

THE ROLE OF NON-HAITIANS IN THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE CONTEMPORARY ART MOVEMENT IN  
HAITI AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR  
ART EDUCATORS IN CROSS-  
CULTURAL SITUATIONS

Katherine Bonathon

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# ABSTRACT

This research will investigate the problem of cross-cultural influence in art which appears when societies at different levels of development come in contact. In particular it will examine the effect of non-Haitians on the Haitian art movement between 1930 and 1973. As Canadian Indian and Eskimo art in the past century has experienced change resulting from similar contacts, examples of parallels in types of influence will be given whenever possible. It should be remembered, however, that this is not a three culture study, and that the focus throughout will be on Haitian art. Because industrialized societies are having a pronounced effect on all aspects of primitive life throughout the world, the thesis will conclude by showing how this information could be applied in similar situations of cross-cultural influence in art elsewhere.

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## INTRODUCTION

### A Need:

The world, in man's eyes at least, is constantly getting smaller. With greater efficiency in electronics we can communicate with almost every corner of the globe in seconds, and air travel has left few places completely inaccessible. The result has been more interchange between primitive and complex societies. The highly developed material culture of North America and Europe with its emphasis on consumer goods is too often imposed on primitive societies as a ready solution to their survival problems. But one cannot change a part of such a society without influencing the whole. The tendency has been, then, for complex industrial societies to dominate in these situations of cross-cultural contact. They must, therefore, recognize their power position and take full responsibility for it.

Increased affluence for North Americans and Europeans has stepped up tourism in exotic and previously isolated areas. Tourists frequently arrive knowing and caring little about the culture but determined to pick up mementos proving they have been there. They seldom carry the knowledge to evaluate the artistic merits of their purchases, and are unaware that their whims will directly effect the future products of the artists and artisans who must live by these sales. They must learn to use their influence

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wisely by encouraging authentic designs and good craftsmanship.

Every year more young professionals from the Western world -- doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers -- are sponsored by international organizations to help with projects in underdeveloped countries. In the case of volunteers working in the visual arts, the difficulty of setting criteria for aesthetic values immediately arises. Artists and teachers cannot help but judge art according to the standards of their own culture, and they tend to use the teaching methods they themselves have experienced or developed in an industrialized society. They may think they are merely introducing a new skill or material, but they are also passing on their own entire attitude towards art and its teaching. They must consider carefully their effect on the already existing art forms of the primitive culture.

The production of handcrafted goods in indigenous cultures is frequently encouraged by foreigners who have come to the country as missionaries, community developers, or investors interested in exploiting the cheap labour. Their main aim is greater marketability of native crafts. They do not hesitate to bring in designs and materials from other cultures. Often the final products have no authentic relation to the original primitive culture and may be poorly designed and crafted. In so doing, not only

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is the buyer duped; but the native artist is taught to replace his own artistic values with those of the foreigner from what he considers a more advanced culture.

At present collecting primitive art is both popular and lucrative. Collectors tend to accept works at face value, as an honest and spontaneous expression of the individual and his culture. However, they should recognize that today no culture exists in isolation and, therefore, most examples of contemporary primitive art have been influenced through cross-cultural contacts. They should be interested in how the art forms of a primitive society may be so changed, and what the cultural origins of the pieces in their own collections actually are.

#### B. Definition of Terms:

Before becoming involved in the text, the meaning of the word "primitive" should be established. This term is loosely applied to two types of art: indigenous and incitic. "Indigenous" art is produced as an integral and functioning part of a simple and often tribal culture. It fulfills a social need frequently in the area of decoration, religion or communication. The artist's aims are those of his social group: to placate the supernatural, to give prestige to his leaders, or to give order to human affairs. He uses only those forms approved by his society.<sup>1</sup>

"Incitic" art is a newly coined term referring to the



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work of artists who function outside the mainstream of the contemporary art world. They produce purely in response to their own need to create and express. The best known example would be the French painter, Henri Rousseau. These artists work only in their spare time and do not attempt to live by the sale of their art. They lack formal training in art and tend to use shapes, colours, and arrangements an art critic would label simple and child-like.<sup>2</sup>

Neither contemporary Indian and Eskimo or Haitian art falls neatly into one of these categories. Indian and Eskimo art was originally indigenous, but now its artists are producing for the white man's market in styles he approves. Similarly, Haitian art began as principally incitic. As soon as the artist had to depend on sales for his livelihood he fell prey to the tastes of his clients, for the most part Europeans and North Americans with narrow concepts of primitive art.

The element drawing contemporary Indian and Eskimo and Haitian art together in this research is that the artists of all three cultures are desperately producing for an outside society in order to live, and as a result their art forms are being changed.

Throughout this thesis the term "primitive" will be replaced by either "indigenous" or "incitic". These will be prefaced by the term commercial when the contemporary extra-cultural element is examined.

C Procedure:

The thesis will take the following form:

a) A study of the direct influence of foreigners on Haitian art with examples of similar influences in Indian and Eskimo art.

b) A study of the influence of Haitians, Indians and Eskimos who have studied outside their culture and brought new ideas back.

c) Examples of foreign elements that have been introduced into Haitian and Indian and Eskimo culture and appear in their art.

The source of information will be personal interviews and observations, and material in relevant publications.

## THE DIRECT INFLUENCE OF FOREIGNERS

### I Teachers:

#### A Haitian Art before the Founding of the Centre d'Art:

In 1937 the antropologist, M.J. Herskovits, lamented that there was little evidence of graphic and plastic arts in the Haitian culture.<sup>3</sup> He was referring to the peasants, not the middle class who had inherited the French concept of easel painting through their classical education.

Of peasant art, Selden Rodman lists the following examples before 1944: cailles or mud huts painted with symbols, flowers and swirls, animal masks for parades; decorated Voodoo equipment; vèvés; and painted tombs.<sup>4</sup> Courlander adds the following: clay figurines and animals used in Voodoo, carved heads of canes, carved and painted calabashes and cha-chas, wooden fetishes, and decorated peasant knapsacks.<sup>5</sup>

Both authors stress the lack of development of African visual arts by the slaves in Haiti. There was no place for it in a colony which looked to France for its decorative art or later in the struggling republic with its subsistence economy.<sup>6</sup>

According to Philippe Thoby-Marcelin, Haitian easel painting before 1930 followed the European academic tradition. In that year a Chicago artist, William Scott, painted and exhibited a series of impressionistic Haitian landscapes in oils. His technique was observed and imitated by three

young Haitians; Edward Preston, who produced incitic works in aggressive colors and vulgar designs and left almost immediately for New York; Michele Giordani, who turned out touristic scenes reminiscent of picture postcards until his death in 1944; and Petion Savain, who passionately set about painting in a style which combined poetic realism with the naïveté of a Rousseau.

Savain held eight exhibits between 1931 and 1939, becoming in each more realistic and less poetic. After winning a bronze medal in painting at the Gallery of Science and Art, New York's World Fair, in 1940 he went to study fresco technique and graphic arts at the New York Art Students' League. He returned to Haiti in 1946 to collaborate with his American wife, Mia Steiner on murals for the exposition celebrating the bicentenary of Port-au-Prince.<sup>7</sup>

Although his early work borrowed heavily from the academic and impressionist style of his teachers, it showed a freshness and expressive sincerity. He proved he could still capture this quality in a recent painting of Cap-Haitien commissioned by his colleague, Néhémy Jean. (figs. 1, 2).

The work he is known for at present, however, is entirely commercially oriented. It is produced by photographing market scenes and tracing the projected slides on canvas. He then introduces his well known curvilinear

distortions and sugary colors.<sup>8</sup> Savain is an example of a master artist, highly respected and widely imitated, who has become so well recognized in his stylistic rut that to try something new would simply mean more work in return for less money.

In addition to Savain who dominated the Haitian art scene from 1931 to 1944 the following incitic artists were painting at this time: Philomé Obin, Peterson Laurent, René Vincent, and J.B. Bottex. But their work went unknown and unencouraged.<sup>9</sup>

#### B The Founding of the Centre d'Art:

When the American artist, DeWitt Peters, arrived in Port-au-Prince to teach English under the United States Good Neighbor Plan he could not understand why with all of Haiti's cultural and visual wealth "... in this city of 150,000 inhabitants ... is there no single art gallery, no art shop, not even a nook where a painting can be hung for the people to see?"<sup>10</sup> Encouraged by several Haitian painters and intellectuals who had studied abroad -- notably Geo Ramponeau, one of Savain's disciples, Peters became determined to found a visual arts center. In a letter to the Haitian Director General of Education, November 4, 1943, he describes his aims:

A nation is judged on the quality of its art by visitors, therefore an art center would help to end Haitian isolation and put her in relation to other countries of the Western hemisphere. I wish to encourage all good painting and not impose on others my methods

or point of view. I try to work individually with each student to develop his personal qualities. A part of my plan is to have a series of conferences on the development of art, given by Haitians and other qualified persons, continual exhibits of examples of good painting and drawing, and a well chosen library. (11)

Since its opening in May 1944, the Centre d'Art has been the spearhead of Haiti's contemporary art movement. After the successful opening show which included paintings by Peters and European-trained Haitian artists, a routine of classes in life drawing and painting and bimonthly exhibits was organized.

At this time Peters had no idea that incitic artists already existed in Haiti. The revelation came in October 1944 when Philomé Obin sent his painting of Roosevelt down on the Cap-Haitien camion. Peters was astounded at its freshness and precision. He learned that this petty government official had been painting self-taught for over thirty years. This was to be Obin's first sale -- \$5.00 in cash and an equal amount in art supplies.<sup>12</sup> With this encouragement he remained in Cap-Haitien to found the school of the North. These artists drawn mainly from Obin's own family, carefully imitate his stiff, clearly defined and minutely detailed accounts of Haitian history and bourgeois life. Through publicity and international exhibitions arranged by the Centre, Obin has come to be recognized as the patriarch of the commercial incitic movement. Now he can sell a painting for over two thousand dollars. This

financial security allows him to paint what and how he wants. Practice has refined his style -- larger shapes, clearer colors, smoother textures -- yet it retains the integrity of his original work and reflects his day-to-day experiences.<sup>13</sup> (figs. 3, 4)

Soon after Obin's discovery, Rigaud Benoit appeared at the Centre with a delicately painted earthenware vase. He claimed to be selling it for a friend and was given cardboard so this person could try a formal painting. He was back shortly with a lyrical river scene complete with ducks and palm trees. Again he was paid and encouraged with more cardboard. When he returned with four strangely poetic works he shyly admitted to being the artist.<sup>14</sup> The encouragement of foreign artists and the opportunity to work beyond the area of purely decorative motif had unleashed Benoit's rich imagination. With the training of the Centre he has become one of Haiti's most sensitive and technically skilled graphic artists. (fig. 5)

In this way more and more hopeful young incitic artists drifted into the Centre and began participating in the beginners' classes. By this time instruction was split in two groups, the avancés who were studying anatomy, color science, perspective, etc., with the foreign teachers, and the incitics who were encouraged to work purely from their imagination. Néhémy Jean describes the beginners' classes:

The classes were directed by Haitian primitive masters such as E. Gourgue and D. Cedor. We watched the master manipulate house paint on board, noticing particularly the play of pinks and blues. We were encouraged to find our own subject matter. My first finished work, "Columbus' Reception by the Indians", was immediately taken by the master as a palette and I was told to try another. This would go on until Peters considered the student's work salable. Then it would be put on display and the student would get 15 percent of the profit. When Peters felt the student was ready he would be promoted to the avancés and required to pay a monthly tuition of \$4.00 or \$5.00 (15)

Peters followed his intended policy of having foreign artists teach and exhibit at the Centre. One of the first Cubans, Carlos Enriquez, introduced Maurice Borno and Luce Turnier, already following the classical training of the ABC drawing correspondence course from Paris, to Cubism and Expressionism.<sup>16</sup> He was followed by two Americans; Paul Keene who encouraged Antonio Joseph to begin using caséine and eventually develop his translucent play of geometric shapes,<sup>17</sup> and Jason Seley who influenced Jasmin Joseph's career as a sculptor.

These visiting teachers used the methods of formal instruction they would normally follow in the art schools of their own countries on the avancés. For instance, Seley in teaching sculpture might discuss examples from the work of Rodin or Michelangelo. The beginners, however, were encouraged to find their own line of development through work and a kind of apprenticeship.<sup>18</sup> Peters' greatest fear, once he began to appreciate the incitic's



genius, was that his spontaneity might be destroyed.

