

Native Funk and Flash: An Emerging Folk Art. By Alexandra Jacopetti.  
Pp. 111, list of artists. Photographs by Jerry Wainwright.  
San Francisco: Scrimshaw Press, 1974. \$7.50.

Review note by Elizabeth Mosby Adler.

Since the 1920's the term "folk art" has increasingly come into the American public's vocabulary. Today, it is a term both widely used and frequently confused by scholars and laymen alike. There is, in fact, no single definition which is agreeable to everyone involved with the type of artifacts included under the heading of material folk art. For this reason, it is important that folklorists familiarize themselves with any work whose titles include catch-phrases like "folk art."

It is meaningful to break down Jacopetti's presentation into its component parts: folk, art, funk, flash, native, emerging. Her "folk" comprise what might be roughly called the counter-culture of the San Francisco Bay area. She implies that this group is a "folk" group, but does not define "folk." Her "art" is a wide range of creations, from embroidery on denim skirts and shirts and coin- and button-encrusted toilets and dressers to stained glass windows. "Funk" and "flash" are never defined; they are, apparently, terms which are commonly understood and need no further explanation.

The use of the term "native" gives a fascinating insight into this art; many of the concepts are native to cultures other than those of the participating group. A better word than native would be "cross-cultural" or perhaps "syncretic," for the artists feel in need of a native culture; rather than its presence, its absence is noted. Thus, these artists turn to other cultures, such as that of Tibet, for guidance and inspiration, but via popular forms such as paperbacks and images.

The final term in the analysis of the title, "emerging," is used as a synonym for "popular." The art motifs emerge from foreign cultures and are absorbed and reflected by the popular consciousness. They are now readily visible, but this is a recent phenomenon. Jacopetti's folk art is actually a popular art, hand-made by its creators, who totemically invest it with their own identity. The "opening of self is what this folk art is all about. It's the story of this opening . . . ." (p. 12).

This attractive little paperback is filled with color pictures of "flashy" and "funky" creations. What little text exists is burdened with dubious insights, such as ". . . chickens are the folk culture's latest, hottest symbol" (p. 70), or "Most of the pieces in this book owe little to traditional teaching . . ." (p. 94). The book concludes with a list of artists represented, some with colorful names like Apple Cobbler (a shoemaker), or Pristine Condition.

Native Funk and Flash is not a scholarly publication, nor does it pretend to be. The well-done color photographs by Jerry Wainwright fully illustrate the creative capacity of these artists. Their designs are inspired. Whether or not these delightful creations are folk art may be disputed. They are, however, indicative of what Jacopetti calls "a much more generalized return to home-decorated functional objects" (p. 5). The relationship of these objects to the folk art studied by folklorists is worthy of further examination. If you are interested in that kind of examination,--and you should be--you need this book.