Primitivisme in Japanese Modern Art: In the Case of Taro Okamoto

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Primitivisme in Japanese Modern Art: In the Case of Taro Okamoto

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Abstract

Taro Okamoto received his elementary art education in Paris from 1930 to 1940. After returning to Japan, he became a leader of contemporary art in Japan. Okamoto should be regarded as avant-garde because he reconstructed old-fashioned Japanese artistic circles with his innovative ideas. However, his thoughts were ambivalent rather than progressive. This is exemplified by his discovery of the beauty of Jomon wares. Until Okamoto noted the esthetic value, they were considered archeological samples, not art. His discovery was an epoch-making event. The root of Okamoto's original sense of beauty lied in *Primitivisme*. While he was in Paris in the 1930s, *Primitivisme*, the Western reflection on the Other, was the influential thinking of the day. Extraordinary as a Japanese student, Okamoto did not solely devote himself to painting but also studied anthropology under Mauss and assimilated the *Primitivisme*. When Okamoto cut his way in the ruins of Japanese artistic circles with his novel ideas, his rhetoric was that of *Primitivisme*. He wished to reset and regenerate Japanese art. For this purpose, he grafted *Primitivisme* onto Japanese modern art. At the beginning of the century, Western avant-garde co-opted Black African art within the Western beauty to reactivate European tradition because Black Africa was thought to be the start of human evolution. Similarly, Okamoto recognized Jomon wares as the starting point of Japanese art history for regenerating Japanese tradition.

Keywords: Taro Okamoto, *Primitivisme*, Japanese Modern Art

1. An Introduction

Taro Okamoto (1911-96), one of the Japanese avant-gardes after the Second World War, received his elementary art education in Paris from 1930 to 1940. He returned to Japan at the outbreak of the Second World War. After the war, he became a leader of contemporary art in Japan. Okamoto's achievements should be regarded as avant-garde because he reconstructed old-fashioned Japanese artistic circles with his innovative ideas. However, his thoughts were not merely progressive.

African art, so-called Primitive art (Fig.1) and Okamoto's work (Fig.2) have visual

Fig.1

Fig.2

affinities. What do the affinities mean? And Okamoto discovered the beauty of Jomon wares. Until Okamoto noted the aesthetic value, they were considered archeological samples, not art. His discovery was an epoch-making event. What is the meaning of his discovery? Okamoto's artistic ideas and his art works tend to be considered from the progressive view point. This consideration is not enough, not only because it can't clarify the reason why Okamoto's work has affinities to Primitive art, but also it can't make clear the meaning of his discovery of Jomon wares. This view point overlooks Okamoto's diversity and ambivalence.

This discussion begins with tracing Okamoto's career in Paris, and shows plainly his interest in Ethnology and *Primitivisme*. Secondly, it examines *Primitivisme* in his artistic surroundings. Then, Chapter 4 makes clear the meaning of his discovery of Jomon wares, considering the relation between his ambivalent view of Japanese art history and *Primitivisme*.

2. Taro Okamoto in Paris

1) Sympathy with Abstract Art

Okamoto, dropping out of Tokyo Bijutsu Gakko, set off for Paris in 1931 at the age of eighteen. In 1932 he displayed his work, (titles unknown) to the *Salon des Surindependants* Exhibit. E.Tériade, one of the well-known critics, reviewed Okamoto's work in *L'intransigeant*. At the same time, Okamoto attended a lecture on Hegel's aesthetics at *Université de Paris*. In 1933 he joined the *Abstraction-Création* group as its youngest member. In 1934 he displayed his work at the *Abstraction-Création's* Exhibit. It was the largest group of abstract artists that came together against Surrealism, the predominant movement at that time.

In 1932 Okamoto viewed Pablo Picasso's *Pitcher and Bowl of Fruit* (Fig.3) at Paul Rosenberg's gallery. It was an opportunity that led him to develop a great interest in abstract art. Touched by the work, Okamoto found "the very universal method of expression (1)" in

Fig.3

abstract art. In 1933 he put his work on display at the *Salon des Surindependants* Exhibit. Maurice Raynal, a famous critic, made reference to Okamoto's work at the exhibition review. The fact that he was noticed by the influential critics, Tériade and Raynal, suggested that Okamoto's artistic activity in Paris progressed smoothly.

