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Kathleen Bickford Berzock, Christa Clarke, eds. *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011. viii + 312 pp. $40.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-295-98961-7.

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African Art Institutionalized in America

In this long-awaited volume, Kathleen Bickford-Berzock and Christa Clarke assemble contributions reconstructing the histories of early collections of African material culture and art in American art museums. With this publication they have created an indispensable handbook for the history of African art studies in the United States, revealing how strategies of collecting, display, and publication have shaped what we today think of as masterworks and comprehend as a corpus of classics. In the past few years, the history of collections has become an attractive topic for scholars and students of African art. Although this interest started earlier for anthropology museums, where it particularly helped to reflect critically on past connections with colonialism and the history of the discipline, it also opens up new perspectives in the study of African art, specifically on the shifting construction of meaning for African objects, the shaping of their public perception, and the public interface of a nascent field of studies.

Although articles about African art collections have been published, this is the first comprehensive collection of institutional narratives, presenting not only familiar histories but also new stories and angles of analysis.[1] It includes contributions on the African collections at thirteen American art museums: the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Hampton University Museum, the Brooklyn Art Museum, the Barnes Foundation, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Museum of Primitive Art in New York, the Art Institute Chicago, the Indiana University Art Museum, the Fowler Museum at UCLA, the Stanley collection in Iowa, the Katherine White collection at the Seattle Art Museum, the de Menil Collection, and the National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian.

The articles are ordered chronologically according to the period when the collections were initiated, the earliest being the Carl Steckelmann collection at the Cincinnati Art Museum. This is a field collection assembled in the late nineteenth century on the Congo's Loango Coast and first exhibited, as described by Christine Mullen Kreamer, in 1889. Though located in an art museum, the collection was displayed in a typological arrangement typical of ethnographic collections in the late Victorian era. The next article by Mary Lou Hultgren denotes the very special and little-known collection of the Hampton University Art Museum. It includes the first systematic collection of African art put together by an African American, the renowned William H. Sheppard. He was the first African American missionary sent to the Congo Free State, where he developed into a ferocious human rights advocate denouncing the brutal exploitation of the people. The African collection was founded with the educational goal of teaching African American students the cultural history of Africa and promoting cross-cultural understanding. Its remarkable quality results from the collections' being assembled and interpreted by such cultural insiders as a Kikuyu chief's son or a Zulu student. Hampton also was among the first institutions to exhibit and collect contemporary African art, beginning in the1960s. Its 1968 "Symposium of Traditional African Art" evolved into the "Triennial Symposium on African Art" so important for African art scholarship to this day.

The late William Siegmann lays out the development and presentation of the African art collection at the Brooklyn Museum, analyzing curatorial impact. The first African objects entered the museum in 1900, but systematic collecting end exhibiting only began with Stewart Culin, who mounted the first exhibition of "primitive Negro art" in an American museum in 1923. By tracing the approaches of subsequent curators, Siegmann paints an interesting and characteristic picture of the changing history of exhibiting and interpreting African art in the United States. Siegmann's chapter is followed by Christa Clarke's overview of Albert Barnes's modernist

collection. Barnes bought exclusively from the renowned dealer Paul Guillaume in Paris. A focus on modernist aesthetics guided his selection, and he exhibited African works as fine art when his foundation opened in 1924. Barnes left a lasting legacy by dissociating African sculpture from an ethnographic context and celebrating it for liberating Western art from classicist norms.

Constantine Petridis in his essay points out that the first African objects at the Cleveland Museum of Art were initially part of an educational collection. Similarly, Kathleen Bickford-Berzock notes that the earliest acquisitions of African art at the Art Institute of Chicago were accessioned for its Children's Museum, where they remained until the late 1950s, when a Department of Primitive Art was founded. Petridis notes that the Cleveland Museum of Art was the first museum in the United States to establish a Department for Primitive Arts (1929), having commissioned the painter Paul B. Travis to collect during his African travels in 1927-28. Influential for positioning the museum was Thomas Munro, aesthetic philosopher and director of education. A decisive moment was the presentation of the Museum of Modern Art's landmark African Negro Art exhibition in 1935. In the 1960s, Katherine White donated over one hundred African works of art to the museum. The larger part of her collection, though, went to the Seattle Art Museum. A separate article in the volume by Pamela McClusky is devoted to White's Seattle collection and shows how this benefactor, art lover, and scholar helped shape a special focus on functional art.

