

The three chapters of Part 4 and the eight of Part 5, however, are largely concerned with art that is made for, or appropriated by, the fine arts world of galleries and exhibitions, something directly addressed by Kathrin Langenohl. The appropriation of modernities into African traditions is tackled by Monica Blackmun Visoná in dealing with the depiction of Western-style top hats on the West coasts of Africa. It is also raised in other essays on the training of artists to contribute to and participate in discourses around “art” and modernisms, but in different sections of the book. Adherence to a very fluid chronology results in Dina A. Ramadan’s essay on the rise of realistic representation in the Egyptian art academy appearing in a different section from art training in Nigeria (Peter Probst on Oshogbo), Zimbabwe (Elizabeth Morton on the workshops), Ghana (Atta Kwami on Antubam), Senegal (Joanna Grabski on Ecole de Dakar) and Uganda (Sunanda K. Sanyal on Makerere). All are concerned with institutions producing artists in structured teaching environments, and it would have been useful to have had them thematically grouped, with a guiding introduction. Placing John Picton’s article, which poses many of the necessary questions for such framing, at the end of Part 5 rather than at its beginning, also appears somewhat counter-intuitive.

The chapters on the rise of art schools and circuits in independent African nations all point to pivotal interactions with Western patrons, teachers, and institutions in the initial production and subsequent consumption and circulation of this art. Its modernity lay more in the fact that it was being made primarily as art, as something divorced from function and tradition. Whether this affected its Africanness is a question asked only by some authors. Picton and Bogumil Jewsiewicki are two who raise the related question of what products may be called “art.”

Another single-chapter section (Part 6) consists of dele jegede’s discussion of transnationalism and globalization in relation to African-American artists and those of the contemporary African Diaspora, contrasting the approaches of Enwezor and Ogbechie to curating contemporary African art with that of Magnin and Pigozzi. The next two parts move on to what may, with some greater clarity, be considered “contemporary” modern art made by African artists. Here the grouping reverts to the mélange that Allen Roberts and Polly Nooter Roberts (quoted on the back cover) find “marvellous.” The reader moves through a study of the search for an indigenous identity by the Vohou Vohou group in Côte d’Ivoire (Yacouba Konate), via a plea for the recognition of contemporary bronze-casters’ works as contemporary rather than faux traditional “art” from Benin (Barbara

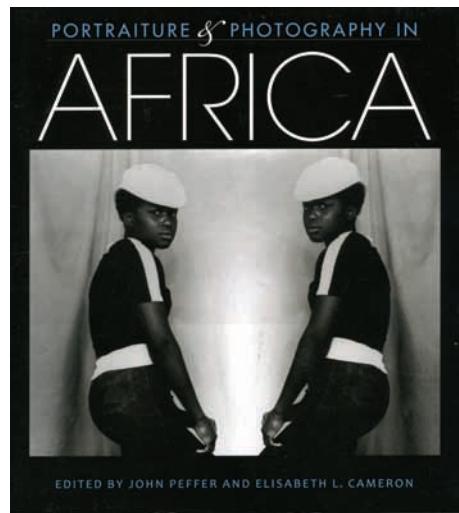
Winston Blackmun), and on to a study of the Handspring Puppet Company’s works. Peter Ukpodoku argues from a theater practice perspective that, used in the staging of Kentridge and Taylor’s *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997), these works allow the liberation of art from museums through social engagement. The section ends with a discussion of the politics and polemic surrounding the building of a Museum of Contemporary Art in Rabat, Morocco by Katarzyna Pieprzak.

Part 8 comprises Sally Price’s review of the ways in which Africa and the rest of the old ‘third world’ are still cast as “primitive” through the architecture and display stratagems of the musée du Quai Branly in Paris. The fact that similar strategies have been followed in a number of other renovations of European museums might have made an interesting codicil to this already much-covered story.

