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# AVANT-GARDISTS AND PRIMITIVISM

**Abstract:** Today, the relations between modern art with primitive art are almost legendary. Contemporary appreciation of non-European artists' contribution to the development of modern art was reflected, for instance, in the ground-breaking exhibition held in 1984 at the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), titled *Primitivism in 20th-century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, curated by the influential art critic and director of this institution, William S. Rubin. Even before that, however, reflections on the phenomenon of primitivism had been based on the combined exhibitions of tribal art and modern art, such as a display of Picasso's works combined with African sculptures, organized in Berlin and in Dresden in1913, as well as the presentation of African art at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 Gallery in New York. Deeper and broader reflection on the importance of the contribution of tribal cultures (including, of course, African culture) to modern art appeared in 1938 in Robert Goldwater's book entitled *Primitivism in Modern Art*. The avant-gardists' expectations concerning so-called primitive art varied. Most often, they sought formal inspirations (Cubist painters, modern sculptors Constantin Brancusi, Pablo Gargallo, Alberto Giacometti, Jacques Lipchitz). However, some artists have looked to it for new representations and symbols as well as a source of human creativity. The article concludes with the words of Georges Salles that the art of black Africa has renewed European artistic scene.

**Keywords:** Avant-garde, visual arts, primitivism, Black Africa, artistic affinities.

Today, the relations between modern art and primitive art are almost legendary. Contemporary appreciation of non-European artists' contribution to the development of modern art was reflected, for instance, in the ground-breaking exhibition held in 1984 at the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), titled *Primitivism in 20th-century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, curated by the influential art critic and director of this institution, William S. Rubin. Even before that, however, reflections on the phenomenon of primitivism had been based on the combined exhibitions of tribal art and modern art, such as a display of Picasso's works combined with African sculptures, organized at the Neue Galerie in Berlin in December 1913 and in Dresden, as well as the presentation of African art at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 Gallery in New York, organized on the initiative of Marius de Zayas in 1914 under the eloquent title *Statuary in Wood by African Savages: the Root of Modern Art*.

Fig. 1. African art presentation at Alfred Stieglietz's New York 291 Gallery, 1916
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Deeper and broader reflection on the importance of the contribution of the tribal cultures (including, of course, African culture) to modern art appeared in 1938 in 1938 in Robert Goldwater's *Primitvism in Modern Art*[1].

The avant-gardists' expectations concerning so-called primitive art varied. Most often, they sought formal inspirations (Cubist painters, modern sculptors: Constantin Brancusi, Pablo Gargallo, Alberto Giacometti, Jacques Lipchitz). However, the artists from the *Die Brücke* group looked to it for new representations and symbols as well as a source of human creativity. The interest in the latter issue was related to the research in human psychology carried out by Sigmunt Freud in the late 19th century. The Expressionists were also inspired by the nudity, presented as part of the life of the tribal communities. It is worth mentioning, however, that some of the artists themselves (e.g. Pablo Picasso) frequently denied the influence of African art on their works.

African culture had not always enjoyed such interest of the Europeans; on the contrary, during the colonial period, the continent was treated only as a source of slave labour, and its inhabitants were thought to have no civilization, culture, or art.[2]

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1 R. Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1986. The book was first published in 1938.

2 Although the European artists were eager to incorporate black protagonists into their works of art, for instance in the popular iconographic motif of the Three Wise Men that came to baby

A deeper appreciation of the objects coming from Africa appeared only at the turn of the 20th century. It was when literary works, such as *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad[3], started to show colonialism as a great destructive force, which not only exploited the continent, but also degenerated its inhabitants and their culture. Almost overnight memorabilia from overseas journeys left the curio cabinets, so-called *Kunst-und Wunderkammern*[4], and appeared in the collections of ethnographic museums, such as the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde operating since 1873,[5] and Musée Ethnographique du Trocadéro, established in 1878 by Ernest Théodore Hamy, providing a treasury of information about the Black Continent. In the early 20th century, Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), a leading theorist of Cubism, came up with a daring idea. In 1909 he suggested that "The Louvre Museum should present some of the masterpieces of exotic art, the sight of which is as moving as the beautiful sculptures of the western civilization".[6]

Interest in the African culture in ethnographic terms resulted in the methodological description of its artefacts. One of the earliest analyses of African sculptures from an aesthetic point of view is a dissertation titled *Negerplastik*.[7] This text was published in 1915 by Carl Einstein (1885–1940), an influential writer and critic associated with the movement of German Expressionists. The author is of the opinion that the distance and stereotypes which prevailed in the relations between the Europeans and the inhabitants of Africa prevented "any aesthetic valuation". Moreover, a European viewing African art was absolutely convin-

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Jesus or in Shakespeare's *Othello*, still it was not until the 19th century Romanticism and its fascination with the Orient when painters decided to depict black characters more willingly. The visions of oriental, mysterious Africa and its inhabitants were the subject of paintings by Jean August Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), Theodore Chasseriau (1819–1856) or Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912). The counterweight to these visions were the drawings and paintings by artists who actually took part in exotic expeditions. See more on that subject in A. Pawłowska, *Afryka - kontynent bez sztuki i historii? O relatywizmie kultury afrykańskiej*, in: *Przeszłość bez historii*, ed. J. Janus, R. Knapek, P. Tomczok, Katowice 2007, pp. 66-75.

3 J. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, "Blackwood's Magazine" (February 1899–April 1899), vol. CLXV pp. 164-460, 460-621, 620-781 and Idem, *An Outpost of Progress*, "Cosmopolis", t. VI–VII (June–July), 1897.

