

LOOKING HIGH AND LOW: ART AND CULTURAL IDENTITY / Edited by Brenda Jo Bright and Liza Bakewell.--Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, November 1995.--210p.: ill.--ISBN 0-8165-1311-2 (cl.); ISBN 0-8165-1516-6 (pa.); LC 94-48508 (cl.); \$17.95 (pa.).

Six essays viewing art as a product of culture rather than as the product of the cultivated and educated mind comprise this work. Traditional fine art is primarily Euro-western defined and critiqued. Like other canons, the canon of "fine" artwork is being challenged. While the parameters of fine art have already been expanded to include less traditional forms like installations and performance art, the authors here would like to stretch the barriers between art and material culture. Their essays explore the boundaries by urging acceptance of a broader, anthropologically based view of art. Four of the authors are, in fact, anthropologists, one a professor of Comparative and Literary Studies, and one an art historian. The essays illustrate that the processes which bring us art, that is galleries, museums, dealers, and even governments, are highly influential filters determining what is acknowledged as high or low art. The separation is, we are reminded, artificial and often political.

Liza Bakewell's essay analyzes the dynamic changeover that took place in the production of art after the Mexican Revolution. A society dominated by classic, western art influences was transformed by a government bent on glorifying its roots. Nationalism led to the production of large scale public works like Diego Rivera murals and the portrayal of peasants and historic events. She describes the delicate balance sought by Mexican artists who try to achieve status within the confines of western modernism without being labeled "anti-Mexican."

Marcus Sanchez-Tranquilino looks at Mexican-American, gang-produced graffiti and Chicano murals. By translating the language and placement of graffiti, he demonstrates that graffiti is not random, but rather a systematic method of communication. He views the murals as having similar functionality. He contends that the dominant culture interprets mural painting as a legitimate art form while it sees graffiti as vandalism, a view it superimposes onto the experiences and artistic production of gang culture.

Perhaps the most striking essay, and the one that challenges us to depart furthest from classic conceptions of art, is by Brenda Jo Bright. Taking the unlikely case of car customizing in Los Angeles, she argues persuasively that this craft embodies an alternative to gang involvement for some, and more broadly, an escape from the confines of race and poverty. In L.A. neighborhoods, the common language of car appreciation has allowed "cruising" and car shows to be an acceptable reason for congregating and for connections between gangs and across racial lines. Imagery painted on cars manipulates the role that the car owners play in society.

Barbara Tedlock differentiates between two policies of the Zuni Pueblo in reference to their artwork. A distinction exists for Zuni between objects created for religious purposes which have since gained artistic status, and those objects which, though containing religious images, are initially created by the Zuni as art. The former have been

aggressively reclaimed from collectors and museums through legal means. Simultaneously, the latter are produced in hopes that they will make their way into the art market.

"Marketing Maria" explores how a Native American potter was endowed with the qualities most desired by her promoters, biographers, and collectors to the point of losing touch with the real woman. "Middlebrow into High Brow at the J. Paul Getty Trust" theorizes about the process through which high culture is created through "middlebrow" aspirations, and the role that money and institutions play in the process. This work, in addition to being an important contribution to the dialogue on what makes art art, is compelling and readable. It is a necessary addition to libraries collecting in modernism, aesthetics, popular culture, Latin American art, Native American art, folk art, anthropology, and mural art. The essays are well written and researched, providing lengthy references. A useful index is included.

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