WIFREDO LAM IN NORTH AMERICA

A GUIDE TO THE EXHIBITION FOR TEACHERS

HAGGERTY MUSEUM OF ART
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

COVER:
Femme aux cheveux longs, I
[Woman with Long Hair, I], 1938
Gouache on paper
W. Lam, cat. raisonné, vol. I, no. 38.62
Collection of Ramon and Nercys Cernuda
Provenance: Hess, New York; Perls Galleries, New York; Collection K. G. Perls, New York

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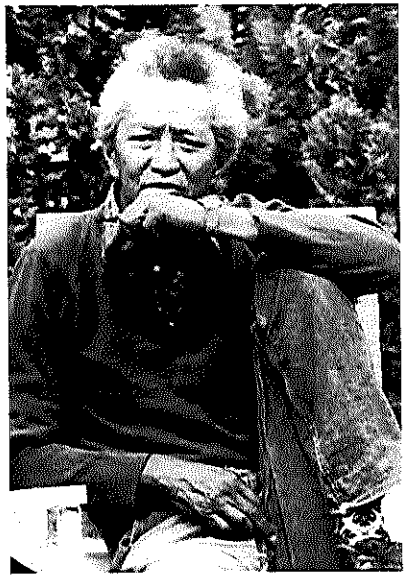
INTRODUCTION

This Teacher Resource Guide accompanies the Haggerty Museum of Art exhibition: *Wifredo Lam in North America*. It is designed to provide ideas, activities, and resources that explore issues raised by this exhibition. The exhibition and guide focus on the varied historical and cultural influences that have contributed to Wifredo Lam's art and its development as culturally rich, visually engaging, and emotionally compelling.

Wifredo Lam in North America at the Haggerty Museum of Art, on view October 11, 2007 – January 21, 2008, represents the little-examined, yet significant, impact of Wifredo Lam's work on developments in modern art in the United States. It brings together over 60 paintings from North American collections including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, the Miami Art Museum, Houston's Menil Collection, the Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, D.C., the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and numerous private collections.

Wifredo Lam in North America will travel to the following destinations: Miami Art Museum [February 8 – May 18, 2008], the Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, California [June 12 – August 31, 2008] and the Salvador Dali Museum, St Petersburg, Florida [October 2, 2008 – January 10, 2009].



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CREDITS

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Museum Hours: Monday – Saturday: 10 – 4:30 Tuesday: 10 – 8 Sunday: 12 – 5
Address: 13th and Clybourn Street on the Marquette University Campus, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Free Admission Daily

For more information on the exhibit: http://www.marquette.edu/haggerty/
For online curriculum materials: http://www.marquette.edu/haggerty/teacherresource
or http://www.lindakreft.com/Lam/lam_contents.html

Wifredo Lam in North America has been sponsored by the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin and funded in part by the Eleanor Boheim Endowment Fund, the Emmett J. Doerr Endowment Fund, Isaac and Cuqui Matz, the Milwaukee Arts Board, the Marquette University Andrew W. Mellon Committee Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, Sotheby's and the Wisconsin Arts Board.

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INTERNET SITES

African American History Through the Arts: African Art and Cubism
http://cghs.dadeschools.net/african-american/twentieth_century/cubism.htm

Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies
http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/CLACS/index.html

Cubism Thematic Essay: The Metropolitan Museum of Art
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cube/hd_cube.htm

Creation Myth: Gavin Jantjes
http://www.lindakreft.com/creationmyth.html

David Richardson: Trojan War Series
http://www.zenithgallery.com/artists/RICHARDSON_DAVID/Main%20Page.htm

Haggerty Museum of Art
http://www.marquette.edu/haggerty/

Living Vodou: Speaking of Faith from American Public Media. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith Chairman of the Department of Africology at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/vodou/index.shtml

Monographs: Great Figures of Modern Art: Picasso
http://www.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-Picasso-EN/ENS-Picasso-EN.html

Musée Picasso
http://www.musee-picasso.fr/

OutreachWorld: A Resource for Teaching Kids About the World
http://www.outreachworld.org/

Picasso and Africa
http://www.brainwavez.org/culture/features/2006/20060420001-01.html

Surrealism Thematic Essay: The Metropolitan Museum of Art
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/surr/hd_surr.htm

Surrealism: Wifredo Lam
http://artscenecal.com/ArticlesFile/Archive/Articles1995/Articles1195/Lam.html

Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa: National Museum of African Art
http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/dialogue/intro.htm

The Art of War: Colm Tóibín
http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1764206,00.html

Wifredo Lam: Like a Maze. Fernando Rodriguez Sosa. CubaNow.net. Interview, November 1980.
http://www.cubanow.net/global/loader.php?&secc=6&cont=show.php&item=431

Art and War: Works in the Kreeger Collection. Judy A. Greenberg. Washington D.C.: Kreeger Museum.2004.
http://www.kreegermuseum.org/museum/press_releases/greatestgeneration.pdf

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OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVES

The material and resources in this guide to the exhibition will help teachers and students learn the following about Wifredo Lam:

Lam used personal experiences, cultural history, and literature as the source of his subject matter. He placed aspects of Afro-Cuban life within the context of universal themes.

Lam's style was influenced by numerous sources, including Western European art, African and Oceanic sculpture, the art of his contemporaries in Europe, Haiti, Mexico, and Cuba. Lam also was an influence on his contemporaries.

Lam is well known for his works on paper and canvas, in which he demonstrated unique and innovative techniques.

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MAPS

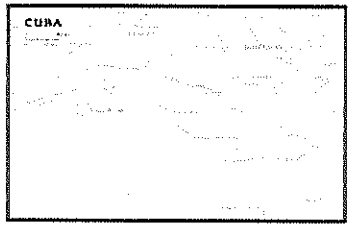
CUBA
Wifredo Lam was born in Cuba and attended the Escuela de Bellas Artes.

SPAIN
In 1923, Lam moved to Madrid, Spain, where he studied at the studio of Fernando Alvarez de Sotomayor, the Director of the Museo del Prado.

