

Sept of Oct
11-25-55

Dear Miss Kramy:

I'm not waiting to have this typed so please excuse the paper & long hand.

Picasso & Braque were among the first artists to recognize African art as "art," although Leo Frobenius, the German anthropologist, was aware of this quality before these artists.

These cubists were struck by the bold yet controlled form of African sculpture. Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger" is definitely influenced by the African mask.

The early efforts of these men paved the way for a new and fresh look at all primitive (so-called) art. Bold form, simplification and expressiveness were the ~~the~~ elements they found in this art and based their own work on them. Miro is a good example. Look at his works. They are simple, even awesome, yet very sophisticated. The same may be said of Paul Klee who went to all sources for his motivations.

Today there flourishes (knowingly or not) a "school" of Primitivism or Africanism. These painters and sculptors,

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While not actually paraphrasing "primitive" art, have sought to arrive at a freedom, clarity and force which is akin to this art. "Free forms" owe much to African forms. Keep in mind that they are not copied, But they do contain the spirit and essence of this source.

This interest in African and similar art forms is linked with the so-called break with traditional and classical art of about 50 years ago. Dada-ism was perhaps the most extreme evidence of this break. Futurism & Cubism were others. The artist was seeking new sources of motivation. He re-examined oriental art (Tobey & Graves on the West Coast). So in this new search they found new meanings in the art of the so-called primitive peoples, (Indian, Aztec etc. etc.) (as well as African).

However, the modern artist rarely delved into the cultures of these peoples. They simply looked at their art and transformed it to their purposes - as forms. The influence, indirectly of African art has spread to many areas outside

of painting & sculpture as such.
 The "free form" coffee table, for example, goes back to african art through Hans Arp, Juan Miro and others. The light, airy quality of modern furniture owes much to african art through Klee and the new interpretation of oriental art. Even the architecture of Le Corbusier owes its ~~step~~ debt to the african & like artists.

And don't forget the work of the great Italian, Modigliani who died in the 20's; Wilfredo Lam, a contemporary Cuban; Henry Moore, British sculptor. Among other moderns whose works show this influence are Wm Bazotes, Adolph Gottlieb.

Another aspect of the new interest in Africa, but is the fact that collectors have avidly gathered up the best examples in all parts of the world. 50 years ago african art was at best a "curio." Today, it ranks with the best classical art of any and all periods in history. This is because it is now seen with a greater understanding of its meaning

and purpose. A wider insight into all art forms has revealed the true quality in African art. Its influence has opened up new ways of seeing, creating and understanding. It now belongs to the tradition of all great expression in art.

Please note I always said African art not Negro art. The latter may be correct but we may be apt to confuse this with American Negro art. They are not the same - although the American Negro is also influenced by it in some cases, I am, for one.

Also don't misunderstand the term primitives. It is misleading. African art is not primitives as we define the term. It is sophisticated, knowingly done, for a definite intent & use. The distortions are deliberate and arbitrary. African art is traditionally refined, even classic. We should look at all art in terms of its purpose just as we look at Chinese or Greek art in terms of their purposes. As André Malraux said, there is no bad style or

Tradition in art - there are only
bad artists"

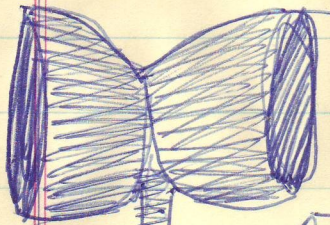
While not all artists today are
"African" by influence - Their work &
their thinking have been re-vitalised
by African Art. This is perhaps its
most significant contribution.

Good luck on your papers -
and don't quote me verbatim - re-
interpret my statements according to
your own thinking.

Sincerely
Zofia Wodny



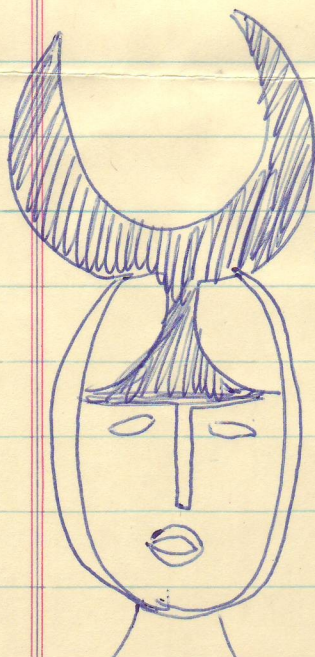
Ivory coast mask - W. Africa
Here the natives identify with
the animals of the region -
a sort of totemism



Head from Dahomey - could not
the "free forms" in art today
be something to this?



Modigliani must have
seen something like this
W. Africa -



Look at the part I shaded then
look at some modern
sculpture

W. African head