The final section (Part 9) contains six chapters, as mixed as the others, but all raise significant questions. Pamela Allara’s essay on Zwelethu Mthethwa’s work, apart from some problematic ideas about the status of “township” and “resistance” art, argues for the recognition of Mthethwa’s pastel drawings as highly as his photographs. Meghan L.E. Kirkwood’s essay on why a North Korean aesthetic suited the post-liberation government of Nujoma is persuasive, but someone has missed the fact that none of the works is by an African “deeply invested in an African locale,” and that their presence in a book on African art is thus deeply suspect (as is the art itself as a formulation of a monolithic political dominance). Kinsey Katchka suggests that, in the context of the global and local biennales, African identities are “redrawn” and understood by diverse audiences in many different ways. This should work to destabilize the notion of a monolithic Africanness, something which is reinforced by Sidney Littlefield Kasfir’s discussion of a number of Ugandan artists whose concern is with local traditions which are primarily Bagandan, then Ugandan, and probably only to modern and modernist outsiders “African.” Both Till Förster and Gitti Salami tackle case studies that have been cast as “popular art” and its imitations into local political and religious domains, and re-surface the question of the status of African art works and the world in which they circulate.

For those who have a strong understanding of the literature that precedes it, this book offers a gathering of less-familiar case studies that enables one to expand the field. It is a companion which may be useful as an addition, but will possibly not function as the primary text through which issues can clearly be introduced to students at any level. One of the main reasons for this is that there are so few illustrations, and that many of them are tiny, a real drawback to an otherwise useful addition

book review



Portraiture and Photography in Africa

Edited by John Peffer and Elisabeth L. Cameron
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. 452 pp., 151 color illus., index. \$35.00, paper

reviewed by Jessica Williams

In the past two decades, a notable number of exhibitions, catalogues, and survey texts have begun to establish—and, at best, to problematize—histories of photography in Africa. As John Peffer notes in his introduction, despite the dominant interest in studio practices and portrait photography displayed by international curators, the art market, and resulting publications, analyses of particular local histories and portraiture’s specific cultural meanings in relation to the medium have largely been disregarded in favor of broad humanistic approaches, leading one to “assume inaccurately that the historical experience of photography—the phenomenological basis for considering photographic meaning—is a cultural universal on European terms” (p. 3).

to the African art corpus because it so obviously downplays the importance of the visual.

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Through extensive field and archival research, the thirteen contributors to this publication complicate traditional European definitions of portraiture and its specifications as a genre while establishing theoretically sound discourses that address the social and cultural *specificities* of both portraiture and photography in Africa. Comprising twelve chapters and a significantly promising introduction, *Portraiture and Photography in Africa* is an indispensable addition to the scholarship on the histories of the medium. Offering a compilation of essays that build on foundational studies of Africanists like Stephen Sprague, Tobias Wendl, and others, this well-illustrated and remarkably affordable text provokingly explores the production of photographic images, their mobility across time, place, and medium, and their various receptions throughout West, Central, and East Africa.

The first of the book's three thematic sections, entitled "Exchange," (re)considers the relationships between photographers and their subjects while exploring the ways in which the circulation of images have connected individuals across borders, communities, and generations. In his case study of Francis W. Joaque, Jürg Schneider broadens our purview of nineteenth century West African studio portrait photography through the writings of Arjun Appadurai, Paul Gilroy, and others. Presenting a reading of these early photographs through a theoretical framework of an "Atlantic visualscape," Schneider ultimately foregrounds the roles *cartes-de-visite* played as a form of cultural currency in potentially reterritorializing social relationships on the global stage. In her extensively researched essay, Érika Nimis writes of a Yoruba aesthetics of studio portrait photography and its proliferation throughout Francophone West Africa. Undoubtedly one of the most layered and soundly structured chapters in the book, Nimis's contribution is ripe with intriguing insights and new potential avenues of research that will most assuredly spur the curiosity of other scholars. In "The Field-worker and the Portrait: The Social Relations of Photography," Elisabeth Cameron offers a refreshing self-reflective examination of her use of photography in Kabompo in northwestern Zambia as she considers how the portraits she made as gifts for those with whom she worked and lived "circulated throughout the community as a currency of identity" (p. 164). In discussing how the particular poses and outfits chosen by sitters for their "snaps" echo both rural sensibilities particular to specific localities and broader urban aspirations, Cameron successfully integrates her own personal narrative with the stories, queries, and statements of those she imaged.

