

Neolithic Childhood

Art in a False Present, c. 1930

Exhibition and Conference; Publication

*Opening: April 12, 2018; April 13 – July 7, 2018
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*Konferenz Tiefenzeit und Krise, ca. 1930 Conference Deep Time and Crisis, c. 1930
May 26 – 27, 2018, from 1 pm daily*

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*as of April 12, 2018
Subject to change*

HKW
100 JAHRE GEGENWART

Haus der Kulturen der Welt

Table of Content

Table of Content

Press Kit *Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930*

As of April 12, 2018 (subject to change)

Press Release *Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930*

Press Release *The Digitalization of the Carl-Einstein-Archiv at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin*

Introduction to the exhibition

Artists and their works

Biographies of Curators and Advisory Board

Preliminary version of the catalogue *Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930*

Irene Albers

Global Art 1929: Kalifala Sidibé

Joyce S. Cheng

Primitivisms

Jenny Nachtigall

Formalism

Kerstin Stakemeier

Autonomy

Sebastian Zeidler

After Cosmogony: Carl Einstein on Jean Arp

Education: Guided tours and talks: Kids&Teens Workshops

Service Info and Media Material

Press Release

Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930

Exhibition and conference; publication

April 13–July 9, 2018

Opening: April 12, 2018

7pm: doors open

7.15pm: Welcome by Prof. Monika Grütters MP, Minister of State for Culture and the Media, Bernd Scherer, director HKW, as well as the curators Anselm Franke, and Tom Holert (Vortragssaal)

Conference: May 26–27, 2018

Berlin, April 12, 2018

How did the artistic avant-garde react to the multiple crises of European modernity around 1930? The exhibition and research project **Neolithic Childhood** does not set out to trace anew the failure of art in the face of reality. Instead, it examines the breathtaking, often contradictory fusion of aesthetic, scientific, and political strategies which protagonists in Paris, Berlin and Prague, employed during the decade between the world wars in response to a present experienced as “fundamentally false.” The structural crisis of capitalism and the resulting material hardship contributed to the confused situation as much as the disquieting influence of the scientific-technical breakthroughs and global imperial expansion on thought, as well as the rapid development of mass society and the contested field of utopias, interpretations of history, and ideologies. This tableau of turbulences inspired the artistic avant-garde and the human sciences to embark on a ceaseless search for origins and the construction of alternative beginnings—the “point of origin” became the limiting function of modernity.

The project’s title, **Neolithic Childhood**, is derived from Carl Einstein (1885-1940). In an essay on Jean (Hans) Arp’s art, the art historian interpreted the pictorial elements in his work as the repetition of children’s ritual “prehistoric”-like play. Based on Einstein’s writings—a thinker of the crisis who is still far too little known—the exhibition addresses the productive despair over the present in Europe around 1930. The loss of social cohesion, the isolation of the individual, and the atomization of society was diagnosed everywhere. It appeared necessary to re-establish the social order, or to leave it behind completely. Thus the interest in “archaic layers” also rose. Resources for a necessary “modification” of the human and new forms of collectivity were discovered in human pre-history. Ideas about a primeval beginning and a historical and individual childhood played a central role in the re-definition of the modernist project.

Thus from the 1920s to the 1940s, the artistic avant-garde in the context of Surrealism became intertwined with the human sciences. **Neolithic Childhood** documents this intensive interaction between the visual arts, politics, philosophy, ethnology, psychology, and the natural sciences in an epoch of historic upheavals. The exhibition will show works of art alongside numerous publications and archive material.

Press Release



The exhibition will present artworks and films, in addition to numerous publications and archivals, from **Jean (Hans) Arp, Willi Baumeister, Georges Braque, Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Sergei Eisenstein, Max Ernst, T. Lux Feininger, Florence Henri, Hannah Höch, Heinrich Hoerle, Valentine Hugo, Paul Klee, Germaine Krull, Len Lye, André Masson, Richard Oelze, Wolfgang Paalen, Jean Painlevé, Alexandra Povòrina, Gaston-Louis Roux, Kurt Seligmann, Kalifala Sidibé, Jindřich Štyrský, Toyen, Frits Van den Berghe, Paule Vézelay, Catherine Yarrow,** and others.

The exhibited printed matter and archival material document the manifold and active role that art, science, and political theory played in the perception of the crises and the radicalization of society around 1930.

In collaboration with the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, the works manuscripts and letters of Carl Einstein, which have been archived there since 1966, have been completely digitized. The exhibition will present original hand written and typed manuscripts from the archive. The digitized archive is on view from April 12, 2018 onwards: adk.de/Einstein For further information have a look at the press release at: [digitalization Carl-Einstein-Archiv](#)

A comprehensive, richly illustrated publication will document and contextualize the exhibition. The authors include, amongst others, Irene Albers, Philipp Albers, Joyce Cheng, Rosa Eidelpes, Anselm Franke, Charles W. Haxthausen, Tom Holert, Clemens Krümmel, Ulrike Müller, Jenny Nachtigall, David Quigley, Cornelius Reiber, Erhard Schüttpelz, Kerstin Stakemeier, Maria Stavrinaki, Elena Vogman, Zairong Xiang, Sebastian Zeidler.

The publication will appear end of May 2018.

A brochure with an introductory essay, texts on the artworks and a detailed map will be published in conjunction with the exhibition.

Curated by **Anselm Franke** and **Tom Holert**; with scientific advice from **Irene Albers, Susanne Leeb, Jenny Nachtigall, Kerstin Stakemeier**.

*Within the framework of **Kanon-Fragen**, supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media due to a ruling of the German Bundestag. Supported by **Akademie der Künste, Berlin**. The digitization of the Carl-Einstein-Archive realized with the support of **Haus der Kulturen der Welt** within the framework of **Kanon-Fragen**. **Haus der Kulturen der Welt** is supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media and the Federal Foreign Office.*

Press Release

The Digitalization of the Carl-Einstein-Archiv at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Accompanying the exhibition and conference; publication:

Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930

April 13-July 9, 2018

Opening: April 12, 2018, doors open 7pm

Conference: May 26-27, 2018

Berlin, April 12, 2018

Carl Einstein (1885–1940), art historian, cultural critic, poet, and anti-Fascist, forms the starting point and anchor of the exhibition **Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930**. Up until now, the Carl-Einstein-Archiv, preserved at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, has only been accessed by a small circle of researchers. Now the digitalization and online publication of Einstein's writings – mostly in German as well as in French, his 2nd literary language – make them available to a wider interested audience. From April 12, 2018: adk.de/einstein

Between Berlin and Paris the independently-minded intellectual—on the run from the Germans until his eventual suicide—displayed a radical productivity which proves disconcerting to this day. The restlessness emanating from Einstein's texts is symptomatic of the multifarious crises which gripped the world from the 1920s to the 1940s. In particular, his published and unpublished writings from the late 1920s and 1930s stand for a radical shift in the function of art history, giving birth to a psycho-historical, materialist cultural history which, although a product of the burgeoning interdisciplinarity of his age, extends well beyond it.

As the Akademie der Künste: "Carl Einstein did not see himself as an art scholar; instead he actively intervened in the debates on the art of today and tomorrow. He drew the criteria for assessing how contemporary art should be created from an analysis of the French avant-garde and African sculpture. Due to their incisive sharpness his judgments were feared by German artists. An innate writer, Einstein loved aphoristic hyperbole. His archive is full of such notes which could have formed the basis for new works. In future, thanks to the digitalization and subsequent open-access publication of his entire estate in the database of the archive at the Academy of the Arts, it will be possible for anyone worldwide to see that even the smallest scrap of paper from Einstein's hand is more inspiring and provocative than numerous voluminous histories of art combined."

Within the framework of the exhibition "Neolithic Childhood", part of the HKW long-term project "Kanon-Fragen", it was of special concern to the Haus der Kulturen der Welt and the curators to initiate and support this important undertaking.

Curated by **Anselm Franke** and **Tom Holert**; advisory board: **Irene Albers, Susanne Leeb, Jenny Nachtigall, Kerstin Stakemeier**.

*In the framework of **Kanon-Fragen**, supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media due to a ruling of the German Bundestag. Supported by the **Akademie der Künste, Berlin**. The digitalization of the Carl-Einstein-Archiv has been realized with funding from **Haus der Kulturen der Welt** within the framework of **Kanon-Fragen**. **Haus der Kulturen der Welt** is supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media as well as by the Federal Foreign Office.*

Introduction

Neolithic Childhood Art in a False Present, c. 1930

This is an exhibition about revolutions, divisions, openings, and contradictions— many of which seem uncannily topical. By “c. 1930,” Western modernism was already being pushed up against the limits of its own project. The crass asymmetries of imperialist, racist rule and the structural crises of capitalism were becoming ever more glaringly apparent. In this situation, which spelled hopelessness for many of those who lived through it and which millions of others would not survive at all, escape routes of all kinds were important, even those that proved fantastical or fallacious. With its implication of a return to first origins, to beginnings, to the freedom of mimetic experimentation, Carl Einstein’s “Neolithic Childhood” captures very well this notion of flight into the realm of the imagination and alternative temporality. It was not by chance that we turned to the art historian, cultural critic, poet, and anti-fascist Carl Einstein (1885–1940) for both guidance and critical interjections. For, until his suicide while fleeing the Germans, this Jewish intellectual, who was based first in Berlin and then in Paris, developed a productive radicalism that remains troubling to this day. The unease conveyed by his texts is symptomatic of the multiple crises gripping the world in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. The exhibition’s geographical parameters may be (Western) European, but they also show how colonial centers such as Paris became genuinely global cities in the interwar years. The visual art produced within the surrealist ambit played a central role here. The works of art thus form an exhibition within an exhibition. Similarly present and engaged in dialogue with the artistic avant-garde are works from other areas of knowledge production and discourse, such as ethnological books and magazines, art historical publications, political pamphlets, about biology and psychology.

The year is 1930—a present wracked by profound crises worldwide. The social order is coming unstuck, but so are traditional categories of knowledge. Europe’s imperialist expansion is at its zenith even as its very legitimacy is being radically called into question. Political and social conflicts quickly assume global dimensions. The First World War, revolutions, the industrialization of production, the scientization of everyday life, and new images and encounters with alterity distributed by mass culture have shaken the Eurocentric worldview to its core—and all the old certainties that came with it. Both economic and social crises corresponded with an epistemological nervousity that has reached fever pitch. The individual’s place in time and even the concept of history itself have become problematic. In search of new beginnings, a new critical awareness manifests itself in a recourse to all things archaic, to “deep time,” and to notions of humanity’s “childhood.” Ethnologists and prehistorians play a crucial role in the anthropological speculation sparked by origins of all kinds. Disseminated by the media and by the increasingly important field of art journalism, “world art” and the spectacle of cave painting become cultural formulae for a revised view of history and modernism. Taking Carl Einstein’s “Handbuch der Kunst” as its operative center, Section A sheds light on pictorial and textual articulations of the “archaic illusion” of the period from the 1920s to the 1940s.

B The S/O Function

Where might a place and state of being untrammelled by the impositions and responsibilities of the present and its institutions be found? Many artists, but also many scientists and philosophers of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, embraced just such a quest. One direction that many of them took was a critique of the prevailing epistemological dualisms. Stimulated by psychoanalysis and ethnology, they

Introduction

produced texts and images that poked holes in what had hitherto been considered the limits of the self and personhood. Art and theory challenged not only orders of knowledge but also orders of being, whether in the pornographic utopia of interpenetration or in the interrogation of “primitive” forms of communication and nonhuman life. Carl Einstein’s cryptic formula “S/O Function” encapsulates nothing less than the ecstatic collapse of Western-style subjectivity. That this collapse might be experienced as rather less liberating than the avant-garde celebration of irrationalism would have us believe, is demonstrated by the political descent into fascism and the ongoing pursuit of overtly imperialist policies by the supposedly “enlightened” nations of Europe. Section B examines the collapse of the dualisms of subject and object, nature and culture, female and male.

AW (ARTWORKS)

The 1920s and 1930s saw the question of art’s social function and “use value” become inseparably tied up with the question of its contact to the “masses.” The problem of the autonomy of art’s methods and interpretations in engaging with reality thus became all the more acute. The “Neolithic Childhood” turned out to be a potential generative matrix for relating differently to the world. Between self-assertion as aesthetic practice and anti modernist self-transgression a new room-for-play emerges. Venturing beyond the categories of abstraction and figuration, as well as the (anti-)category of formlessness, the works of this period reflect the quest for a productively delimited mimesis. “Totemic” landscapes symbolize unearthly affiliations and cosmological visions. Forces of destruction contrast with the potential, the scope, and the maladjustment of childhood. Images experiment in the interstitial spaces of body forms and drawn figures. They touch on points of indifference, where “primordial” symbols and hallucinatory inventions are available equally as both subject and object. Sections A and B are conceived as an excavation site, as the scene of a critical, archaeological engagement with deep time. The central wall of the exhibition, where most of the AWs (Carl Einstein’s shorthand for “Artworks”) are assembled and displayed, functions differently—like a screen onto which the “prehistories” of subjectivity “c. 1930” are projected.

C

Resistance and Lines of Flight

The promise of a way out of the false present of the interwar years and the Second World War sustained not only the resistance movements stirring in the colonies, but also the various manifestations of an alternative modernism. The fault lines of the West—in both the colonies and in the colonial centers of power—were fast becoming apparent in the political organization of a global proletariat and in the art produced by the African and Asian diaspora. “Black Paris” and the “Harlem Renaissance” were more than just counterweights to the spectacle of colonialism; they were also cultural equivalents of the anti-colonial industrial action undertaken by non-white activists in port cities such as Hamburg and Marseille. These ports became contact zones and places of radicalization and it was here that many European artists boarded ships bound for Mexico, Haiti, or the Pacific Northwest with the aim of immersing themselves in indigenous communities and epistemologies. Modernity had once and for all proved itself to be a divided project. And it was to remain unfinished. Section C presents some examples of these fault lines and contact zones.

Artists' list

James L. Allen
(1907–77)

Portrait of James Lesesne Wells, c. 1930
Photograph (reproduction)
22.23 × 15.2 cm
Courtesy Alain Locke Papers/Moorland–Spingarn
Research Center, Howard University

Jean (Hans) Arp
(1886–1966)

Untitled (*Neues Handbuch der Malerei*) [*New handbook of painting*], late 1940s
Collage on paper
35 × 25 cm
Archiv Marzona, Berlin

Willi Baumeister
(1889–1955)

Aufgelöste Figuren [*Disbanded figures*], 1946
Lithograph
33 × 44 cm
Private collection, Berlin

Figur [*Figure*], 1931
Pencil and charcoal on cardboard,
45 × 32.8 cm
Private collection

Fußballspieler [*Football player*], 1935
Pencil and charcoal on cardboard
44.7 × 34.8 cm
Private collection

Lichte Figuren [*Light figures*], 1944–47
Lithograph
47.5 × 60.5 cm
Private collection, Berlin

Untitled (*Urzeitgestalten*) [*Primordial figures*], 1944–47
Lithograph
c. 37 × 43 cm
Private collection, Berlin

Artists' list

Schemen [Schemes], 1936
Pencil and charcoal on cardboard
45 × 34.7 cm
Private collection

Jacques-André Boiffard
(1902–61)

Untitled, c. 1930
Gelatin silver print
16.1 × 20 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/ Centre de creation industrielle

Georges Braque
(1882–1963)

Theogony (by Hesiod), 1–20/20, 1932/55
Etchings
c. 43.5 × 33 cm
Galerie Boissérée

Brassaï
(Gyula Halasz, 1899–1984)

"Du mur des cavernes au mur d'usine"
From *Minotaure*, 3–4 (1933), Skira, Paris (reproduction)

From *Graffiti Series III: "The Birth of the Face,"* 1933–56
Gelatin silver print
28.8 × 22.7 cm
Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequest of Gilberte Boyer Brassaï

From *Graffiti Series IV: "Masks and Faces,"* 1933–56
Gelatin silver print
29.4 × 23 cm
Victoria and
Albert Museum, London. Bequest of Gilberte Boyer Brassaï

From *Graffiti Series VII: "Death,"* 1933–56
Gelatin silver print
38 × 29.2 cm
Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequest of Gilberte Boyer Brassaï

From *Graffiti Series VII: "Death,"* 1933–56
Gelatin silver print
29.7 × 23.5 cm
Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequest of Gilberte Boyer Brassaï

Artists' list

From *Graffiti Series VII*: "Death," 1933–56
Gelatin silver print
30.5 × 24 cm
Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequest of Gilberte Boyer Brassai

From *Graffiti Series VIII*: "Magic," 1933–56
Gelatin silver print
30.3 × 23.6 cm
Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequest of Gilberte Boyer Brassai

From *Graffiti Series VIII*: "Magic," 1933–56
Gelatin silver print
24.2 × 18 cm
Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequest of Gilberte Boyer Brassai

From *Graffiti Series VIII*: "Magic," 1933–56
Gelatin silver print
29.8 × 23.5 cm
Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequest of Gilberte Boyer Brassai

From *Graffiti Series VIII*: "Magic," 1933–56
Gelatin silver print
29.2 × 22.8 cm
Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequest of Gilberte Boyer Brassai

From *Graffiti Series IX*: "Primitive Images," 1933–56
Gelatin silver print
28 × 20.8 cm
Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequest of Gilberte Boyer Brassai

Tériade, *Le point de vue de la nature [The point of view of nature]*, with photos by Brassai, Arts et Metiers Graphiques, no. 54 (1936). Paris: AMG, 1936

Victor Brauner
(1903–66)

Cette guerre morphologique de l'homme [This morphological war of man], 1938
Ink on paper
46 × 58.5 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle

Artists' list

Claude Cahun

(Lucy Schwob, 1894–1954)

Entre Nous [Between us], 1926

Gelatin silver print (reproduction)

10.2 × 7.8 cm

Courtesy Jersey Heritage Collections

Tetes de Cristal [Crystal heads], 1936

Gelatin silver print (reproduction)

10.8 × 8.8 cm

Courtesy Jersey Heritage Collections

Self-Portrait, 1928

Gelatin silver print (reproduction)

11.8 × 8.8 cm

Courtesy Jersey Heritage Collections

Self-Portrait, 1932

Gelatin silver print (reproduction)

10 × 8 cm

Courtesy Jersey Heritage Collections

Claude Cahun (Lucy Schwob, 1894–1954) & Marcel Moor (Suzanne Malherbe, 1892–1972)

Aveux non Avenus [Disavowed confessions], 1930

Photomontage (reproduction)

Joseph Cornell

(1903–72)

By Night with Torch and Spear, 1942

Silent film, 16 mm (original), color, 9 min · Anthology Film Archives, New York

Germaine Dulac

(1882–1942)

La Coquille et le Clergyman [The seashell and the clergyman], 1927

Silent film, 35 mm (original), b/w, 38 min

Artists' list

Sergei Eisenstein

(1898–1948)

From Die Heirat des Chamäleons [The chameleon's wedding], 1931

Colored pencil on paper (reproduction)

Courtesy RGALI, Moscow

Film material for *Que viva Mexico! [Long live Mexico!], 1931–32*

6–8 min, Gosfilmofond, Moscow, research and assembly Elena Vogman and Marie Rebecchi

Max Ernst

(1891–1976)

Barbares marchant vers l'ouest [Barbarians marching to the West], 1935

Oil on canvas

24 × 32 cm

Private collection, Stuttgart.

