

**Simon Ottenberg, *Masked Rituals of Afikpo: The Context of an African Art*. Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1975.
229 pp., 85 illus., \$25.00**

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FIGURE 1. Ajanta, Shrine, Cave 16. From Weiner.

Śākyamuni, represented in the Ajanta cave shrines as seated crossed-legged in teaching gesture with deer and a wheel (*cakra*) at the base, to a Buddha of more transmundane qualities.

In the penultimate chapter, 'Stylistic Trends and Developments,' an attempt is made to connect the early sculptural style of the Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda reliefs with the early work at Ajanta, notably the impressive standing Buddhas flanking the doorway of Cave 19. Of the early Andhra influence at Ajanta, this reviewer would reiterate that the more tenable connections are to be found in fifth-century central India. The majority of the main shrine images, observed to be done in a more heavy and hieratic mode, are dated to ca. AD 475 and compared to several dated sculptures from the first half of the fifth century in central India and to the four seated Buddhas surrounding the Great Stūpa at Sanchi. Weiner considers these Sanchi Buddhas as a synthesis of Mathura and Sarnath idioms which served as a possible source for Sarnath influence in the Deccan. It has been overlooked, however, that these four images are usually considered to be dated by an inscription to AD 450-51, a full quarter-century before the mature Sarnath style appears (see J.F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*, no. 62).

Given the immense scope of the book, perhaps it would have been wiser to plan two separate, longer volumes. The first would spell out

the chronology of the cave sites by refuting systematically the chronologies proposed by Spink and by Begley. Moreover, such a chronology, based on inscriptional evidence and stylistic analysis, should involve close inspection of the majority of the caves rather than a concentration on four or five major caves as we have here. The second volume might be devoted to iconographic problems and the complex stylistic sources for Ajanta and the western Deccan. On both counts Ajanta is probably best understood in light of the fifth-century world of the Guptas rather than that of early Andhra.

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SIMON OTTENBERG *Masked Rituals of Afikpo: The Context of an African Art*. Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1975. 229 pp., 85 illus., \$25.00.

As measured against art historical literature of other fields, the writing in the specialized study of African art has, with few exceptions, consisted of photographic surveys with minimal text. In truth, much of the literature devoted to the study of African art has been directed primarily towards the identification and placement of objects in a geographical and linguistic context, those of one tribe with one language in one geographical region. It has been only within a comparatively short period of time that in-depth contextual studies in African art have emerged, and scholars are now turning to the definition of traditional African art within the total synaesthetic framework of a society. This attitude views the objects as participating elements in a greater cultural nexus which includes the rôle of the object within society, its appearance, and its association to costume, music, and choreography, supported by myth and symbol.

As defined, this full cultural study is a demanding undertaking requiring the multiple skills of anthropologist and linguist allied to an awareness of art and aesthetics.

Fortunately Simon Ottenberg brings these skills and sensitivities to his study. This is the latest in a series of works that Ottenberg has produced as a result of his field research among the Igbo and Afikpo of eastern Nigeria. While among the Afikpo, Ottenberg recorded in detail their rituals, 'plays,' dances, and songs, as well as their masks and carvers. His study is comprehensive in scope and informative in depth. It is objective in its reporting and sympathetic in its discussion of the Afikpo people and their multiple arts. The book draws upon Ottenberg's obvious knowledge and store of data regarding Afikpo masks and their use, and it presents its case with a high order of organization.

The first part opens with a description of the Afikpo and places them in their social and cultural setting. The Afikpo belong to a sub-group of the Igbo called Ade or Edda, who, according to Ottenberg, numbered about 35,000 in 1960, living in twenty-two close village groups along the banks of the Cross River in East Central State of Nigeria. These village groups share, with local variations, similar rituals, shrines, and customs, while also being influenced by their neighbouring peoples with regard to certain mask types and forms.

The following chapter, 'Afikpo Art,' places primary emphasis upon the major sculptural product — masks. It describes the function of art within the context of Afikpo society and its rôle as a mechanism of 'social readjustment.' It considers the masked plays in relationship to the change of seasons and tells that the Afikpo use this time when not working in the fields for ceremony and to devote their energies to re-establishing harmony within the village. 'The ceremonial season is one in which social conflict and judgment are everyday affairs, and the Afikpo turn their productive energies to realigning and readjusting human social ties. The masked rituals are an aspect of this social productivity: they complement and reflect it, as well as having their own particular aesthetic aspects.' Then follows a long and detailed *catalogue raisonné* of mask types and styles. Each mask type is named, its general identifying features described, and its sub-styles or variations given.

The last chapter of Part I describes the carvers of masks and their activities and rôles within Afikpo society. It focuses primarily upon the artistry, skills, and personality of one carver as he made masks commissioned by Ottenberg. The catalogue is, as are most of the photographs, examples of this carver's work. I would have personally preferred examples of other artists' works; however, the fact that the information about the masks is so complete tempers this reservation.

