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978-0-521-58349-7 - The Scramble for Art in Central Africa

Edited by Enid Schildkrout and Curtis A. Keim

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The scramble for art in Central Africa

Western attitudes to Africa have been influenced to an extraordinary degree by the arts and artifacts that were brought back by the early collectors, exhibited in museums, and celebrated by scholars and artists in the metropolitan centres. The contributors to this volume trace the life history of artifacts that were brought to Europe and America from Congo towards the end of the nineteenth century, and became the subjects of museum displays. They also present fascinating case studies of the pioneering collectors, including such major figures as Frobenius and Torday. They discuss the complex and sensitive issues involved in the business of collecting and show how the collections and exhibitions influenced academic debates about the categories of art and artifact, and the notion of authenticity, and challenged conventional aesthetic values, as modern Western artists began to draw on African models.

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*The scramble for
art in Central Africa*

Edited by

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UNIVERSITY PRESS**

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521583497

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First published 1998

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

The scramble for art in Central Africa / edited by Enid Schildkrout
 and Curtis A. Keim.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0 521 58349 7 (hbk). – ISBN 0 521 58678 X (pbk.)

1. Art, Congolese – Collectors and collecting. 2. Art – Collectors
 and collecting. I. Schildkrout, Enid. II. Keim, Curtis A.

N7399.C6S39 1998

709'.6751'075–dc21 97–3061 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-58349-7 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-58349-7 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-58678-8 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-58678-X paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2006

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



The papers in this book were selected from among fourteen contributions to a symposium held at the American Museum of Natural History in New York in October 1990 in conjunction with the exhibition “African Reflections: Art from Northeastern Zaire.” The symposium consisted of a wide ranging discussion of Western collecting and changing modes of representation of the arts of Zaire now called Democratic Republic of Congo. The title of the symposium: “Tradition, innovation, and interpretation: Issues in the collection and display of the arts of Zaire in historical perspective” hints at the broad scope of those discussions. In preparing this volume we have selected papers with a narrower focus, concentrating on those that deal specifically with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century collecting. The one exception is MacGaffey’s paper which frames the discussion in a novel way, provoking a certain reconsideration of basic terms and definitions. Johannes Fabian and John Mack were invited but unable to attend the conference and both submitted their papers with the theme of this volume in mind.

We are very grateful to the presenters and discussants whose papers and comments could not be included in this volume. A certain number of these papers have appeared elsewhere and are referred to in this book; all of the presenters benefited immensely from the provocative comments of these individuals. We wish to thank Didier Demolin, Gordon Gibson, Lema Gwete, Bogumil Jewsiewicki, Mary McMaster, Valentin Y. Mudimbe, Mary Nooter Roberts, Pierre Salmon, all of whom presented papers at the conference. We are also very grateful to the discussants who

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

read and commented on the papers: Thomas O. Beidelman, Jack R. Goody, Simon Ottenberg, Roy Seiber, and Susan Vogel.

The symposium was supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, as one part of the interpretive component of the exhibition, "African Reflections: Art from Northeastern Zaire." Additional support was provided by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the American Museum of Natural History.

We would also like to thank the staff of the library at Moravian College who helped with the references and bibliography. Karen Keim, Alisa La Gamma, Thomas R. Miller, John A. Van Couvering, and Ann Wright Parsons helped in various ways, from constructive criticism to gentle prodding, to bring this project to fruition.