From Histoire Naturelle, Nr. 3: "Trois petites tables autour de la terre" [Natural history, no. 3: Little tables around the earth], 1926

Collotype on vellum after frottage

49.8 × 32.3 cm

Kunstmuseum Bonn

From Histoire Naturelle, Nr. 6: "Las Pampas" [Natural history, no. 6: The pampas], 1926

Collotype on vellum after frottage

32.3 × 49.8 cm

Kunstmuseum Bonn

From Histoire Naturelle, Nr. 10: "Elle garde son secret" [Natural history, no. 10: She guards her secret], 1926

Collotype on vellum after frottage

49.8 × 32.3 cm

Kunstmuseum Bonn

From Histoire Naturelle, Nr. 14: "Le start du chataignier" [Natural history, no. 14: The chestnut trees take-off], 1926

Collotype on vellum after frottage

32.3 × 49.8 cm

Kunstmuseum Bonn

From Histoire Naturelle, Nr. 26: "L'Origine de la pendule" [Natural history, no. 26: The origin of the clock], 1926

Collotype on vellum after frottage

49.8 × 32.3 cm

Kunstmuseum Bonn

Artists' list

From *Histoire Naturelle*, Nr. 28: "Le repas du mort" [*Natural history*, no. 28: The repast of death], 1926

Collotype on vellum after frottage

32.3 × 49.8 cm

Kunstmuseum Bonn

Untitled, 1935

Oil on paper on cardboard

23.7 × 34.8 cm

Private collection, Stuttgart

Oiseau ovoïde [*Ovoid bird*], 1934

Granite

19.7 × 14 × 7.8 cm

Private collection, Stuttgart

Roter Grätenwald [*Red bone forest*], 1927

Oil on canvas

26.7 × 35 cm

Private collection, Stuttgart

T. Lux Feininger

(1910–2011)

Kai von New Orleans [*Quay of New Orleans*], 1931

Oil on canvas

25 × 50 cm

Private collection

Julio Gonzalez

(1876–1942)

Masque Humour no 1 [*Humour Masque No. 1*], 1940

Indian ink, pen drawing, and wash on paper,

31.5 × 24.2 cm

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid

Personnage science fiction [*Science Fiction Character*], 1934

Indian ink, pen drawing, colored pencil, and pencil on Canson paper

15.5 × 12.5 cm

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid

Artists' list

John Heartfield

(Helmut Herzfeld, 1891–1968)

Deutsche Naturgeschichte [German natural history], 1934

Photomontage in copperplate etching, Illustration

for *AIZ* magazine, vol. 13, no. 33 (August 16, 1934), p. 536 (reproduction) • Courtesy

Kunstsammlung Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Florence Henri

(1893–1982)

Untitled (*Kakteen*) [*Cacti*], 1935

Gelatin silver print

37.2 × 27.6 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Untitled (*Komposition mit Spiegel und Tellern*) [*Composition with mirror and plates*], 1931

Gelatin silver print

27.2 × 22.7 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Untitled (*Pariser Fenster*) [*Paris window*], 1930

Gelatin silver print

34 × 26.7 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Untitled (*Stilleben, Komposition mit Kugel, Sieb und Spiegel*) [*Still life, composition with ball, sieve, and mirror*], 1930

Gelatin silver print

22.5 × 27.4 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Stilleben mit Tulpe [*Still life with tulip*], 1931

Gelatin silver print

22.3 × 28.6 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Barbara Hepworth

(1903–75)

Paul Laib

(1869–1958)

Paul Laib, *Reclining Figure, 1933*, by Barbara Hepworth, 1933

Photograph (reproduction)

22 × 32 cm

Courtesy The de Laszlo Collection of Paul Laib Negatives, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London

Artists' list

Paul Laib, *Sculpture with Profiles, 1932, by Barbara Hepworth, 1932*
Photograph (reproduction)
30 × 22 cm
Courtesy The de Laszlo Collection of Paul Laib Negatives, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London

Hannah Höch
(1889–1978)

Aus einem ethnographischen Museum, ohne Titel [From an ethnographic museum, Untitled] original from 1929
Photomontage (reproduction)
49 × 32.5 cm
Courtesy Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

Aus einem ethnographischen Museum, Nr. VIII, „Denkmal I“ [From an ethnographic museum, no. VIII, “Monument 1”] original from 1924
Photomontage (facsimile)
20.1 × 8.8 cm
Berlinische Galerie – Landesmuseum für moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur

Aus einem ethnographischen Museum, Nr. X, ohne Titel [From an ethnographic museum, no. X, Untitled], original from 1924
Photomontage (facsimile)
25.9 × 18.1 cm
Berlinische Galerie – Landesmuseum für moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur

Aus einem ethnographischen Museum, Nr. XI, „Mit Mütze“ [From an ethnographic museum, no. XI, “With cap”] original from 1924
Photomontage (facsimile)
13.5 × 8.5 cm
Berlinische Galerie – Landesmuseum für moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur

Aus einem ethnographischen Museum, Nr. XII, „Der heilige Berg“ [From an ethnographic museum, no. XII, “The holy mountain”] original from 1927
Photomontage (facsimile)
33.5 × 22.5 cm
Berlinische Galerie – Landesmuseum für moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur

J. B. und sein Engel, Original von 1925 [J. B. and his angel, original from 1925]
Photomontage (facsimile)
24.3 × 20 cm
Berlinische Galerie – Landesmuseum für moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur

Artists' list

Heinrich Hoerle
(1896–1936)

from *Pornomappe*, c. 1930/80
Linocuts on paper
42.5 × 30 cm
Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Library

Harry O. Hoyt
(1892-1940)

The Lost World, 1925/1998
Silent film, 35 mm (original), b/w, original version 106 min, exhibition version c. 100 min

Valentine Hugo
(1887–1968)

Illustration, in Achim D'Armin, *Contes Bizarres*. Paris: Cahiers libres, 1933
Private Collection, Berlin

Illustration (single sheets, printed in color), in Andre de Badet, *Contes au clair de lune*. Paris: Rene Kieffer, 1948
Private Collection, Berlin

Illustration, in Paul Eluard, *Les Animaux et Leurs Hommes, les Hommes et Leur Animaux*. Paris: Editions Gallimard, n.d.
Private Collection, Berlin

Illustration, in *Medieuses. Poemes par Paul Eluard*, illustrated by Valentine Hugo. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1944
Private Collection, Berlin

Illustration, in F. H. C. de la Motte-Fouque, *Ondine*. Paris: Jose Corti, 1943
Private Collection, Berlin

Paul Klee
(1879–1940)

Barbaren–Söldner [Barbarian mercenary], 1933
Chalk on paper on cardboard
20.9 × 32.9 cm
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

es wird dünner [getting thinner], 1933
Brush on paper on cardboard
46.4 × 59.8 cm
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Artists' list

Flucht vor sich (erstes Stadium) [Flight from oneself (first state)], 1931

Pen on paper on cardboard

41.8/42.2 × 58/58.2 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Gestirn über Felsen [Stars above rocks], 1929

Pencil on paper on cardboard

20.5 × 22.7 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

l'homme approximatif [the approximate man], 1931

Etching and dry point

17.9 × 14 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

(Metamorphosen:) der Zusammenbruch der biblischen Schlange [(Metamorphoses:)

The collapse of the biblical serpent], 1940

Colored paste on paper on cardboard

34.2 × 49.3 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Pfeile der avant-garde [Arrows of the avant-garde], 1933

Brush on paper on cardboard

48.2 × 63.5 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

sich verwandelnd [to change oneself], 1932

Pen on paper on cardboard

31.7 × 24.1 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Starres und Bewegtes geistert [The rigid and the moving haunts], 1929

Pen on paper on cardboard

45 × 30.2 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

venus matrona, 1932

Pen on paper on cardboard

16.2 × 48.7 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Vermittlung [Mediation], 1930

Charcoal-rubbing on paper on cardboard

46.5 × 60.5 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Artists' list

Zeichnung zur Barbaren-Venus (21/132) [Study for barbarian venus (21/132)], 1920

Pencil on paper on cardboard

27.7 × 21.7 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Germaine Krull

(1897–1985)

Andre Malraux, 1930/99

Gelatin silver print

23.8 × 18 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Certificat d'Identite, 28.9.1943 [Identity certificate, 28.9.1943], 1943

Paper, passport photo

29.9 × 19.6 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Le port, Douala, Cameroun [The port, Douala, Cameroon], 1943

Gelatin silver print

2.2 × 18.7 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Le port, Douala, Cameroun [The port, Douala, Cameroon], 1943

Gelatin silver print

12.2 × 18.7 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Le port. Les quais de dechargement des marchandises, Douala, Cameroun [The port: The wharves for unloading goods, Douala, Cameroon], 1943

Gelatin silver print

12.2 × 18.7 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Costumes de danse Bamilike, des danseurs de la cheferie la plus importante du pays Bamilike, Bandjoun, Cameroun [Bamileke dance costumes belonging to the dancers from the country's most important tribe Bamileke-Bandjoun, Cameroon], 1943

Gelatin silver print

18 × 12.6 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Kamerun [Cameroon], 1943

Gelatin silver print

22.9 × 19 cm

Museum Folkwang, Essen

Artists' list

Lewis Cole, c. 1930
Gelatin silver print
23.7 × 17.4 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Lewis Cole, c. 1930/55
Gelatin silver print
23.4 × 17.4 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Untitled (Blackbirds, Lewis Cole), c. 1930/95
Gelatin silver print
23.8 × 17.2 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Untitled (Homme avec enfant) [Man with child], c. 1943
Gelatin silver print
13 × 16.9 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Pieges a poissons sur la Kotto, Kembe, Oubangu-Chari [Fish traps on the Kotto (Koto) River, Kembe, Ubangi-Shari], 1943
Gelatin silver print
12.9 × 18.5 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Plantation de caoutchouc "Sanaga." La bande de latex deja coagulee est sortie des grandes cuves, Dizangue, Cameroun ["Sanaga" rubber plantation: The coagulated latex is removed from large tanks, Dizangue, Cameroon], 1943
Gelatin silver print
12.8 × 18.4 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Plantation de caoutchouc "Sanaga." L'hevea est saigne, Dizangue, Cameroun ["Sanaga" rubber plantation: Tapping the hevea rubber tree, Dizangue, Cameroon], 1943
Gelatin silver print
11.6 × 17.6 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Plantation de fadoma. Des cordes fabriquees en sisal, Bakouma, Oubangu-Chari [Fadoma plantation: Ropes made out of sisal, Bakouma, Ubangi-Shari], 1943
Gelatin silver print
17 × 11.3 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Plantation de fadoma. La confection d'un gros cable, Bakouma, Oubangu-Chari [Fadoma plantation: The making of a thick cable, Bakouma, Ubangi-Shari], 1943
Gelatin silver print
17.5 × 11.4 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Artists' list

Village Banda, dessins indigenes sur les cases, Oubangu-Chari [Banda village, indigenous drawings on mud huts, Ubangi-Shari], 1943
Gelatin silver print
11.4 × 16.7 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Fernand Léger
(1881–1955)

Composition, 1931
White chalk and graphite on gray-green paper,
63.2 × 49.5 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle

Planète [Planet], 1931
Graphite on paper
43.5 × 30.2 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/ Centre de création industrielle

Troncs d'arbres [Tree trunks], 1931
Pencil on paper
28.5 × 22 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Sammlung Scharf-Gerstenberg

Helen Levitt
(1913–2009)

N.Y. (5 Cent Soda), c. 1939/2000
Gelatin silver print
110 × 72.5 cm
Galerie Thomas Zander

N.Y. (Angel on Door), c. 1939/2000
Gelatin silver print
75.7 × 113 cm
Galerie Thomas Zander

N.Y. (Button to Secret Passage), c. 1939/2000
Gelatin silver print
77 × 87 cm
Galerie Thomas Zander

Eli Lotar
(1905–69)

From *Aux abattoirs de La Villette [At the abattoirs of La Villette], 1929*

Artists' list

Gelatin silver print

52 × 30 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/ Centre de création industrielle

From *Aux abattoirs de La Villette* [*At the abattoirs of La Villette*], 1929

Gelatin silver print

32.2 × 41.4 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/ Centre de création industrielle

Black Birds dans leur loge [*Blackbirds in their dressing-room*], 1929

Gelatin silver print

28 × 40 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/ Centre de création industrielle

Portrait de Feral Benga [*Portrait of Feral Benga*], c. 1929

Gelatin silver print

30 × 40 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/ Centre de création industrielle

Portrait de Feral Benga [*Portrait of Feral Benga*],

c. 1930

Gelatin silver print

40 × 30 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/ Centre de création industrielle

Len Lye

(1901–80)

Tusalava, 1929

Silent film, 16 mm (original), b/w, 10 min

André Masson

(1896–1987)

Construction d'un homme [*Building a man*], 1939

Ink on paper

55.5 × 65.5 cm

Private collection, Paris

Dessin automatique [*Automatic drawing*], 1924

Indian ink on paper

27 × 21 cm

Private collection

Artists' list

La beauté géométrique (IV de 3 Anatomie de mon univers) [Geometric beauty (IV of 3 anatomy of my universe)], 1939

Indian ink on paper
47.9 × 63 cm
Private collection

La ville crânienne [The cranial city], 1939

Indian ink and watercolor on paper
35 × 44 cm
Galerie Natalie Seroussi, Paris

Le génie de l'Espèce [The genius of the species], 1940

Ink on paper,
41.6 × 31.5 cm
Private collection, Paris

Le Massacre [The massacre], 1931

Indian ink on paper
35 × 32 cm
Galerie Natalie Seroussi, Paris

Le thé chez Franco [Tea at Franco's], 1938

Ink on paper
45.5 × 58 cm
Galerie de la Béraudière

Illustration, 1939, in Guy Levis-Mano, *Crane sans lois [Lawless skull]*, illustrations by Andre Masson.
Paris: GLM, 1939, Private collection, Berlin

Massacre. L'enlèvement des Sabines [Massacre: Rape of the Sabines], 1933

Quill drawing and Indian ink on paper
40.5 × 55 cm
Galerie Natalie Seroussi, Paris

Melancolie du Minotaure [Minotaur's melancholy], 1938

Quill drawing and Indian ink on paper
50.5 × 65.8 cm
Galerie Natalie Seroussi, Paris

Cover illustration, *Minotaure*, nos 12–13 (1938). Paris: Skira · Archiv der Avantgarden, Sammlung Egidio Marzona, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Portrait de Benjamin Peret – dessin automatique [Portrait of Benjamin Perret – automatic drawing], c. 1924–25

Indian ink on paper
31.7 × 23.2 cm
Galerie de la Béraudière

Artists' list

Revolte dans la cuisine [Rebellion in the kitchen], 1940

Indian ink on paper

48 × 63 cm

Galerie Natalie Seroussi, Paris

Illustration, 1946 In Tristan Tzara, *Terre sur Terre*, drawings by Andre Masson.