### C. The Foyer des Arts Plastiques:

In 1950 a group of fifty-eight students, mostly avancés, broke away from the Centre and founded with government help the Foyer des Arts Plastiques. Their complaint was that Peters was favouring the incitics, and that the younger than "natural" artists should be given the formal training to enable them to bridge the gap between their primitive experiences and new forms of expressions, through which they could transmit their emotion in stylized realism.<sup>19</sup>

The classes at the Foyer kept this objective in mind. Teachers were mainly Haitians who had studied outside the country such as Lucien Price from the Paris Académie des Beaux Arts. A notable exception is the American, Lois Johns Pierre-Noel, formerly resident artist at Harvard University and now professor at the Washington Academy of Fine Art, who still makes regular yearly visits to the Foyer for demonstration lessons. Her teaching approach as it has been transmitted to the present Foyer director is described on page 64.

It is impossible to make a general qualitative judgment as to the results of the Foyer's training. In cases like Louverture Poisson it has turned an expressive incitic into an expert but emotionless illustrator. (figs. 6, A) In others like Enguerrand Gourgue, it facilitated a fuller development of expressive powers

through an understanding of the formal art elements. (figs. B, 7) The Foyer remains important because it permitted incitic artists to seek such information if they so wished. It also proved that Haitian artists wanted to determine their own future even though they might lose their identity as Haitians in the stream of contemporary international art.

D The Académie des Beaux Arts:

In 1959 the Haitian Ministry of Education financed the founding of the Académie des Beaux Arts under the directorship of the Italian, Marco Montaguelli. Steeped in the French classical sculptural tradition, he set up the school according to European academic models. Students spent time copying plaster casts of classical sculpture in an effort to perfect the skill of exactly reproducing reality. Technically the emphasis was put on bronze casting.

The school offers a three year diploma course in which students who have been selected through entrance exams specialize in drawing, painting or sculpture. All must follow classes in anatomy and international art history. The present director, Gaston Hermantin, a Haitian student of Montaguelli who went on to study in New York and at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, took up his post in August 1971 and appears to be continuing the founding tradition. He describes the school's objectives:

We wish to give the students a good grounding in the fundamentals of fine art through theory and practice. We emphasize mastery of technical skills so that those with creative ability will have the background to hold their own as master artists. I have the greatest respect for the really good Haitian naive artists. I feel, however, standards must be set to save the reputation of Haitian art from the flood of trashy commercialized primitive painting which has declined into an endless flow of peasant cailles and drooping palm trees. (20)

Students of the Académie have developed in a variety of directions. The romantic naturalism of Kesnel Franklin which combines solidity of design with a slick painting technique is in great commercial demand. (fig.C) Bernard Séjourné, who began his studies at the Académie and continued abroad, has produced one of the most outstanding paintings in the Spring '73 exhibit of contemporary Haitian art. His "Deeeses" aptly illustrates his fine background in Florentine Renaissance imagery and flawless draftsmanship. (fig. D)

Rose-Marie Desruisseaux, former student and now painting teacher for the Académie, has passed through a variety of styles imitative of various European trends to arrive at her own synthesis of symbolic forms carved in paint to represent the power of Voodoo in Haitian culture. (figs. E, F)

The Académie offers a formal technical training for the young artist with the spirit to go further on his own. Those without this spark learn the skill to pass off their weak illustrations as professionally slick art

works.

#### E. Foreign Teachers at Atelier Néhémy:

Twelve years ago the fourth major Haitian art school, L'Atelier Institut de Dessin et de Peinture Galerie Néhémy, opened its doors. As the teaching methods of its Haitian founder, Néhémy Jean, have for the most part dominated this school they will be dealt with in the section of indirect influence. Néhémy has so far employed only two foreign teachers: Joan Nina Uccello, an Italian American who followed closely his own style and approach and myself.

I am told by Néhémy that my own teaching is much freer and more spontaneous than either his or Nina Uccello's. Since I took over the twice weekly course in life drawing and painting in January 1973 I have pushed the students towards putting more vitality into their work. They began through exercises in gesture and silhouette drawing to capture the general proportions of the figure before entering that painstaking struggle with exact linear contours. So that drawing could be faster and less rigid, I changed the medium from lead pencil on cartridge to soft charcoal on newsprint. They began in color with oil pastels on canvas rather than paint so that they would be using the same application gesture as in charcoal. They made the transition to painting by blending the pastels with brush and turpentine.

For these students the main color problem was to

pick up the nuances of colored light which the dark skin of the model reflected so well. I suggested blocking in the light and dark volumes in any two complimentary colors, then add the shades of other pure hues where they were being reflected, and finally blending the tones with turpentine. In this way the deadness of beginning with shades of brown could be avoided.

My students, young bourgeois Haitians, resented at first my constant urgings to work faster and push farther. They were used to agonizing three days over a single drawing. If I communicated any one attitude of my own to their concept of art it was that they should be so involved in the work that their limiting ideas of appropriate style and subject matter would fall away. I tried to show them that whatever they produced could be a jumping off point for further development. My own experiences at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts, Montreal and the Banff School of Fine Art are now a part of the foreign influence in Haiti!

## II Foreign Exhibitors:

A series of visiting artists have exhibited at the Centre d'Art. DeWitt Peters' own paintings in the opening show inspired Rigaud Benoit to try his talents.<sup>21</sup> Andrée Malbranche was able to observe the Ingres-like style of Dominican painter, Xavier Amiana, and pass it on to her own pupils at the Centre.<sup>22</sup> When Jason Seley arrived to decorate for the bi-centennial exposition he was enchanted by the simple clay figurines of Jasmin Joseph. But when the Haitian was brought to work at the Centre, he tried to imitate Seley's style. He was eventually convinced that his own approach was valid and worth pursuing.<sup>23</sup> Although Seley influenced Joseph principally through his support and encouragement, both sculptors infuse their work with a spirit of lightness and open simplicity. (figs. 8, 9)

Soon after the opening of the Centre a series of Cuban artists including Carlos Enriquez, Wilfredo Lam, Cundo Bermudez, and Roberto Diago introduced Haitians to the stylized distortions of Picasso through their teaching and exhibits.<sup>24</sup> Even today many of Haiti's non-figurative painters show this influence. (fig. 10)

At present the viewing public of Port-au-Prince is exposed to shows by non-Haitians sponsored by the foreign institutes. For example, during the past six months (December 1972 to May 1973) the French Institute

showed the work of Gerard Economos, the German Institute a group of West African sculptures, and the American Institute drawings and paintings by Robin Mols. For the most part these exhibits would be visited only by bourgeois artists, students and collectors. The peasant artist is far more likely to be influenced by the work of his fellow Haitians which he sees in commercial galleries when he delivers his own work.

We can, however, explore the possible effect of some of these exhibitions. The Economos show was sponsored with great fanfare and publicity by Air France. The artist's press clippings and successes as a commercial illustrator were displayed as prominently as his highly decorative abstract expressionist paintings. This sort of presentation is misleading for Haitian viewers who would generally lack the background knowledge to recognize the artistic weaknesses -- in this case indecisive design and an over-reliance on pretty color combinations. This problem of educating the public is seldom helped by professional art critics who are unwilling to stick their necks out and give an honest judgment. It is easier to acclaim every effort a success and avoid accusations of personal jealousy.

The precision drawing and imaginative compositions of the American, Robin Mols, were shown along side a series of stereotyped paintings by one of Haiti's big name artists, Luckner Lazard. In comparing the two

styles the public was forced to recognize that even a master artist cannot rely on generalized forms and half-remembered images; and that more Haitian artists need to develop solid draftsmanship. (figs. 11, G, 12)

The show of African wood sculpture clearly pointed out by comparison the shoddy commercialism of most Haitian mahogany carving. The depth of expressive sincerity combined with fine workmanship in the African pieces could have provided inspiration for serious sculptors. Unfortunately most Haitian wood carvers, even if they personally wished to raise the standards of their own work, would be hampered by tourist demands for small, characteristically Haitian figurines which can be turned out quickly in bulk. A man whose living depends on this cannot afford to waste time creating complex pieces which may not even sell.



### III Interested Foreigners:

Because there had been so little demand for serious painters in Haiti before the founding of the Centre, the incitic artists were naturally timid about revealing their efforts. The instant enthusiasm of visiting artists and collectors in many cases provides the catalyst to set artists on the road to professional status.

When the French writer, André Breton, visited Haiti in 1946 he raved over the paintings of Hector Hyppolite and took eight of them back to Paris. He felt both the modern surrealists and the Haitian incitics were exploring the subconscious through art, working intuitively towards the essentials of human nature. Peters quotes him as saying: "...that if Hyppolite were known to the young contemporary painters of France he could, single-handed, change the whole course of painting in that country." 25

In January 1947 Hyppolite's paintings stole the spot light at the UNESCO art exhibit in Paris. Simultaneously his talent was endorsed in the United States by critics René Harnoncourt and Robert Goldwater. He was next given a one-man show at the British American Art Centre. Hyppolite never attended classes at the Centre d'Art but this tremendous response increased both his productivity and creative daring. His early paintings tend to have small figures and subdued colors. In 1946-47 the forms became larger and more vivid. Those whose subjects focus on religion are freed from conventional iconography and

use distortions to maximize sensuality. The paintings done just before his death in 1948 show a far more effective integration of figures and landscape into picture space.<sup>26</sup> (figs. 13, 14)

One of Haiti's most sincere and unspoiled incitic painters, Robert St. Brice, was discovered and brought to the Centre in 1947 by the American artist, Alex John. There he was urged to continue his original style -- a child-like use of simple centrally placed figures rendered in a rich texture of overlayed lines and dots.

Now after twenty-six years of painting his work shows an even greater depth of understanding of the mystical forces at work under the surface of natural elements. Visually his work is in complete harmony with the Voodoo spirit that permeates his environment, and shows no foreign influence. Yet if it had not been for the encouragement of foreigners at the Centre and people like the young American artist, St. Brice calls Souiac, who made a point of searching out the master in his own home and paying tribute to him through an exchange of work and ideas; he would still be earning his living in the family grocery store on Carrefour road.

I asked St. Brice if he had a favourite foreign artist. He replied Picasso, because he works with the same freedom, spontaneity, and depth. He was greatly impressed by the show of Picasso prints at Musée College

St. Pierre in September 1972, particularly when told that Picasso had suggested the exhibit after seeing St. Brice's own paintings. <sup>27</sup> (fig. 15)

The Ste. Trinité Murals:

At the end of World War II the American writer, Selden Rodman, returned to Haiti once more as a tourist. A keen student of early Renaissance art, he was immediately taken by the similarity between some of the Haitian incitic paintings and those of the Italian Trecento. From this developed the notion that Haitians might also succeed with monumental frescoes. <sup>28</sup> In 1949 the American expert in egg tempera mural painting, William Calfee, came to instruct the basic techniques. The walls of the Centre became the practice area. It was soon apparent that the incitic artists who had been relegated to the lower parts of the building were well ahead of the overly self-conscious avancés. They traced designs and applied color with complete assurance and freedom.

With this encouragement, Rodman sought out commissions for the new muralists. He first approached the Haitian government which needed decorations in the new buildings for the bi-centennial exposition. The establishment could not accept the idea of native artists representing the Haitian visual tradition before an international audience. Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church, also dominated by the elite, rejected native art because its free forms

and frivolous colors were too vulgar for sacred buildings. Finally Bishop Voegeli offered up the virgin walls of Ste. Tinité Episcopal Cathedral for the experiment. Money was provided by donors in the United States and Rodman took charge.

He found the preliminary sketches first submitted sadly weak in design and overly dependant on the conventional Latin American religious oleographs found all over Haiti. Instead he made assignments on the basis of the artists' successful easel paintings. He insisted that the Biblical stories chosen be illustrated in the imagery of contemporary Haitian life. At first Castera Bazile and Rigaud Benoit protested against using Haitian skin colors and costumes. They were used to seeing religious art in terms of the baroque copies in Roman Catholic churches and Voodoo temples.

After great discussion, Philomé Obin agreed to cross convention and make his crucified Christ beardless. He even accepted Rodman's urgings to include the Masonic "Eye of God" in the same composition.<sup>29</sup> However, when he complained that the tree on the right could not balance out this strong visual element and needed to be backed by a cloud, Obin told Rodman to do it himself. He did.<sup>30</sup> (fig. H)

When the Jacmel painter, Préfète Duffaut, could not understand how to enlarge his village sketch to fill the

assigned space, but kept drawing it easel size in the corner; Rodman drew in the outlines while the artist was taking a lunch break.<sup>31</sup>

Castera Bazile was willing to accept Rodman's photographs of the Haitian sacred waterfall, Saut d'Eau, as a point of departure for his "Baptism of Christ". However, the suggestion that the mass that St. John stands on resembled a typical Haitian oil drum brought about its immediate modification into a rock form.<sup>32</sup> Rodman did succeed in convincing the artist that the laced bra of the woman pounding clothes, although not a strictly Biblical item, should be retained.<sup>33</sup> (fig. I)

And so the American struggled against the Haitian narrow academic ideas of aesthetics and gave the incitits courage to develop their own visual culture rather than copy the European. Eventually he was accused of influencing these artists too much, and asked by Peters to leave before the murals were completed. Now the finished paintings stand as a tribute to his efforts and the genius of the artists he served.

