Marius de Zayas: The Root of African Art in New York

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by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my amazing parents Pam and Kyle who continue to inspire me every day, the rest of my supportive family, and my cat Doodle.
I would like to thank the many friends, relatives, and supporters who have made this happen. To my best friend RaeAnna who supported me in my research, writing, and editing. Dr. Michele Greet, Dr. LaNitra Berger, and the rest of the George Mason University art history faculty members were of invaluable help. A special thanks to my Cornell College art history professors Dr. Christina Penn-Goetsch and Dr. Ellen Hoobler who pushed me to be the best version of myself and follow my dreams. Finally, thanks go out to my fellow art historians and friends for keeping me sane and supporting me along the way.
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ABSTRACT

MARIUS DE ZAYAS: THE ROOT OF AFRICAN ART IN NEW YORK

Kelsey Roberts, M.A.
George Mason University, 2020
Director: Dr. Michele Greet

This thesis focuses on how curatorial attitudes towards African art shifted in the first two decades of the twentieth century in both Europe and the United States. In the early 1900s, due to the European avant-garde’s interest in African objects, art dealers in the United States started to focus on the aesthetics of African art. One of whom, the US-based Mexican artist, art dealer, and theorist, Marius de Zayas, curated an exhibition in 1914 which, for the first time, portrayed objects from Africa as art. This paper examines the exhibitions in New York City which took place between 1914 and 1923 demonstrating how de Zayas continued to challenge the display of African objects as artifacts by showcasing them as art and juxtaposing them with European avant-garde paintings and sculpture. This thesis combines a close examination of the complex connections between European colonialism, artmarkets, and institutions with a discussion of both the European and American avant-garde to argue that Marius de Zayas set the precedent for the presentation and discussion of African art in the United States.
INTRODUCTION

Attitudes towards African art shifted in the first two decades of the twentieth century in both Europe and the United States. While museums originally presented these objects as ethnographic specimens and colonial trophies, a 1914 gallery exhibition in New York led critics and viewers to see these objects as “fine art.” African objects first entered art museums in the United States between 1880 and the 1920s during a period when art museums were grappling with their own identity and the distinctions between “art” and “artifact” were still fluid. While I use the term “art” within the context of this paper for discussing African material culture, it is a Euro-American concept to classify these objects as art. Art museums, including the Hampton University Art Museum, the Cincinnati Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Art Institute of Chicago, all acquired collections of African objects during this period. According to scholars Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Christa Clarke, “The initial paradigm of display that art museums adopted for African objects followed the typological arrangement typical of European natural history and ethnographic

3 The Art Institute of Chicago initially collected their African objects as part of its Children’s Museum while other collections were a part of ethnology departments.
museums.” They argue all of these institutions shared a common impulse to justify the importance of the collections in terms of their educational and civic missions rather than their artistic value.

Technically, these art museums were the first to display African objects; however, they were not displayed or regarded as art. In the early 1900s, due to the European avant-garde’s interest in African objects, art dealers in the United States started to focus on the aesthetics of African art. One of whom, the US-based Mexican artist, art dealer, and theorist, Marius de Zayas, curated an exhibition in 1914 which, for the first time, portrayed objects from Africa as art. Following this exhibition, between 1914 and 1923, de Zayas continued to challenge the display of African objects as artifacts by showcasing them as art and juxtaposing them with European avant-garde paintings and sculpture. His presentation of African objects in relation to European avant-garde works in the United States requires in-depth examination because his methods of display were instrumental in formulating lasting standards for the presentation of African art.

In order to place African art within the broader discourse of the new New York art world, I will combine a close examination of the complex connections between European colonialism, art markets, and institutions with a discussion of both the European and American avant-garde. I will focus on Parisian art dealer, Paul Guillaume, and New York based art dealer, Marius de Zayas. I argue that Marius de Zayas used Paul Guillaume’s collection of African art to set the precedent for the presentation and

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4 Berzock and Clarke, Representing Africa in American Art Museums. 7.
5 Ibid, 7.
discussion of African art in the United States. De Zayas helped shape the discourse and display practices of African art in relation to modern art, which are still prevalent today.

**The Scramble for Africa and the Accessibility of Material**

The era of European colonialism lasted between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries with European powers stretching across the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. European colonization was the practice of acquiring full or partial control over other societies or territories by founding colonies, occupying them with settlers, and exploiting them economically, politically, and culturally.\(^6\) Given the scope of this paper, I will focus on, what is known as the “Scramble for Africa,” which took place during the period between 1881 and 1914. The “Scramble for Africa” was the European invasion, occupation, division, and colonization of Africa during the period known as New Imperialism.\(^7\) This European colonization of Africa requires further examination because unlike other colonized regions, Africa remained relatively untouched until the late nineteenth century. Most African people lived in independent societies up until 1870; only ten percent of Africa was under formal European control. European governments set up trading posts along the coasts. Europe’s most integral colonial holdings were in modern day Angola, Mozambique, Algeria, and South Africa. By 1915, Europe conquered ninety percent of Africa leaving only Ethiopia and Liberia uncolonized.\(^8\) The

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invention of the steamboat and other technological advances in global transportation made it easier for European expansion into Africa.\textsuperscript{9} In addition, these technological advances provided new ways to transport African objects including sculptures, masks, and other material culture back to Europe.

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 was the turning point in the “Scramble for Africa.”\textsuperscript{10} The first Chancellor of Germany, Otto von Bismark, organized the conference as Germany was suddenly emerging as an imperial power.\textsuperscript{11} During this conference, colonial European powers, including Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Great Britain, Italy, and Portugal, divided Africa up among themselves and laid the ground rules for takeover.\textsuperscript{12} The Long Depression, between 1873 and 1896, caused European trade markets to shrink, precipitating a potentially devastating deficit. European consumers had grown accustomed to materials such as copper, cotton, rubber, palm oil, cocoa, diamonds, tea, and tin, but the markets now lacked these goods.\textsuperscript{13} Various parts of Africa were known for producing and trading agricultural commodities, such as groundnuts, palm oil, and cloves, as well as large quantities of ivory and wild rubber. Africa offered these European powers an open market and an increase in trade.\textsuperscript{14} With this in mind, scholar Gregory Maddox, argues that the acquisition of these select trade resources did not justify the expense of colonial conquest; however, these commercial

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid, introduction.
\textsuperscript{10} This conference has also become known as the Congo Conference or the West Africa Conference.
\textsuperscript{11} Maddox, \textit{Conquest and Resistance to Colonialism in Africa}, xiii.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, xiii.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 301.
entities directly involved in trade with Africa exercised political influence on metropolitan governments. Maddox argues that this situation presented Africa as politically important to European countries, which was far greater than its initial economic importance. European countries enforced “effective occupation” to establish outposts, create treaties with presumed African rulers, and build infrastructure, including railroads and ports.

A variety of radical, technological advances made it possible for Europe to invade and colonize Africa. Continuing industrialization resulted in revolutionary forms of transportation, which allowed colonial powers to quickly and efficiently mobilize and conquer previously difficult and expansive areas of Africa. Tropical regions in Africa had been difficult to reach and considered to be deadly to Europeans because of malaria. Once quinine, the prophylactic treating malaria, was discovered, Europeans no longer viewed these remote areas as a threat. Transportation and medicine combined was not enough to ensure complete control over African nations; superior weaponry played a vital role, since by this time mobile artillery had improved. The advent of machine guns also gave Europeans a decisive advantage over the most developed African weaponry.

African communities consistently fought to maintain political independence in spite of Europeans’ successful attempts at dominion. Colonized communities fought for their freedoms by any possible means; their tactics were not limited to acts of war, rather they refused colonial orders, repudiated colonially-appointed African authorities, and

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16 Ibid, xii.
17 Ibid, xii.
engaged in sabotage.\textsuperscript{18} Despite their resistance, the costs of conquest were devastating. The sub-Saharan African population fell dramatically between 1870 and 1920. While some of this decline came from warfare, other deaths stemmed from the spread of new diseases brought by foreign humans and animals. With an increase in colonial control and decrease in African population, the demands on African people and land rose. Famine was a huge contributing factor to the population decline. Without enough provisions to meet the new demands placed upon them by Europeans, Africans were left without enough food to feed themselves.\textsuperscript{19}

African countries remained under the control of European powers until after World War II, but the decolonization of Africa did not truly begin until the mid-to-late 1950s and into the 1960s. In 1945, the Fifth Pan-African Congress demanded the end of colonialism. Post-war debt left European powers lacking the resources needed to maintain their colonies, which allowed African nationalists to negotiate decolonization.\textsuperscript{20} Following an internationally debilitating World War II, decolonization can be interpreted as a European retreat dictated by weakness. The United States along with African colonies, such as Nigeria, Senegal, and Ghana, pushed for self-governance because the colonial powers had been exhausted by war. While most colonies decolonized quickly with few deaths, others, including Algeria, Angola, the Congo, and Kenya, faced violence and high death tolls. By 1977, 54 African countries had liberated themselves from European colonial powers. Despite this liberation, the legacy of colonialism survived in

\textsuperscript{18} Maddox, \textit{Conquest and Resistance to Colonialism in Africa}. xiv.  
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid}, xiv.  
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid}, xiv.
various ways. The random geographical divisions created at the Berlin Conference of 1884 have largely remained unchanged even after decolonization. Colonial Africa of 1946 had the same political geographical boundaries as independent Africa of 1995.\textsuperscript{21} Like the lingering geography, colonial powers left a linguistic impact on modern Africa; instead of Africa’s mother tongues, governments and administrations still use the imposed colonial languages. In certain emerging African republics, the ruling classes preferred speaking French, Portuguese, or English in their social and political dealings.\textsuperscript{22}

The higher education system also remained within the European sphere by using European textbooks and teachings. The biggest cultural influence, aside from language and education, was colonial religion. Christianity spread from the colonial cities to the rural areas where people still clung to their traditional languages and customs. During decolonization, white missionaries remained in Africa with the support of native African Christians. Cultural, emotional, and intellectual decolonization was extremely difficult. Decolonization brought negative images of Africa to the world by spreading stereotypes of images of hunger, arbitrary governments, foreign exploitation, and ecological neglect.\textsuperscript{23} Unfortunately, many of these stereotypes are still associated with Africa today; however, after decolonization the art world has begun to recognize their misinterpretation of African objects. This transformation in perception has been integral to the better understanding of African objects, artifacts, and art, especially sculptures. These changes

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 7.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 89.
facilitated a critical reinterpretation of the history of the circulation, display, and evaluation of African art in Europe and the United States.

