

## L'art nègre comme composant de l'art contemporain

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Back in 1920 in filling out the questionnaire the sculptor Jacques Lipchitz said; " Certes, l'art des nègres nous fut un grand exemple. Leur vraie compréhension de la proportion, leur sentiment du dessin, leur sens aigu de la réalité nous fait entrevoir, oser même, beaucoup de choses. Mais il serrait erroné de croire que notre art pour cela soit devenu mulâtre. Il est bien blanc".

Il est blanc. Or is it?

The works written on the genesis of present-day fiction deal with, in one way or another, the direct or indirect influence Africa's traditional art exercises upon Europe's art.

While this phenomenon (influence is but a conventional name for it) is fairly apparent in the various spheres of the arts ( ranging from popular music and dances to ballet and design), the bulk of the research works still deal with representational art's metamorphoses, primarily with Cubism's history and forerunners. J. Laude's famous book "La peinture française (1905-1914) et l'art nègre", in particular, identifies the turning points traced in the formative process of representational art's new movements and the place "l'art nègre" takes in it. The topic is important in that it is linked up with one of the more pressing problems faced by modern culture studies, for in examining the topic "discoverz of l'art nègre" we attempt to unearth some of the parameters inherent in the process that can be basically described as the absorption by the industrial and urbanistic socium of the aesthetic

potential organic to the traditional (non-European) arts. And this phenomenon is but one of episodic manifestations of the general process of cultural integration.

Now that the presence of the African component in the world's arts is evident, we can safely affirm that l'art nègre discovered by French, German and Russian artists, art researchers and collectors in the early 20th century just cannot be explained away as a fad. A fad is a secondary and zesty manifestation of a phenomenon which does not necessarily appear superficial. And today we are yet to penetrate the mystery of the enigmatic acculturation in the sphere of art, where a less advanced (primary) representational culture has proved to dominate the arts.

Various authors have a keen eye for the distinctive features of l'art nègre, while they often fail to see the paradox of the phenomenon that embraces seemingly mutually excluding properties: primitive heaviness and refined sophistication, pristine simplicity and exquisite quality, utterly laconic and polysemantic plastic structures. (In passing, we can say that it was the African sculpture's capacious and laconic qualities that, according to Lipchitz, made it possible for the sculpture to "combine 20 forms on one" had attracted the avantgardist artists' attention. )

What is the explanation for l'art nègre's contradictory properties that combine to render it infinitely younger and, at the same time, infinitely older than professional art? The answer seems to be as follows: this art is the final stage of the development of primeval syncretic culture.



It stands to reason that when we talk about the youth of traditional art, we point up only its stage of evolution. This art's sophisticated ideoplasticity and refinement is a result of its unusually lengthy evolutionary process that has originated back in the Orignac caves. The much admired laconic and expressive features of the Dogon, Senufo, Fang and Bakota sculpted pieces crystallized over dozens of millenia dates back to the rock pictures and other early forms of representational art.

It is common knowledge that some traditional societies continue now to do rock drawings: for example, in the Songo region the Dogons make rock pictures that are similar to those which have survived in Air and Idrar-Iforas. On the other hand, we know that prior to the Europeans' arrival in Africa early state formations had existed there and some of the traditional societies had been close to inventing writing. The latter accounts for the ideoplastic features of traditional art, which can be said to have been pregnant with writing. The available data suggest that as early as the 15th-16th centuries Africa's syncretic culture was about to take its final form. The evidence to that effect is also provided by the emergence in local representational art of naturalistic trends, which, as a rule, usher in a new cycle, in particular, one of formative statehood (just compare it to the art of Ife and Benin).

It follows that we have no reasons to attribute the emergence of those naturalistic trends to Europe's influence. The works of European art that surfaced in Africa at that time could

have a catalytic effect only where the groundwork had been adequately laid. This, surely, does not rule out its effect as such.

Mutual penetration of cultures is a feature typical of present-day industrial and urbanistic civilization. In the 20th century African art has become a component of the world's artistic process increasingly more visibly affected by Afro-American, Brazilian and other cultures that include a large variety of l'art nègre elements, and l'art nègre shapes the potential of the world's modern arts and culture among other art movements.

On the other hand, African art has become part and parcel of the world's culture today as a result of the development and modernization of Africa's aspects of life in their totality and as a result of its professional creative activities still in the formative process.