#### IV Foreigners in Charge of Self-Help Programmes:

The Haitian economy is constantly being undermined by problems of over-population and depletion of land resources. A number of missionary groups have founded self-help programmes which make use of the incredibly cheap Haitian labour to produce saleable craft items.

The Baptist mission at Fermathe is directed by Wallace Turnbull Jr., an American graduate in the Master of Fine Arts programme at Ohio University. His objectives are twofold: to raise the standards of living for the peasants in the area by developing cottage industries, and to integrate visual and material elements from the craft products into Haitian peasant culture.

With this in mind, he has introduced items which appeal to current American fashions, homespun wild cotton, macramé, patchwork and denim clothing, and embroidery based on floral designs from French magazines and peasant scenes drawn by Barbara Hodges, the daughter of a medical missionary in Haiti. He tries to arrange that these craft skills be integrated into the peasant way of life. For example, he suggested they also use the wild cotton to weave rugs instead of covering themselves with bits of rag against the cold mountain nights. He is currently sponsoring a contest among the women for the most imaginatively embroidered dress they can make for their own wearing.

The shop uses the few original Haitian designs available such as the peasant Azacca shirt and adapted vèvés in wrought iron, carved wood and embroidery whenever possible. But ideas for new products come often from foreign sources -- a folding wood chair from the Congo, a book rest from Surinam, a flower plaque in mahogany which began as a special order for an American in St. Thomas. (figs. 43, 16)

Standards of quality in this shop are controlled by Turnbull himself. He tries to phase out bad or vulgar designs like the red and black highly shellaced mahogany tables by paying higher prices for work he wishes to encourage. Nevertheless, inferior products are often accepted if the peasant badly needs money. As an artist himself, he has added his own design elements to items like a two-way stretch macramé hammock and a carved hope-chest whose prototype was produced for his young wife. His most recent project is the founding of a ceramics school in Kenscoff to use local clay. This is one of the few examples of non-Haitians who are trying to reconcile the conflict of aesthetics and economic necessity in Haitian art and craft.


As a foreigner who has grown up constantly aware of the peasant's difficulties, he sees using the low cost labour to produce hand-crafted goods as one of the few solutions to the economic problem which will not

completely disrupt the Haitian culture. As a well trained artist<sup>o</sup>, he can appreciate the peasant need for a visual tradition and make wise choices in deciding what new elements should be added to what presently exists.<sup>34</sup>

The American sociologist, Barbara Wallace, operates a similar project at the Ste. Trinité Gift Shop in the heart of Port-au-Prince. It was founded in 1958 by Sister Anne Marie of the American order of St. Margaret, when she began selling embroidery by Haitian mothers to defray costs at Ste. Trinité School. Since then it has continued to expand in quantity and variety of goods.

She has lately introduced such new processes as hand-painted textiles in the form of shirts, ties, and skirts; and colored synthetic thread woven into homespun. Many items here have also been designed by foreigners -- the Greek inspired shoulder bag by Barbara Wallace, a mahogany butter dish and knife to go in the refrigerator and hold the cold suggested by an American visitor, and a needle case based on an early American design.

Miss Wallace had no special training in art when she began the enterprise. She was carried along by her desire to relate to the people and her experiences as a social worker in Chicago. It seemed better to meet people over things rather than over social problems. She too makes her own decisions on quality of design and workmanship and believes high standards should take pre-





cedence over production. As a result, she just refused an order for a quarter of a million banana bark cards.<sup>35</sup>

There are over twenty such groups working in Haiti. They are concerned mainly with finding jobs for the peasants. Anything that will sell and is easily made is encouraged. Although many craft ideas come from foreign sources, the Haitians usually manage to expand on them and add their own peculiar cultural slant. For example, the French iron master's design for a monkey at Fermathe has been so distorted by workers, who have never seen such an animal, that is now metamorphized into a Haitian Devil.<sup>36</sup> (fig. 44)

Ideas for new products spread incredibly fast. A peasant who may be working for one shop will teach the design to his relatives who peddle it to others. For example, the three front-pocketed shirt with peasant cross-stitch from Fermathe is now found throughout Haiti, as are the Ste. Trinité banana bark cards. This year Haitian self-help projects formed an organization and received a grant from Oxfam of England for disseminating information and helping new groups with production and marketing. Future products will probably be more standardized but hopefully will have a higher level of design and craftsmanship.

## V Exploiters of Cheap Labour:

With the exception of a few Voodoo fetish figures and altars, there was no wood sculpture in Haiti until the late 1940's.

Around 1948 a Spaniard, Botello Barros, who had been living in Argentina after fleeing General Franco, spent a couple of years in Haiti. He brought with him some African masks which he received as a result of contact with Wilfredo Lam. He enlarged on the idea of the African features and elongated head in his own work. These were shown to Haitian wood workers like the Desir brothers who began to imitate the style. From this began the boom in Haitian wood carving.<sup>37</sup> Certain early pieces by sculptors such as Lafontant and Dimanche showed quality, and there are still a few serious artists producing in wood. (fig. 17, 18)

Today mahogany factories turn out everything from peasant market women to pornographic African warriors. Figures are roughed out with the band saw from cardboard patterns, then finished by hand with chisels. Most are given a coat of dark red stain and rubbed for hours to obtain a gloss. Some are shellaced or oiled. Most forms based on such patterns are so identical they appear to be machine made. Occasionally you may detect a personal touch in a higher degree of workmanship or distortion. It is not surprising that the plaques and

base reliefs are more original, each one telling a slightly different story. A contour pattern is easier to copy than an internal design. There seem to be two reasons why this junk sells. It is, by American standards, incredibly cheap and is produced in mahogany, a traditionally precious material. At the moment supplies of wood are so depleted that this debasing of Haitian sculpture may soon be brought to a halt. But, that the country should lose its trees and suffer land erosion to this end, is nothing short of rape. (fig. J)

The American factory owner, Bill O'Brien, showed me the brochure of a limited line of sculpture which he ships directly to concessions in the United States. He picked up the prototypes while visiting Haiti as chief purser on a tourist boat. They include the usual mediocre African heads, nudes, and Haitian peasant boys. By employing carvers at the minimum wage of a dollar a day and successfully gauging the artistic tastes of many North Americans this foreigner makes a good profit in his business. It is incredible that for buyers in the United States these hackneyed pieces represent Haitian art.

O'Brien's latest project was to open a ceramics factory producing 'cute' child figures similar to the Hummel line. He would be using Haitian materials and labour but nothing from Haitian visual culture.<sup>38</sup> It is not hard to imagine Haitian workers, seeing these mon-

strosities in demand in their dream world -- America,  
eventually regarding them as superior to their own efforts  
at visual expression.

## VI Gallery Owners:

In Haiti the gallery owner is truly the manipulator of trends in Haitian art. Most artists produce because they must earn a living not because they have consistent creative urges. Generally they lack the confidence to strike out into a new style or subject matter without gallery endorsement.

The Monnie Galerie in Port-au-Prince shows the most foreign influence. The owner and his manager son originally came from Switzerland where the family had already gathered a fine collection of European contemporary art. Michael Monnie says he has had no formal training in art but feels he has developed high standards in taste from his general family environment. In his gallery on Grande Rue he provides a studio for his artists to work and exchange ideas. He often stimulates discussions himself and makes suggestions on how paintings can be improved. Art magazines such as Les Muses, Etudes des Arts and a book series on European painting are made available to the artists for study. For example, Calixte Henri has labelled specific paintings as studies of certain masters -- Post Impressionists, Cubists. There is one called "Variations on a Theme of Van Gogh".

Monnie does not dictate style or subject matter to his artists but rather gives them a chance to find creative freedom. He recalls how Calixte Henri tried to

get away from his dependence on blue and green glazes by going into greys. The idea was not successful, but at least he was allowed to experiment without immediate condemnation. Monnie discussed the value of using certain tones in relation to the entire composition in an effort to start the artist thinking for himself.<sup>39</sup>

By now a group of painters have developed the habit of meeting for self-criticism. They include Calixte Henri who learned his color glazing technique by researching European painting, Décollines Manes whose present work has a Neo-Fauve spirit, and Olivier who has leanings towards Paul Klee. (fig. 19, 20, 21)

One of course wonders if this sort of influence will sooner or later erase the Haitian element in such painting. As long as these artists deliberately make studies of European masters they will naturally appear imitative. If through these experiments they can gain a basic understanding of a variety of techniques and the formal elements in art and use them to express aspects of their own culture -- the luminous sometimes garish color schemes, the violent rhythms, the drama and mysticism of Voodoo -- they will truly have evolved as mature Haitian artists.

In contrast to Galerie Monnie you will find the Red Carpet in Petionville. Here Andrew Saba, a Haitian-born Lebanese, operates in the fashion of most gallery owners in Haiti. He buys directly from the artist,

beginning with low prices and gradually working up as he builds them a reputation. He often suggests subjects that will sell easily such as market or Voodoo scenes. He tried to encourage a few to paint nudes but soon realized they lacked the knowledge of anatomy to handle such subjects. If he feels a painting can be improved, he points out areas which are successful and suggests the artist uses that as a starting point.

Saba's own background in art consists of a correspondence course in interior decorating with the New York School of Interior Design. He subsequently designed cotton rugs for La Belle Creole Store in Port-au-Prince, and has since been designing the wood products, jewelry, and goat skin rugs for his own factory and shop.

He claims to be willing to invest in an artist if his work is honest and may eventually sell. For example, the sculptures of St. Just in metal have only recently become popular, whereas Saba has been buying them for years. He tries to discourage artists from repeating a scene simply because it sells. Yet he feels some naive artists are incapable of changing or evolving. They develop one composition which they do well and stick to it. The classic example of this phenomenon is the painter, Casimir. (fig. K) But there are also successful naive artists like Valcin who have the will and persistence to evolve into a more sophisticated style. Saba admires and encourages this even though it may not

benefit his business.<sup>40</sup>

This owner of one of the largest galleries in Haiti is obviously effecting what is being produced in art. But it is his keen judgement of tourist and collectors' tastes rather than his personal likes that establish the criteria. He prefers the two extremes in Haitian art; the very naïve like Antoine Montas, and the very contemporary like the surrealism of Bernard Wah. (fig. 22, L) Yet his store carries the full range of styles -- something for everybody.



## VII Foreign Articles and Art Books:

Books are a luxury in Haiti, and the selection available is still quite limited. Yet incitic artists may occasionally come in contact with the art of other countries in this way. A survey of the major Port-au-Prince book stores revealed the following on art: four Livres de Poche paperbacks on European art criticism and analysis with clear black and white illustrations.

Included were Wolfflin's L'Art Renaissance et Baroque and Elie Faure's L'Esprit des Formes I. The Histoire Mondiale de l'Art series offered works on Egyptian Byzantine, Renaissance, Baroque, Oriental, and Russian art with excellent illustrations in black and white and color. In biographies I found small but well illustrated texts on Lautrec, Bosh, Giotto, Michaelangelo, Palladio, and Pisanello. But in no way did they compare with the large color-exact layouts we are accustomed to in North America. It appears that art books in Haiti are keyed to the elite who may want a casual idea of the fine arts. The only two offering specific instruction to artists were paperbacks on oil and acrylic painting available from the major art supply store.

The libraries of the foreign institutes had more to offer. At the French Institute I found a broad selection on painting, sculpture, and architecture. The focus was on French art, but works were available on international modern painting, and Quebec and African Art, etc. The

library also receives the monthly art journal, Connais-  
sance des Arts, which gives a varied international view.  
 The library of the American Institute has four monthly  
 journals and approximately forty texts on art. These  
 reflect principally the American approach to art history  
 and teaching. They are entirely in English with the ex-  
 ception of John Baur's L'Art Moderne Aux Etats Unis and the  
 journal, L'Amerique et les Arts. Haitian students from  
 the lycées use these libraries freely for research.