FRANCE
Lam moved to Paris, France in 1938, where Picasso took him under his wing and encouraged his interest in African art and primitive masks.

CARIBBEAN
During World War II, Lam spent most of his time in the Caribbean and eventually made his way back home to Cuba.

FRANCE
Lam returned to Paris in 1948, where he died September 11, 1982.

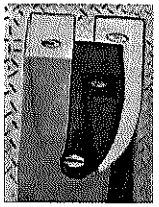


BIOGRAPHY

Wifredo Lam was born December 8, 1902, in Sagua la Grande, Cuba. In 1916, his family moved to Havana, where he attended the Escuela de Bellas Artes. In 1923 he moved to Madrid, Spain where he studied at the studio of Fernando Alvarez de Sotomayor, the Director of the Museo del Prado. In 1929, Lam married Eva Piriz, who died of tuberculosis two years later, as did their young son. This tragic event may have contributed to the dark and brooding appearance of much of Lam's later work.

In the early 1930s, the effects of Surrealism were evident in Lam's work, as was the influence of Henri Matisse and Joaquín Torres-García. In 1936, a traveling exhibition of the work of Pablo Picasso shown in Barcelona, Bilbao, and Madrid provided inspiration to Lam both artistically and politically. Lam moved to Paris in 1938, where Picasso took him under his wing and encouraged his interest in African art and primitive masks. During that year, Lam also traveled to Mexico, where he stayed with Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera.

Lam's own multicultural heritage (as the son of a Chinese father and mother of mixed African, Indian, and European descent) and his involvement with Santería, a religion rooted in African culture, would also become integral to his work. By the late 1930s, he was associated with the Surrealists. He had his first solo show at the Galerie Pierre Loeb in Paris in 1939, and his work was exhibited with Picasso's at the Peris Galleries, New York that same year.



Wifredo Lam
Womans Head, 1939
Oil on cardboard
Galerie de Seine
Paris

Wifredo Lam
Madame Lunumba, 1938
Oil on canvas
Musée Dapper
Paris

Wifredo Lam
Woman [detail], 1942
Pastel and wash on paper
Private Collection
New York

BIOGRAPHY

Wifredo Lam with Pablo Picasso, 1936

During World War II, Lam spent most of his time in the Caribbean, along with Claude Levi-Strauss, Andre Masson, and André Breton, whose poem, "Fata Morgana" he illustrated. He eventually made his way back to Cuba in 1941. It was there that he was introduced to the theories of Carl Jung, and by the end of 1942 he had begun his powerful painting, *The Jungle*.

Lam's exploration of mythic images paralleled that of his contemporaries in New York, the Abstract Expressionists, though he used specific subject matter. Wifredo Lam created his own style by fusing Surrealism and Cubism with the spirit and forms of the Caribbean.

Between 1942 and 1950, he exhibited regularly at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. His second marriage, to Helana Holzer in 1944 ended in divorce in 1950. He traveled extensively until 1952 and then settled for three years in Paris before resuming his travels again in 1955.

It was that year that he married Swedish painter Lou Laurin, with whom he would have three sons. In 1964, he received the Guggenheim International Award, and in 1966-67 there were multiple retrospectives of his work at the Kunsthalle Basel; the Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hannover, the Stedlijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and the Palais des Baux-Arts, Brussels. Wifredo Lam died September 11, 1982, in Paris, France.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

NA-VA.4 UNDERSTANDING THE VISUAL ARTS IN RELATION TO HISTORY AND CULTURES
Grades K–4
Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationship to various cultures.
Students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places
Students demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art.
Grades 5–8
Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.
Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.
Students describe and compare a variety of individual responses to their own artworks and to artworks from various eras and cultures.
Grades 9–12
Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.
Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times, and places.
Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art making.

NA-VA.5 REFLECTING UPON AND ASSESSING THE CHARACTERISTICS AND MERITS OF THEIR WORK AND THE WORK OF OTHERS
Grades K–4
Students understand there are various purposes for creating works of visual art.
Students describe how people's experiences influence the development of specific artworks.
Students understand there are different responses to specific artworks.
Grades 5–8
Students compare multiple purposes for creating works of art.
Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.
Students describe and compare a variety of individual responses to their own artworks and to artworks from various eras and cultures.
Grades 9–12
Students identify intentions of those creating artworks, explore the implications of various purposes, and justify their analyses of purposes in particular works.
Students describe meanings of artworks by analyzing how specific works are created and how they relate to historical and cultural contexts.
Students reflect analytically on various interpretations as a means for understanding and evaluating works of visual art.

NA-VA.6 MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN VISUAL ARTS AND OTHER DISCIPLINES
Grades K–4
Students identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum.
Grades 5–8
Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts.
Grades 9–12
Students compare characteristics of visual arts within a particular historical period or style with ideas, issues, or themes in the humanities or sciences.

TECHNOLOGY
NT.K-12.5 TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH TOOLS
Grades K–12
Students use technology to locate, evaluate, and collect information from a variety of sources.
Students use technology tools to process data and report results.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

Language Arts
NL-ENG.K-12.4 COMMUNICATION SKILLS
Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
NL-ENG.K-12.7 EVALUATING DATA
Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
NL-ENG.K-12.8
DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS
Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
NL-ENG.K-12.11
PARTICIPATING IN SOCIETY
Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
NL-ENG.K-12.12
APPLYING LANGUAGE SKILLS
Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Social Studies (Geography)
NSS.G.K-12.1 THE WORLD IN SPATIAL TERMS
Students should understand how to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.
NSS-G.K-12.2 PLACES AND REGIONS
Students should understand how culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.
NSS-G.K-12.4 HUMAN SYSTEMS
Students should understand the characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.
Students should understand the characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.
NSS-G.K-12.6 THE USES OF GEOGRAPHY
Students should understand how to apply geography to interpret the past.
Students should understand how to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future.

Visual Arts
NA-VA.3 CHOOSING AND EVALUATING A RANGE OF SUBJECT MATTER, SYMBOLS, AND IDEAS
Grades K–4
Students explore and understand prospective content for works of art.
Students select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning.
Grades 5–8
Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks.
Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values, and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks.