4 *Kunst-und Wunderkammer* (cabinet of curiosities) was a way of exhibiting collected works of art from other continents among shells, feathers, or bones, that became highly popular in the 16th century. This tradition lasted till the mid- 19th century. More on that subject: A. Pawłowska, *O potrzebie tworzenia kolekcji sztuki afrykańskiej*, in: *Muzeum sztuki. Od Luwru do Bilbao*, ed. Maria Popczyk, Muzeum Śląskie w Katowicach, Katowice 2006, pp. 272–281.

5 The museum is based on the cabinet of curiosities, known as Kunst- und Raritätenkabinett, that once belonged to Joachim II, Elector of Brandenburg (1505-1571).

6 After: http://detoursdesmondes.typepad.com/dtours_des_mondes/2007/12/apollinaire.html. Cp.: *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art. A Documentary History*, ed. J. Flam, M. Deutch, University of California Press, Berkeley 2003, p. 6.

7 C. Einstein, *Negerplastik*, Verlag der weißen Büche, Leipzig 1915.

ced of his culture's "unconditional, simply fantastic superiority".[8] Interestingly, describing the spatial characteristics of sub-Saharan African sculpture, Einstein used the term "cubic space", very close to the "cubist space", used in the texts referring to Cubism. Another reference to Cubism in the text is the emphasis on the closeness between the visual structure of Cubist painting and African art, but "(...) what seems abstraction here [in Cubism] is directly natural there. In the formal sense, Negro art will turn out to be orthodox realism".[9]

The first French-language publication on African art was the work of the merchant and collector of modern and African art, Paul Guillaume (1891–1934). [Fig. 2] In 1917, he published the book Sculptures Nègres, illustrated with 24 photographs. Its introduction was written by Apollinaire, who emphasized that the purpose of the publication was not only pleasing the sense of sight, but also collecting and grouping items that are typical from the aesthetic point of view.[10] Soon, with

Fig. 2. Paul Guillaume in his first gallery in 1014
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8 After: K. Tkaczyk, *Negerplastik Carla Einsteina nowe spojrzenie na sztukę Afryki*, in: *Kultury Afryki w świecie tradycji, przemian i znaczeń*, ed. A. Nadolska-Styczyńska, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2009, p. 102.

9 Ibid. p. 104.

10 G. Appolinaire, *Concerning the Art of the Blacks*, in: *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art. A Documentary History*, ed. J. Flam, M. Deutch, University of California Press, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 2003, pp. 107-110.

Guillaume's help, the first exhibition of art from Africa and Oceania, titled *Première Exposition d'Art Nègre et d'Art Océanien*, was organized. The exhibition was held between 10th May and 31st May 1919 at Devambez Gallery; the catalogue was prepared by Henri Clouzot and Andre Level, in collaboration with Apollinaire.

Another important intellectual contribution to the body of knowledge on the art from the Black Continent, showing, at the same time, an increase in understanding non-European forms of artistic expression, was the essay "Negro Sculpture" by the artist and critic Roger Fry (1866–1934).[11] He discovered African sculpture in 1919 through the above-mentioned substantial collection of the merchant Paul Guillaume. Fry's article, published in the journal *Athenaeum*, was a commentary on the exhibition of thirty African objects of artistic nature at the Chelsea Book Club in London in 1920. With the superiority typical of the white race, he noted: "We have the habit of thinking that the power to create expressive plastic form is one of the greatest of human achievements (...). It seems unfair to be forced to admit that certain nameless savages have possessed this power not only in a higher degree than we at this moment, but than we as a nation have ever possessed it."[12], adding that what distinguishes African sculpture from the sculpture known in the West is "complete plastic freedom". Fry's unquestionable achievement was his highlighting of two basic features of African sculpture: its freedom from realistic representation and its emphasis on the formal meaning of solid three-dimensionality.[13]

> I have to admit that some of these things are great sculpture – greater, I think, than anything we produced even in the Middle Ages. Certainly they have the special qualities of sculpture in a higher degree. They have indeed complete, plastic freedom; that is to say these African artists really conceive form in three dimensions. Now this is rare in sculpture.[14]

The author summarized his disquisition by stating: "It is curious that people who produced such great artists did not produce also a culture in our sense of the word."[15]

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11 R. Fry, *Vision and Design*, New York 1924, p. 99-103. Original: R. Fry, *Negro Sculpture at the Chelsea Book Club*, "Athenaeum", 1920, vol. 94, April 16, p. 516.

12 F. Spalding, *Roger Fry, art and life*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1980, p. 233.

13 The second author, who also published a review of the same exhibition, was Clive Bell. In his opinion, the greatness of African art stemmed from the fact that "savages create furiously. (...) an artist must retain that primitive energy if the past is to act as his partner". Such an understanding of African sculpture assumed that it was not an outcome of creative intelligence, but a matter of instinct. Compare: T.M. McLaughlin, "Clive Bell's Aesthetic: Tradition and Significant Form", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1977, no. 4, p. 437.

