

bit awkward. The author snaps that Warren was able to ‘profit from Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ̀’s accrued knowledge and reputation’ (14) by writing several books based on Dɔ̀nkɔ̀’s lexica of herbal remedies. Konadu’s language then becomes checkered with commentary about Warren’s ‘interracial’ marriage (166), and the implication that some of the records of Dɔ̀nkɔ̀’s interaction with Warren went purposely missing (172). There is evident bitterness here, as Konadu uses Warren’s work to argue that Dɔ̀nkɔ̀, like other citizens of the newly independent nation of Ghana, was ‘still exposed to the exploits of capitalists, neocolonialists, and the coming-of-age-of African Studies’ (165). Such complications aside, the section on Warren appropriately problematizes the harvesting of anthropological knowledge in the postcolony. It is also worth noting that the Dɔ̀nkɔ̀/Warren encounter, despite what might have been waylaid, did leave a trove of field notes that enabled Konadu to provide a beautiful reflection on Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ̀’s daily healing activities. The Dɔ̀nkɔ̀/Warren records bear witness to the modest blacksmith as someone in full control of his clinical practice and spiritual world, healing a wide array of illnesses in patients from Takyiman and abroad.

There is no getting around the intellectual intensity that the author has invested into *Our Own Way in this Part of the World*. There are some side arguments going on that I can’t cover here, and perhaps wouldn’t be able to even if I tried. And at times, the book gets dense, making it a tough ethnographic slog in parts, especially when the author drags the reader a bit too far into the weeds of everyday Bono life. But there are also some lovely passages too, such as when Konadu thoughtfully suggests that the caricature of ‘fetishism’ might be reframed as a ‘broader agreement between the spiritual forces of nature and the world created by human culture’ (92). The most important thing is that Konadu’s thesis holds. Kofi Dɔ̀nkɔ̀ represents the type of bounded personhood that ‘stretched across two empires, national borders, ecologies, politics, and racial and religious ideologies, signaling a non-national decolonized possibility’ (232). By revealing Dɔ̀nkɔ̀’s story, Konadu has accomplished something innovative, a book worth reading for anyone who wants to challenge themselves to rethink the field of African Studies.

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African Art in an Imperial Center

Metropolitan Fetish: African Sculpture and the Imperial French Invention of Primitive Art

By John Warne Monroe. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019. Pp. 368. \$45.00, hardcover (ISBN: 9781501736353); \$29.99, e-book (ISBN: 9781501736377).

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Metropolitan Fetish tells the story of the circulation, study, display, and sale of African art in Paris. The book focuses on the interwar period during which, Monroe argues, ‘Paris was both an imperial capital and the center of the Western art world’ (15). Combining a history of the academic and intellectual interest in African art in France with the (overlapping) history of its commercial and

popular existence, Monroe sketches out how artistic, aesthetic, exhibitionary, and even popular categories were shaped by the politics of commercial and academic practices. The book joins scholarly work by Maureen Murphy, Daniel J. Sherman, and others, which examines the transnational intersections of modernism, empire, and African art.¹ At the heart of this book is the tension between the ‘affirmation of cultural equality in theory’ that African art’s move to the category of high art implied, and the ‘denial of citizenship rights in practice’ in the French colonies (234). In his study, Monroe thus demonstrates that the contradiction embedded in the French imperial conceptions of citizenship — between the Empire’s supposed universalism on one hand and the racialized reality of imperial rule on the other — was paralleled in the history of African art history.

The book places art dealers and collectors at the center of generative interactions between the commercial, academic, and artistic roles of African objects in France. Their commercial activities, publications, public lives, and exhibitions serve as the bases upon which Monroe develops his history. The book narrates the gradual shift of African art from one Western aesthetic category, ‘*art nègre*’ (objects with a ‘primal magic’), to another, ‘*art primitive*’ (in which the objects are integrated into a universal art history), and the changes in cultural, commercial, and academic developments that undergirded this change.

Metropolitan Fetish’s first chapter traces the ‘life’ of a mask from the Fang community (located in today’s Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon), focusing on how it was appropriated, circulated, and (re)interpreted by various metropolitan actors. So staged, Monroe introduces his readers to the history of French empire in Africa, and the ways in which collections, exhibitions, modernist admiration, and publications transformed certain African objects into ‘art’, which is to say, from objects embedded in distinct cultures into those with a supposedly ‘universal’ aesthetic value. The chapter serves as an introduction to the rest of the book.

