

Anthropology and Art Practice*. Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright, eds. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 184 pp.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Derderian

Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright's latest volume, *Anthropology and Art Practice*, is a companion to their two earlier compilations. *Contemporary Art and Anthropology* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006) focuses on the ways contemporary artists can invigorate representational and anthropological practice, while *Between Art and Anthropology: Contemporary Ethnographic Practice* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010) is concerned with overlapping practices between the fields of art and anthropology, as is this volume. Exploring the shared ways that anthropologists and artists work to represent peoples and communities and often to address similar concerns, this book is a collection of 17 short essays. Schneider and Wright contribute the introduction, and the subsequent 16 pieces are reflections by visual artists on the anthropological aspects of their recent art works, projects, and installations. The volume includes a plethora of fascinating and compelling images, which complement the written descriptions of the projects.

The most predominant and perhaps haunting theme across this collection of essays is the issue of how artists negotiate the representation of others, whether they be individuals or groups. As Schneider and Wright note in their introduction, both art and anthropology struggle with and seek to “mov[e] beyond the binary opposition between participation and exclusion or passivity and acknowledge a whole range of forms that participation can take” (11). In the essays, we see community collaborative projects, such as the “Christmas Birimbirr” exhibition Jennifer Deger describes, executed by a three-person team on behalf of a larger community, and Brad Butler and Karen Mirza’s Museum of Non Participation, which attempts to gather a multiplicity of voices in a mobile exhibitionary form. This experiment in polyvocality dovetails nicely with Kate Hennessy’s presentation of her “Active Pass to IR9” video made with Richard Wilson, where two people ostensibly “from” the same place negotiate very different understandings of it. At different scales, then, these visual experiments show how anthropologically oriented art can be polyvocal in productive ways, taking up a familiar dilemma in anthropology: how to represent without troping, how to write against culture.

Meanwhile, at the individual level, both Juan Orrantia and Yvette Brackman wrestle with questions of how to incorporate the people at the heart of their projects. Brackman notes that her project, “Catalyst,” included 11 iterations of a particular audience-performed script, but the ensuing book includes only the final version and is not published in the language of the community (Sami) from which she based the project. Thus, in representing a community, what is the individual artist or anthropologist’s responsibility to make that work legible to that community? Similarly, Orrantia categorizes his work as “portraiture of place” (37), which is intended to partially address the conditions of workers in Mozambique ports yet breaks with “traditional notions of ethnography” (39). All these artists carefully consider the ways they

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implicate their subjects and are self-reflexive in their work about their accountability for the representation of others.

The volume leaves the reader with the provocative question: what is ethnography? Must it include writing (as indicated in the –graph suffix)? Although the themes of the artworks described in this volume are anthropological in nature, their expression is visual rather than textual. While some contributors identify as anthropologists, they write here as artists first and foremost. Perhaps this is intended to counterbalance the longtime preference of textual anthropological work and foreground the contributions of the anthropologically minded who work best through visual means. However, given the volume’s stated goals of promoting experimental methodologies and ways of working, it could have benefited from additional textual experimentation. Perhaps the title, then, should be *Anthropology in Art Practice*, rather than *Anthropology and Art Practice*.

Indeed, as an exploration of anthropology in art practice, this volume is an exciting contribution to a burgeoning literature on the ways that artists and anthropologists operate in shared spaces and sometimes through similar methods, and is therefore relevant reading for visual artists and cultural anthropologists alike. The kinds of practices showcased here demonstrate the ways that an anthropologically minded art is increasingly relevant to contemporary debates about race, migration, and politics of space. In addition, this volume can perhaps inspire anthropologist readers to consider new ideas and experiments with textual representation. Scholars in the art world, contemporary artists, and visual anthropologists would all benefit from reading this text.

Elizabeth Derderian is a doctoral candidate in the department of Anthropology at Northwestern University. Her dissertation research focuses on questions of national representation in museums. She holds an M.A. in Near Eastern and Museum Studies from New York University.

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