14 R. Fry, *Vision and...,* p. 100.

15 Ibid. p. 103.

The artists associated with the modernist trends discovered a new fascinating form in the sculptures brought from Africa. They were excited by the simple, austere shapes, the economical use of the material and the deliberate deformation of the human figure. These features coincided with the new aesthetic taste of the period. The first viewer to draw attention to it was Marius de Zayas Enriquez y Calmet (1880–1961), a Mexican artist and owner of the influential modern art gallery in New York. In his racism-tinged text from 1916, titled "African Negro Art and Modern Art", filled with parallels between the mentality of a child and a black man, de Zayas noted that "Negro art has re-awakened in us the sense for abstract form".[16]

From the very beginning, the legend-shrouded history of 20th -century artistic avant-garde was inseparably intertwined with the notion of primitivism, which indigenous African art was thought to exemplify.[17] According to the legend based on the artists' memories, everything began in 1905, when the Fauvist painter Maurice Vlaminck visited a bar in Argenteuil after finishing his plein-air work, and saw three African sculptures on the shelf between the bottles of alcohol. In his memoirs, Vlaminck wrote about his earlier visits, with Andre Derain, to the Paris ethnographic museum at the Trocadero Palace, which housed numerous examples of African sculpture, but, according to the artist, "neither Derain nor I treated these works as something more than barbarian fetishes"[18]. [Fig. 3] A mask of the Fang tribe, given by an unknown person to Vlaminck at the turn of 1904 and 1905 has been preserved until today. Vlaminck, in turn, showed it to Derain, who was allegedly "struck dumb with delight". He bought the mask and then showed it to two other pioneers of modern European painting: Pablo Picasso (the author of Cubism and pioneer of modern art in many respects) and Henri Matisse (the most famous Fauvist painter). The above-mentioned mask of the Fang people was, of course, only one of the many items brought from Africa to Europe and sold at antique shops[19]. As recalled by Matisse, "At that time everyone started looking for Negro figurines. They could be found without much difficulty".[20]

Picasso's fascination with African sculpture played an extremely important role in the artist's work. It is not without reason that the early years of Cubism

16 M. de Zayas, "African Negro Art and Modern Art" in: *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art. A Documentary History*, ed. J. Flam, M. Deutch, University of California Press, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 2003, pp. 92-99.

17 African art was not considered as "primitive" until c. 1915. More: K. Tkaczyk, *Negerplastik*..., pp. 103-104.

18 M. de Vlaminck, Portraits avant décès, Flammarion, Paris 1943, pp. 105-107.

19 What is interesting is that the said mask was identified as an inspiration for Cubists and Fauvists. Currently it is a part of Alice Derain Collection. Compare: F. Willett, *African Art. An Introduction*, Thames & Hudson, Toledo 1988, pp. 35-36.