2) Concern about "the Palpable"

However, Okamoto began to have doubts about the movement of abstract art. In 1935 he proposed Neo-Concretism with Kurt Seligmann. It was a new artistic movement to guide the competition between abstract art and Surrealism into a synthesis (2). Here we can find the Hegelian dialectic, that is to say, a thesis, an anti-thesis, and a synthesis. This point may suggest that Okamoto, who learned Hegelism, sympathized with Neo-Concretism, although it is doubtful that he had the same idea as Seligmann's. In 1935, while trying to express "the palpable-something we can touch (3)," Okamoto painted *Ribbons* (Fig.4), and in 1936 he left the *Abstraction-Création* group. In the same year he painted *Wounded Arm* (Fig.5) and submitted it to the *Salon des Surindependants* Exhibit, where the leader of Surrealism, André Breton, noticed the painting and exhibited it in the International Surrealism Exhibit in 1938. It is not certain whether Okamoto welcomed Breton's recommendation or not. Okamoto longed "to express the concrete and the abstract together with the chaotic nature of human existence (4)."

Fig.4

Fig.5

In 1936 Okamoto participated in the first meeting of *Contre-Attaque* which opposed Stalinism, and he was deeply impressed with George Bataille's speech. In 1937 he took part in *Collège de Sociologie Sacrée* which Bataille founded, and drew a clear line between Breton and Okamoto himself. Rising above cares about the abstract or the concrete, Okamoto tried to find "the deepness of the objects (5)." Devoting himself to Bataille led Okamoto to


Fig.6

participate in the secret organization, *Acéphale*. His experience at *Acéphale* guided him to produce *Night* (Fig.6) in 1947.

3) Polarism (Taikyoku-shugi)

In 1937 Okamoto published his first book of paintings. In the preface Pierre Courthion esteemed Okamoto's originality by writing that "Okamoto straddles both continents (6)." Okamoto seemed to gain his achievements in Paris. But he "became aware of a vague contradiction" with Bataille of whom Okamoto was an ardent admirer (7). Okamoto found in Bataille "the will to power" and he set forth his own idea, namely "the desire to impose my own will on others and try to make them accept that will. At the same time, and with equal effort, I feel I do not want them to accept my will…Surely the dialectic of human existence is the will to be simultaneously recognized and rejected (8)." This conception came to be theorized as Polarism.

In 1948 Okamoto made public his idea of Polarism. He thought that "the austere soul today should not tend just towards rationalism or irrationalism and feel at ease. They should not mix them up into a luke warm cocktail either (9)." And he longed for "the contraposition of abstract elements and extremely realistic elements left as a contradiction (10)." He painted *Heavy Industry* (Fig.7) as the embodiment of Polarism in 1949.


Fig.7

4) Interest in Ethnology

However, the most notable feature that drew a sharp line between Okamoto and other Japanese students in Paris was that he did not devote all his energies to painting but studied other fields. He thought that "art demands one exists as a complete human being," and he denied being "a mere craftsperson painting pictures (11)." This was the reason why he studied ethnology at *Université de Paris* in 1938. Around the same time *Musée de l'Homme* opened

and Marcel Mauss began to lecture there. Okamoto attended Mauss's class and he was aware of "a cosmic presence that completely reversed differentiated values such as painting or art (12)." Then he learned that art was deductive and ethnology was inductive. Thinking that "I should find my own true way at the crossing point of these two mental directions (13)," he tried to investigate his original standing position.

Okamoto's elementary art education in Paris was supported by Bataille and Mauss, both giants of different fields.

3. *Primitivisme* in Paris

1) "Discovery" of African Art by *Fauves*

Fig.8

When Okamoto stayed in Paris, *Primitivisme* came to be the artistic concept that fascinated the avant-garde. Originally *Primitivisme* with its beginnings dating back to the Classical period reflected the West's view of the Other. At the beginning of the twentieth century the avant-garde, who were called *Fauves*, found the aesthetic value in African sculptures (Fig.8). Until then they were not considered art but fetishes. After the "discovery," *Primitivisme* began to be the influential thinking of the day.