**African Art in Europe**

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, European colonial expansion led to the influx of art, artifacts, and other material culture from Africa, Oceania, the Americas, and the Pacific Islands. While this paper focuses primarily on African art, this time period also saw the arrival of material culture from other places which endured European colonialism. Transportation innovations had made it easier for European governments to access the entire African continent, but these advances also made it possible to transport African objects to Europe. French military officers, colonial administrators, missionaries, scientists, merchants, and others participated in obtaining and moving African objects from their homeland to France. A large portion of these African objects entered into the collections of natural history and anthropological museums as ethnographic specimens and were displayed as types of colonial trophies which marked the domination of those needing “civilizing.”

Scholar Marianna Torgovnick described museums in the early twentieth century stating, “They displayed their ‘primitive’ objects in a way that resembled a department store during clearance sales: items were displayed en masse, in no specific order so that they were on view but not exhibited lavishly or enticingly.”

Outside museums, flea markets became hot spots for individuals interested in purchasing

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non-Western art as these objects held little economic value and were accessible to lower
classes.  

This enthusiasm for non-Western art led to the formation of a variety of
specialty markets throughout Europe, but Paris developed into a center for African art.

Europeans began collecting African objects as early as the sixteenth century.
Before the Berlin Conference of 1884 initiating the “Scramble for Africa,” traders with
African groups bought or stole African objects as souvenirs or as curios for Cabinets of
Curiosity. During the Renaissance, these were extraordinary collections of objects in the
homes of wealthy European elites. The “curio collecting” period was followed by the
“trophy collecting” period where collectors assembled a compendium of artifacts,
weapons, animal skins, horns, and tusks to flaunt their conquest and dominion over a
certain area. In the same manner of “trophy collecting,” colonialism became the main
source for the acquisition of ethnographic collections in the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries. Starting in the 1870s, as a result of the “Scramble for Africa,” the
French colonized most of North and West Africa. These countries included Algeria,
Morocco, Tunisia, the Ivory Coast, Benin, Mali, Niger, Guinea, Senegal, Burkina Faso,
Togo, and Nigeria. I note these specific countries as most collections of African art that
exist today come from cultures of these regions.

The majority of European museums were founded as state institutions to highlight
collections reflecting and promulgating nationalist interests. Across Europe,
ethnographic and anthropological museums were established for the scientific study of

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28 Berzock and Clarke, Representing Africa in American Art Museums, 5.
humans, human behavior, and societies. Ethnographic collections served to educate and fascinate the public. These museums attempted to define and categorize cultures through their material production by displaying objects in a “scientific” manner divorced from a hierarchy of aesthetic quality. European museums preferred non-Western objects created prior to colonization as the objects were thought to have a certain aura as if they were untouched by the outside world. Museums used the rhetoric of authenticity or purity to argue for the conservation and preservation of these objects because of the threat to non-Western people colonialism posed.

The first ethnographic museum in Paris was the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro, founded in 1878. The French Ministry of Public Education established the museum in the Trocadéro Palace as the Muséum ethnographique des missions scientifiques or the Ethnographic Museum of Scientific Expeditions. The Trocadéro building lacked heat, lighting, and funding, which were not ideal conditions for a museum. Nonetheless, this was one of the main museums in France that housed African art collected in the “Scramble for Africa.” By 1910, the collection had grown from 6,000 to 75,000 objects, displayed in cramped cases. An 1886 report described these displays, “In the display cases, which were unfortunately very inadequate, household objects have been assembled… This section is a bit neglected…” These problematic exhibition

29 Berzock and Clarke, Representing Africa in American Art Museums, 4.
practices remained the same across museums in the early decades of the twentieth century. The museum also lacked proper display materials and often used the packaging the objects were transported in as display cases.\textsuperscript{33} Without funding and the proper storage, the museum was unable to appropriately care for these objects. Various members of the European avant-garde witnessed the atrocious conditions in which the non-Western objects resided. In 1907, Pablo Picasso visited the Trocadéro where he described his experience stating, “The smell of dampness and rot there stuck in my throat. It depressed me so much I wanted to get out fast.”\textsuperscript{34} Despite the poor conditions, Picasso continued to visit the museum, feeling he discovered “what painting was all about” through his observation of African masks on display.\textsuperscript{35}

The Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro continued to face financial burdens and despite numerous efforts to improve the building and conditions of the collection, the museum closed. The palace was demolished in 1935. The Musée de l’Homme opened in the Palais de Chaillot in 1937 and received over 300,000 ethnographic objects from the Trocadéro collection.

Even though African objects were displayed in Europe before and leading up to the first few decades of the twentieth century, aesthetic appreciation for African objects did not emerge until the early twentieth century. Avant-garde artists and galleries began

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 140-51.
\textsuperscript{34} Peter Stepan. \textit{Picasso’s Collection of African and Oceanic Art: Masters of Metamorphosis}. Munich; Prestel, 2006.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
viewing these objects as pieces for inspiration and admiration, which marked a turning point in the journey of African objects in Europe and the United States.

**Primitivism**

In the early twentieth century, European avant-garde artists encountered non-Western masks, sculptures, and statues in museums and flea markets, inspiring a new approach to their work. For them, these objects signified “spiritual” or “conceptual” otherness of African people and culture as constructed in the European imagination. These artists incorporated formal aspects of African objects into their compositions. These European artworks were a representation of the West’s colonial ideology. Abigail Solomon-Godeau explains that this appropriation demonstrates a dense interweaving of racial and sexual fantasies and power, both colonial and patriarchal. In the face of these unknown cultures, Europeans envisioned themselves as evolved and civilized, while they perceived those from non-Western regions as intuitive and magical. This construct reinforced beliefs rooted in racial hierarchy used to justify European colonial subjugation of non-Western cultures.

Primitivism is the term used to describe the Western response to non-Western cultures as revealed in the work and thought of these modern artists. Primitivism is a contested concept within art due to the uneven power dynamics between European artists and those whose objects they exploited. As scholar Michele Greet states, “Meaning is primarily determined and evaluated according to those in power. When influence is from

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37 Torgovnick, Gone Primitive. 75.
the bottom up, as is the case of European primitivism, the modern artist from the imperial
center is seen as actively selecting and interpreting the most stimulating formal sources
from a wide range of objects from distant countries or colonized regions.”38 By using
these objects in this way, artists removed them from their original historical, religious,
and cultural context. Marius de Zayas’ curatorial practices functioned similarly as he
focused on the aesthetic quality of African objects while disregarding their original
functions.

Scholars and museum professionals have widely discussed and explored the topic
of primitivism. The understanding of the terminology over the past century has evolved
along with the world’s perception of African art and culture. Robert Goldwater was one
of the first scholars to use the word “primitivism” in relation to modern artists and can be
seen as one of the original scholars on the subject. His doctoral dissertation, written in
1938, was titled *Primitivism in Modern Painting*.39 Goldwater struggled to give a
definition of primitivism because he did not want to limit its usage to a particular period
or school of painting.40 He looked at the relationship of the modern European painter to
the history of their own art, to their immediate audience, and to their social context in
order to examine the creation of primitivism.41 Over the course of his career, Goldwater
established four different categories of primitivism, including the primitive romanticism

38 Michele Greet, *Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris between the Wars* (New
xxiv.
40 Ibid, xxiv.
41 Ibid, xxv.
of Gauguin, an emotional primitivism exemplified by the Brücke and Blaue Reiter groups in Germany, the intellectual primitivism of Picasso and Modigliani, and a “primitivism of the subconscious” in Miró, Klee, and Dalí. The definitions and categories created by Goldwater have had a lasting impact on the assessment of both European modern art and African art in art history.

Goldwater belonged to the same scholarly circles as Alfred Barr, an American art historian and the first director of the Museum of Modern Art. During Barr’s time as director, he supervised the exhibition *African Negro Art* in 1935. The press release for the exhibition explained, “603 of the finest specimens from private/collections here and abroad will be shown. The art of the primitive negro in its mastery of aesthetic forms, sensitiveness to materials, freedom of naturalistic imitation and boldness of imagination parallels many of the ideals of modern art.” Barr and James Johnson Sweeney, the exhibition’s curator, were adamant about the role African art played in inspiring European avant-garde artists. Marius de Zayas wrote *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York* at the request of Alfred Barr. In retrospect, this relationship leads me to believe that de Zayas’ theories about African art inspired much of Barr’s ideology.

Attitudes towards African art continued mostly unchanged until 1984 when curator, William Rubin, organized an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York titled “*Primitivism* in 20th Century Modern Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the

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42 Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Painting*.
Rubin described the formal affinity he saw between non-Western art and the European avant-garde in the exhibition’s catalogue. Rubin stated, “That he was not so much interested in the pieces of ‘tribal’ art in themselves but instead wanted to focus on the ways in which modern artists ‘discovered’ this art.” In response to this exhibition, scholar, Jean-Hubert Martin, countered that this attitude effectively meant the non-Western objects were “given the status of not much more than footnotes or addenda to the Modernist avant-garde.” Martin argued it was not enough to simply exhibit international works if the social and political realities of Europe’s colonies were ignored.

