

African-American Art Traditions and Developments

by
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Biographical Sketch of the Author

Michael D. Harris is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He holds six degrees, including a B.S. in Education (1971) Bowling Green University; M.F.A. (1979) Howard University; and four degrees from Yale University (M.A. with distinction, African & African-American Studies [1989], M.A. in Art History [1990], M.Phil. [1991] and a Ph.D.-- "Contemporary Yoruba Art Ile-Ife; History Continuum, Motive and Transformation" [1996]). Dr. Harris has published numerous articles including "Africentrism and Curriculum: Concepts, Issues, Prospects," *Journal of Negro Education*, Summer 1992; co-authored *Astonishment and Power*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Museum of African Art, 1993; African Art: An Essay for Teachers, teacher guide for African Art, High Museum and Atlanta Public Schools (1994) and is currently co-authoring a book entitled *African Art Textbook*, to be published in 1998 by Abrahams.

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CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch of the Author	i
CONTENTS	ii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	iii
PREFACE	v
INTRODUCTION	1
THE CONTEXT OF BLACK ART	3
COLLECTIVITY AND RELATIVITY IN AFRICAN ART	4
THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK ART	7
<i>Rock Art</i>	8
<i>Nubian and Egyptian Art</i>	9
WEST AFRICA	12
<i>Early Nigerian Art</i>	13
<i>Summary</i>	15
THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ART	17
<i>19th Century</i>	19
<i>20th Century</i>	20
CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART	27
CONCLUSION	30
SELECTED PHOTOGRAPHS OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN ART	32
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	54
REFERENCES	65
INDEX	71

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

(SELECTED PHOTOGRAPHS OF AFRICAN/AFRICAN-AMERICAN ARTWORK)

Fig. 1. Egungun Society Costume, New Orleans Museum of Art, Museum Purchase: Friends of Ethnographic Art.....	32
Fig. 2. BaKongo nkisi nkondi figure called Mangaaka. Courtesy, The Field Museum, Chicago, IL, Neg#A109979. Photograph by Diane Alexander White.....	33
Fig. 3. Mali, Dogon Civilization, 20th century, Kanaga Mask, Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of James M. Osborn for the Lincoln Collection of African Art.	34
Fig. 4. Fowling Scene, tomb of Nebamun, Thebes, c. 1400 B.C. Copyright British Museum.....	35
Fig. 5. Nok Jemma Head. Collection National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria. Photograph ©: The Detroit Institute of Arts. Photographer Dirk Bakker.	36
Fig. 6. Head of a Queen. Collection National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria. Photograph ©: The Institute of Arts, Photographer Dirk Bakker.	37
Fig. 7. Head of an Oba. 18th century. Courtesy, The Field Museum, Chicago, IL, Neg#99485.....	38
Fig. 8. Joshua Johnson, Portrait of Sea Captain John Murphy. Ca 1810, National Museum of American Art. Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Leonard and Paula Granoff.	39
Fig. 9. Henry O. Tanner, The Banjo Lesson, Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia.....	40
Fig. 10. Aaron Douglas, Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery Through Reconstruction. 1934. Art and Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.	41
Fig. 11. Jacob Lawrence, 1940-41, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.	42
Fig. 12. Romane Howard Bearden, The Prevalence of Ritual: Baptism, 1964 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn by Lee Stalsworth.	43
Fig. 13. Sam Gilliam, Open Cylinder, 1979, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Mrs. Albert Ritzenberg, Copr., 1979. Sam Gilliam.....	44
Fig. 14. Nelson Stevens [Africobra]. Sister Spirit, acrylic. 1972.....	45

- Fig. 15. Jeff Donaldson (Africobra). Victory in the Valley Esu. 1970. serigraph. **46**
- Fig. 16. E. H. Sorrells-Adewale, Short Story Concerning Regeneration, 1960. **47**
- Fig. 17. Renee Stout, Fetish No. 2, 1988.27. Dallas Museum of Art. **48**
- Fig. 18. Martin Puryear, Bower, 1980. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Seattle. **49**
- Fig. 19. Lamdi Fakaye, iyabeji (mother of twins). Yoruba/ Nigeria, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian. Photograph by FRANKO KHOURY, National Museum of African art, Eliot Elisofon, Photographic Archives, Smithsonian institution. Gift of Jean Kennedy and Richard Wolford. **50**
- Fig. 20. Twins Seven Seven. Queen Oranmiyan the Mother of All Future Teller Ghosts, 1967. New Currents, Ancient Rivers: Contemporary African artists in a Generation of Change. Mimi Wolford, #810, 3210 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20016. Phone 202-362-0532. **51**
- Fig. 21. Ben Enwonwu, Anaynwu (The Awakening), 1961. New Currents, Ancient Rivers: Contemporary African Artists in a Generation of Change. Mimi Wolford. #810, 3210 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Washington. DC 20016. Phone 202-362-0532. **52**
- Fig. 22. Moyo Okediji, Onile, 1962. Collection of the Artist. Courtesy of Michael D. Harris. **53**

PREFACE

“African-American Art Traditions and Developments” is one of a series of essays known as the *African-American Baselines Essays*. Its purpose is to provide staff and students of Portland Public Schools with information about the history, culture and contributions of people of African descent. Originally published in 1987, the Art Essay has been significantly revised.

During the decade that has past, the author Michael D. Harris has earned several additional degrees. When the Art Essay was originally written Mr. Harris held a B.S. in Education (1971) Bowling Green State University, and a M.F.A. in Painting (1979) from Howard University. Since the publication of the initial Art Essay, he has added a M.A. with distinction, African and African-American Studies Art History (1989), M.A. History of Art (1990) and a Ph.D. “Contemporary Yoruba Art in Ile-Ife: History Continuum, Motive, and Transformation” (1996) from Yale University. The Essay reflects additional insight and provides selected illustrations the enhance the understanding of the reader.

While “African-American Art Traditions and Developments” provides enough information to broaden the reader’s perspective regarding the history, purpose, place and impact of African and African-American art, it is important that one sees the Essay as a part of a series designed to promote appreciation, respect and understanding of African and African-American contributions to the world in which we live.

Special thanks must be extended to Dr. Jeff Donaldson, Dean, College of Fine Arts, Howard University and Dr. Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, Associate Dean, College of Fine Arts, Howard University who reviewed the Essay and in their summary statements indicated:

Professor Harris’s Baseline . . . provides a treasure for classroom use and research purposes. Its versatility stems from the depth provided within the brief discussion. The essay provides material and routes of study as divergent as the perspective of the critic, primary scholarship for the historian of Africa and Diaspora cultures, and the folk basis of contemporary forms, yet the essential issue of the need to assess work within its own context has been clearly established. This is a significant contribution to the current intellectual and artistic climate seeking to establish a true multiculturalism and authenticity. The extensive bibliography is a laudable contribution to this effort.

As with other resources produced by Portland Public Schools to assist teachers, other staff and students in increasing their understanding and appreciation of different ethnic groups and cultures, “African-American Art Traditions and Development” should be used to support Portland Public Schools’ delivery of *education that is multicultural*.

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INTRODUCTION

The art of African people in Africa and in the Diaspora has a long and rich history. It has suffered in its relationship with, and assessment by, Western culture for several reasons. Sadly, exhibitionman attitudes and assumptions generated in support of imperial expansion and slavery are prominent among them.¹ It is the intention of this essay to present some of the historical and cultural considerations and notions that have affected the art and culture of people of African descent as a means to contextualize that art, and to undermine ideas of “marginality” and “otherness” that often define the work as an appendage of Western expression.

Specific denigrating and dehumanizing concepts motivated by the Protestant Reformation in 16th-century Europe were formed to justify enslaving the African. This movement “spawned the belief in man’s direct accountability to God, implying personal dignity and rights unrecognized before.” Because of the intensity of the Reformation, it was “necessary to demonstrate that the slave was a different kind of man -- indeed, less than a man.”² The anti-slavery pressure of abolitionists contributed to a somewhat organized ideological defense of slavery in the early 19th century, a defense which came to be supported by scientific “proofs” and sociological explanations at that time.

Negative assumptions relative to the social and technological developments of Africans caused their art to be regarded only ethnologically and anthropologically by invading whites. The works not destroyed in missionary fervor as pagan objects were confiscated freely and sent to Europe as ethnographic documentation at most, or as entertaining curios. The general assumption that the “natives” were childlike primitives or savages made it impossible for their work to be regarded as reasoned, controlled, and purposeful. Abstract imagery was assumed to be childish attempts at naturalism, which European artists had mastered, rather than the product of a different but conscious objective.

The malicious misrepresentation of African society and people supported the enormous profitability of slavery upon which the entire American colonial agricultural economy, and a great deal of the European economy, depended. One British writer in 1725 called the Atlantic slave trade “the hinge on which all the trade of this globe moves.” Another in 1746 called it “an inexhaustible fund of wealth and naval power to this nation.”³

Hard stereotypes were developed about the intelligence and social tendencies of people of African descent, and their non-Christian religious practices were exploited to validate the necessity of black captivity as a civilizing mission for whites.⁴ Africans were

presumed to have no civilized history of significance, and the recorded accounts of great cities and sophisticated social organization in West and central America from early explorers were ignored or suppressed.

The growth of Islam, Christian invaders, and the creeping system of slave procurement had destructive effects upon social/political stability and order in many African societies. The ancient accounts of great black peoples and their pre-eminence in Egyptian developments documented by historians such as Herodotus were ignored or disassociated from the blacks encountered in West Africa. The following account from a New York publication in 1825 shows that accurate information regarding Africans was available at that time.

Those who talk in this way, do not recollect, or perhaps do not know that the people whom they traduce, were for more than a thousand years . . . the most enlightened on the globe.

They were called "Ethiopians", from two Greek words denoting the colour of their skin; and the spirit of adventure by which they were distinguished together with the superiority which they every where manifested over the nations among they dwelt. . . .⁵

African contributions to Greek development also became lost to the minds of whites 2,000 years after it was an unquestioned reality for the Greeks.⁶

With their historical realities ignored or negated, Africans and their New World descendants found themselves beneath the same long shadow of stereotypical racial assumptions. The vision of the black as an uncivilized primitive "brute" was incompatible with the idea of the artist-as-genius that developed during the Renaissance. Acceptance of the expression of blacks on the same terms as that of whites would have granted a level of intelligence, sensitivity, and humanity to the black artist that contradicted the dominant concepts of the day. Many African-American artists who were patronized during and after the Harlem Renaissance were expected to conform to certain "primitive" stereotypes for acceptance as artists.⁷ The residual effects of this attitude continue subtly to affect the way the work of black artists is approached and received by the white art establishment today.

The art of people of African descent outside Africa, like the rest of their culture, must be viewed as part of a continuum of developments that began in ancient "Ethiopia" and traversed the civilized history of the continent. From the Nile Valley above and below the first cataract, from the Sudanic region in West Africa, the savanna and forest regions below the Niger River, and southeastern regions of Africa from the areas of ancient rock painting to the mysterious ruins of old Zimbabwe, art and culture spread and was exchanged in every direction people migrated or traded. Black art developed relative to the specific circumstances in which people found themselves, with many documented and notable changes occurring after the Diaspora borne of the Atlantic

slave trade.⁸

This essay will examine how cultural and historical factors affect the role creative expression has played in African and African-American art and present a conceptual overview with references for further study.

THE CONTEXT OF BLACK ART

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than
the flow of human blood in human veins
My soul has grown deep like the rivers

Langston Hughes⁹

African art should be seen with a consideration of the context of its original creation and function. Also, a realization of the baggage Westerners have brought to the assessment of African cultures can be helpful. Often pejorative terms have been associated with the description of African art and culture and should be examined carefully. Terms such as "tribe," "primitive," "fetish," "ancestor worship," and "traditional" should be either stricken from the lexicon or used with great care. For example, there are more Yoruba people than Swiss, Swedes, or Irish. Why would one people be a tribe and the others not? Perhaps the Yoruba could be referred to as a "people" and/or a "culture" rather than as a tribe.

We should try to describe the meaning and form of African art in ways consistent with what the artists or members of the culture producing it have said about it. We also should consider how a Baule mask in the studio of Picasso or Vlaminck in the first decade of the 20th century got there. How was all the royal art of Benin acquired by the British? In other words, art works have histories which comment about things in ways beyond their original intentions, and the appearance of African works in Western museums and collections may be a silent commentary about the recent history of relations between Europe and Africa.

The beginnings of civilization and social organization occurred in Africa near the Nile River. Egypt began in very similar ways as the cultures from Nubia, or Kush, farther in the interior of Africa.¹⁰ Some scholars feel that people migrating from formerly green areas of the Sahara (which began to dry about 3500 B.C.) transmitted similar cultural elements to the Nile Valley, and the Niger River and great lakes areas of West Africa.

