

# "PRIMITIVISM" IN 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ART

## Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
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### FACT SHEET

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EXHIBITION: "PRIMITIVISM" in 20TH CENTURY ART:  
Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern

DATES: September 27, 1984 - January 15, 1985

DIRECTOR: William Rubin, Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, in collaboration with Professor Kirk Varnedoe of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University

SPONSOR: Philip Morris Incorporated is the sponsor of the exhibition and its national tour.

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CONTENTS: "PRIMITIVISM" refers to the interest of modern artists in tribal art and culture--as evinced in their thought and work. This is the first exhibition to juxtapose tribal and modern objects in the light of informed art history. Primitivist works by modernists beginning with Gauguin, Picasso, Brancusi, Klee, and extending to those of contemporary artists, are juxtaposed with tribal works in order to clarify the nature of the Western response to them.

"PRIMITIVISM" IN 20TH CENTURY ART: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern is divided into four sections:

(1) Concepts establishes fundamental aspects of the modern response to tribal objects. Selected comparisons between modern and tribal objects probe the basic issues raised by the intersection of the two arts.

(2) History reviews the direct influence of tribal arts on modern painters and sculptors, from Gauguin at the turn of the century to the Abstract Expressionists around 1950. Frequently, modern works are juxtaposed with specific tribal objects which artists owned or knew from local museums. This section also illustrates those types of tribal objects that became available and influential in successive decades of modern art's development. In addition, an installation dealing with the influence of tribal art on work done for modern theatrical productions will be included.

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(3) Affinities presents a group of superb tribal objects notable for their appeal to modern taste. Also, selected pairings of modern and tribal objects demonstrate the basic common denominators of these arts that are independent of direct influences.

(4) Contemporary Explorations presents a selection of post-1970 Western art, including video and performance, which draws its inspiration not so much from tribal objects as from a more conceptualized sympathy with the methods, materials, and mentality of Primitive cultures. Structures of myth and cosmology here combine with a primal sense of art-making activity to embody a strongly altered but still vital bond between modern and tribal creation. Some 150 modern works are presented. The tribal works--over 200 chosen from Museums and collections worldwide--include masks and figure sculptures from the personal collections of Picasso, Matisse, Nolde, Ernst, Matta, and other modernists.

PUBLICATION: "PRIMITIVISM" IN 20TH CENTURY ART, edited by William Rubin, has been published by The Museum of Modern Art in conjunction with the exhibition. The two-volume, almost 700-page book contains 1,087 illustrations, including 378 in color, and 19 essays by a variety of scholars.

TOUR: Detroit Institute of Arts: February 27 - May 19, 1985  
Dallas Museum of Art: June 23 - September 1, 1985

PRESS PREVIEW: Wednesday, September 19, 1984