A STUDY OF AFRICAN NEGRO ART
AND ITS INFLUENCE ON MODERN ART

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INTRODUCTION
When western art first came upon African art — in its frantic search for something that would prove anti-podal to standard schools and theories — it found something more than it was looking for. It found an art so full of vitality as to be startling and yet that art ran contrary to the usual method of representing natural forms, which had come to be accepted as being integral with art. Here was an art that was alive, and so alive that each work seemed to await the spring of kinetic energy to set it into living motion. Here was an art which dared to be nude, making no exception to any anatomical detail, and yet retaining the dignity of a religious art — perhaps its dignity lay in the fact that each work was religious in inspiration despite its nudity. Here was an art of angles and curves, of cubes and other geometrical clashes that conformed to nothing hitherto known in the civilized world. Here was an art which made the connoisseur look twice and study long.

Like other migratory arts it found its way from its primitive folk origins to other like peoples who had built frontiers in the darkest part of Africa far removed from its Arabic and Egyptian origins.

Its form was originally determined by backward and remote tribes. Some of the productions of this artistic style were made in towns that had a highly organized court life. But even the productions of these courts were still closely related stylistically to the productions of the backward communities.

Africa comprised a group of tribes and city states, up to the time of their conquest, and submission by the Europeans. The first important point for our consideration is the civilization of the people living south of the semitic line. This line is generally considered as running from the eastern boundary of Egypt, across its southern boundary, up its
western boundary to the Sahara desert – and on across that desert to the sea. The people south of this line are more truly Negroid than those farther north. A true line of demarcation would be virtually impossible because of race amalgamation centuries old.

The civilization level of these people has been called savage. This term probably arises out of the general customs of the people, and a kind of European propaganda justifying the slave trade set up there, together with the European exploitation of their mineral wealth. It may be accepted that the people were, and had been, in a state of savagery as compared with some of the elements of western civilization. Savagery may however, be the foundations of a culture that sometimes can reach great heights. Above a certain cultural level Europeans cease to call it "Savage".

By the norms of European civilization it may be accepted that the people of the Congo and Niger basins as well as areas farther south were and are savages. The kinship-family and tribe formed the basis of society and the witch doctor was still the motivating force in the tribe. Even cannibalistic superstitions existed in some of the tribes. These people, living in small thatched-roof houses were generally nomadic and due to climatic factors, they had little use for body garments. These elements and others contributed to the attributes of savagery according to European interpretation.

As we have indicated, comparatively high cultural levels may arise from savagery. In Africa, there were two cultural centers far removed from direct European influences, that built walled cities with broad thoroughfares, erected adobe structures into fine palaces and public
buildings.

There were many tribes, small and large. All of them were not so sophisticated as to have built large urban centers but they all had some form of social organization based on religion, the tribal head and the family. Some of these tribes eventually developed great city states from a beginning of savagery. Among the best known were, Benin, Ifé and Dahomey. Sculpture, being a vital part of the religion, was found in all of the tribes, its form, subject and style being based on age old traditions. It is interesting to note that the height of the civilization saw no break-down in the traditions; instead it eventuated in these traditions being used in more and different materials. It is this art that confronted the twentieth century artist in his search for a different approach to an age old subject.
THE
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
The best known of these African kingdoms centered at Benin. Other kingdoms producing art of importance were the Gold coast, the Ivory coast, Nigeria, the Cameroon district, the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, the Sudan, Angola, Tanganyika, Rhodesia, and the Bushongo region. Of these regions, it was the district around the central western section that produced the best and the most art. In the southern district are found the paintings of the Bushmen, although sculpture is present in all districts.

It is hard to determine what effect the rise of civilization had on the African wood carver. Where the greatest cultures are found, there usually is found an influence from Europe as well. The art products in these places seem to be for the most part, more refined. On the other hand, there are sections in which great cultures arose, where the art products as we see them now, exemplify the African ideals without any European influence, and yet it is known that Europeans had visited there.

In the Yorubaland, two countries, Benin and Ife, show influences that can be called European. Even though the art expresses the African ideal, there is a certain attitude on the part of the designer that indicates European influence. In the terra-cottas and bronzes from Ife, the heads represent races from the Semitic to the Negroid. On the other hand in the Songhai, there is to be seen only the pure Negroid features usually representing a fetish, an idol or an ancestral figure. It is

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1) e.g., the art products from Benin and Ife.
2) This is the best exemplified by the work of two sections, Yorubaland and the Songhai region.
in this section, not only the Songhai, but throughout the Sudan, that a
form comparable to university life was fairly extensive. Scholars came
from all over Europe to teach and study in its schools and in some cases
the Negro scholars were more outstanding than the Arabian. Some of
these universities were equal in ambition of undertaking and attainment
of culture, to the leading European universities of the time. Still
there is little if any influence of Europe on this art. Can it be sup-
posed that the highly cultured civilizations produced these fetishes and
idols that we now know? This is hard to conceive; it must be left to
later historians and ethnologists to straighten this out.

The greater cultures arose on the west coast and in the western re-
gions. The southwest regions have also produced many notable works of
art, but these have evidenced no indications of as high a culture level
as is seen in the other regions. It is interesting to note that most of
these countries and cultures have been known to travellers for several
centuries. "It was usually from travellers in the interior and traders
that the more striking descriptions came; for example, of the great
Negroid kingdom of Ghana which in the tenth and eleventh centuries ex-
tended from Senegal across the bend of the Niger; of Melle the successor
to Ghana in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; and of the Songhai
empire of Gao which arose from the ruins of Melle to touch the zenith
of its power in the sixteenth century when it extended from Lake Chad to
the Atlantic. To the north lay the Haussa states which grew out of the
seven towns of Biram, Gober, Kano, Rano, Zaria, Katsena and Daura, and
were originally peopled by a Negro race, apparently related to the early

17 Calverton, V.F., "The Negroes' Heritage", Catholic World, vol. 149,
April 1939, p. 100.
Songhai.... Farther south along the coast lay the kingdom of Yoruba. At its height it comprised the whole region between the lower Niger on to the east as far as, and including, Ashantiland on the west. And among the native civilizations of Africa it is with reference to an outgrowth of Yoruba, the kingdom of Great-Benin, that we possess the fullest documentation.  

The art of Benin has probably been magnified in importance because it has been known for a longer time than any other African kingdom.

The outstanding art productions as we know them today are mostly bronze representations although some sculpture in clay and wood was done. These were made for the royalty, in connection with ancestor worship and religious fetishes. Of the loot that the British brought from Benin in 1865, there were over 2400 pieces of bronze sculpture. All that the British Museum could afford to buy was 289 pieces. The Dresden Museum purchased 1085 pieces. The rest was acquired by private collectors.

It is very difficult to classify the objects as far as chronology is concerned. Although the difficulties of dating the work is fully realized, there are those who have designated certain periods to the bronzes of Benin. Among these is Bernard Struck. By his classification the art of Benin may be traced through the following styles:

The Archaic period (1140-1360)
The Ancient Period (1360-1500)
The Classical period (1500-1691)

1) Sweeny, J.J., African Negro Art, P. 13
2) Ibid, P.14
Very little has been written on the first period. Frobenius, in the latter part of the last century, was the first to call attention to African art although he treated the subject from a non-aesthetic viewpoint. It was left to the artists of the early twentieth century to discover the aesthetic value of African art. These artists had no interest in the historical side of the art and if they had been interested, it is doubtful if their inquisitiveness would have been rewarded because the works they knew, (particularly the French artists) were picked up from the junk dealers who, if they knew anything of the past history of these art subjects, gained their knowledge from unreliable sources.¹ The German artists knew more of the origin of this art as their examples usually came from museums, but even the ethnologists had little interest in the historical background of the objects.²

II

Due north of Benin and still among the Yoruba people is the city of Ife. It was here that Frobenius carried out an extensive excavation in 1910. Among his findings are many interesting bronzes and terra cottas, "Dating his finds back to the first millennium B.C., he attempts to establish connection between Yorubaland and ancient Mediterranean cultures of the time and basing assumptions largely on comparisons, he drew attention to the ornamental treatment of the headdress of the Olokun head and compared it with similar treatment in Mycenaean, Sardinian, and Etruscan representations. He found similarities between Yoruba and Etruscan cultures by comparing their methods of house construction, their

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¹ Sweeney, J.J., op. cit., p. 12.
² Goldwater, R.J., Primitivism in modern painting, p. 87
³ Meyerowitz, H., op. cit., p. 151
The figures from Ife show more European influence than any of the African art. The representations are more naturalistic, being mostly portraiture. Even though this is true, their method of workmanship is truly Africanesque. "It is tempting to think that this may represent a Negro art not yet dominated by religion, but one which attained a great sense of style and achieved great plastic harmony."¹

The use of the cire perdue method for casting is believed to have been used here earlier than in Benin. As Fry has said, a great sense of style and plastic harmony had been achieved. Meyerowitz also is of the opinion that, "The Ife heads are masterpieces and could not technically be improved upon. The terra-cotta heads are possibly models for cire perdue casts, for they are of a similar material to that which is used for the core of the cire perdue moulds. Possibly at one time or another there was a shortage of metal or wax and therefore these portrait heads were modelled in terra-cotta clay and stored away until the next casting. In fact the terra cotta took the place of the plaster of paris models of the present day sculptor."²

"Whatever may be said of the slight stylistic differences one thing is quite certain; that these bronze heads and most of the terra-cotta heads were made by artists working for an established court. However stylized, they are obviously 'similar' portraits with an amazingly sensitive surface treatment and a clear plastic construction which compares very favourably with portraits of aristocrats of the Echnaton (Iknaton?) and Thut-en-Kamen (Tutenkhamon?) period of Egypt."²

¹ Fry, Roger, Last Lectures, p.83
² Meyerowitz, H., op.cit., p.152
East of Ife with its principle city of Abomey is the kingdom of Dahomey. At one time this kingdom probably enjoyed a culture of as great an importance and grandeur as did Benin and Ife. It thrived on the slave trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the two Americas and the Caribbean Islands; it also was a great warring nation. It is here incidentally that Amazon fighters played a great part in the build-up and maintenance of the kingdom.

The art of Dahomey is mostly of a religious nature, as is that of other parts of Africa; but for the most part, it is kept out of view from the casual traveller or trader. It is with much difficulty that one can see the art, let alone persuade the natives to part with it.¹

Possibly this is the reason that early travellers such as Sir Richard Burton said that the Negro had no idea of the beautiful, that he had evolved no art form and that the art he did have was ungraceful and grotesque.² Later travellers though, such as the Herskovits¹, have told of art and art forms that attain great heights. "Here were the vast compounds that housed the kings and princes with walls decorated in bas-reliefs that from ancient days were the prerogative of royalty and high rank. Here the annual customs for the souls of the royal ancestors were held, when the wealth of the king in clothes and gold, silver and brass figures were massed that all might see and seeing be impressed. Here, too, were the most important temples to the Gods - the vodun - with their priests and retainers, and here the most elaborate of religious ceremonies were witnessed".³

3) Herskovits, M.J., op. cit., p. 67
It is the fault of the writers on the subject that wood is always thought of in connection with African art. The courts had need of different types of art as well as different kinds of artists. There are indications also that the art produced at one time has ceased to exist, both in quantity and quality, although recent explorers seem to refute this idea. "For when the teeming population supported long dynasties, the courts of the monarchs had need of all kinds; where there was an economic order that made for leisure and specialization, there was no lack of men to devote their talents to the arts. In all of West Africa and the Congo, then, these arts existed as they still exist."\(^1\)

These writers say that it is naïve to believe that whenever any civilization, designated by such a word as primitive, comes in contact with a European culture, that it becomes weak. The culture of Dahomey exists in much the same manner as it always has. Moreover, there are many other materials used by these people besides wood. Metals such as iron, bronze, and silver have occupied important places in the Dahoman culture for centuries.\(^2\)

In earlier times, emphasis was put on animal representation, because kings and ancestors were worshipped by the use of animals. The reason for this use of animal forms is revealed in an ancient folk tale.

