

Book and Media Reviews

The Contemporary Pacific, Volume 29, Number 1, 191-222
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be understood as being anticolonial in a capitalist system that is based and premised on Native erasure? Since hula is now a global phenomenon, moreover, how do non-Native Hawaiian bodies function within this circuit of performance?

Imada has clearly opened venues for new and exciting research, activism, and dance in Hawaiian studies and American studies. This important book weaves archival, ethnographic, film, and personal memoirs to document hula practitioners as part of hula networks that circulated throughout the United States and Europe. I commend her for challenging the popular and state records of hula dancers as merely colonial objects and for offering a much more complicated understanding of Hawaiian agency and resistance.

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The Making of Asmat Art: Indigenous Art in a World Perspective, by Nick Stanley. Canon Pyon, UK: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2012. ISBN 978-1-907774-20-1, xiv + 249 pages, illustrations, map, notes, references, index. Cloth, US\$110.00.

In his latest book, Nick Stanley explores interactions between artists working in south Papua and international audiences. Rather than a study of the art itself, this book explores the notion of Asmat visual culture in European imaginations. The title, *The Making of Asmat Art*, does not refer to the technical process by which

Asmat artists carve their famous sculptures but instead suggests how the international art market creates what we know as “Asmat art.” With this perspective, Stanley situates Asmat visual culture within a larger, international context while at the same time rooting these practices and interactions in a longer history.

It is no surprise that Stanley is interested in the notion of Asmat art given his previous work that engages with collecting, display, and depictions of Asmat culture (*Being Ourselves for You: The Global Display of Cultures* [1998]; *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the Southwest Pacific* [2007]). This type of engagement with Indigenous visual culture and the role it plays in international markets is significant because it moves away from notions that Indigenous art is static and somehow represents a “tradition” operating in spite of, or in opposition to, “modernity.” Instead, Stanley demonstrates how Asmat visual culture actively participates in dynamic processes of negotiation, trade, and power.

The book is organized chronologically, tracing interactions between Asmat and Europeans from the days of James Cook’s eighteenth-century voyages to contemporary artists’ renderings of the famous carved shields from the region. The first four chapters explore missionary and anthropological interactions with the Asmat, as well as the region’s role in the international art market. Using journals and photographs from those early explorations, Stanley begins his study by asking how Asmat people have historically been depicted by Europeans. He is specifically interested in the process

of collecting Asmat carvings and other works for ethnographic displays in Europe, such as the British Museum's collection from Lord Moyne's explorations in the late 1930s.

In chapter 3, "Museum Scholars and Collectors," Stanley provides a brief historical overview of colonial authority in the region in order to contextualize the growing interest in Oceanic "ethnographica." He discusses Simon Kooijman, a curator and scholar whose "collecting was always undertaken with a view to the creation of museum displays" (59), while Adrian Gerbrands was a curator whose aim was "not only to apprehend the cultural background of this art but also to gain an insight into the place and function of the individual artist in the community" (Gerbrands quoted in Stanley, 60). Stanley also highlights the design and structural changes in the art itself due to these market demands, such as new, filigree-esque designs which allowed the carvings to be more easily shipped overseas (50–51).

In the late 1960s, the United Nations established a Fund for the Development of West Irian (FUNDWI). The money was intended to help stimulate a source of revenue for the region, and that source turned out to be Asmat carving. The primary audiences for this new market were museums and other cultural institutions, and artists began to work with those specific audiences in mind. This raised questions of quality and demanded that Asmat artists work according to international standards. Stanley states, "This desire to sustain standards and retain continuity with earlier traditional production was premised on the

belief that not only would this sustain Asmat culture and self-confidence, but that it would commend the art to specialist purchasers" (102).

In chapter 6, Stanley turns away from an international perspective and returns to museum practices in the Asmat region itself. He discusses the creation and management of the Asmat Museum of Culture and Progress in Agats, explaining that its aim is to encourage dialogue between different communities as well as to foster a sense of pride in local visual culture (116–117). In chapter 7, "Consolidating New Art Forms," Stanley discusses the Lomba Ukir, an annual carving competition in Agats, which provides a source of income for Asmat artists while at the same time feeding the international market with new work from the region. Again, the issue of quality and meeting high standards of museums and curators is an issue for this event. In particular, the auction that occurs at the end of the competition "has offered a way of supplying the type of work that fits within their [the curators and museums] expectations of ethnographic art" (155).

The final chapter, "Visual Adventures," discusses how Asmat culture has influenced artists around the world through documentary film, photography, and fine art. Stanley calls this trend "artistic ethnography" (170) and goes on to name these non-Asmat artists "visual adventurers" (187). I find the latter term problematic for its potential to perpetuate the notion that Oceanic peoples are "exotic" specimens readily available to be viewed by a neocolonial explorer; however, Stanley considers it useful for describing how outside engagements with Asmat

communities continue in the present day. While this context supports the book's overall inquiry into the way Asmat visual culture is in dialogue with an international audience, I was surprised Stanley did not ground his study in the longer history of cultural appropriation in modern and contemporary art. The controversial *Primitivism* exhibition in 1984 at the New York Museum of Modern Art is but one example of this history.

Throughout the book, Asmat individuals, while mentioned, remain on the periphery of the discussion. Stanley acknowledges early on that his "limited linguistic skills and intermittent presence in the area have precluded extensive close direct relations with many local people" (8). Nevertheless, this study would have greatly benefited from consideration of firsthand experiences Asmat artists have had with the international art market and

global forces that are so intricately enmeshed with their artistic practices. Stanley's book frames Asmat visual culture through a European lens, and perhaps this is what he means by the subtitle *Indigenous Art in a World Perspective*. While Stanley does not explain what he means by a "world perspective," he does not push the boundaries of anthropological scholarship to be more inclusive of Asmat perspectives. The study remains useful, however, for readers interested in practices of collecting and display. The book's overall theme reminds students of Indigenous communities that "art" is not a static, authentic entity but is instead a *process* that engages multiple actors and audiences.

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