

As we advance toward the eastern and northern parts of

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built-in breasts. worn by men, along with a curiously woven costume that has young woman, has a milder and more human expression. It is circumcision rites. The *Mwan Pwo* mask, with the features of a Tshibongo mask is worn by the master of ceremonies during the blur, and nothing remain but two dilated and erratic eyes. The by a conical bonnet. The features are blotted out in a diabolical black head dress shaped as a medieval helmet, the latter surmounted those called *Tshibongo* and *Tshikusa*, the former with its huge times fierce expression. Two of the most remarkable masks are BATSHIOKO masks are characterized by a dramatic, some-

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of Lake Moero, where LUNDA influence prevailed.⁽⁴⁷⁾ during their visit to the court of the *Cazembe*, in the remote land that horrified the Portuguese travellers, Monteiro and Gamito, shaped liked twisted horns, call to mind the double row of statues hands and feet realistically sculptured, their gigantic head-dress in their violent, snarling, animal-like attitudes. Their claw-like cidedly inferior to the ancient statues of this people, unforgettable BATSHIOKO chiefs. But these works of a recent period are de-

We have already described the carved thrones of the BATSHIOKO chiefs. But these works of a recent period are decidedly inferior to the ancient statues of this people, unforgettable in their violent, snarling, animal-like attitudes. Their claw-like hands and feet realistically sculptured, their gigantic head-dress shaped liked twisted horns, call to mind the double row of statues that horrified the Portuguese travellers, Monteiro and Gamito, during their visit to the court of the *Cazembe*, in the remote land of Lake Moero, where LUNDA influence prevailed.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Prof. Oibrechts considers both BATSHIOKO and LUNDA works as included in the great production of BALUBA art of which they constitute a substyle. However, BATSHIOKO sculpture especially remains very distinct and recognizable from any other.
rogatives of a spiritual and religious chief. according to the tradition that confers upon that lady the pre-

"Negro art is the most purely spiritual art we know of," wrote Roger Fry. "It aims at expressing one thing only, the vital essence of man. To the Negro, plastic art is not a means of en-

It is not the tribal characteristics of Negro art nor its strangeness that is interesting: it is its plastic qualities," writes James Johnson Sweeney.⁽⁴⁶⁾ In these plastic qualities lies the secret of all Negro art: "the unflinching ability to conceive of style," as Robert Goldwater puts it. It is probable that the impossibility of fixing human thoughts in written words has developed these astounding gifts for style in plastic expression. But it may be also that these very gifts have kept the Negroes from inventing a writing of their own. All the aspirations of their soul, all they wished to remember from the past and the dead, all they feared from the unknown world and from unaccountable events, all this is faithfully mirrored in their plastic creation.

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To preserve honey, which is an important part of their nourishment, the MANGBETU make curious boxes out of the bark of trees, adorned with graceful, decorative heads.

In the province of Stanleyville, the MANGBETU are perhaps the only tribe of the Congo to manufacture original pottery. Their earthenware bowls in the form of heads with the particular high coiffure of the tribe, show according to Mr. Kjerstemeier, an Egyptian-Sudanese influence.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The masks of the WAREGA (BALEGA) (province of Bukavu) would be worthy of a lengthy study. They are used only by the members of the *Mwami* secret society. They are generally carved in ivory (elephants were formerly numerous in the region inhabited by the BALEGA). An expression of serenity and calm is reflected in the impassive features of these masks. The patina of craftsmanship and material perfection, still more beautiful. However, they are totally different from any other mask to be found in the Belgian Congo, having nothing in common with the traditional creative forms of Bantu Negro cultures. It was *contemplation*, and not *ecstasy*, that inspired their creators.

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Ruanda-Urundi territories have beautiful songs, dances and music, but little or no sculpture.

by Negro art. Matisse and Picasso were the first to collect these objects, whereas Vlaminck was drawn to these statues by their strangeness and curiosity, rather than by their qualities as works of art, as Mr. Goldwater recognizes. (1)

At that time, European ethnological museums (particularly the Paris Trocadéro), already possessed very fine collections of African sculptures, some of them the very best quality.

During the following years, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, the art dealer Paul Guillaume and some early collectors, like M. de Golubew, realized more clearly the aesthetic value of Negro achievements.

Those objects found by the *Fauves* in the most unexpected places were, for the greater part, second rate.

On the other hand, we find few traces of the direct influence of Negro sculptures in the *Fauve* canvases, except perhaps in those of Derain. Curiously enough, with the rise of Cubism around 1910, we see no evidence of any knowledge of the Cameroonian masks and statues, in such close unconscious relationship with the researches of these artists. (2)

Why was it that these young painters attached such importance to African art? This interest goes much deeper than the casual find of a Parisian *colerie*.

