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Splendid Isolation. Art of Easter Island (Review)

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However, although the format suits the scope of the subject, it requires some digging on the part of one who wishes to learn about a single population. For example, according to the index, references to Easter Island appear on 46 pages scattered throughout the book.



Splendid Isolation. Art of Easter Island

Eric Kjellgren

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Yale University Press, New Haven & London. 2001. \$19.95.

ISBN 0-300-09078-1

Review by Paul G. Bahn

THE SMALL EXHIBITION at New York's Metropolitan Museum (see review by Norman Hurst, *RNJ* 16:60-62) has given rise to a slim but beautifully produced catalogue, which is certainly worth buying for the photographs of so many fine and rare objects. Its text, on the other hand, leaves much to be desired.

There are three short essays, the first a general introduction by Eric Kjellgren, the second is an account of the *moai* by Jo Anne Van Tilburg, and the third an overview of the island's art by Adrienne Kaeppler. They are followed by the annotated catalogue of the exhibition's fifty objects.

It is particularly shameful and baffling that the catalogue of an exhibition on Easter Island art, published by one of the world's leading art museums, should pointedly ignore the basic texts on its subject – such as Heyerdahl's monumental *The Art of Easter Island* (1976), or the two leading works on the island's wooden carvings: Joan Seaver Kurze's *Ingrained Images* (1997) and Catherine and Michel Orliac's *Bois Sculptés de l'île de Pâques* (1995).

Surely, anyone interested enough in the exhibition to buy this catalogue may well wish to delve more deeply into the subject of the island's art, but the book provides them with little help, by omitting numerous major works from the references. Instead, the bibliography seems to have a different purpose – it comprises 56 entries, no less than 14 of which (25%!) have been written by Van Tilburg and Kaeppler. To be fair, it is titled a "Selected Bibliography", and it is pretty obvious who did the selecting...

Kjellgren has clearly relied on Van Tilburg's 1994 book, and on little else, for his general background information on Easter Island, and this inevitably has some unfortunate consequences. Readers of the *RNJ* may recall (1995, 9:32-34) the wide variety of unreliable facts in that book, and some of its innumerable errors have found their way into this one: for example, the *tatora* reed is called *Scirpus* instead of *Scirpus* (p. 60); and Kjellgren's claim (p. 13) that the island is 1000 miles from eastern Polynesia and 1400 miles from Chile is clearly derived from the figures in Van Tilburg's book (p. 46), where she has the correct numbers (1400 and 2300), but mistakenly says they are kilometres rather than miles. Hence Kjellgren has turned her kilometre figures into miles, and thus compounded the original error!

One is also somewhat startled to find that for "palaeobotanical evidence for the island's forests" (p. 13), the reader is not referred to the seminal work of John Flenley, but instead to a page of Van Tilburg's book. And similarly, for the

rongorongo phenomenon (p. 77), the reader is not referred to Fischer's exhaustive tome on the subject (although, by some miracle, it is listed in the bibliography), but once again to a page in Van Tilburg's book. There is clearly a definite pattern here.

The catalogue has a number of errors and typos – for example, Kjellgren says (p. 13) that the palm forests were made up of *Jubea chilensis*, whereas the island's palm was merely a similar species, *Paschalococos disperta*; he describes the birdman petroglyphs (p. 18) as having tails; Mata Ngarau is misspelled as *ngara* throughout the book; Georgia Lee appears once as Grant Lee in the references; Stéphen-Chauvet's Christian name is mistakenly given as Charles throughout; the long discredited story of islanders being carried off to guano mines appears several times; two pictures of Tepano are incorrectly described here as Juan Tepano (p. 38 – Kaeppler has explained the origin of this error in her apologetic letter to the *RNJ* (2002) 16:62). In addition, a number of Rapa Nui words are misspelled, as is *tatora* (as *totara*) on p. 60.

Doubtless the vast majority of visitors to the exhibition who buy this catalogue will not notice these errors, but it is a pity that so many different problems have crept into what is a very brief volume, and that an event and a book which could have been used to encourage numerous people to become interested in the island and its artistic heritage have been somewhat diverted from this course by other agendas, which have led to a highly partisan and unscholarly presentation that is characteristically ungenerous towards other specialists.



Pacific 2000: Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Easter Island and the Pacific.

Edited by Christopher M. Stevenson, Georgia Lee, and F. J. Morin. 2001, Easter Island Foundation. Los Osos, CA. (\$35) Paper; 8.5x11; 576 pages; photographs, maps, and drawings. ISBN 1-880636-18-2.

Review by Dave Tuggle

THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EASTER ISLAND was held at Kamuela, Hawai'i in August 2000. The *Pacific 2000 Proceedings* volume has appeared less than two years later. This is remarkable in its own right, but doubly so when considering that this duplicates the publication feat of the Fourth Conference (held in 1997, *Proceedings* printed in 1998). The editors and the Easter Island Foundation deserve some sort of reward for this record-breaking effort. As reviewer, I have no hesitation in suggesting that *RNJ* readers who have not already purchased the volume can reward the Foundation and themselves by sending in their order for this wonderful collection that consists of 56 papers by 75 authors (including the Keynote Address by Peter Bellwood), and 29 abstracts of papers that were not submitted for publication. (The Easter Island Foundation should also consider making this, and their other publications, available on CD-ROM.)

It is of some interest to see that Easter Island researchers have been expanding the boundaries of their comparative universe in great leaps. The first three International Conferences focused exclusively on Easter Island. The Fourth was "Easter