20 A. Vallentin, *Picasso*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1959, p. 188.

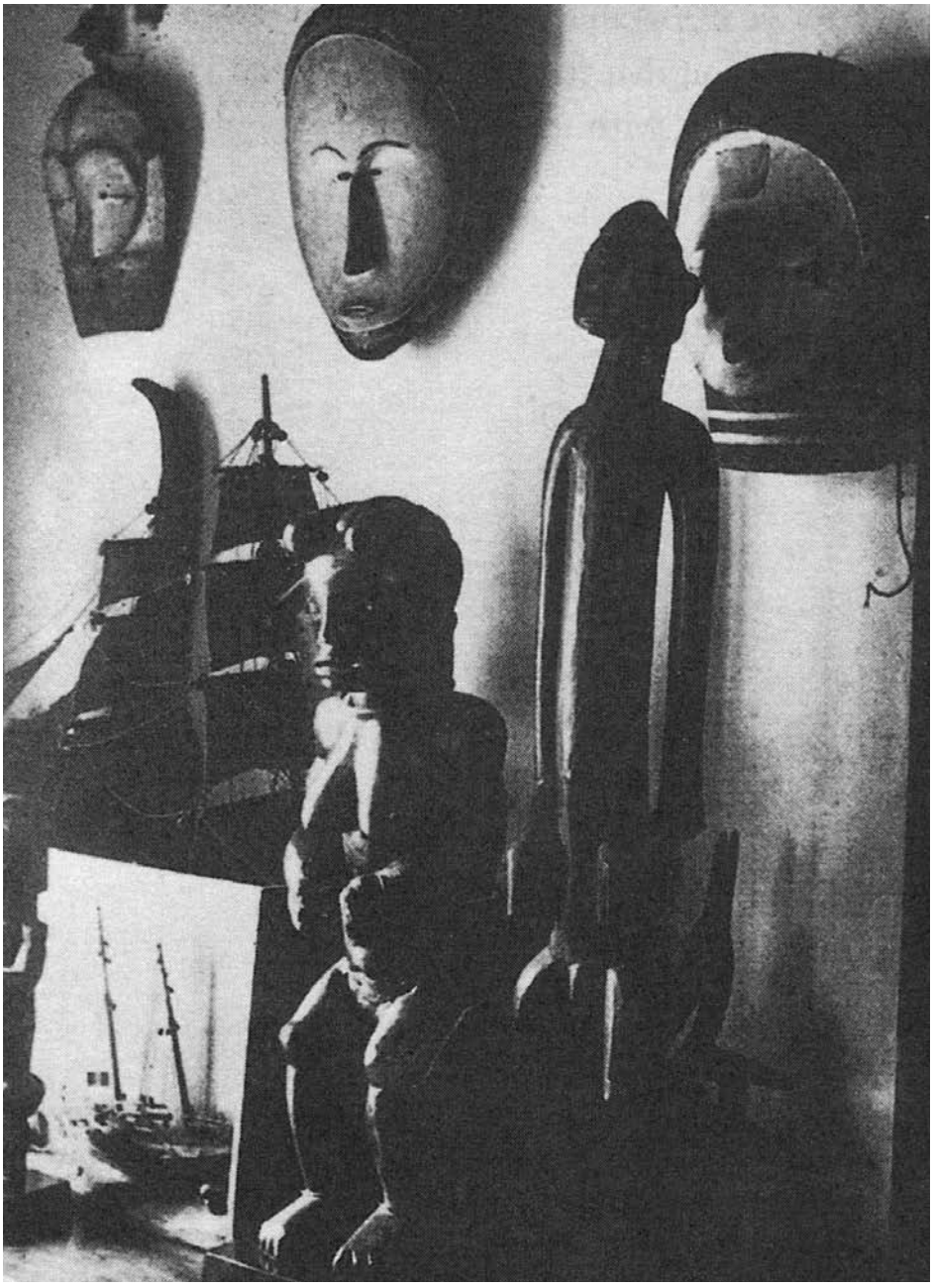

Fig. 3. Corner of the studio in André Derain, Paris, circa 1912–1913
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(1907–1908) are referred to as the "Negro period". A flagship work of the artist from this period – *The Young Ladies of Avignon* – has many features that coincide with African woodcarving. The body is presented here in a new way, divided into parts, into segments. Moreover, the head of one of the women is very clearly inspired by the Baule mask (Ivory Coast).[21] Although Picasso repeatedly denied the influence of African art on his painting[22], there is plenty of evidence that it was close to him. It is known that already in 1910 he had collected a lot of items from Africa, which is confirmed by his long-time female companion, Fernanda Olivier. In her journal, she wrote: "Picasso is becoming a fanatic of Negro sculptures, he has more and more statues, masks, fetishes from different parts of Africa".[23] [Fig. 4] It is also worth mentioning that another Cubist, Georges Braque (1882–1963), admitted openly in a letter to his merchant: "These primitive masks have opened up new horizons for me",[24] while Picasso himself, asked by a journalist to describe what effect "Negro art" had on his work, replied impatiently: "Negro art? I do not know anything like that".[25] [Fig. 5]

The second trend which drew artistic inspirations from primitive plastic arts in the early 20th century was German Expressionism. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1905-1913), Fritz Bleyl (1905–1907), Erich Henkel (1905–1913), Karl Schmidt -Rottluff (1905–1913), Max Pechstein (1906–1912), and Emil Nolde (1906––1907) – members of the Dresden-based group Die Brücke, active in 1905–1914, discovered a new world of forms, materials, images, and symbols in the art of non-European cultures. Their appreciation of the culture of Africa and Oceania was associated with a wider phenomenon of the return to "primitivism", rooted in the European ideas of exotic countries, and with the search for the source of human creativity. The interest in the latter issue was related to the research into human psychology carried out by Sigmunt Freud in the late 19th century. The Expressionists were also inspired by the nudity presented as natural in the life of the tribal communities. The lifestyle and interior design of the studios of *Die Brücke* artists reflected their defiance of "civilized refinement" and "civilized" sexual norms. Their wooden, severely hewn sculptures and wood engravings represented their search for a new way of expression. It was not a coincidence that Kirchner painted figures of people with pseudo-African sculptures and exotic accessories, or

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21 Picasso's friend and art dealer D. Kahnweiler, mentioned the influence of a mask from the *Wobé trib*e (also known as Gere from Ivory Coast), that Picasso is said to have seen. Compare: D. Kahnnweiler, "Negro Art and Cubism", *Horizon*, December 1948, pp. 412-420.

22 Picasso did not acknowledge the link between Cubism and his interest in African art. He believed that these were separate issues. Compare: Brassai (G. Halasz), *Conversations with Picasso*, Gallimard, London 1964, pp. 92-106.

