

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

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NAIVE ART FROM THE MUSEUM COLLECTION, a selection of about 30 works including paintings by Bauchant, Bigaud, Bombois, Hirshfield, Kane, Peyronnet, Pickett, Rousseau and Seraphine will be on view on the third floor at The Museum of Modern Art from January 7 to April 10.

Drawn from a collection of more than 100 works in this genre now owned by the Museum, the paintings shown here were selected by Pierre Apraxine, Assistant Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture. Works of this sort were first brought together by the Museum in the 1938 survey MASTERS OF POPULAR PAINTING: MODERN PRIMITIVES OF EUROPE AND AMERICA which demonstrated the importance and quality of naive expression in the art of our time.

The present selection suggests the variety within the medium and also focuses on works of particularly high achievement. The works are centered around two major groups, the American and the French, and many are being exhibited within this stylistic context for the first time.

The term "naive" is now somewhat preferred to "primitive." Contrary to the general impression, the naive artist is not necessarily one who is completely self-taught or who lives in a remote center without any knowledge of prevailing tendencies. Rather it is an inner conviction of the rightness of his personal vision that preserves in him a certain innocence and leaves him almost untouched by any such contacts he may have. In this sense, the gigantic figure of Henri Rousseau both dominates and epitomizes the position of the naive artist in modern times.

Significantly, it was the more avante-garde artists -- originally the Cubists, and later the Surrealists -- who were among the first to appreciate and bring to public attention the aesthetic strengths of Rousseau and other naive artists. The naive tradition in France has been continued by Bombois, Bauchant and Peyronnet at their best and has been

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sharpened by exposure to Cubism and Surrealism. Their placid vision contrasts strongly with the tormented and mystically oriented approach of Seraphine.

In this country, a tradition of naive art goes back to the seventeenth century. It has found its strongest statements in the twentieth century in the works of Pickett, Kane and Pippin. The American works shown here illustrate different modes of naive vision. There are realistic scrutinies of man and nature by Pickett, Kane, Hoyer and Canadé; and there are worlds of fantasy which illuminate inner truths and personal convictions such as those envisioned by Sullivan and Hamblett. There is also the sophisticated poetry of Lebduska and Hirshfield, and the picturesque approach of Litwak and Zolotow.

Naive art is found extensively in Latin America, especially in Haiti, where one would say it has embodied a national aesthetic. Works by the Haitians Gourgue, Obin and Bigaud, and by Urteaga of Peru, Herrera Guevara of Chile, Moreno of Cuba and Dos Prazeres of Brazil, are among the best examples in the Museum collection.

Additional information available from Diana Goldin, Coordinator, Press Services, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7297, -7501
