

Art as Culture: An Introduction to the Anthropology of Art. EVELYN P. HATCHER. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985. 304 pp., line drawings, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$26.50 (cloth), \$13.75 (paper).

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Art as Culture is a general survey of anthropological questions about, and approaches to, ethnographic and prehistoric art. The book is oriented toward introductory students, and is useful to instructors as well as to those interested in a basic knowledge of past and current research in the field.

The book is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 1, "Contexts and Comparisons: The Anthropological Approach," is a definition of art as culture, and an argument for the study of art in cultural context. Levels of political organization are presented as a framework illustrating the interrelationship of art style and social structure. The idea of a "primitive" art, however, is entertained implicitly by stopping the discussion at the preindustrial sociopolitical level. Hoebel, in his introductory remarks, freely uses the controversial term, "primitive."

Chapter 2, "Where? The Geographical Dimension," is a survey of characteristic artifacts and style traditions associated with specific environments and geographic areas. Students, I find, tend to be cavalier in their study of ethnographic and prehistoric art, interested in theoretical matters without giving attention to discussion of objects and styles from the comparative perspective offered by Hatcher. Chapter 3, "How? The Technological Means," is a discussion of craftsmanship and craft traditions, but without an explicit conception of the problems involved in using the terms "craft" and "art." Chapter 4, "Who? The Psychological Perspective," is a perceptive review of the relevant literature on creativity, artistic personality, and the psychological basis of painting and drawing.

Chapter 5, "Why? Social Contexts and Social Functions," is an interpretation of art as sign and symbol, with emphasis on the sociocultural contexts in which art objects and processes become meaningful. Chapter 6, "What? Art as Communication," is a critique of the usefulness of linguistic models for the study of art through comparison of verbal and visual forms of communication, iconography and iconology, and emic and etic approaches to the study of meaning. Chapter 7, "When and Whence? The Time Dimension," is a review of the applicability of evolutionary, historical, and acculturation models of culture change in relation to persistence and change in art styles and traditions. Hatcher's use of examples from archaeology and prehistory are important, as students often misperceive the anthropological concern with art as exclusively ethnographic.

Chapter 8 is entitled "The Esthetic Mystery." Saving the discussion of aesthetics for last tells us, indeed, that it is the most important though most difficult of all topics. Within art is the issue of aesthetics, and within aesthetics, matters of rhythm, complementary opposition and contrast, and balance. Art, like culture, is a qualitative experience created by humans with biological and psychological pre-

dispositions, in part to define and enhance well-being. One can turn the relationship between art-as-culture on its head and suggest an aesthetic conception of culture-as-art. The study of culture requires attention to the study of art and aesthetics for a more humanistic conception of the nature of culture itself.

Art as Culture is knowledgeable and thorough, though the format of the book detracts somewhat from the significance of the text despite Hatcher's disclaimer that her own excellent line drawings, rather than photographs, are used to keep down the price of the book. "The drawings carry information," she says, "and underscore the idea of first putting aside aesthetic reactions and judgments" (p. xv). Yet, aesthetic reactions and judgments often are important information about the subject presented. It is impossible to discuss the ceiling of the cave at Altamira using line drawings; the shading of charcoal and other contain valuable information. Color is both etic and emic information. To properly use *Art as Culture* in the classroom, color slides of the line drawings are necessary.

Despite this shortcoming, *Art as Culture* is a valuable addition to the literature in the field. The book deserves attention by students and teachers of comparative art and aesthetics.

A Short History of African Art. WERNER GILLON. New York: Facts on File Publications, 1984. 405 pp., maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$21.95 (cloth).

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Abundantly illustrated with 250 black and white photographs (mostly of sculptures but also including paintings, monuments, and other artifacts), the book covers a wide range of topics on African art *latu sensu*. Chapters deal with the rock arts (excluding other types of sculpture, engravings, and paintings) of the Sahara, Tibesti, and South Africa; Nubian art; the ancient arts of West Africa (for example, Nok, Sao, Ife) and East Africa (Ethiopia, Zimbabwe); the ancient kingdoms of West Africa; and present-day ethnic groups and clusters. The work is based on fairly extensive bibliographical research; the bibliography itself is arranged according to each of the 15 chapters.

The aim, initially stated, is modest: "to provide a short initial exploration" (p. 23) introducing Africa's visual history. The hidden ambition, however, seems to have been broader since the author concludes that "the attempt made here to reconstruct that art history" demonstrates "the relationship in style, form, and iconography of peoples who lived in proximity and the cultural connections between those more removed from each other" (p. 347).

