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.
The Scramble for Art in Central Africa

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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, Valentín 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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