Fig.9

Around that time the vitality of the tradition of French paintings which succeeded to the mimetic positivism of the Renaissance declined. The conservative Academy that attached too much importance on the refinement of skill took the teeth out of French tradition (Fig.9). Young artists, including *Fauves*, had a sense of impending crisis. Activation of tradition was urgent for them. At the same time, Africa was regarded as a culturally barren land. One of the grounds was that African people had no written language; therefore they had no written histories. As a result they were regarded as primitive people who did not advance beyond the start of progressive history. However, the people who stayed at the lowest level of evolution were also ones who could produce the plastic arts that consisted of a pure plastic language without the need for letters as a gift from civilization. *Fauves* noticed and appreciated this ambivalent feature of African sculptures (14).

Fauves tried to regenerate French tradition. They found a means of survival in African

art that was situated at the starting point of which holiness was not yet weakened by the attitudes of progressive history. Henri Matisse, *le roi de fauve*, found "the authentic and instinctive sculpturesque qualities (15)." Also André Derain esteemed African sculptures (16). Their "discovery" was an epoch-making event.


Fig.10

After the "discovery," the interest in African art, namely *Art Nègre*, was spread immediately among the avant-garde from Picasso (Fig.10). Guillaume Apollinaire perceived that "the essential interest resides here in the plastic form (17)." The first generation of *Primitivisme* placed value on the form of *Art Nègre*.

2) Roger Fry's Formalism

There was another trend of thought on the background of the "discovery" that was called Formalism. Fry, an art critic, treated the artistic value of *Nègre's* drawing in his article "Bushman Paintings" of 1910 (18). Here Fry analyzed Bushman's drawings by comparing with the Western works based on the form. He articulated the character of Bushman's drawing by focusing on its form (Fig.11).

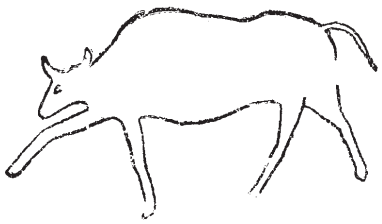
Fig.11

Regarding formalism, Fry insisted on the priority of form over content. And he premised that the values of formalism had universality. Also he separated the artworks from the specific situation surrounding them, and he solemnly appreciated the meaning of the works in their plastic features. By this way of investigating artworks, Fry made it possible that Western works and *Art Nègre* were analyzed at the same level (19).

In the 1910's, the avant-garde's enthusiasm about *Art Nègre* grew to be a movement that involved art dealers. Paul Guillaume, the art dealer whom Apollinaire backed, started advancing the enthusiasm moving within the avant-garde's circle in Paris. In 1919 he presented *Fête Nègre* at *Théâtre des Champs-Elysées* that attracted the public's attention. The enthusiasm was popularized and fakes of *Art Nègre* were rampant. The popularization signified that *Art Nègre* no longer was the trump card of cutting a way through the dull tradition for the avant-garde with radical awareness. Now *Art Nègre* became the new standard of beauty (20).

The reason why *Art Nègre* fascinated the avant-garde in Paris was that it presented a

different aesthetic value from the West's. That is to say, *Art Nègre* had its value because of its alienness. When Western people esteemed the alien, they set up a unified criterion, namely the form. This was an experiment to assimilate Others into the self. However, there was a paradox that the assimilated aliens reduced the *raison d'être* for Otherness, and they no longer were useful to revive the Western tradition. Popularized enthusiasm about *Art Nègre* reached its peak at the Exposition Colonial International in 1931. Around that time Okamoto arrived at Paris and he began to take artistic lessons.

3) Paradigm Shift in *Primitivisme*

The Exposition Colonial International proudly showed off the political concept of the great third republican government that had the high-sounding policy of civilizing the colonies. Surrealists protested this political concept. Breton did not share enthusiasm for *Art Nègre* that was already included within Western aesthetic criteria by being admired from the plastic viewpoint. But he applauded Oceanic or Indian art.