This is obviously not "a comprehensive history of the visual arts of Africa" as the book jacket claims—it would be vain to attempt such a broad subject given the present state of African art research. The book rather presents an introduction to certain aspects of African art (mainly sculpture) produced at different periods and by different populations, with

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focus on the historical rather than the aesthetic, art historical, or ethnographic dimensions. At best, the work provides, for select groups, sketches of regional developments documented in variable time depths, depending on the availability of archaeological, written, or other records. This approach is evident at once from the general contents, the chapter divisions, and the plates. The Dan group or *poro* complex, the Cameroon, the Fang, and northern and eastern Zaire are not considered in the historical survey; the author acknowledges this fact (p. 23) but does not explain the reasons for their exclusion. The omission of certain art traditions contrasts with the extreme emphasis placed on others; for example, the descriptions and illustrations dealing with Nigerian groups comprise about one-third of the text and more than one-third of the plates. This imbalance of coverage is found also in the arts that the author selects for analysis; compare, for example, the Nigerian materials with the scanty documentation on southern Zaire.

This writing of African art "history" sometimes boils down to the enumeration and description of particular sources (accounts of travelers and missionaries, museum catalogs) that present pre-20th-century references about certain types of artwork. The history of African art, however, cannot be restricted to what archaeological and early written European or Arabic sources reveal. For example, one of the major topics to be explored in all its complexities is the ethnohistorical and cultural information surrounding widespread art-producing institutions, such as the *poro* and analogous associations (of West Africa), the men's *mukanda* (of southern Zaire, northern Angola, and Zambia), and women's initiations of the *cisungu* type (southeastern Zaire and Zambia), and the internal artistic developments that accompany these distributions. More attention should also be paid to historical data resulting from linguistic research. In general, the book provides little discussion of how specific African arts evolved in time and in place or how they influenced one another.

When judging the scope of this book, however, we should realize that the author, who is neither an anthropologist nor an art historian but a collector and connoisseur (among his many achievements), has the unique merit of being the first to attempt to present an introduction to African art from a historical perspective and in the broadest possible geographical dimension.

Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs. Translated from the Nahuatl, with an introduction and commentary by JOHN BIERHORST. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985. 559 pp., figures, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$48.50 (cloth).

A Nahuatl-English Dictionary and Concordance to the Cantares Mexicanos. With an analytical transcription and grammatical notes by JOHN BIERHORST. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985. 751 pp., notes, appendix, references. \$69.50 (cloth).

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This lengthy, two-volume set contains a presentation and interpretation of the famous Cantares Mexicanos, or Songs of the Mexicans. The Cantares is a large corpus of songs (91 of them) set down in the 16th century, in the Nahuatl language. As Bierhorst discusses in chapter 13 of Volume 1, these songs (variously called songs or poetry) have intrigued many generations of scholars who have, in the past, provided translations of individual songs and interpretations of the corpus as a whole. With this edition of the Cantares Mexicanos by Bierhorst, however, we have the first full transcription and translation of the entire body of materials included in the Cantares corpus.

The present work is organized into five major segments: (1) a general introduction containing 13 chapters, and presenting the author's thesis and overall interpretation of the songs; (2) transcriptions and translations of the songs; (3) a commentary section which provides a synopsis, general remarks, and stanza-by-stanza paraphrase for most of the songs; (4) a dictionary-concordance of terms found in the Cantares; and (5) an analytic transcription of the Cantares. The first three sections are grouped in Volume 1, the latter two in Volume 2. In addition, the volumes contain two helpful appendixes, one listing native rulers of Tenochtitlan and nearby cities, the other presenting a concordance of the vocabularies found in the Cantares.

The transcriptions and translations of the songs themselves constitute the bulk of Volume 1. Bierhorst is to be commended on his thorough and generally careful transcriptions of the songs (with word division an occasional problem). For this presentation alone, the volume holds great value for Nahuatl scholarship. The translations are, on the whole, good. However, the corpus is subjected to a unique interpretation that leads, in many instances, to mistranslations.

The basic thrust and interpretation of the work is presented in the "General Introduction" of Volume 1. Here Bierhorst lays out his thesis that these songs are "ghost songs," signaling a revitalization movement among those who wrote and sang them. In the author's words, "the Cantares is by and large devoted to the elaboration of a ghost cult, emphasizing the return of ancestor kings, the glorious revival of the warrior ethic, and the recreation of a paradisaical Mexico" (p. 63). When these songs were sung, according to Bierhorst, the ghosts of warrior-ancestors would whirl down from the heavens to augment the ranks of the living Aztec warriors and ensure victory against their enemies.

While this is an intriguing hypothesis, the bases on which these songs are considered "ghost songs" are not clearly nor definitively established. The conclusion seems to be drawn from (1) the metaphoric usages of certain Nahuatl terms, and (2) the context of a conquest culture, which has been known in some other historical cases around the world to be the setting for revitalization movements. It is not clear if the "ghost song" thesis grew out of Bierhorst's overly extended use of metaphoric possibilities, or if his hypothesis led him to a rather bold and uninhibited reliance on metaphors. Whichever the case, the translations do rely heavily on extended