By the American definition of race, Egypt was a black nation.¹¹ This means that the art forms and architecture of Egypt can be seen as black art, and most certainly are African art. Many of these forms and concepts were entirely consistent with work and ideas elsewhere in Africa. The use of outer form to express concepts of inner realities in

Egyptian art is consistent with the practice of most African art throughout history. The Egyptian language has similarities to other North African tongues, like Berber, but is not in the same language families as most African languages to the South. However, the language difference was no barrier to millennia of contact and exchange with southern neighbors in northern Nubia.

Black art had some of its earliest expression in the Nile Valley, and spread influences across the continent as people from Egypt and Nubia migrated or traded south and west. However other ancient traditions developed in West Africa. When invasions and conquests by Asians, Europeans, and Arabs and the desiccation of the Sahara pushed blacks in southern Egypt and Nubia farther south and eventually into a slow Diaspora in all directions, they always encountered an indigenous population.

Trade has allowed culture to spread between societies and groups in Africa, and has connected groups for hundreds or even thousands of years. There has been a tendency for some scholars and historians to suggest that sub-Saharan ethnic groups were unconnected to earlier cultures and events on the continent and they developed intuitive, survivalist lifestyles in relative isolation, but African rivers were connectors for trade, and sustainers of cultures.

COLLECTIVITY AND RELATIVITY IN AFRICAN ART

. . . it is not merely a matter of “different beauties”; it is rather that the arts of different cultures enact different kinds of notions concerning what it is desirable for the created work to achieve.¹²

Robert Armstrong’s analysis of “affecting presence” in art work, though it deconstructs the phenomenon of affectation beyond a point I find useful, does reveal a way of defining the space between traditional African and contemporary Western art. He distinguishes between works that bear the presence of identity (who or what the work is said to be) or of effective process (management of the universe) and those that bear the presence of excellence. He notes that,

. . . the physical *thing* -- the sculpture or the mask, for example -- is one aspect, whereas the power that under appropriate conditions infuses it is another. When the object or event is in enactment, it is a “work”; when that same object is at rest, it is “not a work.”¹³

He continues and defines what I agree to be an essential point of differentiation.

The invoked work tends to be dedicated to the validation of man, whereas the work of virtuosity tends to be dedicated to the validation of itself. The invoked work tends to be communal, whereas the virtuosic work tends to be individual. The former therefore moves in the direction of the powers of the gods or of society and may thus be called "metaphysical," whereas the latter is to be thought of as "psychological," spinning energies not between the gods and man but wholly between itself and its witness.¹⁴

Norma Wolff has pointed out that the crest and platter masks of the *Egungun* masquerade have been collected and displayed in museums throughout the world, but among the Yoruba "it is the flowing cloth shrouding the performer's body that receives more attention." Only "when all parts of the ensemble are brought together and joined in a ritual act does the spirit of the *Egungun* enter the costume." The costume acts as a shrine for the spirit which may be called upon by the owner during the year as necessary.¹⁵

The Great Mask of the Dogon also functions in this way, serving to represent the rebirth of the mythic ancestor Lebe Serou and the general renewal of the community during the *Sigui* festival that takes place every sixty years. A new one is carved for each festival, but it serves as a shrine for the male *Awa* society during their secret rituals in the bush in the intervening years.¹⁶ These works are at once "objects and verbs," their meaning and value fluctuating as they move between objectivity and activity.

Whether the work is part of an expressive ensemble, as in the *Egungun* masquerade, functions on or as a shrine, or acts as an intersection of powers, like the Kongo *nkondi* nail figures, a great deal of African art has expressed a consciousness of collectivity and relationships -- it does not have its objecthood nor the personality of its creator as prime concerns. Contemporary work that may be defined as black art has this larger sense through a representation or affirmation of the concerns and culture of black people. In contrast, modern and post-Modern art expression in the West functions to express the particular individual concerns and ideas of the artist (Abstract Expressionism), contemplates the nature and parameters of Art (Minimalist, and Conceptual Art), and often has a negative or destructive intent such as challenging established norms and definitions (Dadaism, Post-Modernism) or making critical social commentary. African and African-American art developments have tended to function as affirmations, and expressed communal concerns and identities, though contemporary African and African-American art does not exhibit the extreme dialectic with Western art that Armstrong presents above.

In a traditional African context, art cannot exist as an isolated expression of individual genius, though there are individual masters of a particular form (such as Areogun, the carver of the Opin area in Nigeria, whose son, Bamidele, was Lamidi Fakaye's master). Art was tied to beliefs (which are both religious and philosophical at once) and life patterns emerging from those beliefs. Art became a part of the process of affirmation, a

materialization of incorporeal essence, or a commemoration of a person or event of collective significance. As Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu suggests, the art functioned “in the group mind. For this reason, the African view of art was an inner knowledge, and a spiritual participation rather than a result of a critical or analytical attitude.”¹⁷

A social consciousness allows the creation of archetypes and symbols as expressive forms to articulate group concepts, ideas, and beliefs as opposed to naturalistic imagery which tends to reflect specific “present moments.” Naturalism, in one sense, might be seen as a loss of faith, faith being the “evidence of things not seen,” because visual representation is seen as “looking real” instead of being a signifier for underlying realities.

Symbolism is a confirmation of collective consciousness because the “conventional symbol replaces long sequences of reasoning”¹⁸ and the reasoning or meaning consolidated by a symbol must be understood commonly in order for the symbol to function. The symbol can synthesize concrete and abstract realities to express a complex relationship and evoke a collective understanding of this conceptual relationship. This process does not work, however, when the symbolism is personal instead of communal.

The symbol and the symbolic can express the paradoxes of life, and the eternal non-material concepts which, when understood, will allow life patterns to be developed in harmony with perceived existence. Representational imagery expresses specific moments and has limited functions in African aesthetic traditions. There are likenesses and archetypes, but few portraits of living people in African art traditions. As Jahn states, “In all African art the meaning flows plainly from the sign used to express it. No gesture in the dance stands by itself, every one is a symbol.” He continues: “Philosophy, theology, politics, social theory, land law, medicine, psychology, birth and burial, all find themselves logically concatenated in a system so tight that to subtract one item from the whole is to paralyse the structure of that whole.”¹⁹

African art generally is not just aesthetic or personal expression. It embodies religion, politics, philosophy, ritual, craft, symbol, AND individual expression. It is a continual acknowledgment of larger existences, whether of the group, or of the spiritual whole, of which the artists are a part. One cannot separate the music, the performance, the gestures of the dancers, or the costumes from the *kanaga* masks in a Dogon performance. The *kanaga* masks perform in a particular relationship to the *sirige* masks that represent principles deep within the mythology and cosmogony of the Dogon. Even the superstructure of the *kanaga* mask is rooted in the meaning of a particular “Marque de Dieu” (*amma yala*) graphic sign. The totality of the ensemble in related performance gives meaning to the art objects materializing some of the deepest theological and philosophical constructs of the Dogon people in microcosmic expression.²⁰

Africans did not worship sculpture or masks as spirits or gods, and not all work was mythic narrative. As Jack Flam suggests:

Instead of the work of art being a direct translation of mythology into anthropomorphic form (i.e., narrative), the work of art is a metaphorical equivalent of a mythological form, expressed anthropomorphically; therefore the basic concepts are of energies or forces rather than occurrences or events in (legendary) time. These forces are acted out by the mechanics of the style itself. . . .²¹

Most human societies worship spiritual entities that have been anthropomorphized or materialized in some way to represent super-real spiritual forces otherwise unexplainable or incomprehensible. As Jahn correctly points out, "The African does not carve himself Gods that control him, but images which he controls. . . . A carving in an orisha shrine is no more an idol than is a crucifix in a Christian church. Both are accepted symbols of the spiritual being that is worshipped."²²

African art generally was a medium in a process, not an end in itself as an object or commodity (though a great deal of art today is commodified for international markets from tourist art, kente cloth, to the work of notable artists like Cheri Samba). Even when an *ibeji* (twin) figure was commissioned by a Yoruba patron, particular rituals and sacrifices were required, and a specific wood (*ire ona*) was used to ensure the efficacy of the figure as a representation of a deceased twin child.²³ The value of the *ibeji* was in its fulfilling a part in a process rather than the virtuosity of the carver. Photographs and plastic dolls have become functional substitutes for carvings in recent years for some.

African art functioned as an element in a cultural system, expressing or reflecting the values and beliefs of that particular system, and had limited value as objects or artifacts outside that system; it was a medium in a process rather than an end. The system emphasized communal consciousness within which individuality was expressed. The work itself was not worshipped nor looked upon as a fetish, but served as a symbol or concretization of the spiritual entity or force, acted as a medium of contact with spirits, or served as a mnemonic device to evoke the understanding of certain ideas and principles. The study of African art must consider this system and its particular aesthetic valuations when assessing older or traditional African objects.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK ART

The study of black art history is, in many ways, a study of the expression of humans.²⁴ A great deal of human expression is similar in intent and function to that of Africans, or has formal ties to it. Humans first walked erect in Africa, made baskets and pottery there, first made sculpture there, and the earliest foundations of civilization developed along the Nile River.

The earliest forms of art in most sedentary cultures appear to have been similar: basketry, pottery, and, eventually, sculpture. The early rock paintings of ancient

Namibia, and the cave paintings of Altamira in Spain and Lascaux in France were not extremely different and seem to have served similar ritual purposes. Even the kouros of Archaic Greece has an obvious relationship to the formal, frontal Egyptian sculpture that preceded it.

The nature of African art developments did not necessitate the growth of an art history apparatus for documentation and collection as happened in ancient Greece, and in European culture after the Renaissance. The temporal nature of many of the materials used in African art, and the destructive environmental forces such as heat, humidity, and termites, would make this a dubious activity until very recently anyway. Only the dry arid climate of Egypt made possible the preservation of so many artifacts from the Dynastic period of that civilization.

The fact that the art object in many African cultures had little intrinsic value but was seen as a part of a context of life processes inhibited the growth of an attitude of preservation. Often what was valued most in an object was its newness, its freshness, rather than its historical significance; its signification rather than its objecthood carried its importance. A new work was created when an object could no longer be refurbished with paint, and some, like the Great Mask of the Dogon *Sigui* festival, were remade as ritual signs of the renewal of the group. Craftsmanship and form were considerations in the aesthetic judgment of a work, but not necessarily the primary ones.

All of the above contributes to the difficulty of compiling a fairly complete chronicle of African art south of the Sahara, and there are many gaps in information. Also, as Susan Vogel has speculated, the work called “traditional” may have evolved a great deal prior to its documentation and collection by Europeans, and what is considered a canon may not be so. She points out that the “small number of works collected in Africa before the mid nineteenth century are the only reference, but a sizable proportion of them are in styles that are unidentifiable today -- seemingly because they were extinct or had been radically altered by the late nineteenth century.”²⁵ So, not only are there gaps in the record, but a tendency to view traditional forms as static may have misled scholars in their analysis of African art.

With an acknowledgment of these problems, we can move ahead with a look at some of the historical information available while attempting to maintain a consciousness of the historical and epistemological context within which it was formed. Many of these historical and cultural forces affect the expression of contemporary African-American artists and suggest that the work of Romare Bearden in New York and Bruce Onobrakpeya in Lagos to be part of an evolving continuum going back several millennia.

Rock Art

The earliest art work documented from Africa was rock painting, and rock engraving, in Namibia from around 27,000 B.C. Rock paintings and engravings, dated to about 8000 B.C., have been found at Tassili n'Ajjer in Algeria, and others have been discovered in

many other parts of Africa. Over 40,000 rock paintings and engravings have been documented in North Africa, about one quarter of which are in the Tassili n'Ajjer area. They have been found from Mauritania and Morocco in the west to Tibesti and sites in the Nile Valley, and the Egyptian desert between the Nile and the Red Sea in the east.²⁶ The paintings in the Sahara region differ from earlier ones found in France and Spain to an extent that seems to rule out the possibility of diffusion from one source. Human figures dominate the scenes in many African rock paintings, but seldom appear in European works.²⁷ Willett calls it remarkable that "the most striking similarity both in style and subject should be between the art of the extremes of the geographical distribution -- the eastern Spanish paintings and the southern African ones."²⁸

Rock art seems to have served very specific purposes in the cultures of their creation and Gillon feels, "The conclusion must be that the paintings or petroglyphs were rarely secular graffiti but a part of the socio-religious life of the respective African communities, requiring symbols of their rituals and myths to be portrayed in specific traditional places inside caves that were their shrines."²⁹

Willett notes that the "general distribution of the rock art . . . is, for the most part, outside the area of the distribution of sculpture."³⁰ Sculpture seems more to be the product of people inhabiting West African forests and woodlands, and the Congo Basin, than artists of the open savannas; generally agricultural groups, like those growing root crops in the rain forest areas, and cereal cultivators of the savanna woodlands on the fringe of the forests.