Geneva: Trois Collines, 1946

Private collection, Berlin

Joan Miró

(1893–1983)

Cover illustration, in *Minotaure*, no. 7 (1936) Paris: Skira ▪ Archiv der Avantgarden, Sammlung Egidio Marzona, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Max von Moos

(1903–79)

Bote aus dem Jenseits [Messenger from the hereafter], 1940

Oil on cardboard

21.5 × 15 cm

Erica Ebinger-Leutwyler Stiftung, Lucerne

Rolf Nesch

(1893–1975)

Landungsbrücken [Jetties], 1932

Metal print on vellum

59.7 × 45 cm

Private collection

Solomon Nikritin

(1889–1965)

Spiral, 1920–39

Watercolor and charcoal on paper (reproduction),

29.5 × 20.3

Courtesy the State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki

Spiral, 1920–39

Watercolor and charcoal on paper (reproduction),

29.5 × 20.3

Courtesy the State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki

Artists' list

Spiral, 1920–39

Watercolor and charcoal on paper (reproduction),

29.5 × 20.3

Courtesy the State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki

Richard Oelze

(1900–80)

Baumlandschaft [Tree landscape], c. 1935

Pencil on cardboard

42.3 × 56 cm

Galerie Brockstedt/Berlin

Frieda II, 1935

Colored chalks on black cardboard

38.3 × 31 cm

Galerie Brockstedt/Berlin

Landschaft [Landscape], 1934

Pencil on paper

10.5 × 15 cm

Galerie Brockstedt/ Berlin

Wolfgang Paalen

(1905–59)

Fumage [Smoked], 1937

Candle smoke on paper, mounted on cardboard,

22.6 × 31 cm

Private collection, Berlin

Lutin cedre [Cedar goblin], 1938

Oil and smoke on wooden board on wooden
panel,

27.5 × 35.5 cm

Private collection, Berlin

Reise durch British Columbia [Journey across British Columbia], 1939

Film, 2 min

Paalen Archiv Berlin, Paalen–Nachlass

Jean Painlevé

(1902–89)

Hyas et stenorinques [Hyas and Stenorhynchus, marine crustaceans], 1928

Film, 35 mm (original), b/w, 9 min, sound, music: Frédéric Chopin

Artists' list

Alexandra Povòrina
(1885–1963)

Eigensinn [Obstinacy], 1929

Oil on canvas

71.5 × 61.5 cm

Permanent loan of Haspa at Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg

Ying & Yang, 1933

Oil on canvas

124.5 × 105 cm

Permanent loan of Haspa at Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg

Jean Renoir
(1894–1979)

Sur un air de Charleston [Charleston parade], 1926

Silent film, 35 mm (original), b/w, c. 20 min

Gaston-Louis Roux
(1904–88)

Composition, 1928

Crayon with gouache on paper

31.4 × 42.4 cm

Hermann und Margrit Rupf-Stiftung, Kunstmuseum Bern

Composition, 1930

Gouache on paper

27 × 43.9 cm

Hermann und Margrit Rupf-Stiftung, Kunstmuseum Bern

Illustration, 1930

In Carl Einstein, *Entwurf einer Landschaft*. Paris: Éditions de la Galerie Simon, 1930 · Private collection, Berlin.

Franz Wilhelm Seiwert
(1894–1933)

Entwurf für einen Grabstein [Design for a gravestone], 1929

Bronze with golden brown patina

23.9 × 12.4 × 6.1 cm

Private collection

Artists' list

Kurt Seligmann
(1900–62)

Illustration, 1935

In Pierre Courthion, *Bal*, with an image by Kurt Seligmann, Book 2 of 12. Paris: Editions GLM, 1935 · Private collection, Berlin

From *Les vagabondages heraldiques*, Nr. 4 "L'homme du gaz" [*Heraldic meanderings*, no. 4: The gas man], 1933–34

Etching and aquatint

34 × 24.6 cm

Private collection, Berlin

From *Les vagabondages heraldiques*, Nr. 14 "Le roi du charbon" [*Heraldic wanderings*, no. 14: The king of coal], 1933–34

Etching

24.7 × 19.7 cm

Private collection, Berlin

Kurt Seligmann and Pierre Courthion, *Metiers des Hommes*. Paris: GLM, 1936

Private collection, Berlin

Noctambulation, 1941–42

Etching

25 × 18.7 cm

Private collection, Berlin

Untitled, 1937

Drawing In *Cahiers G.L.M.*, no. 5 (1937). Paris: GLM. Private collection, Berlin

Untitled, 1941

Silkscreen

16.5 × 23.5 cm

Front cover, exh. Cat. Kurt Seligmann, Exhibition, April 21–May 12, 1941, Nierendorf Gallery, NY. New York: Nierendorf Gallery 1941 · Private collection, Berlin

Kalifala Sidibé
(c. 1900–30)

Malian Women, 1929

Oil on canvas

69.5 × 66 cm

Michael Graham-Stewart

Artists' list

Untitled, n.d.
Oil on (unknown)
71 × 128 cm
Fondation Le Corbusier

Jindřich Štyrský
(1899–1942)

L'Homme seiche [Human cuttlefish], 1934
Oil on canvas
110 × 59 cm
Géraldine Galateau

Tekuta panenka [Liquid doll], 1934
Oil on canvas
100 × 73 cm
Géraldine Galateau

Toyen
(Marie Čerminova, 1902–80)

Illustration, 1932
In Markety d'Angouleme, *kralovny Navarske [Margaret of Navarre], Heptameron novel [Heptameron]*.
Prague: Družstevni prace, 1932.

Frontispiece, 1937
In Georges Bernanos, *Zločin [The crime]*. Prague: Symposion, 1937

Frontispiece, 1931
In Konstantin Biebl, *Plancius*. Prague: Sfinx B. Janda, 1931

Formes marines [Marine forms], 1933
Indian ink and watercolor on paper
21.3 × 13.5 cm and 13.5 × 12.5 cm
LEVY Galerie

Cover illustration, 1935
In Hermann Hesse, *Siddharthah. Indicka baseň [Siddhartha: An Indian poem]*. Prague: Družstevni
prace, 1935.

Frontispiece, 1933
In Claude Houghton, *Helenina Zahada [Helena's mystery]*. Prague: Symposion, 1933.

Artists' list

Magnetova žena [Magnetic woman], 1934

Oil on canvas
100 × 73 cm
Géraldine Galateau

Untitled (Blatt und Augen) [Leaf and eyes], 1932

Brush and pen in black on vellum
19.3 × 16.3 cm
Florian Sundheimer

Untitled, 1933

Colored ink and watercolor on paper
27 × 22 cm
Florian Sundheimer

Frontispiece, 1933

In Jakob Wassermann, Stanleyovo Africké dobrodružství (Bula Matari) [Bula Matari: Stanley's life].
Prague: Symposion, 1933.

Raoul Ubac

(Rolf Ubach, 1910–85)

Agui au miroir au tain endommagé [Agui in a mirror with a damaged surface], 1932–33/2008

Gelatin silver print
25.5 × 19 cm
Private collection, Berlin

La Nébuleuse [The nebulous], 1939

Gelatin silver print
40 × 28.3 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris Musée national d'art moderne/ Centre de création industrielle

Le Combat de Penthesilee [The battle of Penthesilea], 1937

Photomontage, solarization, gelatin silver print
18.3 × 24.1 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle

Untitled, 1938

Photomontage, solarization, gelatin silver print,
26.5 × 39.6 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle

Artists' list

Frits van den Berghe
(1883–1939)

Engel boven brandende Stad [Angel above burning city], 1929
Oil on canvas
87 × 72 cm
Private collection, Düsseldorf

Fetisjen [Fetishes], 1928
Oil on canvas on wood
49.5 × 38 cm
Galerie Oscar de Vos

Paniek onder de Dieren [Panic among the animals], 1936
Oil on canvas on wood
49.5 × 52 cm
Galerie Oscar de Vos

Paule Vézelay
(1892–1984)

Drapeaux d'hiver [Winter flags], 1930
Oil on canvas
96.5 × 146 cm
England & Co Gallery

Walking in the Wind, 1930
Oil on canvas
73 × 92 cm
England & Co Gallery

WOLS

(Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze, 1913–51)

Untitled, c. 1940
Watercolor and ink on paper
21.5 × 23.7 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Sammlung Scharf–Gerstenberg

Untitled, c. 1941
Indian ink, watercolor, and opaque white on paper
38 × 31.8 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Sammlung Scharf–Gerstenberg

Artists' list

Catherine Yarrow
(1904–90)

Amorphic Figure, c. 1935
Etching and aquatint
17 × 17 cm
Austin Desmond Fine Art

Black and Green Faced Figures, 1935
Gouache and watercolor
46.5 × 33.8 cm
Austin Desmond Fine Art

Crouching Female, 1935
Watercolor
35.2 × 32.5 cm
Austin Desmond Fine Art

Kneeling Purple Figure (Morges), 1935
Watercolor
43.8 × 28.9 cm
Austin Desmond Fine Art

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Biographies of the Curators



Anselm Franke is a curator and writer based in Berlin. He is Head of Visual Arts and Film at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), where he curated the exhibitions *The Whole Earth; After Year Zero* (both 2013), *Forensis* (2014), *Ape Culture* (2015), and *Nervous Systems* (2016), among others. In 2012, he curated the Taipei Biennial, and in 2014, the Shanghai Biennial. Franke's exhibition project *Animism* has been presented in Antwerp, Bern, Vienna, Berlin, New York, Shenzhen, Seoul, and Beirut in various collaborations from 2010 to 2014.

Tom Holert works as an art historian, writer, curator and artist in Berlin. In 2015 he co-founded the Harun Farocki Institut in Berlin. During the 1990s he was an editor with *Texte zur Kunst* and a publisher of *Spex* magazine in Cologne; since then Holert taught and conducted research at Merz Akademie in Stuttgart, ZHdK in Zurich, at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and FU Berlin, among others; in 2012 he was a founding member of the Academy of the Arts of the World in Cologne. Recent book publications include: *Marion von Osten. Once We Were Artists* (2017, ed. with Maria Hlavajova), *Troubling Research. Performing Knowledge in the Arts* (2014, with Johanna Schaffer et al.), *Übergriffe. Zustände und Zuständigkeiten der Gegenwartskunst* (2014). An exhibition on learning and research environments of the 1960s and 1970s at HKW is scheduled for 2020.

Biographies Advisory Board

Irene Albers is Professor for General and Comparative Literature and Romance Philology at the Freie Universität Berlin. The focus of her research is the relationship between literature and photography, the embodiment of the emotions in Romanic novels, and the relationship between literature and ethnology amongst Surrealist circles and the Collège des Sociologie, in particular Michel Leiris. She is the editor, amongst other works, of the German translation of *Collège de sociologie 1937–1939* (2012, with Stephan Moebius) and the volume *Animismus – Revisionen der Moderne* (2012, with Anselm Franke). 2018 will see the publication of *Der diskrete Charme der Anthropologie – Michel Leiris' ethnologische Poetik* by Konstanz University Press.

Susanne Leeb is an art historian and is working as professor for Contemporary Art with a focus on transcultural art histories at the Leuphana University Lüneburg. There she is also directing the Kunstraum (in collaboration with Ulf Wuggenig) and the Leuphana Arts Program. She published her PhD "The Art of the Others. ‚World Art‘ and the Anthropological Configuration of Modernity" in 2015. She is also editor of the section „Transcultural Art History“ of the online review journal *Kunstform*, co-editing the book series POLYPEN with bbooks, Berlin, and she is part of the advisory board of *Texte zur Kunst* and has co-edited in 2017 the issues „We are you“ (No 105.) including an essay on „Local Time. The Presence of Antiquity“, and „Idiom“ (No. 108) including an essay on „Idioms. The Minor ‚a's of Art“.

Jenny Nachtigall works at the Institute for Philosophy and Aesthetic Theory of the Academy of Fine Arts Munich. In 2016 she completed her PhD "Beyond Modernism. Form as Contradiction in Berlin Dada" at University College London. She currently works on the after-lives of vitalism in modern and contemporary art and theory. Recent publications include "Realism after Fetishism", in: *Die Wirklichkeit des Realismus*, (2018, Veronika Thanner, Joseph Vogl, Dorothea Walzer) and *Klassensprachen – Written Praxis* (2017 ed. with Manuela Ammer, Eva Birkenstock, Kerstin Stakemeier, Stephanie Weber). She writes for *Texte zur Kunst*, *Artforum* a.o.

Kerstin Stakemeier is Professor for Art Theory and Education at the Academy of the Fine Arts Nuremberg. She is the editor, amongst other works, of *Painting-The Implicit Horizon* (2012, with Avigail Moss), *Macht des Materials/Politik der Materialität* (2014, with Susanne Witzgall) and *Klassensprachen 0* (2017, with Manuela Ammer, Eva Birkenstock, Jenny Nachtigall and Stephanie Weber), a magazine project with exhibitions of the same name (district Berlin, Kunstverein Düsseldorf). 2016 saw the publication of *Reproducing Autonomy* (with Marina Vishmidt), and 2017 *Entgrenzter Formalismus. Verfahren einer antimodernen Ästhetik*.

Global Art 1929: Kalifala Sidibé

Art creations by contemporary “others” were not part of the discussion about “world art” in the early twentieth century. It is also in relation to art that the category of the “primitive” produces what Johannes Fabian, in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (1983), calls “allochrony”: the others being denied the shared present. “Primitive art” is removed from (European) time. With the help of allochrony, Western modernity defines itself as the norm for the present. While it is perfectly natural since the end of the First World War for black musicians and dancers to perform in Paris, in the realm of fine art, “*art nègre*” continues to be associated with an anonymous and faceless art, expected to be as free as possible from European influences. At the same time, contemporary modern art, so intensively scrutinized by a magazine like *Documents*, is created by white European men. Although African-American painters like Palmer Hayden (1890–1973) or Hale Woodruff (1900–80) study in Paris and are exhibited by renowned galleries,¹ the general perception is that, with the exception of the rock paintings documented by Leo Frobenius and others, there is no African painting, especially no signed panel paintings in the European sense, only masks and sculptures. When the pictures of Kalifala Sidibé (1900?–1930²), who was from Kankan in present-day Guinea and lived in Mali (both, at that time, part of French Sudan and part of French colonial territory), are exhibited in the Paris Galerie Georges Bernheim in November 1929, these interpretative patterns, based on the “primitive”/“modern” dichotomy, experience a significant crisis. This is evident both in the press reactions to the exhibition and in Le Corbusier’s and Michel Leiris’ texts on Kalifala Sidibé. Apart from the discussions of jazz, the *Blackbird Revue*, and the dancer Benga Féral, Leiris’ exhibition review is the only article in *Documents* devoted to a contemporary non-European artist.

Due to his early death and small number of works, Kalifala Sidibé quickly fell into oblivion, unlike two painters from the Belgian Congo, Albert Lubaki and Tshyela Ntendu (Djilatendo). Their works came to Paris (via Brussels) at the same time, and were rediscovered in the 1970s and 1980s as “the first ‘modern’ works of art from Africa.”³ The white “discoverers” of these artists in the 1920s wanted to promote a form of “art nègre” that showed their ability to draw and paint “in our style,” as Georges Hardy, a colonial administrator and author of *L’art nègre: l’art animiste des noirs de l’Afrique* (1927), paternalistically puts it. The “mission civilisatrice” contains a mission of aesthetic education, according to European ideas. Kalifala Sidibé, cited by Hardy as an example of this new contemporary artist from Africa, did not, according to the latter, have to remain an isolated case if properly promoted.⁴ A review of the Lubaki exhibition shows how powerful the prejudices still were: The

¹ Hayden exhibits in 1927 at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune; Woodruff in 1930 at the Galerie Jeune Peinture. See Theresa Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris—African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light 1922–1934*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

² There are no reliable sources concerning the painter’s biography. The information that he is from “Cankan in Mali” can be found in Michael Stevenson and Joost Bosland, *“Take your Road and Travel Along”: The Advent of the Modern Black Painter in Africa*. Michael Stevenson, Michael Graham-Stewart and Johan Borman. Exhibition catalogue, Johannesburg, 2008, p. 40. According to an article in *Berliner Illustrierte* (“The Black Raphael,” December 15, 1929) Sidibé went from Guinea to the land of the Bambara in Mali, following conflicts with his family triggered by his painting. The source is probably Georges Huisman’s catalogue contribution for Galerie Bernheim, *Kalifala Sidibé par Roland Dorgelès, Le Corbusier, G. Huisman*, Paris, 1929. I would like to thank Hélène Serre de Talhouët (Lille), who made a reproduction of the copy from the Huisman family archive available to me.