Part II is entitled 'A Play,' and here the full grasp of Ottenberg's understanding of Afikpo art manifests itself. The play, *Okumkpa*, is, as Ottenberg describes it, 'a creative and aesthetic event' in which the ritual and secular are combined in an event which must be described as a communal happening or village theatre. Creative variation is placed within a traditional framework allowing the leaders of the play the opportunity for full and literal expression in the composition of satiric songs and skits as they comment upon Afikpo life and manners. Ottenberg observed two *Okumkpa* plays, in 1952 and 1960, and it is the former which is described in detail. Ottenberg analyses the play in terms of its sociological, psychological, and aesthetic implications, and the rôle of art as a social control mechanism is well illustrated in the section titled 'Sociological Interpretations.' Ottenberg describes *Okumkpa* as 'a sophisticated and well-integrated vaudeville' whose aesthetic aspects and success depend to great degree upon the abilities of the leading actors, who are authors of the skits and songs. As described, the major aesthetic elements are humour, the continuous action of the players, and the interplay between performers and audience.

Part III, 'A Variety of Masquerades,' discusses Afikpo masked rituals not associated to the *Okumkpa*. These include a public parade of masks worn by young male members of the secret society and a masked run as a test of strength and endurance associated to ritual and social prestige. 'Game masquerades,' in which the young, uninitiated boys strive to overcome or 'throw' a masked adult, are interpreted by Ottenberg as symbolic attempts to overthrow village el-

ders, characterized by the mask, and thus acts of ritualized aggression. The final chapter of Part III discusses initiation into secret societies.

In the concluding chapters of the book, Ottenberg restates the interconnected network composed of the sociological, psychological, and aesthetic factors as a framework through which Afikpo art may be interpreted. Ottenberg's discussion of the sociological factors are the most satisfying. The 'psychological factors' are, to a great extent, personal observations based upon a close understanding of the Afikpo people.

The final chapter discusses the aesthetics of Afikpo art. What emerges is an aesthetic not singularly defined but given as an interrelationship between the various arts of Afikpo society: theatre, music, dance, and the visual arts. In Ottenberg's words, 'We are dealing with an aesthetic that emphasizes action, in which beauty and ugliness, delight and foolishness, come out of doing rather than being.' This definition and description of a 'functional aesthetic' of Afikpo art has much potential for further study and application. The aesthetic here defined also encompasses the concept of variation in masquerades and in the appearances of masks. Ottenberg lists twelve basic mask forms in wood and a number of net masks. Though the number of mask types may be small, they gain a great variety of rôles through associated costumes, and in order to fully define a mask, we must know its total costume and masquerade. Ottenberg's book questions the present definition of art history as regards the study of sub-Saharan African art. It indicates the depth of art – the many and complex levels upon which art exists within a single culture – and it avoids the easy tendency to consider only a single topic, style, or theme.

This is a most important addition to the literature on African art and must be considered for its scholarship as well as its humanistic commentary of Afikpo art. The book is well laid out with maps, drawings, charts, and diagrams integrated to the text. It is lavishly illustrated with sixteen colour plates and sixty-nine black-and-white photographs. The illustrations are clear

and informative, and participate in the text, and in many instances provide exciting records of masked dancing. A glossary and a very serviceable bibliography are included.

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RUDOLF ARNHEIM *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977. 289 + vi pp., illus., \$14.95.

Rudolf Arnheim, who is Professor Emeritus at Harvard University, and who taught for many years at Sarah Lawrence College, is the most distinguished psychologist of art and is known throughout the world for his pioneering book on the cinema and for his major work of 1954 (rev. ed., 1974), *Art and Visual Perception*. The present book, his first major engagement with architecture, applies the method of the latter but, I think, less effectively. To make the best case for his perceptual approach, Arnheim intentionally excludes most of the social, cultural, and environmental affects that give buildings the flavour of time, of place, and of the individual maker. I find that what is left is too reductive and at many points self-evident.¹

The first two chapters discuss the fundamentals of the formal aspects of architecture: space – including figure-ground perceptions as translated from two into three dimensions – and the rôle of vertical and horizontal in the design of masses. The 'dynamics' of the title are introduced in the discussion of the

¹ The illustrations are primarily line drawings by a student: Arnheim did not want to give a 'treasure of substitutes for the real experience.' That aim was too well realized: the drawings not only are inferior in draughtsmanship, they are in most cases reversed, with the left side flipped to the right, an oversight that poorly serves the discussion of the dynamics of asymmetrical compositions like the Capitoline Hill in Rome (fig. 10), Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center (fig. 33), and Florence Cathedral and its campanile (fig. 65).