It is recognized that there was a difference between the first generation's *Primitivisme* and Breton's group's *Primitivisme*. Waldemar George, a critic, admired that the first generation "found therein constructive principles (21)." On the other hand, he criticized that Surrealists, the second generation's "'will to hallucinate' is excited upon contact with these idols (22)." Surrealists stated that Oceanic or Indian objects were the"sorcery to satisfy their 'thirst for mystery' (23)." They tried to draw dissimilation in reading artworks by shifting their viewpoint from the form to the function. They evaluated *Primitivisme* as the lead that crushed rationalism from the Renaissance and faith in the Enlightening reason from the end of the seventeenth century.

Here we find the theoretical shift in *Primitivisme*: The Western viewpoint of appreciating the Other's art was transposed from the plastic to the functional. With the transposition of the viewpoint, the targets noticed by the avant-garde were transferred from *Art Nègre* to Oceanic art. Surely African sculptures (Fig.12) were based on the will to make a figure, even if its proportions were quite different from Western tradition. On the other hand, Oceanic objects (Fig.13) were given meaning by likening driftwood to living things. Surrealists that brought about this paradigm shift in *Primitivisme* were attracted to

Fig.12

Fig.13

the Oceanic idea of producing artifacts. And when Okamoto studied ethnology in Paris, he specialized in Oceania.

There were mainly three persons who formed the idealistic background of Surrealism; an ethnologist, James Frazer who wrote *The Golden Bough* (1890), a sociologist, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl who investigated the mind of Primitive people, and a psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud. Surrealists especially sympathized with psychoanalytic theory in which Freud noticed the unconscious that did not comply with control by consciousness. Understanding Freudian unconsciousness, Surrealists were aware of the Other that existed within themselves.

From each different stand point, all three influential people assumed the universal criteria that connected Western modern society and Primitive Others. Therefore Surrealism's *Primitivisme* assumed the universal cellar that the self and the Other both possess jointly. But this universal cellar did not indicate the form but the function. Premising on the new *Les Vases communicants* (Fig.14, Fig.15), Surrealists tried to find the interchangeability of the significance between Western works and the Other's for the purpose of dissimilation and re-contextualization.

Fig.14

Fig.15

Okamoto's track in Paris had strong relation with the changing process of artistic thinking in Paris from the beginning of the century. Okamoto sympathized with abstract art supporting the infiltration of formalism into art criticism. The formalistic idea allowed an alien Okamoto dream of the joint struggle that overcame cultural differences at the formal level. And there was no room for doubt that the start of Okamoto's inclination to concrete expression was made by the influence of Surrealists, including Bataille. Through this group sharing ideological links, Okamoto's concern with *Primitivisme* grew to be tangible. *Les Vases communicants* that was provided between the Western culture and the Other's stimulated Okamoto to approach *Primitivisme*.

However, Okamoto's career in Paris came to an end by the outbreak of the Second World War. He was compelled to go back to Japan in 1940.

4. "Discovery" of the Bowls of the Jomon Period

1) "Yoru no Kai"

Okamoto displayed his work at the Nika Exhibit and won the Nika prize in 1941. But the next year he went to the front as a soldier, and was sent home in 1946. He was struck dumb with amazement looking at the devastated homeland. At the same time he rebelled against artisans who still thrived in the Japanese artistic circle with an old-fashioned sense of values. In 1948 he founded the avant-garde group "Yoru no Kai" with Kiyoteru Hanada and Hiroshi Noma. Following its manifestation (24), what Okamoto said and did in "Yoru no Kai" were avant-garde. He tried to destroy the old abuses and construct innovative art (25).

We can surmise a part of the debate at "Yoru no Kai" from Okamoto's article "Deforuma sion(*Deformation*) ni tuite" of 1948 (26). In this article he referred to the discovery of African sculptures at the beginning of the century in Paris. His rhetoric, contrasting Western art with African sculptures and describing the former as "the graceful aesthetic format" and the latter as "the grotesque native art (27)," can be found frequently in the discourses around *Primitivisme* in Paris. It is likely that Okamoto carved out his career into the strange field, but not just to proceed evolutionally. His way of thinking soon sparked him to "discover" the bowls of the Jomon period.

