



African Masks: The Barbier-Mueller Collection (African, Asian & Oceanic Art)

By Iris Hahner-Herzog, Lazlo Vajda, Maria Kecskei

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African Masks surveys 248 of the finest examples of masks from the Barbier-Mueller Collection, of which 100 are reproduced in stunning color illustrations. Leading scholars on African art describe the masks' historical and religious functions, and their symbolic significance.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

These two books by the same publisher are very similar in a number of ways?they are designed to accompany major European exhibitions; contain hundreds of visually impressive photos of some of the finest works of African artistry; and cover the art of Africa while emphasizing the sculpture of West and Central Africa. These similarities aside, the books differ significantly in terms of the nature of the text and the focus of the content. Early in the 20th century a small number of European collectors acquired significant collections of African art. Han Coray (1880-1974), a modern art dealer in Zurich, was one of the earliest of those collectors, and his extensive collection eventually became the property of the Zurich University Ethnographic Museum. African Art is a catalog of that collection, with over 300 photographs of the objects. While most of the catalog entries provide useful information about the objects, some are unsatisfyingly only descriptive. More than a dozen essays are also provided, while some are scholarly and informative, many are personal reflections on and reactions to the collector and the collection, which some readers may not find especially enlightening. African Masks explores the nature of one of the most important categories of art in Africa. An excellent introductory essay by scholars Maria Kecske and Lazlo Vajda succinctly discusses the roles of masks in African societies and explains variations in their form and aesthetics. Almost 250 masks in the Barbier-Mueller Museum collection are cataloged with brief entries and small but fine black-and-white photos. The major portion of the book consists of large-format color plates of selected masks with extensive, scholarly notes by Hahner-Herzog. Many of the plates are accompanied by outstandingly useful field photos of the masks as worn by fully costumed performers in their indigenous context. Both books are highly recommended for any public or academic library with an interest in art, anthropology, and/or African studies.?Eugene C. Burt, Art Inst. of Seattle Lib.

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Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

Original Language: German

From the Publisher

The book includes one hundred color plates accompanied by in-depth descriptions, as well as numerous black-and-white photographs of the masks as they are used in religious and secular celebrations. An introductory text by renowned scholars describes how the masks are constructed, examines their significance in African culture, and offers insight into the universal practice of masquerading. A unique contribution to literature on African art, this book is also a wonderful introduction to countless fascinating, ages-old spiritual traditions still being practiced today.

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Levi Ryan:

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