and are, transformed under the pressure of capitalism, colonial rule, and the crisis of independence. What were the effects of these global, economic, political and cultural processes on people's lives? What was done to them? What did they think about it? How did they represent these processes to themselves and explain them to others? The reader will find here some elements of answers to these questions, and to others. In compiling the works under review Bogumil Jewsiewicki has made a contribution to our understanding of the ways in which ordinary people interpreted the process of transformation of their society.

Jewsiewicki adopts an approach which focuses on the material conditions of life in Zaïre, and those who are interested in art as an aesthetic experience will certainly be disappointed. Art et politiques en Afrique Noire is essentially a discussion of the relationship between art and society. The introduction rejects the bourgeois conception of art as an aesthetic experience in favor of the large notion of art viewed as a (political) language which conforms to reality in Europe as well as in Africa. Jewsiewicki urges scholars from the West, his primary audience, to abandon the notion of 'primitive' and 'apolitical' art. For this reviewer, the most interesting part of the argument here is the relationship between art and the political, social and economic orders. But one important question remains