Kate Ezra follows with an analysis of the notes and communication concerning acquisitions between the founders of the New York Museum of Primitive Art–Nelson Rockefeller and René d'Harnoncourt–and its first director, Robert Goldwater. The reasoning behind their decisions provides insight into their definition of excellence in African art. Based on a thorough study of the early museum's catalogue cards that list desiderata inspired by model works, Ezra identifies two phases in the building of the collection. The initial phase depended on d'Harnoncourt's personal taste. His suggestions to Rockefeller were guided by purely formal considerations. The second phase relied on Goldwater's judgment and deeper insight into the significance of the works and his academic scrutiny of known examples.

The Indiana University Art Museum's first accessioned a donation of African art in 1959, beginning to collect actively in the early 1960s. Diane Pelrine describes the instrumental role of Roy Sieber's consultancy in building the collection over two decades. The African art collection at UCLA's Fowler Museum, characterized by Marla Berns, Mary Nooter Roberts, and Doran Ross as being the largest and most diverse in the United States, was begun when the museum was founded in 1963. The gift of the massive Wellcome collection in 1964 provided a sound basis for this cultural institution. The Fowler's emphasis on field collecting and research has informed a rich and innovative program of exhibitions and publications over the last fifty years.bVictoria Rovine contextualizes the Stanley Collection of African Art at the University of Iowa within the life history of the Stanleys as patrons, describing their impact on the development of the University of Iowa as a center for research in the field. She further traces the history of the institution as shaped by crucial scholarly personalities–Roy Sieber, Christopher Roy, and Allen Roberts with Mary Kujawski Roberts.

The volume's last two articles are devoted to the de Menil Collection in Houston and the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art. Marie-Thérèse Brincard recounts John and Dominique de Menil's discovery of African art and how instinct was their guiding principle in building the collection. Dominique de Menil's credo that the art had to speak to her also defined the way works were exhibited. In her museum, she sought to reconstruct the intimacy she had felt with her collection at home. A completely different mission underlay Warren Robbins's founding of the Museum of African Art in Washington, DC, in the mid-1960s. This museum later became a national museum, integrated into the Smithsonian in 1979. Five of its curators (David Binkley, Bryna Freyer, Christine Mullen Kreamer, Andrea Nicolls, and Allyson Purpora) sketch the growth of this institution from a center for cross-cultural communication to one of the foremost American institutions exhibiting and collecting African art.

The specific focus of book is the representation of Africa in American art museums. Therefore, large, important, and older collections of material culture and art in American natural history museums are not considered. From a European perspective, this seems odd, as Europe's most well-known and important collections of African art were assembled in natural history museums that only later converted into specialized ethnographic museums sometimes dedicating separate galleries to African art. It is understandable, though, from an American perspective; the histories of collecting are different, particularly from the mid-twentieth century onward, and this is beautifully laid out in this volume. Various collecting contexts are considered–university collections, individuals establishing art collections and making them public, and

specialized departments within larger universal art museums. The selection of essays also shows how private collectors distributed their holdings to more than one museum, sometimes to allow a new focus in their collection, but also to increase their recognition, like Katherine White (Cleveland and Seattle Museums of Art) or Raymond Wielgus (Art Institute Chicago and Indiana University Art Museum).

The value of the anthology lies in its providing the possibility for comparison across institutions and reflection on how certain personalities and scholars have left their mark on the known corpus of African art. It is a significant addition to the history of African art studies, enlarging the comprehensive overviews of Daniel Biebuyck, Monni Adams, and Paula Ben-Amos Girshick with a new perspective.[2] A comparable analysis of the representation and collecting strategies of the Chicago Field Museum, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia, the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the Peabody Museum for Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, or the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum would complete the picture. These institutions, despite not being art museums, own important collections of African art well worth considering.

Notes

[1]. Susan Vogel, "Bringing African Art to the Metropolitan Museum," *African Arts* 15, no. 2 (1980): 38-45; Doran Ross, "African Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston," *African Arts* 36, no. 3 (2003): 34-55, 94; and Christa Clarke, "Defining African Art: Primitive Negro Art and the Aesthetic Philosophy of Albert Barnes," *African Arts* 36, no. 1 (2003): 40-51, 92.

[2]. Monni Adams, "African Visual Arts from an Art Historical Perspective," *African Studies Review* 32, no. 2 (1989): 55-103; Paula Girshick Ben-Amos, "African Visual Arts from a Social Perspective," *African Studies Review* 32, no. 2 (1989): 1-53; Daniel Biebuyck, "African Art Studies since 1957: Achievements and Directions," *African Studies Review* 26, nos. 3/4 (1983): 99-118.

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