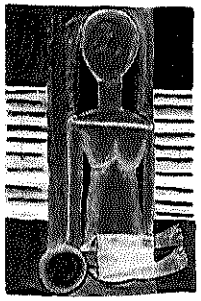
Visual Arts
NA-VA.3 CHOOSING AND EVALUATING A RANGE OF SUBJECT MATTER, SYMBOLS, AND IDEAS
Grades 9–12
Students reflect on how artworks differ visually, spatially, temporally, and functionally, and describe how these are related to history and culture.
Students apply subjects, symbols, and ideas in their artworks and use the skills gained to solve problems in daily life.

ORIGINS

Wifredo Lam Story:

Wifredo Lam's paintings sometimes tell more than one story—one personal, related to his life experiences and Afro-Cuban heritage—another universal, a subject that just about anyone could relate to and understand. The universal element of this painting calls to mind the Virgin of Guadalupe--the Madonna and Child.

In 1929, Pierre Loeb gave Lam his first one-person show, in which he exhibited numerous paintings on the mother-and-child theme. At this time Lam practiced a style of simplified forms influenced by cubism and African sculpture. He simplified his forms and reduced three-dimensional figures in the way similar to Picasso. Despite similarities, Lam's work displays a penchant for geometrical shapes, right angles, and bilateral symmetry, whereas cubist artists like Picasso created forms that are more fluid and asymmetrical.

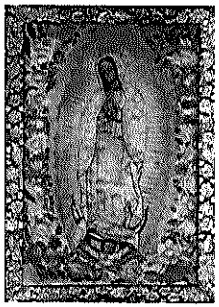


Wifredo Lam
Mother and Child, 1939
Gouache on paper
Museum of Modern Art
New York

Virgin of Guadalupe:

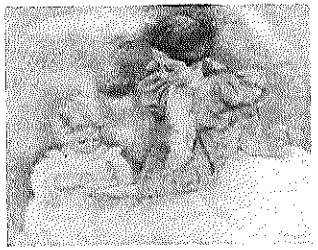
Paintings, such as the *Virgin of Guadalupe*, were sometimes made for wealthy households containing a small chapel. Many of the paintings, like their European counterparts, contained elaborate gold leaf details. Often depictions of the Virgin were shown dressed in elaborate clothing, indicative of the clothing preferred by the Spaniards. Churches and other buildings were so elaborately decorated that at one time it was determined that objects for use in worship should only be made of precious metals.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Latin American artists created a wide array of objects for use in the Roman Catholic Church. Paintings of Mary played a role in religious observance. Spanish, Moorish, Asian, and Pre-Columbian art influenced the sumptuous, elaborate, richly decorated baroque style these objects display.



Virgin of Guadalupe
Agustin del Pino
Oil and lacquer on wood
New Spain, Early eighteenth century

ORIGINS



Mary Cassatt
Mother Playing with Child, 1897
Pastel on woven paper, mounted on cardboard
Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York

Pablo Picasso
Mother and Child, 1907
Oil on canvas
Musée Picasso
Paris

Activity

Brainstorm ideas for themes used in other curriculum areas. Examples such as Identity, Myths and Symbols, Man vs. Nature, Rebellion, Migration, Social Justice, Peace, Pride, World Conflict.

Looking Exercise #1:

Artists throughout history have depicted the theme of family or mother and child. How has Wifredo Lam depicted these themes?

How do artists use the same artistic elements [color, line, shape, space, and texture] to create different artworks with different meanings?

Look at the Mother and Child paintings by Pablo Picasso and Mary Cassatt. How are these paintings similar to Lam's *Mother and Child* painting? How are they different?

Universal: An idea that people all over the world encounter in their lives.

Timelessness: An idea that people have or are affected by throughout history; without beginning or end; eternal; everlasting.

GLOSSARY

Abstract: Art that is dependent on color, form, texture, pattern and line without referring to any subject matter recognizable from the 'visible' world--it is not a painting 'of' something we could see, and so is different from representational art.

Abstract Expressionism: A school of painting that flourished after World War II until the early 1960s, characterized by the view that art is nonrepresentational and chiefly improvisational. The work is characterized by a freedom of technique, a preference for dramatically large canvases and a desire to give spontaneous expression to the unconscious.

Archetype: An original model or type after which other similar things are patterned; a prototype. In Jungian psychology, an inherited pattern of thought or symbolic imagery derived from the past collective experience and present in the individual unconscious.

Avant Garde: the visual, literary, or musical artist, whose works are characterized by daring, radical or experimental methods or techniques.

Bilateral Symmetry: Symmetrical arrangement, as of an organism or a body part, along a central axis, so that the body is divided into equivalent right and left halves by only one plane.

Cubism: A style of representation that relies not on the depiction of things from a single viewpoint, but on a combination of different elements of the subject seen from a variety of different viewpoints, which results in an extremely fragmented appearance.

Hybrid: Bred from two different races, breeds, varieties, species or produced by the interaction of two unlike cultures or traditions.

Iconography: The language of images or forms that is typical of a particular cultural content.

Mythology: A body or collection of myths belonging to a people and addressing their origin, history, deities, ancestors, and heroes.

Ritual: Ceremonies or religious acts; social rites or rituals; observance or practices.

Subsume: To classify, include or incorporate into a more inclusive classification.

Surrealism: A style of art and literature developed in the 20th century that attempts to portray or interpret unconscious thoughts and dreams; it is characterized by fantastic imagery and incongruous juxtapositions.

Symbolic: Using symbolism; visual symbol for something abstract.

Timelessness: An idea that people have or are affected by throughout history.

Transparent: Having the property of transmitting rays of light through its substance so that bodies beneath or behind can be distinctly seen.

Universal: An idea that people all over the world encounter in their lives.

Verdant: Green with vegetation; covered with growing plants or grass; of the color green.

AVANT-GARDE

Looking Exercise #8:

Wifredo Lam
Mujer con Pájaro [Woman with a Bird], 1957
Oil on canvas
Collection of Mrs. Tanya Brillembourg

Abstract: Artwork where objects have been changed or modified so they no longer look realistic. An abstract work of art may, however, use a recognizable object or thing as it reference or origin.