Nubian and Egyptian Art

The Nile valley is the only region of Africa where human settlement stretches without a break across the Sahara from the southern shores of the Mediterranean to the center of the continent. Physical types vary in a gentle gradient from one end to the other of this range, the changes being imperceptible from village to village but evident at longer intervals. . . . All of these people are Africans.³¹

Egyptian and Nubian cultures have interacted for thousands of years. Perhaps the fertility of the Nile valley north of the first cataract allowed Egyptian culture to prosper and support a denser population than was the case for their Nubian neighbors, but cultural influences flowed in both directions. A mummy of an African child preserved through the same process used in Egypt has been found in Nubia, but it predates the oldest known Egyptian mummy by 500 years. Also, a carved incense burner was found near the border of Egypt and Sudan with images very much like those found in Egyptian art, but it was made two centuries before the Dynastic age began in Egypt.³²

Nubian culture shared many of the pre-Dynastic developments farther north in the Nile Valley (4000 - 3000 B.C.), and Nubian and Egyptian paintings share certain iconographic symbols with Saharan paintings, such as a ram with a sphere on its head

which became the symbol of the god Amun in Egypt in a later period.³³ Gillon states that “Nubia is the cradle of sub-Saharan art, where the first sculptures in clay, metal and ivory were produced.” He points out that certain of its artistic traditions in pottery spread north to the Lower Nile Valley, west to Chad, and to areas in the Sahara.³⁴ Nubia influenced some early Egyptian developments, and was influenced by Egypt at various times. The twenty-fifth dynasty was a period of Nubian rule over Egypt. Nubia, or Meröe, declined in the fourth century A.D., and the advent of Christianity in the next century “spelled the end of the cultures created during the rule of the Kingdom of Kush.”³⁵

The Egyptian Dynastic era, beginning around 3100 B.C., may be divided into four major eras: the Archaic Period and the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, the New Kingdom or Empire, and the Late Period. The first period encompassed the first six dynasties and is the era during which the structure of Egyptian social order, beliefs, practices, and art were established. Nearly all of the pyramids, the Sphinx, and the form of the obelisk were completed during this period. The artistic archetypes and formulae and the architectural-celestial relationships also were constructed. Later periods incorporated technological advances, and Rameses built Egypt’s largest temples (i.e., Karnak, Luxor, and Abu-Simbel), but the foundations and paradigms of the culture had been established already and were reinforced or revived continually by later leadership.

The first 1,000 years of Dynastic Egypt during the first six dynasties was a period of undisturbed rule. An intermediate period of about 50 years followed when both Africans and Asians laid claim to power, but it was not until the Hyksos invasions of about 1720 B.C. (Dynasties 13 through 17), after what is called the Middle Kingdom, that African rule was broken.³⁶ The great 18th Dynasty re-established African rule and brought many of Egypt’s most famous personages to power, including Akhenaten, Tutankhamun, Nefertari, Nefertiti, Hatshepsut, and Tutmosis.

It is important to understand that Egyptian art forms were not arbitrary creations, but tied to a system of symbolic meaning dependent upon the cosmogony of the society. The painted and relief images were almost interchangeable with the hieroglyphic signs due to the formulaic, almost mathematical construction of the human figure. The figure was depicted with the following formula

- Frontal eye and shoulders
- Profile head, hips, and legs
- The kilt or skirt often shown frontally in opposition to the legs
- The rearmost leg forward to depict the sex of the subject

This pose was devised as a way of providing all the salient features of the subject in one simple image. It represented an intellectual or conceptual approach as opposed to a purely visual one. Artists conveyed what they knew rather than what they saw.

The bodies were usually standardized and any depiction of age or individuality was shown in the face. Proportional measurements and specific relationships were called for

which allowed the transmitting of a figure into any size, however large or small, with no deviation. The pose of the figure symbolized activity rather than expressing it.

Egyptian art is usually presented in texts as a foundation of Western art, and much discussion (including some in this essay) has debated the race of the ancient Egyptians. The citizens of ancient Memphis would not have been able to eat at white lunch counters in pre-Civil Rights Memphis, Tennessee, but the most significant arguments would appear to be those *culturally* allying Egypt with sub-Saharan Africa. Willett presents an argument of this type.

Egyptian religion can be best understood only by reference to African religion; many other aspects of Egyptian history and polity are illuminated by African ethnography. . . . Egypt was basically an African culture, with intrusions of Asian culture. The resulting culture flourished with the characteristic vigour of a hybrid.³⁷

Aldred tells us that Egypt “was profoundly influenced by magic” and “a belief in the existence of all-pervading, invisible and superhuman forces that had to be propitiated if their aid was to be secured, or neutralized. . . .,” common attitudes associated with art elsewhere in Africa.³⁸ He also mentions that Egyptian art presented “calm, successful men and women” shown “acting in a rational manner.”³⁹ Compare this with Thompson’s explication about the “Aesthetic of the Cool” in the art and culture of the Yoruba and many West African cultures. “Man starts not from a premise of original sin but from the divine spark of equilibrium in the soul which enters the flesh at birth from the world of the gods. To act in foolish anger or petty selfishness is to depart from this original gift of interiorized nobility and conscience.”⁴⁰

It also seems possible to compare the Egyptian concept of *Ma’at* (righteousness, justice, morality) with the Yoruba notion of *ìwàpẹ̀lẹ̀*, a concept of a person’s good character that suggests a morality modeling itself after Olódùmarè (God). “The man who has *ìwàpẹ̀lẹ̀* will not collide with any of the powers both human and supernatural and will therefore live in complete harmony with the forces that govern his universe.”⁴¹

Add to this Arlene Wolinski’s argument that the animal-headed figures in Egyptian reliefs and paintings were depicting masquerades, a tradition far more prominent in sub-Saharan African cultures than in those north of the Mediterranean Sea, and it seems more appropriate to define the Egyptian relationship to Greco-Roman tradition and subsequent Western developments as one of influences by an African culture upon another tradition with which it came into contact.⁴²

Like the West African sculpture to come, Egyptian art was wedded to functional intent. Spiritual belief and cultural expressions were so entwined that art could not be an entity unto itself, but only could be seen as part of the process, and in service to the affirmation of belief and continuity of life. Robert and Deborah Lawlor, translators of the works of Schwaller de Lubicz, state: “Through myth, image, and geometric proportion,

Schwaller de Lubicz believed, the Egyptians were able to encapsulate in their writing and architecture the basic pattern and structures of the natural universe."⁴³

Invasion and increased immigration of Asian and Caucasian peoples near the end of the Dynastic era caused some of the indigenous black population of Egypt to retreat south to Nubia. The lost-wax-casting technique, which was flourishing in Egypt by 3000 B.C., was transmitted through Nubia, as well as other cultural aspects, to more southern and western parts of the continent as later Islamic expansion caused further retreat by some blacks farther into the interior of the continent.

WEST AFRICA

There is evidence of the existence of cultures in the Western Sudan, Sahel, and the savanna and forest regions of West Africa dating back centuries before Christ. Also, there are indications that rice was cultivated in the Senegambian area over 3,000 years ago. Unfortunately, very few objects have survived that provide a picture of the type, meaning or function, and stylistic traditions of the art from these early periods. However, there are art works we can examine from the Nok culture of Northern Nigeria, a society that existed concurrent to early Greek civilization. Some of the earliest terra-cotta sculptures outside the Nile Valley have been attributed to this culture.

The dating of Nok sculpture by carbon 14 and thermoluminescence has produced a consensus of opinion that fixes the period of the culture from 500 B.C. to A.D. 200. As Nok is a highly developed and sophisticated art, it must be concluded that it derived and developed from much earlier ceramic traditions in the area.⁴⁴

Certain formal characteristics of Nok terra-cotta figural sculpture appear in Ife sculpture farther south in Nigeria at a much later date. The triangulation of the eyes can be found in *Egungun* masks, and similar elaborate hairstyles appear. Also, the Jemaa head has a disc on the forehead (figure 47, page 46, Gillon, 1986) that is comparable to two Ife terra-cottas from Ita Yemoo (figure 50, page 103, Eyo and Willett, 1982).

wrog has been confirmed by radiocarbon dates to have been done in Meröe as early as 700 to 600 B.C., a time that coincides with the Nubian Royal court moving to Meröe, and it may have been done even earlier in Nok. There are conflicting opinions about these dates, and iron smelting can only be proved to have been done in Egypt from the Ptolemaic period (330-30 B.C.). Archaeological information available to date would preclude the possibility of this technology being diffused to Nok, "where iron was produced even before smelting arrived in Egypt. . . ." ⁴⁵ There is speculation as to how the Nok culture acquired iron smelting technology, but they did have the technology in the first millennium B.C. in West Africa.

The Iron Age became widespread in West Africa about 500 A.D. during the time of the rise of the kingdom of Gao, often called Ghana after a title given the king, which was located in the Sahel to the north of the modern nation of Ghana. The later state of Ghana appropriated the name when achieving independence from Great Britain. Gao's origins were around 350 A.D. and it remained prominent until the 8th century, finally falling apart in 1075 A.D. The wealth of the kingdom came from the Saharan trade routes, and wars -- some inspired by a desire for the control of these routes -- led to its downfall and the succession of Mali, or Mande. Various Sudanic kingdoms rose and fell in the area encompassing Gao and the River Niger, Timbuktu, Djenne, and over to the coastal area of the River Senegal and River Gambia. Among them are Gao, Mali (during which Islam became a major force in the area), Songhai, Kanem-Borno (farther east near Lake Chad) and various small states like those of the Mossi, Fulani, and Hausa. The pressures and invasions of the Almoravid Moslems, Tuaregs, and Berbers from the north also had an effect.

The clearest artistic evidence from this area available to us today is the mosque architecture in Mopti, Djenne, and Timbuktu. These mud-brick structures date back to the 14th century, and retain their original character though they are regularly restored. Some objects and artifacts from the 9th or 10th century have been attributed to the Tellem, predecessors to the Dogon in the area of the Bandiagara escarpment in Mali.

Equestrian figures from the Senufo, Dogon, Bamana, and ancient Djenne have been collected indicating the significance of the horse in this region. The tsetse fly and the dense foliage of the forest belt prevented the horse and other draft animals from having a prominent role there, though equestrian figures emerged as an important icon in Yoruba art during the past two centuries, reflecting the significance of the horse in the Fulani and Hausa conquests that drove the Yoruba from Old Oyo. This form has come to represent notions of power, aggression, and prestige, and mounted figures most often represent warriors, kings, or, among the Yoruba, deities like Ogun or Shango.⁴⁶ Today in Nigeria, Haiti, and Brazil, an orisha (*òriṣà*) devotee in a state of possession is said to have been "mounted" by the deity.

Early Nigerian Art

The work of the Igbo-Ukwu people of Nigeria is dated from the 9th century, the period when the Tellem migrated to the Bandiagara escarpment in Mali, and a number of significant and refined bronzes have been recovered. Ekpo Eyo said this about the Igbo-Ukwu culture.

Where and how the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes and techniques to make them entered this society is still one of the enigmas of Nigerian art history. All of the objects recovered are intricately designed and made with a complete mastery of lost wax (*cire-perdue*) casting.⁴⁷

The ancient city of Ife, known mythically to the Yoruba as the place the earth was formed and Man created, may have existed as early as 600 A.D., but the period of its artistic and political significance ranges from the 11th to the 15th centuries. The bronze and terra-cotta heads from Ife have proved to be some of the most surprising art objects found in West Africa. Their classic naturalism contradicted many notions about African art *au courant* at the time of their discovery.

There are more terra-cotta than metal heads from Ife. Many of them have elaborate scarification, and, while human beings are the most characteristic subject matter of Ife work, animals often are represented. Naturalism persisted during the period of Ife prominence from the 11th through the 15th centuries, and the surprising naturalism and the refined metallurgy, both exceeding the quality of Medieval European work at the time, led some to compare it to Greek and Roman traditions, or look for Dynastic Egyptian influences. Scientific data rules out these cultures as sources of possible influences, and the work must be regarded as the achievement of the indigenous Yoruba people. It is noted in *Treasures of Ancient Nigeria* that:

The art of Ife seems to have both antecedents and descendants that we know something about, looking back to Nok and forward to Oyo and Benin. The Nok and Ife artists are the only ones we know in the whole of Black Africa to attempt full-length sculpture of human beings on a scale approaching life size. The distribution of beads on Nok figures can be closely paralleled in Ife works, while other works show general similarity.⁴⁸

Benin culture has provided the largest body of all work from Nigeria's ancient traditions. Oral traditions and European documents have provided a broad informational base. The Edo people of Benin trace the foundation of their royal dynasty back to Oranmiyan of Ife, one of the descendants of Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba people. Benin prominence has been dated from 1400 A.D. to 1800 A.D., though the independent existence of the culture ended with the British punitive expedition in 1897, the destruction of the Oba's (king) palace, and the looting of large amounts of royal bronze and ivory art work.