³ Cf. Ulli Beier, “Auf der Suche nach der schwarzen Malerei. Dokumente zur Rezeption von Lubaki und Djilatendo,” *Trickster* 14 (August 1985): pp. 28–48, here p. 28.

⁴ For Hardy, see Yanagisawa Fumiaki, “Le renouvellement des arts africains et l’administration coloniale: le cas de Georges Hardy,” *Aesthetics: The Japanese Society for Aesthetics*, no. 19 (2015): pp. 27–38; and Hardy’s own

Global Art 1929: Kalifala Sidibé – Irene Albers

reviewer doubts that the pictures were painted by an African, alleging that Carlo Rim is the creator and invented the story about the painter being Congolese.⁵ With regard to Kalifala Sidibé, stereotypical reference is made to the almost unbelievable “peculiarity of the case”: “his production stands in stark contrast to what we otherwise know as the art of indigenous people.”⁶ The fact that there are painters in Africa seemingly has to be proven in the first place.

Henri Hirsch probably has to be regarded as the “discoverer” of Kalifala Sidibé. He was a banker working in French West Africa, who became head of the “Compagnie de culture cotonnière du Niger” and received his own concession in Diré in present-day Guinea. In May 1929, Hirsch writes to his childhood friend, the politician and publicist (and later founder of the Cannes Film Festival) Georges Huisman: “With this letter, I’m sending you the photos of the black man; I have the negatives here, as well as a little novel about his life. I think this will please you and will, at least one day, become a great colonial matter that France can be proud of and that the other countries will be envious of.”⁷ Hirsch finances the projects, buying, among other things, canvases and colors for Kalifala Sidibé, who at first—if this is not already the “little novel”—apparently only paints with marking color on jute sacks (from his work in the cotton factory).⁸ He also organizes and pays for the transport of the rolled paintings to Paris, as well as the framing and the creation of photos for press and advertising. Huisman in turn is responsible for the contact to the Galerie Georges Bernheim, the design of the exhibition (the frames are created by the designer Bolette Natanson) and the catalogue, and will later also bring the paintings to galleries in Germany (Galerie Flechtheim in Berlin from January 19 to February 1, 1930, followed by the Kunstverein Hamburg, Prague, Vienna, Wiesbaden, Düsseldorf) and Stockholm (Gummenssons Konsthall, May 1930). Approximately twenty-five large-scale and ten smaller works are exhibited.

In Huisman’s estate there is a list with forty-two picture titles and the projected sales prices. Unfortunately, no exhibition views survive. Only a few of the paintings seem to have survived at all: One of them depicts Malian women in front of village huts with one woman looking at herself in the mirror.⁹ Another, featuring a hunter with a lion and an elephant, can be seen at the Fondation Le Corbusier, in whose study it hung at the beginning of the 1930s, as evidenced by a Brassai photo.¹⁰ The architect seems to have acquired another painting in which, against a background of serially depicted huts, figures can be seen painting calabashes with ornaments, the painter thus mirroring his artistic activity in an indigenous practice. Inferences concerning Kalifala Sidibé’s other works may

account of the program for the acculturation of art practices in “Le noir d’Afrique et la civilisation européenne,” *La Revue de Paris*, vol. 44, no. 8 (1937): pp. 846–65, here p. 854.

⁵ Odette Panetier, “Ein schwarzer Picasso,” *Candide*, 21 (November 1929), cited from the German translation in Beier, “Auf der Suche nach der schwarzen Malerei,” p. 31.

⁶ Wolfgang Born, “Der Negermaler Kalifala Sidibé,” *Österreichische Kunst* (April 1930), pp. 39–40, here p. 40.

⁷ “Je t’envoie ce-inclus les photos du nègre, j’ai ici les clichés et un petit roman sur son existence. Je pense que cela te satisfera et qu’on pourra faire au moins une fois une grande affaire coloniale dont la France sera fière et que l’étranger nous enviera.” Unpublished letter from Henri Hirsch to Georges Huisman from May 29, 1929, cited in Hélène Serre de Talhouët, “Placé pour être utile: Georges Huisman à la Direction Générale des Beaux-arts (1934–1940),” unpublished PhD thesis, Université Charles de Gaulle/Lille III, 2015, p. 101 <<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-01249615/>> accessed September 13, 2017. All further information concerning the exhibition, if not indicated otherwise, is derived from this work; the cited documents are from the Huisman family archive.

⁸ Cf. the information is taken largely from Roland Dorgelès’ and Georges Huisman’s catalogue texts in “Un noir jugé par un blanc,” *L’intransigeant*, (November 24, 1929), and in “Kalifala Sidibé,” *Beaux-Arts* (November 1929): p. 22.

⁹ Michael Graham-Stewart Collection. In this respect, see the commentary in Stevenson and Bosland, “Take your road and travel along,” p. 7.

¹⁰ Published in Brassai, *Les artistes de ma vie*. Paris: Éditions Denoel, 1982, p. 88.

Global Art 1929: Kalifala Sidibé – Irene Albers

only be drawn from the mostly black-and-white illustrations in the contemporary press¹¹ and the images of photographer Marius Gravot, kept in the Fondation Le Corbusier. Judging from these, the paintings depict the life-world of the painter's village, often people and animals in a frieze-like landscape format (which Leiris will discuss): scenes by the Niger with bathing children and washing women, men and boys fishing, a village festival, a parade with two masked men on a stretcher, praying men in front of a mosque, a caravan with donkeys, women in the village, the preparing of food, musicians, elephant hunting with a rifle, shepherds, a family (a man with two women, two children, two dogs) encountering a tiger in the forest, a hunter surprising a lion who is attacking an elephant. A self-portrait shows Sidibé painting, sitting at a table in front of his hut, watched by a woman. The picture depicting a giant snake devouring a man, discussed by Leiris, seems to be more of a "surreal" exception in this body of work. Among the photos taken by Gravot, there is only one similarly phantasmagorical painting: the depiction of a hybrid creature between fish and lion attacking a woman.¹² On the whole, it is not only in the scene with the mirror or the self-portrait that one can clearly recognize what Michael Stevenson and Joost Bosland call an assimilation of the language of European painting into an "African idiom," as a dialogue between aesthetic traditions.¹³

Tellingly, the picture on the cover of the catalogue published by Galerie Bernheim is not one of the paintings, but a photo of the painter and his family in front of a hut with two paintings, also shown alongside the German translation of Le Corbusier's text "Der Negermaler Kalifala Sidibé" in *Der Querschnitt* from December 1929. Kalifala Sidibé, who is not allowed to travel to Paris for the opening of the exhibition, is thus placed in a "primitive" setting. At the same time, it serves as photographic proof for the authenticity of this "phenomenon." The biography of the painter Huisman writes for the catalogue similarly has an authenticating function, while texts by Le Corbusier, who is a friend of Huisman, and the writer Roland Dorgelès are seemingly intended as an interpretative framework. In the absence of categories, the commentators make do with references to the painter's "race," with a statement of general negrophilia ("J'AIME les nègres" is the motto of Dorgelès' contribution), and speculative art-historical comparisons: For Dorgelès he is a "Giotto of the Black Continent,"¹⁴ while Le Corbusier, who will publish his contribution in several other newspapers, associates Sidibé's painting with Oriental art (Persian, Arabic, Indian). For Huisman, finally, he is an African revenant of "Douanier Rousseau's" "naïve" painting. It is clear that in the catalogue, art theoretical categories are already unraveling.

As part of the attempt to mobilize the press for the exhibition, a letter from the editors of *Documents*—quoted by Hélène Serre de Talhouët—is sent to Huisman on August 31, 1929, promising a meeting with Georges Henri Rivière and Pierre d'Espezel at the end of September for the purpose of previewing Sidibé's paintings.¹⁵ Although the show at Galerie Bernheim, which runs October 15–30,

¹¹ Kalifala Sidibé: *On the banks of the Niger*, pictured in *Comœdia* (October 15, 1929) and *Berliner Illustrierte* (December 15, 1929); *The Promenade*, pictured in *Omnibus* (1931), Owner: Ludwig Katzenellenbogen, Berlin; *Caravan* pictured in *Der Querschnitt*, vol. 9, no. 12 (1929); *Snake Devouring a Man*, pictured in *Documents*, 6 (1929); *untitled* (Man and Woman), pictured in *Le Populaire* (November 24, 1929); *Village Festival*, pictured in *Cicerone 2* (1930); *Self Portrait*, pictured in Stevenson and Bosland, "Take your road and travel along," p. 8; *By the Niger* (Fishing Scene), *Elephant Hunt*, and *Paris' Judgement*, pictured in the cigarette card collection album *Die Bunte Welt*. Leipzig: Julius Klinkhardt Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1931, p. 37. I wish to thank Tom Holert for pointing me to this publication. The image titles were certainly created by the gallery.

¹² Fondation Le Corbusier, Photo no. 59. In Georges Huisman's article, "La peinture nègre inconnue. Kalifala Sidibé," *La Lumière* (November 2, 1929), where he emphasizes the "visions phantasmagoriques" and the "hallucinations" of many images. I wish to thank Hélène Serre for a reproduction of the article.

¹³ Stevenson and Bosland, "Take your road and travel along," p. 9.

¹⁴ At the meeting of the *Journal des débats* (P.F.) on October 18, 1929, this becomes the slogan "une sorte de Giotto du continent noir."

¹⁵ Cf. Serre de Talhouët, "Placé pour être utile," p. 104, n. 501. One may assume that Rivière and d'Espezel take

Global Art 1929: Kalifala Sidibé – Irene Albers

must have been disappointing in commercial terms (only four pictures are sold), the feedback is considerable. The press essentially focuses on elements of what Henri Hirsch had already proposed as the “little novel” about the painter, the story that is supposed to launch his career in Paris and sell his works. Central to this is the narrative about an “authentic” black painter who developed his painting style in a wholly autonomous and autodidactic fashion, without ever leaving his village “sur les bords du Niger”¹⁶ or coming in contact with European painting, except on postcards or in magazines.¹⁷ According to Huisman, this proved that the statement “La peinture nègre, cela n’existe pas” is due solely to ignorance concerning African art.¹⁸ To distract himself, Kalifala Sidibé had begun to paint the factory’s jute sacks. His patron had encouraged him in this.¹⁹ At the same time, the “nègre artiste peintre,” as Dorgelès puts it in his catalogue text, was unique.²⁰ For he was not a typical “evolved black man” (*noir évolué*), who had learned how to draw in a colonial school (as Hardy imagines it) or in a European metropolis, but a “pure Sudanese” (*pur Soudanais*), an “unmixed black man (*sans mélange*), who eats yam roots, worships crocodiles and dries meat on the roof of his hut.”²¹ In order to create a journalistic sensation, it is claimed that “this primitive” had “invented painting”: A critic for *Beaux-Arts*, who is nonetheless skeptical of this narrative of a complete absence of aesthetic education, asserts that “if the black artist has really invented this technique on his own, he is a kind of genius in his own species.”²² Dorgelès claims that Sidibé, without ever having seen any painted images or brushes before, and driven by the “need to copy nature,” had one day portrayed his wife on a piece of cotton with the red and green colors used to label the cotton bags in the factory. “Six centuries later, under a different sky, the marvelous story of Giotto repeats itself.”²³ This is a reference to the legend of Giotto the shepherd, as told by Vasari, who, as a kind of natural or divine genius, had one day drawn a flock of sheep on a stone. Like Giotto, Sidibé “has invented painting, propelled by his tribe’s deity or the spirit of the wind.”²⁴ By “repeating” Giotto, Sidibé seems to have delivered the proof for the anthropological universality of the European “invention” of painting. He no longer is a subject with a specific experience or history, but the medium of a creation through “inspiration.” Huisman recounts that Sidibé, when asked why he could paint and if he had ever seen European paintings, remained silent and referred to “the devil,” which the author immediately likens to an “artist, who is driven by an inner demon.”²⁵ As a German article pointedly puts it: “he himself does not want to [paint], but he has to.” The German author of these words, Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, alludes to a conflict ignored by the French press, when he reports that “Mohammedan religion” proscribed painting, and that because of this “sacrilege” Sidibé had to leave his home and migrate to French Niger.²⁶ Here, Sidibé appears typically modern, forced to break with his religion and culture.

their editorial secretary, Leiris, with them to the appointment and that he is subsequently tasked with reviewing the exhibition.

¹⁶ According to the information in *L’Intransigeant*, 24 (November 1929). See evidence for “nègre authentique” in Yanagisawa Fumiaki, “La naissance du tableau en Afrique noire,” *Aesthetics: The Japanese Society for Aesthetics*, no. 20 (2016), 38–49, here p. 42.

¹⁷ Cf. Huisman’s draft letter, cited in Serre de Talhouët, “Placé pour être utile,” p. 106.

¹⁸ Huisman, “La peinture nègre inconnue. Kalifala Sidibé.”

¹⁹ This is the “pretty story,” according to a review entitled “Les œuvres nègres” (J.-R. M.), *Le Journal* (October 30, 1929).

²⁰ “I have never seen a black painter” (“Je n’ai jamais vu de nègre artiste peintre”). Dorgelès’ catalogue contribution entitled “Kalifala Sidibé peintre soudanais” was also published in *Comœdia* (October 15, 1929).

²¹ “Kalifala Sidibé peintre soudanais” (catalogue), unpaginated.

²² Anon., “Kalifala Sidibé,” *Beaux-Arts* (November 1929): p. 22: In the face of such painterly skill and humor, the author suspects “a less primitive education and life as is claimed” (“une éducation et une vie moins primitive qu’on ne l’affirme”).

²³ Dorgelès, „Kalifala Sidibé peintre soudanais“ (catalogue).

²⁴ “Poussé par le Dieu de sa tribu ou le Génie du vent, ce primitif a inventé la peinture!” Ibid.

²⁵ Huisman, “La peinture nègre inconnue. Kalifala Sidibé.”

²⁶ Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, “Das Herz Europas,” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, vol. 36, no. 70 (1930): pp. 145–

Global Art 1929: Kalifala Sidibé – Irene Albers

Only thus was he able to create his “picture series of monumental simplicity and the greatness of folksy depiction.” This characterization in turn follows Dorgelès, who describes the aesthetic quality of Sidibé’s pictures with the attributes “naïve frankness” (*franchise naïve*) and “childlike truth” (*enfantine vérité*). The genuine guilelessness, which did not merely hide artistic incompetence, was reminiscent of Henri Rousseau. Sidibé sang and danced with colors, not thinking about what he was doing. Recurrent is the implicitly derogatory comparison with “our peasant painting,” while some others believe they recognize Matisse.²⁷

Le Corbusier is different: He tries to situate Kalifala Sidibé’s painting, which for him is neither modern nor traditional (“peinture ni moderne ni ancienne”), as a pictorial “écriture” alongside the new monumental language of architecture. Here, painting becomes a new language: “When I was invited to see the work of the Negro painter Kalifala Sidibé, I was able to read contemporary Negro stories on the impressive stretch of painted calicos, told with great precision, written with the brush, with the colors, which are the colors.”²⁸ The architect and theoretician emphasizes the “painter’s genius” and “his intuitive qualities as a sculptor,” less to primitivize his style than to trace it back to an Asian influence, here “racially” mediated, “as if he belongs to those peoples (*racés*), who were connected via Arabia with the Persians and the Hindus.” In the end, this “uncultivated black man” (*ce nègre inculte*) is appropriated for Le Corbusier’s own cause, for a new truth, which no longer comes from the academies.²⁹ Maybe Le Corbusier, like Huisman, thinks of the African’s large-scale paintings as an ideal decoration for the concrete walls of the new architecture, a renewal of the art of the fresco, which might also be the reason why he asks Fernand Léger for a catalogue contribution.³⁰

Besides the appropriation of Sidibé’s painting by the advocates of the “esprit nouveau,” articles by conservative critics refuse to recognize as art what was “reminiscent of the scribbling of a European peasant,” suggesting that the painter should first of all attend art school.³¹ One of the few newspaper articles that question the official narrative and mock Corbusier’s assumption of a stylistic connection to Persia, as well as the assertion that one is dealing with “something never seen before,” appears in November 1929, in the *Revue hebdomadaire*. The author also disputes the thesis of a “besoin de copier la nature,” operating as it were beyond any specific culture, and ultimately characterizes Sidibé’s pictures—one cannot make do without categorical projections—as less realist than surrealist, because: “ce nègre croit à la magie de l’art.”³² The critical conclusion situates the “primitive” in the European past: “There are no children anymore, the blacks become white (*blanchissent*) [...], and the last primitive was our Douanier Rousseau.”³³

47, here p. 146.

²⁷“Peasant painting” appears in a review of the Berlin exhibition: “Rundschau,” *Cicerone* 1 (1930): p. 83; the Matisse reference is from Paul Fierens, *Revue hebdomadaire* (November 9, 1929): p. 234.

²⁸ Le Corbusier, “Der Negermaler Kalifala Sidibé,” *Der Querschnitt*, vol. 9, no. 12 (1929): p. 888; French: “Kalifala Sidibé,” *Omnibus* (1931): p. 32.

