

***Inauthentic Archaeologies: Public Uses and Abuses of the Past.* Troy Lovata. Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2007. 168 pp.¹**

Reviewed by Jamie C. Brandon

As museum anthropologists and archaeologists, many of us feel that we have a charge to debunk hoaxes, pseudoscientific beliefs about the past and other “inauthentic archaeologies.” While Troy Lovata understands this reaction, he also challenges us to look closer at inauthentic archaeologies. He asks us to examine them the way we might examine any other cultural phenomenon—with an eye for the subtleties and nuances of their contexts in order to attempt to understand how they work and why they might be important.

In this slim but diverse volume, *Inauthentic Archaeologies* demonstrates that the inauthentic can still be meaningful to people engaging with the past—partially because it lets us understand how archaeology operates and partially because we can sometimes interact with forged, faked, re-created, or replicated pasts in ways that we may not be able to with legitimate artifacts and historic places.

The book itself is quite clever in its scope and execution. After a brief introduction to the study of inauthentic archaeologies (Chapter 1), Lovata treats us to a graphic novella about the Piltdown Man hoax (Chapter 2) and what it says about the importance of inauthentic archaeologies. The author follows this with two very insightful chapters that serve as case studies of inauthentic archaeology—a look at the fake Anasazi ruins of Manitou Springs (Chapter 3) and an exploration of the various meanings and manifestations of the torreón as a cultural icon in the American southwest (Chapter 4).

Lovata’s case studies do not dismiss authenticity as an unreal or unworkable concept. On the contrary, he firmly believes that “not all views of the past are equal, and it is completely acceptable to refute claims for which you have evidence to the contrary” (p.20). At the same time, however, Lovata makes the point that blatantly inauthentic sites may be charged with a very real importance to the everyday consumer of history and historic places. At Manitou Springs, cliff dwellings were constructed at the turn of the century out of materials from actual Anasazi sites specifically for heritage tourism purposes. Lovata recognizes that there is a power in things and this power is all the more magnified by the process of touching, feeling, and physically experiencing things and places. Visitors are able to wander through the rooms, touch the masonry, and interact with the site in ways that are prohibited at Mesa Verde or Chaco Canyon. Thus, despite the fact that the ruins at Manitou Springs are fake, they are (in some ways) an effective and more accessible representation of the past (including the direct involvement of descendant communities). We must not forget, of course, that Manitou Springs has a history itself as a popular attraction that has drawn tourism for more than a century.

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Lovata's insightful examination of torreóns underscores his point that the context of inauthentic archaeologies is as important as the context of any artifact. Torreóns, stone watchtowers that have come to represent a historical connection to Spanish culture in the southwestern United States, may share some basic attributes, but they also have very different resonances in the hands of archaeologists, historic preservation specialists, architects, and artists. Excavated torreóns, restored torreóns and reconstructed torreóns stand along side renditions of torreóns incorporated into contemporary public art, public buildings, and capitalist enterprises (such as the McDonald's in the Barelás neighborhood of Albuquerque, New Mexico that graces the back cover of the book). For Lovata, all of these iconic images evoke the past and the Hispanic roots of the region, but the subtle nuances of the message(s) varies with context—sometimes dependant on, and sometimes independent of, their authenticity.

These case studies are followed by three brief interviews with artists that use archeological materials or information in their works (Chapter 5). Lovata points out that archaeologists have a complex relationship with art, as the process of reconstructing the past through excavations, artifacts and exhibits is a very visual undertaking. But Lovata is less interested in art in the service of archaeology than he is in archaeology in the service of art. His interviews with Adam Horowitz (creator of Stonefridge/Fridgehenge), Eric Shanower (the writer and illustrator of the *Age of Bronze* comics that retell the Trojan War), and Mark Dion (a renowned American artist that directly links archaeology to his found-art exhibits) are revealing and entertaining.

The concluding chapter examines Stonehenge II, a playful Texas recreation of the famous English megalith site with the added whimsy of two Rapa Nui moai (AKA Easter Island heads). Here Lovata explores the fun of inauthentic archaeological sites that do not appeal to accuracy. In fact, sites such as these are playful *because* they are so inexplicable and incongruous with their surroundings.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not point out that this book is engineered as a potential textbook for introductory audiences—complete with “sidebar” topics and a “Critical Questions and Exercises” section at the end of each chapter. Personally, I would have a problem fitting this book into my freshman-level curriculum, but I could easily see using it in honors-level courses or upper division classes that deal with approaches to the archaeological record, critical museum studies, or interpretations of the past.

In summary, Lovata's *Inauthentic Archaeologies* is an unconventional and entertaining book for both professionals and student audiences. His critical but contextually interpretive approach to inauthentic archaeologies is refreshing and perceptive and the volume's brevity and approachability should make it attractive to instructors. This volume would be a fine addition to the library of most archaeologists, historic preservation specialists, and museum anthropologists who are faced with (and must interpret) the inauthentic on a regular basis.

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