

***Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900.* By Ruth Philips. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill- Queen's University Press, 1999. \$85, ISBN 0-7735-1806-1 cloth, \$45.95, ISBN 0-7735-1807-X pbk.)**

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Volume 22, numéro 2, 2000

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087913ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087913ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

M'Closkey, K. (2000). Compte rendu de [*Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900.* By Ruth Philips. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill- Queen's University Press, 1999. \$85, ISBN 0-7735-1806-1 cloth, \$45.95, ISBN 0-7735-1807-X pbk.)]. *Ethnologies*, 22(2), 315-317. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087913ar>

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Richly illustrated, *Trading Identities* surveys the enormous souvenir production by Native North Americans located in the northeast from 1700 to 1900. The book contains a multifaceted and panoramic study of material culture cross-fertilized by forms, colours, patterns, mediums and materials

encountered during the colonial process. Because these objects for trade were created after Aboriginal peoples came under the economic and political hegemony of Europe, their creations must be considered within the larger narrative of Western imperialism. In her preface, art historian Ruth Phillips notes how “authenticity” paradigms have marginalised both objects and makers. Phillips references how art history categories conferring location on the descending ladder of fine/high art to lowly craft left no place for the “souvenir.” The stylistic hybridity of these commoditized non-Western forms signified their corruption. Cultural evolutionists deemed them “degenerate” and “contaminated...” thereby affirming that the authenticity of the “primitive” lies outside modernity. As she notes, conventions of naming become important indicators of typical meanings read into objects. The large corpus of souvenirs were derisively labelled “whimsy,” “geegaw,” “curio,” “knickknack” and “trinket” indicating their bargain-basement status. Phillips repositions these objects within a complex matrix of economic, historical, social and artistic factors, thereby demonstrating the agency of the makers.

Meticulously documented, the author effectively integrates archival and museum research with fieldwork. Based on years of painstaking research, Phillips has produced a narrative as richly embellished as her subject matter. Although she utilizes time honoured art historical techniques, she provides an incisive postcolonial critique that interrogates the devaluation of souvenir arts through conventional academic practices of representation. *Trading Identities* fills a gap as scholars pioneering work in tourism and tourist arts were typically concerned with the economics of production and the semiotics of touristic communication rather than aesthetics or historical developments.

Each chapter provides fresh perspectives and insights into a complex topic that intersects with many areas of scholarly interest. Phillips corrects a number of erroneous assumptions concerning the origins and use of patterns and materials by various ethnic groups. She reviews the controversy surrounding the origins of floral design and elaborates on the differing interpretations debated by ethnologists Speck and Barbeau. She maps the transcultural exchanges that occurred in the production and sale of moosehair embroidery on bark by French Canadian nuns, Euro-American women and Huron, Mi'kmaq and Maliseet women. The clerical entrepreneurs produced numerous accessories thereby sustaining their convents. The direct competition of native wares and clerical production throughout the eighteenth century has created confusion among scholars concerning provenance. The diversity of forms and

motifs depicted in numerous photographs is remarkable. A tabernacle and candlesticks covered with birchbark panels exquisitely embroidered in quillwork provides a strikingly unique contrast to images of containers of every imaginable shape and size.

Trading Identities reveals the fundamentally dialogic nature of Aboriginal souvenir production as transcultural process. Phillips cogently demonstrates how the creation and sale of these marginalized wares served to mediate the impact of colonialism. Phillips plumbs the emergent paradox: the vast array of objects created over two centuries by vanishing Peoples. She utilizes the concept of “dual signification” and argues for polyvalency, that a single image may evoke divergent fields of meaning for Aboriginal makers and Euro-western consumers. Such a concept is confirmed through powerful testimonials gathered from Aboriginal informants who adamantly express the spiritual, cultural and economic significance of the production and sale of souvenir art by their ancestors. Oral histories acquired from the descendants of the makers reveal unacknowledged values related to spiritual and community concerns contributing to cultural survival. Their commentary provides an essential critique of the standard scholarly representation of commoditized Native arts.

The book is a *tour de force*. Although Phillips claims her work is merely a beginning, it will stand as an exemplary model of the “new” art history. It cogently historicizes artifacts typically mocked and marginalized by generations of ethnologists and fine arts curators. Phillips’ richly textured narrative will be of interest to scholars concerned with colonialism, material culture, art-culture systems, travel and tourism, literary criticism and cultural studies.

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