2016-2017

Xarxa Zande

Oriol Fontdevila

ARTS SANTA MÒNICA

Writing a biography of objects can be a very difficult task.

[a] Some time during the 20th century, a Zande hunter wove a net to hunt monkeys in the jungles of South Sudan.

[b] A European anthropologist took a copy of this hunting net to include it an ethnographic collection.

[c] William Rubin organised the exhibition Primitivism in 20th Century Art at the MoMA. He displayed a Kwakiutl mask alongside Picasso, trying to establish formal connections between modern and “primitive” art. The exhibition triggered a wave of criticism. Rubin was accused of judging the value of non-Western objects based on their affinity with modern aesthetics.

[d] In reaction to the MoMA exhibition, Susan Vogel opened Art/Artifact (1988) at the Center for African Art in New York. In the first room, she displayed a Zande hunting net alongside other objects of African origin. Vogel wanted to illustrate the debate surrounding the difficult limits between art and artefacts.

[e] Some visitors confused the hunting net with the work of a post-minimal artist.

[f] Arthur Danto tried to create order using the text of the Art/Artifact catalogue. Remaining faithful to the idea that it is the active agents of the art world who recognise objects as art, Danto denied the hunting net’s potential as a work of art. In his eagerness to differentiate between objects, he concluded that the net was a tool and nothing more. So, it belonged to the Natural History Museum and not the Art History Museum.

[g] In Vogel’s Net (1996), the anthropologist Alfred Gell reignited the controversy. Taking apart Danto’s arguments, he stated that the Zande hunting net, as a trap, perfectly portrayed the complex layers of subjectivity that may surround an object. This complexity and the capacity to trap multiple agencies is, precisely, the feature that characterises a work of art.

[h] At Arts Santa Mònica, a program curated by Oriol Fontdevila returns to the Zande hunting net. It is unfolded again so that various reflections can be triggered to redefine the place of the institution and of the artistic object itself, including all the relationships involved. The participants are: Roger Bernat, Black Tulip, Víctor García Tur, Hijos de Martín, Consol Llupià, Regina de Miguel, Objetologías, Gerard Ortín, Straddle3 and Petia Cervera Krupova.