

The Archaeology of Seeing: Science and Interpretation, the Past and Contemporary Visual Art. LILIANA JANIK. 2020. Routledge, New York. xiii + 233 pp. \$160.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-367-36025-2. \$46.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-367-36022-1. \$46.95 (e-book), ISBN 978-0-429-34333-9.

Reviewed by Iain Davidson, University of New England, Australia

The rich premise of this book is that archaeological art—including cave art of Ice Age Europe—can be compared with art in the recent past, and that it is possible to use ideas from contemporary art criticism when analyzing prehistoric visual art and communication. By “pre-historic,” Liliana Janik means art predating written accounts communicated about the art itself, although she does not acknowledge the slight that some Indigenous people feel as a result of that word. By looking at the way in which both ancient and modern can be considered art and can be shown to communicate, we can enhance our understanding of the “origins and breadth of human artistic endeavor” (p. xii). I am all in favor of explorations of the relationships between archaeological art and those works we call art today, but the exploration must be done carefully.

One cannot have a book about art without pictures of the art, and Janik admirably includes works from Europe (including Russia), Africa, Asia (Japan), South America, and Australia. Her solution to the copyright problem—and presumably cost—was to engage an artist to copy, in uniform style, images of past and present art forms in black and white. This creates several problems, particularly with respect to size and detail. Some detail omitted by redrawing could have been crucial to the production of the art, and crucial to its interpretation by archaeologists.

The book has six substantive chapters: “How Contemporary Is Prehistoric Art?” (Chapter 1), “The Origins of Art” (Chapter 2), “The Gallery: Unveiling Visual Narrative” (Chapter 3), “Power of Display: The Artist and the Object” (Chapter 4), “Embodiment and Disembodiment: The Corporeality of Visual Art and Interwoven Landscapes” (Chapter 5), and “Portraiture and the Reverence of the Other” (Chapter 6). Each of these is divided into sections, and each chapter has its own bibliography. As an illustration of the sections and to make a further point, in Chapter 1, I would have expected discussion of counterarguments that “art” was invented in the eighteenth century, of recognition of the color restrictions in early paintings to earth tones or charcoal, of the problems about lines when art is redrawn, of the literature on pareidolia in archaeology, of the archaeology of the body and the

problem of redrawn images not always representing details that support or oppose any argument about the image, and of the literature on motion in archaeological art and in photography. Many relevant major references are not cited. Some omissions might be strengths because they show an author stepping out of the mainstream, but not all. Some of the implications of these points show how the author’s argument could have been made more forcefully.

The central point of Janik’s argument is that judgments about art depend on the cultural context (on this, I side with her), and she could have made this point by exposing that it is the core of Larry Shiner’s argument (*The Invention of Art*, 2001). Meaning comes from cultural background. In discussing female figurines from 25,000 years ago that have been discussed in the media as sexual objects, Janik ignores the demolition of the sexual argument (April Nowell and Melanie Chang, “Science, the Media, and Interpretations of Upper Paleolithic Figurines,” *American Anthropologist* 116:562–577, 2014) despite the fact that it derives partly from a cultural context that is modern, male-determined sexism. That derivation means that it is inappropriate. Likewise, sequences of images may be different in different cultures. They may form narratives as a story, but they may also be components of memory devices (Lynne Kelly, *Knowledge and Power in Prehistoric Societies*, 2015). It depends on cultural contexts.

The seers are important, but Janik sometimes forgets that we should not ignore the cultural contexts of the producers. She refers properly to the “agency of seeing,” but in reality, producers and their audience have agency, as do the seers long after the benefit of the producers’ commentary. Sometimes their view of the art makes it seem as if the art itself has agency, but that is a major mistake. Only sentient beings have agency, but producers represented humans and animals in the art to have agency toward each other—that is what makes a scene (Iain Davidson, Chapter 1 in *Making Scenes: Global Perspectives on Scenes in Rock Art*, edited by Iain Davidson and April Nowell, 2021). Appropriate analysis in both modern and archaeological art requires attention to the attitudes of producers and seers as well as to the subjects (what is represented) and objects (the finished art) of their attention. And in some instances, it becomes necessary to consider the physical context of the work in terms of its scale and location at the time of production—something that often requires seeing the originals in context and not on Wikipedia.