There are examples of direct influence of such texts  
 on Haitian painting. Néhémy Jean recalls how he lent  
 Wesner Pierre-Louis the catalogue, European Painters In  
German Galleries. The artist did not bother to read the  
 text, but attempted to copy the illustrations of pictures  
 by Sisley and Van Gogh. As a result of this type of  
 study his own style has become an adaptation of impres-  
 sionist techniques to Haitian themes.<sup>41</sup> (fig. M)

According to Rodman, Louverture Poisson probably  
 began developing his highly realistic style by studying  
 magazine illustrations.<sup>42</sup> (figs. 6, A) Philomé Obin's mural  
 of the "Last Supper" at Ste. Trinité (fig. 23) shows  
 strong compositional affinities with Leonardo's great  
 painting suggesting Obin was inspired by pictures of the  
 original. Similarly, a recent work by Byron made use of  
 the "in situ" composition so often found in Italian  
 baroque ceiling painting. (fig. 24) This artist could

only have seen such an effect in an art illustration.  
Georges Hector in describing his stylistic development  
mentions copying Kandinsky, Cezanne and Braque. His  
present use of collage could be traced to synthetic  
Cubism. (fig. 25)

### VIII The Influence of Tourists:

In 1972 more than 107,000 tourists visited Haiti<sup>44</sup> compared with the 23,400 in 1964.<sup>45</sup> Every guide book dealing with this country expounds on the high value and low prices in art. Direct exports of art from Haiti rose from 15,000 dollars in 1962 to 230,000 dollars in 1969.<sup>46</sup> Haitian art, then, is produced mainly for an outside market, and as a result the foreign consumer's tastes are feeding back into the culture.

A quick survey of the major galleries in Port-au-Prince will reveal few paintings with dimensions over 3 feet. Artists complain that galleries discourage large works because the tourist finds them difficult to transport. According to gallery owner, increased size merely magnifies weak design in most Haitian paintings.

Haitian artists are now working in more sophisticated materials than they used when producing for their own culture. André Pierre and Rigaud Benoit once painted on any available surface - calabashes, pottery, backs of calendars - and used the dark tones of Sapolin house paint. Now artists use artists' oil and acrylic paint on canvas and masonite. As a result colors are much brighter, there is more variety in texture, and compositions are expanded to involve the entire surface area.<sup>47</sup>

Often tourists come with a preconception of what the style of Haitian painting should be. Seeing Haiti as

an underdeveloped tropical country they expect to find the usual naive style -- simplified, often symbolic forms; pure colors; crowded compositions; and the absence or misuse of three dimensional illusion in the form of shading or perspective. The hundreds of Haitians with a little manual dexterity and a knack for illustration are happy to provide all this, but seldom does it gel into anything more than a decorative peasant scene. To the untutored tourist these represent Haitian art which may soon double in price, according to the color insert in a Haitian tourist newspaper.<sup>48</sup>

Some visitors find the incitic style too child-like. They are looking for the concept of 'fine art', a touch of the old masters. For these there are the slick professionals who turn out naturalistic scenes in strong chiaro scuros with an occasional daring sortie into Impressionism or palette-knife technique.

Tourists generally want pictures to remind them of their own experiences of Haiti -- colorful markets, milling crowds, moon-lit streets, wild dancing, mysterious Voodoo rites. The most popular artists are those who represent the superficial appearance of a characteristically Haitian scene without demanding any depth of understanding.

The results of tourist influence are both positive and negative. When the contemporary movement began the

Haitian elite considered peasant art and craft unworthy of their interest or investment. Now the Haitian government proudly issues stamps showing the Ste. Trinité murals. Turnbull reports that 50 percent of his sales at Fernethe are to Haitians. In April 1973 the Musée College St. Pierre paid tribute to Haitian popular art with a show which included everything from decorated Voodoo utensils to the 'Fresco' wagon found on every street corner. (fig. 26, 27, N)

It has taken the acclaim of the outsider and his money to teach the Haitian that standards in art do not have to follow classical European models, and that his own culture has valuable elements of visual expression.

The problem of the taste of the public becomes paramount when an artist must sell to live. In Haiti, where unemployment is the rule rather than the exception, art is a way for many who lack education or professional training to stay alive. At one time naive painting was by far the most commercially profitable. Rodman recounts how Wilson Bigaud began by painting the picturesque exterior world, but with experience gained the technical ability to mimic the distortions of more sophisticated styles. His Neo-Cubist work "The Coffee Carriers" hung ignored at the Centre d'Art for some time while the commercial incitatives kept selling. Bigaud decided to return to his former style but was able to give his forms

a greater sense of structure and monumentality as a result of this deviation.<sup>49</sup> However his style might have developed in a completely different direction had his first experiments been a commercial success.

Many artists, once they find they can peddle their work to a local gallery and even get an exclusivity contract, cease to experiment or express new ideas. They turn into a painting machine. Even worse, once they become frozen in a commercially acceptable style, they acquire imitators who copy without having even the initial understanding of the design or expression.

I witnessed Néhém Jean dealing with this problem in reference to M. Laurent and his pupil, Roger Desulmé, who have been turning out stylistically identical work. He gave Laurent some advice on how to improve his design by not cutting the painting in two with a centrally placed vertical shape. Desulmé he warned not to come back unless he could produce something which can be distinguished from this teacher's work. The danger is that the pupil will go to another gallery and be acclaimed as a great new discovery.

There are also artists who produce in two styles; one which sells well and allows them to live, and another in which they give freer rein to creative expression and stylistic evolution. An example of this is the sculptor, Maurice, whose commercial mahogany

carvings are monumental reproductions of objective reality. Occasionally he does pieces in highly sophisticated geometric distortion. (fig. 17, 18) He says he cannot work entirely in the second style because it requires too much time and calculation. In the past twenty-six years he found time to try only six pieces in this style although he enjoys the demand and challenge it offers.<sup>50</sup>

Jean René Jérôme's work is another example of this stylistic schizophrenia. He paints nude glamour girls for the commercial market and still has time to explore other stylistic potentials he has encountered through contacts with artists such as Bernard Séjourné and tours of the United States. He claims that doing the nudes in addition to providing financial security, helps him keep his technical accuracy. He is then able to distort and manipulate similar subject matter in his serious work.<sup>51</sup> (fig. 0, 28)

Revival of tourism in Haiti has both stimulated its art world to the point where many talented young people are willing to try it as a career, and as well encouraged the production of a great deal of second rate work. But this must be true of any on-going movement. The pressing need right now is to establish recognized standards. Both the director of the Académie des Beaux Arts and the gallery owner and artist, Néhémy Jean, have suggested a yearly salon with prizes to be awarded by



internationally recognized authorities and a fixed  
pricing system.

## IX Direct Foreign Influences in Canadian Indigenous Art:

### A Teachers:

Initially, the difference between Haitian and Canadian indigenous art lies in the fact that the latter existed in a highly developed and sophisticated form before contact with the white man. This factor has helped to condition the nature of foreign influence. Originally natives used locally available materials and developed techniques related to their economy. Boas stresses that art was an outgrowth of the other cultural activities of the North Pacific Coast Indians: "The industry in which they have attained the greatest proficiency, (basketry and woodworking) is, at the same time, the one in which their decorative art is most fully developed."<sup>52</sup> Carpenter's description of the Aivilik Eskimo's aesthetic approach may be given wider application:

The carver doesn't divide his products into works of art and utilitarian objects, but the two are usually one: the sun goggles are beautiful -- that line which is aesthetically so appealing is the line that fits the brow so perfectly. The harpoon is graceful: and deadly. Even the most mundane tool becomes an art object, for the Aivilik -- can I say "spontaneously"? -- add a line here, a face there, and it becomes a delight.

Figures are sometimes carved in the round for ornamental or religious purposes, in the latter case usually to evoke the absent animal or propitiate it after it is slain. (53)

The direct influence of foreign art teachers on the

contemporary movement in Canadian Eskimo art dates back to James Houston's 1949 project to find northern art which could be marketed by the Canadian Guild of Handicrafts. Since that period the Department of Northern Affairs had made courses in art and crafts available as part of their adult education programme for native peoples. In 1965 the Indian Affairs branch spent 23,000 dollars on this type of project.<sup>54</sup> Consequently many Indians and Eskimos are receiving direct training from white art specialists.

In describing his craft programme with the Micmac Indians in New Brunswick, Dr. Crowell explains that the Indians began by insisting that they wanted to do not Indian but 'white man's stuff'. They meant things which were not limited to traditional designs and relegated to the category of native souvenirs. Specialists were brought in to teach such new techniques as weaving, turning, and silkscreen. But once the students were familiar enough with the processes to know what they wanted to do, they took over the decision-making. They began introducing innovations from their own culture such as weaving wood splints into place mats and illustrating Micmac legends on cards. Some of the first designs were dreadful, but the white teachers, instead of imposing their own as alternatives, allowed the natives to continue. Today as a result the center has several fine original craftsmen.<sup>55</sup>

The government is now making it a practice to have professional white artists take up residence in Eskimo communities. In 1965 Victor Tinkl was teaching graphic art at Povungnituk, Claude Grenier ceramics at Rankin Inlet, and Gabriel Gely sculpture at Baker Lake. The purpose is to have these professionals help Eskimos with new techniques, and, more important, establish standards for aesthetic value and craftsmanship. Previously the local government agent or Hudson's Bay Company trader paid the highest prices for work which had special appeal for him, but there was no guarantee his judgement was artistically sound.<sup>56</sup>

It is hoped that these teacher-artists will stay long enough to understand the present values and attitudes of the Eskimos, and encourage them to incorporate these into their art. In this way the gap between the southern market's view of what Eskimo art should be like and the Eskimo's view of what constitutes good art may be bridged. These outside artists would be performing the same role as the foreign artists teaching at the Haitian Centre d'Art.

Most Indian and Eskimo children first encounter formal art instruction in public school. Their teachers establish for them white aesthetic standards and provide models for their own. Generally the curriculum and texts designed for the white population are also used in native schools in each province.<sup>57</sup> Schools in the North West Territories

58  
follow the curriculum of the province of Alberta. One would expect, therefore, that artistic styles and values which teach native children through public education would be slanted towards our Greco-Roman tradition.

Carpenter cites how the welfare teacher at Coral Harbour gave drawing lessons in single point perspective to the Aiviliks. As a result the teenaged students abandoned the multiple view style that had been part of their heritage. They usually placed the vanishing point directly in the center of the page, locking all objects securely in static space. Occasionally the concept of diminishing size was misunderstood and reversed so that space seems to open rather than close. 59

Wolcott's approach at the day school in Blackfish Village is far more acceptable. He did not introduce art as a formal subject but rather let his Indian students gravitate naturally to it as they finished other assignments. He notes evidence of Kwakiutl style in drawings and paintings where spaces are crowded with detail and figures are ornamented with additional animal faces and limbs. Generally students chose subjects closely related to their own life: seiners, whales, speedboats. But even in this remote village outside influence had penetrated. Two girls who had been under white instruction at a residential school in Alert Bay introduced the concept of brightly colored geometric shapes and

were often copied by younger students.<sup>60</sup>

In contrast, the art activities at the elementary school in Eek, Alaska are far more teacher-directed. The American teacher, Paul Forrer, believes his programme is open simply because he does not ration time or supplies. When introducing new tools and media he demonstrates specific techniques but goes on to invite student innovation. But when it comes to subject matter Forrer deliberately de-emphasizes themes relating to the Eskimo's daily activities because he feels "... their exposure should range from cave paintings of prehistory to the Pop Art of yesterday."<sup>61</sup> As a result, compositions directly related to nature and requiring keen observation succeed. Whereas those involving the big city and other subjects which students have only experienced in photos and films appear contrived.

I feel the best guide lines for art teachers in these cross-cultural situations is first to make an effort to know something of the visual tradition of the alien culture. Children should be provided with the material and freedom to express their own personal life and emotions. And teachers should also have enough knowledge of the student's cultural environment to be able to encourage and stimulate this type of expression.

If art history is introduced, it should be related both to the student's culture and personal experiences.

For example: the religious motives for European cave paintings are paralleled in early Eskimo sculpture, the illusionistic tradition of baroque painting can be seen as a reflection of both Haitian colonial and eighteenth century French society, and the use of commercial images in Pop Art can probably be better understood in indigenous societies where there was no distinction between fine and applied art than in our own.

Because the foreign teacher is representing a materially successful and therefore apparently superior culture, he must demonstrate to the student that the visual style of his own society is equally valid. But at the same time the native artist should not feel tied or limited to traditional designs. Other cultures are changing and evolving as quickly as our own. The most authentic form of art expresses a culture at the moment of artistic creation. If foreign elements are part of the society they will also appear in its art.

