

own joint publications (cited on most pages and accounting for 40 of the Introduction's 76 references). Given the potential interest of the material—not just regionally but in global comparative terms—this would seem an opportunity missed.

The photographs are a good feature (some more relevant than others admittedly), but the publishers' editorial processes seem a little slapdash, and the total absence of any proper maps in a volume of this kind is deplorable. That said, there is much to welcome in this collection. One cannot help but be moved by the expressions of sorrow and of love that run through many of the songs and tales—universal themes of human poetic art perhaps, but formulated in wonderfully specific ways in the examples here—by words and song artistically delivered, and by the interpenetration of new and old actualized by singers and listeners in the contemporary world.

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Hiapo: Past and Present in Niuean Barkcloth, by John Pule and Nicholas Thomas. Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2005. ISBN 1-877-372-00-5; 159 pages, figures, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography. US\$59.95.

This book, like each of the objects that are its subject, has a number of different potential meanings and uses. It is a catalogue of most of the Niuean barkcloth—hiapo—the authors were

able to track down over a ten-year period. It is an ethnography of what is known about hiapo. It is a personal response to the barkcloth by both authors, but especially by John Pule. It is also a reflection by Nicholas Thomas about this very issue: the varying nature of responses to objects. In material culture, museum, and anthropology of art studies, Arjun Appadurai's insight that objects have social lives and social histories has become a truism. The insight is often framed as an understanding that the same object can mean different things at different times to different people. Having the insight is one thing; knowing how to manage or express that insight in considering objects is often another. This book is a kind of multiple layering of different perspectives on Niuean hiapo.

In the introduction, Thomas proposes a specific aim for the book "to reveal the power of a remarkable art" (9). Acknowledging that the written and illustrative sources relating to Niue are sparse, the authors have, he says, "tried to turn this poverty of facts to advantage" responding to hiapo in ways that are "personal, impressionistic, and maybe idiosyncratic" (15). The book's specific aim is undoubtedly met. The photographs powerfully demonstrate the vigor and visual complexity of hiapo painting. The ordering of images makes it possible to recognize distinctive styles that may well be the work of individual artists, underlining the skill they embody. Pule's own etchings and paintings in response to hiapo are included, forming another kind of consideration of the artfulness of hiapo painting. Hiapo imageries

follow a pattern in which geometric forms (grids, circles, columns) are infilled with a rich variety of images: depictions of plants, leaves, flowers, and repeating patterns. As with Shaker quilts, the symmetry of patterns is always intentionally disrupted. Thomas suggests that in these paintings, pattern was produced in order to be unsettled, creating images that are “alive and in motion” (71).

Pule’s response to hiapo is embodied in his own art, and in an essay entitled “Desire Lives in Hiapo.” This essay is probably best understood as a prose poem. It is not easy to read and is full of baffling sentences. Certain words and images recur through the text, and in their repetition begin to appear like a verbal rendition of hiapo painting. Moisture, soil, fragrance, houses, and rain recur like the repeated botanical images in the paintings. At the same time, the essay contains a slightly subterranean critique of colonialism and of museums. Pule observes that “every hiapo I have had the privilege to view is messed up in many ways with museum criteria” (53), tracing some of the visits that he and Thomas made to museums around the world to see the paintings. His essay attempts to imaginatively disentangle hiapo from the clutches of curators, and re-embed them in the landscape of Niue itself: “here I present something different and organic, alive and breathing like a person, not jailed in Western terms and scientific jargon” (17).

Thomas’s essay also details in personal terms the process of looking at hiapo in museums, and the process of looking at images of hiapo with Niueans, but Thomas’s personal

response is both intellectual and aesthetic and thus engages with many issues around looking at art and objects. He argues, building on Alfred Gell’s work, that optical dynamism is pervasive in Oceanic art because the objects were embedded in social processes of interaction and even antagonism—used to dazzle, awe, or frighten others. He raises the issue of what is gained or lost when works are removed from source communities to museums. Hiapo, he points out, were paintings that, like contemporary indigenous Australian art, were often produced for export as well as for local contexts; the gain and loss in meaning is thus not always straightforward. Contemporary museum preoccupations with indigenous investments in objects often serve to bolster the one object/one origin approach that museum cataloguing and labeling processes already tend to effect. The study of hiapo suggests, he comments insightfully, that we should allow some objects to carry “what we could call emigrant identities, that are less easily situated and repatriated” (78).

This short book not only provides an opportunity to pay attention to an important Pacific art form but also addresses several core issues in the study of objects and material culture. It would be of considerable use in teaching and is a pleasure to behold. Pule writes about walking through the gardens reproduced in hiapo. This book enables others of us to think about walking there also.

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