



The Storage Box of Tradition: Kwakiutl Art, Anthropologists, and Museums, 1881-1981

Ira Jacknis

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This unique study investigates the effects of the long interaction between anthropologists and the Kwakwaka'wakw (or Kwakiutl) peoples of coastal British Columbia. Beginning with Franz Boas, anthropologists have written extensively about the rich material culture of the Kwakwaka'wakw and have long collected their intricately detailed storage boxes, totem poles, and elaborate ceremonial wear. But how did the relationship between these two groups contribute to transform both ordinary and ritual objects into ethnological specimens, and then to works of art proudly displayed in museums? This expansive book is an anthropology of anthropology. Ira Jacknis identifies not only the effects of cross-cultural exchanges but also examines anthropology itself as a cultural process. He considers as well how museums define and present Native art and how their choices in turn influence current Native artists. The book offers a valuable collection of 131 halftones, ranging from nineteenth-century ethnographic photographs to catalog images from the American Museum of Natural History to documentary photographs taken by Jacknis in the 1980s. Together with Jacknis's close account of this classic chapter in anthropological history, they vividly show how the "anthropological encounter" is in fact an extraordinarily complex and fluid relationship.

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