#### B Art Dealers:

Middle men, traders and art dealers, have helped to commercialize and thus change indigenous art. As a result of early contact with European traders, Plains Indians began replacing their traditional quill work decoration which carried religious meaning with bead decoration which could be produced faster and traded without transgressing religious taboos.<sup>62</sup> During the,

early colonial period in British Columbia, Russian traders<sup>63</sup> commissioned Pacific Coast Indians to decorate bracelets hammered from silver coins with Russian designs like baroque hearts. The Aivilik Eskimos were taught by New England whalers to intensify the incised designs on commissioned works such as cribbage boards by rubbing in ink or carbon.<sup>64</sup>

The Hudson's Bay Company has been accustomed to buy Eskimo carvings to provide natives with funds to deal at the company store. These sculptures were sold at its outlets in the south. Because original costs were so low, even with the inevitable mark up, these works could be offered at better prices than those fostered by the present co-op system. The resulting promotion of sales has contributed to the present popularity of Eskimo art and its market expansion. Unfortunately works were bought without concern for artistic quality. In fact the agent at Port Harvison would only buy sculpture from successful trappers in order to encourage them to buy equipment and bring in more furs.<sup>65</sup>

#### C. Interested Foreigners:

While on a painting trip in the Hudson's Bay region in 1948, James Houston was horrified by the difficulties in health and welfare of the Eskimos. He returned to Montreal to convince the Canadian Handicrafts Guild of the commercial value of rejuvenating Eskimo art and



and crafts. Following the initial successful sale of nearly a thousand carvings collected by Houston, a concerted plan was organized to provide Eskimo artists with soapstone, basic instruction, and proper tools.<sup>66</sup>

Encouragement of Eskimos to produce for a commercial market has resulted in changes of material, size, and style. Working in large pieces of soapstone rather than small hard stones or bone and ivory has made more monumental pieces possible. Kennedy claims the following stylistic innovations resulting from the use of a softer material: "... a flowing fulsomeness of form, animation and style ... fluidity, movement and feeling."<sup>67</sup> According to Carpenter, teaching the Eskimo to carve stone effigies for southerners has produced work which is static and heavy, sitting securely on a base. Formerly they were unstable and dynamic, intending to be examined and turned in the hand. At one time Aivilik sculpture defined its own space and showed multiple views, now there is a definite orientation and perspective, a favoured point of viewing.<sup>68</sup>

In 1957 Houston introduced the Eskimos to print making with stone cuts, and seal skin and paper stencils. After his 1958-59 study of more advanced printing techniques in Japan, block printing and subsequently copper plate engraving and silkscreen were used. Introduction of these new techniques along with encouragement of drawing

in pencil, crayon and felt pen has brought about stylistic changes. Prehistoric Eskimo drawing consisted of incised lines on irregular three-dimensional artifacts. Shapes were often just abbreviations of natural objects, and forms tended to have a surging quality that engulfed the surface. With the introduction of a two-dimensional rectangular paper surface, artists are far more aware of the importance of well defined negative space. The Japanese influence is felt in the flatness of sharp silhouettes. There is greater naturalism, fullness, and detail in figures. Occasionally tonal gradation is used. In some cases the movement appears to be towards European naturalism with its use of single point perspective. Yet other such evidence, use of bird's eye views and definition of space through environmental settings, can be traced back to prehistoric Eskimo drawings. Vastokas concludes that while contemporary Eskimo graphic art makes use of new materials and techniques, it is still very much a part of the continuity of Eskimo indigenous art.<sup>69</sup>

The middle men in the field of Canadian native art have played the same role as the gallery owners in Haiti. Both have fostered production of art for consumption by an outside culture. For the artist their suggestions and preferences represent the taste of the market. As a result of their influence new materials are introduced and new styles are developed.

#### D Self-Help Programmes:

Commercial art and crafts are now an important source of revenue for Canadian Indians and Eskimos.<sup>70</sup> The government of British Columbia and the Department of Indian Affairs is financing several self-help projects to preserve and extend native crafts in that province. The Museum of British Columbia has sponsored the preservation of ancient totem poles and the teaching of carving by master craftsman, Mungo Martin.<sup>71</sup> The technique of basketry using split cedar splints has been revived and adapted to new styles: fishing creels, tea trays, wall hangings. The Alaska Native Service Program has reintroduced the art of Chilkat blanket weaving, and St. George's School on the Lytton Reserve has imported a woman from Chilliwack to teach the knitting of Cowichan sweaters.<sup>72</sup> There has been a notable rise in this kind of production where good sales outlets are available, and where government agents supply natives with raw materials. Hopefully Indian agency offices will be more willing to open shops similar to the one operated by the Baptist mission in Fermathe, Haiti. Otherwise Indian artists will continue to be at the mercy of the local tourist shops and general stores.

The most overt examples of self-help programmes among Canadian native peoples are the Eskimo co-operatives. The first one dealing with art was founded by Father Steinman in 1959 at Povungnituk.<sup>73</sup> Others appeared in the late 1950's as a result of the Department of Northern Affairs

encouraging local administrators to buy carvings and thus help the economy.

The co-operatives are administered by Eskimos with the help and advice of southern experts. All art works by co-op members are bought and shipped south. The artist gets an initial price and later a percentage of the profit, although this may take the form of shares in the co-op. Materials, tools, and often work facilities are made available through the co-op. In some cases artists work in groups and share ideas, in others work is brought in only when ready for sale. Judgements on the quality of a piece may be made by a co-op official, or, as used to be the case at Povungnituk, all members gather and vote on each work.<sup>74</sup> Although all work by members is accepted at the co-op level, southern criteria are exercised by a committee of whites in determining the drawings which will become prints. It tends to favour the 'primitive' Eskimo style: fanciful abstracted figures and bilateral symmetry. Elements from the whiteman's society which have become part of the Eskimo's environment, rifles, skidoos, planes, are banned from his commercially acceptable art.<sup>75</sup>

The consequences of such co-ops have been beneficial. They represent an organization of power and permanence in the community operated by natives. The result has been to considerably raise their self-image in relation to government institutions.<sup>76</sup> The systematic marketing of native art in this way has boosted the economy in depressed areas, yet

it allows few alternatives for the Eskimo who does not want to become an artist. A man carves to live. As a result much mediocre work is turned out. Stylistically, the operators of co-ops have a pretty clear idea of what the south will accept as Eskimo art. Where the Eskimo himself may prefer realism resulting from keen observation, a vital twisting movement, and a polished finish; the white-man still values a more 'archaic' style. Because the dealer pays more for larger sculpture, the Eskimo now sees size as increasing aesthetic value, yet often smaller pieces are more dynamic.

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The motives and activities of these Canadian self-help programmes parallel those operated by Wallace and Turnbull in Haiti. Two prime differences exist. In Canada the products are derived from previously existing indigenous forms with commercial modifications in design and material. Most Haitian craft products have been introduced as foreign designs which can make use of native skills and materials and have occasionally been modified by Haitian craftsmen. In Canada the native peoples are participating far more in initiating and administering these programmes. Hopefully this will also soon be true in Haiti. The best evidence at the moment is a gallery called the Haitian Artists' Co-op, founded by a group of Haitians to market their own work and that of non-members which they buy out-right.

**E Exploiters of Cheap Labour:**

As in Haiti, there are always exploiters anxious to take advantage of cheap labour made available by problems of low per capita earnings and unemployment among Canadian native peoples. Haida Indians get less than 50 percent of the dealers' price for their black slate carvings.<sup>78</sup>

Kwakiutl carvers are forced to do miniature totem poles for souvenirs because there is little demand for full-sized authentic versions. If they carve slowly and well they can make only \$1.00 a day. When they speed up and do inferior work they can average \$2.00 per day.<sup>79</sup> Silver bracelets of so-called Indian design are farmed out to Indians with factory stamped designs already in place. Indian labour is used merely for finishing and polishing.<sup>80</sup>

The problem of Indian and Eskimo education with all its socio-economic considerations is far too complex to be dealt with here in a few glib phrases. But certainly training in skills leading to other forms of employment would help prevent this prostitution of native arts.

#### F Tourism:

Tourism has had both good and bad effects on Canadian indigenous art. On the positive side, ancient crafts such as Haida slate etching have been saved from extinction.<sup>81</sup> New crafts such as knitting Cowichan sweaters have been introduced to provide marketable products and later been adopted as useful in the native culture itself.<sup>82</sup>

As with Haitian master artists, acclaim by foreigners

has raised the self-image of Canadian native artists. It has also helped to introduce the western value of individualism which is in opposition to the traditional Indian and Eskimo concept of collaboration and interdependence.

In both Haiti and Canada tourists are attracted to items which are overtly ethnic, hand-crafted, and dirt cheap. Indians on the Lytton Reserve on the Trans-Canada Highway tell how tourists will pay only \$8.00 for a basket which took three weeks to make, and often try to trade items for old clothes.<sup>83</sup> The results in both countries can only be deterioration of design and craftsmanship.

Tourists, despite their usual ignorance of truly authentic ethnic designs, generally have a preconception of what the crafts of the alien culture should be like. Indian arts and crafts produced for revenue are "... embellishments or miniatures of those needed in the home or on the trap line."<sup>84</sup> If an artist knows his market is limited to tourism he is confined to what can be recognized as typically Indian, Eskimo or Haitian.

One way of expanding his potential range of designs is to educate the public to understand native culture in greater depth. The Canadian Department of Northern Affairs has put out publications, for example, on Eskimo stone carving; but they could well follow the lead of the United States Indian Service in producing series on craft technique, tribal groups, and texts on Indian culture for

85 school children. More films such as Douglas Leechman's The Loon's Necklace ... would be a very effective way of creating public appreciation through entertainment." 86 The recent international tour of Sculpture Inuit has helped to familiarize many potential tourists with the evolution of Canadian Eskimo sculpture. In Haiti the museum of Voodoo and popular arts associated with the tourist shop at Fermahe and the series of video tapes on Haitian artists produced in 1973 by Paul and Joelle Paryski are moves towards public education, but much more could be done.

With better informed tourists the problem of mass-produced imitations of native art would be partially eliminated. At the moment many tourist shops are carrying replicas of Eskimo sculpture which are cast in artificial stone in Canadian factories. The inferiority of these works will reduce the reputation of authentic Eskimo sculpture in the eyes of the untrained tourists. Bill C-30 passed by the Canadian Parliament in 1968 provided against importation of foreign replicas of native art but 87 not against its production in our own country. Indian arts in the United States are suffering from similar problems:

The Italians are making Zuni fetishes with molds and stamping machines, the Japanese are turning out Santo Domingo Hiesh necklaces with electric drills and lathes, and the Mexicans are tooling staghorn coral into "Indian" necklaces. (88)

Tourists wanting authentic items must be willing to pay higher prices and be taught to recognize trade mark



guarantees such as those established by the British Columbia Indian Arts and Welfare Society and the Canadian Handicraft Guild.<sup>89</sup> In Haiti guarantees of originality and quality

materials pose a greater problem than authenticity. As yet no one can make Haitian art cheaper than the Haitians.

The Académie des Beaux Arts is hoping to establish a trade mark of quality, but unless production is directly supervised, validity will be subject to the ethics of the artist and gallery owner. The Haitian Sculptors' Association offers a certificate of originality with signed pieces sold at its outlet in Kenscoff. But I noted that a wood sculpture there by St. Felix was actually a replica of a life-sized plaster figure done by his cousin, Booz, some years earlier.

MEMBERS OF THE CULTURE WHO HAVE  
ASSIMILATED FOREIGN INFLUENCE AND  
PASSED IT ON:

I New Materials and Techniques in Haitian Art:

Since the contemporary art movement began in Haiti thirty years ago many artists, encouraged by an initial success at home, have studied outside the country and returned with new ideas. Antonio Joseph began at the Centre d'Art, won a Guggenheim Fellowship to study in the United States in 1954, and has subsequently spent considerable time there travelling, learning and exhibiting. He now acts on the advisory committee of the Centre and has introduced there the serigraph process for transforming the artists' drawings into prints. The results with artists like Philippe-Auguste are excellent, but in general the incitic artists prefer to let Joseph attend to the mechanical side of the process. Also, although they can recognize the commercial advantage of printing, they are less attracted by the precision and austerity imposed by drawing. They prefer the freedom and flamboyance of paint.