²⁹ The catalogue text is reproduced with the title “Le Corbusier et Kalifala,” in *L'intransigeant*, 21 (October 1929). Le Corbusier publishes the same text in *Omnibus – Almanach auf das Jahr 1931*, p. 32, as well as in *Le Populaire* (October 24, 1929), and in a German translation with the title, “Der Negermaler Kalifala Sidibé,” *Der Querschnitt* (December 1929): p. 888, where the image of the painter in front of his hut can be found on p. 890.

³⁰ Cf. Huisman, “La peinture nègre inconnue. Kalifala Sidibé.” In this respect, see Serre de Talhouët, “Placé pour être utile,” pp. 101, 104 (Léger).

³¹ For example, Roland Elissa-Rhais, “Kalifala Sidibé peintre soudanais,” *Les annales coloniales* (October 17, 1929) (“gribouillages d’un paysan d’Europe”) and René-Jean, “Types nègres dans l’art d’aujourd’hui et de hier,” *Comœdia* (October 24, 1929).

³² Anon., “Chronique artistique,” *La Revue hebdomadaire* (November 29, 1929): pp. 234–35, here p. 235.

³³ “Il n’y a plus d’enfants, les nègres blanchissent [...]; et le dernier des primitifs fut notre douanier Rousseau,” in Anon., *ibid.*, p. 235.

Global Art 1929: Kalifala Sidibé – Irene Albers

When Leiris' article about the exhibition is published in the sixth issue of *Documents*, the discursive field is thus already laid out. Once again, it becomes clear how the "war machine"³⁴ *Documents* is based on dissent against the consensus, how the inverse "ethnologization"³⁵ of art criticism undermines the primitivistic and colonial-racist discourse. Instead of speculating about the "race noire" and its artistic abilities or "naivety," like the exhibition catalogue and the press, Leiris first of all describes his contemporaries and readers with precisely these concepts: "Conceited and naïve, the white race imagines itself to be alone in the world, arrogating to itself the privilege of intelligence and civilization."³⁶ The hierarchization of races (the darker, the more despicable) was a "completely arbitrary classification," corresponding to economic motives (or material greed). Distancing himself from any racially motivated interest, for which "everything that comes from the blacks is interesting," he criticizes the media attention on the "black painter" and its focus on the painter's skin color. The "Sudanese painter," as he calls him, was anything but a "pretentious" autodidact, who copied what he had seen in museums; instead his "pictures have a different charm" than the alleged "so-called naïve clumsiness" ("cette gaucherie soi-disant naïve"). Leiris refuses the reduction to those categories that had been the focus of the catalogue and the press, instead drawing attention to the subjects and style of the paintings. He thus adds an element—obvious in the context of *Documents*—to the often-helpless attempts to grasp the specificity of Kalifala Sidibé's work, when he characterizes the images as "inspired by African folklore" (*inspirés du folklore africain*), thereby referring aesthetics back to ethnology. As *Documents* also does this with contemporary European art—Carl Einstein writing about André Masson's totemism or Leiris about Alberto Giacometti's fetishism—it becomes a symmetrical gesture and not a form of *othering*.

Leiris explains what he means by "African folklore": "Here people and animals live in wonderful intimacy. This is a complete totemism (*le plein totémisme*), the absence of typically human arrogance."³⁷ Leiris might be thinking of the popular collections of African fairy tales, including many animal fables, in Cendrars' *Anthologie nègre* (Paris, 1921) or (for West Africa) in Moussa Travélé's *Proverbes et contes bambara* (Paris, 1923). In any case, "folklore" does not stand for a simpler, backward, or naïve world view, but for a different presence of the "marvelous," here as a negation of the difference between the human and the animal realms. As already intimated in Leiris' occultism essay,³⁸ this revaluation implies a devaluation of the dualism associated with Western modernity, which was indicative of "arrogance." Leiris thereby raises the question concerning the meaning of Sidibé's images to another level. For him, the images are documents of a different ontology³⁹ (here referred to as totemism), of an anti-anthropocentric relationship with nature, in which man, as in occultist tracts, does not place himself above all other beings. Analogously to Einstein, Leiris postulates a transformational force that the image, conceived in this way, exerts on the viewer. He takes this quite literally: "one becomes like those primitive heroes, who for their marriage have the choice between a woman, a tree, two or three weasels, some buffalos or a certain number of foxes."⁴⁰

³⁴ This is Leiris' phrase ("machine de guerre contre les idées reçues"), see "From the Impossible Bataille to the Impossible *Documents*" (1963), in Michel Leiris, *Brisées Broken Branches*. San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1989, pp. 237–47, here p. 241.

³⁵ This term stems from Klaus H. Kiefer, "Die Ethnologisierung des kunstkritischen Diskurses—Carl Einsteins Beitrag zu *Documents*," in Hubertus Gaßner (ed.), *Elan vital oder Das Auge des Eros*. Munich: Benteli, 1994, pp. 90–103.

³⁶ Leiris, "Exposition Kalifala Sidibé (Galerie. Georges Bernheim)," *Documents*, 6 (1929): p. 343.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ "Notes sur deux figures microcosmiques des XIVe et XVe siècles," *Documents*, 1 (1929): pp. 48–52, and "À propos du 'Musée des sorciers,'" *Documents*, nos 1/2 (1929): pp. 109–16. Translated as "Concerning the Witch Museum," in Neil Mathson (ed.), *Sources of Surrealism*. Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2006, pp. 567–69.

³⁹ For this analysis of totemism see Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013, Chapter 7, "Totemism as an Ontology."

⁴⁰ Leiris, "Exposition Kalifala Sidibé," p. 343.

Global Art 1929: Kalifala Sidibé – Irene Albers

The images transform the viewers, transposing them into a world in which, as Philippe Descola puts it with regard to the ontology of totemism, “there exists a moral and physical continuity between groups of humans and groups of nonhumans,”⁴¹ so that marriage between people and trees or animals, not only seems possible but quite natural. At the same time, Leiris is reminded of the genre of colonial nursery stories, also evoked in “L’œil de l’ethnographe” (*Documents*, 7, 1930) through the story “Little Black Sambo,” in which “black or white children fall victim to the thousand pranks played by mischievous animals [*animaux facétieux*]”; he thus once again emphasizes the connection with the imaginary world of children, including, as far as his choice of the image *Serpent avalant un homme* is concerned, with children’s nightmares. These nightmares are here anthropologized into transcultural archetypes and declared to be the source of “poetry” (no longer linked with the institution of literature). Thus, Leiris is able to mirror himself in the painting from West Africa, to create connections between the others’ imaginary and himself and between the others’ experience of alterity and his own. Sidibé’s painting comes as close as possible to the “elementary and dreadful constructions, which [...] sometimes leave traces on an entire life.”⁴² Even though he does not talk about himself in the first person, as in his contributions on Antoine Caron or Joan Miró, or like Einstein in his Arp essay, he places Sidibé’s man-devouring snake alongside the ambivalent images that fascinated him as a child.

Leiris’ short essay on the exhibition culminates in the declaration of his predilection for cultural mixing, turning against the presentation of the painter, dominant in the catalogue and the press, as a “pure African,” without contact to European culture. The reference to Sidibé’s Bambara ethnicity implies a “composite” identity, in the conflicting contexts of Islamization, colonization, and autochthonous traditions. In the end, he includes Sidibé in the tradition of cultural and aesthetic mixing, which extended from Roman sarcophagi, via Alexandrian philosophy, to black people in Harlem, but also included inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego, who wore European trousers—remnants of shipwrecks—in the same way that Kalifala Sidibé initially misappropriated jute sacks and marking colors, before painting with canvas and color. For Leiris, as is made clear in the only article in *Documents* about a truly contemporary “art of others,” the “ethnologization of art-critical discourse” constitutes a joyful farewell to Eurocentric myths and the condition for granting the “other” contemporaneity and their own agency in appropriating colonial culture.

Preliminary version, taken from the catalogue *Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930*

This text is an excerpt of Irene Albers book *Der diskrete Charme der Anthropologie - Michel Leiris' ethnologische Poetik*, published by: Konstanz University Press 2018.

⁴¹ Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, p. 165.

⁴² Leiris, “Exposition Kalifala Sidibé,” p. 343.

Primitivisms

As an intellectual problem with aesthetic, philosophical, anthropological, and psychiatric dimensions, primitivism is notoriously difficult to discuss, let alone represent in the context of the museum. As indicated by William Rubin's "Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art" (1984) at the Museum of Modern Art—but also by subsequent exhibitions that offered alternatives, to varying degree of success—primitivism as an explicit or implicit subject for exhibition seems doomed as a colonial or neocolonial enterprise.¹ This difficulty suggests that the contemporary era is still in search of a functional language for addressing a historical phenomenon that, perhaps more than any other, exposes Western bourgeois modernity's dependency on its "other." This dependency is material (the exploitation of indigenous labor and natural resources of the colonies) as well as symbolic (the construction of the primitive as the antipode of the modern, therefore justification for progress). So complete is this dependency that the *critique* of the same Western bourgeois modernity, for better or for worse, is likewise inextricable from reflections and practices that would be inconceivable without the European contact with non-European cultures. It is only in this sense that primitivism—a broad term for these reflections and practices, including but not limited to artistic ones—may be understood as a critical machine, aiming to aggravate the *crise de l'esprit* (Paul Valéry) within modern civilization. And this machine is arguably at its most powerful in the period between the two world wars, when its primary target—the life forms and values of the secular, industrial-capitalist societies of western Europe—faced the possibility of total collapse.

Schematically, one might describe two predominant and concurrent forms of primitivist thought in the European interwar period as *dialectical* and *subversive*. Both, to a large degree, are progenitors of surrealism, here understood not simply as an avant-garde movement initiated by poets and followed by artists, but a milieu for cultural formation that drew on contemporaneous research in philosophy, ethnology, psychoanalysis, and psychiatry. In contrast to prewar modernist primitivism, dialectical and subversive primitivisms in the late 1920s and 1930s saw aesthetic concerns (e.g. the influence of tribal objects on metropolitan European artists) not as ends in themselves but as instruments of critical thought. The latter took the contemporary crisis as an opportunity for dismantling the foundations of Western post-Enlightenment humanism, specifically its legitimization of reason as the sole form of authority. To this end, dialectical and subversive primitivisms accorded epistemological authority to modes of experience perceived as reason's "other": childhood, dream, hallucination, trance, and madness. Ranging from prosaic to pathological, these experiential modes have in common the passivity of the individual subject. Paradoxically, in order to theorize these states of *de-subjectification*, both dialectical and subversive primitivisms found it necessary to evoke figures of the primitive as speculative *ersatz subjects*: the peasant, the child, the troglodyte, the tribesperson, the schizophrenic. This sheer variety makes clear that the primitive does not exist other than as

¹ William Rubin (ed.), *"Primitivism" in Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, 2 vols. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984. Some of the exemplary criticisms of the MoMA exhibition and its naïvely universalist platform are re-published in Jack Flam (ed.), *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*. Berkeley, CA, et al: University of California Press, 2003. Jean-Hubert Martin's "Magiciens de la Terre" (1989) at the Centre Pompidou, the best-known alternative to "MoMA Primitivism," also received ample criticisms. See Jean-Hubert Martin, *Magiciens de la terre*. Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou and Musée National d'Art Moderne, 1989. For recent critical reflections on the exhibition in the context of global contemporary art, see Lucy Steeds (ed.), *Making Art Global (Part 2): "Magiciens de la Terre" 1989* (exhibition histories books and events). London: Afterall Books, 2013.

Primitivisms – Joyce S. Cheng

figures to whom the white, bourgeois, and male theoreticians of both primitivisms attributed privileged access to states of alterity.²

The two interwar primitivisms nevertheless adopted different strategies as the means to realize their common critical project. For those who practiced dialectical primitivism, such as the surrealist poets around André Breton, debunking the artificial normativity of a modern subjectivity consisted in narrowing the gap between logical and “prelogical” thought. The unity of the two, far from being the exclusive property of “primitive peoples” as Lucien Lévy-Bruhl argued, is the principle feature of the poetic mind. In the realm of poetry, a privileged medium in surrealism, “*mentalité primitive*” is not an aberration but the norm, where “the logical and prelogical are not arranged in layers and separated from each other like oil and water in a glass [but rather] permeate each other [in] a mixture.”³ For dialectical primitivism, *mentalité primitive* was always already *raison primitive* if not poetic thought *tout court*.⁴ Insofar as *raison primitive* consists in integrating representation with *presence*, it is predisposed to the image, where “it makes no difference whether there remains a perceptible difference between beings which are evoked and beings which are present.”⁵ Breton’s claim that “the eye exists in a savage state” also justified the movement’s incorporation of the visual arts regardless of mediums; moreover, it prefigured the eventual adoption of magic and myth (synonymous with “primitive” for contemporaneous ethnologists) as conceptual paradigms for art, which served as the means to reduce the chiasm between works by metropolitan and tribal, trained and untrained, healthy and asylum artists.⁶

Subversive primitivism adopted a different strategy. Rather than closing the gap between the primitive/savage/prelogical and the modern/civilized/logical, it aimed to exacerbate this Manichean divide in order to make the primitive the transgressive “specter” in a para-revolutionary imaginary. In this imaginary, the figures of the primitive are necessarily “subversive forms [...] lower forms transformed with a view to the struggle against the sovereign forms. [...] require[ing] that what is low become high, that what is high become low.”⁷ The barbaric Gauls versus the disciplined Hellens, the deranged Aztecs versus the conservative Mayans, the sado-destructive child against the civilized adult: If such extreme polarities abound in the writings of the philosopher Georges Bataille, it is

² To quote Olivier Leroy in 1927, even Lucien Lévy-Bruhl “is aware that the term ‘primitive’ is ‘improper,’ but he considers it indispensable. In stating this, the author [of *La mentalité primitive*] no doubt implies that no people can actually be called primitive, which is obvious.” See Olivier Leroy, *La raison primitive: essai de réfutation de la théorie du prélogisme*. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927, p. 16. Trans. by Joyce S. Cheng.

³ Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, trans. Lilian A. Clare. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 106; from the French: *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*. Paris: F. Alcan, 1912.

⁴ *La raison primitive* is the title of a 1927 essay by the economist Olivier Leroy refuting Lévy-Bruhl’s notion of “*mentalité primitive*.” In 1932, the surrealists listed Lévy-Bruhl under the “Don’t Read” column in a reading guide. Jules Monnerot subsequently condemned the ethnologist’s racism in Jules Monnerot, “À partir de quelques traits particulières à la mentalité civilisée,” *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 5 (1933): pp. 35–37. For Breton’s adherence to Leroy, see André Breton, “Incidences de l’autre dans l’autre,” in Marguerite Bonnet (ed.) *André Breton: Œuvres complètes, vol. IV, Écrits sur l’art et autres textes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966/2008, p. 897.

⁵ André Breton, “Surrealism and Painting” (1928), in *Surrealism and Painting*. Boston, MA: Museum of Fine Arts, 2002, pp. 2–3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷ Georges Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,” in Allan Stoekl (ed.), *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927–1939*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p. 157.

Primitivisms – Joyce S. Cheng

because the leading figure of heterodox surrealists considered that “a spectral content only truly exists as such [...] when the milieu that contains it defines itself through its intolerance toward [...] it as a crime.”⁸ At the risk of abjection of the “other,” the first term of each Manichean pairing must be excluded and unassimilated in order to retain its *heterogeneous* character in relation to a social order conceived as *homogeneous* and assimilative. If dialectical primitivism sought to make the primitive indistinguishable from its rhetorical antipodes while rejecting certain assimilation models as colonialist (e.g. the colonial exhibition in 1931 against which the surrealists protested), subversive primitivism conceived of the primitive as wholly “other” to systems of representation (language, figuration, etc.), hence its advocacy for a *materialism* “designat[ing] the direct interpretation, excluding all *idealism*, of raw phenomena” in the absence of symbolic mediation.⁹

The extent to which subversive primitivism could entirely circumvent representation was a subject of debate between the two critical primitivisms.¹⁰ Another important issue concerns the question of the social. For dialectical primitivism, it is by actively incorporating the marginalized that the pervious domain of poetry and the arts stands a chance of affecting a symbolic transformation that, with time, would become socially transformative. But for subversive primitivism, which equates the social with authority and economic exploitation, to assimilate the primitive—namely, to make it rational and real via a Hegelian dialectic—is to neutralize it and make it lose “its spectral characterization, its free falseness.”¹¹ That there are no easy answers to these issues is why dialectical and subversive primitivisms, notwithstanding occasional animosities, maintained productive dialogues throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and why many interwar thinkers (e.g. Michel Leiris and Carl Einstein) could be easily aligned with both modes of critical thought. In the contemporary era, when metropolitan art institutions in Europe, North America, and their satellite regions strive to be inclusive while remaining wary of the violence of assimilation, the issues at the heart of critical primitivisms remain as current as they were c. 1930.

