



Guitar Makers: The Endurance of Artisanal Values in North America

Kathryn Marie Dudley

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It whispers, it sings, it rocks, and it howls. It expresses the voice of the folk—the open road, freedom, protest and rebellion, youth and love. It is the acoustic guitar. And over the last five decades it has become a quintessential American icon. Because this musical instrument is significant to so many—in ways that are emotional, cultural, and economic—guitar making has experienced a renaissance in North America, both as a popular hobby and, for some, a way of life.

In *Guitar Makers*, Kathryn Marie Dudley introduces us to builders of artisanal guitars, their place in the art world, and the specialized knowledge they've developed. Drawing on in-depth interviews with members of the lutherie community, she finds that guitar making is a social movement with political implications. Guitars are not simply made—they are born. Artisans listen to their wood, respond to its liveliness, and strive to endow each instrument with an unforgettable tone. Although professional luthiers work within a market society, Dudley observes that their overriding sentiment is passion and love of the craft. Guitar makers are not aiming for quick turnover or the low-cost reproduction of commodities but the creation of singular instruments with unique qualities, and face-to-face transactions between makers, buyers, and dealers are commonplace.

In an era when technological change has pushed skilled artisanship to the margins of the global economy, and in the midst of a capitalist system that places a premium on ever faster and more efficient modes of commerce, Dudley shows us how artisanal guitar makers have carved out a unique world that operates on alternative, more humane, and ecologically sustainable terms.

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