

## BOOK REVIEWS

draws on as examples museums oriented toward social control, such as the atheist institutions of Soviet Russia (p. 82), and those with a particular religious agenda such as Creationist museums (p. 88), as well as the shifting conceptions of religion in science museums (p. 76).

Another major focus is how visitors engage, disengage, or reject religious objects. Despite the context or content of a specific display, many visitors are unable or unwilling to change their pre-existing conceptions of a particular culture (p. 25). How does that impact their museum experience? Through a variety of means, an institution might wittingly or unwittingly promote a particular philosophy or theory, be it through exhibition curation, display design, or interpretive techniques, each of which impact a museum visitor's experience of the space and understanding of the material. Overall, displays still rely most heavily on guided tours and object labels (p. 109) for their visitor-education efforts, which are by definition limiting as they are a one-way conduit of curated information.

Another approach to providing context has been in-gallery cultural performances, phenomena that Paine notes are predominantly non-Christian: reconstructing Hindu shrines, Buddhist altars, and meditation spaces, among others (p. 39). Paine points out that regardless of an institution's intent, there have been some aggressive—and occasionally violent—attacks directed toward objects, exhibitions, and institutions by individuals unable to reconcile their personal conceptions with a conflicting presentation (p. 90).

*Religious Objects in Museums* provides a survey of techniques and approaches—successful and otherwise—with the stated aim that institutions acknowledge and address the effects of an increasingly interconnected world, given that groups with radically different orientations and, often, conflicting perspectives are encountering each other in museum spaces and over religious objects, which can cause effects and fallout in the real world (p. 114). Museums serve as interlocutors for and educators about the world's cultural diversity and provide the venue in which differing ideas, orientations, peoples, and practices ought to be brought together and presented in an educational context, with the goal of empathy and understanding different perspectives (p. 114).

Although at times the volume provides only brief treatment of a concept, it offers much fodder for deeper discussions and potentially rich avenues for future research. The comprehensive bibliography offers abundant resources for additional study. Overall, the volume is highly readable and desirable for museum professionals, museum studies students, and those interested in exploring new ways to consider questions of identity, display, and stewardship.

## REFERENCE CITED

Paine, Crispin, ed.

2000 *Godly Things: Museums, Objects and Religion*. London: Leicester University Press.

---

*World Art and the Legacies of Colonial Violence*.

Daniel J. Rycroft, ed. FARNHAM, ENGLAND: ASHGATE, 2013. 263 pp.

---

*Robin R. R. Gray*

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

The postcolonial imperative to re-assess historical processes has engendered a range of engagements across the academic world. In *World Art and the Legacies of Colonial Violence*, nine contributors react to this imperative by interrogating the aesthetics of colonial violence and their aftereffects. That is, the contributors seek to uncover the historical relationship between global imperialism and art, and they question “how these histories and effects are recognized, re-imagined and/or reversed” (p. 1) in the contested spaces of knowledge production, nation-state, and identity politics.

Given this focus, the book's cover image is quite fitting. The artwork shows an Afghan man holding a rifle across his knees as he crouches over where the head would be on an authoritatively garbed body of an unidentified, but phenotypically white, colonial figure. The artist, Rajkamal Kahlon, titled this provocative artwork *A Brief History of Afghanistan* (2010). Kahlon is known for altering media from colonial archives, “so that the original pedagogical function of the imagery is transformed,” creating “a dialogue between past and present geo-political ambitions” (Kahlon 2014). It makes sense then that the editor, Daniel J. Rycroft, chose to feature this particular artwork to introduce the scope of this volume.

The image evokes an expectation in the reader that the authors will interrogate imagery from colonial archives in provocative ways, render new readings of the past, and contribute to debates about the pedagogical functions of art. The authors meet these expectations in interesting ways, particularly in the geopolitical contexts of artistic creativity, collection, categorizing, and display.

The book consists of an introduction written by Rycroft, eight case studies, and a ninth chapter also written by the editor. It is a useful historical and theoretical resource for readers interested in learning more about global imperialism, “less as a territorial strategy and more as an ongoing, shared, and ‘restless’ event” (p. 1). This restlessness is conceptualized in terms of *imperial tensions*, a rubric offered by Rycroft to foster “a historical and cultural critique of those asymmetric relations that violated co-existence” (p. 20). *Imperial tensions* acts not only as the rubric that frames and synthesizes the scholarship in the case studies but also as an analytical tool for studies on art and imperialism in general. In this volume, art historians, anthropologists, curators, and museologists work together to contribute to the postcolonial imperative. Each of the case studies is compelling and varied, and, as a whole, they help to “unravel dominant ways of seeing, displaying, viewing, storing, thinking, telling and knowing” (p. 231).

Part 1, “Empires and Exhibitions,” contains three case studies from Cameroon (Dell), North America (Pratt), and Australia (McLean). Dell analyzes the different ways that sacred objects of the Bamum were transformed via their incorporation into colonial regimes of display. Pratt reveals how colonial images worked to categorize “Indian customs” in homogenizing ways and how the vanishing Indian paradigm fueled the collecting culture of North American polities. Finally, McLean exposes how the avant-garde, anthropologists, and curators categorized aboriginal art according to anti-aboriginal sensibilities in their efforts to create a distinctive brand for their own practices. This section thus resituates the role of the exhibit, the artist, and the scientist in various colonial encounters.