Preliminary version, taken from the catalogue *Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930*

⁸ Georges Bataille, “The Pineal Eye,” in Stoekl (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, 1985, p. 81. *Visions* contains several primitivist texts by Bataille originally published in the review *Documents*. See also Georges Bataille, “Extinct America,” trans. Annette Michelson, *October*, vol. 36 (1986): pp. 3–9; Georges Bataille, “Primitive Art,” in Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (eds), *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*. Cambridge, MA, and New York: MIT Press and Zone Books, 2005, pp. 35–44.

⁹ Georges Bataille, “Materialism,” in Stoekl (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, 1985, p. 16.

¹⁰ See notably Breton’s critique of Bataille in André Breton, “Second Manifesto of Surrealism” (1930), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Helen R. Lane and Richard Seaver, ed. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1972, pp. 117–87.

¹¹ Here Bataille refers to the assimilation of myth into science. See Bataille, “The Pineal Eye,” p. 81.

Formalism – Jenny Nachtigall

Formalism

A scientific analysis of art's immanent properties, formalism came into prominence around 1900 through the work of Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin, and the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand (who had popularized the formalism that his friend the philosopher Konrad Fiedler had developed in the 1880s). Rather than an austere aestheticism hostile to theoretical mediation, its methodologies were informed by the (neo-Kantian) psychology of perception (Hermann von Helmholtz, Johann Friedrich Herbart, Theodor Lipps), as well as by life philosophy and phenomenology.¹ Formalism strove to overcome the positivism that art history had inherited from the discipline of history and put the lofty aesthetics of appreciation rampant at the time on a scientific basis. With the inception of this new approach, art history constituted itself as a *discipline*, as a more or less clearly circumscribed subfield dedicated to the institutionalization of art as an object of knowledge. Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History* (1915), which became something of a formalist bible, aimed at establishing art history as an autonomous *science of seeing*. Combining an "intuitive apprehension of the work of art with Wilhelm Dilthey's effort to make this phenomenological approach rigorous and insert it into a disciplinary framework," art history's mission was understood as scientific, as well as profoundly pedagogic and political.²

As such, the shift from the positivist and historicist paradigms of the previous epoch and their focus on substance and meaning were not exclusive to the discipline. Formalist approaches emerged within multiple intellectual fields at the turn of the twentieth century. Their common ground consisted in a sense of instability, of epistemological or political crisis, which their respective notions of form either sought to contain or furthered. The latter encompassed, for instance, Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology, his "linguistic formalism," that introduced an understanding of language as a fundamentally unstable system of dynamic forms (signs) perpetually in motion;³ Ernst Mach's philosophy of science that reframed Newtonian physics as an economy of psychic functions, putting the positivist apparatus of knowledge into crisis;⁴ and Sigmund Freud, a one-time admirer of Mach, who developed a psychoanalytic method to decenter subjectivity into a topological model of dynamic forms and conflictual relations between heterogeneous instances (the id, ego, superego, etc.). The notion of the unconscious was explicitly meant as a "wound to human narcissism," i.e. the anthropocentrism of "his" thought.⁵ Art history's response to the epistemological and political battlefields of modernity was, in turn, anything but iconoclastic. It was reformist rather than revolutionary in ambition, and deeply informed by a bourgeois humanism whose roots reach back to

¹ For an introduction to formalism's debts to psychological aesthetics, see, for instance, Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, "Formalism: Heinrich Wölfflin and Alois Riegl," in *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, pp. 65–95.

² Evonne Levy, "Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History* (1915–2015). A Prolegomenon on its Second Century," in Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Early Modern Art*, trans. Jonathan Blower, eds Evonne Levy and Tristan Weddigen. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Los Angeles, 2015, p. 20.

³ For a reading of Saussure that stresses the importance of structural *dynamics* in his theory against its rigid interpretation (popularized by the culture and media success of structuralism in the 1960s), see Johannes Fehr, "Saussure Zwischen Linguistik und Semiologie. Ein einleitender Kommentar," in Ferdinand de Saussure, *Linguistik und Semiologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003, pp. 17–226.

⁴ See, for instance, Ernst Mach, *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen* (1922). Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985.

⁵ See Sigmund Freud, "Eine Schwierigkeit der Psychoanalyse" (1917), in *Sigmund Freud: Gesammelte Werke, Vol. XII. Werke aus den Jahren 1917–1920*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2006, pp. 1–12.

Formalism – Jenny Nachtigall

the German prewar discourse on culture. It is precisely the limitations of this discourse from which Carl Einstein's dissident formalism departed—along with a plethora of nondisciplinary deviations in the art and theory of the interwar period—mobilizing the unstable, dynamic, disruptive iterations of formalism against their (art historical) pacification.

Wölfflin's credo of "learning to see" was in this sense part of a broader tendency that arose in response to modern consumer capitalism, reverberating widely across different fields around 1900. Going by the label "crisis of *culture*" (rather than, for example, *material life*), its shared concern was the loss of a (precapitalist) unity of form within the fragmentation and velocity that defined capitalist modernity (prominently epitomized by Ferdinand Tönnies as the conflict between community and society).⁶ "Guided seeing" was consequently not only a disciplinary endeavor geared toward entrenching the scientific study of art. It was also a conduit for conveying spiritual value in order to oppose the compartmentalizing effects of industrialization, and the increasing commercialization of the visual sphere.⁷ The rise of modern mass culture, in other words, was inscribed into the very "principles of art history." Against an expanding economization of form as a fleeting figure of "fashion," formalism aspired to the unity and stability of the precapitalist nature of form—to "style"—at the moment of its definite demise.⁸ Wölfflin's somewhat laconic remark that the task of art history was to "keep *at least the idea* of such a unified form of seeing alive, to overcome the bewildering confusion," articulates the extent to which academic formalism was a romantic anti-capitalism:⁹ An idealism oriented to the bygone model of classical European culture, a humanist model of bourgeois *Bildung*.

Paradoxically, however, it was precisely this desire for unity projected onto art as one of the last bastions of "style" that contributed to the very objectification of art as an object isolated from its social surrounding, and thus to the collapse of unified style into a fragmented figure of fashion. As a kind of gated community in which a vanished, idealized equilibrium was kept artificially alive, artistic form was sealed off from its exterior and from its anterior, resulting in a fetishization that was capitalist to the core.¹⁰ Given that the economization of form that formalism struggled to keep at bay itself remained a blind spot in its theory, this perverse reversal was "inevitable": Its effects could be deplored while their causes were left unquestioned. It has often been noted that Wölfflin's formalism lacks a theory of historical change.¹¹ While providing detailed descriptions of changes that *have* occurred, one never gets to know exactly *why* they occurred. The unacknowledged premise of the progressive linearity that underlies this view—like that of many bourgeois intellectuals at the time-

⁶ See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887). Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010.

⁷ See Daniel Adler, "Painterly Politics: Wölfflin, Formalism and German Academic Culture, 1885–1915," *Art History*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2004): pp. 431–56; Mark Jarzombek, "De-scribing the Language of Looking: Wölfflin and the History of Aesthetic Experientialism," *Assemblage*, vol. 23 (1994): pp. 28–69.

⁸ For the role of mass culture in the formation of formalism, and on the style-versus-fashion debate, see Frederic J. Schwartz, "Fashion. Concepts of Style in Wölfflin and Adorno," in *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-century Germany*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005, pp. 1–35.

⁹ Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, p. 75 (emphasis added).

¹⁰ Kerstin Stakemeier argues in this regard that formalism transferred a fundamental ontology of natural forms into an epistemological ontology of social forms. See Kerstin Stakemeier, *Entgrenzter Formalismus. Verfahren einer antimodernen Ästhetik*. Berlin: b-books, 2017, p. 18.

¹¹ Schwartz, "Fashion," p. 23.

Formalism – Jenny Nachtigall

is that of capitalism as natural history: An evolution that is inevitable, and whose undesirable consequences could be considered only as tragic.¹²

While within this frame the past figured as a lost ideal of form, for Carl Einstein (who studied with Wölfflin in Berlin, but never completed his studies), as well as for heterodox art historians such as Lu Märten (who was self-taught), it was not a closed entity whose disintegration was to be mourned. The past was a contested field that had to be reclaimed again and again in the present. Although their dissident, non-disciplinary formalisms equally took shape within the prewar debates on the crisis of culture, they were not *tragic*. As Märten argued in her *Wesen und Veränderungen der Formen/Künste* (1924)—a comprehensive attempt at devising a materialist aesthetics informed by ethnology, life philosophy, and the writings of Marx—the relegation of art to a segregated sphere in society was historically contingent on bourgeois capitalist society and thus must be subject to change.¹³ In the same way that capitalism and its “laws” of segregation were anything but natural, those of formalism could not be either. Establishing a radically de-hierarchized and nonlinear theory and history of form that locate art within an originary capacity of work (not labor) as collective praxis, Märten’s anthropologically inflected materialism envisions a “classless form”: A speculative figure of a collectivity to come, traces of which she found in the Proletkult tendencies of her present.¹⁴ Just a year earlier, Ernst Cassirer published the first of his three-part study on the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923, 1925, 1929), which took issue with both the limited, neo-Kantian notion of a priori form and the inwardness of phenomenology. Cassirer introduced a horizontalized notion of form (for him: symbol) that, rather than being confined to reason, as for the neo-Kantians, encompassed all dimensions of human existence. The function of myth and its relation to the symbol-making capacities of the human were granted particular attention in Cassirer’s “symbolism.”¹⁵

Einstein, too, wanted to bring the social index of form, its ties to “human activity and history” from which art history, philosophy, and science had gradually separated it, back into the frame.¹⁶ What he shared with Märten was a Marxist perspective on the class-based relations of form to which art history was blind: For Einstein, style was “the expression of power by a ruling class.”¹⁷ He was closer to Cassirer, however, in his focus on the cultic (rather than artisanal) register of form’s collectivity. Although, as for Märten, ethnology and life philosophy figured prominently in his revision of formalism, Freud and Mach were no less central to his focus on the role that de-individualizing and de-bordering processes of hallucination, animism, and functionalism harbor for corroding and decomposing the modern European forms of subjectivity and knowledge from within.¹⁸ Formalism’s

¹² See Georg Simmel, “Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur” (1923), in *Philosophische Kultur: Über das Abenteuer, die Geschlechter und die Krise der Moderne*. Berlin: Wagenbach, 1998, pp. 195–219.

¹³ Lu Märten, *Wesen und Veränderung der Formen/Künste. Resultate historisch-materialistischer Untersuchungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Taifun-Verlag, 1924.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 279 ff.

¹⁵ See especially Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Volume 2: Mythical Thought* (1925), trans. Ralph Manheim. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.

¹⁶ Carl Einstein, “Das Transvisuelle. Fiktion. Ästhetizismus. Individualismus und Imagination,” in Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (eds), *Carl Einstein: Werke* (Berliner Ausgabe). *Text aus dem Nachlaß* (5 vols), vol. 4. Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1992, p. 352.

¹⁷ Carl Einstein, “Halluzination und Bewußtsein. Geschichtsprozesse und Kunstwerk. Methode der Kunstgeschichte, Bildoptik, Sehen. Utopie und Kunst. Stil,” in Haarmann and Siebenhaar (eds), *Werke* (Berliner Ausgabe), vol. 4, p. 396.

¹⁸ For different approaches to this, see Sebastian Zeidler, *Form as Revolt. Carl Einstein and the Ground of Art*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016; Devin Fore, “A Necrologue of the Ego: Carl Einstein’s Autobiography,

Formalism – Jenny Nachtigall

idealism that derives “form from form” was for Einstein consequently not only a strictly epistemological problem in the sense that the procedure of explaining form in art within its own artistic immanence was entirely tautological.¹⁹ It was also deeply political: In naturalizing art’s modern separatism, such an “aesthetic attitude is characteristic for the capitalist epoch” and the politics of its (northern European) national core.²⁰ For Einstein and Märten, academic formalism was a mode of capitalist fetishism that naturalizes art’s modern exceptionalism. For Cassirer, neo-Kantian formalism unjustifiably limited the scope of human culture to science. The isolation of form from its social and historical embeddedness was the hallmark of what Einstein called “aesthetic annexionism”: The extension of colonialism within the realm of culture.²¹ Academic formalism, in other words, was a misnomer for “capitalist formalism,” for an art history whose aspirations to an autonomous art were inscribed into the horizon of capitalism as natural history.

Decentering the northern European (i.e. capitalist and colonial) premises of academic formalism was not limited to the work of Einstein or Märten, however. It was part of a larger network of dissident and expanded formalisms in interwar Europe across different intellectual fields, including, among others, the Czech scene around Devětsil (which further developed Märten’s work) as well as the French circle around Georges Bataille (with whom Einstein edited the magazine *Documents*); it also encompassed Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms and the semiotic revision of Russian formalism, and Saussurean linguistics by Roman Jakobson and Jan Mukařovský in the Prague linguistic circle of the 1920 and 1930s (developed in close dialogue with artistic practices). This is only a snapshot of the extensive network of formalisms in the interwar period. The complex and expanded sense of form that animated them was mostly lost after the Second World War, when Clement Greenberg—a once orthodox Marxist who turned conservative—came to define the discourse on formalism in art history, providing the negative foil from which the subsequent generation departed.²² The relation between artistic form and mass culture (no doubt to the detriment of the latter) that was central to Greenberg’s early work for the Trotskyist *Partisan Review* in the late 1930s and early 1940s still bore the traces of the prewar debates on the crisis of culture.²³ After the lost fight against fascism, however, Greenberg’s romantic anti-capitalism gave way to a rigid Kantianism committed to preserving the European Enlightenment ideal of freedom and autonomy with formalism as its host.²⁴ Formalism has had an enduringly bad reputation, not least owing to this limited version. As exemplified in the work of figures such as Einstein and Märten, there are also other versions to retrieve for the present.

Preliminary version, taken from the catalogue *Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930*

Bebuquin II,” in *Realism after Modernism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012, pp. 187–242; Georges Didi-Huberman, “Picture = Rupture’: Visual Experience, Form and Symptom according to Carl Einstein,” *Papers of Surrealism*, no. 7 (2007): pp. 1–25.

¹⁹ Einstein, “Das Transvisuelle,” p. 352.

²⁰ Einstein, “Halluzination und Bewußtsein,” 1992, p. 395.

²¹ Carl Einstein, “Stil und Bildwirkung. Betrachter, Entwertung des Motivs ...,” in Haarmann and Siebenhaar (eds), *Werke* (Berliner Ausgabe), vol. 4, p. 418.

²² See, as an example, Rosalind E. Krauss, “A Voyage on the North Sea.” *Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1999; Yve-Alain Bois, “Whose Formalism?,” *Art Bulletin*, vol. 78, no. 1 (1996): pp. 9–12.

²³ Greenberg’s founding essay as a critic appeared in the *Partisan Review*. See Clement Greenberg, “Avant-garde and Kitsch” (1939), in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

²⁴ See Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting” (1961), in John O’Brian (ed.) *The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance 1957–1969*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 85–93.

Autonomy

“Practicing art history as the history of an aesthetic phenomenon means imprisoning art in a late definition from the outset—a definition whose historical validity and existence is very brief.”¹ The autonomy of art which, in its modern form, grew into a bourgeois ideal, did not, as Carl Einstein noted, extend beyond this ideal. As purely aesthetic autonomy, it remained socially ornamental. Understood in philosophical terms, even within German idealism, as merely an isolating transitional stage of the human intellect, modern autonomy remains locked into art just as art is locked into it. Autonomy is a bourgeois formula for the restriction of aesthetic freedom. It exists only as an illusion, in Karl Marx’s words: the “formation of the illusion of this [bourgeois] class about itself.”² The aesthetic establishment of autonomy beyond work and utility condemns it, even for Friedrich Schiller, one of its greatest apologists, not to be “freedom in fact, but freedom in appearance, autonomy in appearance.”³ Ultimately, modern autonomy lacks life. Its function remains bodiless, and hence both intellectualized and, finally, imaginary.

The establishment of art as an academic discipline, which helped to consolidate the value of the aesthetic at the dawn of the twentieth century, also left art without life. Art history, identified by Arnold Hauser as an “institutionalization”⁴ of the objects of aesthetic production, as an agent of stasis, isolated art in a questionable exceptionalism. Autonomy was stabilized as a format for the social alienation of art. Einstein, too, thus emphasizes that art history—no more than “a sum of objects”—omits “to examine what function these various artworks performed, what specific meaning they possessed.”⁵ Art history ends the life of art, as well as the life of those who look at it. Solitary viewing of works results in a perpetual repetition of their degradation to objects of contemplation for an un-lived freedom. Bourgeois art evolved into the capitalization of a dead autonomy of aesthetic self-assurance. But only following the Second World War, in bourgeois attempts to move away from the fascistization of modernism, was the ideal of autonomy affirmatively enthroned and institutionalized: Only after 1945 did the autonomy of art become systemic, and its lack of function became art’s political and aesthetic ideal form.

During the interwar period many critics of the imperialist nation states of a modernizing Europe, Einstein included, still opposed this autonomy-shaped sterilization of human praxis in the isolation of capital as a merely aesthetic phenomenon. Not for nothing, for example, did Lu Märten’s materialist aesthetic develop out of studies of the working-class culture of past centuries. It was a historiographical attempt, based on a fundamentally expanded understanding of *all* forms of labor as cultural forms, to develop a potentially (pre-)modern and (non-)European model of an aesthetic within which all human metabolisms become identifiable as consequential forms of aesthetic praxis: an aesthetic of collective appropriation of the world.

