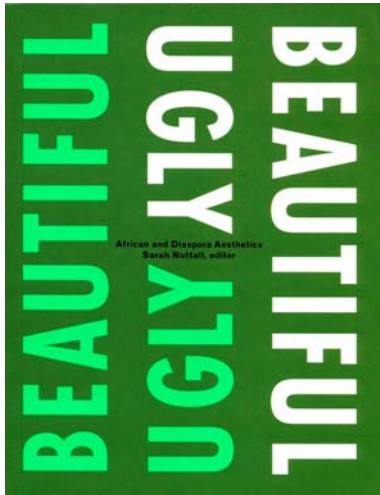


Beautiful/Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics / Edited by Sarah Nuttall.—Durham, NC: Duke University Press, February 2007.—416 p.: ill.—ISBN 0-8223-3918-8 (pa., alk. paper): \$27.95.



In this anthology, scholars, writers, educators and artists examine beauty and its often-neglected counterpart, ugliness, as they appear in all aspects of post-colonial African and diaspora life. Editor Sarah Nuttall, associate professor of literary and cultural studies at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, has gathered a unique group of authors as diverse as the subjects and geography they address. Interwoven with short stories and an interview, the essays consider interpretations of varied African aesthetics in Africa, the African diaspora, and the West—from the United States to South Africa, to the Congo, Mozambique and Brazil.

As Nuttall states, this book is not an art historical study. Nevertheless, and perhaps for this reason, it is an indispensable resource for students as well as established scholars in the field. Nuttall's introduction provides an excellent survey of recent publications in aesthetics. Along with Simon Gikandi's essay "Picasso, Africa and the Schemata of Difference," it sets the tone for the more esoteric portions of the anthology. The only work in the collection

published elsewhere, Gikandi's article provides a highly relevant discussion of the influence of African art on Picasso, the artist's relationship to the African body, and the advent of primitivism in Western art. The refutation of Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty*, a Western scholar's endeavor to re-introduce beauty into scholarly discourse, is another major theme of these essays. In direct response to Scarry, Rita Barnard and Patricia Pinho encourage readers to consider beauty in the specific contexts of culture, geography, and history, rather than as a universal, isolated, even "metaphysical" concept that emanates from the object of beauty itself.

The visual and narrative elements of the book would appeal to wider audiences, especially artists, writers, and college students seeking a broader global perspective and information on contemporary African artists. A photographic essay of the residential architecture of Mozambique accompanies two stories by Mia Couto. Pippa Stein lyrically details the reconfiguration of waste into beautiful dolls by children living in extreme poverty. Many such images of material culture, some from the authors' personal collections, appear in this book along with works by South African artists William Kentridge and Rodney Place. These reproductions, however, include only basic rights information, rather than full citations. Notes for each essay, some followed by additional references, and an index are also included.

Megan Macken, Assistant Director, Visual Resources Collection, University of Chicago,
mmacken@uchicago.edu

Copyright © 2007 ARLIS/NA