

Carl Einstein

EXCERPT FROM "NEGRO SCULPTURE," 1915

. . . A few years ago, in France, we lived through the epoch-making crisis. By means of a tremendous effort at awareness, men recognised the irrelevance and questionableness of the accepted method. Some painters were able to command sufficient strength to turn away from mechanical, repetitive craftsmanship; shaking free from the customary means of expression, they investigated the elements of the perception of space-what this leads to, and what conditions it imposes. The results of this important struggle are sufficiently well known. At the same time they necessarily discovered Negro sculpture, and recognised that it has, on its own, given birth to the pure plastic forms.

The efforts of these painters are usually referred to as abstraction, although no one could possibly deny that a direct spatial awareness could not have been approached without an immense critical effort in clearing away erroneous paraphrases. This is the essential point; and it sharply distinguishes Negro art from the art which has taken it as a guide. What appears in the latter as abstraction is, in the former, a direct experience of nature. From a formal point of view Negro sculpture will be found to be-out-and-out realism.

The contemporary artist cannot concentrate on working towards pure form; he still feels himself to be in opposition to what has gone before. His creative effort involves an excessive element of reaction. His inevitably critical approach strengthens the analytical in his work.

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