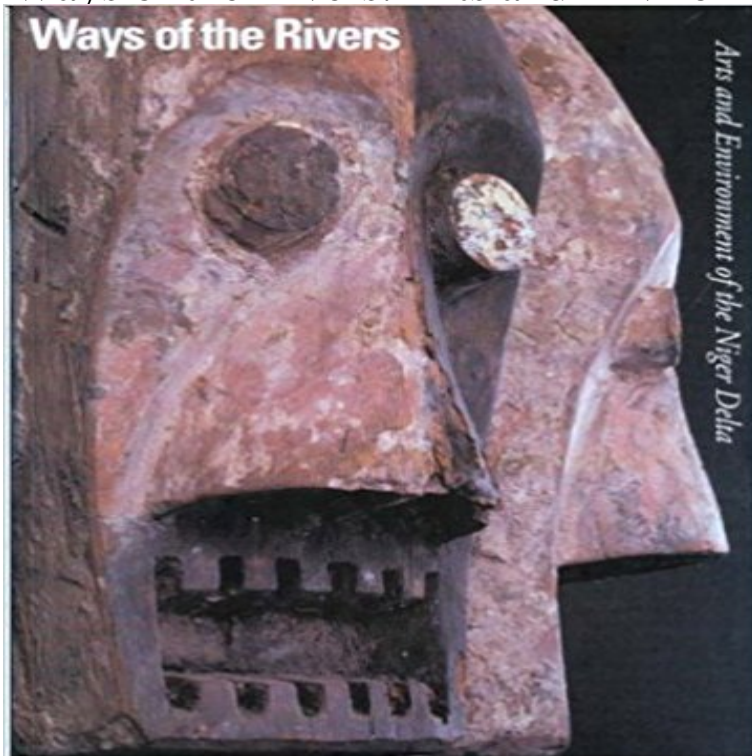


Ways of the Rivers: Arts and Environment of the Niger Delta



An intricate maze of rivers and islands cuts across southern Nigeria's Niger Delta, a region subject to floods, tides, and tropical downpours that continually alter its geography. While these waterways serve to separate the many ethnic groups dwelling in this aqueous environment - each with its own unique cultural traditions and often its language - they have also long been employed as routes of transmission and trade. Delta men and women traversed the region in canoes long before the Portuguese arrived at its shores in the fifteenth century. Their ideas and art forms - including some of the largest wood sculptures and most vibrant masquerades in all of Africa - travelled with them, being adopted, adapted, and sometimes appropriated in the process. European influence has also been keenly felt, and Western artifacts and articles of dress appear in shrines, regalia, and masquerades. The essays assembled in this lavishly illustrated volume are unique in considering issues of cultural convergence and divergence within a single region in Africa. They examine and celebrate the water-related ethos and the warrior ethos that are present throughout the Delta and explore the influence of its unique environment on beliefs and material culture. Sadly, in the twentieth century the delicate ecosystems of the Niger Delta have suffered greatly as a result of the modern drilling technology employed by Western oil companies. While garnering huge profits, these firms have undermined the environment and deprived the Delta's inhabitants of basic necessities such as fresh fish and potable water. Despite these depredations the people of the Delta persevere, and the incredibly beautiful and varied works of art that appear in this volume are a testament to their history of inventiveness, adaptability, and courage. Recently published by the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History Art of the

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