James Clifford’s book, published in 1988, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art was a turning point for art historians and anthropologists in the discourse surrounding primitivism. Clifford utilizes a unique approach to scholarship on primitivism as he combines perspectives from history, literary analysis, anthropology, and cultural studies. He provides a historical critique of European systems of thought linked to issues of “culture,” “man,” the “primitive,” and the “exotic.” He believes scholars should criticize how Euro-American artists and institutions redefined these objects as art to suit their own artistic vision without regard to the object’s original purpose. Clifford emphasizes the error and harm of focusing solely on

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48 Ibid.
the visual aspect of non-Western art while omitting the circumstances under which colonists obtained and transported objects from one part of the world to another.\textsuperscript{50} The shifting definition of “art” and how African art moved from Africa, to Europe, and then to the United States is crucial for this paper.

Also in the 1980s, scholar Susan Vogel explored how the presentation of art influences its perception.\textsuperscript{51} Vogel scrutinized current museum display practices in the United States of displaying African artifacts as art. Vogel discussed the ways museums make African objects accessible to Euro-American audiences by stripping them of their meaning and context.\textsuperscript{52} She pointed out, “The impulse to strip African art of its visible cultural context has roots in the desire to make it resemble art of the West and conform to our definition of what art is.”\textsuperscript{53} These ideas are crucial to the analysis of de Zayas’ presentation of African objects and how they shaped the way these objects were understood, impacting the broader perception of African culture and society. I argue the precedent de Zayas set in the early 1900s is the root of the issues Vogel fought to change during her career.

\textbf{A Review of the Literature on Paul Guillaume and Marius de Zayas}

Specialized African art markets became increasingly popular during the early twentieth century in Paris. French art dealer, Paul Guillaume, became known as the prominent dealer of African art. He amassed his collection of African art in the early

\textsuperscript{50} Clifford, \textit{The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art}, 189-214.
\textsuperscript{51} Vogel, \textit{Art, Artifact: African Art}, 11.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid}, 11.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Ibid}, 14.
1900s through a series of colonial trade networks. Guillaume was well known for collecting and selling African art; however, he was also known for his connections with the European avant-garde. It was through these connections that Guillaume met de Zayas.

Paul Guillaume has remained understudied by art historians, however; John Warne Monroe’s book *Metropolitan Fetish: African Sculpture and the Imperial French Invention of Primitive Art* sheds light on the French reception of African art in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Within this book, Monroe examines Guillaume’s role as an African art connoisseur in conjunction with his career as an art dealer for the avant-garde. Monroe investigates Guillaume’s marketing strategy and how he persuaded wealthy clients to pay “high art” prices for objects that had once been considered ethnographic specimens and curios. This book serves as one of the few sources focused on Guillaume and his legacy. Michele Hornn and Solveig Pigearias wrote their article “Paul Guillaume and African art; the history of a collection in light of new research” which provides background information on Guillaume’s life which led to his popularity as an African art dealer. While scholarship on Guillaume remains incomplete, the theories, art, and life of Marius de Zayas have been discussed by numerous academics.

Scholars, including Willard Bohn, Lauren Kroiz, Charles Brock, Douglas Hyland, and Antonio Saborit, have examined de Zayas and his complicated theories

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55 Ibid, 89.
comprehensively. In his article “The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas” Bohn argues that de Zayas’ complex theories of abstraction, which combined algebraic formulas with “geometric equivalents,” played an important role in the evolution of the American avant-garde. Bohn also believes de Zayas was crucial to New York Dada because his theories on abstraction inspired Francis Picabia to create his mechanomorphic style in 1915.

Lauren Kroiz’s essay “Breeding Modern Art: Criticism, Caricature, and Condoms in New York’s Avant-garde Melting Pot” examines early twentieth-century modernism in New York through a study of Marius de Zayas. She investigates the racially charged rhetoric used in aesthetic theory and art criticism of the period. Her study contextualizes de Zayas' interest in creating an identity for American art which incorporated the diversity of the country's immigrant population. Kroiz analyzes de Zayas' artwork and theories to argue that: “U. S. artists needed to invent a scientifically derived, evolutionary aesthetic theory to direct the fertile crossbreeding of artistic strategies and mediums, as well as ethnic and racial differences, in order to create a unique national and modern art.”

Charles Brock focuses on the exhibitions Marius de Zayas put together during his time at Stieglitz's gallery, 291, and how he helped to revolutionize modern art in New

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York through these avenues. Brock argues the time de Zayas spent in Paris influenced his theories and display practices back in New York. Before de Zayas’ trip to Paris in 1910, he did not believe in Stieglitz’s mission to explore radical art in Europe; however, this trip changed his ideas on what modern art should be. The inspiration de Zayas took from his trip led him to believe he could capture a type of religious spirituality through algebraic formulas. Additionally, Brock believes de Zayas was the most important interpreter and critic of the modern art movements in New York at the time.

In 1982, curator, Douglas Hyland, organized the exhibition, *Marius de Zayas: Conjurer of Souls* at the Spencer Museum of Art in Kansas. The exhibition was one of the first in over seventy years devoted solely to the art of de Zayas and provided a retrospective assessment of his entire career. In the catalogue, Hyland analyzes de Zayas’ personality and the motives behind his theories and caricatures.

Despite the existence of scholarship on de Zayas, his connections with African art have been under examined. This thesis will fill in some scholarly gaps and consider how these theories correspond to de Zayas’ presentation of African art. I argue that what de Zayas learned about African art in France influenced how he discussed, regarded, and displayed African objects in New York. Additionally, I contend that de Zayas set a lasting precedent for displaying African art with European modern art which remains prevalent today.

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In the years between 1914 and 1923, de Zayas began to present African art juxtaposed with European avant-garde art in both 291 and his gallery known as The Modern Gallery. While curating exhibitions, he continued writing about the connections he perceived between these two types of art. These writings introduced an intellectual assessment of this art for the first time to the New York art world to foster understanding and appreciation. He published *African Negro Art: Its Influence on Modern Art* alongside an exhibition on the subject in 1916, which I will address later in this paper. This primary source reveals de Zayas valued African art primarily because of its relation to the art of the West. A comprehensive account of de Zayas’ curatorial work between 1914 and 1923 will shed light on the fundamental role he played in constructing a connection between the display of African art and that of the European avant-garde and how his original treatment of African objects had a lasting impact on future displays of African art.

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63 The Modern Gallery would later become known as the de Zayas Gallery.
PAUL GUILLAUME AND MARIUS DE ZAYAS: PROVIDERS OF AFRICAN ART

Paul Guillaume and Marius de Zayas were pioneers of collecting and marketing African art in both Europe and the United States; their individual lives and their professional relationship deserves exploration. This section examines the history of these men leading up to their meeting in 1914, which led to de Zayas creating the first avant-garde presentation of African art in the United States.

Paul Guillaume was a French art dealer known as one of the first to distribute African art in Paris during the early 1900s. Over the course of his life, Guillaume sold over 830 different African objects throughout Europe and the United States. He proposed a new way of studying African objects by observing them directly and describing their characteristics clearly, concentrating on sculpture, its forms, qualities, and aesthetic properties. He referred to his approach as “revolutionary”; however, the revolution of African art in Europe had already begun. By the time Guillaume began promoting African art, members of the European avant-garde, museums, and flea markets were already familiar with these objects as curiosities, trophies, ethnographic specimens, and objects of admiration.

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66 Ibid, 88.
Guillaume first encountered African objects in 1911; he worked in an automobile shop which sold tires made from rubber acquired through trade with African colonies. African rubber merchants often brought back additional objects to sell, including ivory sculptures, masks, and wooden statues. During one of his shifts, Guillaume opened a rubber shipment containing an African sculpture. With permission from his boss, Guillaume placed the sculpture on display in the shop window. According to Alfred Basler, Guillaume managed to acquire a collection of African objects, which he kept on display in the shop corner. This window display attracted the attention of poet and art critic, Guillaume Apollinaire. Subsequently, the two entered a long and close friendship, which helped Guillaume become one of the top art dealers in Paris during the early twentieth century. Apollinaire took Guillaume under his wing and taught him about both African and modern art. Apollinaire was inspired by the “expressive force” of objects from Africa and believed African art should be better known and appreciated. This attitude helped shape Guillaume’s understanding and appreciation of African art. Additionally, Apollinaire introduced Guillaume to European avant-garde painters, writers, and musicians throughout Paris. These new connections provided Guillaume with a way to enter the Parisian art world.

In 1912, Guillaume posted advertisements in French colonial newspapers requesting the help of colonial administrators to collect African objects for him from

68 Lazareff, "Paul Guillaume, who launched Art Negre in Paris, will be selling his famous collection,” 78.
69 Ibid. 79.
70 Maureen Murphy, art historian, Senior lecturer at the Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne. https://www.musee-orangerie.fr/en/event/apollinaire-and-exotic-arts
West and Central Africa.\textsuperscript{71} This ad connected Guillaume with the French colonial administrator, Aristide Courtois. Guillaume was the first person with whom Courtois had commercial dealings.\textsuperscript{72} This relationship helped Guillaume compile his immense collection of African art and explains why the majority of his collection came from French colonies, particularly Cote d’Ivoire and the Congo.

In July 1912, several currently unknown avant-garde artists created the \textit{Société d’art et d’archéologie Nègre} with Guillaume as the representative of the society. This group proposed to sponsor lectures, fund a scholarly journal, and establish a small museum.\textsuperscript{73} The initial attempts this society took to build a broader interest in African sculpture failed to attract the support needed and the projects never took shape. In 1913, Guillaume founded the \textit{Société des Mélanophiles}, of which both Apollinaire and Alberto Savinio were members. The creation of these societies reinforced the steps Apollinaire and Guillaume took to try and legitimize African art within the Parisian art world.\textsuperscript{74}

In 1914, Guillaume opened his gallery at 6, Rue de Mirosmesnil (Fig. 1). The announcement for the opening proclaimed that the gallery would feature, “modern paintings by Francis Picabia, Giorgio de Chirico, Pierre Roy, Madeleine Berly, Robert Lotiron, and Black African sculpture.”\textsuperscript{75} This exhibition of both avant-garde and African art in the same gallery was revolutionary, especially compared to the current museum

\textsuperscript{72}Following Guillaume’s death in 1934, Courtois entered into dealings with Charles Ratton.
\textsuperscript{73}Monroe, \textit{Metropolitan Fetish: African Sculpture and the Imperial French Invention of Primitive Art}, 92.
\textsuperscript{74}Hornn and Pigearias, “Paul Guillaume and African Art; the History of a Collection in Light of New Research,” 79.
\textsuperscript{75}\textit{Ibid}, 80.
display practices. Guillaume established himself not only as the go-to art dealer for African art but also modern art. Following that exhibition in 1914, Apollinaire officially introduced Guillaume to Marius de Zayas.