2) Discovering the Bowls of the Jomon Period

Fig.16

In 1951 Okamoto encountered the bowls of the Jomon period at the National Museum of Tokyo (Fig.16). The potteries that were made about thirteen thousand years ago were not art but archeological specimens up to that point. He found their aesthetic value for the first time. This was the "discovery" of Jomon's beauty by Okamoto.

He spoke very highly of the potteries of Jomon with such descriptions, "grotesque," "monstrosities," "barbarian," that seemed to have nothing to do with positive valuations (28). Okamoto's writing should be compared with Gelette Burgess's sentences of 1910. "I had mused over the art of the Niger and of Dahomey, I had gazed at Hindu monstrosities…and many other primitive grotesques;…Men had painted and carved grim and obscene things when the world was young (29)." We can find the close resemblance between Burgess's writing and Okamoto's. It is interesting that Okamoto's tone of admiring the potteries of Jomon looked like Western discourse around African sculptures.

This fact indicates that Okamoto contacted the fashion of *Primitivisme* during his stay in Paris, and he knew very well that Western people highly evaluated the so called Primitive art. Moreover it shows that Okamoto tried to place the potteries of Jomon in Japanese art history at the same position as Primitive art in Western art history.

Okamoto noticed "the rude disharmonious form and design of the bowls of the Jomon period," and he described that their visual features were "completely opposite to Japanese tradition which is commonly appreciated to be amiable and graceful (30)." It was important that he caught the traits of the potteries of Jomon from the viewpoint of form, and he found the aesthetic value. Okamoto seemed to learn in Paris that the formalistic viewpoint was effective when the unknown objects, the potteries of Jomon in Okamoto's context, were evaluated.

3) Japanesque *Primitivisme*

The common points between Okamoto's evaluation of the potteries of Jomon and Western reflection on the Other, *Primitivisme*, seem not only at the level of the tone of narrative but also at the level of the structure of thinking. We can comprehend Okamoto's understanding of *Primitivisme* in his usage of the word "*primitif*" within "Deforumasion (*Deformation*) ni tuite (31)." To begin with, the "*primitif*" was applied to the era that dated back to the past in Western civilization. But from the Age of Great Navigations during the process that Western people increased the knowledge of the Other, the "*primitif*" was to be applied also to the area of the same age out of the Western cultural sphere. However, African culture was not included within the application of the "*primitif*" until the twentieth century. Therefore it was an epoch-making event that *Fauves* were interested in African objects and in their discourse they applied the word "*primitif*" to African objects in a positive meaning(32). Okamoto also used the same word for esteeming African art. The fact indicated that he traced the achievements of the first generation of *Primitivisme* in Paris.

Moreover Okamoto described the feature of Primitive art that "the pre-logic exists firmly against the logic (33)." The word, "pre-logic," can be found in *Primitive Mentality* (1922) in which the author Lévy-Bruhl used the word for defining Primitive people's thinking. Owing to this fact, we can confirm that Okamoto was under the influence of *Primitivisme* after the paradigm shift by the Surrealists. For Okamoto's valuation of the potteries of Jomon, the acceptance of *Primitivisme* by Okamoto was indispensable.

Okamoto's thinking on Jomon culture suggested his view of art history. He found in the bowls of the Jomon period "a deep impression that affected humanity at the primordial

level (34)," at the same time he pointed out that "there is surely a chasm between the Jomon culture and cultures after Jomon (35)." We can find here his view that Jomon culture was a different kind from the Japanese "traditional" one that lasted from the Yayoi period (Fig.17). This shows that Okamoto perceived the view at that time that a large-scale national shift had happened from the Jomon period to the Yayoi period. Moreover he evaluated the potteries of Jomon that was situated at "the starting point of history (36)." Going back to the beginning of the history, he found their aesthetic value. Also describing that they "appeal to us today (37)," he emphasized the resemblance between them and the art of Okamoto's time. His logic was homogeneous with the logical structure that sustained Western thinking, *Primitivisme*.