It is certain that during the first years of the XXth century, the conflict between collectivity and personality weighed heavily on the artist. In this epoch, more than any other, art served as a weapon of defense for the artist's individuality. Hence the "defensive" character of so many works of art of those days: they are refugees, shelters for both the creator and his followers. Modern art in its entirety has sprung from such a scission of the personality.

The impressionists, despite their continuous struggle against the academic taste of the ruling classes, belong decidedly to the *bourgeoisie*, and their greatest masterpieces exalted the sensuous pastimes and the lighthearted pleasures of the middle-class (the bar of the *Folies-Bergère*, the picnic on the lawn, the towers' lunch, etc.). With the increasing pressure of collectivity into the artists' field, the painters in an effort to preserve their personality, sought a refuge in the secret of their own art. Gone were the portrayal

joying the free exercise of the spirit as we do. For that he turns to music and to dance. But he chooses from appearances certain almost abstract plastic themes, and builds out of them a consistent rhythmical system. By means which seem to escape our comprehension, the miracle of an intense inner life is achieved." (50)

Negro art may be religious, social or familial in its essence. It may be, as Georges Hardy thinks, more realistic and lifelike among peoples that dwell in dense and obscure forests, while it becomes more rigid, hieratic and motionless in regions of plains and savannahs. (51) It may charm a critic of our days by the exquisiteness of its quality: "Touch one of these African figures," writes Mr. Clive Bell, "and it will remind you of the rarest Chinese porcelain." (52)

Be that as it may, Negro art is born from the two elementary feelings that animate mankind: love and fear.

It has found a rich emotional source in the love of the departed, in the ethnical communion which perpetuates the virtues of the ancestors and in the bonds of the secret societies that unite their members in a self-sacrificing friendship.

In the fear of the geni that symbolize the forces of nature, in the fear of the magic powers that surround the frail existence of man, woman and child in the depth of the jungle, Negro art has developed into a metaphysical affirmation. It has given to the panic-stricken peoples, by purely plastic means, the liberation of ecstasy. Love, fear, ecstasy shall never be estranged from the heart of man.

III

It is generally admitted that the discovery of Negro art and its beauty is the find of the *Fauve* painters in Paris. In fact, Maurice de Vlaminck in his boisterous book of memoirs, *Tournant Dangereux*, tells us that on seeing two negro statues behind the counter of a *bistro*, among the bottles of Picon and Vermouth, he bought them. This took place around 1904. Mr. Goldwater, in bringing this fact to our attention in his excellent book, *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (1936), perpetuates this anecdote.

Assuredly, Maurice de Vlaminck, like André Derain, Henri Matisse, and somewhat later, Braque and Picasso, were attracted

The German group of the *Blaue Reiter* (Kandinsky, Marc, etc.), that flourished in Munich in 1912, felt greatly the influence of primitivism of all kinds, including Negro art. But it is the Swiss-born Paul Klee who was most inspired by Negro masks and objects.

The sculptors, of course, were soon to become aware of the rich material that was brought to them by Negro art. Lipschitz, Henri Laurens, Zadkine and Modigliani, in his rare but splendid sculptures, show us that they have understood the lessons of the Ivory Coast, Gabun and Congo sculptures.

What is the precise nature of this influence? This is not easy to answer. A determined influence, that is, a tendency to imitate this or that type of Negro sculpture, is limited to very few cases: Picasso's Negro period (1906-1909), and some of Klee's fantastic personages or animals. But besides such direct and evident influence, many other traces of Negro craftsmanship can be found, more or less assimilated and enshrouded within the technique of modern painters and sculptors.

In the XXth century, Negro art has become a factor that cannot be ignored any more than Romanesque sculpture or Byzantine mosaics.

We will endeavor to enumerate some of the most striking processes that the contemporary artists have borrowed from Negro technique:

- 1) the treatment of the human face; the simplification of the features, reduced to essential lines exaggerating the eyes, and uniting eyelids and nose in one curved or broken element. (Rouault, Léger, Permeke, Tytgat).
- 2) the construction of the face in which the nose is a volume in itself, distinct from the rest of the composition, such as we see in a famous Picasso portrait entitled: *la femme au nez en quart-de-bric*.
- 3) the adoption of the *perspective descendante* of which we have already spoken in connection with the appearance of the human body as in many of Giorgio de Chirico's seated figures.
- 4) the use of purely decorative designs out of which a powerfully realistic image emerges; this is the technique cur-

of suburban mirth and innocent voluptuousness. Gauguin fled to virgin islands of the South Seas; the aristocratic Toulouse-Lautrec plunged deeply into the underworld; the solitary Odilon Redon retired into a dreamland of books and flowers. Cézanne, father of our century, in his shining solitude of Provence, opened wide the doors of the future, through which were to pass both *Fauves* and Cubists.

The new generation was to go still further, not in its withdrawal from society or civilized life, but rather in the shielding of its personality.

Carl Einstein attributes to this psychological process the origin of Cubism. (2) And we can ascribe to the same cause the attraction of European artists towards children's drawings, works by a self-taught genius such as Henri Rousseau, and lastly towards Negro and Oceanian art.