Marius de Zayas was born in Veracruz, Mexico in 1880. His father was a wealthy historian, orator, lawyer, and was named poet laureate of his country; later he established two newspapers in Veracruz, which provided de Zayas the opportunity to create caricatures and receive artistic training from caricature artist, Carlo de Fornaro.76 These newspapers published articles opposing the dictator Porfirio Diaz, but because of political backlash, the de Zayas family fled Mexico and moved to the United States in 1907. He resided with his family in the Bronx where he became known as a gifted draftsman and cartoonist within the art world. It was while working in New York that de Zayas came into contact with photographer, Alfred Stieglitz, and the Stieglitz Circle. In January 1909, Stieglitz gave de Zayas his first public showing, which included his most famous caricatures.77 In October 1910, Marius de Zayas traveled to Paris functioning as a talent scout for Stieglitz. He was initially baffled by Cubism, which he referred to as a “deadly movement.”78 A few months later, however, de Zayas met Pablo Picasso and conducted in-depth interviews with him in their common language, Spanish.79 This friendship helped advance de Zayas’ views on cubism and other avant-garde art movements in Europe at this time. From Paris, de Zayas helped to arrange the first Picasso exhibition in

77 Ibid. x
78 Ibid. x
79 Ibid. xi
the United States held at 291 in April 1911.\textsuperscript{80} It was during this trip to Paris and through his friendship with Picasso, who since 1907 had been incorporating the characteristic geometric simplification of African asks in his work, that de Zayas encountered African art as source material for the European avant-garde. At first, de Zayas was doubtful upon seeing the African artworks that the avant-garde sought out; he wrote to Stieglitz stating, “Some of the sculptors have merely copied African art without taking the trouble to translate it into French.”\textsuperscript{81} Despite this initial skepticism, in 1911, de Zayas returned to New York with a newfound interest in the connections between African art and European modernism. Back in New York, de Zayas proposed exhibitions of African art at 291 to Alfred Stieglitz; however, despite de Zayas’ enthusiasm, he was unable to proceed because he lacked resources to acquire African art. While Paul Guillaume was able to import African objects from French colonies, the United States lacked those direct ties to Africa.\textsuperscript{82} Although de Zayas was unable to curate exhibitions of African art in New York in 1911, he began developing complex theories about abstraction in modern art and its correlation with non-Western forms.

From fall 1911 until spring 1914, de Zayas achieved a new level of maturity as a theorist. In 1912, while working on his theories, he claimed, “Art is Dead,” because he believed the culture of religious faith necessary for the survival of art no longer existed having been vanquished by science.\textsuperscript{83} De Zayas believed the modern artist was a casualty

\textsuperscript{80} De Zayas, \textit{How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York}, xi.
\textsuperscript{81} De Zayas to Stieglitz, Paris, April 21, 1911. ALS, Stieglitz Papers, YCAL.
on an evolutionary path moving away from the abstract and imaginative toward a new factual representation of form epitomized by photography.\textsuperscript{84} He explained that photographers who expressed “pure objectivity” were closely aligned with the true scientific spirit of the age and therefore the most advanced artists of his time could be considered scientists in training.\textsuperscript{85}

De Zayas continued to explore different theories and in 1913, wrote the book \textit{A Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression} alongside fellow writer and photographer, Paul B. Haviland. This book meant to teach one how to look at and appreciate the most current manifestations of the new art that had been inspired by non-Western forms.\textsuperscript{86} Scholar Antonio Saborit, explains that this book introduced de Zayas’ initial understanding about the evolution of artistic forms and the influence of so-called “primitive” art in the creative process of his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{87} In \textit{A Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression}, de Zayas and Haviland discuss how in order to express new ideas in art, one must look to different forms. The influence of non-Western art, both ancient and modern, inspired both de Zayas and Haviland. They believed that an emotional element, which they concluded could be found in non-Western art, was missing in modern art. To them, modern art should provide an abstract emotion, much

\textsuperscript{84} Brock, “Marius de Zayas, 1909-1915: A Commerce of Ideas,” 146.
like music does. With this in mind, they believed non-Western art could provide inspiration for powerful, complex emotions. According to de Zayas and Haviland, “It has selected at its departure the form of the art of the primitive races, logically, we think, because primitive form is the most adaptable to the expression of feelings being essentially the imaginative form, and also the most simple and direct. Primitive art is the work most closely related to feelings.” De Zayas also argued the study of non-Western races was important because it facilitated the study of abstraction and its significance leading to the study of plastic metaphysics.

De Zayas’ efforts to arrive at a new scientific yet spiritual approach to art can be seen in his portraiture of this time. He believed utilizing aspects of non-Western art would help find “the spirit” within representational caricatures. He theorized that spirit could be represented mathematically by “algebraic formulas” and physical matter could be represented by “geometrical equivalents.” Additionally, he thought there was a third component. De Zayas stated, “man in relation to his own life and to mankind, forms a third psychological entity, which is not an arithmetical addition, but a chemical combination.” For example, in de Zayas’ portrait of Alfred Stieglitz (Fig. 2), de Zayas used geometrical shapes to represent the physical attributes of Stieglitz. The two dark circles serve as eye glasses while the parallel lines create a triangular shape on the lower

89 Ibid, 20.
90 Ibid, 35.
91 Ibid, 20.
92 De Zayas’ catalogue essay was reprinted as “Caricature: Absolute and Relative.” *Camera Work* 46 (April 1914), 19-21.
left, suggesting a mustache. While this portrait is abstract, there are still traces of a physical likeness, showing Stieglitz’s eyeglasses and mustache. The additional circles represent camera lenses, alluding to Stieglitz’s work as a photographer. The many lines, patterns, and diagonals act as a type of chaotic representation for the intensity of Stieglitz’s activities. The fragmentation of Stieglitz’s appearance and the repetitive features are surely derived from the European Cubism de Zayas previously encountered in Paris. While these symbols have representational meaning in the depiction of Stieglitz, there is also a spiritual component suggested in the presentation of circles and lines. The central vertical line with five pairs of circles was inspired by a rope object made in Pukapuka (Cook Islands), an object known as a “soul-catcher.” De Zayas discovered this object at the British Museum in 1911 during his short trip to London. To de Zayas, the idea of a soul-catcher captured the spirit of Stieglitz’s hold on the artistic souls of the New York avant-garde. In addition to the inclusion of this non-Western object, the mathematical equations symbolize the spirit of Stieglitz. The combination of the soul-catcher and algebraic equation incorporates the emotion of non-Western art with the scientific authority of the Western modernist.

Despite the fact that de Zayas was experimenting with theories involving non-Western art, all the connections he made were in relation to their significance to avant-garde art. A year after publishing *A Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression*,

during the summer of 1914, de Zayas returned to Paris in hopes of acquiring new and
innovative works of art for Stieglitz’s gallery, 291. He hoped that African art would be
displayed among the works of modern art at 291. De Zayas repeatedly visited the
Trocadéro to photograph the African objects housed there. 97 He also spoke of the horrid
conditions of the Trocadéro in letters he sent to Stieglitz. De Zayas wrote, “I have kept
taking photographs of the negro art in the Trocadéro. The photographs are indeed bad,
but very helpful to me. The conditions in which one takes them cannot be worse, but at
any rate they show the form and I can make my studies from them.” 98 These photographs
facilitated de Zayas’ studies on the evolution of form. He also spoke with the conservator
of the Trocadéro to acquire information that would further his theoretical writings. 99

While de Zayas certainly encountered African objects at the Trocadéro, he was
also in contact with Paul Guillaume. Unlike at the Trocadéro, in Guillaume’s gallery, de
Zayas could view African statuary alongside European avant-garde art. Correspondence
between de Zayas and Stieglitz reveals that Guillaume offered de Zayas a collection of 18
African objects for an exhibition at 291: “I believe I can arrange an exhibition of
remarkable negro statuettes. Guillaume, the art dealer has a very important collection and
is willing to let you have them. I have always believed that a show of the art of the
negroes would be a great thing for 291. Tell me if you want them.” 100 It is important to
note that both de Zayas and Guillaume were solely interested in African statuary as

97 Unfortunately, these photographs no longer exist.
98 De Zayas to Stieglitz, Paris, 9 July 1914., ALS, Stieglitz Papers, YCAL.
100 De Zayas to Stieglitz, Paris, 26 May 1914., ALS, Stieglitz Papers, YCAL.
opposed to other cultural items. This emphasis on figurative statuary stemmed from the knowledge that European modernists — including Maurice Vlaminck, André Derian, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso — took inspiration from such objects to formulate innovative ways of depicting the human face and body.  

In response to Guillaume’s offer, Stieglitz wrote on June 3, 1914, “This morning I had a letter from Paul Guillaume in which he tells me that you had told him to write to me. He says that he would be glad to let us have a show of negro art. Has he really good things, and what do you think about it? Of course I would like to have a show of Negro art as you know. I want to make the next season at 291 a live one.”  

