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analytical tool, this book explores the depth and richness of its methodological claims and applicability. It therefore serves well as an introductory work to the topic of Mimesis and its traces in the canonical Gospels.

Joseph E. Brito
Concordia University

Sacred Objects in Secular Spaces: Exhibiting Asian Religions in Museums. Edited by Bruce M. Sullivan. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2015. 256 pages. \$34.55 USD (Paperback).

In the past two decades, scholars such as Gregory Schopen, Ronald Grimes, Richard H. Davis, Crispin Paine, John E. Cort, and Carol Duncan have published influential studies on material cultures in general, and religious objects and images in particular. *Sacred Objects in Secular Spaces*, edited by Bruce M. Sullivan, makes a valuable contribution to an important dimension of this field: the exhibiting and viewing of Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh religious objects in secular spaces of museums. The volume brings together art historians and religious studies scholars with expertise in Asian arts and religions to explore the following questions: How do we understand, describe, and exhibit religious objects in museums? Should we still see them as sacred objects or simply as objects of art? What are “sacred objects” after all? And do they represent cultural heritage, and to what extent? This highly readable ethnographically and historically well-informed and well-written volume will be of interest to researchers and museum curators who seek to understand religious material culture, museum studies, and Asian religious studies.

This book consists of eleven chapters divided into three sections on the challenges and experiences of displaying Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh religious objects in museums. Richard H. Davis opens the discussion by arguing that “objects have life stories, just as humans do” and thus, “biographies highlight the ways that identities can be reframed in different settings and renegotiated in encounters with different audiences” (11). When examining a religious object one often tries to understand what kind of object it is, which deity it represents, from what school or mythology it comes, or in what period

it was made, but often the life story of the object is forgotten. Thus Davis emphasises this way of interpreting objects through tracing their life stories.

The life story of the Hindu deity, Kali, is the focus of the second chapter by Deepak Sarma, who shows how the Kali image was marketed and commercialized in the historical context of colonialism and globalization. Bruce M. Sullivan follows with an analysis of the practice of yoga in museums for commercial purposes as another way of marketing, which encourages the reader to think of the role and definition of museums in a new light: museums are no longer the historical houses of “treasures” from the far away past. Cultural heritage can be seen through Anne Murphy’s study of “Sikh Museuming”, in which she describes how Sikh communities have represented their identity and history through the collections of religious and historical objects, such as weapons and relics. In addition, Denise Patry Leidy examines the history of Buddhism in the West, and explains how early sacred objects found their way into the museums’ acquisition. This gives a necessary background for the reader to learn about how, when, and why Asian religions were presented in museums in Europe and North America.

The volume ends with a well-crafted contribution authored by Michael Willis, who discusses the role and function of exhibitions of religious art with a somewhat paradoxical and challenging claim that “The museum is certainly a place where certain kinds of memories are celebrated and fabricated, but in the final analysis the museum is really a place of amnesia” (145). What he means by “amnesia” here is the growing distance between the viewers and the objects, or younger curators of objects who have struggled to re-establish the links between records and objects that were the proprietary knowledge of their predecessors. Willis leaves the readers thinking about this ongoing struggle of museums to keep memories from and connections to the past. However, “amnesia” happens as soon as objects are removed from their context of religious backgrounds to the new environments of the secular museum. They are deconsecrated and we, as outsiders, cannot re-consecrate an object to make it sacred as it was in its original context. What is interesting is that, as suggested by Davis, identities can be reframed with different audiences. We see the example, as discussed by Bruce M. Sullivan, that some yoga practitioners in the Sackler Gallery in Washington D.C. explained that they “regarded their practice as ‘re-consecrating the icons’” (47). This shows the complexity in defining what is sacred when one experiences and interacts with an object differently from another in the secular space.

Book Reviews

When discussing the exhibition of five world religions, Janet Baker suggests that the designers of such an exhibition should be well familiar with each of the five religious traditions to be able to represent them equally well (132), yet she focuses almost exclusively on Buddhism. Moreover, the entire book has more to say about Buddhist objects and Buddhism than other traditions. This gives a sense that the book itself represents a way of marketing religion to societies that hold Buddhism in high regard. A nice addition would have been to elaborate more on Hinduism and Sikhism, as well as on the collection and exhibition of religious art of the “Indianized” states of Southeast Asia such as Funan, Champa, Java and Cambodia. One example of such an exhibition was the “Lost Kingdoms, Hindu-Buddhist Sculptures of Early Southeast Asia” that took place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2014. In addition, through the representation of Asian religious objects, Asian religions were portrayed in this volume as a collection of certain historical moments from the past; missing from all those exhibitions and discussions were the images of contemporary practices in Asia. Images or videos showing how people practiced their religions in recent times would very likely help the visitors to understand a certain religion better from its past to its present.

In sum, this volume covers a wide range of topics to which the contributors bring a great deal of knowledge, expertise, and hands-on experience. On one hand, it discusses the preservation of artefacts and the museum establishment, how deity images were marketed and commercialized in the historical context of colonialism and globalization, how icons were re-consecrated through the practice of yoga in a museum, and how to exhibit five world religions together. On the other hand, it shows the enormous effort curators put into an exhibition to display the religious objects in a systematic and theoretical way, and also to attract enough visitors to museums to keep them financially viable. There is no definite answer to the questions raised in the introduction regarding objects in museums as being categorized as “sacred” and “secular”. However, the book provides a valuable window into current scholarly discussions on understanding religious objects, while evoking thoughts on the role of curators and museums in modernity.

Bui Dieu Linh Mai
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