In the earlier days there were many figures of men represented by the sculptors. Everyone in the village owned some representation of a figure. The more wealthy a man was, the more figures he was likely to own. It came to pass, after many years, that the children began to die soon after they were born. Soon there were no more children left in the

1) Ibid.
2) Ibid. p. 68
village. The king became perturbed over the condition and sent for a diviner to ask the gods the reason for the death of the children. The answer given by the gods was, that man could not have children and the image of man also, but he could have his choice as to the one he would rather have. From that time on, when the sculptor wished to represent an ancestor or a king it was done by using an animal figure. Lion, buffalo, and elephant figures became the official representations of the kings. This taboo on the human figure, in contrast to Mohammedan usage, was only in connection with religious art. Because of the ban on the figure in religious art, it entered the secular art. Here it was used as ornament on benches, stools, combs and in any way objects of ornamentation could beautify the home. ¹

These works are to be found in the average compound much in the same manner that the genre figure was to be found in the eighteenth and nineteenth century European home.

All emissaries visiting Abomey, the capital of Dahomey, were carried to the great treasury house and shown the riches of the king. He loved to show his wealth. These ministers would be given two or three of the brass figures from the treasury house so that they might carry them home and tell the homefolk what a great place the kingdom of Dahomey was.

Besides the sculptors, the native workers in cloth are important in Dahomey. The natives say, "Thanks to man that our gods are finely clothed."² This is a fit statement, for the native spends much time in

¹) Ibid., p.67
²) Ibid., p.71
making clothes for the different rituals - religion seems to tie up
with every act of these people.

Applique cloth designs are used in many different ways. The Umbrella,
always highly decorated, is the symbol of high office as it was in the
Mediterranean and far Eastern civilizations. Friendship is institu-
tionalized and when a friend dies, there is much ritual that requires the
use of applique designs.

Many traditional carvings, religious and secular are important in
the makeup of the everyday life of the Dahomean. Besides the re-
ligious customs which require carved figures, there are many personal
charms that most natives possess.

The carver in this tribe usually comes from a family long known as
carvers. Not all of the works produced, as is to be expected, are of
the same value. The gods favor those works which are the best.
Usually if the gods have shown favor to one man in particular, in
order not to incur jealousy from his fellow carvers, he will fashion
an indifferently good work to represent the wife of Legba. This is
usually viewed by most of the tribe. Behind the closed doors of his
compound, he will lavish all of his skill on some family fetish which
is not for the eyes of other members of the tribe. If he is interest-
ed in adding to his personal income, he may be indifferent or careless
in executing his family fetishes, and spend his time working on a com-
mission.

The carver does not hold an envied position in the life of the
tribe. His fellows feel that he doesn't have the prudence needed to
1) Ibid., p.71
build a fortune from his works because he is usually too independent. It seems that temperamental artists belong not only to modern civilization. In the days of the great kings it was necessary, when they desired to have any carving done, to capture a sculptor and keep him under guard, if the king was to be assured of having the work completed. Even with these methods, the artists worked slowly and leisurely.¹

There are relatively few figures from Dahomey in European collections because of the difficulty of acquiring them. In Nigeria, works can be bought outright, but in Dahomey there must be much bargaining. M.J. and F.S. Herskovits spent four months in Dahomey before they even saw any sculpture and it was another month before they could purchase any. After buying the sculpture, it has to be replaced with an exact replica which one must have carved.²

As for its antiquity, no great claim can be made for the wood carving. The treatment of sacrifices such as coating with blood and corn meal and many other factors make for the disintegration of this sculpture. One need not reckon with time in considering the figures since the subjects, the techniques, and the designs are centuries old, having been handed down from generation to generation. It is the custom for the older members of the family to teach the younger ones to draw the formal designs in the sand at an early age. They grow up with the designs deeply instilled in their minds.³ "Yet in a sense, the date is of small significance. The important point is that these works do

1) Ibid
2) Ibid., p.130
3) Locke, Alaine, "A collection of Congo Art", The Arts, February 1927
3) vol. 11, p.63
not represent a moribund art, but are a part of a contributing tradition that has thus far not given way to European influences.\textsuperscript{1}

The artist has evolved many ways of adapting and changing the traditionalized forms that have been passed down to him by preceding generations. The designs are more of an incentive or a starting point from which he bases his conceptions of the figure. The result is as interesting as those executed years before.

IV

Besides the larger kingdoms already mentioned there are many smaller ones scattered throughout central Africa. The more important of these kingdoms are to be found on the west coast; some of importance however, are to be found far into the interior, even as far as the east coast.\textsuperscript{2} At the present time all of them are European possessions.

The country is divided into large political divisions such as, for example, the French Sudan. This in turn is divided into many smaller political sub-divisions; the Ivory coast, the Gold coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, French and Portuguese Guinea, Gambia, and the Bisogas Islands. These sub-divisions house many smaller tribes, some crowded and scattered far apart from one another. In the upper Sudan region are such tribes as the Gao, Songhai, Fula, Mossi, Bobo and other smaller, less important ones.

On the Gold Coast are the Ashanti and the Fanti tribes; the Ivory Coast - the Baloue, Guro and the Enufa tribes. In Liberia is the Dan

\textsuperscript{1} Herskovits, M.J., \textit{op. cit.}, p.131
\textsuperscript{2} Sweeney, J.J., \textit{op. cit.}; see map
tribe which produced some of the important masks. Still eastward in Sierra Leone, the Mendi and Temne tribes are located. In French Guinea are the Fouta-Djallon and Bogas tribes. These tribes are the most important of the Sudan district on the west coast.¹

Because of the many tribes in the Sudan it is hard to designate a singular typical art form for the entire region. There are no common bonds to be noted that fit all of the tribes. For the most part though, the art found here is elongated. It makes frequent use of straight lines and pointed projections, flat planæ and sharp edges.²

Another large political division, not as immense as the Sudan region, is Nigeria. Benin and Ifé are located in this section. The Efik, Ibo, Nupe, Fula, Bornu and the Haussa tribes are to be found here as well. Under the control of the British, most of these tribes and their works are better known than those of other sections because of publicity.

The Cameroon district, located below British Nigeria on the west coast is made up of the following tribes: M'Bum, BaMum, BaKoto, and the Fumban.

The Congo district is broken into three political divisions; the Belgian, the French, and the Angolan, the Belgian Congo being the largest. Its important tribes are: Bangala, Sa Porto, Mangbetu, Azande, Ruanda, Mongo, Kundu, Bassongo Meno, WaRegga, Wazimba, and many smaller and less important ones. In the French Congo, is the important region of Gabun in which are such important tribes as the Pahouin or

¹) Ibid.
²) Gillaume, Paul, and Munro, Thomas, *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, p.63
Fang, the M'pongwe, the Loango and the MaYombe. Angolan Congo is
greater than the other divisions but the tribes are most scattered and
the products are not as striking. The tribes are: The Kioko, Kanioka,
BaLunda, BaKonde and BaRtose.

There were many existing artistic traditions existing side by side
here in the Congo. Even though there were some dominant stylistic tra-
ditions, the natives of different regions were able to vary designs so
that each tribe’s work is individualistic. The lines for the most
part are rhythmic, tending toward a bulbous shape. Little ornament is
used and effects are obtained by contrasting the massed which compose
the basic structure.

The political and social organization of these different tribes is
very similar to that of Benin and Dahomey, on a smaller scale. They
have similar customs and religious practices. The art products are
therefore: also similar, but for the most part wood or some similar
easily obtained material was used.

There is found in Dutch Guinea, South America, a tribe of Negroes
known as the Djuka tribe, but usually referred to as "Bush Negroes".
They originally came from Ashanti and the Ivory Coast and are the des-
cendants of slaves that had been brought to America during the middle
of the eighteenth century. The South American jungle of Dutch Guinea
was very similar to the surroundings from which they had been taken;
run-away and revolters settled in the jungle which the white man could
not easily penetrate. After a large group had settled in the jungle,
there were several revolts from the slaves in the villages, mixed with

1) Ibid.
raids from those in the jungle, which harassed the Dutch inhabitants until they finally gave these Negroes their freedom. The same traditions, religious practices, habits and other practices were carried on by these Negroes in America as had been done in Africa. Very little influence on the designs and method of work has been imposed on these natives. There is an influence in the use of materials but this only helps to add to the effect of the final product.¹

The African Negro experienced many different kinds of cultures from that of a nomadic type to that which afforded extensive university life. There are art examples from the regions that supported these many cultures but there is little evidence from this art that the level of the culture had any effect on the works. There is also little European influence to be noted although these people had been familiar with the European culture for many centuries. "Meanwhile it remains an indisputable fact that the decorative character manifested in the handicrafts of the black races of Africa is of surprising quality.¹¹..Nor have our makers of china and crockery ever imagined shapes more harmonious than the earthenware receptacles made by Negro craftsmen and ranging in dimensions from the millet jars in which a man can hide himself to the minute betel pots which the native women tuck into the complicated architecture of their coiffures."²

After knowing where the different works of art came from it is necessary to know the purposes for which these were made.

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² Lepage, Captain, P.C., "Arts and Crafts of the Negro" International Studio, vol. 78, March 1924, p.478
THE FUNCTIONS OF AFRICAN ART
Art in Africa, unlike the art of the other countries, does not try to show every side of life. The aim of the artist is to express one thing only, "... the vital essence of man, that energy of the inner life which manifests itself in certain forms and rhythms. Negro art is the most purely spiritual art we know of. It is narrowly and exclusively spiritual. It is the expression of an intensely animated religion which conceives of everything as due to the action of spirits."

It is interesting to see in what form this art expresses the inner essence of man such as captivated Roger Fry. It will be seen that most Negro art is made for the purpose of utility. Design is a necessary factor. It does not have to justify its existence by the philosophy that an understanding of it will give the observer a broader view of life, and make his living richer and fuller. It is almost always a direct influence on the life of the individual. "Religion among primitive peoples is concerned with the maintenance of life values; it permeates every phase of existence." 2 Since primitive religion is so necessary to this life there must also be certain tools of religion, art being the foremost. Religious works consist of idols, fetishes, amulets, and many personal charms that are owned by every member of the tribe.

