



Remembering the Present: Painting and Popular History in Zaire

Johannes Fabian

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This book combines ethnography with the study of art to present a fascinating new vision of African history. It contains the paintings of a single artist depicting Zaire's history, along with a series of ethnographic essays discussing local history, its complex relationship to forms of self-expression and self-understanding, and the aesthetics of contemporary urban African and Third World societies. As a collaboration between ethnographer and painter, this innovative study challenges text-oriented approaches to understanding history and argues instead for an event- and experience-oriented model, ultimately adding a fresh perspective to the discourse on the relationship between modernity and tradition.

During the 1970s, Johannes Fabian encouraged Tshibumba Kanda Matulu to paint the history of Zaire. The artist delivered the work in batches, together with an oral narrative. Fabian recorded these statements along with his own question-and-answer sessions with the painter. The first part of the book is the complete series of 100 paintings, with excerpts from the artist's narrative and the artist-anthropologist dialogues. Part Two consists of Fabian's essays about this and other popular painting in Zaire. The essays discuss such topics as performance, orality, history, colonization, and popular art.

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