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Susan Cooksey, ed. *Africa Interweave: Textile Diasporas.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011. Illustrations. 160 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-9833085-0-8.

Reviewed by Amanda Gilvin
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Moving Monuments: An Exhibition Catalogue of African Textiles

The catalogue *Africa Interweave: Textile Diasporas* accompanied an exhibition of the same name held at the University of Florida's Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art in early 2011. Although only part of a much larger project that included extensive educational programming for the exhibition, the catalogue stands on its own as a valuable contribution to the field. Its broad theme of "textile diasporas" encompasses a vast range of objects without claiming a need for an encyclopedic account of textiles in Africa.

By considering textiles and motifs themselves in movement, this project successfully gives biographies of the social lives of things–a concept developed by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1986)–that do, indeed, interweave cultures and peoples in sometimes surprising ways. With this method, the catalogue compiles topics variously organized according to media, geography, motifs, artists, or cultural traditions. The catalogue offers analyses of textiles and the other media with which they interact in substantive, complex ways that account for the distinct spheres in which artworks circulate–whether fashion shows, funeral ceremonies, or church services–and the spheres that they share, such as the museum gallery. Art historian MacKenzie Moon Ryan could be discussing many of the other textiles in the catalogue when describing the "distinctly local and particular" history of the East African industrially printed garment, the *kanga*, that was nonetheless "triggered by international factors" (p. 129).

Along with other noted scholars of African textiles, art historian and the exhibition's curator Susan Cooksey contributes five essays in addition to the introduction. Four essays from PhD candidates offer accounts of very recent research, which, combined with equally passionate essays from authors well known in the field, give the catalogue a tone both enthusiastic and rigorous. Cooksey's introduction signals several subthemes that repeatedly emerge throughout the volume. She opens with Ghanaian artist El Anatsui's assertion that "cloth is to the African what monuments are to Westerners" (p. 14). Each essay attests to the significant expressive role given to textiles in many African cultures. Like monuments elsewhere, they often serve to sustain memories of peoples and events. Second, Cooksey focuses on the use of textiles in performance, and the impact of performance on the interpretation of certain textiles, even once a cloth or costume is no longer in motion. Finally, she notes the widespread "high regard for an historic style of dress combined with receptivity to modernity and a globalized fashion sense," which results in longstanding traditions that interact with passing fads (p. 15).

Some essays take specific media as their focus. In her essay on indigo, Cooksey addresses the changes in indigo dyeing techniques over time, and concludes by examining the innovations of Nigerian artist Nike Davies Okundaye and Malian artist Aboubakar Fofana, which look at historical techniques without nostalgia to address such challenges as environmental degradation. Art historian Victoria Rovine argues that because of embroidery's accessibility, flexibility, and adaptability, it is a "central element of dress practices in West Africa," despite having been neglected by scholars who have concentrated on weaving and dyeing in studies of African textiles (p. 57). Although Rovine notes innovation in several case studies, she asserts that embroiderers adhered to certain formal expectations in each case even as they experimented. Art historian Cynthia Becker traces not only the textiles themselves, but also the motifs on them in an essay that investigates the trans-Saharan trade in objects, ideas, and aesthetics. Drawing from examples of embroidery and hand weaving from the northern and southern borders of the Sahara, Becker reaffirms the significance of trans-Saharan travel and exchange through the shared aesthetic preferences of disparate and distant cultures.

Suzanne Gott demonstrates that the famous handwoven Ghanaian *kente* cloth and commemorative African print cloth, often juxtaposed in dress, exhibition, and scholarly practices in and outside of Ghana, have not received adequate comparison as related textiles traditions. Along with integrating analyses of globalization throughout her essay, Gott observes the complex movement of weavers, motifs, and textiles in Ghana by describing the ways in which the Asante and Ewe weaving traditions are intertwined, rather than being associated with isolated, competing centers as they are often described. In his brief contribution, art historian Christopher Richards documents the prominence of textiles as public expressions of President Barack Obama's popularity in advance of his 2009 speech in Accra, Ghana, reinforcing the authors' shared argument on the centrality of textiles in African cultures.

The volume contains several essays on textile forms underrepresented in the scholarly literature. Cooksey offers a concise and much-needed history of *bazin*, a cotton damask cherished throughout West Africa. She then attends to another understudied medium in "Bark and Raffia Cloth: Interpreting Indigenous Prestige." She surveys its production and use in West and central Africa, and interprets its symbolic import in the work of contemporary artists. Anthropologist Sarah Fee's essay represents another important contribution in this volume for, as the author remarks, the numerous fascinating textile traditions of Eastern Africa have been neglected in a body of scholarly literature that has focused on weaving in West Africa. Fee situates the handwoven cotton Somali textile *futa benadir* in the Indian Ocean rim economies over time, noting influences from American, Indian, and Arabian textiles. Her discussion of the class positions of weavers and other artisans is especially incisive.

The final essays of the book emphasize performative uses of textiles, also an important subject in art historian Robin Poynor's demonstration of how textiles gain meaning in combination with other media in Yoruba *ako* ceremonies, elaborate seventeen-day long funeral events held in honor of specific ancestors years after their death. Noting the capacity of textiles to conceal, protect, and extend the human form, Cooksey examines the allusions to performance in works by Senegalese artist Viyé Diba and Ethiopian artist Achamyeleh Debela. In her essay, art historian Courtnay Micots briefly traces the political, social, and religious meanings of Ghanaian Fante *asafo* flags by studying examples attributed to a single producer, Kweku Kakanu. Art historian Jordan Fenton closely analyzes two masquerade ensembles in the Harn collection, insisting on the global scope of each masquerade's aesthetic allusions. In the final essay, Cooksey considers the transition from locally produced textiles to imported ones in most West African masquerade traditions. She concludes by offering Anglo-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare's *Victorian Couple* (1999) as an instructive contrast to the integration of imported cloth into the culturally identifying performances of many masquerades. While imported cloth in masquerades can signify change and life force so as to strengthen the connection between the living and their ancestors, the wax-print cloth in Shonibare's sculptures challenges easy stereotypes about the meaning of both wax-print textiles and human identities by simultaneously highlighting and undermining their association with Africa.

With beautiful high quality illustrations of diverse textiles from across the continent, *Africa Interweave* intersects with several key current discourses on African art, including those on contemporary art and others on networks of exchange. The inclusion of analyses of textiles that have received less scholarly attention is an especially welcome feature. Just as Poynor, using the example of the memorial *ako* figures, notes that textiles and clothing often have longer social lives than their makers and first owners, strengthening their association with the ancestors, so too does this catalogue honor the dynamic persistence of textiles and textile traditions in Africa by recognizing them as truly grand monuments.

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