In Dahomey are many carvings that are essential to everyday life. "Every compound has somewhere near its entrance a shrine to Legba, the divine trickster and the intermediary between men and gods. Under the low-roofed shrine to Legba is an image intended for the god himself to

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1) Fry, Roger, *op. cit.*, p. 83, see fig. 98
2) Gillauze, Paul, *op. cit.*, p. 74
to animate at his pleasure. This must be modelled in clay, but the images of one or sometimes two of the wives of this god are of wood. Directly before the entrance of the compound a magic charm to ward off evil is always to be seen, and this most commonly consists of a wooden image, which may be Janus-faced, or may be a single figure facing sternly outward or with its gaze fastened on the compound itself. At the side of individual houses, within the compound, or inside the houses, at one side of the doorway, or one at each side of the doorway as sentinels are other figures carved of wood..." 1

Besides these idols there are many other idols that the tribe uses in their prayers to the Gods. There are representations of the gods of war, gods of agriculture, and other gods that represent undertakings that are important to the tribe. Two pictures of gods from the Museum of Modern Art exhibition of African art are reproduced by J.J.Sweeney. 2 Neither of these figures have the horror that the god mars has. Instead there is a calm determination and a cold fearless expression on the face of each of these figures. One is a nude (238), while the other is clothed in a short skirt. Even though both of these figures are very formal in appearance, they are not static.

One of the most interesting and expressive of the art objects is the mask. Among its many diverse users, it was used largely as a ceremonial object, and its most important function is the inspiration of terror. The story of the origin of the mask told by Torday and related by Hiler in 'From Nudity to Raiment' is interesting and helpful

2) Sweeney, J.J. op.cit., catalogue nos. 237 and 238
in understanding its further uses.

"Sometime after Samba Mkepe—who appears to have been the ninety-third king of the Bahuka known by the name of Shamba Bolongongo—had married Kaskashi, the latter had a child. One day, when she left the village to go and get some water, the child ran after her. She said to him. 'Go back to the village, child, and stay with our father, while I go and look for some water.' But the child did not wish to obey, and, in spite of punishment, persisted in following her. Having to look after the obstinate child, Kashashi spilled the greater portion of her water on the way and was obliged to return to the river. Again the child insisted on accompanying her. Threats, and even punishment, on the part of the father availed nothing, and the child continued to cry and scream until permitted to follow his mother. However, Kashashi was a very resourceful woman, and during the night she reflected, trying to find out how she could prevent the child from annoying her in her work. At last she found a scheme. On the body of the calabash she scratched the body of a hideous painted visage, and when the child ran after her, she held the calabash, thus arranged, up before her face and suddenly turned around. The child was terrified. 'That is not my mother! it is a horrible Mæshi (phantom),' he cried and turning around he ran back to the village. Thus Kashashi was the inventor of such masks as the Shene Malula and the Mokenga."

"It further appears that Samba Mkepe was much annoyed by the invention of masks on the part of his spouse, saying, 'what will happen if, during their youth, our sons learn to be afraid of women.' He, therefore, forebade women the use of the mask, and introduced it in certain
initiation ceremonies to try the nerve of the prospective candidate.\(^1\)

Women were not only forebode to wear masks, but in some tribes it was believed that if they look upon a mask, they would die.\(^2\) In order for them to be so effective the artist had to make them as expressive as possible. Much time was spent on their execution, and the same ideals and principles were used in making masks that were used in the execution of other objects. In his *Last Lectures*, Roger Fry analyzes the reproduction of a mask. "In the mask (fig.90), you see an utterly different choice of the plastic themes. The mouth is almost suppressed, and the ridge of the nose becomes a support to the almost plant-like exfoliation of the eyes. These are deeply undercut beneath the eyelids, perhaps it is these deep shadows beneath the weight of the prominent lids that gives to the mask its strange melancholy expressiveness. There is no doubt that it creates in us the idea of a human spirit, though one the like of which we have never met. Then again, the hair treated with extraordinary delicacy and precision, picks up again the almost vegetable regularity of the features. This chevelure folds like a calyx round the forehead. And here again what delicate sensibility the curvature of the brow shows; how right, we feel, the bold flattening of the cheeks and what a rare discovery is the sharp but delicate salience of the chin, which seems to close and hold this strangely beautiful plastic sequence."\(^3\)

In some of the ritual dances and proceedings, the mask was used in frightening away evil spirits. Strangely enough, these masks do not

\(^1\) Hiler, Hilaire, *From Nudity to Raiment*, p. 114
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 118
\(^3\) Fry, Roger, *op. cit.*, p. 78
seem to have such a horrible appearance at first glance. The horror seems to be motivated by some inward force. This force swells to a higher pitch, the longer one gazes at the mask, one from Pablo Picasso's collection in the 1927 edition of Cahiers d'Art, shows this force at its heights. The eyes are set close together with large glaring white pupils. The nose comes down to a point over an open mouth, oval in shape, exhibiting an oval row of jagged teeth. To accentuate the jaggedness of the teeth, there are two rows of "V" shaped designs around the side of the face and extending on each side up to a mat of bushy hair. Below these "V" shaped designs is a white collar of a similar shape which helps to heighten the effect. The hair itself is bushy, human hair, and travels in all directions. Being human hair, it multiplies the horror effect.

"In the Belgian Congo the use of masks is closely connected with the circumcision rites, which seem to have much in common with the ceremonies of 'death and rebirth', popular with primitives, in which masks were often used, seemingly to aid in the process of completely changing the identity, so desired by the initiate." 1

Few of these masks were kept after the ceremony. Even though they were temporary ornaments the execution was as careful and as deliberate as that of an important idol. Polychromy and any other materials were used when it was possible to heighten the effect that the artist wished to give.

There was also much need for personal charms. These were "Small", wooden images ranging from three to five inches in height, which a man

1) Hiler, Hilaire, op. cit., p. 120
preferred to carve for himself, so that no strange carver may knowingly or unwittingly introduce an element to invalidate the powers to be given it. In addition, any special venture, or a quarrel, may introduce into the household other magic preventives and some of these may be asked to reside inside the images of wood. Then there is the cult of Destiny. At least one adult male in every compound will have ascertained, through the diviner, his personal Destiny, and all undertakings which hold the threat of danger to the physical or material well-being of the inhabitants of that compound will be referred to a diviner who will interpret the questions put to him in terms of the relation of this man's personal Destiny to the Universal Destiny. To do this, objects necessary for divining are brought into play. One of these objects is a cup for the palm-kernels used for divining, always finely carved, if the means of the consultant, or his personal artistic gifts, permit of such a possession. Another is a carved stick eight or ten inches with which to call Fata and this is supplemented by a second stick, also carved, ending in a wooden bell, which has similar use. Finally there is the board on which the diviner makes his lines as he throws his kernels. This is edged with a carved border figuring the symbols of the cult, and is always worked with consummate artistry.¹

Even the poorest families have carvings of this type. There are many shrines and temples to the patron deities of diviners or makers of charms or workers of black magic; all have one or more images to symbolize an ancestor who initiated the worship of the gods, or the cult of the divine knowledge of good and bad magic.²

¹) Herskovits, op. cit. p. 126
²) Ibid
As noted in Chapter one the people of Africa are given to worship of ancestors which are represented by animals and human figures. "Occasionally an animal is taken as a totem at the instigation of a sorcerer, who may detect in it the malign influence which has caused the misfortunes that prompted the consultation. For instance, at Pagabru a man slew two leopards. This was an event of no small order. Shortly after, several people in his compound died. The sorcerer was visited and as a result the man learned that the leopard was a totem or rater taboo for him. He therefore modelled two clay leopards outside the gate of his compound and sacrificed to them." In the Museum of Modern Art catalogue there are several such animals which may denote ancestor worship. Catalogue number 280 represents a leopard from Benin. It is a bronze figure, finely modelled, and beautifully finished. The body is covered with a subtle design of circles. The figure itself is solid and life-like, but the head is more human than animal like. Number 306 is a headdress representing a buffalo. The design is abstract. The horns on it take a backward circular sweep; the nose protruding in a keystone shape, arises from a mouth and jaw, above a heavy cone shaped neck. These two figures are in the collection of Charles Ratton in Paris. In the collection of Louis Carre there are two other animal figures that are interesting in design and execution. One, an antelope, expresses a long sweep of line flowing to the horns from the nose, the back of the figure, counteracting the convex lines of the horns with a concave one in the same direction. The other, the "Head of a Male", reminds one by its construction of a work by Modigliani.

1) Frazer, Sir James George, Totemica, p. 432
2) Sweeney, J. J. op cit. see Illustrations.
The sides of the forehead meet in the front. At the top, a leaf-like ear projects from either side, the nose arresting the downward sweep of the front line. ¹

"The bronze heads that come from Benin were usually portraits of ancestors. For a long while it was a custom for the Obe of Ife to send one of these heads to the coronation of each new king of Benin. One head which Frobenius found in the excavations at Ife in 1910, was described by Meyerowitz as being, "not only a perfect portrait with a surface technique rarely equalled by anything in world history of sculpture, but it was also used as a ritual mask, probably as an impersonation of a deceased divine king. The curved slits under the eyes being clearly for the use of the wearer and the puncture for moustache and beard for inserting hair or perhaps raffia."²

In the Djuka tribe of Dutch Guinea, many carvings are found that have a direct bearing on the beliefs of the native. One of the most prominent subjects is one depicting fertility. The designs are highly stylized and none of the sensuous elements seem to be present as in most African art.³ In an article in The Arts Magazine, the Herskovits' have illustrated many objects from this tribe. One of the most interesting is a tray, used for bringing produce from the fields or for winnowing rice. This tray measures thirty inches in diameter and is carved on both sides, the inner one receiving the most attention. "... the balance achieved by the artist in utilizing his surface is particularly interesting as is the breaking up of the outer rim. The

1) Sweeney, J.J. op. cit. see illustrations
2) Ibid.
3) Wilenski, R.H., The Meaning of Modern Sculpture, p. 143
design is symmetrical and each half holds a man and a woman figure, so stylized that only the limbs are shown. Two smaller outlines near the center of the outer rim, facing each other, represent a male and female child to be born as a result of the matings. The male child is distinguished by repeating the line of the inner design of one of the symbols for the children.\(^1\)

Many carvings of the Africans have little or no connection with the tribal religion. It can easily be seen how the major purpose of these could change because of the multifarious ways in which they were used. The constant change of fetishes affected their purposes. An example of such secular carvings is that of the human figure which has long been used as decoration for the household objects. Frequently it is used as a support for head rests. Here is a female figure from the Belgian Congo squatting on her haunches, supporting a head rest on her head. The figure is simply but powerfully carved with decorative motifs around the hair line of the forehead and the mid-section below the breasts. Another figure from the Belgian Congo is of a standing female figure with the rest on her head and her hands placed on her abdomen. The feet are extremely broad and powerful, and the face represents grief intermixed with a feeling of resignation. This feeling is comparable to that in the other figure which is of deep slumber and resignation. Still another design is of a head rest supported by three oblong cubes of wood with circular decorations. The lines of the top part of this rest are sweeping and clean cut, resembling an oriental design. The wealth and rank of the family determines the number and

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2) cf. p. 15
3) Sweeney, J.J., op. cit. illustrations 470 and 472
kind of carved figures to be found in the home.

