
and Society. The anthropological

y of art, sometimes called "primitive"
focuses on the contextual setting in
art is produced and used. The anthropologist, as anthropologist, is not an art
z. His or her concern is with the meaning
r, a frozen bit of culture, in its proper
culural setting. To discern the meaning
of an item of art, it is necessary to know
that art has a use beyond the aesthetic. It is
for a practical purpose—to be part of a
be used as a drinking vessel, and so
h. There is no art produced for museums,
a lot of art consists of decorated
such as Housebeams) and uten-

This experience with small societies has
anced the way anthropologists view art
nger ones. They still look for social fac-
in interpreting its meaning. Thus, while

an American writer differs in social position
from a storyteller among the Ibo of Nigeria,
an understanding of both their social pos-
tions and functions is necessary to an under-
standing of their cultural products. In fact,
there is still room for a good deal of ethnog-

graphic research on the role of the artist in
various sociocultural contexts. More work
such as that of Roger Abrahams and Charles
Kell is needed. These two men have fol-
lowed a tradition pioneered by Ruth Bunzel
in her study of a Zuni potter. All three have
looked at the role of creation. The impor-
tance of the artist's social position, moti-

ation, attitude, training, use of his or her
creation—all are given careful attention.

Furthermore, the indigenous standards of ex-
ceellence are examined. Abrahams calls this
attention to the interaction between artist and
and audience the rhetorical approach to
folklore. The object of creation has an es-
cially important, sometimes supernatural,
position in homogeneous societies—ever
those found within larger societies.

Anthropology and Art Criticism. Ant

thropologists have, since the days of Franz
Boas, opposed the application of universal
standards of judgment on art products. The total
misunderstanding of African art has pro-
vided an object lesson. Ceremonial objects
were interpreted in a Western frame of refer-
ce by critics who had no knowledge of
the original context in which these objects
were used. Various theories of "primitive
prelogical mentality" were put forth to ex-
plain African and other primitive art.

The anthropological stress on under-
standing the total context has led to some
changes in art criticism in our own society.

Even specialists, after all, belong to some
community, and a contextual approach, or
Abrahams' rhetorical approach, can illu-
nate the interaction between artists and
and their audiences in the most industrialized
countries. Eventually such an approach
should produce truly valuable comparative
studies of art and society.

See also Aesthetic appreciation; Art; Art, primi-

tive

Consult: Abrahams, Roger D., "Introductory
Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore.
Journal of American Folklore. 81 (1968):
1-16.
Boas, Franz. Primitive Art (New York:
Dover, 1927).
Bunzel, Ruth. The Pueblo Potter
Kell, Charles. Urban Blues (Chicago Uni-

--- Frank A. Salamone, St. John's University.

Wood and cloth fetish figure, from the Byaka
tribe, the Congo.
(mostly red, white, black) may be applied to the entire sculpture or to parts of it. Some objects are darkened by means of fire, smoke, hot irons, or treatment with seps or mud; others are beautifully patinated through intensive usage and oiling. Oil, blood, or resin may be added to the surfaces in the course of consecration and usage.

The greatest diversity of sculpture occurs in the southern half of the Zaire Republic, overlapping into the Congo (Brazzaville), N. Angola, and W. Zambia. Among the better known art-producing groups we encounter, from west to east, the Kongo, Teke, Yaka, Suku, Mbala, Pende, Cokwe, Kuba, Ndenge, Lukowa, Lunda, Kinshasa, Songye, Luba, and Tabwa. Many of these peoples have military and centralized political institutions, but there are several exceptions. All are Bantu-speakers, and many of the entities have close linguistic and historical connections. Among these entities are numerous smaller and larger groups—such as Dzing, Yans, Hol, Lwaliwa, Mbagani, and Salamasu—whereoutstanding artistic traditions have flourished.

In the northern half of the Zaire Republic, overlapping into the Congo (Brazzaville), the Central African Republic, and the Sudan, the sculptural traditions have developed on a somewhat lesser scale throughout the rain forest and into the northern savannas, among such Bantu-speaking peoples as the Monge, Ngala, Tetela, Mitoko, Lengola, Pete, Komo, Vela, Bali, and Lega, and among such non-Bantu peoples as the Ngasha, Nkandu, Monzo, Furu, Zande, Mangbatu, and Bari. In many parts of this vast region, the relative scarcity of sculpture is amply compensated by rich smithing traditions, culminating in a great diversity of knives, swords, spears, arrowheads and spearheads, anklets, bracelets, and necklaces.

The first exhaustive attempts at a systematic classification of the various art styles in Central Africa were made by O'Brien and Masson. Detailed studies on specific groups or areas by Bastin, Biebuyck, Bussens, de Sousbergehe, Timmermans, Volavkova, and others have added considerable refinement to these classifications, but definitive grouping and interpretation have yet to be produced.

No easy generalizations can be made about the usages, functions, and meanings of these sculptures, since various ethnic groups, and art-using institutions within and across them, have developed highly specific ideas about them. Many sculptures are directly linked with different forms of ancestral cult (heretic, royal, lineage, family, and personal ancestors). Others are intimately associated with beliefs about the survival of the soul and the life force, and are used in conjunction with burial ceremonies and grave sites. A few sculptures form an intrinsic part of healing, hunting, protective and aggressive magic, and divination. In widely scattered areas, sculptures are linked with initiation systems (circumcision and puberty ceremonies; membership in voluntary associations and cult groups). In addition to their ritual, social control, and status functions, they have an important didactic content. Sculptures as insignia and paraphernalia of rank and status, and as power and prestige symbols, also occur in many groups.

In any given group, numerous categories of artworks with different functions and forms, may be present. A particular artwork can also carry multiple, more or less complementary, meanings and functions, depending to some extent on the context of usage.

In general, little is known regarding the artists, their method of working, their training, their motivations and creative freedom. Our ignorance is due partly to the rapid breakdown of the great artistic traditions in Central Africa under the impact of colonial rule. Artists do not belong to exclusive castes, but operate within the framework of lineages, families, and courts. The users and patrons of the arts are overwhelmingly male, but in certain areas women have a special relationship with the arts. Many of the artworks are individually owned by chiefs, village headmen, lineage heads, cult leaders, or common members of the group, some are placed under the control of a collectivity (a lineage, a village, a chieftain, a ritual community).


-Daniel P. Biebuyck, University of Delaware