***Art of the Northwest Coast*. Aldona Jonaitis. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006. 322pp.**[1]

Reviewed by Jennifer Kramer

Art of the Northwest Coast provides a much-needed compendium on the Native art traditions of this area and fills a long-standing lacuna in the literature. Aldona Jonaitis, a distinguished scholar of Northwest Coast art, takes on the challenge of summarizing the breadth and significance of this well-known and valued art style, while grounding her conclusions in rich historical and ethnographic detail. Teachers of Native American art will be pleased to assign this engaging and portable textbook, which cogently organizes the extensive history of this complicated topic into digestible portions that are both descriptive and critical. The book is enriched by 63 black and white and 89 full color illustrations with lengthy captions that provide informed contextualization. For the student, a useful bibliographic essay reviews and categorizes the pertinent literature.

The text is divided into nine chapters that trace: 1) the prehistoric archaeological record, 2) the effects of European and American explorers and maritime and land fur-traders on Native art production, 3-5) 19th century art traditions in the south, central, and north regions of the coast, 6) the history of colonization, missionization, and Euro-Canadian and American settlement, 7) non-Native awareness of Northwest Coast art through tourism, photography, film, museum collecting and world's fairs, 8) the persistence of art traditions from 1900-1960, and 9) contemporary post-canonic art and identity politics including repatriation, collaboration with museums, and reflective changes in Native Northwest Coast art scholarship.

Jonaitis tackles some of the major theoretical hurdles in the field by offering deconstructions of ideology that have endured despite scholarship to the contrary. These ideological holdovers include: the purist Boasian salvage anthropology paradigm that assumes Native Northwest Coast art is authentic only if made before contact with Europeans; the evolutionary model of style that uses a language of innovative nascence, classical maturity, and decadent decline adopted by those who recognized a Northwest Coast art 'Renaissance' in the 1960s; and the tendency to use the 19th century northern Northwest Coast formline canon, exemplified by Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian art, as the standard from which to compare central or southern art styles.

A prominent agenda in the text is to rectify the imbalance of scholarly recognition traditionally given to Coast Salish and other southern Native Northwest Coast art. Jonaitis' intentions are made apparent from her dedication of the book to noted and now-deceased anthropologist of Salish art and culture, Wayne Suttles. This concerted stance to give equal recognition to marginalized positions is evident in Jonaitis' efforts to recognize the arts of women and arts made for sale, especially those often devalued as 'tourist souvenirs.'

[1] Posted on *Museum Anthropology Review* October 23, 2007. See: http://museumanthropology.wordpress.com/2007/10/23/mar-2007-1-26/. © 2007 Jennifer Kramer.

While Jonaitis makes significant inroads to correct the privileging of the typically male media of carving and painting wood, stone, and ivory by emphasizing the typically female media of textiles and weaving, she reifies this division by leaving unmarked her descriptions of masks and totem poles while subtitling two of her sections on baskets and button blankets as "Women's art." This inadvertently normalizes male art production and marginalizes female art production. Given Jonaitis' intention to emphasize typically de-valued art forms, it seems strange that beading, especially Tlingit beading, is barely mentioned except in a photo caption on page 186 about octopus bags. However, it is easy to complain about what is not here when so much is vying for attention in a book of this genre.

A text that defines a geographical region, which encompasses varied cultures and time-periods, will be inherently wanting for the author is compelled to dance between specifics of time, place, and cultural style while making larger generalizations about categories and patterns. Given the impossibility of producing such a classificatory text without being reductive, Jonaitis effectively conveys broadly shared traditions while emphasizing the distinctiveness of various peoples and their resulting art. Although she achieves a subtle balancing act, I wished that she had discussed the difficulties of this endeavor. For it is a central irony, un-remarked upon by Jonaitis, that while she deflects the emphasis on a northern Northwest Coast canon and the supremacy of 19th century 'classic' art in the scholarly and aesthetic realms, she does not reflect on how this book itself produces a standardizing canon, a powerful creation with historical and political implications.

Jonaitis does make the important point that permission must be asked of appropriate Native individuals or tribes when publishing images of sacred pieces. She states with frankness and illumination:

> Although I regret some of these omissions, I am in full sympathy with those Native people who insist on having control over their cultural heritage. Indeed, this is the logical extension of the efforts to obtain a voice in representations of Native culture, and the absence of certain images tells an important part of the ongoing history of the Northwest Coast art (p. 294).

However, I would have liked to read more about growing Native concerns around cultural appropriation and resulting Native pressure to gain control over cultural representations, often resulting in strategies of secrecy. One extension of this prominent and vocal argument for heritage boundary maintenance is opposition to non-Native people writing about Native Northwest Coast culture and art production. As this issue is so much a part of the contested, intercultural history of the recognition of Native Northwest Coast art, it should be examined.

In this critical scholarly reading, Jonaitis merges an art historical, stylistic analysis articulated in Bill Holm's formline language with an anthropological understanding of identity work accomplished through art production and display. Without directly stating it, Jonaitis conveys the vital message that aesthetic value judgments of Native Northwest Coast art always stem from a political and historical process that are predicated on the context from which the reading emerges. Sometimes Jonaitis' own enthusiasm for what she terms the "considerable aesthetic merit" of this art style leads her to naively exceed her own crucial contextualizations and make

universal and a-temporal assumptions about quality. Even so, I appreciate her candor and willingness to publicly wrestle with the uncertainty around valuing this art form.

I actually find this discontinuity refreshing. Jonaitis is known for being forthright and for producing research that is multi-faceted, yet transparent. Jonaitis does not fall victim to overly jargonizing the field of Native Northwest Coast art, nor does she retreat from squarely facing some of the central paradoxes of this discipline. I recommend this book for successfully accomplishing what it sets out to achieve.

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