

Nevertheless, *Houses in the Rainforest* is a must-read for those interested in Central African peoples in particular, or the world-wide relationship between foragers and farmers in general.

JAMES ANTHONY PRITCHETT

*Boston University*

AFRICAN ART IN TRANSIT. *By Christopher Steiner.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. xiii, 220; 42 illustrations. \$54.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

*African Art in Transit* is an important contribution to African studies as a whole, and the anthropology of African art and economics in particular. It is a detailed and lucid ethnographic account of the way in which middlemen construct value in the art markets in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. A vital study for anyone interested in contemporary African art, it is, for the field to date, the most theoretically informed study of authenticity as a construct, and as it is used in the market to create value. For African art, it is a landmark study for the ways in which it brings social and economic theory to bear on the creation of surplus value through bargaining processes, that is, through the competitive "mediation of knowledge" in the art market.

In the first three chapters Steiner describes the economic structure of the Ivoirian art market, the range of objects available, the contexts in which they are sold, and the organization of labor, as well as great detail about the economics of the trade in terms of the bargaining processes through which value is determined. The fourth chapter examines ethnicity, focusing in particular on its commodification, and alongside the next two chapters, provides an extended analysis of authenticity. Describing numerous examples of the ways in which authenticity is constructed, Steiner considers an anxiety over the "real" in the search for the "authentic." Extending this in Chapter Six, after describing how objects are altered to satisfy Western perceptions of authenticity, he points out a paradox of authenticity in the tourist industry in which authenticity is precluded by the very process of its manufacture. Going further in the concluding chapter, Steiner argues that authenticity in African art today is a parody of fetishism as envisioned by Marx, and he theorizes the associated mystifications. Through this theoretically informed and detailed analysis of the market, he accordingly documents how authenticity is built upon "primitivist" Western perceptions of Africa, which draw on powerful cultural and economic hegemonic motives.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Steiner's study is his account of the indeterminacy of value in African art. He provides considerable ethnographic evidence in Chapter Three on the ways in which value emerges through bargaining. In discussing the price-setting mechanisms in the market, he describes four types of bargaining—extractive, wholesale, retail, and performative. The calculation of economic worth and the nature of the bargaining process are very different at each phase, and it is mainly in the final phase, of performative bargaining, where the staging of authenticity becomes critical for establishing value. In addition to this, Steiner considers how knowledge itself is a commodity, showing how in bargaining, the traders capitalize upon their differential abilities to assess authenticity and therefore more reliably create a profit in a market in which they can never be sure of an object's authenticity.

Reviewing the debate over authenticity in African art history, Steiner points out that in light of the centrality of the notion to the field, there has been little explicit attention paid to the concept. Proceeding to do so, he briefly reviews the extant literature and highlights the essential character of authenticity as a quality dependant on the actual prior use of the art object in African ritual. The "naked truths," he reveals here, are the techniques and discourses of feigning this authenticity, for as he relates, the traders are well aware both of the European taste for the exotic that underlies this market, as well as the types of art they favor as more authentic. Furthermore, he reveals the strategies through which new forms of authentic African art can be promoted, and problematizes the entire idea of authenticity in his humorous accounts of how on the one hand, the traders see all African art today as copies, as reproductions of canonical works they have seen in publications, while on the other hand, insisting that all the works are old. Many of these accounts were captured in the film "In and Out of Africa," directed by Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor, in close collaboration with Steiner. As a result, the text and the film very successfully complement each other.

Though Steiner sees authenticity as something that is constructed rather than inherent, he sometimes appears reluctant to relinquish the ontological status of the "real" thing, merely hypothesizing theoretical questions about what might happen if the market was flooded with "fakes," which he notes has long been the case. He proposes that the differential capacity to discern authenticity provides for a competitive force in the market, and thus the basis for the relative success of different dealers. Steiner concludes that African art is given value in the West through the disavowal of its original use value as well as of its current exchange value. He argues that in order for the acquired objects to become art they must be shed of their utility—that is, the creation of value is a celebration of the loss of utility through the decontextualization of both the artist's labor and the object's original meaning. As he writes:

The work of African art [thus] becomes socially repressed by a complicity of consumers who destroy in their imagery of the African

art object all traces of production, and, in the end, celebrate the decontextualized results of dehumanized labor—the mysterious sparkle of the commodity cult (p. 164).

In discussing the paradox of authenticity in which, through marking objects as authentic, traders stereotypically invent meanings to satisfy the buyers' expectations of African art, Steiner explains an anxiety over authenticity in which, in the quest for the "genuine," the tourists (and the dealers and connoisseurs), often find only signs of the "original." Sometimes, then, they must find "the real thing," though Steiner clearly shows that one can rarely, if ever, be sure.

*African Art in Transit* is a particularly valuable addition to two prior studies in African art, these being *Art, Economics and Change: The Kulebele of Northern Ivory Coast* by Dolores Richter (1980) and *The Messages of Tourist Art: An African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective* by Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1984). In light of the importance of those studies and the similar issues covered therein, one might have expected a closer consideration of those texts, as well as a more intensive review of the rapidly emerging body of literature on tourism and the politics of representation in which authenticity has come to be seen as a highly nuanced category, meaning different things to different people. Aside from these relatively minor points, the text is a fascinating, original and rare fusion of economic anthropology and African art history.

JONATHAN ZILBERG

*University of Illinois at Urbana*

MASERU: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY. *By David Ambrose.* Morija, Lesotho: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993. Pp. 256; 130 illustrations, 17 maps and plans. Cloth: M75 in Lesotho, R85 in South Africa, \$45.00 in USA, and sterling £25 in UK.

Maseru is the capital city of Lesotho. In the years since independence in 1966, it has grown from a small administrative and trading center with perhaps 1 percent of the country's population, to a sprawling and largely unplanned conglomeration with probably over 10 percent of a much larger population. The present book is the first and only published study of the city's history. Its origins lie in a commissioned study for the Swedish International Development Authority, who provided technical and other assistance to the planning authority established in the 1980s for Maseru, namely the Physical Planning Division of the Ministry of the Interior.