Turner’s watercolors that Turner’s work may be considered a precedent for Abstract Expressionism (p. 215).

The book has a useful index and footnotes, but, inexcusably, no bibliography. One also wonders about the current editorial practices at Oxford University Press when Goldstein, “in order to avoid excessive swelling in the notes”, omits the sources of his information on the dates of exhibitions but instead “beg[s] my readers to trust me on this important matter” (p. xv). Despite the author’s extensive research and his detailed knowledge of the gallery system, the shortcomings in the book are serious enough to limit its appeal and usefulness to economists.

MARTHA WHITE PAAS
Department of Economics,
Carleton College,
Northfield, Minnesota 55057, U.S.A.


This is a book about “tourist art”. The editors, at the time of publication, were, respectively, director of the Museum of Anthropology and professor of fine arts and anthropology at the University of British Columbia, and associate professor and director of Museum Studies at Connecticut College. Other chapters are by people ranging from a tribal chairman, to professors of anthropology or art history or gender studies or museum studies, to museum directors, researchers and curators in anthropology or ethnology and history. Several of the latter also hold professorships in one or more of the subjects listed. They represent expertise in Native American arts, including pottery, sandpaintings and basketry, South Indian potter-priests, Pre-Columbian art, Marquesan sculpture and tapa cloth, the arts of Nigeria, Zaire, Kenya and of the Mende of Sierra Leone, Yup’ik Eskimo coiled basketry, Toba Batak textiles, religious vestments of China, and Sepik River (New Guinea) art, and several have knowledge of dealing in such art.

Tourist art has replaced “primitive art” as a category. Primitive art was “discovered” by Cubists in the early twentieth century and adopted by collectors with a taste for the spare and the abstract. It stood for the very opposite of “classical” (figural, narrative art made according to certain rhetorical principles and following ancient sculptural models deemed to convey ideal beauty). It also had attached to it an attractive aura of the tribal, of mystery and of ritual. Primitive art flourished among western collectors for much of the remainder of the twentieth century, but it has become increasingly problematic as a category. One aspect of this is a growing awareness that “primitive” peoples have long made certain objects for
tourists. Though these had earlier been dismissed, there is now more unease about
the problem of distinguishing the truly “authentic” primitive piece from the piece
made for sale to foreigners. This practical difficulty, which of course affects the
value to be placed on uniqueness and aura, has become entwined with the concep-
tual difficulty that an outsider who comes into possession of an object made by
“primitive” peoples has no way of knowing for certain just what it signified in its
original context. The combination has rendered “authentic” a suspect notion. These
emerging changes in awareness were given a filip by the publication, in 1976, of a
book that celebrated tourist art, Ethnic and Tourist Arts. Its author, Nelson Graburn,
contributes an afterword to the volume under review which is, in one sense, a
quarter-century celebration of his invitation to be done with “primitiveness” and
authenticity. His subtitle is revealing: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World.
Graburn in effect invited researchers and others to focus not on western perceptions
but on the ways in which other peoples made objects as expressions of themselves.
That these objects were increasingly made for the tourist trade only meant that they
were both art object and commodities.

Yet, while the authors here no longer worry about whether “tourist art” is art, nor
do they care much about authenticity as such, they are greatly concerned with “the
clash and resolution of culturally different ideas about the nature of authenticity”
as it affects “cultural Others”. What is compelling for them are stories of struggle;
the struggles of cultural Others for “self-representation” and “self-identification” in
the face of the leveling and standardizing forces of the global market (alternatively
put, “repeating patterns of imperialist encounter and capitalist exchange”) (editors’
Introduction, pp. 3–4). The encounter, indeed, is central to the method here. The
authors do not uniformly condemn the impact of the market. Several acknowledge
tensions, but also accept that the market for tourist art creates income that might
not otherwise be available. What is regretted most is that during the processes
whereby “Western modes of commodity production” have inscribed themselves
on the lives and artistic activities of Others, typically there has been loss: the loss
of “indigenous patterns of value and meaning attached to objects” (pp. 4, 7).

Economists are familiar with the need, in making the case for free trade, to
take into account that there will normally be winners and losers. But the standard
argument that winners can in principle compensate losers rests on an assumption,
that both gains and losses can be measured along a common dimension, cost sav-
ings or price reductions. The writers here do not show any awareness of this line
of economic reasoning. But I suspect that if they encountered the argument they
would react by saying that it is altogether too narrow, precisely because it takes no
account of cultural value and meaning.

Economists can dismiss this concern, arguing as many do, that market price
subsumes all such factors – subjective, social, cultural, and so on, even if the econo-
mist has no way of identifying the degree to which each contributes to price. This
is unhelpful, particularly in a world where bean counters demand, as an essential
part of the process of divvying up public funds, that each contestant for support