Once Stieglitz agreed to exhibit African objects at 291, de Zayas arranged to transport the objects back to New York. Showcasing African art in New York provided an opportunity to present these objects as fine art with the hope of opening a new market. Avant-garde circles in New York and Europe had begun viewing these objects as aesthetically important, while museums continued to regard them solely as ethnographic specimens. The exchange between de Zayas and Stieglitz highlights the ever-evolving conversation surrounding African art during this time.

Just prior to World War I, in 1913, the Armory Show, also known as the International Exhibition of Modern art, introduced U.S. Americans to the experimental

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styles of the European avant-garde, including fauvism, cubism, and futurism. This exhibition was the first of its kind and size in the United States and served as a catalyst for American avant-garde artists to create their own artistic identities. It was a three-city exhibition which began in New York City at the 69th Regiment Armory which is a National Guard armory building, then traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago, and ended in Boston at The Copley Society of Art; however, the lack of space in Boston led to all of the work by U.S. American artists being removed. Over 1,300 paintings, sculptures, and other avant-garde works created by 300 different European and U.S. American artists were showcased. News reports across all three cities mocked the exhibition; however, the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s acquisition of avant-garde works signaled a new integration of modernism into U.S. art museums.

On July 28, 1914, World War I broke out, causing de Zayas to flee Paris. De Zayas left with many artworks by Picasso, Braque, and Picabia, as well as, African objects. He explained in a letter to Stieglitz on September 13, 1914, what happened, “We arrived here (New York City) yesterday night, not flying but retreating, and with all the honors of the war, for I brought with myself the pictures of Picasso, Braque, and Picabia that I had promised you for the exhibition at 291. Also fifteen of the best negro things that has ever been brought to the civilized races.”

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105 De Zayas to Stieglitz, September 13, 1914. De Zayas, How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York, 185.
superiority reflect both the mindset that Europeans held as a result of colonialism, as well as the legacy left behind by slavery in the United States. African people and their objects were viewed as “primitive” and inferior but gained some semblance of importance once obtained by Europeans who perceived themselves as racially superior people. This mindset was ever present in the writings and work of de Zayas and other members of the avant-garde.

In 1914, as a result of the war, aspects of the art market were uprooted from Paris to New York. After the Armory Show, a uniquely U.S. American modernism emerged. Groups including the Stieglitz Circle introduced new types of art through experimentation and exploration. De Zayas’ acquisition of Guillaume’s collection was the impetus for the Stieglitz Circle’s inclusion of African objects in their formulation of the category of “new” art. De Zayas later described Guillaume’s donation of African objects saying, “That was his first contribution to exhibitions of modern art in New York; many others followed.”

Guillaume regularly sent African objects to de Zayas in New York up until 1919. This collaboration helped to shape the understanding and appreciation for African art in the United States.

With this new collection of African objects, de Zayas prepared for one of the first exhibitions of African objects as art in New York. The exhibition of Guillaume’s collection was titled *Statuary in Wood by African Savages: The Root of Modern Art*, which opened in November 1914 (Fig. 3). This was the first time that these types of objects were used for aesthetic rather than ethnographic study in the United States. On

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the invitation to the exhibition, Stieglitz described the presentation as, “The first time in the history of exhibitions that Negro statuary will be shown from the point of view of art.” De Zayas wrote the exhibition catalogue, which was published in *Photo-Secessio*n in November 1914. De Zayas, like Stieglitz, claimed, “That the exhibition of African Negro Art that we made at the Photo-Succession with those pieces was the first ever held presenting Negro sculpture as Art.” Helen M. Shannon argues that this installation of African art allowed the aesthetic qualities of the sculpture to be studied from various viewpoints, and William Innes Homer explained that the objects were placed on view with the hope that audiences would regard them as works of art instead of ethnological specimens. As previously mentioned, African objects had been displayed in the United States both in ethnographic and art museums; however, the 291 exhibition was the first to showcase African objects as “fine art” in an avant-garde gallery space.

Henry McBride, in his *New York Sun* review from Sunday, November 8, 1914, described how Stieglitz and de Zayas displayed the objects on the gallery’s signature gray walls; however, by November 14, 1914, the reviews noted the “setting of crude and violent color.” Edward Steichen was responsible for these changes. He often designed installations at 291 when he visited New York from his home in France. Upon returning for the 1914 exhibition, he asked Stieglitz to let him brighten up the exhibition with

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107 Stieglitz exhibition announcement, YCAL.
yellow, orange, and black sheets of paper. Steichen created abstract geometric patterns with the paper in overlapping horizontal, vertical, diagonal, and trapezoidal forms, stuck them on the walls, and then replaced the artwork. Based on the misleading stereotype of the African continent as covered by jungle, Steichen asserted, “The whole room came alive, the colored papers serving like a backdrop of jungle drums.”

The response to African art in the United States was complex because of the tension created between the avant-garde’s vision and the deeply embedded racial biases left by the legacy of slavery. Steichen’s installation showcased these contradictions, visually illustrating these racial and national connotations of an uncivilized African jungle theme. Shannon argues that Steichen utilized the colored paper in a way that alluded to both Picasso’s palette during his “Negro Period” and his later analytic cubist phase. Steichen was also responsible for rearranging the objects themselves. He raised certain objects to eye level in hopes that they would create a direct physical and emotional impact on the viewer. For example, Steichen placed a Baule portrait mask in the middle of a wall, flanked by two spoons and a comb (Fig. 4). According to Shannon, this arrangement was reminiscent of the decorative, symmetrical design of colonial museums. This mix of ethnographic museum display combined with the new modernist aesthetic of 291 showcased the transitional nature of this revolutionary moment. Photographs taken by Alfred Stieglitz also demonstrate the experimental rearrangement of the objects. Unlike ethnographic museums, this exhibition displayed the objects on pedestals and mounted on walls.

114 Ibid, 176.
The audience reception of the exhibition was mixed as some saw the objects as artworks in their own right, while others only viewed the African objects as important because of their relation to the European avant-garde. Critics understood that this exhibition offered examples of the dramatic influence that African art had on the European avant-garde. Those that came to appreciate the quality of the objects because of the exhibit included J. Edgar Chamberlain, who wrote for the *New York Mail* stating, “We do not think of the wild African tribes as great sculptors, but the exhibition of their work which Mr. Stieglitz has been holding at *Photo-Succession* gallery proves that they are real artists, expressing a definite idea with great skill.”

A writer for the *New York Herald* proclaimed, “It is certain that before the introduction of the plastic principles of negro art, abstract representations did not exist among Europeans. Negro art has reawakened in us the feeling for abstract form.” In contrast, the *New York Evening Post* wrote, “In the case of these exhibits it was not necessary to explain that they are savage. Savage indeed! The rank savor of savagery attacks the visitor the instant he enters the diminutive room. This rude carving belongs to the black recesses of the jungle. Some examples are hardly human, and are so powerfully expressive of gross brutality that the flesh quails.”

These types of damning comments serve to remind us of the socio-political realities of the United States at this time; the lynching of African Americans and racism towards African descendants continued. While the Harlem Renaissance and New Negro Movement were spreading across the country, it is not

115 J. Edgar Chamberlain in the *New York Mail.*
surprising that certain audiences had harsh comments for an exhibit dedicated to African objects. Despite the political realities and negative feedback, de Zayas remained hopeful he could continue successfully exhibiting African objects in avant-garde spaces.

The same African objects, which had previously entered Europe as colonial trophies and perplexed modernists in Europe, entered the United States at 291 as objects worthy of aesthetic contemplation. These objects were appreciated by the New York avant-garde for their marketability as potential objects of modern art. This appreciation came at a price, though; de Zayas introduced African objects to the New York art world in the context of the European avant-garde. While the exhibition did not directly include avant-garde art, the context of the modern art gallery, and the exhibition catalogue legitimized the association, asserting that European artists discovered African objects, which deemed them as worthy. De Zayas discussed these connections in the exhibition wall labels and catalogue which influenced visitors’ understanding of the objects.\textsuperscript{118} In the introductory note for the catalogue, de Zayas maintained that Pablo Picasso was responsible for discovering African art and introducing it to European artists. Additionally, de Zayas wrote, “Modern art is not individualistic and esoteric and even less an expression of spontaneous generation. It shows itself more and more frankly as an art of discoveries… Negro art has had thus a direct influence on our comprehension of form, teaching us to see and feel its purely expressive side and opening our eyes to a new world of plastic sensations.”\textsuperscript{119} While de Zayas wanted this exhibition to help audiences

\textsuperscript{118} De Zayas, \textit{How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York}. 55.
\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Ibid}, 56.
appreciate African art, it was only meant to be important aesthetically, for its ability to visually portray emotions. The original, historical, and religious contexts of the objects were never known or researched. In spite of this lack of understanding, the elevation of these objects to fine art drew attention to them as pieces with significance beyond that of curios or ethnographic specimens. 1914 became known as the year in which the United States “discovered” African objects as art. Scholars, Berzock and Clarke, argue that this exhibition and the growing interest in Western modern art led to a growing market for African art.\textsuperscript{120} Following this exhibition, de Zayas continued to curate exhibitions of African art at 291 and his newly established \textit{The Modern Gallery} in New York City.

\textsuperscript{120} Berzock and Clarke, \textit{Representing Africa in American Art Museums}, 7.
Upon de Zayas’ return to New York from Europe in 1914, he found himself motivated to revitalize the New York art scene. The previously discussed 1914 exhibition *Statuary in Wood by African Savages: The Root of Modern Art* was a part of this revitalization attempt. In addition to creating new exhibitions, de Zayas, alongside Paul B. Haviland, believed that a new publication was necessary, and they encouraged Stieglitz to publish the magazine “291.” In the twelfth issue, the cover showcased an African mask from the 1914 exhibition and included a short essay de Zayas wrote on African art and its influences on Picasso. Despite de Zayas’ excitement and dedication to the magazine, it only lasted for twelve issues before being discontinued; but it served as an additional source for de Zayas to discuss African art. De Zayas was dedicated to revitalizing and legitimizing modern art and worked to integrate African art within this realm of modernism. He championed the use of modern photography to elevate African art. Between 1915 and 1923, he continued exhibiting, selling, and reviewing African art in New York City.

