

# 'PRIMITIVISM' AND THE MODERN

OTHER MODERNISMS

11 OCTOBER 2023

# TODAY

1. Overview of different Primitivisms
2. Critical look at Primitivism
3. Examples, case studies
4. More examples

# 'PRIMITIVISM'

- art that employs 'primitive' elements or forms

Primitivism in art involves the appreciation and imitation of art (craft) and practices perceived to be “primitive,” or at an earlier stage of a supposed common scale of human development.

1. 'Primitives' of the 14-15<sup>th</sup> century
2. Non-western = south American, south Asian, and especially Africa, Oceania
3. Untrained amateur artists
4. Child art

# CHILD ART

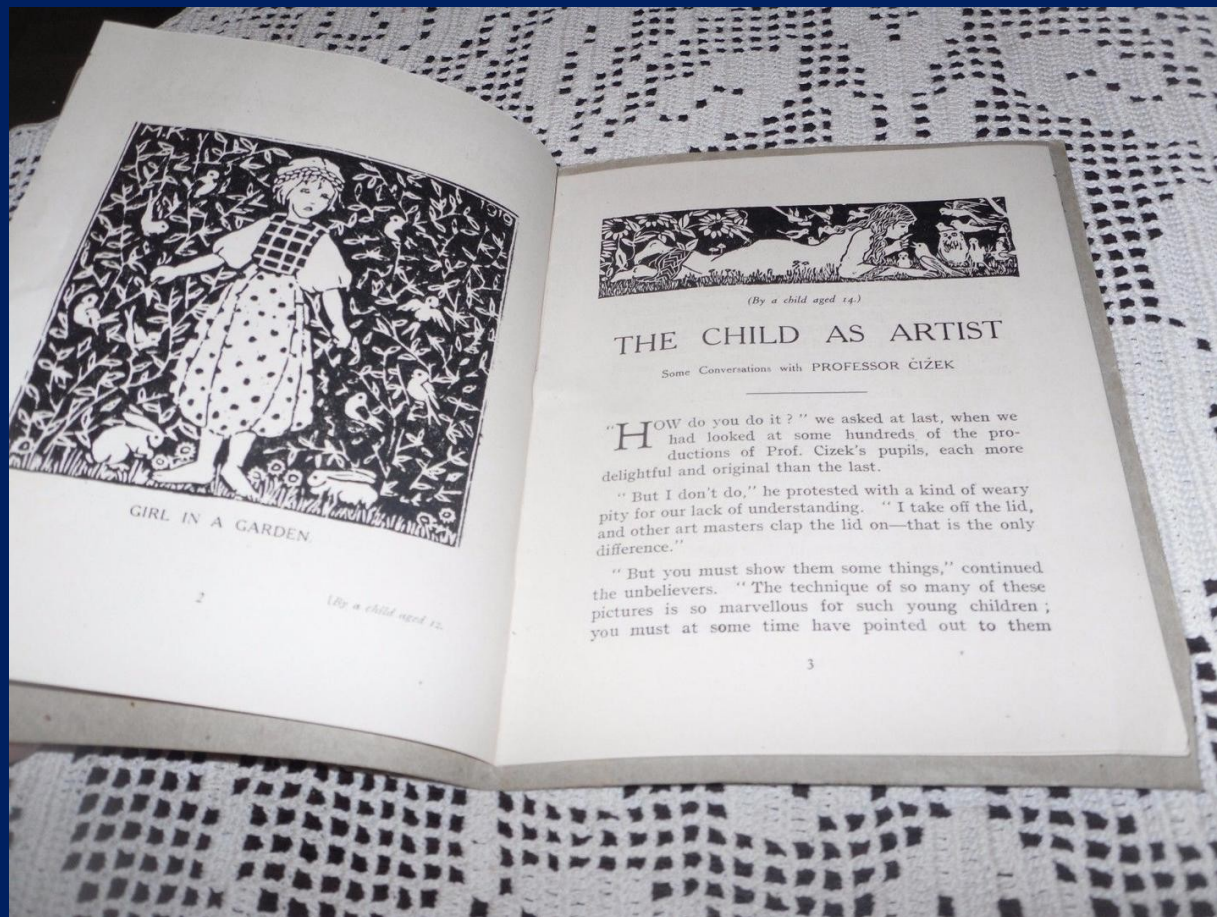


Figura 12 - Trude Izaak presenting her works

Franz Čížek (1865-1946)