¹ Carl Einstein, quoted by Sibylle Penkert in her introduction to *Carl Einstein, Existenz und Ästhetik*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1970, p. 36.

² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The German Ideology,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 5. New York: International Publishers, 1975, p. 60.

³ Friedrich Schiller, “Kallias oder über die Schönheit: Schönheit als Heautonomie,” in Gerhard Fricke and Herbert G. Göpfert (eds), *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5. Munich: Hanser, 1962, p. 285.

⁴ Arnold Hauser, *Der Manierismus. Die Krise der Renaissance und der Ursprung der Modernen Kunst*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1964, p. 104.

⁵ Quoted in Penkert, *Carl Einstein, Existenz und Ästhetik*, p. 58.

Autonomy – Kerstin Stakemeier

Einstein's thinking was oriented toward the expansions of European art into ethnology and life philosophy. Although this took him in a similar direction to Märten, Einstein chose, not labor itself, but the products of work as the point of departure for his de-autonomizing approach to writing art history. Art had become the arena for metamorphic processes, its works were forms of expression for a marshaled vitality. Consequently, Einstein, too, pushed the figure of aesthetic autonomy out of the center of his thinking. His texts on art theory increasingly became records of vivid contradictions in the field of the aesthetic. In contrast to Märten's collectivist thinking, which in her magnum opus *Wesen und Veränderung der Formen und Künste* (Essence and evolution of forms and arts, 1924) opened up a cultural history of possible aesthetic communitization, Einstein's writings give rise to a form of community that is not self-generating but rather degenerating. Within bourgeois societies, where works (of art) are unable to escape the aesthetic of autonomy, by contradicting it they become incompatible with their supposed "freedom": Einstein outlines an artistic materialism of rendering oneself progressively impossible, a movement that sees itself locked into its own thinking, in a "perversity of the will of times of decline."⁶

Only when deployed strategically *against* its status within society does the figure of autonomy momentarily take on an active quality for Einstein. His text "Man schaffe den Besitz ab" (Abolish property), published anonymously in *Die Pleite* in 1919, calls for an autonomization of labor "so that everyone works productively."⁷ Whereas, within the capitalist order, labor is the epitome of heteronomy, here, as for Märten, it becomes a predestined site of possible autonomy. This is an astonishing statement from someone who a few years later, in his *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, adopts the productivity fetish of Russia's revolutionary artists, their praise of the worker subject, calling for the "execution of the subject to be increased" in the West "in order to avoid leftwing gazebo."⁸

Not for nothing was the earlier text in *Die Pleite* published anonymously: It was a political intervention on Einstein's part, not part of his aesthetic theory, where labor had no place. It was replaced by a consistent aesthetic materialization of concepts of experience that criticize the inherent idealism of these concepts. In his essay "Gestalt und Begriff"⁹ (Form and concept, c. 1930), the concept of *Erkennen* (cognizance) is spanned between these two poles. While *Erkennen* initially figures here in the sense of lived experience, it returns a little later in the text as the conceptual structure of this very experience, "opposing thought, whose deadly end phase it signifies."¹⁰ Such destabilizations of one's own linguistic autonomy, effectively ruling out autonomously stabilized cultural figures and affirmatively usable conceptual models, apply the problematization of aesthetic autonomy to the author's own work.

For Märten, too, the concept of labor can only become a tool with which to lever the meaning of art out of its bourgeois institutionalization by strategically shifting its status in a fundamental way:

⁶ Carl Einstein, "von der künstlichkeit," in Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (eds), *Carl Einstein: Werke. Berliner Ausgabe. Text aus dem Nachlaß* (5 vols), vol. 4. Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1992, p. 118.

⁷ Carl Einstein, "Man schaffe den Besitz ab," in Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (eds), *Carl Einstein: Werke. Berliner Ausgabe* (5 vols), vol. 2 (1919–1928). Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1996, p. 17.

⁸ Carl Einstein, "Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts" (1931), in Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (eds), *Carl Einstein: Werke. Berliner Ausgabe. Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (5 vols), vol. 5. Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1996, p. 224.

⁹ Carl Einstein, printed under the title "Diese Aesthetiker verlassen uns," in Haarmann and Siebenhaar (eds), *Werke*, vol. 4, 1992, pp. 194–221.

¹⁰ Einstein, "Gestalt und Begriff," p. 203.

Autonomy – Kerstin Stakemeier

Whereas for Einstein work is a mere token in the field of general human disciplining of the metamorphic, Märten opens labor up as a metabolistic life form. She dissolves the boundaries of the concept of labor so decisively that, ultimately, work covers every expression of life. As early as 1914, she described the “economic situation of the artist” as rendering her forms of work structurally impossible: “The conflict between individual work and industrial-utilitarian labor; the conflict between idea and mechanism [...] manifestly and evidently pushes the specific representatives of individual work, the artists, into increasingly severe personal conflicts, into increasingly problematic social conditions of existence.”¹¹ Art is an impossible form of labor: Its financial dependency—occupations forced into “status-ridden luxury niches” and “extraordinary parties”—causes it to become the expression of forms of life “that ultimately lack all prerequisites.”¹²

Märten’s reconstruction of labor as a metabolic life form of work, restricted again and again *by* autonomy, and Einstein’s identification of work as a present political space of necessary revolutionization, eject autonomy from the center of aesthetic practice and identify it as a marginal phenomenon of bourgeois reification: Art collections, Einstein wrote, are accumulations of objects in which “remembering traditions have been gathered. So the task of a beginning revolution would be to destroy the objects; de-objectification in favor of a utopia.”¹³ Until further notice, we remain what Einstein called “secondhand people who live off the dividends of tradition, in short, mediate Europeans.”¹⁴

Preliminary version, taken from the catalogue *Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930*

¹¹ Lu Märten, *Die wirtschaftliche Lage der Künstler*. Munich: G. Müller, 1914, p. 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹³ Einstein, “Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts,” p. 236.

¹⁴ Carl Einstein, “On Primitive Art” (1919), trans. Charles W. Haxthausen, *October*, vol. 105 (2003): p. 124.

After Cosmogony: Carl Einstein on Jean Arp - Sebastian Zeidler

After Cosmogony: Carl Einstein on Jean Arp

Published in Documents magazine in 1930, "Neolithic Childhood" is one of Carl Einstein's major texts, and it is a demanding one.¹ It manages to compress the several dimensions of Einstein's project into less than nine pages without being reducible to any one of them: ethnography, art criticism, autobiography, art history.

On one hand, the essay is a speculative psycho-ethnography of childhood that draws on the work of Lévy-Bruhl and Mauss, on Freud's Totem and Taboo, and on Jean Piaget's seminal study of The Child's Conception of the World.² But "Neolithic Childhood" also incorporates material from BEB II, the vast autobiographical project on which Einstein was working throughout the final decade of his life. The BEB II sections on the theme of cosmogony, in which Einstein was reading his own fictionalized childhood memories through the myths of ancient Greece, are especially relevant here.³

Finally and most obviously, "Neolithic Childhood" is a work of Surrealist art criticism, a perceptive response to a number of powerful reliefs by Jean Arp that were shown at the Goemans Gallery in Paris in 1929. That fact in turn opens Einstein's essay onto a range of other art-critical texts from around 1930, notably his chapter on Paul Klee in the third edition of his Art of the 20th Century, and another Documents essay on Arp, this one by Michel Leiris.⁴

But the real challenge posed by the essay is not simply to spot these connections. It is to understand what makes them connect in the first place: Einstein's ontology of "the real," or, as he called it in "Neolithic Childhood," "the altogether." To get a sense of what the altogether might be, let us consider a central passage from that text.

1 Carl Einstein, "L'Enfance néolithique," in Documents 8 (1930), pp. 35–43.

I would like to thank the Nomis Foundation for their generous support of my work.

2 Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think* (1910), trans. Lilian A. Clare. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985; Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, *A General Theory of Magic* (1902/03), trans. Robert Brain. London: Routledge, 2001; Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (1913), in James Strachey et al. (eds), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74, vol. XIII, pp. 1–162; and Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (1926), trans. Joan and Andrew Tomlinson. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1929. For an exploration of "Neolithic Childhood" in light of Hubert and Mauss on mana, see now Joyce Suechun Cheng, "Neolithic Childhood: Conflicting Temporalities in the Primitivism of Carl Einstein and Georges Bataille," in *Time and Temporality in Literary Modernism (1900–1950)*. Leuven: Peeters, 2015, pp. 49–61. The relevance of Piaget's underrated study for Surrealism in general and the Documents circle in particular has been established by Christopher Green, "The Infant in the Adult: Joan Miró and the Infantile Image," in Jonathan Fineberg (ed.), *Discovering Child Art: Essays on Childhood, Primitivism and Modernism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998, pp. 210–34.

3 BEB II remains largely unpublished, but Ines Franke-Gremmelspacher has transcribed a number of crucial passages from its cosmogony sections in her "Notwendigkeit der Kunst"? Zu den späten Schriften Carl Einsteins. Stuttgart: Heinz, 1989.

4 Carl Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin: Propyläen, 1931, reprinted in Uwe Fleckner and Thomas W. Gaehtgens (eds), *Carl Einstein, Werke*, vol. 5. Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1996, pp. 259–69; Michel Leiris, "Exposition Hans Arp (Galerie Goemans)," in Documents 6 (1929), pp. 340–42. For an analysis of Arp's work in light of Leiris's essay, see Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art*. New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 55–65.

After Cosmogony: Carl Einstein on Jean Arp - Sebastian Zeidler

Arp isolates the facts in order not to drown in the mud. If a thing is not to remain nameless, it needs to be extracted from the altogether and overvalued; in this way, logical continuity is disowned. Even so, these isolated figurations have numerous psychic meanings. A leaf contains a vast amount of different experiences, all of which deviate from the initial object, the more so the more distinctly the leaf has been represented. Every theme provokes its opposite into being and imperceptibly glides towards it.⁵

This complex argument deserves parsing step by step. Jean Arp, Einstein is saying, has something in common with the children whose games of animist make-believe are described elsewhere in the essay. Arp in his reliefs is isolating empirical facts as visual shapes the way children are isolating them by naming them. For Einstein, that is a deeply ambiguous thing to do, and it is not just a pastime for artists and children. Giving things a shape or a name is our basic method of sorting our field of vision, indeed of creating something like a field of vision in the first place. If we didn't isolate things—if we didn't cut into the world with our art and our language—we would be “drowning in the mud.” The world would be the altogether in all its sheerness, a swirling vortex of inchoate matter and time.

So, whether visually or linguistically, we need to “isolate the facts,” to “extract them from the altogether,” in order to establish the parameters that help us to navigate our paths through the world: point of view and field of vision, distance and scale, figure and ground, before and after, shapes and names for humans and animals and plants and things.

But to a Nietzschean like Einstein, that is another way of saying that partitioning the world through art and language is a conquest in the wake of a defeat. It is because we cannot process the altogether that we slice it up into bits which we then go on to rearrange into our myths and our images. Hence it is not paradoxical to say that the origin of cosmogony was also the end of cosmogony—that one kind of world creation emerged in the wake of another. When Hesiod and the prehistoric artists were weaving a second, human world of myth and art from words and shapes, they were suppressing the first, actual world of nameless flux.⁶

The proper way for contemporary art to respond to that original suppression was not to try to undo its ontological violence by regressing back to an Edenic childhood of man that never was. The proper way was rather to show how man's defeat by the world was continuing on into a conquest that had always been an illusion to begin with. This is what the work of Jean Arp seemed to demonstrate: that,

⁵ “Arp isole les faits pour ne pas se noyer dans le borbier. Pour qu'une chose ne reste pas anonyme, il faut l'arracher de l'ensemble et la surestimer; ainsi, la continuité logique est dépossédée. Mais ces figurations isolées ont de nombreuses significations psychiques. Une feuille contient une quantité d'expériences divergentes qui toutes diffèrent de l'objet initial, et ceci d'autant plus que cette feuille est figurée plus distinctement. Chaque thème provoque son contraire et glisse vers lui insensiblement.” Einstein, “L'Enfance néolithique,” 1930, p. 39.

⁶ As Einstein put it in the raw diction and orthography of his *BEB II* fragments: “in cosmogony, THE EMERGENCE OF GRAMMAR (alphabet) from the fear of getting lost, from the terror of the complex processes that cannot be controlled, hence a means of confinement, of human separation, a means of isolation from the cosmos [...] Hence END OF COSMOGONY man has deprived himself of his cosmic relations and ties.” / “in der kosmogonie, DIE ENTSTEHUNG DER GRAMMATIK (Alfabet) aus furcht sich zu verirren, aus schrecken über die nicht bewältigbaren komplexen vorgänge, also ein mittel der einschränkung, der menschlichen abgrenzung, mittel sich vom kosmos zu isolieren [...] Damit aber ENDE DER KOSMOGONIE hat der mensch seine kosmischen beziehungen eingebüsst.” Einstein, *BEB II*, cited in Franke-Gremmelspacher, “Notwendigkeit der Kunst”?, 1989, p. 177, n. 76.

After Cosmogony: Carl Einstein on Jean Arp - Sebastian Zeidler

so far from mastering the altogether, man was actually just “master over the tip of a needle.” “The rest he anxiously pushes aside; it is the fear of death that makes him split up and fixate the forms.”⁷

*

With these last remarks Einstein was responding to the specific visuality of a number of remarkable reliefs which Arp made in the later 1920s. We should resist the temptation to call them biomorphic abstractions, since they differ from the standard offerings in that genre by Yves Tanguy, or indeed from the sculptures Arp himself began to create in the early 1930s. Unlike these other works, the reliefs are not naturalistic representations of wobbly things. They are rather “isolations of facts,” results of a process of tearing a small number of shapes out of the altogether, and of making that process visible as the violent effort it is.

Take *Head with Bristling Moustache* and *The Lips*, two reliefs from 1926 (figs 1, 2). Similar to Arp’s Dadaist work from a decade earlier, they are composed of cardboard layers which the artist painted, cut out, and then glued one atop the other. But while the format of the Dada reliefs had typically been arbitrary, the present examples are emphatically rectangular and come with a prominent frame that encloses their image field.

Put another way, and more so than in his Dada-period work, Arp is foregrounding the hybridity of his medium here, the suspended condition of relief in between painting and sculpture. With free-standing sculpture a relief shares the three-dimensionality of its materials; with painting it shares the frontality of aspect and the framedness of a section of the world that’s seen as if from a distance through a window. In his two reliefs Arp is turning these properties against each other. By materializing painting and flattening sculpture, he defines the isolation of facts as a violence which the artist inflicts on the world by turning it into art.

As in his series of prints from 1923 known as the *Arpaden* (fig. 3), it is as if an automatic viewfinder has zoomed in on and freeze-framed a single motif: an outsized moustache, a woman’s pouty lips. But while the *Arpaden* motifs seem to be afloat in an intangible white space, in the reliefs the process of focusing has been materialized as a physical intervention. Like the cardboard sheets of which they are composed, the motifs appear to have been ripped out of a larger continuum and reinserted into an image world that does not extend beyond its own frame, as it normally does in countless paintings and prints.

Hence while we are fascinated by the sagging, animated shape of the moustache, we also notice that the white stump of the head to which it is attached is severed at the neck by the lower edge of the frame. And while we are startled by the sight of a garter that has momentarily convulsed into a pair of bloated lips, we also observe how the pale flesh of the calf around which the garter is tied, seems to have been cut off at top and bottom.

Moreover, what goes for the lateral extension of the image also goes for its extension into depth: it terminates just as suddenly. The fluid, bulging contours of moustache, head, calf, and lips are crying out for their continuation in the round, say by means of a zone of light and dark that would softly blend their outlines into the background of a virtual image space. It is just this kind of blending that we expect of an artwork that presents itself like a painting to us.

But even as Arp accepts the convention of painting by framing his reliefs, he defies it by purging pictorial depth from them. Unlike Leonardo da Vinci, Arp doesn’t paint *sfumato* but rather literalizes it: we know his cardboard silhouettes are paper-thin because we see them cast shadows on each

⁷ “L’homme [...] est maître sur une pointe d’aiguille [...] il escamote le reste par angoisse; par peur de la mort, il divise et fixe les forms.” Einstein, “L’Enfance néolithique,” 1930, p. 42.

After Cosmogony: Carl Einstein on Jean Arp - Sebastian Zeidler

other. This in turn underscores the razor-sharp quality of their contours, which is responsible for the powerful visual tension between shape and technique that's unique to this series of works: the tension between the swelling organic curves and the inorganic precision of the cut that generated them.