Fig.17

Okamoto considered that the expression of the potteries of Jomon belonged to the art that continued to stand at the starting point and that was broken off with the evolution or refinement accompanied by historical development. Okamoto seemed to think that this Other, the potteries of Jomon, was the very trump card for regenerating the true tradition of Japanese art and pushing it to the same level as Western art. *Primitivisme* that Okamoto learned in Paris was the thinking that co-opted the Other's culture into the self, and it led him to the "discovery" of the bowls of the Jomon period which seemed to have the expression of uncontrollable power that escaped from the rule by reason.

5. Conclusion

Okamoto did not devote all his energy to go ahead as an avant-garde within Japanese artistic circles after the World War. At the same time he tried to regenerate the true tradition of Japanese art by discovering the aesthetic value in the bowls of the Jomon period that seemed to hold the power of the beginning. Regarding this point, his standing position was ambivalent. And in this very point we can find his originality in Japanese postwar artistic circle.

However, Okamoto did not merely apply *Primitivisme*, the Western reflection on the Other, to Japanese art history. His view of art history was constructed in the specific field of Japanese postwar artistic circles. He opposed the group that looked for the origin of Japan in Jodai, the Nara period, and wished to keep up appearances of the consistent Japanese art history by maintaining the tradition that lasted from the Yayoi period. He objected to


Fig.18


Fig.19

their view of art history by assuming the starting point at the Jomon period (Fig.18, Fig.19). Consequently Okamoto's *Primitivisme* was deconstructed Western *Primitivisme*. In other words he grafted *Primitivisme* from Paris to Tokyo.

However in the process of recovering from defeat of the war, Okamoto's view of Japan was not accepted easily. His thinking: "Japan consisted of the complex structure of diverse layers (38)," and was opposed to the postwar nationalism that looked for national unity. A reason why Okamoto has not yet been placed exactly in Japanese postwar art history seems to be caused by his original view of Japanese art history.

Notes

1 Taro Okamoto, *Pari no Nakamatachi*, 1960. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Hon 1*, Tokyo, 1998, p.172: "I felt progressively that abstract art was the very universal method of expression that broke through any restrictions; the national border, races, cultural spheres, and others…. In this field it was possible that original new ground was broken. A young romantic Japanese found the new sphere without any conditions."

2 Kurt Seligmann, "Our Neo-Concretism," 1935. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Kaiga*, Exh.Cat., Kawasaki, 2009,pp.172-173: "Amidst the controversies in the European art scene, we clearly see two groups with conflicting aims, namely Purism and Surrealism…. They [Neo-Concretism] do not desire to return becoming Naturalist painters, but their motifs desire returning to it."

3 Okamoto, "Watashi no Sakuga-riron (On Creative Theory),"1942. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Kaiga*, p.170: "Even in the abstract paintings, what I wanted to express was the palpable - something we can touch."

4 Okamoto, *Jidensho*, 1976. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Hon 1*, pp.221-222: "There are a few reasons why I left the group [Abstraction-Création]. In terms of original expression, I gradually started to paint by blending together specific, concrete elements with the abstract./ The abstract art movement did not allow even an inch of concrete images to be included …. As I had always wanted to, I was able to express the concrete and the abstract together with the chaotic nature of human existence."

5 George Bataille, "On Drowsiness,"1946. Cited in *Okamoto Taro no Kaiga*, p.156.

6 Pierre Courthion, "Preface," in *OKAMOTO*, Paris,1937. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Kaiga*, p.171.

7 Okamoto, *Jidensho*, 1976. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Hon* 1, p.230.

8 Ibid., p.230.

9 Okamoto, "Taikyoku-shugi (Polarism)," 1948. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Kaiga*, p.171.

10 Ibid., p.171.

11 Okamoto, *Jidensho*, 1976. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Hon 1*, p.226.

12 Okamoto, "Omoide no Pari," 1971. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Kaiga*, p.156.

13 Okamoto, "Watashi to Jinruigaku," 1971. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Hon* 5, Tokyo, 2000, pp.251-252: "The art unfolds the image deductively from the solitary sphere. But ethnology excludes all subjective judgments, and solely tries to get to the conclusion inductively. I should find my own true way at the crossing point of these two mental directions."

14 Kyoko Okubo, *"Purimithivisumu(Primitivisme)" to "Purimithivizumu(Primitivism)",* Tokyo, 2009, pp.17-52.

15 Transcript of lecture given at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, dated 22 October 1951(courtesy of the Archives of American Art).