Part 2, “Imperial Altercations,” contains case studies from the United Kingdom (Thomas), East Timor (Roque), and Italy (Milicia) that examine the politics of difference. Thomas problematizes the nexus

between race, history, and memory to examine the motivations for curating the visual culture of colonial slavery and British abolition in museums, including their social consequences. Similarly, Milicia examines the role of a popular scientific journal to confront the historical relationship between fascism and anthropological science in controlling the national consciousness and in supporting the race-based rhetoric of Italian imperialism. In sync with the postcolonial goals of this volume, both chapters offer critical insights into the way technologies of power work in the context of European imperialism, with added perspective on the role of discourse in constructing difference and producing social inequality. It is not as clear, however, how the chapter written by Roque responds to the postcolonial goals of this volume. Roque attempts to demonstrate how the sociocultural sensibilities that motivate indigenous peoples (the “colonized”) to repatriate human remains in the postcolonial era are more similar than one would think to the motivations of European communities (the “colonizers”) who were repatriating human remains during the colonial period. Describing a case of Portuguese colonization is historically interesting in that it offers a case of repatriation overlooked in the contemporary discourse. However provocative, I believe that Roque missed an opportunity to discuss what his study means for repatriation today and how it applies to the postcolonial goal of decolonization.

The final section, “Modernist Apprehensions,” offers two case studies on German imperialism (Neumeister) and Philippine nationalism (Flores) and a final essay on phenomenology (Rycroft). This section considers the effects of modernist art and related philosophies on personal, national, and artistic identities, and it re-evaluates how imperial modernity stimulated a mutual transformation between colonizer and colonized. The concluding essay is focused and theoretical, tackling the concept of co-existence and bringing the reader back to consider the rubric of *imperial tensions*.

As a contribution to postcolonial studies, this volume situates the domain of world art as a key source for examining the violence of imperialism. Due to the book’s format, regionalists could easily isolate any of the case studies for research purposes, as they incorporate useful historical sources from colonial archives and collections and plenty of images that help to give

added sensory context to their respective topics. Along the same lines, upper-level undergraduate and graduate students in art history and theory, anthropology, or museum studies will find the final essay from Rycroft useful, although his philosophical contributions run the risk of being lost if the book is not read in its entirety.

#### REFERENCE CITED

Kahlon, Rajkamal

2014 Double Take: 2011–2010. <http://www.rajkamalkahlon.com/#!2010-2011/c1oau>, accessed July 8, 2014.

---

*This Is Our Life: Haida Material Heritage and Changing Museum Practice.* Cara Krmptich and Laura Peers, with the Haida Repatriation Committee and Staff of the Pitt Rivers Museum and British Museum. VANCOUVER: UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA PRESS, 2013. 292 PP.

---

*Lisa Truong*

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

*This Is Our Life* is an engaging and thought-provoking book that questions core theories and practices in museum anthropology and conservation that emerge from engagements between indigenous and nonindigenous museums. It follows Cara Krmptich, Laura Peers, the Haida Repatriation Committee, and UK museum professionals as they develop, execute, and reflect upon the Haida Project—a collaborative research project that seeks to build long-term, mutually beneficial relationships based upon Haida collections in UK museums. Krmptich and Peers argue for the value of collaborative and collective research in building intergenerational and personal relationships that can serve as quintessential methods for decolonization in museums.

Unique to this narrative is the multiplicity of Haida and institutional voices that the authors weave together and the comprehensive way in which they respond to all aspects of the Haida Project. Krmptich and Peers braid together anecdotes, reflections, and discussions from participants whose voices are not usually heard, thus breaking down the

anonymous and homogenizing categories of “museum” and “indigenous” in academic literature. The result is a deeply personal and emotional account of research that is rarely encountered in writing on museum anthropology.

The text is organized in two parts: before the Haida delegation visit to UK museums and after. The first chapter offers a personal and theoretical overview of the colonial history behind Haida collections in Great Britain and the development of collaborative museum–indigenous research. The reader is introduced to the work of the Haida Repatriation Committee and their project of locating their ancestral remains and material culture in Canada, the United States, and Europe and initiating repatriation. Drawing from James Clifford’s model of the museum as contact zone and Homi Bhabha’s third space, this chapter introduces the Haida Project as an initiative that is both experimental and personal as it works toward cultural revitalization and changes in museum practice.

In comparison with most discussions of indigenous museum visits and collections research, the second chapter offers a highly detailed account of the creative, intellectual, physical, and visual preparations performed by the museum staff. Nika Collison’s (Ts’aahl) contribution provides insight into community politics and the concerns involved in organizing research trips and highlights the ways in which the composition of the delegation and financial considerations significantly shape the types of research and knowledge that was produced on the trip. Chapter 3 is perhaps the most emotionally stirring. Here, Haida delegates and museum staff share individual experiences of their encounters with objects, publics, and each other. The various voices provide personal, professional, and culturally specific accounts of the breaking of stereotypes, the negotiation of ethical reconsiderations, and the formation of mutual understandings that occurred as the narrators struggled to address core concerns pertaining to the preservation of objects and their cultural meaning. By “talking through” their experiences, Krmptich and Peers effectively show that the conflicts within a contact zone can be difficult yet productive and that they should be invited.