The painter, Arijac, owes his popularity in part to the unusual texture he achieves by mixing bees' wax with dry pigment. This 'encaustic' technique began in Italy eight centuries ago and was revived in the 1920's by the Cubists. Arijac was introduced to the process by Sacha Thebaud, a Haitian who studied painting and architecture in the United States.<sup>90</sup> (fig. 29)

The Haitian artist, Max Ewold, studied architecture and urban planning in Paris for eight years. His training abroad helped to develop his creative sensitivity to the potentials of new materials and techniques. He wanted to use the natural materials of Haiti in his art. In the early 1960's a Haitian nun working in West Africa wrote home to her brother, also an artist, describing the technique of inlaying different shades of bark to create a picture. Eventually this information was communicated to Ewold.<sup>91</sup>

In 1967 a French financing group from Martinique approached Ewold to design and produce wall hangings of fabric collage on felt. He agreed providing he could substitute a more natural background. Eventually he came up with the rich dark brown of banana bark. He soon found that there were a variety of tones depending on the kind of tree and that the material could be dyed without losing its texture. Although the French firm decided not to sponsor the project, Ewold began producing his own decorative panels, pictures, and shades. The technique is now widely used in Haiti. Further, Ewold has just recently introduced the technique of using cocoa nut palm bark as a background for wall hangings decorated with woven, corded and chopped sisal and ceramic Voodoo beads.<sup>92</sup>

(figs. P, Q)

## II Stylistic Influences in Haitian Art:

Once an artistic style has gained respect and proved itself commercially successful in Haiti it cannot escape imitation. Bernard Séjourné, through his studies outside the country principally at the Art Students' League of New York, has evolved a distinct personal approach. He builds up a dimension of fragmented images by applying successive layers of rich translucent acrylic glazes. Figures melt into geometric shapes only to reappear in their natural form. I have observed Jean René Jerome, who often visits Séjourné's studio, now trying the same style. But he manages to adapt it from Séjourné's elaborate Renaissance convolutions to a fuller expression of the Haitian context, an inter-weaving of the attributes of the Virgin Mary and the Voodoo love goddess, Erzulie. (figs. D, O, 28)

Although Antonio Joseph does not actually teach at the Centre d'Art his paintings are constantly on view there, and he is available to advise artists. In this way Calixte Henri was able to observe his style of juxtaposing translucent rectangles of close-mixed colors in his backgrounds and eventually employ it in his own work. In particular both artists rely on the medium blue-green color range. Although Henri is trying to expand by experimenting and studying other artists, he knows his most commercially successful work is derived from the Antonio Joseph idea.<sup>93</sup> (figs. 29,30)

When Arijac began applying encaustic medium with a palette knife he automatically developed an uneven texture with areas of the canvas scraped bare. From this he deliberately introduced scraped lines to define contours. Encouraged by this example, Calixte Henri's young student, Fritz Lamothe, who was already imitating his teacher's use of cool colors, began drawing outlines with a razor blade.<sup>94</sup> In this way Lamothe's well-known personal style evolved. It is now being passed on and transformed by student artists at the studio of Monnie Galerie (fig.31)

The present director and teacher at the Foyer des Arts Plastiques described the pedagogical approach he learned from the original Foyer teachers and later from Lois Pierre-Noel. This involves reducing the subject to simple geometric volumes and from that developing the natural object, all the while stressing three-dimensional volume. This Cezanne-like solidity was generally evident in the work of Foyer artists.<sup>95</sup> (fig. 2)

Néhémy Jean, originally a student at the Foyer, uses much the same technique in teaching drawing. In painting he has students begin washing in a full range of shades in one hue or perhaps black and white. They then move into brown and ochre and eventually a full range of colors. This technique of building up glazes and impasto goes back at least three centuries in Europe and produces a quite traditional classic effect.<sup>96</sup>

### III Parallel Influences in Canadian Indigenous Art:

So far most of the new styles and techniques in Canadian native art are the result of direct contact with white men who have come into the community as teacher-specialists. It is probable that many native artists have assimilated ideas in the galleries and art centers of large cities while on visits and promotional tours. But the long-range results of these influences on other artists are as yet undocumented.

Similarly the effect of native artists who have studied in a Euro-Canadian environment and returned to their own people still requires further study. An outstanding example of this form of influence is the extremely articulate Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Alaska, Ronald Senungetuk. After his initial education at native schools in Alaska he studied at the Rochester Institute of Technology and subsequently at the National Arts and Crafts School of Norway. His contact with an international cross-section of artist-craftsmen has influence both the ideas in design and materials and the philosophy of art he brings back to his native students. He laments the ethno-centricity of native arts and the encouragement of their development for purely economic purposes:

Alaska has those who take art in a commercial sense and those who believe Mt. McKinley or velvet moose mean art. Importantly, it has groups that can be educated and it has an aboriginal background from which to extend new ideas.

The new ideas must be developed in an orderly fashion otherwise they will only add to potboilers that have been a common aftermath of Northwest Coast Art and Arctic Applied Arts. Learning and experimental centres must be established to give direction to new ideas. In this context what chances are there for Native artists? I think the present conditions are not conducive to fine arts. Subservient attitudes and submission to the status quo deny a creative future. Since artists of the world are not made of these negative elements, changes will have to be made in Alaska. Native artists will have to stop listening to cost conscious and righteous souvenir hunters and experts in Indian ways of life... The Native craftsman must indeed exert his own influence in the art style which he practices. (97)

Senungetuk's own work in cast sterling silver jewelry in its incorporation of both the principles of abstract design and early Eskimo motifs reflects his philosophy.

**FOREIGN ELEMENTS WHICH HAVE  
BEEN INTRODUCED INTO THE  
CULTURE AND CONSEQUENTLY  
APPEAR IN ITS ART:**

**I Haitian Culture as Hybrid:**

No society is completely closed and uninfluenced by contacts with other cultures, but Haitian culture in particular has grown out of a mixture of foreign influences. Since its discovery by Columbus in 1492 the land has been occupied by Spaniards, British, French, and Americans all for relatively short periods. Each has contributed some elements without dominating to the extent of excluding those from other cultures. Similarly the African nature of Haitian culture is not standardized. Although the Haitian Negro looks to Dahomey as his ancestral home the slaves were in fact derived from a variety of areas. In many cases they were from nomadic Congo tribes who lost prisoners to the Dahomeans in war time.

Haitian visual culture, then, is not constant or homogeneous. Because communication within the country continues to be slow, you will still find designs and techniques unique to isolated areas. For example, only in the northwest peasants practice a peculiar form of board weaving; and only around Kenscoff do peasants wear the blue Zacca shirt with red and white line embroidery.<sup>98</sup> Keeping in mind the difficulty of identifying a uniquely Haitian culture, we will examine elements that have retained their foreign character while becoming part of the culture and its art.



## II The Education System:

### A Art in Elementary Schools:

The educated Haitian's view of art is established by his French classical education. In the elementary grades art is taught under the title of dessin one hour a week usually by the class teacher. The stated aims of the syllabus are to develop the child's powers of concentration, observation, manual dexterity, and eye-hand co-ordination.<sup>99</sup>

The usual teaching method is to draw a stereotyped picture on the blackboard for students to copy. Those most accurately resembling the original are pinned on the wall.

When I interviewed Philom  Obin about the methods used in his art school he showed me the 'cahier de dessin'. Each student had an exercise book with the pages divided into quarters. Obin does a simple sketch -- in this case a swan -- at the top and the student copies it four times below. In this way all his pupils learn to imitate his own precise style. However, when I inquired if he had ever studied another artist's work himself he responded that he detested the idea of copying.<sup>100</sup>

When I visited the rural elementary school as Verette to do a workshop in art, the principal, a retired American teacher, lamented the over-reliance of her teachers on the same 'cahier de dessin'. Yet on entering the classroom I could sympathize with their difficulty.

Sixty ten year olds were crowded into a narrow dark room, sitting two or three to a desk. The mechanics of

setting up a lesson using any kind of complicated equipment would be impossible in terms of the time and space available. The young teachers were keen to pick up any ideas I could offer. Yet their questions and general attitude reflected the teaching methods of rote memorization they have been taught to use in other subjects. They were surprised that I expected every student in the demonstration class to turn out a different picture, and that I encouraged them to experiment with color mixing and application without telling them in advance what to expect.

Such an approach would be in direct opposition to the present Haitian education system, which discourages personal initiative or original thinking. Students pass exams by repeating word for word great masses of information they have learned line by line through oral repetition. In a system where art is reduced to the skill of copying or imitating reality, and repetition is rewarded; it is easy to understand why many Haitian artists feel no shame in reproducing the same painting many times. For them art is not an original creative expression. A painting or sculpture is a market object to be sold like a cabbage.

A more modern approach to art education is offered at the teacher training school, Collège Pédagogique Rurale Eglise Methodiste in Petionville. The Scottish director, Henry Keyes, has set up a course which aims at enabling the rural teacher to expose pupils to the possibilities of a career in art and encourage those with sufficient ability.

The student teacher, who may only have completed the elementary certificate himself, goes through a one year course in European art history co-ordinated with studio work associated with each period. He also learns to find local substitutes for commercial art materials by, for example: mixing paint from local dyes, making brushes from goat hair and sisal, and building collages from banana bark. In the second and third years he develops and presents lessons in the college's own elementary school. He is encouraged to permit free expression and discovery through playing with materials at the primary level. In the upper elementary pupils follow specific assignments usually designed to develop their powers of observation. The college sends twenty graduates per year back to the rural areas as teachers and community leaders, but there seems to be little feedback as to the success of the programme.<sup>101</sup>

#### B Art in the Secondary Schools:

Although students who finish elementary school must pass a test in drawing there is at present no official requirement to continue this skill at the secondary level. In 1955 the cours de dessin was extended into the first three years of secondary,<sup>102</sup> but the Programme Révisé et Plan d'Etudes presented for secondary education in 1963 makes no mention of practical studies in art.

Students do have some contact with art in their European history. Ancient history includes Greek and Roman architecture. The middle ages deal with the Gothic cathedral.

The Italian Renaissance, of course, makes mention of the great artists of that period. Art, however, is treated solely as evidence of different forms and stages of civilization. There is no instruction in comprehension or critical analysis.<sup>103</sup>

The Haitian whose concept of art is founded on this background will see it as extremely formal and classical. He will have no basis for understanding abstraction or the other modern movements and will be unable to see the artistic value in the popular art of his own country.

Fortunately, despite lack of official credit, many lycées do offer one hour a week of drawing and painting. But as there is no departmental curriculum each teacher develops a programme according to his own background and the facilities available. Consequently results vary widely.

During July 1973 the Académie des Beaux Arts is sponsoring a contest and exhibition of art by secondary school students. Hopefully this will encourage greater interest in developing a secondary art programme.

### III. Mechanization:

Haitian society is essentially rural and agrarian. Over four-fifths of the population live outside Port-au-Prince, the only city where any form of manufacturing takes place. The peasant brings his produce to market and takes back the few manufactured goods, almost entirely foreign made, that he needs. All internal combustion and electrical machinery is imported. Where mechanization appears as an influence in art, therefore, it may be considered as a partially assimilated foreign element.

The most obvious example of mechanization in Haitian art is the use of the machine as an art object or decorative element. In a recent painting by Jasmin Joseph a shiny red car stretches across the canvas while admiring Haitians languish around it. (fig. 32) Similarly in Bottes's painting of a woman sewing the machine dominates the design in terms of size and detail. (fig. 33) Haitians usually build rectangular ancestral tombs in cement. The most original example I have encountered was cast and painted to represent an automobile. (fig. S)

The traditional ra-ra bands which wander the streets between Epiphany and Easter playing country music on bamboo pipes and drums usually carry a standard to identify their Voodoo community. Most use traditional Voodoo insignia, but on Good Friday 1973 I saw one band led by a two foot green wooden airplane complete with whirling propellers mounted

on a six foot pole.

Similarly, images of jet planes and gun boats are appearing with greater frequency in the popular paintings on the intra-city buses or tap-taps. (fig. R)

Haitians have also proved clever at adapting foreign manufactured goods to their own particular cultural needs. Tinsmiths import rolls of surplus tin with designs from Coca Cola, Budweizer, etc., already stamped on them. From these they make cooking pans and suitcases. The printed commercial designs are considered a decorative element as they are always left on the exposed outer surface. (fig. 34)

The oil drums which make up the steel bands of the British West Indies are used in Haiti for sculpture. The technique was begun by Georges Liautaud, a blacksmith who had been forging cemetery decorations in Croix des Bouquets. He started hammering oil drums flat and cutting out silhouettes of inter-woven figures and abstract shapes. His first efforts were discovered and encouraged by the Centre d'Art in 1953. From this the craft has been developed to a high degree of sophistication (fig. V)

#### IV Haitian Popular Art:

Many indigenous societies attempt to make objects from foreign cultures more a part of their own by adding decorations. This has happened with the camions and pick-up trucks which form the Haitian public transportation system. Since their introduction after World War II they have been decorated with bright geometric designs, flower motifs and native scenes. (figs. 35, 36, 37)

Two origins have been suggested for the idea: foreign circuses with wagons using similar decorations have frequently visited Haiti, and the jeep of the Centre d'Art was used as surface area for paintings by incitic artists.<sup>104</sup>

The elaborate lettering and romanticized scenes have become such a familiar sight on the streets of Port-au-Prince that one can almost call the tap-tap the art gallery of the people. There is also a carry through into formal art.

The artist, Normil, began his craft decorating trucks.

I have noticed tap-tap motifs appearing in the work of my students at Ecole St. Vincent and in the work of novice artists which is sold along the street. (fig. T) Unfortunately in the past year there has been a deterioration in the decoration of the more modern trucks, Haitians have discovered paint in spray cans and are using it to produce an all over marbled effect in place of the formerly well defined motifs and pure colours.

Other examples of Haitian street art employing designs of foreign origin are the gambling boards in the street.

casino which have adopted motifs from circus midway games, and imported electronic slot and pinball machines. (fig.38) In many cases the numbers and color divisions on the board are purely decorative and bear no relation to the actual game being played.