Activity

Make a list of all the things you see in this painting without making any kind of judgment about the work. Sketch the artwork. Then list things you noticed only after sketching. Point out the abstracted shape of the face and body. Look at which art elements the artist used. Look for ways those elements were used to organize the composition using rhythm, balance, movement, proportion, variety, emphasis, and unity.

Abstract Expressionism covers a wide range of non-objective painting in the United States in the latter half of the 20th century. It became the first American art movement with international impact. Some preferred the term "Painterly Abstraction", and many Abstract Expressionist painters were characterized by the lavish and loose manner in which paint was applied to canvas.

Wifredo Lam employs color to create a mood or evoke a memory and the use of line, shape and color to obtain a sense of reality in the painting, *Woman with a Bird.*

CUBISM

Wifredo Lam did not return to the distant past of the pre-Columbian era for inspiration, but rather his subject matter of hybrid animal-vegetal-spirit forms focuses on the African inspired religion of his childhood. He was drawn to his mother's African origins and to the syncretized Christian-Vodou religion of his godmother, a priestess of the Afro-Cuban Santeria religion.

Ritual: The word ritual has positive and negative meanings, depending on how we use it. When we talk about family rituals we may associate these with nurturing, enriching, coping with trauma and bonding. However, the word often has negative associations when used to describe traditional practices in Africa and the Caribbean. Western scholars used to use the word 'ritual', to suggest the idea of Africa and the Caribbean as dark, savage, heathen, compulsive, irrational, chaotic or lacking purpose. For this reason many writers today prefer to avoid the word ritual to describe ceremonies in Africa and the Caribbean.

By the 1920s, ancient African art was popular in Paris, and was more or less a universal language to be drawn upon by anybody in the Avant-Garde. It presented painters and sculptors looking for a way out of reality with art that, while anonymous, was constructed in a "new" style that was much admired. These artists created a style where the components of a face or body were reduced to bold and simple shapes. This style has been termed Cubism.

"African artists had been sculpting masks as early as Paleolithic times, continuing to do so through the Kingdoms of the Dogon, the Baule, the Basongye and the Dan. The masks were typically used as stand-ins for the gods, deities or spirits of ancestors."

[Lowrey Stokes Sims]

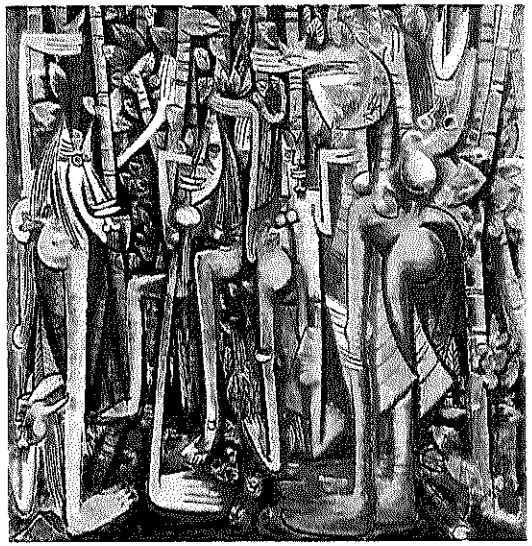
Wifredo Lam, in his painting, *The Jungle*, portrays at least four figures resembling the bamboo stalks they stand between. They are architectural columns, they are trees, rooted and straight, but narrow. The ancient African faces that peer out of the Cuban jungle in his painting are universal and old. They represent a bond between Africans worldwide where ancient [African] gods live secretly in an island far away from Africa.

Cubism: An artistic movement beginning in France in 1907 that featured surfaces of geometrical planes; a combination of different elements of the subject seen from a variety of different viewpoints.

Sims, Lowrey Stokes. *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 1923-1982.* Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press. 2002.

CUBISM

Looking Exercise #2:



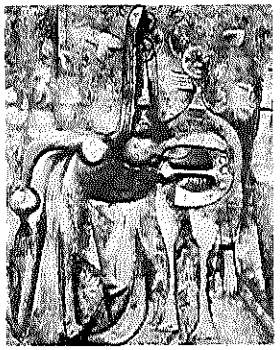
Wifredo Lam
The Jungle, 1943
Gouache on paper mounted on canvas
The Museum of Modern Art
New York

Activity
Describe this work of art. What do you see?
Can you find the masked half man, half animal emerging out of a jungle?
Traditionalist painters became confused by Cubism, the cubist's ideals were not to translate objects naturally but to emotionally manipulate the subject matter so compiled elements are changed for aesthetic reasons rather than reality. How did Wifredo Lam create this emotion?

Activity
Create a multi-media composition showing multiple views of various objects—fracturing the planes in the manner of the cubists. Read the interview with "Wifredo Lam: Like a Maze" from November 1980 see link below and find out what he says are the elements and symbols of his painting, *The Jungle*.

Wifredo Lam: Like a Maze. Fernando Rodriguez Sosa. CubaNow.net. Interview, November 1980.
http://www.cubanow.net/global/loader.php?&secc=6&cont=show.php&item=431

AVANT-GARDE



Wifredo Lam
Le Sombre Malembo, Dieu du Carrefour,
[Dark Malembo, God of the Crossroads], 1943
Oil on canvas
Collection of Isaac and Betty Rudman

Abstract and Abstract Expressionism

Wifredo Lam was the youngest of eight children and the only son of a Chinese father and an Afro-Cuban mother. His father adhered to Confucius and Lao Tse. His mother raised him as a Roman Catholic. Had his grandmother had her way, he would have become a Santeria priest-healer. He left Havana when he was twenty-one to study art in Madrid, Spain.

From there he went to Paris where he was exposed to Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Picasso, Matisse and others contemporaries. Unlike the European Surrealists, Lam synthesized Cubist and Surrealist techniques to re-create the unique melding of vegetal-animal spirits of his Afro-Cuban culture.

Unlike the Abstract Expressionists, Lam continued to synthesize abstraction with deliberate recognizable figures, seen in the multi-headed animal-humanoid deities inspired by Santeria Vodou.