Chapter Two explains how African art objects came to be seen as ‘antiquities’. The apparatus behind the creation of value in the early 1920s, Monroe argues, rested with art dealers, collectors, and artists rather than museum curators and academics. Through an analysis of the publications of author and collector Henri Clouzot, and art dealer and fellow collector André Level, Monroe traces the transformation of African art into a category of high art by being written into ‘universal’ histories of art as a form of antiquity.

Three subsequent chapters trace shifting interpretations of African art objects through the juxtaposition of the careers and activities of art dealers Paul Guillaume and Charles Ratton. Guillaume enveloped his activities in a glamorous social elitism; he developed the persona of the connoisseur who ‘blended an avant-garde artist’s daring formal sensibility with an antique dealers erudition’ (122) and became a critical authority in determining the antiquity and aesthetic value of African art. Guillaume’s authority was eventually displaced, however, by academic expertise coming out of the growing academic and museum infrastructure around ethnography. The latter considered African art from an ethnographic instead of a historical perspective. Monroe also explores how the growing popularity of Black Deco, a decorative trend that appropriated stylistic elements from African and other ‘primitive’ art, as well as the rise of surrealism, also shifted the cultural field through which French connoisseurs interpreted African art.

This shift, prompted by a growing academic interest in African art, the simultaneous popularizing of African art or African art-inspired objects as decorative objects, and the surrealist rejection of avant-garde elitism, led to the rise of art dealers such as Charles Ratton, who located African art in the broader context of ‘primitive’ art. Rather than as the model of abstraction, Ratton was more interested in surrealism’s opposition to ‘cultivated taste’ and promoted African art for its supposed ‘radical cultural alterity’ (192). Ratton’s approach was associated with the rise of French ethnology, as well as his notable collaboration with the curator George Henri Rivière, which resulted in new

¹M. Murphy, *De l’imaginaire au musée: les arts d’Afrique à Paris et à New York (1931–2006)* (Dijon, 2009); D. J. Sherman, *French Primitivism and the End of Empire, 1945–1975* (Chicago, 2011).

and more ethnographically founded definitions of connoisseurship (and thus new forms of gate-keeping) and a broadening canon (and hence more marketable objects). With Ratton, Monroe argues, the trade of African art shifted from the contemporary art context Guillaume had cultivated to that of the antiques trade. Interestingly, Monroe considers how the growing importance of African diasporic interest in African art objects, as well as the booming American art market during this period, played a significant role in both the contemporary art and the primitivist approach. Guillaume's connection with the American collector Albert C. Barnes fed his business, while Ratton cultivated African art as a form of ancestral arts with the avant-garde role of black American artists and intellectuals, thereby heightening its profile with collectors.

The last chapter circulates around the shifting meanings of authenticity in African art, one of the central threads Monroe develops throughout the book. The 'authenticity problem' (236–7), as he describes it, reflected the tension between competing historical (based around aesthetic and material analyses of the objects) and cultural (based around the presumed identity of the maker of the objects) interpretations of the concept, and the political implications of each of these interpretations. Monroe brings empire more tangibly to the fore here, both as the site of collecting enabled by colonial states, as well as the location of state-sponsored craft production (especially of sculpture), which was enabled by a cultural interpretation of authenticity in the context of interwar colonial humanism.

Ultimately, Monroe argues, the aesthetic category of 'primitive art' was of primary importance. The concept had a long-term impact on the way African art is regarded because of the late appearance of academic ethnology in France and the deep-seated racism of the colonial system. This book thus presents a French history that will be of interest to scholars who study African art, as well as those interested in colonial knowledge cultures. Not all of its content breaks new ground, but its singular focus on several generations of art dealers, collectors, and scholars in Paris is relevant because of the longstanding power of the category of 'primitive' art, which as Monroe points out is still influential, despite its 'racist paternalism' (293).

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Using Dirt to Write History

Histories of Dirt: Media and Urban Life in Colonial and Postcolonial Lagos

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The provocation at the heart of Stephanie Newell's *Histories of Dirt: Media and Urban Life in Colonial and Postcolonial Lagos* is that dirt is so much more than the opposite of clean. In ten