And so it goes. This is a book full of good ideas along with analyses that often step outside the mainstream. That is good, but it needs some reference to classic texts that would support elements of Janik’s

arguments. Additionally, there are numerous and irritating instances of sloppy scholarship, some of which the copy editor should have flagged and others that the author should have checked. For example, on page 50, Janik refers to Winckelmann [1717–1768] following an idea by Hegel [1770–1831]. Such carelessness contributes to making *The Archaeology of Seeing* a difficult read, despite the interesting ideas it introduces.

A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace. LYNN MESKELL. 2018. Oxford University Press, New York. xxiii + 372 pp. \$33.99 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-19064-834-3.

Reviewed by Angela M. Labrador, Coherit Associates LLC

Lynn Meskell's *A Future in Ruins* begins with a paradox: Why is it that UNESCO's globally renowned World Heritage List includes so many important archaeological sites and yet UNESCO has seemingly had little impact on the discipline of archaeology itself? Through exhaustive archival research and ethnography—and even some autoethnography—Meskell reveals that although the discipline of archaeology was originally fundamental to the utopian “One World” vision of UNESCO, UNESCO's post-World War II dream was fundamentally altered by the escalating political maneuverings of its member states. She argues that the abandonment of archaeology's central role in UNESCO's culture sector in favor of a “monumental” approach to heritage has had dire consequences for archaeological sites and their local communities around the world.

Beginning with Chapter 1, “Utopia,” and ending with Chapter 8, “Dystopia,” the reader can expect a descent from the headiness of postwar internationalism to today's fractured reality of continued conflict and inequality. Yet, Meskell's analysis simultaneously interweaves elements of “hope and cynicism.” As such, the book offers constructive suggestions that may encourage heritage professionals and archaeologists to fashion new modes of collaboration.

What makes *A Future in Ruins* distinct from earlier studies of UNESCO World Heritage is its singular focus on archaeology. Chapter 1 describes its formative role under UNESCO's first director-general, Julian Huxley, whose modernist vision for archaeology harked back to the League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 document scientific archaeology's rise and fall within UNESCO, and they chart the ascendancy of tourism-based “monumental” heritage. Meskell's archival research shines as she tracks

Huxley's downfall as UNESCO director and describes the infighting that broke out among archaeologists of various nations during the International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia beginning in 1960. Yet, her recounting of the results of the multinational archaeological research—over 700 publications and the documentation of thousands of sites—hints at the scientific impact that UNESCO-backed archaeological projects could have had.

As the book proceeds, Meskell details how UNESCO has effectively used technocracy to shield it from political rivalries among its member states. Meskell argues that “national prestige, economic revenues, and the international bargaining potential that World Heritage bestows now eclipse the conservation of historic sites” (p. 93). Chapters 4 through 8 draw on interviews, observation at World Heritage Committee (WHC) meetings, and archival evidence to detail how competition for the World Heritage “brand” has intensified as it becomes a stage for soft power plays between member states. Readers who enjoy tales of political intrigue will find rich material in the book's second half—rumors of bribes, anonymous tip-offs, and secret deals on the WHC meeting floor.

In Chapter 5, we return to archaeology for a brief interlude: an autoethnography of the World Heritage (WH) inscription process at Çatalhöyük, an archaeological site at which Meskell has worked since 2004. There, she observed the host member state using the WH process as political theater, paying lip service to community participation to gain inscription but jettisoning it post-inscription—by terminating public outreach efforts, once a cornerstone of the project.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 detail the entanglement of the WHC in the bitter conflicts involving Jerusalem to the more subtle symbolic violence of the inscription of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution sites. Meskell reminds us how deeply the World Heritage process is embroiled in contemporary conflict even as it rhetorically promotes tolerance and intercultural understanding. This is obvious at WH sites such as Dubrovnik's Old Town, Mostar Bridge, Bamiyan, and Timbuktu—all of which have become alluring targets for wartime destruction. Yet, when UNESCO occasionally lifts its image of “objective” technical expertise to condemn politicization, it risks losing political and financial support from some of its most powerful members, as evinced by the 2018 withdrawal from the organization by the United States because of a perceived anti-Israel bias.

Archaeologists, heritage professionals, legal scholars, and political scientists will find much of interest in Meskell's accessible study, her astute