

4-1-2012

Chris Spring. *Angaza Afrika: African Art Now*. London: Lawrence King. 2008

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Recommended Citation

Fubah, Mathias Alubafi (2012) "Chris Spring. *Angaza Afrika: African Art Now*. London: Lawrence King. 2008," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 3 : No. 2 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol3/iss2/21>

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Angaza Afrika is a Swahili term meaning to “shed light on Africa” or “look around Africa” (p. 7). Appropriately, Chris Spring’s work takes the reader on just such a tour of the continent. Spring’s *Angaza Afrika: African Art Now* includes numerous photographs illustrating the “sheer diversity of Africa, embracing the whole continent and its diaspora”; the text also includes “the cultural complexes that make up the Mediterranean, Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds” (p. 6). Spring’s work is divided into two parts: part one looks at the variety of contemporary art across the region delimited as Africa (pp. 8-17), and part two focuses on the artists themselves. The first part of this text specifically highlights pertinent genres of contemporary African art, such as those of the Khiyamiya or the tent makers of Cairo, the fantasy coffins of the Teshie in Ghana, the Tinga Tinga Cooperative Society in Dar Es Salaam, sign painters in Kenya, the Kangas across East Africa, portrait and studio photography in North and Southern Africa, pottery in Northern and Eastern Africa, textiles in Tunisia, and metalwork in Eastern Africa.

Part two focuses on contemporary African artists working in major African cities and in the diaspora (pp. 18-336). In this section, Spring discusses and presents the works of over sixty three contemporary African artists. He begins with the work of UK born and educated Nigerian artist Akinbode Akinbiyi and presents an amazing array of visual material, mostly photography, by the artist. He also makes the case for Akinbiyi’s inspiration, which is the artist’s fascination with “the mega-cities” of Africa, such as Lagos, Cairo, Johannesburg, and Kinshasa and how these compare with smaller African cities such as Bamako, for example. The relationship of African cities to older European cities such as Paris, Berlin, and Barcelona is also highlighted in an attempt to articulate their distinctive influences on contemporary African artists and their art. Finally, a careful reading of the works of other contemporary African artists discussed in this book indicates that there is much more to contemporary African art than just cities and photography.

This breadth and scope of contemporary African art is subtly captured in the work of Julien Sinzogan, for example, which focuses on the “way of life informed and inspired by the Yoruba divinatory and religious system known as *Ifa*” (p. 300). As is the case across Africa, “The Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin see life as taking a cyclical trajectory through which individuals experience the tangible world, *aye*, [or] depart to the spirit world *orun* [and] are reborn” (p. 300). Spring brings out this important aspect of traditional African religion in his contemporary African art anthology in an attempt to bridge the gap between the different but closely related worlds of traditional and contemporary African art. After all, we now know from Anthony Appiah that “there is not one Africa, but many.” We also know about the influence of modernism and technology not only in the West but also in Africa. This book tells us that despite such influences, contemporary African art “did not just appear from nowhere towards the end of the colonial period,” nor is it “solely a response to bombardment by alien cultural forms” (Kasfir 1999, p. 9). Rather, “contemporary African art has built through a process of *bricolage* upon the already existing structures and scenarios on which the older, pre-colonial and colonial genres of African art were made” (Kasfir 1999, p. 9).

Still, Spring sees some contemporary African artists, such as Cheri Samba for example, as having developed a distinctive style of painting that bears little or no resemblance to what may be considered typical of older, pre-colonial, or colonial

genres of African art. He quotes from Cheri Samba himself when Samba said, “I had noticed that people in the street would walk by paintings, glance at them and keep going. I thought that if I added a bit of text, people would have to stop and take time to read it, to get more into the painting and to admire it. That’s what I called the ‘Samba Signature.’ From then on, I put text in all my paintings” (p. 288), said Samba. While Cheri Samba has been a household name in the encyclopaedia of contemporary African artists since “Magiciens de la Terre” at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 1989, his work has often been criticized for appealing largely to a Western audience and, in turn, legitimizing Western preconceptions about African art. Spring dismisses this claim, arguing that pictures by Cheri Samba are “painted for Africans, not for Westerners, and that despite their ribald [humor] and grotesquery, they have serious points to make: that there [is] poverty, stupidity, corruption, chaos, universal decadence” in the world. As Samba has proclaimed, “I like to think that artists can change people’s mentality; I stimulate people’s consciousness; artists should make people think” (p. 288), and Samba’s art attempts to do just that, according to Spring.

This book represents as much a catalogue of contemporary African artists and their encounters with the realities of the African society as it does a review of Spring’s experience with contemporary African artists and their art at the British Museum (where he works) and in other international African art exhibitions and biennales. This compilation fully justifies the claim made by Olu Oguibe in the preface: “I think we’ve gone past the stage of African group highlights, whether continental or regional . . . people must begin to show confidence in the ability of individual African artists to stand shoulder to shoulder with their peers on the global stage” (p. 6). By putting the works of contemporary African artists into a 300+ page anthology with over 150 illustrations, Chris Spring is somewhat able to free some contemporary African artists, giving them a voice in the highly contested field of contemporary African art, in which works of classical African art have remained largely unrecognized in the West (or when recognized, attributed to “the tribe” rather than to the individual). This book is rich and informative, and its value to those interested in contemporary African art is enormous, not least because the illustrations are interesting and accessible, but also because it reminds us that Africa, indeed, has an equally enormous role to play in the world of contemporary art.

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