Comics from France and the United States are sold in most book stores in Port-au-Prince. A journalist who visited Jasmin Joseph claims he uses Walt Disney and other comic book animals as models for his animal paintings.<sup>105</sup> I detected the same cartoon style in St. Aude's painting of the three-headed astronaut. (fig. X).



## V Voodoo:

In Haiti Voodoo has been described as a fusion of African tribal beliefs and Christian practice.<sup>106</sup> The slaves brought to Haiti by the Spanish and French were immediately baptized and forced to attend Roman Catholic services. Their training in Christian doctrine, however, remained a superficial addition to the already deeply entrenched beliefs of their African heritage. Ceremonies to the old gods were officially banned, but pagan worship could be disguised with the trappings of Roman Catholic ritual. Gradually the slave expanded his former beliefs to take in the Christian pantheon of saints and rediscover them in the characteristics of his tribal gods. "St. Patrick, for example, who is shown trampling a knot of serpents, could be identified with Damballa Oueddo, the master of the rainbow whose symbol is a snake."<sup>107</sup> Most Voodoo ceremonies today begin with an invocation of the major saints, signs of the cross, and often the burning of incense and words in Latin.

At present the official religion of Haiti is Catholicism, but throughout the society and particularly among the peasants Voodoo is one of the central life themes. Voodoo temples, found everywhere, can range from a temporary shelter of palm branches to a solid seven-room cement structure in the heart of down-town Port-au-Prince. They are traditionally decorated with strings of flags or tissue paper cutouts stretching from the center pole or poto-mitan

across the ceiling. The trend in decoration has currently switched to elaborate murals depicting the gods.

During November and December 1972 I assisted a Haitian artist, Wilfrid Austin, in decorating a newly built temple on Rue du Centre in Port-au-Prince. The plan of decoration was worked out between the artist and the chief priest or houngan. Austin was asked to reproduce in mural scale the sentimental Latin American religious pictures which are sold along the sidewalk of Grande Rue. To the casual observer they are a testimony to the power of Catholicism. In fact they have crystalized into icons representing the various Voodoo gods or loas.

On the walls of the main room we copied in tondo form oleographs of the Virgin Dolorosa as Erzulie Freda, the love goddess; St. Isadore brandishing a fish to represent Agoué, master of the seas; and various other saints.

Although all the features for recognizing the god are present the artist has added his own Haitian flavour to the works. (figs. W, 39) Around these reproductions we inscribed the abstract linear designs based on vévés, the insignia of the gods drawn in cornmeal on the floor of the temple before each ceremony. The four sanctuaries were treated with the same combination of realism and abstraction.

I questioned Austin, who is not a Voodooist, as to why he had agreed to donate so much time to this project. He believes Voodoo is the true foundation of Haitian culture, and in order to preserve and regenerate this Haitians must

be aware of it. His aims were: to produce an art work which would become a living part of the culture, to expose the popular class to his abstract designs which have affinities with contemporary European painting, to see if these designs can carry the message of Voodoo and be used in harmony with more concrete symbols, and to allow the popular class to see professional artists using various painting techniques.<sup>108</sup>

Our painting antics were certainly well scrutinized by the ever-present Voodoo congregation, which appears to use the temple as a twenty-four hour community center. A dedicated observer could have learned much about oil painting technique. The afternoon we painted the pink serpents coiling up the poto-mitan, for example, Austin demonstrated the techniques of shading to white, stippling with crushed tissue, and printing with a bottle cap. (fig. 40) Most of the onlookers, however, were most interested in the accuracy of the images and in what they represented. The abstract designs were regarded as space-filling decoration.

The altars of Voodoo sanctuaries also illustrate foreign influence; along with the pacquets of magic powders and govis or pots containing the spirits of the dead are the saint oleographs, American-made dolls, boxes and bottles with commercial designs, and containers decorated with such manufactured objects as the spoons and scissors forming a cross. (figs. 41, U)

## VI Missionaries and Masons:

Haiti is a prime target for missionaries from North America. It is close, underdeveloped, and, where Voodoo dominates, pagan. Teachings of missionaries have determined the subject matter of some incitic paintings. Bible scenes, particularly the Garden of Eden, have always been popular. Bottex recently did a series on the life of Christ. In the Marriage at Cana (fig. 42) and all the others the scenes are completely Haitian excepting for the representation of Christ as a bearded Caucasian in a white robe. Similarly, in the painting of Abraham about to Sacrifice Isaac, Abraham is singled out in the same way. This sort of color distinction suggests that through missionary influence some Haitians still see Christianity as the religion of the white foreigner.

Free Masonry is a strong movement in Haiti. It is given a highly mystical slant and in many cases regarded as a secret society employing powerful ritual to gain specific ends. Because of this masonic images appear less frequently than would be expected in Haitian art. The mason artist is reluctant to expose these symbols for fear they will lose their power. There are recognized affinities between masonry and both Voodoo and the Protestant sects. In Seneque Obin's painting of a masonic group in full regalia the skull and cross-bones symbol of Pap Guédé, loa of the dead, (fig. Y) appear on banners and aprons. The eye and hand of God

symbols also shown here can be traced to Voodoo decoration  
(fig. 40) and to Obin's mural of the Crucifixion at Ste.  
Trinité. (fig. H)

VII: Foreign Elements in Indian and Eskimo Culture that  
Effect their Art:

The formal education offered to Canadian native peoples is based on Euro-Canadian models. As such, it either ignores or degrades the image of the native, and at the same time fails to equip him with the skills to compete economically with the white man. The native has come to view his culture as inferior and his art as a curiosity. Yet he may be forced to produce native art objects through economic necessity. With such a negative background a creative on-going art movement would have little hope for survival. Ancient skills die out, work becomes slovenly, and designs are repeated without innovation. Fortunately the present upsurge in interest in native art and culture is changing this. For example, Indian and Eskimo art were introduced as part of the art history curriculum for Quebec High School Leaving Certificates in 1970.

McEwen feels a full revision of Canadian native education is necessary. We should follow the example of the Danes in Greenland where education is a continuation of Eskimo culture: teachers and language of instruction are local, and curriculum has local relevance. Natives receive practical training in gaining a living in their environment, and as a result, have made outstanding progress compared to Canadian Eskimos. "... real development can only take place when it starts within a culture and works its way up to the modern. 109

The philosophy of individualism is probably the most outstanding trait in education that contradicts the original ideals of native peoples. Wolcott describes his difficulty in assessing the school work of individual Kwakiutl children because they regarded each assignment as a group project.<sup>110</sup> Carpenter claims the switch to single view points and more static images is a sign of the in-roads of southern culture on the Aivilik Eskimo's once co-operative and interdependent way of life.<sup>111</sup> Today with increasing frequency individual native artists are singled out for one-man shows and international recognition. The young native artist must choose between the desire to be individually creative or to perpetuate his native heritage.

The southern consumers of Canadian indigenous art have decided that evidence of the white man's culture in native art would make it less authentic. Early Eskimo carvers, however, did reproduce mechanized objects such as miniature rifles in ivory in their art.<sup>112</sup>

Like the Haitians, Pacific Coast Indians decorated European manufactured objects to adapt them to their culture. Examples are: a Haida carved flintlock,<sup>113</sup> and Hudson's Bay blankets decorated with buttons, thimbles, and copper shields to make ceremonial robes.<sup>114</sup>

The Northwest Coast Indians were first exposed to European traders bringing new materials and tools rather than missionaries wishing to suppress idolatry in their art.

As a result, Pacific Coast art became more varied and prolific. Russians brought brass and copper wire that was rolled into bracelets, and bullets and sleigh bells which were used to decorate ceremonial aprons.<sup>115</sup> More efficient metal tools improved wood carving. Manufactured paint replaced earth dyes, and string twine and muslin replaced cedar bark. These new materials, however, were always adapted to traditional designs and integrated into the native culture.<sup>116</sup>

Missionaries originally discouraged indigenous art because there was a direct conflict between Christianity and the pagan religious elements it represented. Occasionally native artists were commissioned to do Christian work such as the Tsimshian angel on the font at Port Simpson, carved by Freddie Alexei in 1886.<sup>117</sup> Often the first contact with European illusionistic painting for native peoples were the religious illustrations shown them by missionaries.

Indian artists testified to the white man's presence by including him as subject matter in their art. The Kwakiutl carved his face on ceremonial masks,<sup>118</sup> and a Salish Coast artist produced a full length statue of an Indian agent complete with a slot for his official scroll.<sup>119</sup> They also adapted his symbols to their own use. The "Iroquois National Badge" design in silver-work came from the Scottish double-heart, and their "Council Fires" design can be traced to Masonic emblems.<sup>120</sup>



### Conclusion:

Artists and teachers in these cross-cultural situations must recognize that the art of alien cultures will be changed with or without their help. It is far better that they as experts attempt to determine the nature and degree of influence on primitive art rather than allow its complete suppression through imposition of alien values or degradation through commercialization. They should also accept that most artists in contemporary primitive movements would not have continued to work and develop without a market demand for their pieces.

Commercialization of art in these cultures has shown certain general tendencies in the nature of change. The variety and sophistication of materials, tools and techniques has increased. There has been a rise in the number of artists and rate of artistic production, and, as a result, the overall quality of workmanship has suffered.

In terms of stylistic change, the format of the art work begins to conform more to western ideas. It sits on a base or is contained within a two dimensional geometric plane. It is recognized for its expressive value rather than as a decorative addition to a utilitarian object. In the area of applied arts, designs and objects useful in industrialized society are introduced.

The commercialization of incitic and indigenous art may change it aesthetically, but need not reduce its value

or authenticity. The key is to assure that artists with ability are paid enough to prevent the economic need of over-producing. Alternative employment should be available for those who can only produce inferior work and would actually prefer not being artists.

The foreign teacher wishing to encourage a commercially viable art movement in a primitive society must recognize that his role is temporary. The best measure of his success is how soon native artists can handle their own production and marketing and make their own decisions on quality and aesthetics. With this in mind, the teacher must understand the alien culture's already existing concepts of art, administrative procedures, and work groupings; so that his proposals may be in harmony with already existing systems and be quickly integrated.

It is unfortunate that the consumers of contemporary primitive art are usually from an alien culture. The foreign teacher should make every effort to develop an appreciation and possibly a market for it within the producing culture. In the case of both Haiti and Canada this was begun with the example set by foreign artists and collectors. But too often the native values his own art only because the white man buys it. He has no real basis for judging its aesthetic value. He should be brought to an in-depth understanding of its cultural origins and evolution. This can be done through formal education and by making

native artists aware of their responsibility of  
communicating their artistic values to their own people.



Fig. A Louverture Poisson:  
Vendeuse.