A chief will bear a carved totemic on a proverbially symbolic animal to serve as a handle to swing over his shoulder. "Those of high rank carry walking sticks with carved handles and their stools are raised on the heads of two, four or eight carved bearers standing on a base, the whole base carved from a single block of wood".⁴ Men carve, "boat and paddle, door-frame and house posts, mortar and pestle, comb and clothes beater, food-stirrer and tray and peanut pounding board, drums and gods, while the women ... incise designs on gourds and sew their picturesque clothes."²

In Dahomey, appliqué cloths have varied and interesting utilitarian purposes. The umbrella being the symbol of high rank is very large and richly covered with appliqué designs. Much of this work is also used in the cult of friendship. When death comes to a friend many clothes must be prepared in order to insure proper status in the next world. This institutionalized friendship requires specific gifts upon death — in addition to ritual burial clothes of native weave — one of which is a cloth of appliqué design. On each group of designs is a proverb, and as the friend of the deceased presents the cloth and displays it before the mourners, he speaks these proverbs which by the use of the hyperbole, dwell upon the qualities of the dead and the depth of friendship between the two men.³

When new societies are formed appliqué designs on white cloth are

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3) Herskovits, M. J., "The Art of Dahomey".
used to tell of the deeds of the members. Applique is also seen on the caps and bonnets worn by chiefs, on awning-like tops of the hammocks, and on special costumes used in worshipping the gods. In Dahomey there is to be seen an aesthetic appreciation of designs on cloth wholly divorced from any material use. These cloths are woven and designed having a value much in the same sense as our paintings and tapestries.

"Though occasional black designs are sewn on a white surface, the favorite background is either gold or black, and the other colors used are red, blue, green and white. When the background is black, the principle figure is in gold and when gold, in black. Human figures may be either black or red, for the skin-color of the Dahomean is distinctly a reddish tinge rather than the deep brownish-black usually associated with Negro peoples. The materials used are sateen for the colors, cambric for the white, while small units of design are often done in brocaded sateen. Patterns are made on stiff paper for each design-unit and these patterns are kept from one generation until the next. When a new cloth is being planned, several of these units can be arranged and rearranged in the sand until a pleasing composition is obtained, but if entirely new figures are to be introduced, it is possible to draw the projected composition in the sand and then play with the several figures or emblems until the artist is satisfied with the effect. Once this is attained, he proceeds to cut out his patterns."

Weaving is practiced by most of the tribes. "Among the most beautiful productions from African hands are the jars of plaited rice or millet straw and palm fiber which the necessities of nomadic life substituted for the earthenware pitcher. They are so tightly woven that

1) Ibid. p. 74
they may be carried long distances on the backs of camels and oxen without losing a drop of the liquid which they contain."

"To vegetable fibers, the African Negro resorts also for his extremely simple needs in wearing apparel, adorning it with charming color key and other patterns or, as in certain parts, mingling it with bands of a cotton stuff pleasing to the eye and agreeable to the touch. Here thongs of leather are plaited in and out just as are the fibrous substances, and splendid is the concert of hues that these bring to the eye when the native cavalry parade."

"While these elements serve for the magic display of color, for sheer beauty of line appeal must be made to iron and brass; and here, among weapons, ornaments and utensils, we find forms astonishing in their variety within that breadth of line demanded by wrought metal. The material affording the native his best and most original opportunities, however is wood; for it must be remembered that the Islamic conqueror has not extended his iconoclastic zeal, hostile to the representation of the human face and body, into the regions where grows a very jungle of various shapes and uses carved in wood. It is in this material that the native artist transcends the ornamental and permits his graphic gifts to have full freedom. Abstract concepts borrowing nothing from life forms here yield place to observation and that impericus instinct for synthesis which, in the heathen and fetish worshipping regions, adopts human and animal forms to ornamental requirements with surpassing mastery."

Thus we see that art has been used for many purposes among the

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1) Lepage, Caption P.C., op. cit., p.477
African Negroes. The greatest need, however, is a religious one. The religious use shades into the material one. This in turn is closely connected with an aesthetic use. The rituals of secret societies and various cults have need for many different works of art. The products are themselves influenced by the type of ritual for which they are used. Closely associated to religion is the worship of ancestors which is in some instances totemic. Tribes influenced one another by their constant warfare, trade by barter and intermarriage. In some instances, marriage is not permitted by members of the same tribe nor with members of one's mother's tribe, even though one is not a member of the same one of which she was originally a part.

We have considered the cultural background, the type and the functions of the art of Africa. It is still necessary to examine some of the objects themselves to see what works later European artists and critics accepted so wholeheartedly. It will be interesting to note the concepts of these artists and what type of experiences they were striving for. The criticisms that outstanding critics have given them should also be noted.

The size of the objects were generally small. Their use made this necessary. They were used as idols and fetishes to be carried around or placed within a cache inside the home or shrine. Even though the palaces and cities were sometimes enormous, the sculpture usually remained small. Only in Benin is there any mention of sculpture on a heroic scale.

Materials used by the artists range from different types of wood, metals, cloths, terra cotta, and leather. The metals were silver, brass, bronze and iron.
It has generally been thought that the methods of work that children have are comparable to the methods of primitive African tribes.1 Observers reveal that this is not true.2 The African wood carver goes about his work slowly and deliberately, analyzing it carefully as he proceeds. He "...fashions his pieces with the aid of tools produced by native iron workers. In Dahomey the carver ... used only a small adze, a chisel, and a knife the size of a pocket knife ... With the chisel, the piece is roughly blocked out - head, neck, arms, breast, if the figure is to be that of a woman, legs - the handle of the adze being used as a hammer to give force to the bite of the chisel's blade. This done, the carver takes up the piece in his left hand, and with adze in right, sharpens the outline of the figure he has blocked out. As he does this, he frequently pauses and holds the figure away from him, looking intently at the proportions of the torso and head and extremities. His strokes are firm, but unhurried, and as he proceeds, the pause to examine what he has done recurs more frequently. When his adzing has progressed to a point where the figure is fully outlined and needs finer treatment, the small knife is brought into play, rounding and smoothing the curves of the figure, and working in the details of face and body -fashioning ears and eyes and nostrils, fingers and toes. This accomplished, a final polishing of the figure is necessary. This is sometimes done with the use of sand, but more often with a leaf whose structure is rough and spiny, and leaves the wood with little trace of the lines left by the adze and knife."

2) see Zayas, Marius, "Négro Art", The Arts, vol. 3, March 1923 p.199
"The figure thus completed still has none of the patination that associated with African art. Its color is pale brown or light red, for though hard woods are almost always used, the color of many varieties of these African woods is light. It is only after offerings of blood and corn meal, and more particularly, of palm oil, are given the statuette that it turns the dark rich color that characterizes the pieces which we figure here. Or, in the case of smaller figures, it is only after years of handling that the patination comes."

The bronze works from Benin and Ife and silver ones from Dahomey were usually cast by the cire perdue method. This is an ancient process and until "a representation of figures in Portuguese garb was discovered on certain of the plaques no explanation of the origin of the native knowledge of the process could be offered. Then the explanation seemed obvious: the Portuguese had imported the method. To bear out the theory, an English researcher managed to discover a so-called local tradition to the effect that one Ahammangiva, a member of the first party of white men to set foot in Benin, in the Reign of Esige, had introduced bronze casting."

"However, since the beginning of the century, other discoveries have brought this theory into question. A better knowledge of African History, an analysis of the stylistic features of the Benin productions which shows it to be fundamentally Negroid and, finally, the discoveries made by Frobenius during his excavations in Ifa (Ife?) lead us to believe today that Great-Benin inherited its strange civilization through the ancient realm of Yoruba from the Sydanese empires which were constantly in touch with Egypt."
African art is an art that probes deeply into the mind and feeling of the observer. Its forms are treated with extreme freedom from the subject but at the same time with a realistic representation that is peculiarly African. "At times we find individual portraits, but interjected and as it were recreated, with an astounding feeling for the unity and the continuity of its plastic rhythms. Though Negro sculpture is so exclusively concerned with the human spirit it is rarely dramatic in our sense, there is too little reaction to fate, there is always, rather, a profound sense of discouragement and resignation,"¹

The formal qualities, the architectonic beauty of this sculpture are full of import. This power of form is one of the factors that goes to make up the creativeness and originality of African art. To the European the creators of these works possess another important quality that aids in originality. He has the power to see phenomenon as no one had seen it before.²

Although the work follows certain stylizations set up by the tribe, the artist is ever the individual. "... it is inner structure, rhythm, plastic vitality, organic order, architectonics, coiled power - all this plus or shaped by the artist's individual way of revealing his feelings; the distinctive differences that make his painting other than a Jones' or Brown's "³ Every part in a typical fully realized Negro statue functions as an element in plastic design; an embodiment, a repetition of rhythmic, varied sequence, of some theme in mass line or surface."⁴

1) Fry, Roger, op. cit., p.76
2) Wilenski, R.H., op. cit., p. 145
3) Cheney, Sheldon, Expressionism in Art, p.105
4) Gillaume, Paul, op. cit., p. 35
Another attribute of the African artist was his attitude toward the nude form. It was necessary for him to treat the nude, even sex in the nude, because sex figured greatly in much of the religion. This treatment, however, was not sensuous. "The Negro sculptures are the results of direct reactions to the naked human body; they were carved by men who could perceive this phenomenon as nobody had perceived it before, and these perceptions equal and surpass in vividness, intensity, and sometimes in emotional quality, the perceptions of the Romantic artists who have set out standards in this field".\(^1\) It is in this aspect that the African is different from the European in expressing his forms. There is no feeling of desire or caressability as expressed by the Europeans.\(^2\)

"In the end, however, it is not the tribal characteristics of Negro art nor its strangeness that is interesting. It is its plastic qualities. Picturesque or exotic features as well as historical and ethnographic considerations have a tendency to blind us to its true worth. This was realized at once by its earliest amateurs. Today with the advance we have made during the last thirty years in our knowledge of Africa it has become an even graver danger. Our approach must be held conscientiously in quite another direction. It is the vitality of the forms of Negro Art that should speak to us, the simplification without impoverishment, the unerring emphasis on the essential, the consistent, three-dimensional organization of structural planes in architectonic sequences, the uncompromising truth to material with a seemingly intuitive adaptation of it, and the tension achieved between the ideas or emotion to be expressed through representation and the abstract principles of

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1) Ibid
2) Ibid., p.144
sculpture.\textsuperscript{1}

If we carry this objectivity of view into the various phases of African art, we must needs arrive at the same conclusion as Fry - the same purpose of utility. We must then realize that underlying all African art is practicality and pragmatism. Herein lies the key to its understanding.

\textsuperscript{1} Sweeney, J.J., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 21
EVALUATION OF THE ART
In order to appreciate the art works themselves, it is necessary to consider them one by one. Roger Fry, R.H. Wilenski, Paul Gillaume, Clive Bell, and other authoritative critics have given interesting and informative accounts of individual examples of sculpture, such as the mask mentioned by Roger Fry.

The Ivory Coast represents one of the most interesting art producing sections. The sculpture is characterized by a tendency to surface ornament and richness of detail. "Yet its ornamentation is not merely superficial, since the structural basis is itself strongly conceived in terms of design, and the ornamental elements intimately correlated with it. One may even say that there is economy, since all the details are made to count in the total effect; one does not feel them as distracting irrelevancies or as afterthoughts which could be eliminated without damage to the design. Constant use is made, not only of the main facial elements, but of others, such as beards, tattoo marks, head-dresses, etc., which increase the possible intricacy and variety of patterns. All tend to be highly stylized, away from the naturalistic in form, and often into rather hard, cameo-like finish. This is distinctively not, as primitive art is thought to be, crude and uncertain. It is evidently the product of the centuries of practice in technical craftsmanship, of long refinements of methods. Yet, in the best pieces, it is not stereotyped into conventionality or formalized into dead geometry; no matter how symmetrical and suavely finished in detail, each piece contains the elements of variety, contrast, originality and unity which mean life to a design."¹

¹) Gillaume, Paul, op. cit., p.38
The art of the Ivory Coast exemplifies what Wilenski means when he speaks of conveying the maximum of formal meaning by the relation of forms, one to another.\(^1\) One of the most interesting of the figures from this section is a mask. The formal design is classical in appearances. This mask "... is frankly symmetrical and formal; it is finished in workmanship to a delicate refinement of surface, with a classical severity of linear pattern ... The artist has faced the problem of uniting the face with an ornamental crest above it. A fundamental bond is provided by the fact that the main element in the crest is a small reproduction of the face below; each line and projection below is repeated above. While such repetition is rhythmic, it tends to monotony, so variation must be introduced. At the same time the two faces must be plastically unified so that they will not seem like two separate designs."