16 André Derain, *Lettres à Vlaminck*, Paris, 1955, pp.196-197: "I've been rather moved by my visits around London and to the National Museum, as well as to the Negro Museum. It's amazing, disquieting in expression." Also Derain talked Gelett Burgess in 1910. Burgess, "The Wild Men of Paris," *The Architectural Record*, May 1910, p.407: "These Africans being primitive, uncomplex, uncultured, can express their thought by a direct appeal to the instinct. Their carvings are informed with emotion."

17 Guillaume Apollinaire, "Sculptures d'Afrique et d'Océanie," *Les Arts à Paris*, 15 juillet 1918, dans L.-C.Breunig(éd.), *Chroniques d'art, 1902-1918*, Paris, 1960, pp.552-553.

18 Roger Fry, "Bushman Paintings," *Burlington Magazine*, 1910, pp.334-338.

19 Okubo, "*Purimithivisumu(Primitivisme)" to "Purimithivizumu(Primitivism)"*, pp.25-31.

20 Cf. Jean Cocteau, "Opinions on Negro Art,"1920. Repr. in Jack Flam with Miriam Deutch(eds.), *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2003, p.129: "The Negro crisis has become as boring as Mallarméan Japonisme."

21 Waldemar George, "The Twilight of the Idols," 1930. Repr. in Flam with Deutch(eds.), *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art*, p.213: "Painters, and you yourself, dear friend, found therein constructive principles that were adequate to your own needs and concerns."

22 Ibid., p.213: "Poets, dealers, and Surrealist painters speak of Negro sculpture the way Paul Gauguin spoke of Maori art. They ask these strange objects of sorcery to satisfy their "thirst for mystery." Their "will to hallucinate" is excited upon contact with these idols that were torn from the very heart of darkness."

23 Ibid., p.213.

24 Okamoto, "Yoru no Kai," 1948. Repr. in *Setagaya-jidai no Okamoto Taro 1946-1954*, Exh. Cat., Tokyo, 2007, p.15: "To deny the night: It is "Yoru no Kai." / The night becomes darker by being denied. / We gaze ourselves at the depths of the darkness….We cry with all our strength. / Go ahead!!"

25 Ibid., p.16: "The adult men, artisans, belonging to the dying old days! Don't you know the fact that your past negative non-activity, the most vicious action, will get all our country into trouble, and continues to scatter the poison still now? "

26 Okamoto, "Deforumasion(*Deformation*) ni tuite," 1948. In *Okamoto Taro Dai-ichi Gabunshu*, Tokyo, 1952, pp. 104-114.

27 Ibid., p.112: "In Paris, the forefront of European culture, Picasso, who is the most refined artist, incorporates the grotesque native art which is fully an antithesis to the graceful aesthetic format of the magnificent city into his works. It is a great interesting affair. I feel the necessity in it."

28 Okamoto, "Jomon Doki,"1952. Repr., in *Okamoto Taro no Hon 2*, Tokyo, 1999, p.24: "The grotesque beauty. Discovering the bowls of the Jomon period for the first time, one is shocked at the monstrosities. Does any barbarian make it? One must think that the bowls of the Jomon period are so eccentric."

29 Burgess, "The Wild Men of Paris," p402.

30 Okamoto, "Jomon Doki-ron," *Mizue*, No.558, 1952, p.3.

31 Okamoto, "Deforumasion(*Deformation*) ni tuite," p.112: "There were mature artistic styles in France from the Renaissance; the Rococo of the eighteenth century, the Classicism, the Romanticism of the nineteenth century, realism and so on. They reached a high cultural level by refinement, but such a mature culture utterly lost the primordial, namely the *primitif* for human beings. I suppose that there is a reason why Picasso took the lead in introducing primitive art into his work."