So it is that Arp's reliefs declare that fragmentation is the flip side of signification. For us to zero in on some detail in the world is to charge it up with human meaning, fetishistic or otherwise: it is to "overvalue" that detail, as Einstein put it in "Neolithic Childhood." Yet to charge it up in this way is also to rip it out of the flux of the altogether. "Ecstatic isolation" is Einstein's fitting oxymoron for this claustrophobic anthropocentrism, for a psychic intensity that's confined to the tip of a needle.⁸

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But that is just part one of the story, part two of which we already read Einstein tell above. Arp may well be wanting to isolate his shapes, Einstein was saying; but "these isolated figurations have numerous psychic meanings. A leaf contains a vast amount of different experiences [...] the more so the more distinctly the leaf has been represented."

So, an Arp relief is a kind of semantic bottleneck, a zero point between two infinities. First, the artist tries to defend himself against the inchoate flux by paring it down to a few distinct forms. Then, the flux resurges within these forms themselves. The violence of reduction, which the artist had inflicted on the world as he was making the work, is countermanded by a violence of proliferation, which the artwork inflicts on the viewer once he starts looking at it.⁹ It is precisely because all there is to see is the simple silhouette of a leaf that a thousand other shapes and meanings will crowd to the viewer's mind, some of which he would rather not recall.

Einstein was referring to a number of remarkable reliefs in which a leaf silhouette is combined with a few other shapes, typically irregular circles or ovals (figs 4, 5). Arp had gone out of his way to declare a visual kinship among these elements. It's not just that the leaves and ovals were painted the same creamy white and were made from the same sections of cord; these sections are moreover of exactly the same length. As a result, the difference between the vegetal and the geometric, between nature and mathematics, is no longer absolute but relative. Depending on how you twist the cord, a leaf is a botanized oval, and an oval a straightened leaf. These formal resonances, in turn, are amplified by semantic ones: between leaves, navels, umbilical cords, maternal eggs, ouroboroi, and, finally, eyes.

Hence the overall theme of the reliefs seems clear enough. It is cosmogony, the creation of a world as the burgeoning exfoliation of form up and down the micro- and macrocosmic scales, from cellular partition through childbirth to the origin of the universe. Or so it seems at first blush. But Einstein in "Neolithic Childhood" was bearing down on the subtler visual points made by the reliefs. They raise a number of questions that are out of sync with their ostensible theme.

What about their colorlessness, for example? If your subject matter is the exuberant productivity of creation, why bury it as if under a layer of mildew? Why soak your shapes in an off-white paint that has got all the vitalist energy of distilled water? Why use those lengths of cord as your material,

⁸ Ibid. ("isolement extatique").

⁹ The violence inflicted by the artwork on its viewer is enabled by what Einstein in his monograph on Georges Braque called *Organverengung*. This equally ungraceful and untranslatable term describes a significant fact about looking attentively at art. The artwork forces its viewers momentarily to concentrate their entire sense of self into their sense of sight, and thereby ensures that its impact on them will be as strong as it can possibly be. Call it traumatic opticality. See Carl Einstein, "Georges Braque" (typescript, early 1930s), reprinted in Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (eds), *Carl Einstein, Werke*, vol. 3. Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1996, pp. 251–516; p. 297.

After Cosmogony: Carl Einstein on Jean Arp - Sebastian Zeidler

whose twisted fibers remain so clearly visible through the paint? Moreover, just how are we to understand the recurring constellation of a leaf inscribed within an oval cell? At the center of *Leaves and Navels* (fig. 5), doesn't the leaf seem about to burst through the cell and destroy it in the process? Conversely, on the left, doesn't the cell appear to contract and so threaten to crush the leaf?

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To ask these leading questions is to prepare the reader for Einstein's extraordinary response to Arp's reliefs in "Neolithic Childhood": "In his work Arp fixates the culminating points of the most intense shocks, such as: birth, the explosion of the maternal egg, a tie that's strangling a choking communicant, a burial under a cascade of leaves, childhood shocks, and negro fears."¹⁰

Nobody knows what the "negro fears" are, but the other references can be identified. What we have here, condensed into a single sentence that sums up pages of autobiographical notes from BEB II, are Einstein's recollections, real or imagined, of a number of traumatic events from his own childhood.

There is for one thing the death of his father. Daniel Einstein died in a mental asylum when his son was fourteen years old, probably by suicide, possibly by hanging himself. In BEB II Einstein floated the idea that it was the son who had found his father's corpse dangling from the noose.¹¹ He repeated that pseudo-recollection in a short autobiographical sketch that was published in the same year as the Arp essay.¹²

Meanwhile, in the essay itself, Einstein took his cue from Arp's ecstatic isolation of certain visual facts, and kept alluding to strangling and decapitation. The "tie that's strangling a choking communicant," for example, refers to *Shirt and Tie*, a relief that was illustrated on the closing page of the text as if to summarize a thesis (fig. 6). Einstein's description of this work is spurious, of course. But while it is true that Arp's headless figure is not a communicant, it is also true that Einstein's father, a pious Jew, was the director of a religious teacher's college. In thinking the two together while he was looking at the relief, Einstein was giving an example of art's violence of semantic proliferation by submitting himself personally to it.

Then there is the issue of the leaves. Among the most important sections of BEB II are the childhood memories which Einstein assembled under the heading "Cosmogony." They include an extensive description of a scene in which a group of children reenacts Hesiod's *Theogony* in the forest, complete with orgiastic rites and human sacrifice. The scene culminates in the "burial of leaves" to which Einstein refers in the sentence I quoted above. A boy is chosen for sacrifice and lies down in a hollow with a girl. He is covered with leaves by the other children; one of them mistakenly thinks he suffocated him in the process.¹³

So, leaves in Einstein are overdetermined motifs indeed, conjunctions of life and death, creation and murder, childhood and adulthood, autobiography and art criticism. That is why he found Arp's leaf

¹⁰ "Arp fixe dans ses œuvres les points culminants des chocs les plus intenses, tels que: naissance, explosion de l'œuf maternel, cravate étranglant un communicant congestionné, enterrement sous une chute de feuillage, chocs enfantins et frayeurs nègres." Einstein, "L'Enfance néolithique," 1930, p. 43.

¹¹ For the biographical facts and a selection of pertinent passages from BEB II, see Sibylle Penkert, Carl Einstein: *Beiträge zu einer Monographie*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969, pp. 33–34.

¹² "I remember one night having bumped into a hanged man in a hallway." "Ich erinnere mich, einmal nachts in einem Hausflur gegen einen Erhängten gerannt zu sein." Carl Einstein, "Kleine Autobiographie" (1930), Carl Einstein, *Werke*, vol. 3, 1996, pp. 154–56; p. 156.

¹³ For a transcription of the "burial of leaves" scene, see Franke-Gremmelspacher, "Notwendigkeit der Kunst"?, 1989, pp. 168–69, n. 32.

After Cosmogony: Carl Einstein on Jean Arp - Sebastian Zeidler

reliefs so enthralling: because the same material which in them serves as the fabric of cosmogony can also serve as a hangman's noose. As in BEB II's childhood memories, so in the art of Jean Arp, the origin of the world was literally bound up with sacrificial death.

Nor is this all. Leaves kept swirling through Einstein's published texts from around 1930, including his Documents essay on the seventeenth-century artist Hercules Segers and "Design for a Landscape," his last major poem.¹⁴ As Devin Fore has pointed out, the reason for this ubiquity is a metapoetic reflection, which is enabled by the meaning of the German word Blatt as leaf and as sheet of paper. Just as the child in BEB II was buried under the forest leaves, so its author was slowly burying himself under more than a thousand pages of a principally endless autobiography.¹⁵ As Einstein suggested in another passage in BEB II, that was a considered choice he had made.

In the age of the deceased god the breathing of the forests was horrifically empty / But the trees were rolling like leafed wheels within the law of the ages and the teachers. The earth had been imprisoned in the cage that had become law, and had been deprived of its godlike infinity.¹⁶

What we have here is a miniature disenchantment story, a fall from grace into modernity after the death of the father. Shortly after Daniel Einstein's suicide, his son went to a gymnasium where he was immersed in the world of mathematics and the Bildungsbürger canon of the classics. Young Carl's relation to this material was very complex. He was equally fascinated and terrified by much of it, and the BEB II passage explains why. An expanded paraphrase of it would go something like this:

Once upon a time, in the age of the creator-father, the forest had been vibrant with life and the Earth had extended into infinity in all directions. The altogether of creation had been one, indivisible, and full. But then the father died and the Earth was imprisoned in the iron cage of modern knowledge. It was found to be governed by laws, and these laws could be taught. The forest stood empty now, for its trees had been felled and their leaves turned into sheets of paper that were endlessly revolving on the "leafed wheels" of the modern rotational printing press.

This fallen world was beyond repair. All that was left to do was to embrace its new, bad infinity. And so, Carl Einstein set out to be a writer, spinning forth a modern ersatz version of the altogether as an open-ended proliferation of text: as art criticism, autobiography, and, to bring up the final dimension of "Neolithic Childhood," as speculative art history.

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14 Carl Einstein, "Gravures d'Hercules Seghers," in Documents 4 (1929), pp. 202-08; id., Entwurf einer Landschaft (1930), in Haarmann and Siebenhaar (eds), Carl Einstein, Werke, vol. 3, 1996, pp. 73-83.

15 Devin Fore, Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012, pp. 205-06.

16 "IN DER ZEIT DES GESTORBENEN GOTTES ATMETEN DIE WAELDER FURCHTBAR LEER / DOCH WIE GEBLAETTERTE RAEDER ROLLTEN die Bäume im gesetz der zeiten und der lehrer. die erde war in den Käfig der gesetz geworden gefangen und hatte ihre gotthafte endlosigkeit eingebuesst." Carl Einstein, BEB II, cited in Penkert, Carl Einstein, 1969, p. 32.

After Cosmogony: Carl Einstein on Jean Arp - Sebastian Zeidler

After all, the very title of Einstein's essay points to an issue he had considered in his extensive and fragmentary notes on the history of art, which he began writing up in earnest in the later 1920s.¹⁷ In these notes he set up an opposition between the Paleolithic and the Neolithic: between a style of vivid naturalism, as at Altamira, and a style of abstract ornament, as at Newgrange.¹⁸

The celebrated naturalism of the Paleolithic, Einstein decided, was not a sign of man's lordship over nature—of his ability to represent the altogether, and thereby to control it—but rather of his capitulation before it. It was because the cavemen were so much in awe of the hostile animal world around them that they were reduced to depicting it as accurately as possible. Paleolithic art was nature not seen through a temperament. By the same token, its imagery of herds in full gallop was not proof of technical accomplishment; it was rather an expression of the agitated anxiety of the hunters who were drawing their fearsome prey on the walls of the caves.

But then, one style yielded to another, and the Neolithic went on to suppress the Paleolithic's mimetic frenzy by an act of tectonic censorship. A style of settlers rather than nomads, consonant with the world of Hesiod's *Works and Days* rather than his *Theogony*, the Neolithic carvings smothered the contingent, untamable flux of the altogether under the static pattern of repetitive forms. In Neolithic art and its successor, the so-called Animal Style that endured for millennia in Scandinavia and Central Asia, animal bodies were spliced up and woven into ornament or were displaced by it altogether.

Still, mimesis would return, say in the Renaissance, even as at other times ornament would resurge, as in Islamic art (Einstein was enthralled by the Mshatta façade). The history of art was cyclical, therefore: it kept bouncing back and forth between versions of the Paleolithic and the Neolithic. Einstein's term for this cyclical movement was "stylistic inversion," and he believed it was a self-perpetuating one: "Every style provokes its own inversion through what it excludes." "Every style reverts into its own opposite." "The excluded elements will periodically assert themselves; the result is an inversion of style."¹⁹

17 The next few paragraphs summarize a number of scattered ideas from Einstein's notes on the Paleolithic and Neolithic styles. Here are some representative passages: "NomadenK[unst] u Primat der Bewegung ohne Baustatik—Jagd u Tiernähe—Versöhnen u Verzaubern des gejagten u getöteten Wilds—also antistatische, nicht siedler, antitektonisch mimetische K[unst] (nachahmen der tiere)." "Tekton[ik]—die Grenzsetzung des Ausdrucks... Schutz vor dem sich verlieren im Detail—der Bau als Mitte—das Bild als Bauteil u sekundäres—(Paläolithikum freiere Malerei—Neolith. Malerei an Bauformen gebunden) die Abwehr der Erfahrung, Censur, Auslese." Berlin, Akademie der Künste, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, call number 252, fols 4v and 7v.

18 For a first, brief stab at exploring this opposition see my *Form as Revolt: Carl Einstein and the Ground of Modern Art*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015, pp. 162–63.

19 These sentences are taken from a sheet with important notes that is preserved at the Einstein archive under the call number 244 and which is variously numbered fols 4, 6, 9, and (?): "jeder Stil weckt die umkehrung, durch das, was er ausschliesst." "Jeder Stil schlaegt in seinen Gegensatz um." "die ausgeschlossenen elemente machen sich periodisch geltend, in folge dessen stilumkehr." *Stilumkehr* may or may not rhyme with *Triebumkehr* in Freud.

After Cosmogony: Carl Einstein on Jean Arp - Sebastian Zeidler

There are echoes here of Hegel on the dialectic; of Heinrich Wölfflin (Einstein's teacher) on the shift from the linear to the painterly style and back again;²⁰ and perhaps of Nietzsche on the Eternal Return. But Einstein's argument is distinct from his readings, not least because it is as bleak as it could possibly get. According to him, there simply is no development or change in the history of art; all there is are the constant displacements of one style by another that is its negative foil and twin. Stylistic inversion is a zero-sum game in which a visuality of mimetic frenzy and a visuality of tectonic control keep flipping over into one another because they keep excluding one another.

The deeper kinship between these two styles, and the reason they kept recurring in the first place, was that both were missed encounters with the altogether. The Paleolithic was missing it by capitulating before it; and the Neolithic, by sweeping it under the rug. Given this vicious circle, the best one could hope to do was point to instances in visual art in which the altogether was asserting itself as if against the will of its own makers. That is the art-historical reason Einstein wrote his essay on Jean Arp. In the Neolithic ornamentation of his leaf reliefs, Arp had declined to suppress the sacrifice of the origin he was claiming to represent.

Preliminary version, taken from the catalogue *Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930*

²⁰ Art historians usually assume that in Wölfflin the linear/painterly opposition is restricted to the Renaissance and the Baroque, and that the transition from the former to the latter is irreversible. But Wölfflin himself was not so sure. In a lecture class from 1911 he extended his scheme all the way into the present. He demonstrated to his students how, after "line had been negated absolutely" in the Rococo (the late Baroque), a new linear style emerged around 1800 in the art of Greuze and Peter Cornelius. In time, this new linearity was displaced by Impressionism's painterliness, which was then displaced by the linearity of Ferdinand Hodler. Why art history should work this way Wölfflin found hard to fathom. He was reduced to stating that "once the painterly has reached its apex, the whole thing just reverts into its opposite and you start over again." Except that by 1911 you no longer did. Wölfflin noted that the contemporaneous work of Auguste Rodin and Adolf von Hildebrand represented "two tendencies that appear not just to exclude but to negate one another," which to him indicated that "our age is one of oppositions." That sounds like the point of origin, not just for the argument of Einstein's *Negro Sculpture*, but of his speculative art history from the 1930s. See Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Akademische Vorlesung aus dem Archiv des Kunsthistorischen Instituts der Universität Wien*, ed. Norbert M. Schmitz. Alfter: VDG, 2/1994, pp. 23, 28, 15.

Service Info and Media Material

Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930

Exhibition and conference; publication
April 13–July 9, 2018

Exhibition

Daily (except Tue) and on holidays 11am–7pm
9€/6€ incl. exhibition guide. The ticket is valid for two visits.
Mon & under-16s free admission

Exhibition Opening

Thursday, April 12, 2018 (free admission)
7pm: doors open
7.15pm: Welcome by Prof. Monika Grütters MP, Minister of State for Culture and the Media, Bernd Scherer, director HKW, as well as the curators Anselm Franke and Tom Holert (Vortragssaal)

Exhibition Architecture: Kooperative für Darstellungspolitik (Jesko Fezer, Anita Kaspar, Andreas Müller with Maximilian Weydringer)

Exhibition Design: Grafikdesign NLF Team (Nils Reinke-Dieker, Larissa Starke, Friederike Wolf)

Press Tour

April 12, 11 am – accreditation requested at presse@hkw.de

There will be talking: Bernd Scherer (director HKW), Anselm Franke (Head of Visual Art and Film Department HKW, curator) and Tom Holert (Curator); Moderation: Anne Maier (Head of Press HKW)

Conference *Tiefenzeit und Krise, ca. 1930*

May 26 & 27, 2018: both starts 1pm (Conference Room 1)
Day ticket including exhibition: 11€/8€

Education

Guided tours, Curator-led tour, Talks, Student's Day and Kids&Teens workshops during the exhibition opening time.

Publication

A correspondent publication will be released in June 2018 by diaphanes (German and English edition). Pre-orders: books@hkw.de

For detailed press information on all productions of **Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930:**

Press kit ready for download: www.hkw.de/presse

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Photos from the opening will be ready for download from April 13: www.hkw.de/pressefotos

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