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The direct influence of African statues and masks is felt in the pictures Picasso painted between the years 1906 and 1909. The most famous of these is *Les Femmes d'Algeron*, which hangs today in the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

It is not our intention to analyze or to explain the character of this influence. We leave it to the reader to compare and to draw his own conclusions concerning Picasso's Negro period and the models that may have been his inspiration. This applies to other modern artists who have been subjected to similar influences. We find these artists everywhere: among painters and sculptors, in Paris and in Germany, in Belgium and in Austria. In the *Ecole de Paris*, Derain, Modigliani, Léger and Rouault are among the most striking examples. And again Picasso, in whose stupendous developments the features of BALUBA and Ivory Coast masks pass like Ariadne's thread.

In Belgium, the first masks brought from the Congo, in the early nineties, greatly impressed the foremost Belgian artist, James Ensor. (4) In his still-lives, where masks mingle with shells and porcelain, he creates a grotesque synthesis which combines the elements of both Flemish carnival and Negro ceremonial masks. In the works of the Flemish expressionists Permeke, Frits van den Berghe, Desmet and Tytgat, many resemblances with Negro sculptors may be traced.

POSTSCRIPT

By J. M. Jador

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of the Native Arts and Crafts.)*

It is not without interest to recall some of the steps which the Belgian Government has taken to support Congolese artists and craftsmen. The objective of its efforts in this field is to make them participate, without prejudice to their own culture, in a world civilization, in which the different cultures of mankind will be integrated.

During the last fifty years, the Belgian Government's interest in the Congo's plastic arts has not been limited to that of an art collector or a museum expert. That is how it was in the days of the Congo Free State, from 1885 till 1908. Around 1897, the first curator of the Tervuren Congo Museum was more puzzled by the strangeness of Negro art objects than ready to admire their expressive quality. In fact, he had the audacity to call them "magots" (apes).

His immediate successors began to look at them with the open mind and subtle insight of the ethnographer, and later of the ethnologist. Today, Belgian interest in Negro art is far more lively and active than it was in the days before Belgium took over the administration of the Congo in 1908.

In the first place, our ethnographers and ethnologists, guided by the humanistic and social motives of the Mother Country which wants "to rule only in order to serve" (P. Ryckmans), have focused their studies of the Congolese ethnical past on what still has vital and lasting value for the future. This has brought them closer to an understanding with art lovers and artists, and so they are now indulging less than before in those professional squabbles which Mr. Koehnitzky so much deplores. They have recognized that Negro art, like everything else in African Negro culture, unavoidably combines economic, social, political, spiritual and, above all, religious elements. They have realized that the only reason why there is so little to learn from the history of this art, is the fact that the primitive Africans had no written language in which to record it for future generations.

But that is not the full story. Around 1921, Belgian writers and artists began to take up the defense of Negro art, in a selfless and active spirit.

In January 1935, as a result of an intervention in the Belgian Chamber by the late Louis Piéard, the Minister of Colonies created a permanent Commission for the protection of the native arts and crafts of the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi. Since then this Commission has made constant efforts to promote the local conservation of the artistic heritage of the Congolese tribes. It has supported the establishment of an educational system based on respect for the natives' particular temperament and artistic qualities. In the same spirit, studios and workshops for native artists have been created. Municipal, provincial and local museums have been founded. They enable working artists to remain in direct touch with the artistic achievements of their ancestors. Finally, sale counters have been established which promote the authentic products of native artists and craftsmen. By introducing a sharp control on the quality of the art products offered for sale, these counters have done much to insure markets and outlets, which make artists feel that their effort pays.

The first chairman of the Commission was the former Minister of Arts and Sciences, Jules Desiré, founder of the Belgian Royal Academy of French Language and Literature. He was an orator and writer, as well as an outstanding art lover and critic. His successors were H. Postiaux, Honorary Governor of the Colonies, Louis Piéard, journalist, author, art critic and member of the Belgian Parliament, and the writer of the present note.

Under these successive chairmen, the Commission has continued to take an interest in the development of every aspect of the artistic life of the Congolese peoples. In its advisory capacity it helps the authorities, which frequently consult the Commission, and in some cases it takes the initiative in proposing steps which it believes to be its duty to suggest. It also sponsored numerous public events and exhibitions that are likely to advance the interests of native artists. Its efforts have contributed to the creation of prizes to reward the best among them. In 1950, it published an illustrated luxury edition of a book on native arts, as a mark of confidence in its rebirth and future development (*L'Art nègre du Congo Belge*, 200 pages in-16, with illustrations, Brussels, Copami, 1950).

This brief survey of the activities of the Commission shows that the Belgian attitude towards Congolese Negro art is now beyond the stage of a distant relation between ethnologists and art lovers. Today this art is seen again in the right perspective, as