"In solution of this problem, the size and shape of the crest are calculated, with relation to the face, so that the two together make a single ellipse, the eye travels naturally over the gap between the horn-like ornaments on the temples and the triangle at the top. This triangle is a reversal of the bottom of the face, so that already a basic relationship between crest and face is established. For variety, the small face is painted brown instead of black, like the lower one; its features, being smaller, are a little simplified, and outlined in black for emphasis and clarity. The other parts of the crest serve to bind it to the face below, with varied repetition of its rhythms. The cluster of triangles at the extreme top is almost a reversal of the hair

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1) Wilenski, R.H., *op.cit.*, p. 141
ridge on the forehead, the latter being turned to curves for variety. But the former is painted white like the sides of the horn-like ornaments of the temples; also for variety. Repetitions below of the angles and points above are made to connect the small face with the large one, and to act as ears and beard around the latter. The mouth is a similar angle, small and chinless as as to bring the face to a graceful point. All through the movement angles are softened into curves, then stiffened again into angles and triangles. On the forehead are three symmetrical groups of parallel curving ridges, which as corrugated surfaces contrast with the smoothly curving planes below. As curves, they repeat in various positions the arches of the eyebrows and of the nostrils. Elsewhere are straight singular cuts and ridges, for contrast. The straight horizontal of the lower eyelid is carried out sideward in rows of small scars, which resemble in shape the square segments into which the eyebrow arch is divided. Two different rhythms are thus in motion at once: a series of smooth but firm and decisive curves (ellipses and parts of ellipses) and a series of crisp staccato angles. They interlace, echo and reverse each other, here, one predominant, there another. The mouth suggests both the angles of the beard below and the small arches of the nostrils above; these angles themselves are individually sharp, but arranged in a carving row. All the multiplicity of movement is tamed and regulated, each fitted precisely into place and confined to its proper scope, so that the whole is a structure of almost frozen perfection.1 It is this type of construction; this angular repetition of planes, staccato repetitions. That did much to influence the artists of the early

1) Gillauve, Paul, op.cit., p. 104
twentieth century.

"In the Ethnological Museum at Leipzig, there is a Negro carving of a man seated rather in the attitude of Rodin's 'Le Penseur'. It comes from Assam, West Cameroons and is forty-seven centimeters high. The anatomy of this work is fantastic and all the forms, as forms, seem to be ordered to convey the maximum of formal meaning by their relations among themselves. But it is impossible to pretend that the terrific vitality of this little figure derives solely from the frank deliberate fashioning of each individual form and from the juxtapositions of these forms one against another. It is equally impossible not to realize that any alternation in this formal architecture would lessen not only the meaning of the object as force but also the meaning of derived from the objects relation to the naked human body. The status in fact, compels the spectator to admit the paradox that if any alternations would lessen and not increase the statues meaning in relation to the naked human body."

"The explanation is that the vitality of this figure is dual in character—it derives partly from the artists power to image and order form as such and partly from the vividness of his first hand concept of the essential character of the naked human body."  

In the French Congo sub-division, Gabun are the Fangs or Pahouin tribes. The sculpture of these people is extremely plain and simple, lacking any ornamentation as found in the works from the Ivory Coast. In their simplicity, these works usually tend toward a bulbous or pear-like shape, which is often repeated throughout the whole as well as in parts of the whole figure. These shapes are usually extremely

1) Wilenski, R.H., op.cit., p.41
rhythmical flowing curved planes which rise from hollows into smooth swelling surfaces. The effect is pleasing, being gained by a contrast between the rhythm of the bulbous line and masses. In most of these works, there is monumental simplicity akin to the Egyptian in solidity but entirely African in its expression. As in the works from the Ivory Coast there are many variations that provide interest and protect the forms from becoming monotonous from repetition.

Besides an innate knowledge of materials, aesthetic possibilities and limitations, these artists are able to order form until it reached a maximum without over or under doing it. In the criticisms of Roger Fry, there is an account of a head from the Gabun region "... the artist has seized on the dome-like dominance of the forehead, and he has found how to support it by variations, the prominence of the nose; and against these he has played the straight line of the base of the nose and the terrible horizontal prominence of the mouth and teeth. But, as often as not an African sculptor will suppress the mouth altogether, or reduce it to a slit, and will build on the hollow of the eye-orbit, in exact contradiction to the treatment of this head, which eliminates the orbit almost entirely. There is no convention to govern the choice, scarcely any habitual treatment. But what an astonishing grasp of plastic form the head reveals. The sculptor has somehow got behind the facts of appearance. He understands the language of plastic expression so completely that he can create a living human being without regard to the facts of any existing or even possible human head. He has the same sort of control of expressive elements of plastic form as the musician has the relation of notes."

1) Gillaume, Paul, op. cit., p. 63
2) Fry, Roger, op. cit., p. 77
This ability to get behind the facts of appearance is better illustrated in a spirit head. "It is one of usual suavity of form and a strange melancholy graciousness of bearing. We find in a high degree here, the peculiar delicate sensibility of the Negro in the modeling of the brow and the subtle transitions of the cheeks and eye orbits. Here are the artist's complete freedom from a conceptional catalogue of features which we expect from the primitive arts is more surprising than ever. There are no eyes at all, scarcely more than a suggestion of the nose, no mouth, and impossible diminution of the jaw. But it is, nevertheless, a perfect coherent and convincing discovery. It is perhaps how a spirit may look, especially one living in the anxious unsatisfied and troubled limbo to which the African imagination consigned the dead. Work like this seems to me, to transport us into the remote regions of the spiritual life, which some of the greatest musicians and a few of the greatest artists alone have explored."¹ There is mention here of the delicate sensibility in the modeling of the brow. This is later to be seen as a definite influence on modern artists, especially Picasso.

One of the most pleasingly satisfying of all African art is a female head. Perhaps a spirit head, from the Fehouin, now in the collection of Paul Gilleume. The domed forehead is predominate. This takes a sweeping forward turn down each side of the cheeks, ending in a pair of lips, which protrude beyond the nose. There is no chin and indeed, there is no need for one, as the lips serve this purpose. The head rests on a long, cylindrical neck and the central axis seems to run up the front of the neck to the top of the head, and then drops straight down

¹) Fry, Roger, op.cit., p. 81, see fig. 86.
separating itself from the head in a flat plane and ending in a slight upward curve—just enough to prevent rigidity. On the downward drop of the hair, the hair-line is arrested three times before it ends: first, by an abstract ear shape, a slight repetition of the shape of the back of the head is on a direct line with the highly arched eyebrows which repeat the shape of the top of the head. These meet and flow down that of the nose. Not only do they break a would-be monotonous line, but they repeat almost every bulbous shape in the face, thus increasing the fluidness of the lines. The eyes seem to be unfinished rises on each side of the face, but are complete in themselves. The mouth is done in the same unfinished technique as the eyes. Not only is the head rhythmic in its design but it is almost musical in its expression. There is a quality of sadness and despair throughout the figure.

In the Sudan region are the Fula and Songhai tribes, and the cities of Gao and Timbuctoo. It is in this district that at one time extensive university life existed. Here the typical piece is slender and awkward. An awkwardness of attitude and crudity of surface tend to augment the total effect of sharp staccato force or wing suppleness.

For example, one, "...Fig. 14 is thin and stiffly angular, like a child's jumping-jack. At first crude and haphazard, it arouses in the observer unused to plastic form the feelings associated with a toy or caricature. But if these associations can be disregarded, the figure will stand out in its own right as a transformation of the body into a distinctive and forceful design. Its long, rigid parts are arranged in

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1) Fry, Roger, op. cit., p. 83, see fig. 98
an unsteady equilibrium, animated and poised for movement. They meet and dart this way and that with a crisp, jerky, irregular, rhythm. The figure resolves itself into a few equivalent masses; head and trunk, arms and legs. Long, sharp-pointed cones protrude horizontally forward and make a design. The two breasts are the largest of the series of conical masses, stiffly projecting. Above is a smaller cone, the nose, enlarged until one sees it in relation to the breasts. Below the breasts the navel sticks out in a point similar to the nose. Further down, the knees come to points like the breasts. Fingers and toes, mere rows of notches, make the limbs bristle out in four rhythmical clusters of points.1

Courtly art is included among the art of Benin, Dahomey and Ifé. In the work of the latter, there is to be seen more polish and finish than in the other two. Portraiture is to be seen more frequently and in some cases the likeness appears to have been nearly perfect. The heads from Ifé are different from that of Benin in that the latter are more descriptive and naturalistic. Art products from both these centers differ from that of Dahomey in that the bulk of the work there is more expressionistic, much in the same way that the works described above have been. Some believe that the works found by Frobenius in Ifé may represent the works of an earlier period than that of other sections. "I suspect that they are Negro, and we may find a connection link in that upward head of a girl. If they are, they would seem to show that in the remote parts the Negroes had a tradition of sculpture much more akin to our own. It has much of the vital force of true Negro sculpture,

1) Gillauwe, Paul, op. cit., p.74
although it is expressed without any of those distortions and re-
interpretations which distinguish most Negro art. It shows too, a very
delicate and fine sensibility in the modelling of the eye-orbits and the
muscles of the mouth. It is tempting to think that this may represent
a Negro art not yet dominated by religion, but which attained to a
great sense of style and achieved plastic harmony.\(^1\)

The arts of Africa present many types of approaches, methods of
working and materials. These arts were recognized in the early years
of the twentieth century not at first by the critics but by the
artists.\(^2\) In order to recognize its qualities, certain preconceived
prejudices had to be overcome. This held true for the average ar-
tist as well as for the layman. "We must remember, moreover, that the
reactions of white men to Negro figures...are complicated, (a) by the
white man's instinctive prejudice in favor of the white man's physique,
and (b) by the religious attitude of the white races which began by re-
garding sculpture as something to be used for religious purposes, and
which was transformed in the Renaissance into an attitude that regarded
sculpture as Renaissance painting in another material."