The art of Benin in Western museums and collections is a royal art. Bronze casting could be commissioned by no one but the king, and ivory, the second most important media after bronze, also was a material of royal prerogative. The king was the principal patron of the arts, and the arts had difficulty surviving once the British had deposed him.

In Benin art we find objects from the royal altars both of the Oba and the Queen Mother. There are plaques depicting people and events from dynastic history, and the Portuguese appear prominently because the wealth which developed from trade with them caused them to be associated with Olokun, the god of the sea from whom abundance flowed.

Benin art and culture provides an example of the diversity of African art. Many different

types of objects were created using many varied materials. The organization of the society politically as a powerful central kingship contrasts with the village polities of people like the Dogon. Among Mande-speaking people, blacksmiths created art objects, whereas royally-sanctioned guilds created Benin work, and among the Yoruba master carvers created various masks, house and palace posts, and carved doors.

There are many many African cultures with expressive forms represented in European and American museums. The Yoruba have created the brass and terra-cotta Ife heads, beaded crowns, brass ogboni staffs, carved epa masks, cloth Egungun costumes, body decoration, musical instruments, and varied ceramic objects during the past 900 years.⁴⁹ Among the Mende, one of the few women's masquerades is found with the Sande society performance of the sowo mask.⁵⁰ The Ibo have fascinating masks, and the women play prominent roles in the decoration of mbari houses. In Central Africa, complex patterns can be found in Kuba cloth, and interesting dynastic sculpture documents the rulership of several kings. Among the BaKongo, the powerful nkisi nkondi nail figures, managed by a ritual expert known as the nganga, are ritual objects through which spiritual forces (bisimibi) are invoked for certain functions in the community.⁵¹ The art of South Africa and north African areas like Sudan are just beginning to be documented, and Ethiopia has a Coptic art tradition dating back nearly 2,000 years.

Today contemporary African artists work and exhibit all over the world. They have taken their cultural foundations and in varying degrees have interpreted modern realities in the vocabularies of international art and their own cultural foundations. They can be found in urban centers like Abidjan and Lagos in Africa, and in Paris, London, and New York in the West. They comprise the most recent part of the continuum.

Summary

The history of art in Africa is rich and varied and covers the extent of human history. There are many West and Central African traditions that can be investigated in some depth beginning with Portuguese contacts in the 15th century along the coast of Africa and in Kongo. In Nigeria people have studied the cultures of the Ibo, Ejagham, e, Edo, and Yoruba. In neighboring areas scholars have investigated the Dogon, Bamana, Mande, Baule, Dan, and Asante, and to the south Kongo-Angolan traditions have provided a wealth of material. Recently, the Mangbetu and their neighbors in northeastern Zaire have been the subject of research.⁵² Robert Farris Thompson has traced traditions from Dahomey (modern Benin), Nigeria, and Kongo to Haiti, Cuba, Brazil, Suriname, Mexico, Central America, and the United States.⁵³

It is possible to place the art of African peoples within the time frames familiar to students of Western art history. The art of Ife flourished during the late Medieval and Gothic periods, and Benin rose to prominence during the early Renaissance. The Nok terra-cottas were being produced during the time when Greek and Roman civilizations rose to their heights. Correlation like this can create a broader sense of history for the

student of art.

African expression is a long tradition with many tributaries that continues to flow today. There are, however, some generalities that can be stated about African art.

1. The earliest work was painting and engraving on rocks and in caves in many areas, or basketry and ceramics in other areas.
2. A great deal of the art is sculpture and most of that has been wooden. Metal, stone, clay, and ivory also were used. Valuable permanent materials were used for royal art.
3. It is said Africans “think with art” and most art deals with humankind’s relations with one another, natural forces, or spiritual forces. Seldom was art devoid of meaning or intended solely for the pleasure of viewing.
4. Most art was created in the service of belief until very recently, and ritual and performance functions contextualized the work.
5. Naturalism was not attempted, and work often defined as naturalistic (i.e. the Ife heads) was archetypal and ideal, usually depicting divine royalty and suggested an inner perfection. When specific royalty was depicted, recognizable characteristics were usually confined to the face.⁵⁴

Most, but not all work created was for religious or ritual purposes. Weaving, basketry, beadwork, jewelry, women’s hairstyles, body scarification and tattooing, pottery, musical instruments, calabashes, combs, stools, weapons, and the like were decorative or decorated and expressive of ideas of beauty or adornment, yet they often contained cultural references understood by members of the community. Guilds similar to Medieval European craft guilds existed, and each culture developed aesthetic standards for the evaluation of objects. Some groups were known for a particular craft or skill, and there are tribal variations in style, detail, or emphasis among groups, but the general characteristics suggest a consistency and unity greater than the details of diversity.

The art of Africans cannot be defined only by form or style, but form and style are a part of the work and may be appreciated. The work must be defined by meaning, context, and *the meaning and value its creators assign it!* African art always has evolved formally, and African cultures have assimilated elements from other cultures with which they have come into contact (for example, the Mangbetu of the late 19th century), but just as Picasso transposed African masks into a European context, the people of Kongo Africanize outside elements that they absorb.⁵⁵

The technology, language, or format of others has affected the form and style of the expression of black Africans and their descendants, but the character and function of the expression often is the same. This is an important point because external forces began to destroy the system that supported and inspired traditional art forms in Africa, but African expression did not stop. It changed.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ART

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes.
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll sit at the table
When company comes.
Nobody 'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed, --

I, too, am America
Langston Hughes⁵⁶

The Atlantic slave trade put millions of Africans in a new, alien environment and their creative expression began to fuse the old ways with the new experiences. African-American art began as a new chapter in the long history of African expression.

Most early African-American expression occurred in folk idioms, particularly in musical form. It is possible that the so-called "blue tonality" associated with black music (a sliding tone) is a product of the tonal character of West African languages, and their transformation into expressive forms such as the talking drum.⁵⁷ This tonality may have formed a foundation for slave songs, ragtime, blues, and, eventually, jazz. Slaves had little access to expressive media or musical instruments, but the human body in performance and song was available.

Blacks assimilated many aspects of European culture, but were never assimilated into it, a fact that preserved the integrity of what may be called a distinct black culture -- a blend of European elements into a black cultural foundation, itself a blend of West African cultural practices. In places where independent or Maroon black communities had limited contact with whites, such as Saamaka in Suriname, Bahia in Brazil, the hills of Jamaica, and the Sea Islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, many elements of African languages, cultural practices, and religions have been discovered

almost intact. Also, a cultural dialogue has continued between New World blacks and Africans on the continent for hundreds of years.

Brazilians who purchased their freedom from slavery sailed back to Nigeria on slave ships that had unloaded captives in Brazil and were *en route* to Africa for more. Robert Campbell and Martin Delany traveled to West Africa in 1859 to investigate the potential of African-Americans settling there to escape slavery and racial oppression.⁵⁸ Edward Wilmot Blyden moved from Jamaica to West Africa in the latter half of the 19th century and began writing and speaking for independent West African states led by African-Americans. Kwame Nkruma and many Africans who took leadership roles in 1950s and 1960s independence and intellectual movements in West Africa (i.e., Senghor, Diop, Fanon, and Obenga among the Francophone Africans) attended American or European universities and interacted with blacks in those places.⁵⁹ So we have cross-fertilization among Africans and African descendants in the colonial metropolises. This supports Hannerz's caution against generalization of the concept of a "culture" as a homogeneous whole that is static and self-contained.

"A culture" need not be homogeneous, or even particularly coherent. Instead of assuming far-reaching cultural sharing, a "replication of uniformity", we should take a distributive view of cultures as systems of meaning. The social organization of culture always depends both on the communicative flow and on the differentiation of experiences and interests in society.⁶⁰

Inter-cultural exchanges also are never one-way. While African-Americans were assimilating European culture and language in many ways, Euro-Americans were assimilating African cultural elements in subtle ways which have produced a cumulative effect that is obvious in the late 20th century. Hannerz states:

Asians, Africans, Latin Americans and West Indians in Europe and North America are usually considered in social science research only as immigrants to the metropolises. Simultaneously, however, they form extensions of their home societies, of which they often remain active members. In this way London, Paris, Brussels and Miami are among the major Third World cities, and a varied cultural flow passes from them throughout the networks of migrant workers, students, exiles, international petty entrepreneurs and tourists.⁶¹

The African visual arts traditions of weaving, metal work, and sculpture were suppressed in the New World, but heavy slave concentrations in isolated areas allowed the folk traditions of basketry, woodcarving, and ceramics to survive.⁶² African strip cloth and appliqué traditions appear in African-American quilting as well.⁶³

A great deal of creative energy found expression through the body via song, speech, and dance. The system that inspired and supported the visual arts was gone, so visual expression began to emulate that of the dominant Euro-American society.⁶⁴

African-Americans had no appreciable middle-class prior to World War I, and, prior to the 20th century, had little “security” or “education” as a group. Whites did not patronize African-American artists, and the black community did not have the financial foundation to do so. Black artists prior to 1900 met immense odds against their *existence*, as well as against their success.

Most early art by African-Americans was that of slave artisans. South Carolina stoneware depicting faces, sea grass baskets from the coastal islands, ironwork in Charleston and New Orleans, and various architectural structures in Virginia and Louisiana provide examples. Numerous articles, such as carved walking sticks and small figures done by anonymous craftsmen show vestiges of African imagery.

In the middle of the 18th century a severe shortage of white artisans led to a greater use of the talents of slaves. Many began to be trained to build houses, furniture, and utensils. Some were trained as potters, blacksmiths, weavers, carpenters, and seamstresses. It must be remembered that most slaves came from agrarian societies and many had skills as potters, blacksmiths, weavers, and the like prior to captivity. Because of their race or servitude, most black artisans were anonymous and seldom received credit for their achievements, but a few gained recognition and were sought after. Some slaves with outstanding skills were valuable and were hired out for \$20.00 to \$40.00 more per job than was the average.

Some blacks began to pursue arts in the European tradition, and one of the earliest of these was Scipio Moorhead, a painter, who was identified in a poem by Phyllis Wheatley. Joshua Johnson (1765-1830) was probably the most celebrated of the early black painters. His work has been compared favorably with that of the Peale family dynasty begun by Charles Wilson Peale.

19th Century

The political and social climate of the Civil War and Reconstruction periods provided little opportunity for black creative development. The war, and the subsequent concerns for the education and employment of the freed blacks took precedence in the minds of black leaders and concerned whites. To this was added the momentum of an ideological defense of slavery based upon a pejorative construct of blacks that was picked up by white supremacists to justify segregation after the war. A plethora of negative images translated this into the popular psyche, and inhibited black artists from depicting black genre for decades.⁶⁵

The few blacks that pursued art careers at this time tended to follow the path of their white counterparts. They attended white art schools, made pilgrimages to Europe, and

ended up working in the styles contemporary to either side of the North Atlantic. The work of the Barbizon painters of France affected the work of Edward Bannister (1828-1901), who was one of the founders of the Providence Art Club, which was the nucleus for what later became the Rhode Island School of Design.

The American movement called the Hudson River School affected the work of Robert Duncanson (1817-1872), another prominent mid-century painter. The sculptor Edmonia Lewis (1843-1900) went to Rome and was affected by the Neo-Classical style. Henry O. Tanner (1859-1937) was probably the most notable of all 19th century black artists. He developed an Impressionistic approach, and, after migrating to Paris in 1891, used this style to interpret Biblical subject matter. His early work was influenced by the teaching and friendship of Thomas Eakins, who hoped he would develop into a painter of black genre.

All these early African-American artists were faced with a dilemma. American art and popular imagery depicted blacks in a stereotypical, pejorative manner. The depiction of blacks in human, dignified fashion by artists such as Rembrandt, Rubens, Bosch, Velazquez, and John Singleton Copley had given way to plantation images. Seeking to avoid identification with these stereotypes -- the social clown, minstrel, pickaninny, or Uncle Tom -- black artists searched for white middle-class values with which to identify and moved away from their own cultural base. They attempted to avoid popular "low genre" images, but had difficulty finding a middle-class identity because most blacks were locked in what was perceived as the "low genre" socially and economically. Tanner and Lewis expatriated to Europe in their desire to escape objectification.

20th Century

You are disdainful and magnificent --
Your perfect body and your pompous gait,
Your dark eyes flashing solemnly with hate,
Small wonder that you are incompetent
To imitate those whom you so despise --
Your shoulders towering high above the throng,
Your head thrown back in rich, barbaric song,
Palm trees and mangoes stretched before your eyes.
Let others toil and sweat for labor's sake
And wring from grasping hands their meed of gold.
Why urge ahead your supercilious feet?
Scorn will efface each footprint that you make.
I love your laughter arrogant and bold.
You are too splendid for this city street.