32 Okubo, *"Purimithivisumu(Primitivisme)" to "Purimithivizumu(Primitivism)",* pp.17-52.

33 Okamoto, "Deforumasion(*Deformation*) ni tuite," p.113.

34 Okamoto, "Jomon Doki-ron," p.5.

35 Okamoto, "Jomon Doki-ron," p.3: "From the viewpoint of cultural history as well as morphology, there is surely a chasm between the Jomon culture and cultures after Jomon. There is a systematic sequence from the Yayoi culture to Japanese modern culture. But it is too mechanical and too naïve to think that the tradition should keep the stereotyped sequence, therefore the Jomon culture which broke off from cultures after Jomon has no relation with Japanese tradition."

36 Okamoto, "Jomon Doki,"p.35: "This, what is called Japanese form or Japanese aesthetic sense, sounds somewhat old-fashioned. On the other hand the positiveness and the spatial sense of the bowls of the Jomon period, which belong to the most distant times so as to be called the starting point of history, appeal to us today. This is marvelous."

37 Ibid., p.35.

38 Okamoto, "Kankoku Hakken,"1982. Repr. in *Okamoto Taro no Hon 5*, Tokyo, 2000, p.159

Figures

(1) Nalu or Baga, *Serpent Figure*, 19th century, Guinea, Painted wood, 222cm high, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris.

(2) Taro Okamoto, *Élan*, 1976, FRP, 152.0×40.0×22.0cm, Taro Okamoto Museum of Art, Kawasaki.

(3) Pablo Picasso, *Pitcher and Bowl of Fruit*, 1931, Oil on canvas, 130 × 162cm, Guggenheim Museum, New York.

(4) Taro Okamoto, *Ribbons*, 1935, Oil on canvas, 130.0×162.0cm, Destroyed by fire.

(5) Taro Okamoto, *Wounded Arm*, 1936/1949 reproduction, Oil on canvas, 111.8 × 162.2cm, Taro Okamoto Museum of Art, Kawasaki.

(6) Taro Okamoto, *Night*, 1947, Oil on canvas, 130.7×194.5cm, Taro Okamoto Museum of Art, Kawasaki.

(7) Taro Okamoto, *Heavy Industry*, 1949, Oil on canvas, 206.3×266.6cm, Taro Okamoto Museum of Art, Kawasaki.

(8) Vili, *Figure*, People's Republic of the Congo, Wood, 24cm high, Private collection. Formerly Collection Henri Matisse.

(9) William Bouguereau, *Regina Angelorum*, 1900, Oil on canvas, 285×185 cm, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris.

(10) Picasso in his studio, Paris.

(11) Bushman's Drawing.

(12) Fang, *Reliquary Figure*, Gabon, Wood and metal, 64.8cm high, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

(13) Imunu, *Figure*, Namau, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea, Wood, 53.3cm high, Friede Collection, New York.

(14) Petroglyphs of Bird-Men on the cliffs of Orongo, Easter Island.

(15) Max Ernst, *After Us, Motherhood*, 1927, Oil on canvas, 141.6×114.9cm, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

(16) Taro Okamoto, *Bowl of the Jomon Period*, Gelatin silver print, 43.2×35.6cm, Taro Okamoto Museum of Art, Kawasaki.

(17) Bowl of the Yayoi Period.

(18) Jomon Clay Figure.

(19) Taro Okamoto, *Face*, 1952, Ceramic, 97.0×102.0×56.0cm, Taro Okamoto Museum of Art, Kawasaki.

Photographs of the figures are taken from:

Musée du quai Branly Guide Book, Paris, 2006, p.176. (Fig.1)

"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art, Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern, Exh.Cat., New York, 1984, pp.58, 214, 225, 299, 557, 558, (Figs.8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15)

Okamoto Taro no Kaiga, Exh.Cat., Kawasaki, 2009, pp.40,43,45,54,102. (Figs.2,3,5,6,7)

Setagaya- jidai no Okamoto Taro 1946-1954, Exh. Cat., Tokyo, 2007, pp.32,74. (Figs.4,19)

Taro Okamoto, *Nihon no Dento*, Tokyo, 2005, pp.2,11,96. (Figs.16,17,18)

1900: Art at the Crossroads, Exh. Cat., London, New York, 2000, p.306. (Fig.9)

Kyoko Okubo, *"Purimithivisumu(Primitivisme)" to "Purimithivizumu(Primitivism)"*, Tokyo, 2009, p.26. (Fig.11)

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