"Confronted with such figures the average student thus must say,
(a) on the basis of the Greek prejudice and the white physique preju-
dice: 'the figure is entirely lacking in caressability', and (b) on the
basis of the Christian and Renaissance attitudes: 'If this figure is a
magic idol, it has an offensive religious meaning, and if it is not an
idol, its meaning is obscene', and (c) on the basis of the prejudice-
pie

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1) Fry, Roger, \textit{op.cit.}, es, p.83, see fig. 98

2) Bell, Clive, "Negro Sculpture", \textit{Arts and Decoration}, vol. 13, p.
178, August, 1920.
generally: 'the fellow who made this statue would have made statues resembling Greek, Renaissance and nineteenth century Romantic works if he had not been a poor ignorant savage unable to do so.' "1 The person who wishes to understand this art, must start at the beginning and learn a new method of appreciation that would enable them to appreciate an evaluate that art which falls outside of the norm. "Though the forms of art which men have created from prehistoric times down to the present are many, the 'spirit of the forms is one'. "2 If therefore, we are properly to understand the arts, "we must approach them not as isolated phenomena, the local products of a definite time and place, but as form of creative expression which artists of different ages, employed, because being faced with similar human and formal problems, and having comparable technical vocabularies at their command, they attempted to solve them in same way."3 It must also be taken into consideration that although "men are different from each other" at the same time "they are more similar than different."4

In forming an approach, the use of the word primitive must be clarified. This word has given a connotation that the art produced was in a stage of infancy. One critic explains that, "It is not an embryonic art from which a more complete and perfect one is to evolve, as the drawings of a child develop into the art of an adult. African Negro art is a complete and perfect art in itself with various stages of development if not of evolution." 5

1) Wilenski, R.H., op.cit., p.143
3) Ibid.
4) Ibid.
While some critics attempted to approach the appreciation problem from the point of attempting to understand this art, other critics tried to evaluate it. After a study of art in Ife, Meyerowitz wrote in evaluating: It is certain that we are confronted with the peak of an ancient and extremely powerful artistic tradition. Mr. Duckworth's and our own photographs have been shown to African, Egyptian, Persian, Indian and other research specialists here and on the Continent and while all these highly trained people could not find any decisive cultural or stylistic affinities they were all unanimous in their verdict: that we have here some of the most outstanding masterpieces in the world history of art. Sir William Rothenstein, for example, writes as follows: 'I know nothing of the cultures which produced these noble pieces, nor what influences, native or alien, inspired them. I know only that they are superb works of art, worthy to be set beside the best examples of sculpture of any period.' 1

Of the art of Africa in general, Roger Fry thinks of it as "a strangely disquieting art... and yet touching heights that few have reached and hinting at much more than has ever been accomplished — for what might not such an acute and rarefied plastic sensibility accomplish if it could be utilized by the wide range of experience, the awareness and intellectual power of a great European artist?" 2

Carl Einstein, one of the first champions of African art, attributed the inability of the European to understand African art to ignorance on the part of the European. "Our contempt is merely a reflection of our ignorance." He goes on to explain "that Negro sculpture is the

1) Meyerowitz, A., op.cit., p.155
2) Fry, Roger, op.cit., p.83
only true sculpture, the only sculpture that has dealt with and solved the fundamental problems of the art. That of the representation of cubic mass by direct methods...For Einstein, those sculptors, too, who, at the other end of the evolution of European art, have taken cognizance of primitive sculpture and have attempted a similar handling of fundamental problems, differ in an essential manner from its achievements: 'what in the former is abstraction is in the latter nature rendered directly! Negro sculpture in the formal sense proves itself to be the strongest of realisms. Like Boas, Einstein emphasizes the fact that African art is not primitive; it is anything but primitive, and under no circumstances constructive; but there is this difference: Boas insists that primitive art is adult in relation to its own environment. Einstein avers that, in comparison to the arts of others, African art alone is fully adult. For the latter it is better.'\(^1\) Wilenski thinks along the same lines as Einstein, whereas Roger Fry insists that in considering the art of the Africans and of the Europeans a different viewpoint must be taken; but on the other hand, if the best from each be absorbed, digested and given back again by some great artist, the results would be an art form more perfect than any ever seen.\(^2\)

There have been artists who have tried to do this, some with success, but none to the extent that Fry would like to see it.

1) Goldwater, R. J., *op. cit.* p.32
2) Fry, Roger, *op. cit.*, p.83
THE INFLUENCE OF AFRICAN ART
ON EUROPEAN ART
African Negro art offers a concrete example of influence on the modern movement in art. This was only because the modern artist recognized certain qualities that the Africans were seeking to attain in their works. The artists of the early twentieth century recognized these qualities because they were mentally ready and able to do so. Twenty years earlier this would have been relatively impossible with the majority of the artists.

If the recognition of certain qualities in African Negro art would have been impossible twenty years before 1904, what were the circumstances that led up to the ability of both the artists and the ethnologists to open their minds to an art so totally foreign to the art forms to which they had been accustomed?

This attitude of open-mindedness can be traced back to about 1850 and the beginning of functionalism. It probably can be traced back much further but for the purpose of this discussion this date forms an adequate starting point. The purpose of functionalism as it developed was to do away with unnecessary ornament and eclecticism. In 1870 the Impressionists became prominent. The two important results were first, a scientific attitude of experimentation on the part of the artist and scientists in the interest of art, and second, the development of a revolutionary attitude on the part of the artist. The use of shocking subject matter came into play about this time.

Following the Impressionists came Cezanne. His desire was to add solidity to the findings of the Impressionists. This search led to his statement that "you must see in nature the cylinder, the sphere and the cone." Cezanne's search was for the quality of pure

1) Behrendt, W.C., Modern Building, Pt.2, Chap.II
2) Goldwater, R.J., op.cit., p.119
form.1 "... his progress was marked by increasing achievement of the precious quality of expressive form. And he died despairingly because he could not touch yet closer to pure form."2

"No one, as much as Cezanne, forced French painting toward the primitive..."3

Directly on the heels of the Impressionists and still in the nineteenth century were the Post-Impressionists. One of this group, Henri Rousseau, is known as the first modern primitive painter. He was not called a primitive in the same sense that the Africans were; he possessed, however, some of the same qualities—a certain naivety and simplicity. Paul Gauguin was in another way different from Rousseau and the other Post-Impressionists. He set out purposely to work in a manner that did not comply with the rules. Later he developed a liking for the primitive or the "Barbarian" as he called it. Gauguin went to Tahiti in 1891, where he felt he could paint best the things he wanted to paint by living among the type of people who lived what he hoped to express. The attitude toward art that Gauguin evolved can best be gained from his own writings. In answering a refusal of Strindberg to write a preface for his exhibit of 1895 because he did not understand the work, Gauguin wrote, "A shock between your civilization and your barbarism. Civilization from which you suffer, barbarism which has been a rejuvenation for me. Before the eve of my choice whom I have painted in the forms and the harmonies of another world, your memories have evoked a painful past. The eve of your civilized conception nearly always makes you, and makes us, misogynist; the ancient Eve, who frightens

1) Cheney, Sheldon, A Primer of Modern Art, p. 83
2) Ibid.
3) Goldwater, R.J., op. cit., p. xviii
you in my studio might some day smile at you less bitterly. This world, which prefers not rediscover a Cuvier, nor a botanist, would be a Paradise, that I would have merely sketched. And from the sketch to the completion of the dream it is for. What matter! Is not a glimpse of happiness a foretaste of nirvana.  

"Have before you always the Persians, the Cambodians, and a little of the Egyptian. The great error is the Greek, however beautiful it may be. You will always find nourishing milk in the primitive arts, but I doubt if you will find it in the arts of the ripe civilizations."  

In this counsel to his daughter, it can be seen that Gaugin had a real appreciation for the primitive arts and of their value to the modern artist.

In the search for a definite expression he laments - "I have gone back, further back than the horses of the Parthenon ... as far back as the Dada of my babyhood, the good rocking house." Gaugin was one of the first to realize the worth of the primitive arts and write about it. Goldwater says that he is the beginning of the trend which has its final culmination in the interest in African art.

Japanese art played its part in helping the artist to see African art. "Doubtless the appreciation of Oriental art in the nineteenth century hastened us in becoming conscious of our problem; doubtless the art which aroused the enthusiasm of certain painters and sculptors in the first years of the twentieth century offered forms which were of great aid to us, because the Negro, with his intensity of emotion and

1) Ibid. p.61
2) Ibid. p.59
3) Ibid. p.59
4) Ibid., p.61
his incredible mastery of wood carving, translates his religious awe through hard planes which elongate and intersect in a manner suggesting an escape from the tyranny of the visible, against which we are struggling. ¹ Japanese art, when first viewed by the European, presented a new way of seeing. That of seeing objects painted in flat colors and without perspective as this Western World has been used to it.

Revolution was apparent among the literary and musical worlds, as well as the plastic arts. Men such as Emile Zola, Alphonse Daudet, the Goncourt brothers, Guy de Maupassant among the writers; Satie, Stravinsky, and the Six, among the Musicians, were spreading the revolutionary and experimental fire throughout the art realm. ² After the recognition of African art by the artists, Gilletteu Amelaine, a literary apostle, followed closely on their heels to trumpet the merit of this newly founded art.³ Because of this rapid development of events in all of the arts, by the beginning of the twentieth century African Negro art was ready to be "discovered". It would have been more logical if Gauguin had been the first to do so, but from all records, it seems as though he did not know of the Africans.⁴

"Twenty years ago the aspirations of the young artists to introduce into painting that which the older works lack suggested to their imagination an ardent passion to seek all that was instinctive, initial in ideas, curious, and in a word, all that was susceptible to enlarge the domains of painting.

1) Pech, Walter, Masters of Modern Art. p.73
2) Gilliame, Paul, op.cit., p. 134
3) Ibid.
4) Goldwater, R.J. op.cit., p.74
In this development of pictorial acquisitions the young painters rarely searched among works of known civilizations. They gave above all, their spirit and thirst of instinct to the creations of primitive people...the young painters were sensitive and preferred the art of certain African tribes. The pieces came from the Congo, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Gabun, with textiles, utilitarian objects, a mask or a piece of sculpture awakened the sensibilities of the painters that had been dulled by association and experience with ordinary material.

In the forms and in the expressions realized by the Negroes, the young painters have borrowed the designs with the possibilities of adjusting them, the search for expression, volumes, have considerably augmented our pictorial inheritance. The works of the Negroes are brought to us under this freshness, this uncertain promise of poetry which moves a thousand passions, thousands and thousands of suggestions. "Negro sculpture in a word, interested the modern sculptors not only by their formal characters but also because those formal characters made the figures look amazingly alive."

Vlaminck was the first of the French painters to come across African art. Sometimes during the year 1904, he saw two Negro statues in a tavern and liking them, he bought them for two litres of aramon, with which he treated the customers present. Vlaminck appreciated these pieces of sculpture "Because he experienced the 'same astonishment, the same profound sensation of humanity' that he had from the puppets of a street fair, which however, he had not been able to purchase." The Fauves, a group of painters with which Vlaminck is associated, pride themselves as being the first to discover and appreciate the value of primitive art. Andre Derain, a fellow artist saw the pieces that

2) Wilenski, R.H., op.cit., p.138
3) Goldwater, R.J., op. cit., p.74
4) Ibid.
Vlaminck had picked up and appreciated them much in the same manner, Neither of them, though, thought enough of this art to make a collection of it. It was left for Henri Matisse of the same group, to make the first large collection of African art. Outside this group of artists collections, his is matched only by that of Picasso.¹

The influences that these works and others were to have on the Fauves was not an eclectic one. Instead they tried to express similar feelings that they got from African art and to translate this feeling to a work of art. In groping for expression of the same feelings Matisse writes, "It is through (the human figure) that I best succeed in expressing the nearly religious feeling that I have towards life...the simplest means are those which enable the artist to express himself best.²

The influence is not seen directly in the paintings of this group, with perhaps the exception of Matisse. The subject matter of this group is not cluttered with figures of another country or race nor is there a similarity of technique. But if such an elusive term as "feeling" can be permitted the keynote of the way the primitive influenced these men is given by Vlaminck. "It was necessary therefore to return to the feeling for things abandoning the acquired style... I have had to look for the interior character, save the feeling for the object."³

Simultaneously with Vlaminck's "discovery" of African art, a German artist, Ernest Ludwig Kirchner, a member of the Brucke group, made a

¹) Ibid. p. 74
²) Ibid. p.85
³) Ibid. p.84
similar find in the cases of the Dresden Ethnological Museum. Because of a more advanced state of the ethnological collection in Germany, these artist were able to become acquainted with a range and variety of style which it took the French some years to discover.¹

The influence of this newly "discovered" art on the German group was similar to that of the Fauves in France. The main influence is a general one and can be seen in "their simplification of form, its definition within simple contours, and the elimination of nuances of modeling and variegations of surface which might detract from the single immediate impression that the artist might wish to convey."² This art is primitivizing because of its desire to get at the bottom of emotion.

