

Art history



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Art History The video under examination is *Eternal Ancestors – African Art and Modernism*. In large part this video takes place in lecture format and considers the relation between African sculpture and Western Modern art. The video argues that this relation occurred around 1906 and developed throughout the 20th century. The primary interaction between African sculpture and Western art is argued to be between influences African sculpture had on Western artistic formulations. One such influence came in terms of so called-primitive elements that were adopted by Western artists. The video considers a variety of early 20th century artists that implemented African art techniques, and argues that it was these early Western artists that in great part shaped the way later Western artists would use and implement African sculpture. The video goes on to demonstrate through side-by-side comparisons ways that Western artists appropriated African sculpture within their own work. It argues that in this appropriation Western artists oftentimes misinterpreted the African art. One such example comes in terms of a sculpture of an African face, and its appropriation in a Western painting. One of the weaknesses of the video is that it takes a somewhat pedantic view of influence in criticizing Western appropriation of these African sculptures. For instance, the video never gives an in-depth explanation of how the artists misread the African art. It also neglects to note that it may not have been the intention of the Western artists to accurately interpret the African art, but instead to implement its structural or artistic dimensions as a means of influence. Perhaps some of the most engaging elements are the video are the biographical footage it contains into the lives and apartments of early 20th century artists. These photos provide the viewer with direct insight into the lives and habitats of these Western artists.

One such depiction contained Georges Braque in his Paris apartment in 1911. The apartment contains Braques seated with African masks and an African guitar in the background hanging on the wall. The video argues that as the masks and guitar are hanging on the wall, it demonstrates that the artist has misappropriated their intention, and in-effect incapacitated them. In these regards, one's attention is brought to the way that Western artists took the African art and in a sense exoticized it. One might think in terms of a foreign culture taking an American guitar and hanging it on the wall to demonstrate it unique and artistic construction. The video goes on to consider the issue of primitivism as it relates to Western appropriation of African art. In these regards, it argues that Western artist's appropriation of African art in the early 20th century was greatly similar to the way that Romanticism articulated idealized culture. It demonstrated that Western artists saw in African art a more primitive means of existence that was more pure or true to reality. The argument is because African art is not tainted by elements of culture and society. Ultimately, the video presents a critical, yet informative, view of the ways that Western artists appropriated African art in early 20th century modernist creations.