23 F. Olivier, *Loving Picasso, the private journal of Fernande Olivier*, Harry N. Abrams, New York–London 2001, p. 84.

24 F. Willett, *African Art*..., p. 36.

25 A. Vallentin, *Picasso*, p. 189.

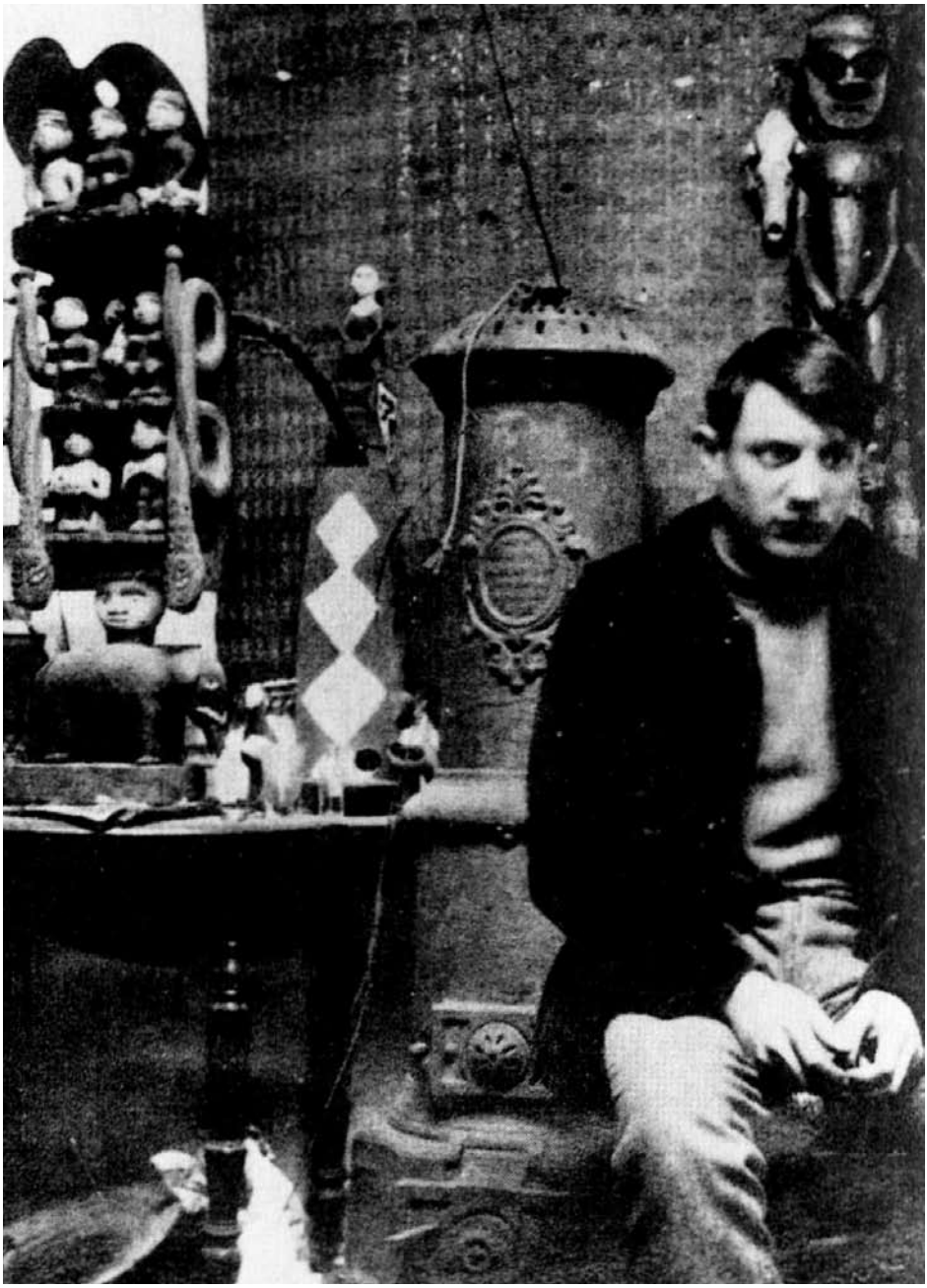

Fig. 4. Picasso at his studio in the Bateau Lavoir, Paris 1908
https://pl.pinterest.com/explore/bateau-lavoir/?lp=true [20.07.2017]

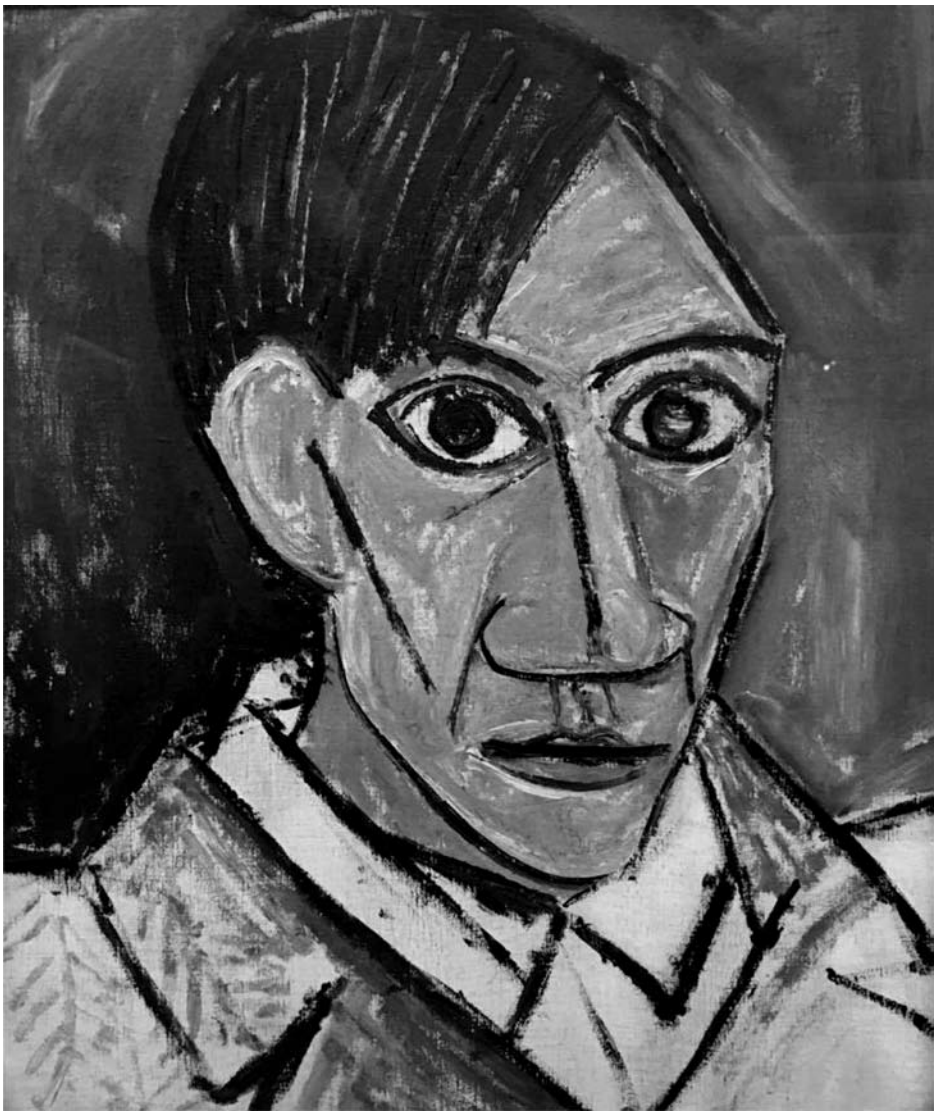

Fig. 5. Pablo Picasso, *Self-Portrait* from "Negro period", 1907, Veletrzni Palac Prague, fot. E. Podawczyk

against the background of frescoes or curtains with "primitive" motifs of lovers. For this purpose, he used the decorations of his Dresden studio. Kirchner's mature paintings, such as *Playing Naked People* (1910) and F*emale Nudes Striding into the Sea* (1912), appear to be clearly inspired by the statues of the Bambara peoples (today's Mali). The unobstructed nudity of the young people shown in