Besides the general influence, it is at times possible to see direct influences in the art of some of the members of this group, especially in the work of Kirchner and Nolde. In the work of Kirchner it is the influence of the Cameroon that is predominant. This is possibly so, because this German colony is well represented in the Museums.³

Emile Nolde was mainly influenced by work from German New Guinea. Goldwater says that the piece Strangeness (1923) came from this section and that two pieces in the painting Marks (1920) are also of Cameroon influence. The members of this group did not look upon the work of these primitive artists as Vlaminck had done, but it was "raised up to the level of art...pleasing, ripe, original art."⁴ Other works of

1) Ibid. p. 87
2) Ibid. p. 96
3) Ibid. p. 90
4) Ibid. p. 100
his showing the influence of African art were "The Missionary" and
"Man, Woman and the Beasts" which "are harmonious interpretations of
life in terms of this art and show no attempt to copy formal character-
istics. Even though they are directly influenced by Art from Dahomey.
The general influence is in his desire for strength and inwardness.

Another group of German painters, which formed around 1906, but
whose official beginning was in 1912, knew the art of the African
Negro; the group called the Blaue Reiter. The painters in the south
of Germany had a wider selection of primitive art to study than
either the Equus or the Brueck group. They studied Folk art, early
German wood cuts, and the art of primitive people of both the eastern
and western hemispheres.

"The best indications of the acquaintances of
the Munich group with primitive art and of
their appreciation of its various manifestations
is to be found in its elaborate manifesto pub-
lished in 1912 and from which the group derives
its name. There, in addition to examples of their
own work and of their French contemporaries whom
they admired, we find illustrations of figures
from New Caledonia, the Malay Peninsula, Easter
Island, and the Cameroon; a Brazilian mask, and
a stone Greek relief; Japanese wood cuts, Bara-
vian glass paintings of the fifteenth and six-
teenth centuries and German nineteenth century
folk pictures, a thirteenth century head of a
stone cutter, fourteenth century tapestries and
a Baldung Grien wood cut. In addition there are
European and Arabian children's drawings and
water colors and many popular votive pictures."

Such a diverse collection or rather a conglomeration of art work
considered primitive suggests that there was something that the pri-
mitive artists had been able to express that the Germans wished to
capture, define and apply to their own work. It also shows that they
were not copying directly from the art of any particular region. In a literary expression of the reason for such a diverse study of primitive art, Kandinsky writes.

"When there is a similarity of inner tendency in the whole moral and spiritual atmosphere, a similarity of ideals, at first closely pursued but later lost to sight, a similarity in the inner feeling of any period to that of another, the local result will be a revival of the external forms which served to express those inner feelings in an earlier age. An example of this today is our sympathy, our spiritual relationship with the primitives. Like ourselves these artists sought to express in their work only internal truths, renouncing in consequence all consideration of external form."^1

Not only did they denounce putting emphasis on external form, but also on the use of reason. They felt that being intuitive would allow them to grasp and express feeling better than reason which is analytical, and being analytical is of necessity to a great extent cold and hard. Besides this, they were fairly sure that the primitive artists, whose works they studied knew nothing of the same type of reason as the European mind. The same feeling has been voiced by later critics and artists. "Too much reasoning leads to...high polish, symbols and general prettiness. Emotional subjectivity is what counts, not intellectual."^2

In argument for the use of intuition as against reason Kandinsky writes, "Reason was discovered to be incapable of grasping true reality, which one tried to penetrate with the aid of intuition.... Intuition permits me to see everything at once, instead of by summation of parts...... Thus, in a manner analogous to that of philosophy, art

1) Ibid. p.104
2) Cheney, Sheldon, A Primer of Modern Art, p.280
hopes... to give absolute views, to seize the external."\(^1\)

Another member of this group, August Macke, defending the primitive artists, expresses at the same time his appreciation for their art and a similar contempt for external form as had Kandinsky. He writes, "To hear the thunder is to feel its secret. To understand the speech of forms is to be near the secret. To live. Are not children creators who build directly from the secrets of perceptions, rather than the imitations of the Greek form? Are not the Aboriginal artists who have their own form, strong as the form of the thunder?"\(^2\)

The search of the Blaue Reiter was one of ideals and attitudes. For them Greek art, and the ideals that it had been built upon, were worn out, and to go beyond the external form on the philosophy of this art was impossible.

In their efforts to penetrate beyond the external they were brought in contact with the arts of many aboriginal cultures.\(^3\) This was necessary if their search was to be a thorough one. The fact that is most important here is that African art took and held, an important part in this search. It seemed to possess the quality of penetrating beyond the external and creating a spiritual contact between the object and the observer, more so than any of the other arts studied.

This is important because, here again, a group of artists were able to recognize and appreciate the value of this art. They went further and tried to incorporate some of the feeling gained from it, in their own world. What they were seeking was broader than the ideals of any

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1) Goldwater, R.J., \textit{op.cit.}, p.112
2) \textit{Ibid.}, p.105
3) cf. p.68
group preceding them. They wanted to find "the mystical essence of the universe"; they felt that they could find this essence "in the simple minds of primitive folk", or those whom they considered as such, and "that they should try to interpret the world as such people interpret it."¹ This, in the main, was the influence of African art on the Blaue Reiter group.

Thus far the discussion has dealt with only an indirect influence of African art. Only in isolated cases has there been any direct influence.² Even here there is only an effort to copy subject matter or treatment of materials. These artists were looking for an intangible force from these primitive works to guide them. About the same time other artists were interested in African art. Influences here are more direct and can be noted in various works. These artists did not theorize by writings as did the members of the other groups discussed. Their search led them directly to specific objects. This study of African art was started around 1906 and has continued to the present day. Among those artists to be influenced, we find Picasso foremost. Such men as Derain, Modigliani, Soutine and Matisse in painting, as Lipchitz, Archipenko, Gaudier, Zadkine, Modigliani, Skeaping, Epstein, Lébruck and Brancusi in sculpture, were also affected.

First introduced to Negro sculpture by Derain in 1906, Picasso has striven for an evocative art; an art that is the means and result of getting in touch with the powers of our unconscious self. Throughout his work, it can be seen that he has attempted to interpret the primitive

¹ Goldwater, R. J., op. cit., 105
² cf. p. 60
much in the same manner by the pre-archaic Greeks and with the greatest
of clarity by the tribes in the Gabun. ¹ He delved into the deepest re-
cess of the unconscious where lies a full record of past racial wisdom.
The primitive artist on the road to the elucidation of their problems,
similarly reached deep into the primordial memories. His work since
1927 discloses a most profound instinct into the problems of space
and matter; into the origins of form and their logical destination.

Even though semblances of the African influence can still be seen
in the works of Picasso, the direct influence was short-lived. There
are two basic traditions operating up to our present day; the Graeco-
African and the Perso–Indo-Chinese; the Graeco-African tradition is
based on geometric design; it is centripetal and synthetic in prin-
ciple; it has a spontaneous technique; it uses earth colors; and the hel-
met it evolved is rooster-like. This aesthetic culture was probably
evolved by a dark-skinned race and has its roots in Africa, Greece,
Spain, Italy and around the Mediterranean Sea. Examples are paintings
in Altamira caves, Spain and the Beuchuanaland, South Africa, sculpture
of equatorial Africa, pre-archaic paintings and sculpture of Greece and
Etueria, early Byzantine and Spanish art, Pompeian wall paintings and
the embroidery and weaving of Spain, Morocco and the Balkans. The in-
fluence of these civilizations traveled in fragmentary form as far
north as Scandinavia and Russia. ² Yet, it is decidedly evident that
this present influence is comparable to the earlier movements in a much
broader and more general form. Negro art has brought to us a new point

¹) Graham, J.D., "Primitive Art and Picasso", Magazine of Art, 30;236,
April, 1937.
²) Ibid
of view of aesthetics, and has had a direct influence on contemporary
painting. It is a basic cause of the school known as cubism and the
schools that derivate from cubism. 1

The earliest of the African influences is to be seen in a group of
portrait studies in 1907. Possibly the earliest of these, is a self-
portrait called the "Head". The identification is made by the way
that the hair is worn, which is the same style that he [Picasso] wears
today. Another was a full length standing "Nude". These portraits
have definite influences from the style of the Ivory Coast. 2

"The oval head coming to a point under the chin, the lozenge eyes, the large long nose sharply se-
parated from the planes of the face the same small pursed mouth all are reminiscent of the styliza-
tions of the masks and grave figures of the Ivory Coast. Moreover, the simplification of the ear
of the "Head" may well come from the simple "U" turned on its side which is found on Ivory Coast bobbins; while the modeling of the torso of the
"Nude" which shapes the belly to a point, character-
izes certain of the older Ivory Coast ancestor fig-
ures. It is to be noted that the surface of the
forms of the two paintings, in spite of concavities of outline in the nude, are still convex, with an
emphasis on their roundness and positive bulging qualities. In the simplifications, the reduction
of the face to one or two simple planes of the
nose to a sharp-edged pyramid, and in the
straightening of arms and legs... What in African
statues are subtle relations and delicate modeling,
Picasso changes into striking contrasts and dynamic
effects. Thus the heavy upper eyelid and bulging
eyeball is replaced by a staring open eye; the
long column of the neck, important in establishing
the permanence of a vertical axis, is hidden, so
that the head and the body are juxtaposed without
visible connection; while what are repetitions of
generally similar shaped masses become repetitions
of parallel contours...

1) de Zayas, Marius, op. cit., p.199
2) Goldwater, op. cit., p.119
These tendencies are continued in what are, to judge by their movements toward a latter style, the next works completed by Picasso; the studies for two parts of the large figure painting, The Ladies of Avignon, also of 1907. The study from the standing figure on the right is close to the previously discussed "Nude". It has, however, an increased emphasis on hollows and shadows at the expense of unbroken surface of solid forms. Thus the mouth, small and shut in the earlier canvas, is now large and open, and the nose casts a large double shadow, destroying the plane of the cheek. The eyes have become bigger and darker and show the influence of Bakota metal technique. In addition there is an astigmatic shifting of forms which forecasts later cubistic work. The study for the seated figure on the right seems removed from the inspiration of Blaue art; yet in its violent contortion and twisting of the nose, which becomes more remarkable if we can for the moment forget Picasso's later work, we must recognize a personal adaptation of the mask shapes of the northern Ivory Coast, an influence more clearly seen in other faces of the complete picture...the solidity of the forms above shows that the African influence is still very strongly present.

