

# みんなくりポジトリ

国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

## Comment

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## Comment

by **Kenji YOSHIDA**

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Thank you very much. My name is Yoshida, and I am from the National Museum of Ethnology.

The major point of Mr. Ikwuemesi's presentation is that the West has prescribed and framed African Art. I'd like to go further back from the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* to a 1984 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York called *Primitivism in 20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern*. As the sub-title suggests, works of modern art and examples of what curators termed 'tribal art' that may have influenced modern art or that resembles it were juxtaposed in the exhibition so that formal or conceptual similarities — what the curator of the show, William Rubin, called 'affinities' — might be evoked. Masterpieces by many modern artists such as Picasso, Matisse, Giacometti, Moore and Richard Long, among others, were collected from art museums all over the world, while at the same time, relevant 'tribal art works', that is African, Oceanic, and American masks and sculptures, were brought from various ethnographic museums in Europe and America.

This large scale encounter of modern art with tribal art was intended to demonstrate the 'affinity' between the two, and thus a universal humanity. However, the exhibition stirred up controversy concerning the Eurocentric ideas behind the show.

Perhaps the most important achievement of the exhibition was to assemble so many works of Western and non-Western art from art as well as ethnographic museums, thereby expanding the discussion of primitivism, which until then had been a subject of treatment only within the art world, to now include anthropologists and historians, thereby elevating the discussion to reconsideration of modernism itself. In fact, the exhibition fuelled the positive process of coming to clear terms with the preconceived frameworks inherent in the distinction between art museums and ethnographic museums. For example, why is it that while creator of the works displayed in art museums are regarded as individual geniuses and so indicated, the individuality of those who created the works in an ethnographic museum is completely ignored, the only specificity being the indication of tribe and locality on the label? Why is it that one always talks of modernism in the West, while Third World modernism, which developed simultaneously in the Third World, has been diminished by the developed world's focus on only the traditional aspects of non-Western cultures? The exhibition revealed the heretofore silent and hallowed assumptions about differences between the 'civilized' and the 'primitive', the self and 'the other' — that the self is too complex to be generalized, while 'the other' is simple and capable of being generalized.

As a result, the *Primitivism* show promoted a more self-conscious use of language in exhibitions. Since then, various alternative display agendas have been presented. Among the various alternative display strategies promoted by the *Primitivism* show is revisionist representation, which focuses on Third World modernism, or more precisely, global modernism. From the end of 1980's, African modernism was the subject of exhibitions. A good number of exhibitions were organized to solve the problems identified in the *Primitivism* exhibition. Now I hear from the speaker Mr. Ikwuemesi here, however, those efforts were almost in vain.

As Mr. Ikwuemesi pointed out, I don't think the Japanese know much about Africa. On the other hand, there have been a few challenges in regard to displaying African contemporary art in Japan. In 1995, Mr. Kawaguchi organized *An Inside Story: African Art of our Time* in Tokyo. In conjunction with the exhibition, a symposium was held, at which a Nigerian, Mr. Dele Jegede, asked, "Why does one think that all of African art can be compressed in one exhibition?" At the time I took it rather lightly, but after listening to the speaker here today, I realized this is a crucial issue. Indeed, how can one exhibition embody all of a continent? While one most certainly cannot embody all of Europe and American art, why in case of Africa this is taken for granted. Now that we're aware of the issue, what can we do? I'd like to ask Dr. Mary Jo Arnoldi from the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History how she and her museum have faced this difficult problem.

I agreed with Mr. Ikwuemesi, especially when he said it's important to establish an authentic history of African art. We Japanese have the experience of producing our own authentic Japanese history, dating back to 1900. At that time, an international exposition was held in Paris. Ryuichi Kuki and Tenshin Okakura who belonged to the then Imperial Museum edited an art history which centered on the eight periods of Japan, based on the art held by political rulers in those times. This history is exactly what Japanese people today consider to be an authentic history of Japanese art. But This history did not reflect folk art such as ukiyo-e and netsuke art. These were exported to the world after the Meiji Restoration for the purpose of promoting industry, so this created a gap between the knowledge of Japanese art held abroad and in Japan.

Needless to say, we, human beings, have diverse perceptions of art, depending on age, sex, social status and region. Which view of art should represent the whole community? And who selects what kind of art? Who has the right to represent art of your own is an unsolved question. As long as we engage in exhibitions of art, we cannot be freed from the issue of power and politics of representation. When I organize an exhibition, I always try to clarify who is talking about art or culture from what kind of standpoint for what purpose, so that we can open the path for criticism.

Thank you very much for your attention.

