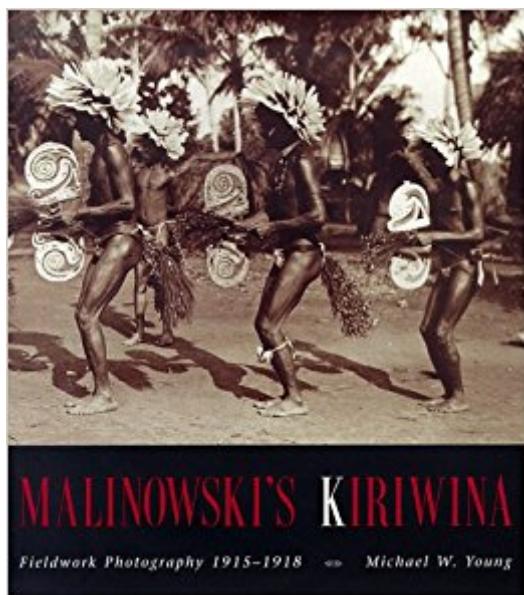


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Malinowski's Kiriwina: Fieldwork Photography 1915-1918



Synopsis

Kiriwina, the largest of the Trobriand Islands in eastern Papua New Guinea, is anthropology's "sacred place." It was here that Bronislaw Malinowski conducted the path-breaking fieldwork that enabled him to revolutionize British social anthropology. And it was here that he developed one of anthropology's most important tools: photography. Malinowski's Kiriwina presents nearly two hundred of Malinowski's previously unpublished photographs, taken between 1915 and 1918, of the Trobriand Islanders. The images are more than embellishments of his ethnography; they are a recreation in striking detail of a distant world. Michael Young, an anthropologist and Malinowski's authorized biographer, has selected the photographs based on one of Malinowski's unpublished studies of the region, and the plan of that abandoned project has helped structure this book. Divided into fourteen sections, Malinowski's Kiriwina is a series of linked photo-essays based on Trobriand institutions and cultural themes as described by Malinowski. The introductory essay by Young appraises the founding anthropologist's photographic oeuvre, explains the historical circumstances and technical aspects of the images, and puts them in their colonial context. Young illuminates the photographs with quotations from Malinowski's diaries, letters, and field notes, thereby giving a biographical dimension to the collection. Commentaries on the images by contemporary Trobrianders add a further layer of interpretation. The result is a stunning record not only of a fascinating place, but of the mutual relationship between ethnography and the visual.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

While World War I raged in his native Europe, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski was drawn to the tiny Trobriand Islands, also known as the Kiriwina Islands, in Papua New Guinea to learn and record the ways of the "sexual savages" there. Young has carefully collected the photographs and penned an essay on each one, explaining who is in the photos (Malinowski spent much time with the Trobrianders, and certain family members pop up periodically). Young also points out aspects of Malinowski's photography style: he didn't take individual close-ups; he rarely photographed tools or artifacts without people using them; and it's obvious the photographer got on famously with the natives. In general, this collection, though designed as a coffee-table book of photographs, is like an extended National Geographic visit to New Guinea. Young states that there do exist photos Malinowski took of actual sexual rites of the Trobrianders, but they're too lewd to appear here. No matter. This travelogue through the Trobriand Islands is still an interesting one for those who decide to take it. Joe Collins

...the engagingly written text and colorful quotations ... will make it a pleasure for the general reader.
-- The New York Times Book Review, Suzanne MacNeill

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