these paintings at the same time calls up associations with the state of primordial freedom. Even during the First World War, the young artists from Zurich, associated with the decadent Dadaist movement, were fascinated by the primitive origins of African art. Especially Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974) was obsessed with African rhythms. "He particularly liked a great slit drum, whose sounds usually accompanied his recitations of the defiant *Prayers (Phantastische Gebete)*." As noted by his friend, another Dadaist, Hugo Ball (1886–1927): "He pleads for an intensification of rhythm (Negro rhythm). He would best love to drum literature and to perdition".[26] Elsewhere, Ball recalls Marcel Janco (1895–1984), an artist coming from Bucharest, also associated with the Dadaist revolt in art, who was fascinated with masks: "For another evening, Janco prepared a series of more than fine masks. (...) The masks not only made it necessary to complement them with a costume, but they also dictated a strictly defined, pathetic gesticulation, verging on madness. (...) These masks simply demanded starting a ridiculously absurd dance".[27] Of course, it is unnecessary to add that the masks created by the artist were clearly inspired by African masks both in their form and in their dynamic ritual function.[28]

A momentous change in the evaluation of African art occurred after the First World War. The war, which caused so much havoc and highlighted the enormity of human suffering, also accelerated the rhythm of life, brought with it poisoned pleasures, and gave rise to new emotions. Sclerotic pre-war art turned out to be too weak to express the chaos caused by the fall of the classic myths. In such a climate, the wide public discovered non-European art, and especially African art, together with all its forms of artistic expression. Jazz, imported from America via radio transmissions, shook Europe with its unsettling rhythm; African poetry attracted attention with its original naivety, refined in its simplicity; African sculpture also enjoyed great interest. During the decade between 1915 and 1925, the popularity of primitive sculpture reached its apogee. In May 1919, the Devambez Gallery organized the first exhibition of sculptures from Africa and Oceania in Paris; *Anthologie nègre* by Blaise Cendrars was published in 1920, and in the same year the avant-garde magazine *L'Action* published the comments of leading modernist artists on African art. Félix Fénéon (1861–1944), an influential critic with anarchist views, conducted a questionnaire, asking the leading figures in early 20th century culture and art: "Will there be time when works from distant places will be exhibited in the Louvre?"[29] In 1923, Paris was overwhelmed by

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26 https://diegosartlabblog.wordpress.com/2016/09/17/richard-huelsenbeck-dada-poet/ [29.04.2017]

27 H. Richter, *Dadaizm*, trans. J. Buras, Wydawnictwo Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1983, p. 32.

28 More on African inspirations in art: A. Pawłowska, *Inspiracje kulturą Afryki w malarstwie europejskim pierwszej połowy XX wieku*, "Afryka" 2007, no. 25, pp. 71-90.

29 F. Fénéon, *Will arts from the remote places be admitted into the Louvre*, in: *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art. A Documentary History*, ed. J. Flam, M. Deutch, University of California Press, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 2003, pp. 148-166.

the ballet *La création du monde* with Darius Milhaud's jazz music and Fernand Léger's costumes, with the libretto based on African cosmogony, by Blaise Cendrars. Josephine Baker (1906–1975), a black American, who danced barefoot and almost naked as if in a tribal trance, enjoyed her success. An important figure in Paris in the 1920s was the charismatic jazzman, dancer and boxer, a lover of Jean Cocteau: Al Brown (1902–1951). From 1925 Brown and Baker danced in the sensational *La Revue Nègre*,[30] clearly contributing to the phenomenon known as *Negrophilia*, which swept through the avant-garde Paris. At that time, everybody danced jazzing dances of African origin, such as charleston, lindy hop or black bottom, and their artistic equivalents were created by the abstractionist Piet Mondrian (1872–1944). Women imitated the hairstyle of Josephine Baker, while the neo-Cubist artist Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979) designed dresses and fabrics ins-pired by African jazz rhythms. It should be noted that in this period the un-critical admiration for tribal art had nothing to do with ethnographic evaluation of the produced objects, for example their religious or functional context, but it merely focused on their formal qualities seen through the filter of contemporary European art. The first author to mention it was the Italian Carlo Anti (1889–1961) in the text devoted to the exhibition of African sculpture entitled *Primitive Negro Art, Chiefly from the Belgian Congo* (April-May 1923) at the Brooklyn Museum in New York.[31] In 1926, Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro (1897–1974) published the book *Primitive Negro Sculpture*. The 134 pages of the pub-lication contained as many as 41 photographs of items from the collection of the American Barnes Foundation. They wrote:

> If negro sculpture is to be enjoyed at all, it will probably be through its plastic effects. In other ways it is apt to be unmeaning or even disagreeable to civilized people. But in shapes and designs of line, plane and mass, it has achieved a variety of striking effects that few if any other types of sculpture have equalled.[32]

The admiration of the critics and art theorists for the purely artistic quality of the sculptures from the Black Continent aroused considerable interest in Afri-can objects among the European sculptors. This phenomenon is clearly visible e.g. in the works of the famous masters of the avant-garde: Constantin Brâncuşi (1876–1957), Pablo Gargallo (1881–1934), Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966)

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30 P. Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*, Thames & Hudson, London 2000, pp. 70–74.

31 C. Anti, *The sculpture of the African negroes*, in: *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art. A Documentary History*, ed. J. Flam, M. Deutch, University of California Press, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 2003, pp. 180-183.

