



Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s (Interplay)

Petrine Archer-Straw

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In the years after the end of the First World War, large numbers of Africans and African Americans emigrated to the cities of Europe in search of work and improved social conditions. Their impact on white European society was immense. In Paris, where the artistic climate was particularly sensitive and experimental, avant garde artists courted black personalities such as Josephine Baker, Henry Crowder, and Langston Hughes for their sense of style, vitality, and "otherness". Leger, Picasso, Brancusi, Man Ray, Giacometti, Sonia Delaunay, and others enthusiastically collected African sculptures and wore tribal jewelry and clothes. More importantly, they adopted black forms in their work, and their style soon influenced a larger audience anxious to be in vogue. A passion for black culture swept through Paris, and by the end of the 1920s, black forms that had provided the initial spark to the modernist vision had become the commercially successful Art Deco style.

Negrophilia, from the French *negrophilie* -- the contemporary term to describe the craze -- examines this commingling of black and white cultures in jazz-age Paris. Painting, sculpture, photography, popular music, dance, theater, literature, journalism, furniture design, fashion, and advertising -- all are scrutinized to show how black forms were appropriated, adapted, and popularized by white artists. The photographs, writings, and memorabilia of poet Guillaume Apollinaire, art collectors Paul Guillaume and Albert Barnes, shipping heiress and publisher Nancy Cunard, and Surrealists Michel Leiris and Georges Bataille help to recreate the contemporary atmosphere. The book raises questions about the avantgarde's motives, and suggests reasons and meaning for its interest.

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