Helene Johnson⁶⁶

During the first two decades of the 20th century the New Negro Movement began to

develop. One point of the movement was the negation and replacement of plantation images of blacks with those of educated, dignified, creative blacks and may explain the great number of portraits painted by black artists during the 1920s and 1930s.⁶⁷ Mary Schmidt Campbell writes:

The impact of the New Negro Movement was enormous. . . . The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909 and dedicated to securing full civil and political rights for Black Americans. The Urban League was founded in 1910 with the goal of acclimating recent migrants to the rigors of urban life. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of the newfound sense of purpose and activism was the popularity of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).⁶⁸

Despite negative imagery like that in the movie “Birth of a Nation,” African-Americans attempted to subjectify themselves to escape the objectification of the previous centuries.

Blacks had begun migrating north to work in the factories during World War I, and they were funneled into certain neighborhoods, and segregated into crowded ghettos, but they began to develop a growing sense of community. A sense of race pride and an interest in African heritage blossomed, and was encouraged by the growing European interest in African art during the 1920s. Locke published his call for black artists to look toward their “ancestral legacy” for inspiration in their work as European artists had used it in Europe.⁶⁹ This activity and these northern communities became the urban base for the 1950s and 1960s protest movements.

Many young blacks rejected the identification with the white middle-class of their parent’s era and sought inspiration instead from black folk culture, but these “everyday people” largely were unaware of this new interest in black genre and its expression in art. The separation of art and society common in the modern world seemed inherent with the adoption of Western art forms, and folk expression like blues, and the music we call jazz, was more meaningful to most blacks, and more functional in their lives, than work in a gallery.⁷⁰

The growing European interest in African work as a collectable *art* form reflected a changing consciousness about art toward a great emphasis upon symbolic and formal concerns. Unfortunately, African art was taken seriously by many only after it was validated by the interest of white artists. Many leading French and German artists were electrified by what they saw in African art, and this directly affected their expression.

. . . it was only about 1904-5 that African art began to make its distinctive impact. One piece is still identifiable; it is a mask that had been given to Maurice Vlaminck in 1905. He records that Derain was “speechless” and “stunned” when

he saw it, bought it from Vlaminck and in turn showed it to Picasso and Matisse, who were also greatly affected by it. Ambroise Vollard then borrowed it and had it cast in bronze by Maillol's bronzesmith. The revolution of twentieth-century art was under way.⁷¹

These European artists were impressed by formal and interpretive possibilities revealed by African sculpture. Just as African artists adopt new forms and means of expression in their approach to art, these artists adopted ideas from African art to fit their particular cultural orientation. Colonial exploitation brought the Parisian artists (including Picasso, Braque, Modigliani, and Brancusi) into contact with African work from Francophone colonies -- the current nations of Mali, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Sierra Leone -- while their German counterparts encountered different work, and a slightly different attitude prevailed about relations with colonial culture and people. (A great deal of nonsensical discussion has taken place during this century about the supposed "superiority" of English colonial policy, an approach the Germans approximated, versus French policy. Such discussion approximates that of 19th-century United States discourse about good versus bad slave masters.)

The contact with African art hastened the movement away from the Renaissance "window to the world" tradition in Western art. The image disintegrated in Impressionism, and artists like Gauguin led symbolist experimentation, while Munch anticipated German Expressionism, and Cezanne explored geometric interpretations of the image. They laid the foundation for the recognition of what African artists had been doing for centuries but which Europeans had no epistemological basis for understanding.

One ironic development was the impact of African-influenced modern art upon African-American artists who went to study or work in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. Palmer Hayden and Hale Woodruff were two artists whose work was more reflective of their racial identity after returning from Europe. The impact of African art upon European art also influenced Alain Locke's ideas in his essay, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," published in 1925.

Interest in African "tribal" art also led to an interest in and emphasis upon the folk and "primitive" aspects of black culture and people by white intellectuals. Josephine Baker became the rage in Paris, and the naïve paintings of Horace Pippin were exhibited in New York. New myths and stereotypes were being created to replace the plantation images, and when a black writer or artist proved to be a bit too sophisticated, he or she was dropped by his or her white patron.⁷² Black primitivism became popular in literature such as O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* (1920), Anderson's *Dark Laughter* (1925), Heywood's *Porgy* (1925), and Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* (1926). Even the Harmon Foundation, whose support, coupled with WPA support in the mid-1930s, provided an extremely important boost to the development of African-American art, "promoted a set of questionable attitudes" according to Mary Schmidt Campbell.

In organizing its segregated exhibitions, the foundation published catalogues in which it was argued that there were "inherent Negro traits" -- a point of view that was condescending at the very least. The repertoire of Negro characteristics included "natural rhythm," "optimism," "humor," and "simplicity."⁷³

Meta Warrick Fuller was one of the first African-American artists to identify directly with Africa in her work "Ethiopia Awakening" (1914). Aaron Douglas is the artist most often (and most accurately) associated with the Harlem Renaissance and Locke's ideas, and his murals and illustrations (in *The New Negro*, various issues of *Crisis* magazine, and James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones*) showed forms that drew upon the stylized abstractions of African art. Other black artists of the between-the-Wars period like Charles Alston, Archibald Motley, Richmond Barthe, and Jacob Lawrence consciously sought to express the black experience, or experiment with forms inspired by African imagery.

Lawrence painted several series of stylized paintings examining the social and political conditions of black people in America. The first of these was "Migration of the Negro," followed in 1943 by a series entitled "Harlem." He also did a series based upon Toussaint L'Ouverture's leadership in the successful San Domingue (Haitian) slave rebellion of 1789.

Two philosophical positions emerged that have dominated the African-American art scene from the mid-1930s until today. James Porter, who later became the chairman of the Howard University art department, felt that Locke's essay urging a look toward "ancestral heritage" was an apologist position and urged blacks to compete with whites as equal Americans. He said they were "justifying an alliance of art with primitive mentality, and a naïve perspective with true achievement." He questioned it because "such self-conscious pursuit of the primitive inevitably would stress a separate and singular existence for the American Negro, and [some Negro writers and scientists] objected to the implication that he could resist the countless integrating influences of his environment."⁷⁴

One is tempted to make an essentialist interpretation of both positions, calling Porter "integrationist" and Locke "pan-Africanist," though this oversimplifies the debate. It is true that black isolation was a genuine concern in the 1930s and 1940s because of white violence and terrorism against blacks that was tacitly (or openly) condoned by the state and national governmental apparatuses by inaction and refusal to enforce the laws protecting citizens. Continued isolation would subject the black community to continued assault. Also, Porter rightly objected to the superficial appropriation of African forms.

However, it is true also that artists emerging from the black Nationalism of the 1960s (groups such as Africobra, Weusi, and individuals like Charles Searles and Ed Sorrells-Adewale) who attempted to go beyond the forms of African expression into its deeper significances and intentions have not received the same attention from the museum and

art-historical apparatus of this society as Feminists (Faith Ringgold), Post-Modern artists (Adrian Piper), or those drawing imagery from black folk or genre traditions (Allison Saar, Lawrence, Bearden) have received. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., feels that the 1925 edition of *Survey Graphic* that Locke edited “transformed black militancy and translated it into an apolitical movement within the arts. Locke’s New Negro was a poet, and it was through the sublimities of the fine arts, not through political action or protest, that white Americans would at last embrace the Negro.”⁷⁵

In the 1960s the political consciousness and activism returned in the work of many artists as African-American artists began to come to terms with their African cultural heritage and sought to reflect or express it in their imagery. (In New York, for example, the group Spiral, which included Bearden, Alston, and Mayhew, briefly came together to do a benefit exhibition for the Civil Rights Movement.) The work of many artists began to serve as a means of collective expression, gradually bridging that gap between the larger black community and the art gallery. The folk traditions of the black community were consistent with the community-based art of West Africa where everyone understood the work on some level, though the ritual and religious work often contained esoteric references known only to the initiated. Visual art still does not play the same role in the lives of the average African-American as music, but images, and the significance of symbols (i.e., kente cloth), have penetrated the psyche of the community-at-large and now are deemed important.

Not all black artists create black or Pan-African art. Many attempt to use art to express their humanity in a way that transcends race. Racial distinction is irrelevant when not attached to cultural distinction. Artists like Richard Mayhew, Sam Gilliam, Martin Puryear, and Richard Hunt create forms that reveal the cultural heritage of the artist in very subtle ways, if at all. They deal with many of the same aesthetic issues and ideas of their white counterparts, although they bring unique solutions to problems that undoubtedly reflect the particular perspective inherent in being black in a Euro-centric society. However, they attempt to communicate with the entire art public rather than aiming just at the black segment of it.

Artists like Carrie Mae Weems, Lorna Simpson, and Adrian Piper interrogate white attitudes toward blacks, issues of identity, and racial stereotypes. What seems to separate them from the Black Arts movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s and its attacks on racism is that the Black Arts, Black Nationalist, and Pan-African movements have tended to engage in an internal dialogue that transformed Locke’s New Negro into a political entity, but continued the reinvention process as a countermeasure against pejorative images inspired by white superiority. Weems and Piper confront whites at the intersection of racial conflict and challenge white acceptance of, or acquiescence to, many of the assumptions and responses which feed that conflict.

Artists like Dana Chandler, David Hammons, Ademola Olugbefola, Ben Jones, and the Africobra members created images in the late 1960s and early 1970s that attacked racism and oppression, or affirmed the validity and value of African cultural heritage and African-American folk tradition. The class analysis (folk versus elite) is a covert one, but seeks to undermine the Western elitist notion of art, and the control of the elitist white

art apparatus (museums, galleries, critics, and historians). Chicago became the generational energy center for the Black Arts movement. The Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) was founded to ferment socially conscious expression, and funded the creation of the Wall of Respect in 1967. Several artists involved in the project formed Africobra in 1968, a group committed to incorporating African aesthetics, African iconography, and what Jeff Donaldson describes as “African diasporan imagery in a positive response to contemporary political situations.”⁷⁶ Donaldson, a founding member of Africobra, also coordinated the development and organization of CONFABA in 1970 through one of his classes at Northwestern University. A CONFABA statement clearly states the position of the participants, and separates them from Porter’s early ideas.

The heart of the Black Artist’s ideology is the dedication of his art to the cultural liberation of his people. It is in this sense that Black art is decidedly functional, politically and spiritually, and it is not to be confused by the alienation concept of “art for art’s sake” rather than art for people’s sake.⁷⁷

At the same time Benny Andrews, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Joe Overstreet, Alvin Hollingsworth, and John Biggers have created works from a similar perspective but with less direct political imagery. Artists such as Betye Saar, Houston Conwill, Ed Sorrells-Adewale, and, recently, Renee Stout have made installations and altars that recall the ritualistic functionalism and religious roles of art in African societies. Stout transformed a sculptural self-portrait into something akin to a Kongo *nkisi nknodi* figure complete with medicine pouches (*Black Art: Ancestral Legacy*, pp. 230-231).

The black community recently has developed a broader educational and financial base, a larger middle class more interested in its own heritage, and the pressure of segregation has been eased to some degree, which has reduced enforced group identification and the need for a united front in the minds of some. The result has been a broader plurality in black expression and increased internal support from the black community. The Atlanta University exhibitions were replaced by the Atlanta Life Insurance Company National Exhibitions in the 1980s, companies like the Johnson Publishing Company have gathered large collections of black art, and many important museums and galleries around the country have taken an interest in the work of black artists. The rigid racism that prevented Edward Bannister from entering the exhibition hall to accept the award he won at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition has abated, and Martin Puryear was the first black American to represent the United States at the Sao Paulo Biennale in 1989.

The socially conscious striving of the New Negro, the artistic growth during and after the WPA projects, the sense of humanity and dignity of the 1950s, and the volatile political statements and imitative African imagery of the 1960s all indicate self-assuredness and confidence. The European sojourns after World War I have been replaced by African pilgrimages, and work ranging from direct acknowledgment of the African “ancestral

legacy,” transformation of black folk culture, to the work of artists working in mainstream post-modern modes is being created.

At the turn of the century, in *Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois wrote about the “double-consciousness” experienced by blacks:

. . . the Negro is a sort of seventh son born with a veil, and gifted with a second sight in this American world -- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.⁷⁸

This double-consciousness has evolved to become a double-vision, an ability to see in two worlds, a view spanning the Atlantic encompassing two continents. It also has become a double vision perceiving two perspectives: the white (external) gaze, and the black view.⁷⁹ There is a polyrhythmic and syncopative character to this consciousness that begins to take on coordinations and balances similar to black music. Indeed, it is more productive to assess pan-African, or TransAfrican,⁸⁰ expression as having a symbiotic relationship to the music of John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, and Fela Kuti than to see it as part of the modern tradition of paralleling literary movements, or functioning as a “text” like some post-modern expression.