32 Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro. *Primitive Negro Sculpture,* Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York 1926, p. 7.

and Jacques Lipchitz (1891–1973). These sculptors were eager to create objects inspired with African ones, such as masks, but made in metal (Pablo Gargallo, *Sleeping Muse*, 1911); the Surrealist Alberto Giacometti, fascinated by primitive sculpture, created mysterious, simplified figures, constructed from geometric segments that resembled idols, fetishes or masks (*Woman-spoon, Couple*, 1926).[33] Jacques Lipchitz, who worked mostly in stone, was fascinated by wooden Dogon sculptures, for a long time attributing them wrongly (due to the perfection of their simple form) to Egyptian artists.[34] He collected African since he started living in Paris in 1909. Echoes of African sculpture may also be found in the work of the controversial painter and sculptor, Amadeo Modigliani (1884–1920). His stone sculptures created of ca. 1912, inspired by masks, depict elongated heads with evocative eyes. The notes of Jacob Epstein, another sculptor influenced by *Art Nègre*, show that Modigliani used to put candles on these stone heads in the evening, which made the visitors to his studio feel as if they were at a temple. [Fig. 6]

After the First World War, the dominant trend in the avant-garde movement was the use of symbols and signs. The works created by the artists associated with this trend, such as Max Ernst (1891–1976), Paul Klee (1879–1940), Joan Miró (1893–1983) were visibly inspired by African art. The style of those artists was often a subtle combination of the elements of Surrealism, organic abstraction, and graphic characters resembling primitive art and children's drawings. Paul Klee was fascinated not only by the culture of black Africa. His stay in Tunis at that time resulted in representations of mosques and deserts, stylized to the point of abstraction. In his collages, Max Ernst frequently introduced the motif of a man with a bird's (cock's?) head, evoking the image of the shoulder masks found among the Nimba and Baga peoples from Guinea. In 1950, he created the lithographic series called The masks, which explicitly refers to African masks. The inspiration with African culture was most evident in the flagship image of surrealism, titled *The Elephant Celebes* from 1921. The oval shapes of the fantastic elephant are inspired by the animal-shaped coffins of the Ga people.[35]

The United States was another country which could not resist the powerful influence of *African Negro Art*. It was a fundamental inspiration for the activities of the African-American artists: musicians, writers, and visual artists. The most eminent characters associated with the movement promoting the creativity of black Americans, the so-called *Harlem Renaissance*, were Lois Mailou Jones (1905–1998), Meta Warwick Fuller (1877–1968) and Aaron Douglas (1899–1979), who was active in the early 1920s. Theoretical basis for the movement

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33 More on the impact of African art on 20th century sculpture: A. Kotula, P. Krakowski, *Rzeźba współczesna*, Wydawnictwo Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1985, pp. 136-139, 216-219.

34 Attributing African sculptures to Egyptians and looking for connections between these two, was popular in the beginnings of 20th century.

