Art as Culture: An Introduction to the Anthropology of Art, EVELYN P. HATCHER, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1985, 304 pp., line drawings, notes, glossary, bibliog- raphy, index. $26.50 (cloth), $13.75 (paper).

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Art as Culture is a good survey of anthropological questions about, and approaches to, ethnographic and prehistoric art. The book is oriented to- ward introductory students, and is useful to instruc- tors as well as interested members of the public. The book begins in the introductory pages and throughout is a pleasant and informative guide to the subject.

The book is organized into eight chapters, Chapter 1, "Contexts and Comparisons: The Anthropo- logical Approach," is a brief introduction to the study of art as culture and an argument for the study of art in cultural context. Levels of political organization are presented as a framework illustrating the interrelationship of art within and among cultures. The idea of a "primiti- ve" art, however, is entertained implicitly by skip- ping the discussion at the preindustrial sociopoliti- cal level. Hoebel, in his introductory remarks, freely uses the controversial term, "primitive."

Chapter 2, "Where? The Geographical Dimen- sion," is a survey of characteristic artifacts and styles associated with specific environments and geographic areas. Students, I find, tend to be cavalier in their study of ethnographic and prehis- toric art, sometimes treating it as a minor matter without giving attention to discussion of objects and styles from the comparative perspective offered by Hatcher. Chapter 3, "How? The Technological Means," is a discussion of craftsmanship and craft traditions, but without an explicit conception of the problems involved in using the terms "craft" and "art." Chapter 4, "Psychological Per- spective," is a perceptive review of the relevant litera- ture on creativity, artistic personality, and the psychological basis of painting and drawing. Chapter 5, "The Social Context and Social Functions," is an interpretation of art as sign and symbol, with emphasis on the sociocultural con- texts in which art objects and processes became embedded. Chapter 6, "Language as Communi- cation," is a critique of the usefulness of linguistic models for the study of art through comparison of verbal and visual forms of communication, icon- ography and iconology, and emic and etic ap- proaches to the study of meaning. Chapter 7, "When and Whence? The Time Dimension," is a revision of the evolutionary, historical, and cultural models of culture change in relation to persistence and change in art forms and traditions. Chapter 8, "The Methodological Approach," is an exploration of the relationship between art and other cultural practices. The book provides a valuable supplement to the study of art in that it is written by someone who understands and enjoys the subject. The book is a useful introduction to the study of art as culture and a guide to the reading of the subject.


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Abundantly illustrated with 250 black and white photographs (mostly of sculptures but also including paintings, monuments, and other artifacts), the book covers a wide range of topics on African art. The book is divided into four parts: (1) "The Beginning of African Art," (2) "The Later Development of African Art," (3) "The Art of the Sahara," (4) "The Art of the South." Each part begins with an introduction and concludes with a collection of etic and emic approaches to the study of meaning. The book is a useful guide to the study of African art and a valuable resource for students and researchers.

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This lengthy, two-volume set contains a presenta- tion and interpretation of the famous Cantares Mexicanos, or Songs of the Mexicans. The Cantares is a large corpus of songs (or "cantares") set down in the 16th century in the Nahua language. As Bier- horst discusses in chapter 13 of Volume 1, these songs (variously called songs, poetry, or prose) have in- trigued many generations of scholars who have, in the past, provided translations of individual songs and interpretations of the corpus as a whole. With this edition of the Cantares published in Mexico (and, we are informed), however, we have the first full transcription and translation of the entire body of material included in the Cantares corpus.

The present work is organized into five major segments: (1) a general introduction containing 13 chapters, and presenting the author's thesis and overall interpretation of the Cantares; (2) transcriptions and translations of the songs; (3) a commentary section which provides a synopsis, general remarks, and stanza-by-stanza paraphrase for most of the songs; (4) a dictionary and a lexicon of terms found in the Cantares; and (5) a analytical transcription of the Cantares. The first three sections are grouped in Volume 1, the latter two in Volume 2. In addition, the volumes contain appendices, one listing native rulers of Tenochtitlan and nearby cities; the other presenting a concordance of the vocab- laries found in the Cantares.

The transcriptions and translations of the songs themselves constitute the bulk of Volume 1. Bier- horst is to be commended on his thorough and gen- erally careful transcription and translation (though not without occasional omissions or misprints). The author, in his introduction, notes that the book is "an attempt to present an introduction to the history and culture of the Nahuatl-speaking peoples of Mexico" (p. 63). When these songs were sung, according to Bierhorst, the gods of warfare and war- ters would whirl down from the heavens to aug- ment the ranks of the living Aztec warriors and en- sure victory against their enemies.

While this is an attractive hypothesis, the bases on which these songs are considered "ghost songs" are not clearly nor definitively established. The conclusion seems to be drawn from (1) the metaphysical usages of certain Nahua-speaking peoples, and (2) the existence of a "cult of the dead" (a sump- tuous feast) that was known in some other historical cases around the world. This letter is set for the following reaction: not to set the world on fire with this new Bier- horst's overly extended use of metaphoric possibili- ties, or if his hypothesis led him to a rather bold and uninhibited interpretation. Whatever the case, the transcriptions do rely heavily on extended