Cameron's essay nicely transitions into the book's second section, entitled "Social Lives," in which Zoë Strother brilliantly tackles the

all-too-familiar tropes regarding local perceptions of photography in Africa that have been embedded in Western photographic theories. Taking as her point of departure the misconception that those who reject being photographed do so out of fear that a "photograph steals the soul," Strother explores reasons for why an individual might not want to be imaged before moving on to an analysis of the complex interrelatedness of photography, sorcery, and modernity.¹ Looking to culturally specific vocabulary surrounding portrait photography among Pende in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Strother compellingly argues against Rosalind Krauss's (and others') contention that a physical relationship exists between the object photographed and its resulting image. Isolde Brielmaier's essay, "Mombasa on Display: Photography and the Formation of an Urban Public from the 1940s Onward," echoes previous revelations by scholars writing on portrait studio photography in Africa that urban clients "used portrait photography ... to imagine, negotiate and produce new urban subjectivities." She continues, "Together with their photographers they engaged in a creative and collaborative process drawing upon diverse elements ... in order to create idealized images of themselves" (pp. 253–55). Although such insights are not necessarily revelatory, her focus on Mombasa is a welcome contribution to a burgeoning field that has primarily highlighted photographers and photographic histories in South and West Africa.

The third and final section of the book, entitled "Traditions," comprises essays that explore how photography's technological innovations have altered African visual traditions and how these historic visual cultures have in turn influenced the production of photographic portraits. In her contribution, Jean Borgatti looks to portraiture in traditional African contexts as sites where one's presence was evoked and not merely simulated. She thus introduces various strategies in the realm of portraiture for asserting identity and conveying character, noting that not all approaches to portraiture on the continent are set on conveying representational or physical likenesses. Building onward, Borgatti ultimately suggests that photography in Africa has stimulated a shift within African traditions of portraiture from non-representational to representational forms. Candace Keller's essay, "Visual Griots: Identity, Aesthetics, and the Social Roles of Portrait Photographers in Mali," serves as one of the book's strongest chapters in terms of its theoretical structure and sound use of visual analysis. Though the photographers she examines (Malick Sidibé and Seydou Keïta) are hardly new to the discourse of African photographic histories, her use of a local theoretical system (examining the photographs of these two "visual griots" through the concepts of *fadenya* and *badenya*) is an intriguing and

fruitful endeavor in that it offers readings of these images that are not grounded in western imperatives. Looking to W.J.T. Mitchell, Till Förster discusses the intermediality of images and their cultural changes in meaning as they migrate across mediums—from wooden effigies, to the physical printing paper of the photograph, to the material weave of the canvas, to the pixelated screen of a cell phone. Christraud Geary addresses similar ideas in the book's second section. Eloquent and intriguing, her contribution investigates the histories and uses of photography in the Bamum Kingdom of Cameroon, including but not limited to how portrait photography both inspired and influenced the drawing and painting of so-called king lists. Similar to Borgatti, Geary also addresses how photographic portraiture affected later renderings of people that emphasized individual physical likeness.

Compiled for academic readers rather than the general public, *Portraiture and Photography in Africa* is an essential volume for those studying the histories of photography. Considering the field's particular concern with the ways in which photography has constructed and shaped subjectivities, Peffer and Cameron's edited publication is a necessary reference for curators seeking to situate their exhibitions within compelling discourses. In their interrogation of established photographic histories the book's thirteen contributors importantly offer readings of the medium through a lens of cultural specificity while putting forth innovative theoretical approaches to the study of portraiture. These authors' insights will undoubtedly prove generative to professors and curators alike while also sparking interest in a new generation of scholars and artists who critically engage with the medium.

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Notes

¹ Strother's exploration of the reasons one might be averse to being photographed are very intriguing. One such example she includes stems from the various uses of blown powders in Central Pende society in the 1910s–1930s (in rituals to protect one against war, in newly established masquerades, etc.) and the contemporary use of rice powder by portrait photographers on their subjects to smooth the look of one's skin and potentially make it "easier to photograph the features of the face by lightening the complexion" (pp. 193–94). Of these connections, Strother writes that the use of powder by a photographer in this community during this particular time "could easily have triggered alarm" (p. 194). "It was not the image, nor the technology, but the makeup that provoked," Strother writes (p. 194, emphasis original).