African-American art in the 20th century in many ways is a chronicle documenting the black reclamation of self, defining that self, and locating it within a historical/cultural continuum. The weight of pejorative “coon” images is being overcome, and white supremacist descriptions of Africa, and people of African descent are being interrogated and undermined. The psychological damage suffered by blacks, the erosion of self-esteem, is being undone, and the epistemological, ontological, and cosmological interpretations of non-whites are being examined as valid alternatives. African-American art is evidence of these processes.

Bananas ripe and green, and ginger root,
Cocoa in pods and alligator pears,
And tangerines and mangoes and grape fruit,
Fit for the highest prize at parish fairs.

Set in the window, bringing memories
Of fruit-trees laden by low-singing rills,
And dewy dawns, and mystical blue skies
In benediction over nun-like hills.

My eyes grew dim, and I could no more gaze;
A wave of longing through my body swept,

And, hungry for the old familiar ways,
I turned aside and bowed my head and wept.

“The Tropics in New York”

Claude McKay⁸¹

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART

There has been a profusion of books on traditional African art in recent years. Though many of these are excellent they tend to create the impression that artistic expression is a thing of the past in Africa and that nothing of value is being produced today.

Ulli Beier, 1968⁸²

. . . the contemporary African artist and, although many are true artists, they are not truly African artists, although of African race, because they have been trained in art schools in the Western romantic tradition and conform unmistakably to the international style, whereas their patrons are almost exclusively not African.

William Fagg, 1969⁸³

. . . failing to deal with the history of Africa, all too often we also fail to deal with its present. The Africa we describe frequently exists neither in history nor in the present.

In some sense, it is perhaps easier to allow Africa its past than its present.

Philip Ravenhill, 1990⁸⁴

The widespread assumption that to be modern is to be Western insidiously denies the authenticity of contemporary African cultural expressions by regarding them *a priori* as imitations of the West.

Susan Vogel, 1991⁸⁵

Contemporary African art is one of the most problematic categories of art in art history, as the quotations above show. This partly is the result of prevailing notions about “traditional” African art which define it in terms of an “ethnological present” -- terminology describing work as though it is unchanging over time, and free from outside influences. The collective or communal nature of most African expression has caused it to be identified as “tribal,” and the assumption has been that there are tribal styles. However, among the Yoruba there are regional styles that can be identified among *ibeji* figures, and differences between forms such as *edan ogboni*, *oshe Shango*, *Erinle* vessels, and *Gelede* masks. Styles can differ also across time, an example being the ancient Ife bronzes and terra-cottas which seem to have no descendant styles.⁸⁶

African art always has changed to incorporate individual innovation, and external influences. Artists and clients have collaborated for many years to modify standard forms. Also, there has been contact between West Africa and the Mediterranean, Europe, and the Islamic world for centuries. Susan Vogel correctly states that “Africans have so thoroughly digested and interpreted foreign forms in terms of their own value systems and visual codes that the foreign origins of those forms have become virtually unrecognizable.”⁸⁷

The Atlantic slave trade, and subsequent European colonial domination, had a profound effect upon African societies and cultures. The slave trade encouraged fratricidal wars that were destructive and disruptive. The trade itself took over 20 million people from the continent. (It is not known how many captive Africans died traveling to the coast, on or near the coast, or in the Middle Passage.) The economies of many West and Central African areas were altered drastically, as were social practices, by this trade. The colonial domination that followed undermined the system of authority, denigrated and suppressed religious beliefs, and destroyed any vestige of self-sufficiency in indigenous economies. Societies could no longer grow enough food to feed themselves because cash crops were produced on large plantations that replaced the small farms. In short, the cultural matrix that inspired, generated, and supported the art forms we define as “traditional” was being dismantled and Western practices, products, religions, and ideas were inserted to replace the local ones. These new contexts that were developing would call for new art forms.

Many Africans were trained in mission schools, and some went to the colonial metropolises for university educations. As mentioned earlier, some radical leadership emerged from this elite cadre, but many began to seek European middle-class stature and lifestyles. The *lingua franca* of many modern African nations is Arabic, English, or French. With the authority and economic infrastructures drastically changed, many African nations found that they were no longer capable of sustaining themselves,⁸⁸ and were not built up by the colonial powers to have any significant means of industrial production. They could not compete in the world economy, and were relegated to “dependent” and “debtor” nation status. It must be stated that many African nations have suffered self-inflicted damage as well.

New attitudes and approaches to the arts evolved, and museum systems began to

develop for the preservation of those ancient and valuable art objects remaining in Africa. Mission-inspired art was the bridge from pre-colonial to modern forms. The earliest documented mission-inspired work came from the Lower Congo region in the 15th century. Crucifixes were made that appeared to imitate European art objects, but substituted African persona. Very little of this was significant to either culture, and it quickly lost its meaning to the Africans. In some instances the objects were used later for different purposes.

One significant mission intervention was Father Carroll's workshop in Nigeria in the late 1940s which included Bamidele Areogun (son of the great Areogun), and his apprentice, Lamidi Fakaye. They continued the tradition of carvers from the Opin Ekiti area, but adjusted to new clientele and a new support system requiring work serving different functions. Both Bamidele and Fakaye were descendants of generations of carvers, but with the patronage of the religious and authority figures of the community eradicated, they became two of the few carvers able to continue the craft.

Workshops led by Europeans formed in the late 1950s and early 1960s to encourage untrained artists to explore their talents through painting, printmaking, and drawing. The most famous of these were the Mbari Mbayo formed by Ulli Beier in Oshogbo, Nigeria (1962), and Frank McEwen's school in Salisbury, Rhodesia (1957). Artists were given materials and encouraged to work by drawing inspiration and imagery from their own culture. In some ways these were folk artists and they generally are driven by market concerns more than by aesthetic considerations. There is no denying the energy and creativity of the work of Twins Seven Seven, Jimoh Buraimoh, and Rufus Ogundele, but questions have been raised about Ulli Beier's subtle influence upon the direction and imagery of these workshop artists because a similar experiment in New Guinea produced similar work.

This new art is generally an urban art and is not well known in the rural villages. Many of the patrons are from Europe and the United States, or from the elite of African society. The religious cults no longer can afford to commission successful artists or carvers, and, therefore, do not exert any client pressure influencing the evolution of forms.

University-trained artists have begun to appear on the scene, particularly in the coastal cities or on university campuses. Governments began to formulate official support for the arts, and some illustrious artists like Papa Ibra Tall of Senegal have become cultural officials in their governments. Ibrahim N'Diaye of Senegal studied and taught in Paris, and spends his time moving between Paris and Senegal. Ibrahim el Salahi, Ahmed Shibrain, and Kamala Ishaq from Sudan, Bruce Onobrakpeya, and Ben Enwonwu of Nigeria, Skunder Boghassian of Ethiopia, and Vincent Kofi of Ghana are some of the more celebrated artists of the 1960s through the 1980s. Valente Malangatana of Mozambique continues to paint in what Mount once called "a highly charged and emotional fashion both aberrant and elemental aspects of life: madness, sex, suicide, and divorce."⁸⁹ There also are groups of younger artists beginning to have an impact, such as the Ona group of Ife, the Aka group of Enugu, and Bogolan of Bamako.

One advantage modern African artists have had over their African-American

counterparts has been their direct and continuous contact with and understanding of their cultures. Much more of it was left intact and this has formed a natural reservoir for their imagery. Tayo Ojomo of Ife creates oil paintings with content based upon the elucidation of Yoruba proverbs. Moyo Okediji and Bolaji Campbell of the Ona group have studied the traditional shrine painting executed by guilds of women in Ife and utilized its earth pigments and some of the formal elements in their *paintings* -- a term used loosely in describing their use of indigenous natural materials and pigments on two-dimensional surfaces.

The cultural base and support system in post-colonial Africa is still African at the deeper levels, and obviously so when moving inland from the large coastal cities. The art work coming from modern Africa is African even though it may have incorporated elements of European tradition.

A similar conception of art -- one notably different from Europe's -- unites African artists from the beginning of the century until the present: we find similar ideas about the purpose of art, the artist's role, his or her interaction with clients, and the way he or she works, even among African artists living in Europe and America. Content, for example, is of prime importance for African artists, critics, and audiences, who tend to share an expectation that works of art will have a readable message or story.⁹⁰

The explorations of these contemporary African artists have led to a dynamic synthesis of form suited to the expression of the modern African soul. Traditional approaches to imagery no longer have a stable context in many areas, and sprawling urban centers present new contexts, so, despite the ugly reasons behind the changes in African social and political systems, new forms are appropriate. They also are very African.

CONCLUSION

African art still is a vital, living thing. The tendency to stereotype the African as a primitive tribesperson has inhibited the recognition of that fact. The attitudes generated in support of slavery and colonialism continue to affect the perception, valuation, and validation of the art work of black people in the minds of whites. Black art seldom is examined in museums, galleries, or historical surveys outside of a "tribal" context, and often is discussed in terms of "marginality" and "otherness." These terms validate the centrality of mainstream white art by the implication of its centrality in relation to those in the margin.

African and African-American culture should be seen as a competing epistemology rather than a "marginal" or "minority" entity.⁹¹ This allows Hannerz's ideas of creolization to become useful in analyzing the complicated, mutual influences each culture or epistemology exerts upon the other. Valorization of black culture as a parallel reality

encourages an analysis of black art with a consideration of the historical, social, and relational factors that frame it. The participation of Norman Lewis in the abstract expressionist movement in the 1940s and 1950s, and his historical and critical dismissal from it, means very different things than the similar experience of Lee Krasner. The surrealism of everyday life in the segregated South during the 1920s and 1930s would cause black artists to be concerned with very different issues than Breton and other surrealists in Europe and the United States, and many echoed Billie Holliday's lament, "Strange Fruit," in their imagery. The assumed centrality of white males causes the 20th century to be defined by a series of avant garde movements that express the concerns of varied people with a particular relationship to power.

African, or black, art has developed continually for over 25,000 years. It has remained generally a meaning-centered expression of communal culture. The specific forms and functions have evolved and shifted, but it remains, on the whole, a means toward an end. However, Robert L. Douglas feels that "formal qualities -- such as the use of brilliant and high-key colors and geometric shapes or design patterns -- in . . . much African-American art, reflect and signify a distinctive visual form born of an African one."⁹²

The African reality has not been a vision-centered material one, but has tended to emphasize symbolic essences or aspects. The naturalism gaining popularity among black artists affected by Western ideas and culture might be seen as a loss of faith if faith is defined in the Biblical sense as "evidence of things not seen." There are some who interpret Modernism as the Europeanization of African aesthetics because it breaks sharply with the Renaissance tradition of naturalism that dominated the West for 500 years. This makes William Fagg's statement even more ironic. Also, like the African-American artists migrating to Europe to study and work after World War I, African artists are being influenced by African-influenced Western art.

Black art created today in London, Bahia, Havana, Kingston, Atlanta, and New York has continuities and linkages with that being made in Lagos, Kumasi, Dakar, and Kinshasa. All of it has heritage in Tassili n'Ajjer, Egypt, Nubia, and Nok. Elements from this stream have flowed into the European tradition, and European waters are a tributary for black expression. The past few centuries of intense interaction between the two cultures have caused each culture, African and European, to converge because of a pattern of cross-pollination that continues.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Art

SELECTED PHOTOGRAPHS OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN ART



**Fig. 1. Egungun Society Costume, New Orleans Museum of Art, Museum Purchase:
Friends of Ethnographic Art.**



Fig. 2. BaKongo nkisi nkondi figure called Mangaaka. Courtesy, The Field Museum, Chicago, IL, Neg#A109979. Photograph by Diane Alexander White.