De Zayas helped Stieglitz curate the Picasso-Braque exhibition at 291, which took place between December 1914 and January 1915. This exhibition was the first to provide the United States with an overview of European cubism between 1912 and 1913. While the exhibition itself was successful, perhaps the most renowned reference to it is the
famous exhibition photograph taken by Alfred Stieglitz. This photograph showcases a figurine of the Kota people between two works by Picasso, as well as a wasp’s nest and an empty brass bowl (Fig. 5). While this photograph has become the referenced example for African art installations in the early twentieth century, it is not an accurate representation of the exhibition. This photograph was not an installation photograph, but instead a posed composition carefully constructed by Stieglitz and de Zayas. During the duration of the exhibition, there were multiple reviews in newspapers, an art magazine, and Camera Work, but no critic or writer, including Stieglitz himself, mentions the presence of African sculpture or the nest in the actual exhibition. The lack of acknowledgment of the presentation of these non-Western and atypical objects in a gallery is surprising, especially after the attention the Statuary in Wood by African Savages exhibition received. Upon further inspection, the visual elements within the photograph also point to the conclusion of staging. The works by Picasso were not attached to the wall but instead leaned against the ledge. The brass bowl is shown empty, but in other photographs taken at 291 it was filled with dried vegetation (Fig. 6). The pedestal, on which the wasp’s nest sits, appears to be unpainted with a box sitting on top of it, with a piece of cloth attached at its front. The lack of attention paid to preparing the pedestal indicates the hurried composition solely for the photograph.

123 Ibid, 178.
Additionally, the composition of this photograph differs from other installation photographs taken at 291 during this period. Other photographs, including from *Statuary in Wood by African Savages*, have a compressed sense of space to allow the largest number of objects to be shown. In Stieglitz’s photograph, the five objects appear to have been strategically placed to give the best view of each. The hanging lamp shades, which can be seen in the *Statuary in Wood by African Savages* images, are also missing in the photograph. The composition has been meticulously created to eliminate clutter to create a less distracting image. The question that remains is why did Stieglitz and de Zayas create this scene? Helen Shannon argues that Stieglitz used this image to illustrate the defense and promotion of modernism propagated by the Stieglitz Circle and to test the avant-garde theory that form is the subject of modern art exemplified by photography. Shannon’s argument solidifies the idea that de Zayas was continuing to work as a champion for photography in New York at this time. I would also argue that perhaps the bringing together of these objects was an attempt to demonstrate a new type of equality in art to challenge the artistic cannon. According to Shannon, this photograph challenged the idea of the aesthetic hierarchy which regarded Western painting and drawing as “high” art while non-Western objects were viewed as “the lowest” and “savage” forms of creation. Stieglitz’s photograph showcases these varying forms of art on the same aesthetic level within an avant-garde space.

At the time, the photograph was not viewed as revolutionary, but in the time since, it has become legendary and known as the image for African art displays during the early twentieth century. The reason, perhaps, is that this photograph was never seen by the critics or the general public.\textsuperscript{127} This image played a key role in the discussion of viewing African art through a photographer’s lens and the modernist perspective in New York moving forward.\textsuperscript{128}

Soon after the Picasso-Braque exhibition, de Zayas determined that New York needed a new avant-garde art gallery. In October 1915, de Zayas opened \textit{The Modern Gallery} with the financial support of art patrons Eugene and Agnes Meyer. De Zayas claimed the gallery was a commercial branch of Stieglitz’s gallery \textit{291}; however, after experimenting for three months, de Zayas found the two galleries were incompatible and suggested they be separated.\textsuperscript{129} Stieglitz later saw the success of this gallery as direct competition with \textit{291} and subsequently ended his friendship with de Zayas.\textsuperscript{130} Despite this tension, the opening of \textit{The Modern Gallery} helped de Zayas to establish himself as the foremost dealer and curator of African art. Until 1919, de Zayas stayed in contact with Paul Guillaume, who regularly sent African objects to de Zayas providing a rotating collection of African sculptures to display. In addition to African art, de Zayas created exhibitions of works by Picasso, Picabia, Brâncuși, Diego Rivera, and Pre-Columbian art. The mélange of avant-garde and non-Western art de Zayas presented in these exhibitions

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, 179.
\textsuperscript{129} De Zayas, \textit{How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York}, 94.
led to a new standard in the United States. Unlike at 291, de Zayas used his own gallery to physically present African objects alongside avant-garde art. This provided another way to establish African art as important through the context of modernist art. De Zayas left this practice as his legacy, and curators and art historians continue to grapple with it to this day.

From December 13, 1915 to January 3, 1916, de Zayas held two simultaneous exhibitions in his gallery: *Picasso Exhibition* and *Negro Sculpture Exhibition*. This combination was the first time European modern art and African art had been placed adjacent to each other in an avant-garde gallery in the United States. It was previously believed that the Picasso-Braque exhibition was the first of this kind; however, as discussed earlier, Stieglitz had not actually included African objects in the exhibition but just staged the photograph. De Zayas’ two exhibitions included eight Picasso paintings and a variety of African sculptures from the Ivory Coast, Sudan, the Congo, and Guinea. The *Herald* reviewed de Zayas’ exhibition with the title, “Picasso’s Art and Negro Work in Same Gallery.” The presses’ acknowledgment of these adjacent exhibitions demonstrates the unfamiliarity of viewing both African and modern art in the same space. While no installation photographs exist, there is a photograph of Marius de Zayas taken by Stieglitz at *The Modern Gallery* during these exhibitions (Fig. 7). In this photograph, we see de Zayas in the middle with two African masks to the left and two modernist works to the right. This photograph provides visual evidence that de Zayas was

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131 *Herald*, December 20, 1915.
132 *Mask*, Bete People (location unknown); *Mask*, We or Bete People, Ivory Coast, 19th/early 20th century (private collection); Marius de Zayas, *Katharine N. Rhoades*, c. 1915, charcoal on paper (The Metropolitan
actively hanging African objects on the same walls as avant-garde works. The photograph also validates de Zayas’ effort to use photography and other modernist modes to elevate African art in the avant-garde space. This echoes de Zayas’ conviction, "African sculpture is fundamentally abstract, and it is the foundation of modern abstract art."133

The next year from September 11 to September 30, 1916, de Zayas curated the show Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture. This exhibition showcased works by Brâncuși, Braque, Burty, Cézanne, Derain, Manolo, Picabia, Picasso, Diego Rivera, and African statuary. It is significant that de Zayas regarded African statuary as important enough to be included in an exhibition of avant-garde art. The statuary and other African objects had served as inspiration for many of these artists previously, so I would argue it is the reason de Zayas included the statuary in his exhibition. Since there were no installation images, it is impossible to know which works were actively imitating or inspired by the African objects. Despite the lack of scholarship and documentation, an exhibition of nine avant-garde artists shown alongside African art is noteworthy. American Art News included this exhibition in their publication from September 16, 1916 stating, “Mr. De Zayas has arranged an interesting display of modernist paintings, drawings and sculptures, and African negro sculptures. It is somewhat difficult to determine which are the more ugly.”134 This quote is revealing of the attitudes prevalent

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133 De Zayas, 1919.

towards misunderstood forms of art at the time. According to that critic, there was no aesthetic appeal to either African or modernist art. If his audience was not convinced by this juxtaposition of art for their aesthetic properties, where did that leave de Zayas in his quest to elevate African art?

A few months later, from November 26 to December 31, 1916, de Zayas curated the show *Exhibition of African Negro Sculpture* and published *African Negro Art: Its Influence on Modern Art*. The installation included 43 different African objects including statues, masks, urns, musical instruments, carved tusks, and other objects de Zayas designated as “wands” and “fetishes.”

*African Negro Art: Its Influence on Modern Art* was one of the first serious studies published on the subject of African art from an aesthetic viewpoint. As previously discussed, de Zayas was fascinated with the evolution of artistic form and published various theories on the complex aesthetic problems of modern art. De Zayas hoped to understand how African art was used as a stepping stone for the avant-garde’s development. He used this publication as a means of exploring what he believed to be psychological, social, and mental differences between European and African people. He thought that by studying the work sociologists had done on African customs and habits, he could gain an understanding of the “primitive mentality.” He had been inspired by evolutionist anthropology and his goal was to “scientifically” demonstrate the role of African objects as a source of inspiration for European innovation. De Zayas explains

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how European artists sought out African objects as inspiration for their creation of new elements in their plastic expression. He argued that Europeans could gain new knowledge and therefore imagine different types of representation through their exposure to what he believed to be different “mental states” and “degrees of development.”

De Zayas wrote, “Plastic evolution is the result of intellectual evolution... It can be said that the cerebral condition of the negro savage is particularly primitive, and that his brain keeps the conditional state of the first state of the evolution of the human brain.”

This book exposes the ramifications scientific racism and hierarchical typologies had throughout both the United States and Europe. While we can and should criticize de Zayas' theories for their outdated racist overtures, he was successfully able to explain how avant-garde artists utilized African art to progress, despite the heightened racist tones and statements. This publication was another way for de Zayas to continue to reinforce what he deemed to be the importance of African art through modern art.

As is evident in the multiple exhibitions de Zayas curated, he made frequent attempts to validate African art through its presentation with avant-garde art and through his writings; however, he also made extensive use of photographs to highlight the aesthetic value of African objects. In December 1917, de Zayas held the Exhibition of Photographs by Charles Sheeler. According to de Zayas, this exhibition provided proof of the truths fundamental to “Modern Art.”

Sheeler had been influenced by African art

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139 Ibid, 6-10.
140 De Zayas, How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York, 151.
and the “pure expressiveness of form and the sensorial significance of matter.”\textsuperscript{141} Reviews of the show focused on the connections between the two types of art. \textit{American Art News} described the exhibition stating, “Modernist photography by Charles Sheeler was exemplified in the exhibition held at the Modern Gallery. Negro art has exerted considerable influence on the artist who has sought to prove by photography the reality of modern forms and values.”\textsuperscript{142} De Zayas utilized Sheeler’s photographs as a means of forming yet another connection between modernist and African art which was now being recognized by the public.