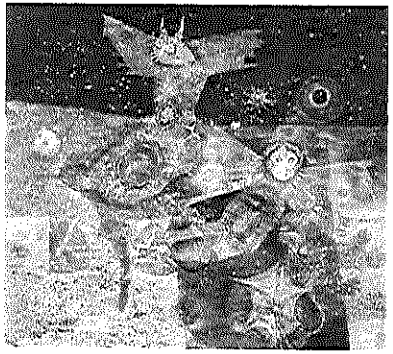
In *Malembo, God of the Crossroads* the Cubist balance of vertical figures combines with the brilliant, gestural tapestry of color, moving from thick scumbling to thin transparencies.

The word "voodoo" evokes images of sorcery and sticking pins into dolls. In fact, it's a living tradition wherever Haitians are found based on ancestral religions in Africa. A Voudou priest guides us through this mysterious tradition – one with dramatic rituals of trances, and dreaming and of belief in spirits who speak though human beings, with both good and evil potential.

> Abstract Expressionism: A school of painting that flourished after World War II until the early 1960s, characterized by the view that art is nonrepresentational and chiefly improvisational. The work is characterized by a freedom of technique, a preference for dramatically large canvases and a desire to give spontaneous expression to the unconscious.

Living Vodou: Speaking of Faith from American Public Media. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith Chairman of the Department of Africology at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/vodou/index.shtml

TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE



Alexander Skunder Boghossian
Night Flight of Dread and Delight, 1964
Oil on canvas with collage
North Carolina Museum of Art
Raleigh

Alexander Skunder Boghossian's artistic sensibilities are rooted in Ethiopian history and culture, but they grow out of his experiences with art and artists from Europe and Africa he encountered while living in Paris and the United States. In Paris, he was influenced by the work of Paul Klee, Roberto Matta and Wifredo Lam. To Boghossian images like those of Lam, seem surreal and abstract, but they contain fragments also of Ethiopian culture and practice, imagery and memory.

Boghossian's painting, *Night Flight of Dread and Delight* shows two demons or dream-figures merging partly into the background. The rear figure has no hands or feet but a rather human bottom, owlish eyes and beak, two owlish bushes of hair from the ears, extended members and a flat body against a richly ornamented background. The other figure has a cat's face and a body long, round and bent like an insect's with spinning wings. Both are flying at night over a translucent plain with many dots and ornaments under a sky strewn with stars and two obs like eyes.

"Boghossian often talked of political and cultural influences in Paris, citing Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Chekh Anta Diop as well as creative forces in modern art like Paul Klee. Older painters in Paris encouraged him. One of them, South African artist, Gerard Sokoto, introduced him to the great Cuban surrealist painter, Wifredo Lam. He also worked closely with a group of West African artists. African colonies were becoming independent and he was part of "the creativity of resistance."

[Elizabeth Harney]

Enwezor, Okwui. *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa.* New York, New York: Prestel. 2001

Harmey, Elizabeth. *Ethiopian Passages: Contemporary Art From the Diaspora.* Washington D.C.: Philip Publishers, Limited. Smithsonian National Museum of African Art. 2003.

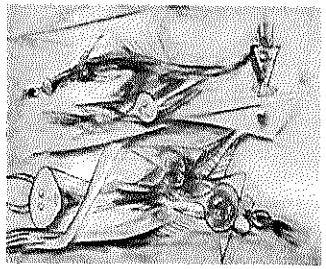
Degela, Achamyeleh. *Alexander Skunder Boghossian: A Jewel of a Painter of the 21st Century.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University. African Arts Council 12th Triennial Conference. 2004. http://www.blengrafix.com/blenmagazine/skunder_jewel.htm

INFLUENCES

Looking Exercise #3:

CAN YOU FIND THESE SUBJECTS IN THE WIFREDO LAM PAINTINGS?

Symbolic creatures
Vegetal-animal forms
Cycles of life and death
Horse-headed figures
Mask-like facial features
Lush natural environments
Spirit figures
Large hands
Large Feet
Bird-like forms
African-derived imagery
Stories from religion



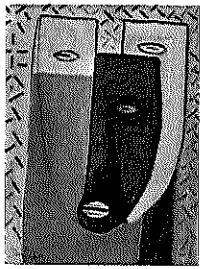
Wifredo Lam
Untitled, 1942
Oil on canvas
Collection of Ramon and Nercys Cernuda
Miami, Florida

African Art's Impact:

Throughout the history of art, African art has inspired artists working in various styles and media. Its distinctive characteristics and inspirations have influenced many artists to adapt their own interpretation of the art of their own time period. Characteristics of African art made its way into many paintings in the Cubist period.

The work of African American modernists educated their audience on two levels. First, they encouraged them to relate to their own African heritage. Second, they intervened into the history of art by revealing how artists like Pablo Picasso and George Braque came in contact with African art and used its visual languages to invent their cubist styles during the turn of the twentieth century.

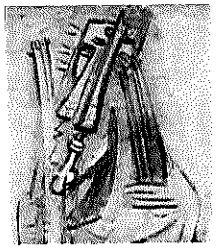
Wifredo Lam incorporated masks in his cubist work as well as ritual inspired objects from his Afro-Cuban background.



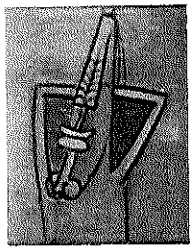
Wifredo Lam
Woman's Head, 1939
Oil on cardboard
Galerie de Seine
Paris

INFLUENCES

Looking Exercise #4

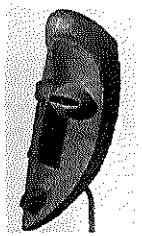


Wifredo Lam
Figure [Detail], 1942
Tempera and pastel on paper
Collection of José and Annelies De Costa Gómez



Wifredo Lam
Homme cheval [*Male-Headed Horse*], 1942
Oil and encaustic on paper mounted on canvas
Collection of Mrs. Tanya Brillembourg

Mask
Fang
Gabon
Musée du quai Branly
Paris



Mask
Mahongwe
Republic of Congo
Museum of Modern Art
New York

Mask
Baule
Ivory Coast
Musée Picasso
Paris

Mask
Dan
Ivory Coast
Museum Reitberg
Zurich

CAN YOU IDENTIFY THESE MASKS AS FACIAL FEATURES IN OTHER PAINTINGS BY WIFREDO LAM?

TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE

Contemporary Art In And Out of Africa:

"Over the centuries, a dialogue evolved across the Atlantic as Africans came to the New World and blacks from America returned to the continent of origin. An aesthetic conversation or dialogue has recently developed between African and African American artists as they work from different perspectives to reconcile their African identity and heritage within the currents of contemporary art."

[Michael D. Harris]

Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa exhibition explores the varied ways that African and African American artists interpret their ideas and identities. Similarities of style as well as diversity of expression emerge from a shared African heritage.

"It could be emotions, feelings, graphic renderings of nature, or organic images. ... If there was an artist that I would say that I was influenced by, it would be Wifredo Lam."

Having acknowledged the kind of influence that Klee, Matta and Lam may have had on his own way of painting and the reason for it Alexander Skunder Boghossian concludes:

"Latin-American artists have brought to me the same functioning agony. It is through them that I have found closeness to the continent. Latin America became a synthesis of Europe, Africa, and America. What was synthesized was immediate to us as Africans, more so than Picasso or Giacometti. They [Picasso and Giacommetti] were discovering Africa on another level."

[Alexander Skunder Boghossian]

Harris, Michael D. *Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa.* Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Ackland Art Museum The University of North Carolina. 1999

Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa National Museum of African Art http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/dialogue/intro.htm

INFLUENCES

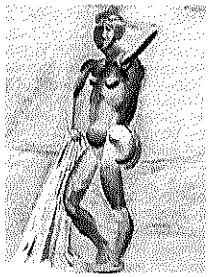
Picasso and Africa:

It was only in 1937 after years of denial that Pablo Picasso [in a conversation with Andre Malraux not reported publicly until 1974] admitted to the African presence in his work. Picasso stated:

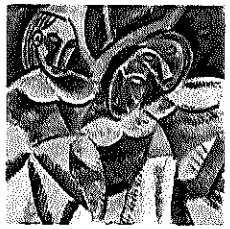
> *"I have felt my strongest artistic emotions, when suddenly confronted with the sublime beauty of sculptures executed by the anonymous artists of Africa. These works of a religious passionate, and rigorously logical art are the most powerful and most beautiful things the human imagination has ever produced. I hasten to add that, nevertheless, I detest exoticism."*

"It is now an accepted fact that African art resuscitated European art that was dying a slow death from the lack of creative ability. It is beyond a shadow of a doubt that African art inspired Europe to the eventual birth of Modern Art."

[Madeline Laurence]



Pablo Picasso
Femme nue au bord de la mer
1908-1909
Museum of Modern Art
New York



Pablo Picasso
Three Figures Under a Tree, 1907
Oil on canvas
Musée Picasso
Paris

William S. Rubin *Les Demoiselles D' Avignon: Studies in Modern Art.* New York, New York: Thames and Hudson. 1994.

Picasso and Africa. Laurence Madeline, Marilyn Martin. Bell-Roberts Publishing. 2006 ISBN 0-620-35721-5.

Picasso and Africa
http://www.brainwavez.org/culture/features/2006/20060420001-01.html

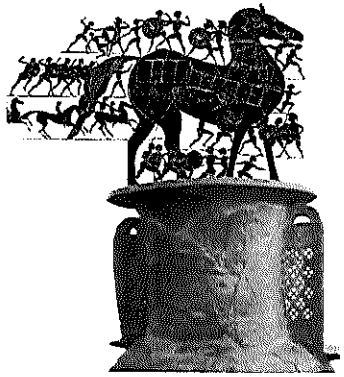
African American History Through the Arts: African Art and Cubism
http://cghs.dadeschools.net/africanamerican/twentieth_century/cubism.htm

INFLUENCES

Borrowing and Mixing

"I wanted with all my heart to paint the drama of my country, but by thoroughly expressing the black spirit, the beauty of the plastic art of the blacks. In this way I could act as a Trojan horse that would spew forth-hallucinating figures with the power to surprise, to disturb the dreams of the exploiters. I knew I was running the risk of not being understood by either the man in the street or by the others. But a true picture has the power to set the imagination to work even if it takes time."

[Wifredo Lam]



A rare surviving Greek representation of the Trojan Horse – hidden in which the Greeks finally managed to gain entry into Troy. This clay *pithos* [storage jar] from Mykonos was made not very long after the composition of Homer's *Odyssey*. This detail depicts some of the Greek warriors still inside the wheeled horse, looking out through little windows and handing armor down to those who are already outside.

Trojan Horse
Greek Vase, ca. 670 bce
Terracotta Funeral Amphora
Mykonos Archaeological Museum, photograph Barbara McManus, 1988
Trojan horse drawing: Bellerophon Books, 1995

Activity
Wifredo Lam said, "I could act as a Trojan horse..." What do you know about the Trojan War and the myth of the Trojan horse? Research the myth of the Trojan War and discover the archaeological evidence of the Trojan horse.

Spielvogel, Jackson J. *World History: National Geographic Special Report: More Than Myth to the Illad.* Columbus, Ohio: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill. 2005. [Pages 134-137]

Strauss, Barry. *The Trojan War: A New History.* New York, New York: Simon and Schuster. 2006.

MODERN

Looking Exercise #5:

"Painting is ...
An instrument of war"
[Pablo Picasso]

Wifredo Lam
The Fascinated Nest, 1944
Oil on canvas
Signed and dated lower left
W. Lam, cat. Raisonné, vol. I, no. 44.36
Collection Diana & Moisés Berezdivin

Pablo Picasso
Guernica, 1937
Oil on canvas
Museo Nacional del Prado
Madrid, Spain

Activity

Describe these works of art. Describe the colors, lines, and shapes in these works of art.
Do the colors convey a certain mood?
What idea or feeling do you think the artist wished to convey?
What symbols seen in these works are still used today to convey peace and war?

