

Delinda Collier. 2016. *Repainting the Walls of Lunda: Information Colonialism and Angolan Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 253 pp.

Delinda Collier's *Repainting the Walls of Lunda* is a book about a book; more specifically, it is a meticulous examination of the motivations, interventions, and legacies of a mid-century study of Chokwe murals by Portuguese anthropologist, Jose Redinha, entitled *Paredes Pintadas da Lunda* (*Painted Walls of Lunda*, 1953). The seemingly tight focus of the study, however, is immensely generative, opening onto a broad field of inquiry that exposes the enmeshing of art, media, and political processes, muddies the periodization of Africa's "colonial" and "post-colonial" eras, offers new insights into socialist art making in the "Third World," and challenges the romantic, racist stereotype of what Collier succinctly and effectively calls "the myth of analog Africa"—the enduring perception of the continent as "unmediated," "natural," and "primitive" (p. 75).

Collier's text uses the production, circulation, and ultimate dispersal of *Paredes Pintadas da Lunda* to reveal the process of what she terms remediation or the ways in which "media objects transact colonialism" (p. 2). The familiar understanding of "remediation" as a process of remedying that which is considered deleterious here gains a secondary, apposite connotation. Collier identifies the production of media objects motivated by a desire to halt,

or re-write certain narratives (the disappearance of “traditional” Chokwe culture, the forging of anti-colonial nationalism, the “correction” of colonialist endeavors, etc.) that both remediate and *re*-mediate; that is, they seek to correct/rewrite via a new medium that consumes that which went before. This concept of “remediation,” first made visible through Redinha’s attempted pinning down of Chokwe *sona* drawings via his own autographed paintings published in a static, printed book (the act itself predicated on the conceit that *sona* were pure, unmediated “traditional” images), is a significant contribution to both histories of African art in the twentieth century, and to methodological approaches to the latter. Attention to “remediation” demands that scholars look beyond the content of images to the significant surfaces on which they are rendered, the specific sources from which they have drawn, the manner in which they “recode” (p. 173) such sources and the networks in which they are embroiled. *Repainting the Walls of Lunda* is, thus, as much an invaluable history of Angolan artistic practice since mid-century, as it is an exemplary study of the ways in which walls, canvases, printed pages, screens, and other “media technologies” obsolesce and are obsolesced, and the material, political legacies of such processes.

Repainting the Walls of Lunda is a stratigraphic study; it excavates layers of reproductive media that have presented, represented, and displaced Chokwe artistic practices since mid-century. Tellingly, Collier’s starting point for this study was the 2006 website for the first *Trienal de Luanda*, on which the original plates of *Paredes Pintadas da Lunda* had been appropriated, digitally altered (to remove the signature of Redinha, held up as embodiment of Angola’s formal colonial masters), and repackaged via the supposedly “democratic” medium of the internet. The website declared itself to be an “anti-colonial” gesture. As Collier reveals, however, it did not so much wrest Chokwe artistic practice out of colonialist hands and return it to the people as to further disperse Redinha’s earlier intervention: the Trienal website “[converted] the media object of colonial capital, the book, into an even more ephemeral media operation, the...Internet” (p. 216). Taking this radical dematerialization as a starting point, Collier traces the evolution of *Paredes Pintadas da Lunda* that leads to this point. This journey takes us from the extractive operations of the Portuguese diamond mining company, Diamang, for whose museum in Lunda Redinha produced his original text, through the post-independence years of civil conflict, in which anti-colonial artists (most notably, and eloquently, Vitor Manuel “Viteix” Teixeira) used painting to “remediate” Chokwe symbols in pursuit of a new nation, through to a postwar era in which contemporary art is burgeoning under the sponsorship of an African business elite that have benefited from Angola’s immensely rich natural resources and export economy.

Repainting the Walls of Lunda provides many new insights into three seminal eras in Angola’s modern history. Collier’s study of Diamang reveals the company’s mobilization of photography not simply as propaganda, but as extension of its colonialist apparatus. Her explication of Angola’s anti-colonial artists’ embrace of the socialist “New Man,” and of the latter as “a type of networked discourse” (p. 136) intervenes in global histories of Cold War-era culture, which so often remain limited to tracing Soviet imperialism or deriding derivative socialist art. And, finally, in its mapping of the country’s shifting art scene amidst a tumultuous economy of diamonds, oil, and the global networks in which resultant capital flows, *Repainting the Walls of Lunda* helps us to better understand the rapid growth of Luanda as a burgeoning global art city. In confronting both long-standing misconceptions

and urgent contemporary phenomena, the contributions of Collier's book to histories of art, media, technology, and colonialism in Africa are manifold.

Kate Cowcher, *University of St. Andrews*