35 J. Bingham, *African Art & Culture,* Heinemann-Raintree, Chicago 2005, p. 37.

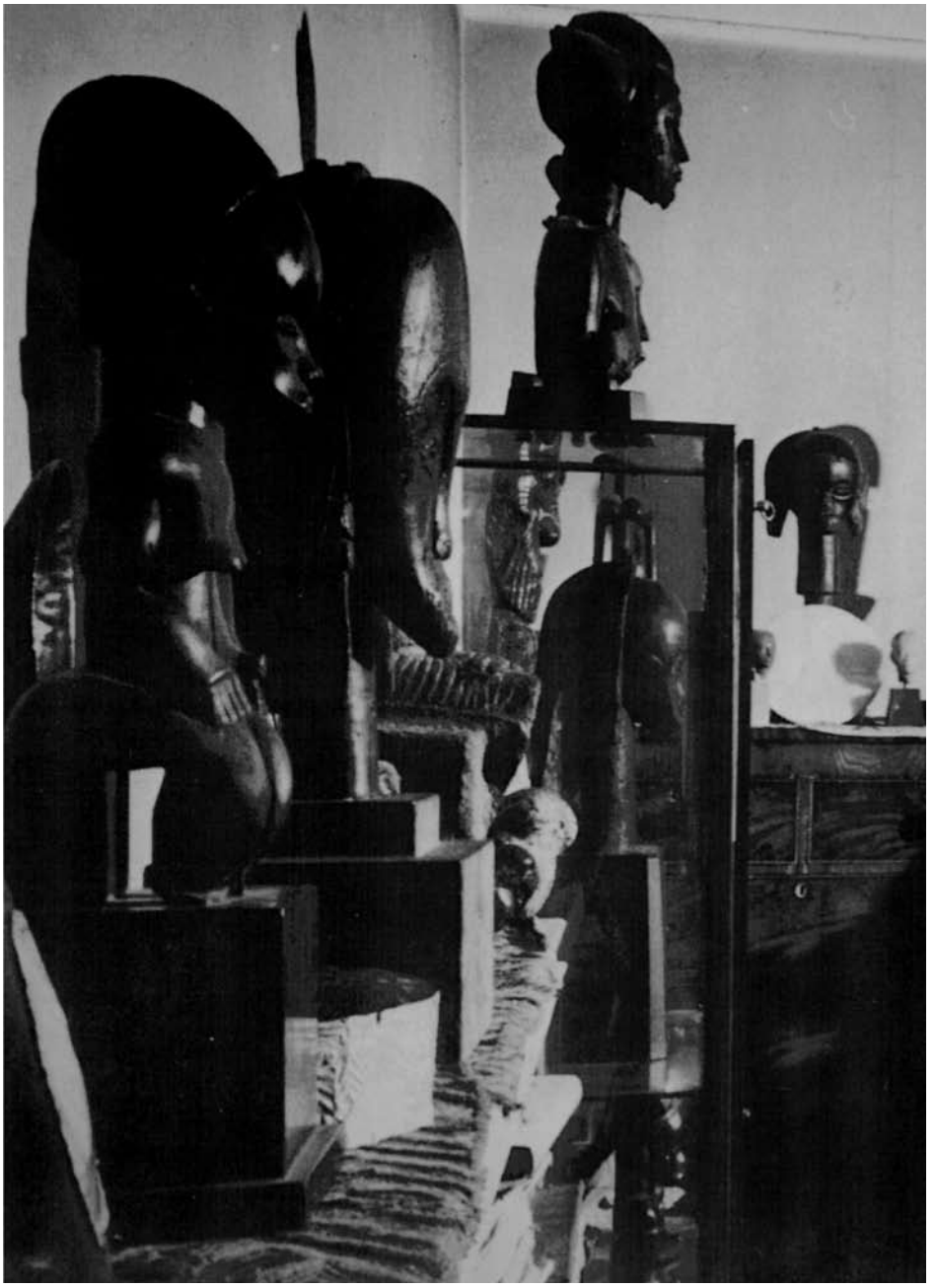

Fig. 6. Part of Jacog Epstein's collection of Fang sculptures, circa 1919
http://pl.pinterest.com/adamorton39/jacob-epstein/?lp=true [20.07.2017]

was created by Alain Locke (1886–1954), who in 1925 published the manifesto of *The Legacy of Ancestral Art*. Locke called for young black artists from the United States to look for new formal solutions and content, as did the European modernists some time before.[36]

Looking at the changes taking place in art from the perspective of the 21st century, it can be said that the contact with the mysterious world of African forms at the beginning of the 20th century proved to be extremely inspiring for modern European art. The simple, yet refined forms of the masks and figurines, their remarkable economy and wonderful spatial form played a major role in the formation of Cubism. The unique deformations of African cult objects, aimed at obtaining the maximum expressiveness of magical forms, sometimes getting close to abstraction, inspired German Expressionism and French Fauvism, allowing the release of "wild existential rage" (Nietzsche). It is worth recalling here the remark of the outstanding French art historian and promoter of the idea of modernism, Georges Salles (1889–1966) on the art of black Africa:

> Since I am closing this article of question marks with some wishes, I will add that of seeing some pieces of these primitive arts take their place in the great conservator of the arts of the past, which is our Louvre Museum. Just because an art presents itself without papers and certificates is no reason to exclude it from the company of those that carry with them the guarantee of numbered archives. What should be enough is that it is a gripping and novel expression of the oldest human concerns. If it did not have this quality, Negro art would not have been able to renew our artistic world and refresh our sense of mystery during the past decade.[37]

Similar comments may be also made on the African-influenced avant-garde trends in the European art of the 20th century. At the same time, although in certain artistic trends, such as Constructivism or Surrealism, it is difficult to find direct quotations from African sculptures, we strongly feel their interest in a certain kind of mental attitude referred to as primitive, which frees the artists from the status ascribed to them for ages.

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36 R.J. Powell, *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, University of California Press, London–Berkeley 1997, pp. 5-12.

37 *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*..., op. cit., p. 204.

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## AWANGARDYŚCI I PRYMITYWIZM (streszczenie)

Związki sztuki nowoczesnej z prymitywną są już dziś nieomal legendarne. O tym, że obecnie ich wkład w formowanie sztuki nowoczesnej został w pełni doceniony świadczy chociażby przełomowa wystawa w nowojorskim Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) z 1984 r. zatytułowana *Primitivism' in 20th-century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern*, której kuratorem był wpływowy krytyk sztuki i zarazem dyrektor tejże placówki William S. Rubin. Zasadniczą podstawę do refleksji na temat zjawiska prymitywizmu stanowiły wspólne ekspozycje sztuki plemiennej i sztuki nowoczesnej, podobnie jak widoczne w twórczości awangardowych artystów inspiracje sztuką plemienną (n.p. prezentacja dzieł Picassa zestawionych z afrykańskimi rzeźbami, zorganizowana w Neue Galerie w Berlinie w grudniu 1913 r. i w Dreźnie czy prezentacja sztuki afrykańskiej w nowojorskiej Galerii 291 Alfreda Stieglietza, zorganizowana z inicjatywy Mariusa de Zayasa w 1914 r. pod wymownym tytułem – *Statuary in Wood by African Savages: the Root of Modern Art*. Poszerzona i pogłębiona refleksja nad doniosłością wkładu kultur plemiennych (w tym oczywiście afrykańskich) w sztukę nowoczesną pojawiła się w 1938 r. w książce Roberta Goldwatera *Primitvism in Modern Art*. Oczekiwania awangardystów względem tak zwanej sztuki prymitywnej były niejednorodne. Najczęściej uwzględniano inspiracje formalne (malarze kubiści, rzeźbiarze: C. Brancusi, P. Gargallo, A. Giacometti, J. Lipchitza). Twórcy z niemieckiej grupy *Die Brücke*, poszukiwali nowych wyobrażeń i symboli a zarazem źródła twórczości ludzkiej. Zainteresowanie tym ostatnim zagadnieniem związane było z badaniami nad psychiką człowieka prowadzonymi przez Zygmunta Freuda w końcu XIX w. Inspiracją dla ekspresjonistów była także nagość, której prezentacja nawiązywała do życia w warunkach społeczności plemiennych. Warto dodać, iż sami artyści niejednokrotnie – np. Picasso – zaprzeczali wpływom sztuki z Afryki na ich dzieła. Konkluzją artykułu jest myśl G. Sallesa, iż sztuka z Czarnej Afryki odnowiła tę z Europy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Awangarda, sztuki wizualne, prymitywizm, Czarna Afryka, powinowactwa artystyczne.