In 1918, de Zayas asked Sheeler to photograph \textit{The Modern Gallery’s} collection of African art to serve as a record of the objects circulating in New York at that time. Sheeler published this set of 20 photographic plates in a small book known as the “African Negro Wood Sculpture” collection. De Zayas wrote the introduction for the collection’s book explaining the foundation of his theories of African and modern art; he wrote, "Negro sculpture has been the stepping stone for a fecund evolution in our art. It brought to us a new form of expression and a new expression of form, finding a point of support in our sensibility.”\textsuperscript{143} Once again, it is evident that de Zayas was legitimizing African art through its connection with European modernism. The photographs themselves make this even more indisputable (Figs. 8-10). Sheeler did not attempt to photograph these objects in a documentary manner but instead produced images arguing for modernity in both his medium and the objects. These photographs reveal more about

\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Ibid}, 151.
\textsuperscript{143} “African Negro Sculpture,” photographed by Charles Sheeler with a preface by Marius de Zayas
themselves and the artist than the African objects. Scholar Wendy Grossman has written extensively on how modernist photography profoundly shaped the reception of African objects as engaged in conversation with avant-garde art.\textsuperscript{144} Grossman explains how Sheeler’s photographs promoted the elevation of African objects from craft to art, demonstrating non-Western art could be on par with modern photography.\textsuperscript{145} The creation of this portfolio is undoubtedly connected to de Zayas’ active involvement in the debates over the artistic potential of photography. By promoting African art through a lens, de Zayas was able to promote it both within a modernist aesthetic and a commercial enterprise.\textsuperscript{146} The problem lies in how the photographs captured Sheeler and de Zayas’ shared vision about the objects and not what they were originally meant for. Sheeler’s photographs promote African objects for their purely aesthetic allure and there is no attempt to provide information on cultural, historical, or religious context. In fact, no text is included in the book alongside the photographs, which further asserts the artistic rather than the documentary nature of these photographs.\textsuperscript{147} The formal qualities of the objects is what is promoted as significant, a practice which has remained entrenched in art for decades.

The objects Sheeler had selected for his photographs were showcased in another exhibition titled \textit{African Negro Sculpture}, which took place between January 26 and February 9, 1918. While little is known about this exhibition, a description of the

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Ibid,} 305-306.
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Ibid,} 305-306.
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Ibid,} 306.
exhibition in *American Art News* provides an understanding of how de Zayas described the objects to viewers. The review stated, "At the Modern Gallery, 500 Fifth Ave., there are fifty pieces of African negro sculpture shown until Feb. 9. The pieces shown originated in the Congo along the Ivory Coast, in the Soudan, Nigeria, Guinea, Senegal, Gaboon, Dahomey, and in Kissi. The statuette fetish, as produced by the African negro is interesting. It embodies African sentiment, folklore and a long line of myth tradition, and the esoteric is frequently and graphically expressed by the Etheopian carvers. The present exhibition is rich in masks, and the statuettes are a history in themselves, full of miracles and domanticism."  

This explanation of the exhibit validates de Zayas’ work to push African art to the front of the art world. Visitors to the exhibition were considering the aesthetic forms of these objects within an avant-garde gallery space. This also provides evidence that de Zayas had included provenance information of the objects, something he previously had not done.

In 1919, de Zayas renamed *The Modern Gallery* to *The de Zayas Gallery*. Over the course of the next two years, de Zayas continued publicizing both African and modern art. That same year, he held another exhibition of African art during the first half of November. While no photographs or additional information exists on the show, it is obvious that de Zayas wanted to continue promoting African art to the New York avant-garde. The following year in 1920, de Zayas put on the show *Exhibition of French and American Artists; Asiatic Arts and African Sculpture*. Unfortunately, there is no information on this exhibition to explain this interesting combination of cultures. This

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was the last exhibition which included African art to take place at his gallery due to the closure of *The De Zayas Gallery* in 1921. While he may have shut down his avant-garde gallery, he did not give up on African art.

Almost a decade after de Zayas’ first gallery exhibition of African art in New York, up-and-coming institutions were starting to take note of its importance. In 1923, de Zayas was invited to co-curate the exhibition *Recent Paintings by Pablo Picasso and Negro Sculpture* at the Whitney Studio Club in New York with Paul Guillaume (Figs. 11-12). De Zayas had created a name for himself as one of the experts on the evolution of modern art movements in the United States. Gertrude Whitney and Juliana Force, the founders of Whitney Studio, approached de Zayas asking him to curate an exhibition which would summarize his perspective on the subject. The Picasso paintings de Zayas chose surveyed over thirteen years of Cubism. Unsurprisingly, a large number of Picasso’s paintings were sold during the exhibition. While all of the African objects utilized in the show came from Paul Guillaume; these were almost all sold to Dr. Albert Barnes at a later date. The exhibition was included in *The Art News* international newspaper. The review is titled “Picasso’s Recent Work” and excludes any information about the inclusion of African art; it states, “The recent work of Pablo Picasso, shown at Mrs. Whitney’s Gallery, 8 West 8th St., reveals him with the exception of several lithographs and one portrait, in his most abstract mood. There are a few oils but by far the most interesting portion of the thirty or more pictures is a series of fairly small prints, purely abstract in subject matter.”

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and line in various works; however, the African objects are not mentioned. Given the presses’ mention of earlier exhibitions of African and modern art, it is surprising that African objects have been omitted from this conversation. The installation images and documentation from both de Zayas and Guillaume demonstrate how the two types of art were displayed together, thus proving this was a deliberate omission by the newspaper. It is easy to speculate as to why the newspaper neglected to mention the African objects; however, the evolving conversation around African art and culture combined with the socio-political realities in the United states at the time most definitely impacted that discourse.

During the early twentieth century, art galleries advocated for the avant-garde to engage with the unfamiliar. De Zayas’ curatorial work exemplifies this as it illustrates a unique approach to exhibitions of African art in New York City. The display of African art did not end with de Zayas in the 1920s but evolved over the years based on his legacy. Two decades worth of curatorial work led by an avant-garde artist and art dealer established how African art is still perceived.
CONCLUSION

Marius de Zayas was an integral figure in shaping the attitudes towards African art in the United States by bringing these objects to avant-garde gallery spaces and incorporating them in curatorial practices. While European artists were introduced to African objects in flea markets and ethnographic museums, the New York art world first saw them as objects worthy of aesthetic consideration through the work of the European avant-garde. While de Zayas advocated for the study of African objects, the ways in which he displayed, discussed, and regarded African art had a lasting impact on the art world. His continued reinforcement of African art through its relevance to the European and New York avant-garde artists created a legacy that is still being grappled with today. As a result, scholars continue to validate African art through the work of the twentieth century avant-garde. Numerous collections and exhibitions throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century have approached African art based on the precedent de Zayas set. While his work was groundbreaking at the time, it has proven difficult for curators to move into new ways of imagining African art exhibitions.

In 1919, the perspectives had changed in favor of considering African art for its aesthetic value which I argue took place because of de Zayas’ work. This appreciation led to a growing market for African art resulting in the formation of private collections, often out of an interest in modernist art. In the United States, the Barnes Foundation in
Pennsylvania is perhaps one of the most famous collections that demonstrates this. Throughout the 1920s, Dr. Albert Barnes amassed his collection with the help of Paul Guillaume leading to an interesting mix of African, modern European, and American art. In 1923, two years before he established the foundation, Barnes wrote, "When the foundation opens, negro art will have a place among the great manifestations of all times." 

Barnes was the first American to collect African art based on specific aesthetic criteria; therefore, he created the first permanent display presenting African art as fine art. The Barnes Foundation was originally founded as an educational institution. Barnes cultivated opportunities for expanding the educational potential of the foundation by advocating for the appreciation of African sculpture. In 1924, Barnes became involved in the “New Negro” Movement (also known as the Harlem Renaissance) which allowed him to use the study of African sculpture as a means of social reform to advance the “negro cause.” Barnes promoted the importance of African sculpture and its relation to the “New Negro” Movement through various writings, publications, and speeches. The most notable speech happened when the African American philosopher Alain Locke invited Barnes to speak at a dinner at the Civic Club in New York on March 21, 1924. This event is now regarded as the formal launching of the Harlem Renaissance; therefore, inviting Barnes to speak on the subject of African art bolstered his importance within the movement and presented him as a subject expert. Barnes was able to cultivate an

150 Albert C. Barnes to Paul Guillaume, November 5, 1923, the Barnes Foundation Archives, Merion, Pennsylvania. 
151 Berzock and Clarke, Representing Africa in American Art Museums, 7. 
152 Ibid, 93.
appreciation for African objects while also advancing the aesthetic relationship between African sculpture and African Americans because he promoted these ideas within the goal for racial equality.\textsuperscript{153} This new relationship between African art and the Harlem Renaissance artists allowed Barnes to incorporate different perspectives on African art into a new, modern style. The interior of the foundation’s building demonstrates what Barnes called “wall ensembles” which were designed to facilitate aesthetic appreciation.\textsuperscript{154} The African art was integrated with other works from the collection in order to demonstrate what Barnes believed to be historic interrelationships between works of different cultures. To Barnes, the significance of African art within history was a result of its relationship to modernism.\textsuperscript{155} The curatorial work done by Barnes continued to fortify the perceived connections between African and modernist art. Barnes played a crucial role in the United States by championing African art through his promotion of its aesthetic value. The Barnes Foundation maintains the practice of juxtaposing African and modernist art on the same walls as it remains on view, its arrangement untouched since Barnes’ death in 1951.