Of the finished picture of the Young Ladies, only the two figures at the right are under African influence... and indirect influence from Africa is nevertheless discernable in the profile face at the extreme left, the darkness of whose modeling, and the separation of whose planes indicate its reworking for a stronger accent to balance the two striking faces at the right. The bodies of all five figures, however, show more influence of the primitive than a simplification of form, which, while it may be inspired by African practices, does not in any way recall it...

The paintings of the following year, 1908, although they move in the direction of cubism, are still under an influence of Negro sculpture. The Dancer of 1907-08 has the same oval head, small half-open mouth, staring pupils that we saw in the earlier work. Here the derivation from Bakota metal-covered grave images is seen not alone in the silhouette with its joined legs, but also in the modeling. There is again the increased dramatization that we have noted. The planes of the face, depicted with less modeling, have become flatter, the shadow of the nose is entirely schematic and geometrical and the transition from one plane to another is sharp and without gradation...
in the two pictures (Woman with a White Towel and Two Nudes) the exaggeration of the hands and a simplification of the figures into blocked out units in order that the hands may become a more important plastic unit than they otherwise would be, are both characteristic of African sculpture which here may have an important part. But in the formation of the heads, in which the surfaces have almost become concave, meeting each other in ridges, and where the former balancing of the two sides of the faces indicated by the pointed chin for which a continuous rounded contour is now substituted is lost, the African influence is weaker...The Harlequin (period of 1909)...we may consider as closing Picasso's Negroid period. One other painting of this time must be mentioned, however; The Farm Woman of 1908. Here Picasso has combined his previous lessons from the African with that influence from Cezanne...This picture might, indeed, be an illustration of the famous sentence written by Cezanne to Emile Bernard, then published by him in 1905, 'You must see in nature the cylinder, the sphere, and the cone.'

Through this lengthy discussion of the influence that African Negro art had on Picasso, it can be seen that there was a direct influence on his works only for a definite period of time. Still there is not to be seen the type of eclecticism that is seen in the works of the baroque painters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is more of an adaption of form and technique. It is carrying the work of Brucke and the Blaue Reiter a step further.

On the work of other painters of this same period, there is not as much influence as we have seen on Picasso. In the work of Derain, there is only one painting that is directly affected, a Nude of 1908. Here the influence is seen in the squat proportions of the figure. In the paintings of Modigliani, an influence is noticed which is more of a carry over from his sculpture. Here we see the elongated face of the

Ivory Coast, the long nose and the protruding mouth. In the work of

1) Ibid.,
2) Ibid., p.127
Matisse the influence is mainly to be seen in his designs which he uses as the background of many of his nude studies.

Among the modern sculptors there are many men being influenced by the arts of Africa. Modigliani was one of the first to come in contact with this Negro art, in 1909, about the time that the influence was losing its hold on Picasso. During this period, he was persuaded by Brancusi to do sculpture and the natural influence was that of Africa, the predominant foreign influence. He was attracted especially by the elegant masks from the Ivory Coast which are much more suave in character than most Negro work. His stone head in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, is a construction of two eleptical forms, two plates, as it were, facing one another with a sheet of cardboard between. The plates form the profile and the edge of the cardboard forms the nose. Modigliani's works show this influence from 1909-12.

The relation of these works to the style of the Ivory Coast...becomes clear upon the "juxtaposition of the stone head done in 1909, with an Ivory Coast mask...we find the same rectangular shape in the face, the same long, fine, flat nose and the same joining of the line of the nose and the eyelids." Gaudier was making a study of African art at the same time as Modigliani. Wilenski calls him one of the first sculptors to study the art of primitive people.

Zadkine another sculptor, has made a broad study of the art forms of different people. From this study, he has produced several idols. The most important effect is seen in his excellent organizations of contrasted concavities in bronze. The most notables of these works

1) Wilenski, R.H., op.cit., p.147
2) Goldwater, R.J., op.cit., p.125
3) Wilenski, H.E., op.cit., p.147
are, Girl with a Bird and Two Friends.¹

Akua-ba is the title of a sculpture by an Englishman, John Skeaping, who has made a serious study of African art. The term Akua-ba means a fetish worn by the woman of certain tribes during pregnancy and if worn in certain positions will assure the birth of a male child. This figure reveals the study of African sculpture such as the Seated Man from Assam, and the male and female statues from the Phillipines, the French Congo and elsewhere.² As Willensky says, "In Aku-ba, the sculptor has sought not only to organize form but also to capture a direct inhibited vision of the naked body as the Negro sculptors captured it, and to convey the meaning of this vision in maximum intensity without lessening the intensity of the formal meaning as was done so miraculously by the Assam sculptor. He has tried like the Negro sculptors to convey the meaning of the perception by means of the meaning of form. It has a sexual meaning; but not the sensual meaning of caressability because it is not intended to provide the substitute gratification of a pretty girl ninepin."³

Wilenski contradicts those who say that African art has had a direct influence on the work of Jacob Epstein, but he does admit a strong indirect one. The use of Negroid features in his work, particularly his "Genesis", shows the latter. In this work in the face of Negroid character, but the concave treatment is the same as is some of the African masks. However, there is nothing to indicate the principle of form revolving around an axis, nor is there any new vision of the naked form, but, the critic adds, "the 'Genesis' could never have ap-

¹Ibid., p. 149
²Ibid., p. 149
³Ibid.
peared without an experience of Negro sculpture". Epstein has se-
riously studied a great many works of the Negro sculpture and has amas-
sed a large collection of these works.¹

Thus, it seems that African Negro art "grew" on the European ar-
tists. It must also be noted at this time that the attitude of the
ethnologists toward African art was changing. They too, were forced to
change from denouncing and ignoring this work to praising it.

"Negro art has brought to our civilization new images, new forms,
new constructive elements, devoid of all literary subject, in which
there is no philosophy or poetry. Its influence has reached the field
of photography, proving...that a geometrical expression of form exists
in all things and that this is the basis on which we are primarily im-
pressed by objects."²

Like all other influences, it has had importance for individual
artists if not for artists in general. Its effects though, have not
worn off easily. The artists were able to get a certain rejuvenation
from this art which was so different from the art produced on a basis
of the Greek ideal.

It must also be noted that African art at first was one among many
primitive arts that were being studied by the progressive artists at
the turn of the century. But more than the arts of other aboriginal
cultures it has proven its worth and has remained outstanding since it
was first noticed.

¹) Ibid
²) de Zayas, Marius, op. cit., p.199
CONCLUSIONS
After a fragmentary consideration of African art it may be said in summary, that it broke upon the modern world with a sudden freshness and an unequalled vitality, depicting an art of a high stage of evolution among a people far removed from Europe and her tradition; an art arising out of the necessity of religion, plus the impulse to decorate. There is little evidence of the jargon of art for art's sake. The art began a new tangent for European art, increasing and broadening the view first begun by Cezanne.

Africa was not altogether devoid of high cultures. These had grown out of a state of savagery to high cultural levels at times rivalling those of Europe. The art found in these many rungs of civilization represented the same interest in form that is seen in the more remote tribes, the type of form that Wilenski describes as revolving around an axis. In some centers it was descriptive in some more realistic, in others expressionistic. All were able to express sex without the element of sensuousness. From the study made of different tribes, civilization does not play the important part in the development of the art that one would expect. The outstanding fact seen in the work from some of the higher cultures is that it is more descriptive art with an interest in surface finish. On the other hand, where the greatest of these cultures arose, in the Songhai region, there is little difference between the works of this section and those coming from the more backward cultures.

The countries from which the art came were many, and in different stages of culture. The most important of these were Benin, Ifé, and Dahomey, but for the most part they were not countries, but small states and tribes at times respecting each other's boundaries, or
participating in more or less constant warfare. Each tribe has its own chief and Witch Doctor or Medicine man although in general the government was a theocracy. The theocratic government tied in with the art of the people for it was the product, in part of the religious dictates. Most art objects had some religious significance. In some sections works are to be found which are used for purely aesthetic purposes. Although this is not rare, the objects are not as many nor as important as the religious works. The African loves to decorate, though not profusely, all of his surroundings that lend themselves to decorations. The important point is that he knows how much decoration to apply to each object to enhance it as much as possible.

The Negro Sculptor had no desire to express the prettiness of things, his work was for a functional purpose. It is in this use that the artist has not hesitated to sacrifice those elements essential for prettiness as we know it to reach the spiritual feeling. And doing this he is able to represent a universal harmony of spirit and feeling, at the same time keeping this concept more intact than the realistic almost photographic reproductions of the artist of the fore part of the nineteenth century, or other periods.

The outstanding critics of the age have seen fit to pass judgement on this art and have found it worthy to be called a great art. Some have been enthusiastic in their criticism, such as Carl Einstein who calls it the only true sculpture because it has solved the fundamental problems of cubic mass. Others, as Clive Bell, would place it among the great but not among the greatest.

African art was not studied because it was felt to be a great art,
or had developed a great art movement as had the Greeks, the Italians in the Renaissance, or the later Romanticists; but because it answered certain needs of the European artists of the early twentieth century. This art fitted into the beliefs and theories of these artists. The philosophy of the public in general, the trends of art up to the time, the background of the artists and many other factors went together to make for an appreciation and understanding of the arts of Africa. It would have been logical for Gaugin to have discovered African art. Yes, even Cezanne might have understood their works if he had come in contact with them. As it was, the twentieth century French and German artists came upon it about the same time, each without a knowledge of the other's discoveries. If the Fauves, the Brucke, nor the Blue Reiter groups had not come in contact with the arts of Africa some later group would inevitably have done so.

When the French artists finally came upon African art it was not with a sudden understanding of the art but an enjoyment of it because it was different and yet had sculptural quality.

Revolution had been apparent in the arts since early in the nineteenth century. This revolution led up to the open mindedness of the twentieth century artists which enabled them to appreciate and understand the primitive arts. The greatest influence is seen in the works of Picasso. His study of the Africans seems to have been more thorough and prolonged than any of the other painters. On the other hand an influence of African art may seem more prevalent in his works because certain forms can be compared with African works for their similarity whereas the other painters were influenced by the intangible qualities, such as feeling and mood. The study of this art by Picasso finally led
to Cubism from which a host of modern schools have developed. Matisse, Derain, and Modigliani, were among the painters interested in the art of the Africans; Modigliani, Skeaping, Zadkine, and Epstein among the sculptors. These men in turn have influenced many other artists, spreading the African influence through them.

African art then, was an inevitable factor in the evolution of Art. A mature art itself when discovered by the modern artists, it has undergone a second evolution since its discovery. This art has done much to change the thinking and understanding of the modern artist. It may be only another step to a greater art that is to come, but no matter what part later historians will attribute to it, it has been one of the most revitilazing agents in the history of modern art.
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CARVED DOOR FROM NORTHERN NIGERIA

The facial types and the interlace patterns show remnants of the great tradition of Benin.
MAN WITH A SWORD
Carved wood, Bankongo Tribe, Maritime Congo.
IVORY IMAGE OF A WOMAN

From the Katanga region, Belgian Congo.
CAMEROON DANCE MASK

Influences of the Bimia tradition are apparent in the stylization of the eyes and hair.
MAT WITH ANTELOPE
GHOST MASK FROM LIBERIA

The spiral design of the helmet derives from the traditional work done in gold on the Gold Coast.
BAKONGO MATERNITY FETISH

European glass is used in the eyes and in the box cover held by the child.
PYGMY BOWL

The facial type and the combination of head and bowl are influences borrowed by the Pygmies from their neighbors.
AFRICAN FETISHES

The two central fetishes are from the French Soudan.