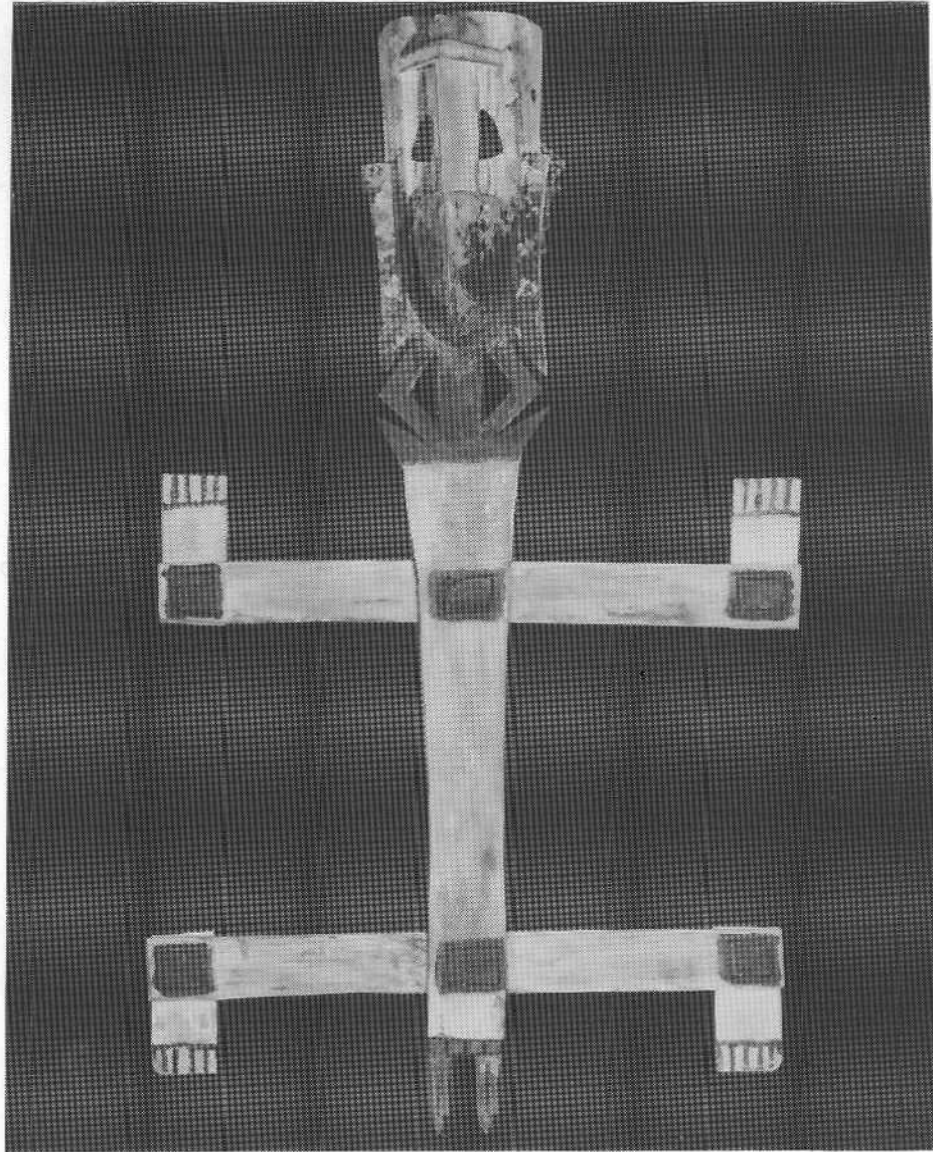


Fig. 3. Mali, Dogon Civilization, 20th century, Kanaga Mask, Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of James M. Osborn for the Lincoln Collection of African Art.



Fig. 4. Fowling Scene, tomb of Nebamun, Thebes, c. 1400 B.C. Copyright British Museum.



Fig. 5. Nok Jemma Head. Collection National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria. Photograph ©: The Detroit Institute of Arts. Photographer Dirk Bakker.



Fig. 6. Head of a Queen. Collection National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria. Photograph ©: The Institute of Arts, Photographer Dirk Bakker.



Fig. 7. Head of an Oba. 18th century. Courtesy, The Field Museum, Chicago, IL, Neg#99485.

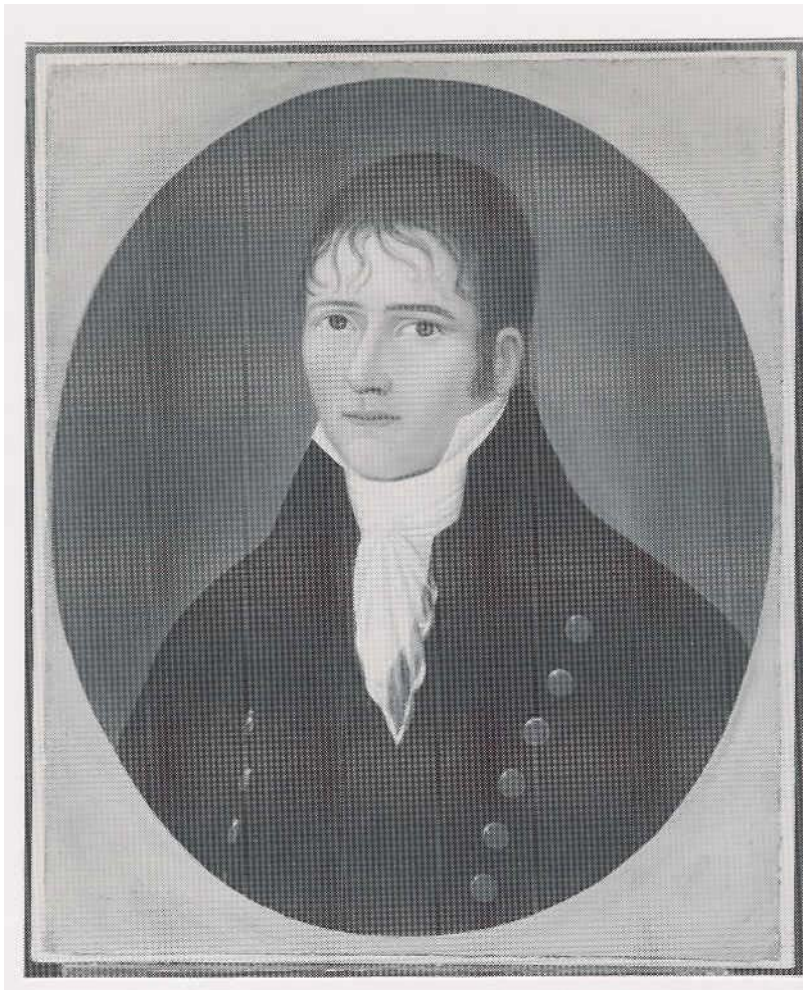


Fig. 8. Joshua Johnson, Portrait of Sea Captain John Murphy. Ca 1810, National Museum of American Art. Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Leonard and Paula Granoff.

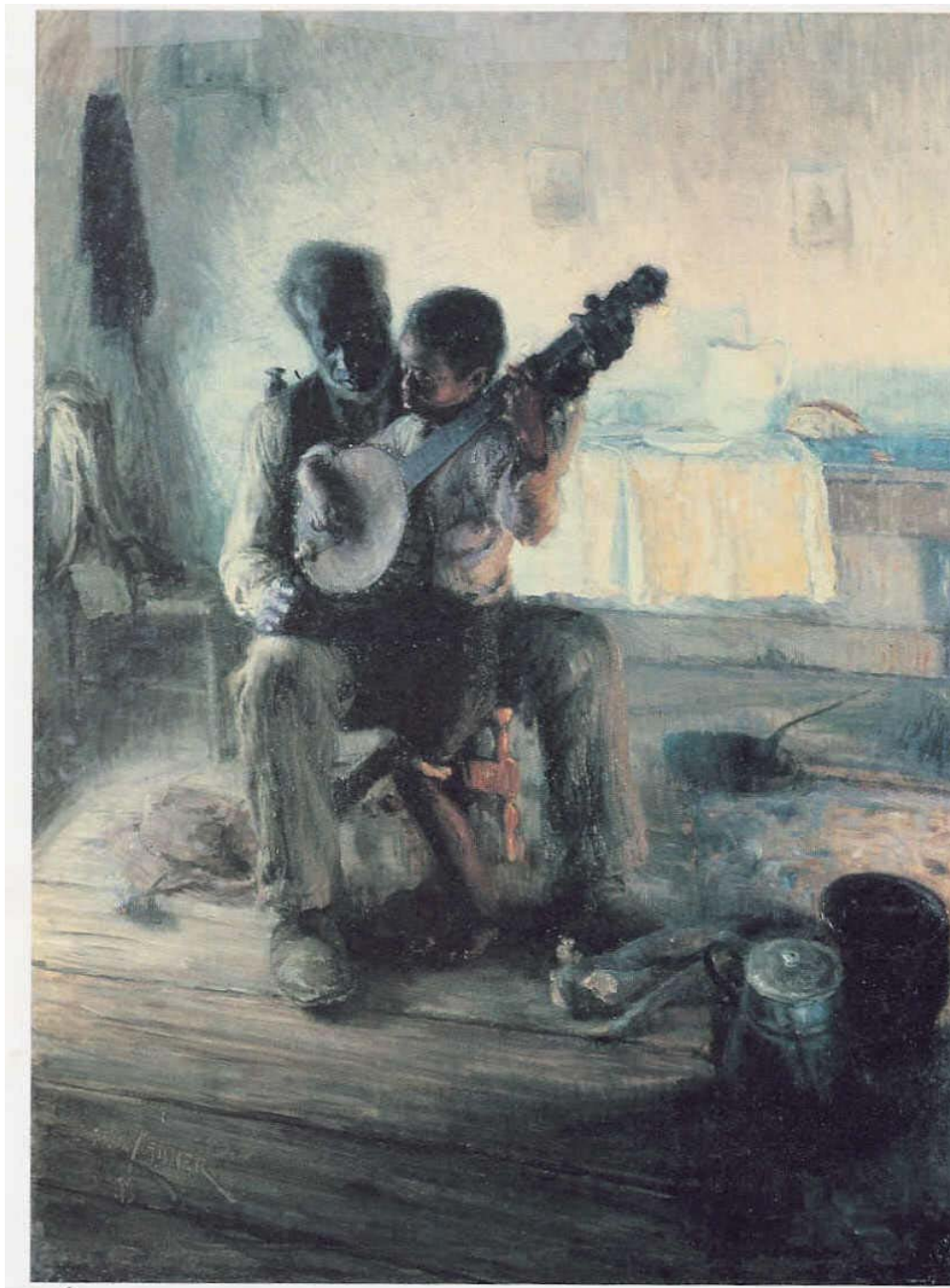


Fig. 9. Henry O. Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia.



Fig. 10. Aaron Douglas, Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery Through Reconstruction. 1934. Art and Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.



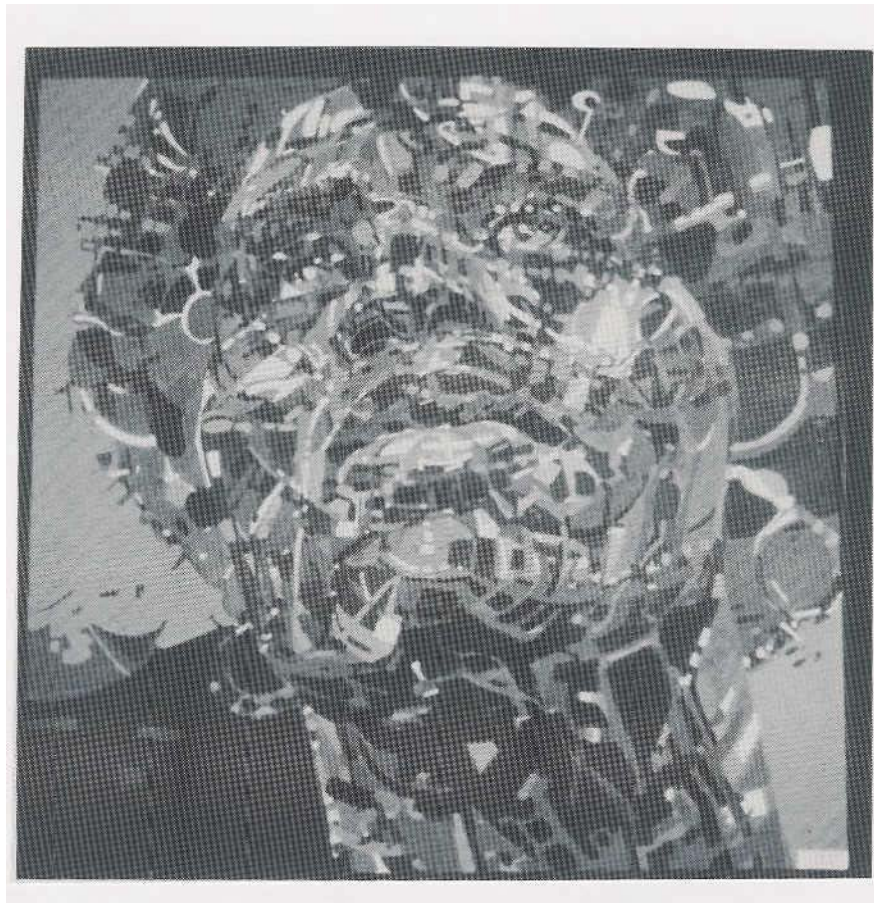
Fig. 11. Jacob Lawrence, 1940-41, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.



Fig. 12. Romane Howard Bearden, *The Prevalence of Ritual: Baptism*, 1964 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn by Lee Stalsworth.



Fig. 13. Sam Gilliam, Open Cylinder, 1979, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Mrs. Albert Ritzenberg, Copr., 1979, Sam Gilliam.



**Fig. 14. Nelson Stevens [Africobra]. Sister Spirit, acrylic. 1972.
Collection of the artist.**



Fig. 15. Jeff Donaldson [Africobra], Victory in the Valley Esu, 1970, serigraph. Collection of the Artist.