Activity

Compare and contrast the symbolism found in Wifredo Lams *The Fascinated Nest* to Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*.

INFLUENCES

Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*:

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon is one of modern art's founding works, heralding both Cubism and Expressionism. It took Picasso nine months to complete this painting and a great number of preparatory studies. Among them, *Bust of a Woman* occupies a pivotal point between these two stylistic orientations. In this study, *Bust of a Woman*, the face and the bust are shaped with gentle curves, which are regular and stylized, while the hair, the brow and the nose are done with angular hatchings. Marking the beginning of the emblematic violent theme of this painting. The wedge-shaped nose, almost by itself, subsumes the violence of the study; without any recourse to perspective or traditional modeling, it conveys an impression of relief, which demonstrates the painter's wish to sacrifice reality for the sake of pictorial solutions.

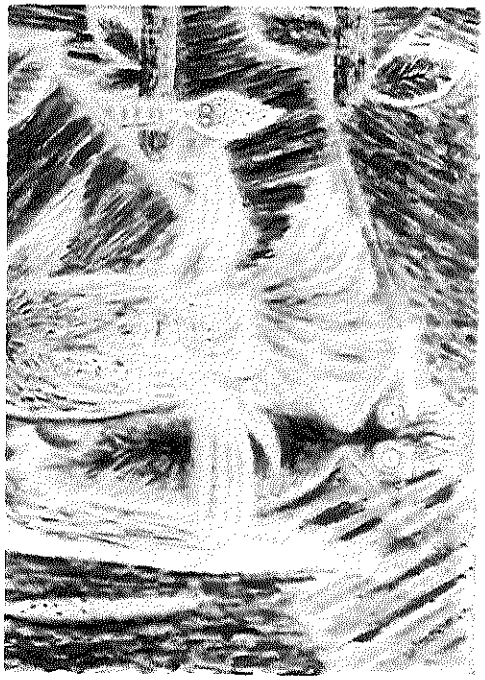
Pablo Picasso
Bust of a Woman, 1907
Study for Les Demoiselles d'Avignon
Oil on canvas
Musée National d'Art Moderne,
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Mask
Pende, Democratic Republic of Congo
Royal Museum for Central Africa Tervuren

Pablo Picasso
Les Demoiselles d'Avignon [Detail], 1907
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Monographs: Great Figures of Modern Art: Picasso
http://www.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-Picasso-EN/ENS-Picasso-EN.html

SCRUTINIZE A WIFREDO LAM



LOOK FOR THE FOLLOWING:

Leaf like part of a palm
A fern
Animals
Mythic imagery
Transparent light
Tropical plant parts
Colors of verdant greens, blues and reds

SURREALISM

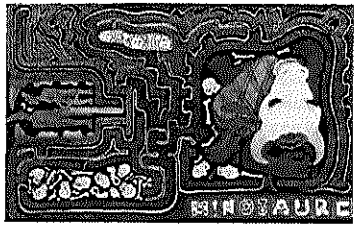
Prior to World War II during the early 1930s, trends in modern art in Europe and Asia were developing at a rapid pace. This evolution proved significant, as it involved the increasing duality of abstraction and surrealism. Looking back in 1958, André Breton, the surrealist poet, wrote:

> *"The situation in art...has never been so precarious as it was in Europe during the summer of 1940, when its doom appeared to be sealed...The annihilation of such art, which was the product and the generative force of liberty, featured prominently in the invader's plans."*

The destruction of art would have been disastrous as, for many, art represented an affirmation of freedom and a source of hope during those terrible years. Most American artists paid little attention to the European surrealists' revolutionary ideals. Instead, they focused on surrealist techniques, content, and attitudes, and combined bits and pieces of Surrealism with other elements to create a wide range of hybrid forms. During the 1940s, artists including Breton, Ernst, Tanguy and Lam sought refuge from the war by moving to the Americas. These artists added an infusion of creative energy into their new environments while making important work of their own.

Latin Americans added an interest in archetypes—images, ideas or patterns that have become to be considered universal models. These archetypes, which appear in mythology, religion and art, make up what Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung and others termed the collective unconscious. Muralism is sometimes contrasted with the Surrealism practiced by painters in exile, chief among them Wifredo Lam and the Chilean Matta [Roberto Matta Echaurren]. Matta and Diego Rivera produced illustrations and articles in the Surrealist journal *Minotaure*. In 1940, Mexico City was the scene of a major Surrealist exhibition, which included Rivera and his wife, Frida Kahlo. Their presence provided New York-based artists such as Arshile Gorky, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock with a closer knowledge of Surrealism, which in turn became an important influence on the development of Abstract Expressionism. Surrealism had a significant impact on American art.

Roberto Matta
Invasion of the Night, 1940
Oil on canvas
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
San Francisco



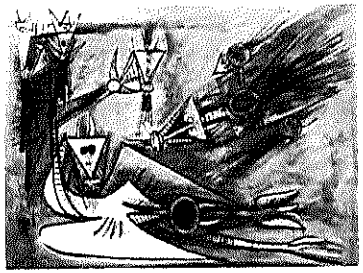
Diego Rivera
Minotaure, 1939
Design for the inner cover No. 12-13

Art and War: Works in the Kreeger Collection. Judy A. Greenberg. Washington D.C.: Kreeger Museum.2004.
http://www.kreegermuseum.org/museum/press_releases/greatestgeneration.pdf

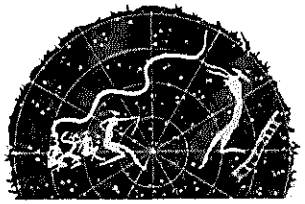
SURREALISM

Looking Exercise #6:

Surrealism: A style of art and literature developed in the 20th century that attempts to portray or interpret unconscious thoughts and dreams; it is characterized by fantastic imagery and incongruous juxtapositions.



Wifredo Lam
Le rêve, II [The Dream, II], 1947
Oil on canvas
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.



