

***The Things We Value: Culture and History in Solomon Islands.* Ben Burt and Lissant Bolton, eds. Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2014. 149 pp.**

World Art: An Introduction to the Art in Artefacts.* Ben Burt. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 253 pp.

Reviewed by Jennifer Wagelie

Two recent publications grapple with how the history of disciplines like anthropology and art history, as well as the history of colonization, influenced contemporary scholarship and museum practice. In turn, they ask how do we best represent, include, and incorporate indigenous points of view into scholarship and museum practice. Ben Burt's *World Art: An Introduction to the Art in Artefacts*, asks readers to define the meaning of art and then wonders if that definition matters. Burt, a curator at the British Museum, along with Lissant Bolton, a keeper at the same institution, serve as the co-editors of *The Things We Value: Culture and History in the Solomon Islands*. It is the product of the five-year Melanesian Art project of the British Museum and the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, London.¹ While implicit in the title *The Things We Value*, the definition of value is at the root of both works.

World Art: An Introduction to the Art in Artefacts, is a primer to better understanding the roots of the term, "World Art," and the effects that the methodologies of art history and anthropology have had on our understandings of cultures outside our own. As a term, world art means everything and nothing all at once. As an anthropologist, Burt attempts to help us make sense of this complicated notion and begins by asking the reader, "what do we mean by 'art,' and does it matter?"

The book is divided into three parts, "Western Perspectives," "Cross-Cultural Perspectives," and "Artistic Globalization." Through chapters that explore the historical roots of Classical, Oriental, Primitive, and Prehistoric Art, part one introduces the reader to the origin of the word art and lays the groundwork for better understanding the difficulty of defining the term. Part two then takes that baseline knowledge and examines form, symbols, iconography, and performance using examples from South America, the Pacific, and the Northwest Coast and what characterizes artifacts from these areas that can be described as "art." Part three concludes by examining how Western institutions and scholarly disciplines have brought world art together, and what the reaction has been.

Overall, *World Art* would function well in any survey course that is examining a discipline globally, particularly art history, where it would make a fine companion to a traditional survey textbook. Its organization is superb in giving brief overviews of each chapter that are followed by discussion questions and lists of bibliographic resources that will build and expand on what has been discussed in the previous pages. That said, there are some curious bits about the book,

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namely that it is taking an expansive view of world art and artifacts, but limits its examples to a single institution, the British Museum. That could be easily explained away by the logistics of creating a book of this nature, but it is something of which to take note. There are a few examples of sweeping generalizations made by the author regarding what a discipline of scholars believes, without further explanation, but that too is a minor detail. One thing that is a bit of a sticking point is alluded to in the acknowledgements. Burt explains that *World Art* is based on a course of the same name that he co-taught with art historian Fiona Candlin at the University of London's Birkbeck College. He explains that he might have been able to write the book with her, "if only we could agree on what we meant by 'art.'" And that is the one thing that is missing from this otherwise well written, well-organized book: a more dominant art historical voice would have been a perfect addition as a topic as large as world art warrants as many voices as possible in the conversation.

The Things We Value: Culture and History in Solomon Islands, brings together a collection of essays by authors from the Solomon Islands, Europe, the U. K., and Taiwan, who are considering the concepts of both "things" and "value" within this area of Melanesia. The co-editors acknowledge early on that, "the Western category of the object—a bounded and material things which can be seen, touched and moved from one place to another—does not necessarily apply in the Solomon Islands where all kinds of things from land to knowledge, including objects, may be classified and identified by other criteria" (1). *Value* exists in a relationship where it is compared to something else and by engaging authors to write essays from both anthropological and personal accounts it broadens our understanding of value as a concept.

Burt and Bolton introduce *The Things We Value* in an informative essay that provides the reader with a basic history and background of the Solomon Islands. The book is beautifully illustrated with color photographs and each chapter begins with a detailed map, created by Burt. The first five chapters deal with types of money—shell and feather—from different areas of the Solomon Islands. The remaining seven chapters examine other forms of value—land, *kakamora* stones, war canoes, carvings, and assessments of the local contemporary art scenes, as well as one author's personal account of her family treasures. With the varied notions of value and things, as well as the variety of backgrounds of the authors, *The Things We Value* is an important and significant contribution to our understanding of Solomon Islands. Interestingly enough for a book about value, its one drawback is its price of \$135, which may prove prohibitive for wide distribution, despite its scholarly worth.

While inclusion, representation, and incorporation are issues that have been grappled with for decades by scholars and museum professionals, these two works are fantastic examples of current thinking and practice on the topic. In going forward, they provide us with much to wrestle with in how we approach research and scholarship of cultures that are not our own.

Notes

1. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_projects/all_current_projects/melanesia_project.aspx

Jennifer Wagelie received her Ph.D. in Art History from the Graduate Center, City University of New York, where her dissertation traced this history of the collection and display of Māori art in the United States. She worked at the National Gallery of Art, Washington and the Indiana University Art Museum and held two postdoctoral fellowships at the University of British Columbia and in the anthropology department of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. She has recently finished a book on the Smithsonian's Māori collections and is co-editing a book on mannequins in museums.

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