Concurrent to the work done by Dr. Barnes, the Brooklyn Museum’s approach to its ethnographic collections changed through the work of curator Stewart Culin. During the 1920s, Culin became interested in the influence African art had on modern artists, focusing on its aesthetic qualities. In 1923, he organized the exhibition \textit{Primitive Negro Art, Chiefly from the Belgin Congo}. Culin installed the objects to emphasize their formal qualities.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{153} Berzock and Clarke, \textit{Representing Africa in American Art Museums}, 93.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Ibid}, 90.
\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Ibid}, 90.
\end{footnotesize}
qualities, displaying them as a form of art rather than ethnographic specimens.\textsuperscript{156} This was the first museum exhibition in the United States promoting African objects as art. The curatorial work done by de Zayas leading up to this exhibition opened the door for museum exhibitions of this manner to occur.

A few years later, the Museum of Modern Art in New York organized the groundbreaking 1935 exhibition \textit{African Negro Art}. It had been commonly assumed by scholars that the history of African art display began in 1935 with this exhibition.\textsuperscript{157} Curator James Johnson Sweeney exhibited 603 African objects which he had acquired from Paul Guillaume and through travels to England, Germany, Belgium, and France. These objects included not only masks and figural sculptures but also textiles, jewelry, furniture, and other utilitarian objects. The selection of objects did not occupy a place within the canon that had been developed by the earlier avant-garde.\textsuperscript{158} The installation established what has become the dominant, modernist inspired aesthetic showing a preference for figural works with strong formal qualities and abstraction.\textsuperscript{159} Sweeney stated, “the art of Negro Africa… its place of respect among the esthetic traditionalists of the world.”\textsuperscript{160} The display was devoid of explanatory labels or contextual information about the objects because Sweeney believed they would detract from the viewer’s

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\textsuperscript{158} Berzock and Clarke, \textit{Representing Africa in American Art Museums}, 8.

\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Ibid}, 8.

\textsuperscript{160} James Johnson Sweeney. \textit{African Negro Art}, 11.
communion with the objects.\textsuperscript{161} This exhibition was meant to be a purely visual approach to African art (Figs. 13-14). While in New York, the attendance to this show averaged 1,000 visitors a day generating critical observations. The exhibition traveled the United States visiting museums including the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Arts Club of Chicago. While the exhibition was dedicated solely to showing African art, the press releases and accompanying book emphasized the influence of the objects on modern artists continuing the narrative began by de Zayas. Despite this, the exhibition had a significant impact on the perceptions of African objects as art.

Following the 1935 exhibition, personal collections of African art in the United States continued to reflect the modernist ideals and aesthetic importance which de Zayas originally promoted and reinforced. Moving through the mid-twentieth century, public art institutions continued to grow as they represented African art. Then in 1957, African art was established as a field within art history. Roy Sieber was the first person to earn a doctorate in African art history in 1957, followed by Robert Farris Thompson in 1966.\textsuperscript{162} This time period also experienced the dissolution of colonialism and the founding of independent African nations.\textsuperscript{163} This decolonization was followed by various social and political movements throughout the world, including the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. These black movements throughout the world helped encourage new studies and travels to Africa. Scholars, including Sieber and Thompson, hoped to connect

\textsuperscript{161} Berzock and Clarke, \textit{Representing Africa in American Art Museums}, 8.
\textsuperscript{162} Roy Sieber received his doctorate from the University of Iowa. Robert Farris Thomson received his doctorate from Yale University.
\textsuperscript{163} Berzock and Clarke, \textit{Representing Africa in American Art Museums}, 10.
collections of African objects with their original cultures through fieldwork in Africa.\(^\text{164}\) Both men went on to establish African art history programs at major universities in the United States. The creation of African art as an academic discipline allowed for scholarly engagement between universities, collectors, and museums. As a result, the confines that defined African art were being challenged. The creation of the periodical *African Arts* in 1967 at the University of California, Los Angeles acts as a form of documentation for the changes which took place. Contemporary African art was regularly featured in *African Arts* through the 1960s and into the early 1970s.\(^\text{165}\) By the late 1970s, American art museums were attempting to dismantle the connections between African and modern art created by earlier generations, including de Zayas. Museums began curating exhibitions offering a contextualized approach to African art. During the 1980s, museum professionals and scholars began questioning how and why non-Western art was displayed within museums.\(^\text{166}\) There was a deconstruction of Western display practices by questioning how museums construct meaning and value. Two important exhibitions took place during this time which played a crucial role in the curatorial practices surrounding African art.

In 1984, the Museum of Modern Art held a new exhibition on both non-Western and European art, focusing specifically on primitivism in modern art. “*Primitivism” in 20th Century Modern Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* exhibited 150 works by modern artists including Picasso, Gauguin, and Brâncuși alongside more than 200 objects

\(^{164}\) *Ibid*, 10.  
\(^{165}\) Berzock and Clarke, *Representing Africa in American Art Museums*, 11.  
\(^{166}\) *Ibid*, 12.
from Africa, Oceania, and North America. The curator, William Rubin, celebrated the use of non-Western objects as inspiration for the European avant-garde through various juxtapositions of works across cultures. He believed there was an “affinity” between the different art forms, mimicking the same viewpoints that the earlier avant-garde held. The exhibition’s theme and labels focused on the influence African art had on the European avant-garde while ignoring the cultures the objects came from. This curatorial decision differs from that of de Zayas because Rubin had access to contextual information but made a conscious choice to omit it. Scholar Thomas McEvilly called out the curator’s omission of dates, explanations of the object functions, religious or mythological connections, and their environments.\textsuperscript{167} McEvilly went on to explain how this then resulted in an “absolute repression of primitive context, meaning, content, and intention.”\textsuperscript{168} This criticism sparked debate between McEvilly and Rubin who was concerned with telling a particular story within the history of Western art through the “recontextualization” of non-Western art. McEvilly was not the only one to take issue with this exhibition as it was subjected to an explosion of criticism in the press. James Clifford responded to the exhibition in his book \textit{The Predicament of Culture}, explaining how an emphasis on a purely visual affinity omitted the realities of how objects had moved from one part of the world to another as a result of European colonialism.\textsuperscript{169} Scholar, Jack Flam, later commented on the exhibition in 2003 explaining how it had

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{169} Clifford, \textit{The Predicament of Culture}, 189.
been conceived in one cultural climate which inadvertently helped to manifest another. With the emergence of self-aware ethnography in the 1980s came this shift in attitudes so whereas de Zayas could get away with his display strategy, it was no longer acceptable. This exhibition attempted to fortify the belief that African and other non-Western art was only valid because of the avant-garde; however, it inspired new approaches to art history.

As a counterpoint to the 1984 exhibition, Susan Vogel’s *Art/artifact* exhibition of 1988 challenged the way the perception of a work of art is conditioned by its presentation. Vogel’s exhibition focused on how Western outsiders have regarded African art over the past century. The exhibition challenged previous display practices and the lack of information and understanding of African culture and art. Vogel explained that African objects came from a culture where they would have been utilized in rituals or sacred spaces to be viewed on rare occasions; however, the context has been erased to make these objects accessible to Western visual culture. As this paper argues, the ways in which de Zayas introduced African art to the United States led to this lack of understanding because the avant-garde did not have the means to obtain information on the context of those objects. Vogel’s exhibition took place during another vital shift in the attitudes towards African art as scholars were beginning to consider the implications of earlier generations’ approach to curatorial practices. Institutions and art professionals questioned and responded against the ingrained notions that African art was only legitimate because of the early twentieth century avant-garde.

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Moving into the twenty-first century, curators have continued responding to de Zayas’ precedent. Recently, in 2018, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts held an exhibition titled *From Africa to the Americas: Face-to-Face Picasso, Past and Present*. The curator, Nathalie Bondil, scrutinized the ways in which previous exhibitions had juxtaposed non-Western and modern art. The headline of this exhibition was, “A major exhibition offering a new perspective and inspiring a rereading of art history.” This exhibition served as a reminder that it is imperative that art historians continue to reread art history and challenge the concepts left behind.

My analysis of African art exhibitions through the lens of modern art does not argue that exhibitions of African art should not have taken place. Marius de Zayas facilitated an introduction of African art to the New York art world and validated these objects as art worthy of display. As de Zayas stated, “It was through African art that cubism and abstract art evolved; but, in turn, it was through cubism and abstract art that African art came to be understood in all its aesthetic significance.” While we now can examine the problems that arose from legitimizing African art through the work of the avant-garde, de Zayas helped foreground this art in the United States. De Zayas’ legacy serves to remind us of where the conversation surrounding African art began and how we can continue shaping the conversation. Over the past century, art institutions in the United States have revealed more about Western aesthetic attitudes and display practices.

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than African art itself. The dilemma we face in changing the discourse is addressing how we can better represent non-Western peoples and cultures.
FIGURES

Figure 1
Paul Guillaume in his first gallery, 1914, Musée de l'Orangerie.
Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7
Figure 8

Figure 9
Figure 10
Figure 11

Charles Sheeler, Installation view of Whitney Studio Club exhibition Recent Paintings by Pablo Picasso and Negro Sculpture, 1923, gelatin silver print, Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.
Figure 12
Figure 14


“From Africa to the Americas: Face-to-Face Picasso, Past and Present,” The Montreal


Museum of Art, 1981.


Naumann, Francis M. “Marius de Zayas and Alfred Stieglitz Part Ways: The Publication


Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. “Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist


BIOGRAPHY

Kelsey Roberts graduated from Reed-Custer High School, Braidwood, Illinois, in 2013. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Art History in 2017 from Cornell College, Mt. Vernon, IA. Later that year, she moved to the Washington D.C. metro area to further her education at George Mason University. While working towards her Master's in Art History, she completed an internship at Capital One in their art program, worked as a teaching assistant, interned at the non-profit arts organization Transformer, and worked as a Graduate Professional Assistant for the Preservation Services Unit at Fenwick Library. She received her Master of Arts in Art History from George Mason University in 2020.