Gavin Jantjes
Untitled, 1990
Ink and photocopy on paper
National Museum of African Art
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Activity

Describe these works of art. What do you see?

Are these works of art true to life?

In making these works of art, what materials and tools do you think the artists used?

Why do you think these artists made these works of art?

The contemporary artist Gavin Jantjes is also inspired by mythology. What is there about his work that is similar to Lams?

Activity

Design and create an environment using drawing materials and a style of representation you choose. [i.e. Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism].

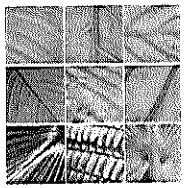
Experiment using animals, insects, birds and symbols to create a mythological place.

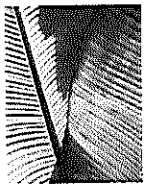
Gavin Jantes Mythology Paintings
http://www.nmafa.si.edu/exhibits/insights/index2.html

SCRUTINIZE A WIFREDO LAM

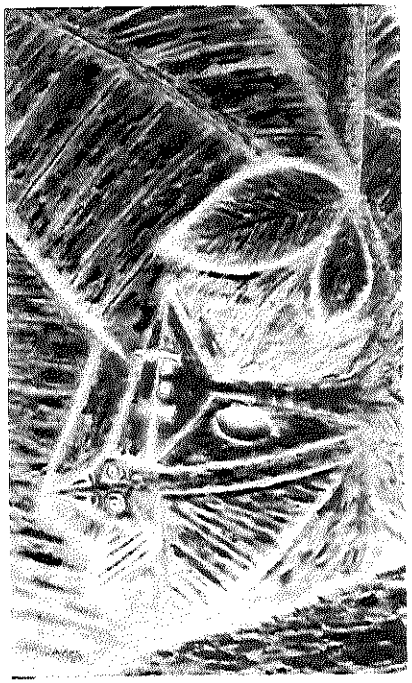
Looking Exercise #7:

Wifredo Lam
La serre
[The Greenhouse], 1944
Oil on canvas
Signed and dated lower left
Collection of Diana and Moisés Berezdivin

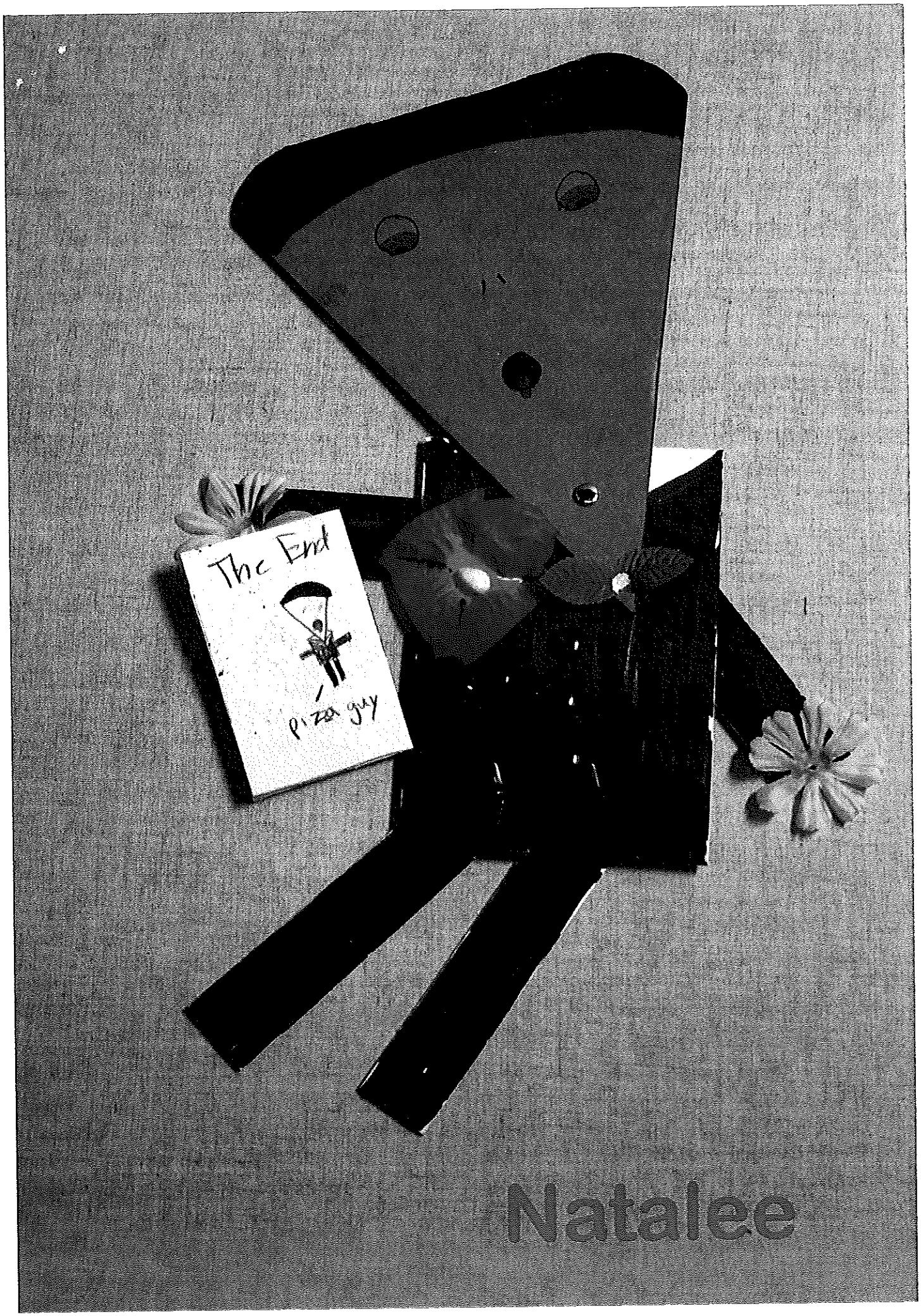




Above is a collage of photographic images of plants that may have inspired Wifredo Lam when he painted *La serre*.



CREATE YOUR OWN PLANT INSPIRED DRAWING.



Natalee