Fig. B E. Gourgue: Mural, 1962

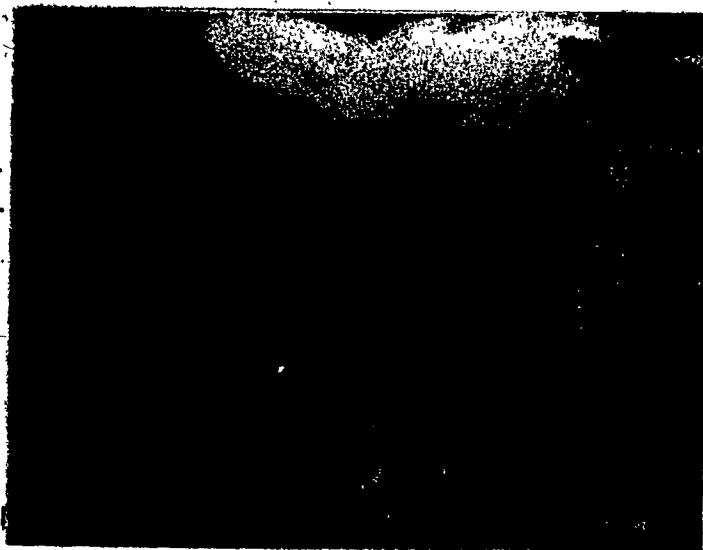


Fig. C Kesnel Franklin: Street Scene

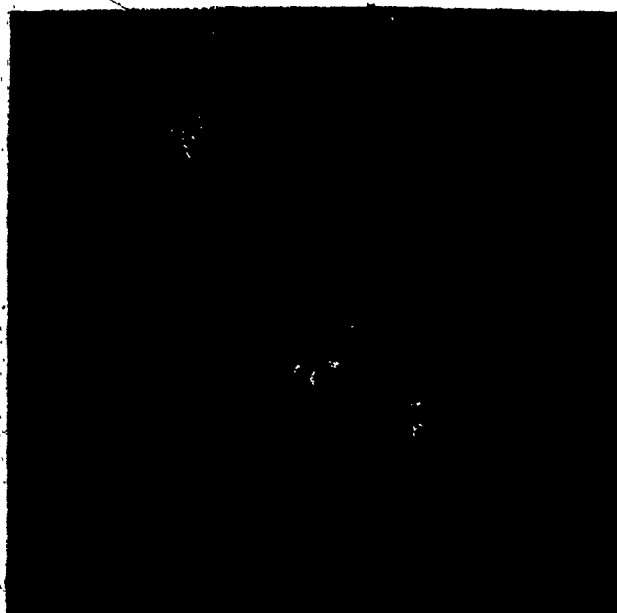


Fig. D Bernard Séjourné: Deeses

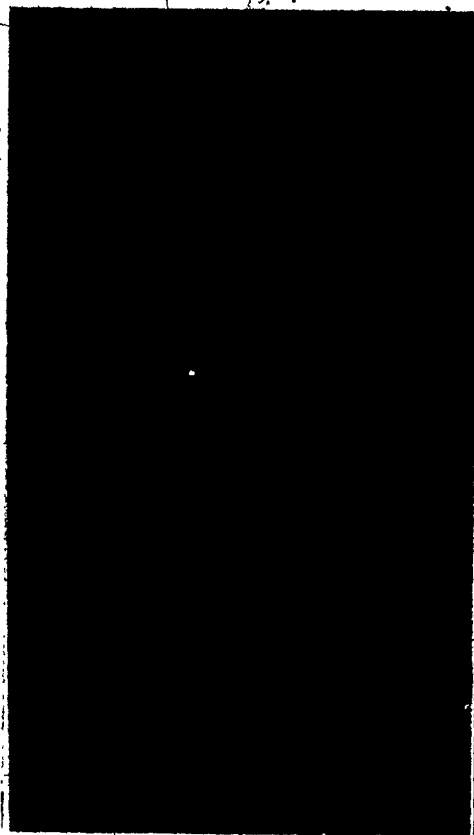


Fig. E Painting showing  
Cubist influence

Rose-Marie Desruisseaux

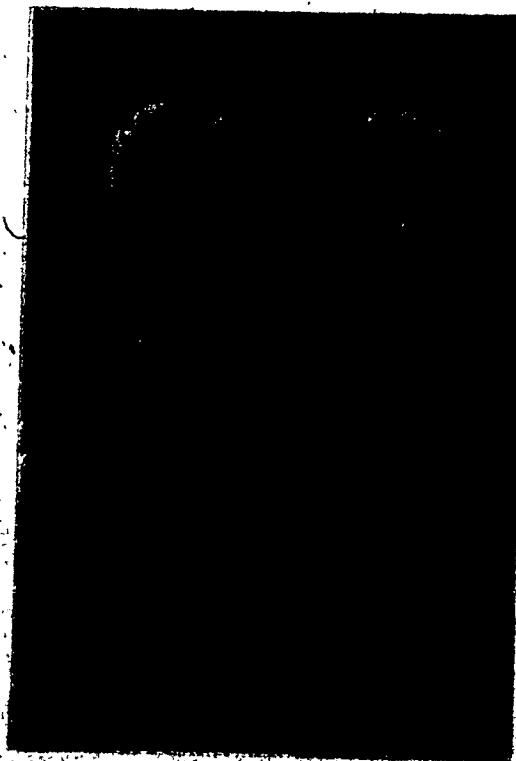


Fig. F Painting using  
synthesis of Voodoo elements

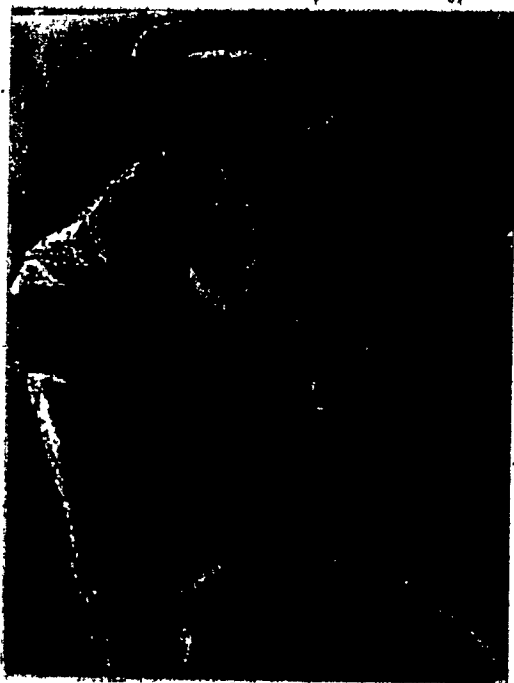


Fig. G Luckner Lazard: Musician, 1972



Fig. H Philome Obin:  
Crucifixion, Ste. Trinité



Fig. I C. Baxile: Baptism of  
Christ, Ste. Trinité



Fig. J Pornographic Warrior

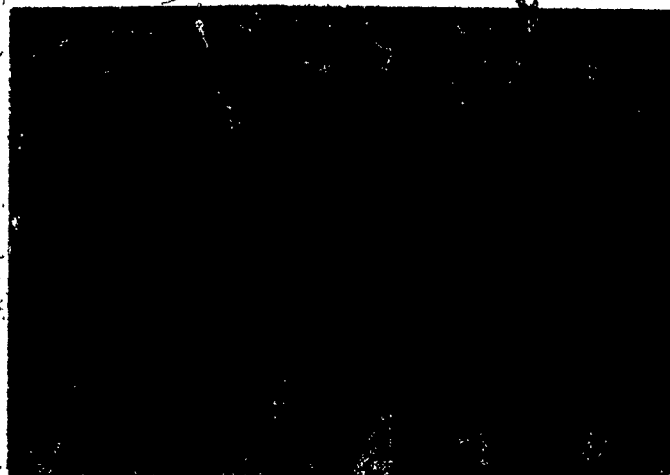


Fig. K Casimir: Market





Fig. L Bernard Wah: Reclining  
Nude

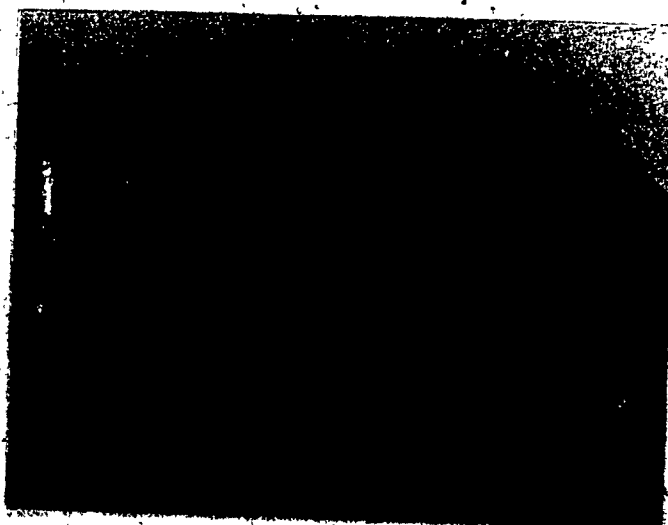


Fig. M Wesner Pierre-Louis: Paysage

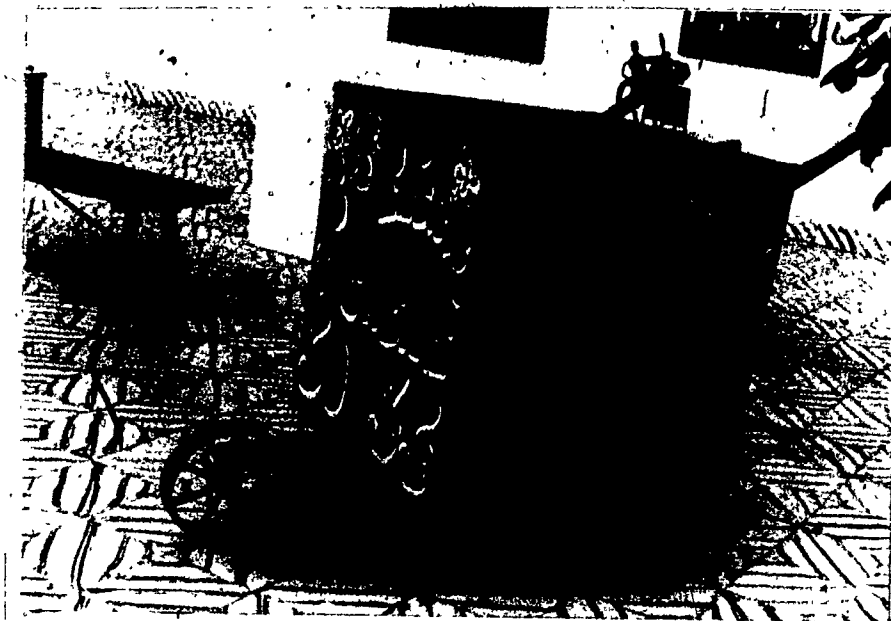


Fig. N Fresco Wagon, Musée College St. Pierre



Fig. O Jean René Jerome:  
Femme du Plaisir

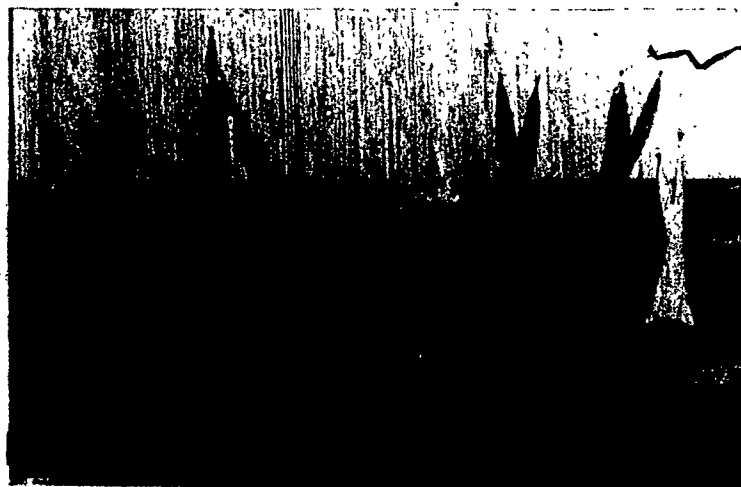


Fig. P Max Ewold: Collage of banana bark

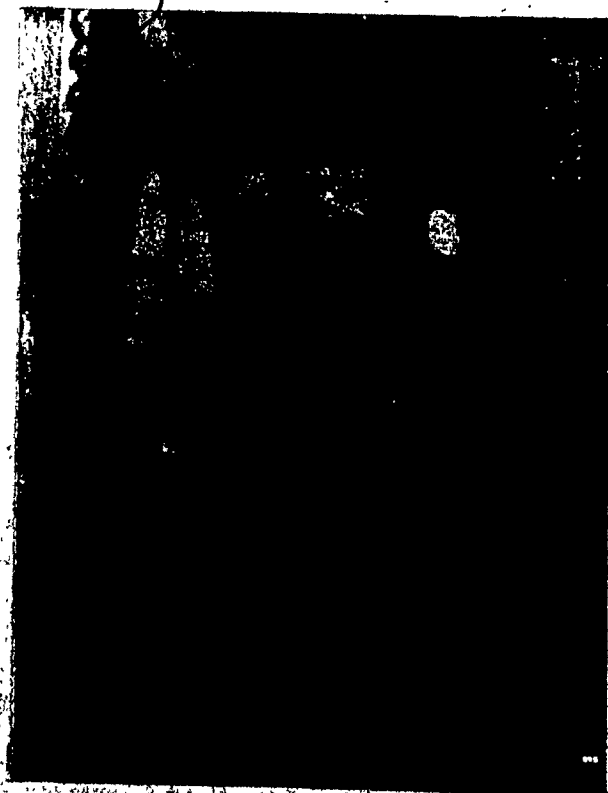


Fig. Q Max Ewold: Collage wall hanging, cocca nut bark and sisal



Fig. R Tap-tap Painting

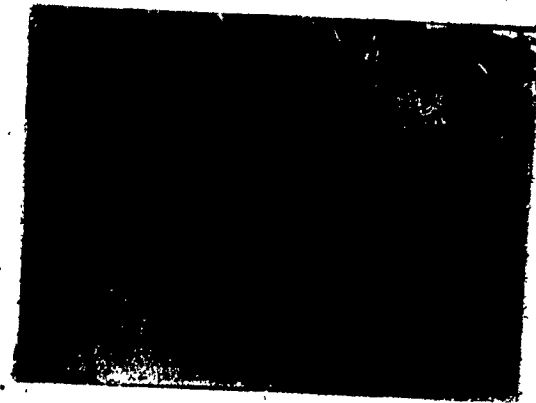


Fig. S Haitian Tomb



Fig. T Painting by elementary school student



Fig. U Voodoo Bottle



Fig. W Virgin Dolorosa



Fig. V Sculpture made from  
oil drum



Fig. X St. Aude: Astronaut



Fig. Y Semène Obin:  
Masonic Group (detail)



Fig. Z Painting by  
student of Foyer des  
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