Fig. 16. E. H. Sorrells-Adewale, Short Story Concerning Regeneration, 1960.
Collection of the artist.



Fig. 17. Renee Stout, Fetish No. 2, 1988.27. Dallas Museum of Art.



Fig. 18. Martin Puryear, Bower, 1980. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Seattle.



Fig. 19. Lamdi Fakaye, iyabeji (mother of twins). Yoruba/ Nigeria,.National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian. Photograph by FRANKO KHOURY, National Museum of African art, Eliot Elisofon, Photographic Archives, Smithsonian institution. Gift of Jean Kennedy and Richard Wolford.



Fig. 20. Twins Seven Seven. Queen Oranmiyan the Mother of All Future Teller Ghosts, 1967. New Currents, Ancient Rivers: Contemporary African artists in a Generation of Change. Mimi Wolford, #810, 3210 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20016. Phone 202-362-0532.



Fig. 21. Ben Enwonwu, Anaynwu (The Awakening), 1961. New Currents, Ancient Rivers: Contemporary African Artists in a Generation of Change. Mimi Wolford. #810, 3210 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20016. Phone 202-362-0532.

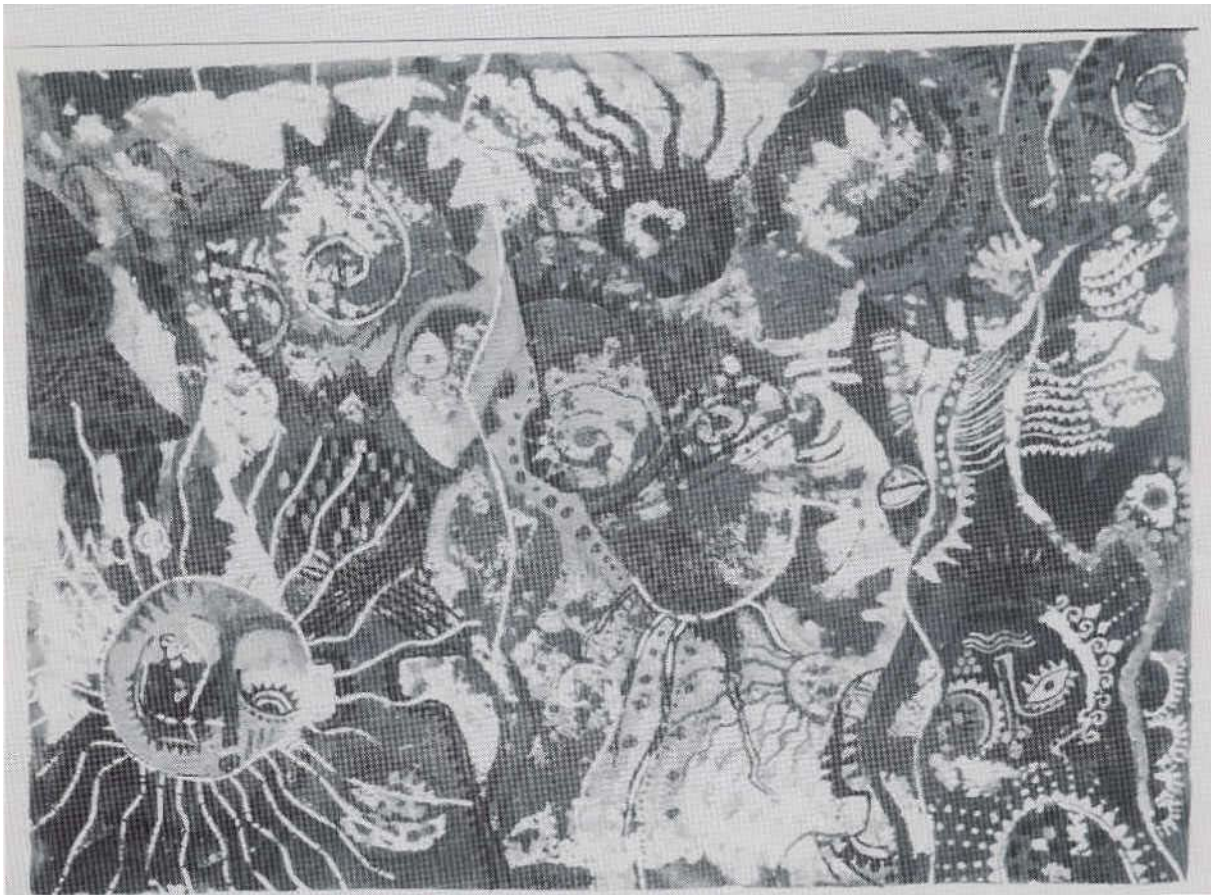


Fig. 22. Moyo Okediji, Onile, 1962. Collection of the Artist. Courtesy of Michael D. Harris.

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- 48 Frank Willett, "Nigerian Art: An Overview," *Treasures of Ancient Nigeria*, op cit., pp. 35-36.
- 49 See Henry J. Drewal, John Pemberton III, and Rowland Abiodun, *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*, New York: The Center for African Art, 1989.

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- 51 Wyatt MacGaffey, "The Eyes of Understanding," in Wyatt MacGaffey and Michael D. Harris, *Astonishment and Power*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Museum of African Art, 1993, pp. 21-103. Wyatt MacGaffey, "The Personhood of Ritual Objects: Kongo Minkisi," *Etnofoor*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1990, pp. 45-61.
- 52 Enid Schildkrout and Curtis A. Keim, *African Reflections: Art from Northeastern Zaire*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, American Museum of Natural History, 1990.
- 53 See R. F. Thompson, *The Flash of the Spirit*, op. cit., and Alvia J. Wardlaw and Maureen A. McKenna, eds., "The Song that Named the Land: The Visionary Presence of African-American Art," *Black Art, Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American Art*, Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1989, pp. 97-141.
- 54 Also, Margaret Trowell has made some generalizations about sub-Saharan African art that may be useful. She lists three types of art which she calls "spirit-regarding," "man-regarding," and the "art of ritual display." Willett tells us that this "is a classificatory device for dealing with the material; it has the great merit of emphasizing the function of the art in the society which produced it. . . ." Willett, *African Art*, op. cit., p. 41. Also, Margaret Trowell, *Classical African Sculpture*, London: _____, 1964, 2nd ed., cf. Willett, p. 41.
- 55 Ulf Hannerz presents an interesting look at cultural creolization as a bi-directional exchange in "The World in Creolisation," *Africa*, Vol. 57, No. 4, 1987, pp. 546-559.
- 56 Langston Hughes, "I, Too," "Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro," *Survey Graphic*, special issue, edited by Alain Locke, Vol., 6, No. 6, March 1925, p. 683.
- 57 In Yoruba, the tonal range is low, mid, high, the equivalent of the musical *do, re, mi*, and the meaning of a word shifts with the intonation. For example: *ara* (body) becomes *àrà* (style) and *àrá* (lightning) with tonal changes.
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- 59 Mudimbe tells us that "L. G. Damas, just before his death in 1978, strongly confirmed [L. Kesteloot's] thesis with reference to the contributions of W. E. B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Carter Woodson, Countee Cullen, and, in particular, Mercer Cook, all of whom he considered links between black Americans and Africans. . . . To these names, Senghor adds Claude MacKay and Richard Wright." V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 90.
- 60 Hannerz, "The World in Creolisation," p. 550.
- 61 *Ibid.*, pp. 548-549. Also see "New York: The Secret African City," a video production by BBC with Robert Farris Thompson, 1990.
- 62 Gerald L. Davis, "Afro-American Coil Basketry in Charleston County, South Carolina: Affective Characteristics of an Artistic Craft in Social Context," *American Folklife*, Don Yoder, ed., Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976, and John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*, Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978.

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- ⁶³ Maude Southwell Wahlman, "African-American Quilts, Tracing the Aesthetic Principles," *The Clarion*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Spring 1989, pp. 44-54, and "Religious Symbolism in African-American Quilts," *The Clarion*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Summer 1989, pp. 36-44. See also, Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, op cit., pp. 207-222.
- ⁶⁴ Elsa Fine points out that "Visual expression in Western culture is essentially a middle-class endeavor. Painting as a fine art grew out of the artisan class, which eventually became the middle-class. . . . The peasants developed folk art, but the fine arts are a product of leisure, security, and education." Elsa Honig Fine, *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973, p. 3.
- ⁶⁵ George Frederickson documents the ideological development in *The Black Image in the White Mind*, op. cit. For a look at the imagery, see Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990; Guy C. McElroy, *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art 1710-1940*, Washington, DC: Bedford Arts/Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990; and Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art, IV: From the American Revolution to World War I*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- ⁶⁶ Helene Johnson, "Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem," *American Negro Poetry*, revised edition, Arna Bontemps, ed., New York: Hill and Wang, 1974, p. 102.
- ⁶⁷ For example, see Alain Locke, ed., *Negro Art: Past and Present*, Washington, DC: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936, and Alain Locke, ed., *The Negro in Art: A Pictorial Record of the Negro Artists and the Negro Theme in Art*, Washington, DC: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1940.
- ⁶⁸ Mary Schmidt Campbell, "Introduction," *Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987, p. 15.
- ⁶⁹ Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," *The New Negro*, New York: Atheneum, 1980 edition [1925].
- ⁷⁰ Keith Morrison reveals some of the elitist or bourgeois manifestations in the growth of the Howard University Art Gallery, and the Barnett Aden Collection in Washington, DC, during the 1930s and 1940s in *Art in Washington and Its Afro-American Presence: 1940-1970*, Washington, DC: Project for the Arts, 1988.
- ⁷¹ Willett, *African Art*, pp. 35-36.
- ⁷² Elsa Fine, *The Afro-American Artist*, p. 44. Langston Hughes alludes to this expectation as affecting his relationship with a patron others have identified as Charlotte Mason in his autobiography, *The Big Sea*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1963 edition [1940], pp. 324-326.
- ⁷³ Mary Schmidt Campbell, op. cit., p. 49.
- ⁷⁴ James A. Porter, *Modern Negro Art*, New York: Arno Press/*The New York Times*, 1969, pp. 99-100. This book was developed from his master's thesis at New York University in the early 1940s.
- ⁷⁵ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Face and Voice of Blackness," *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710-1940*, Washington, DC: Bedford Arts/Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990, p. xli.
- ⁷⁶ Jeff Donaldson, personal conversation, April 1991.

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- 77 Program for CONFABA Conference on the Functional Aspects of Black Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, May 1970, *cf.*, Edmund Barry Gaither, "Heritage Reclaimed: An Historical Perspective and Chronology," *Black Art, Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American Art*, Robert Rozelle, Alvia Wardlaw, and Maureen McKenna, eds., Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1989, p. 25.
- 78 W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York: New American Library, 1969 [1903], p. 45.
- 79 See Michael D. Harris, "From Double Consciousness to Double Vision: The Africentric Artist," *African Arts*, Vol. 27, No. 2, April 1994, pp. 44-52, 94-95.
- 80 This is a term developed by Jeff Donaldson to denote work moving beyond African work in a specific sense. Wherever artists of African descent are working, the work takes on the persona of that environment, but retains an African element as well. See "TransAfrican Art," *The Black Collegian*, October/November, 1980, pp. 90-102.
- 81 Claude McKay, "The Tropics in New York," *Survey Graphic, Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro*, Vol. 6, No. 6, March 1925, p. 648.
- 82 Ulli Beier, "Preface," *Contemporary Art in Africa*, Praeger: New York, 1968.
- 83 William Fagg, "The African Artist," *Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, p. 45.
- 84 Philip Ravenhill, "First Word: The Challenge of History," *African Arts*, Vol. 23, No. 3, July 1990, pp. 1, 6, 8. □
- 85 Susan Vogel, "Introduction: Digesting the West," *Africa Explores*, op. cit., p. 30.
- 86 See Robert Farris Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings: Yoruba Art at UCLA*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971, and Henry John Drewal and John Pemberton III with Rowland Abiodun, *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*, New York: The Center for African Art/Harry Abrams, Inc., 1989).
- 87 Susan Vogel, "Traditional Art," *Africa Explores*, op cit., p. 36.
- 88 Patrick McNaughton defines this as "subsistence plus" to indicate the production of enough surplus in African societies for the last two millennia to sustain an intricate, complex system of trade that spanned the entire continent north of the equator. Personal conversation, Washington, DC, October 1991.
- 89 Marshall W. Mount, *African Art: The Years Since 1920*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973, p. 161.
- 90 Susan Vogel, "Introduction: Digesting the West," *Africa Explores*, op. cit., p. 16.
- 91 Patricia Hill Collins has written a very interesting essay that provides an excellent paradigm for the notion of competing epistemologies in "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1989, pp. 745-773.
- 92 Robert L. Douglas, "Formalizing an African-American Aesthetic," *New Art Examiner*, Vol. 18, No. 10, June/Summer 1991, p. 18.

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INDEX