# AMATEUR ART





# 'ITALIAN PRIMITIVES'



Giotto, *Lamentation (The Mourning of Christ)*, Scrovegni Chapel, around 1305



Masaccio, *The Tribute Money*, fresco in the Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence. Around 1425



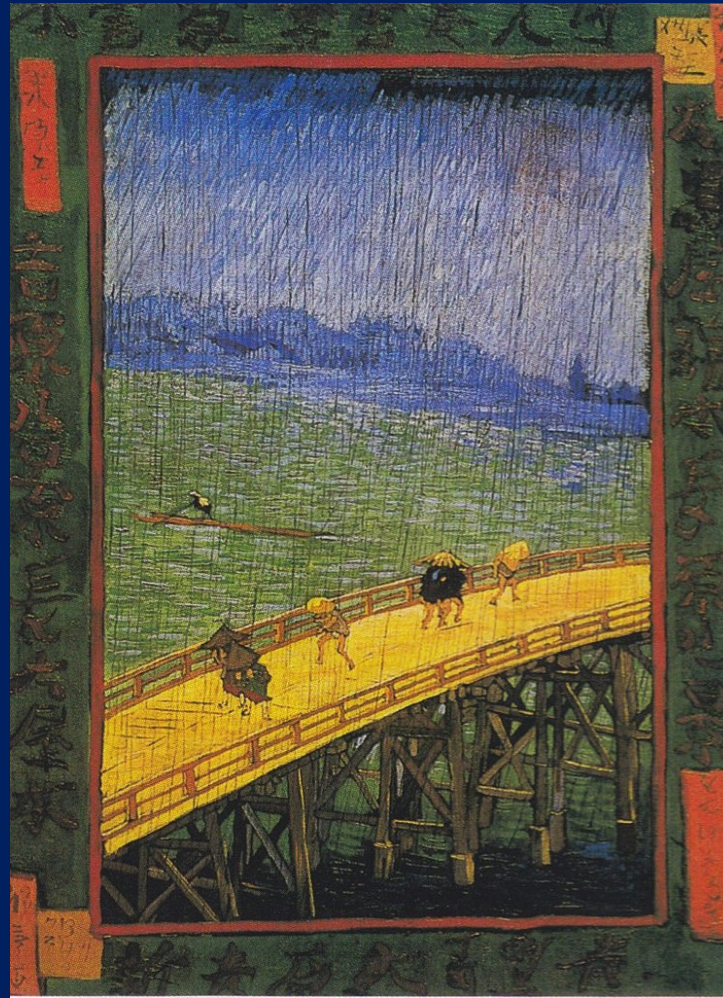
# LATE 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

- Artists exhausted artistic ideas related to naturalism
- The French, British, Germans look overseas for inspiration

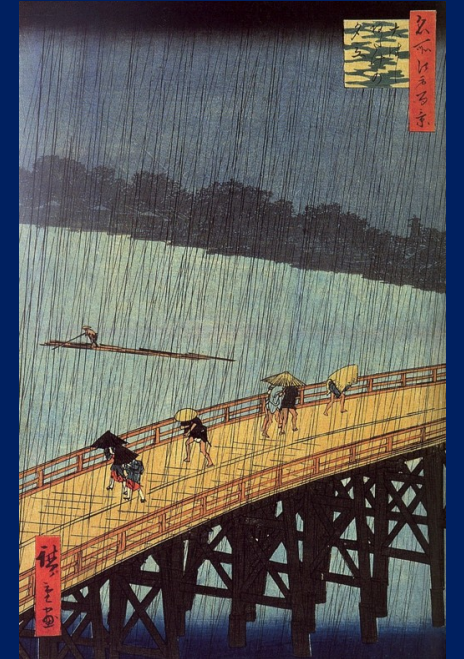
Edouard Manet, Portrait of Emile Zola (1868)







Vincent van Gogh, The Bridge in the Rain (after Hiroshige) (1887)



Hiroshige, A Sudden Shower and the Bridge (1856-8)

Henri de Toulouse Lautrec, Reine de Joie (1892)





Hokusai – The Wave (1823-29)

Arnošt Hofbauer, Poster for the 1898 Mánès Exhibition, Topič Gallery, Prague



# NOBLE SAVAGE

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78):

- lives according to universal natural law
- Is inherently moral and good
- Possesses indigenous knowledge
- lives simple life





## ORIENTALISM

- Sees non-Europeans as unenlightened or illogical,
- justifies European intervention in that culture

## PRIMITIVISM

- parallels these early fixations with Eastern civilizations.
- Primitivism is a mixture of admiration and denigration, appreciation and exploitation, elevation and repression.

**European supremacy**



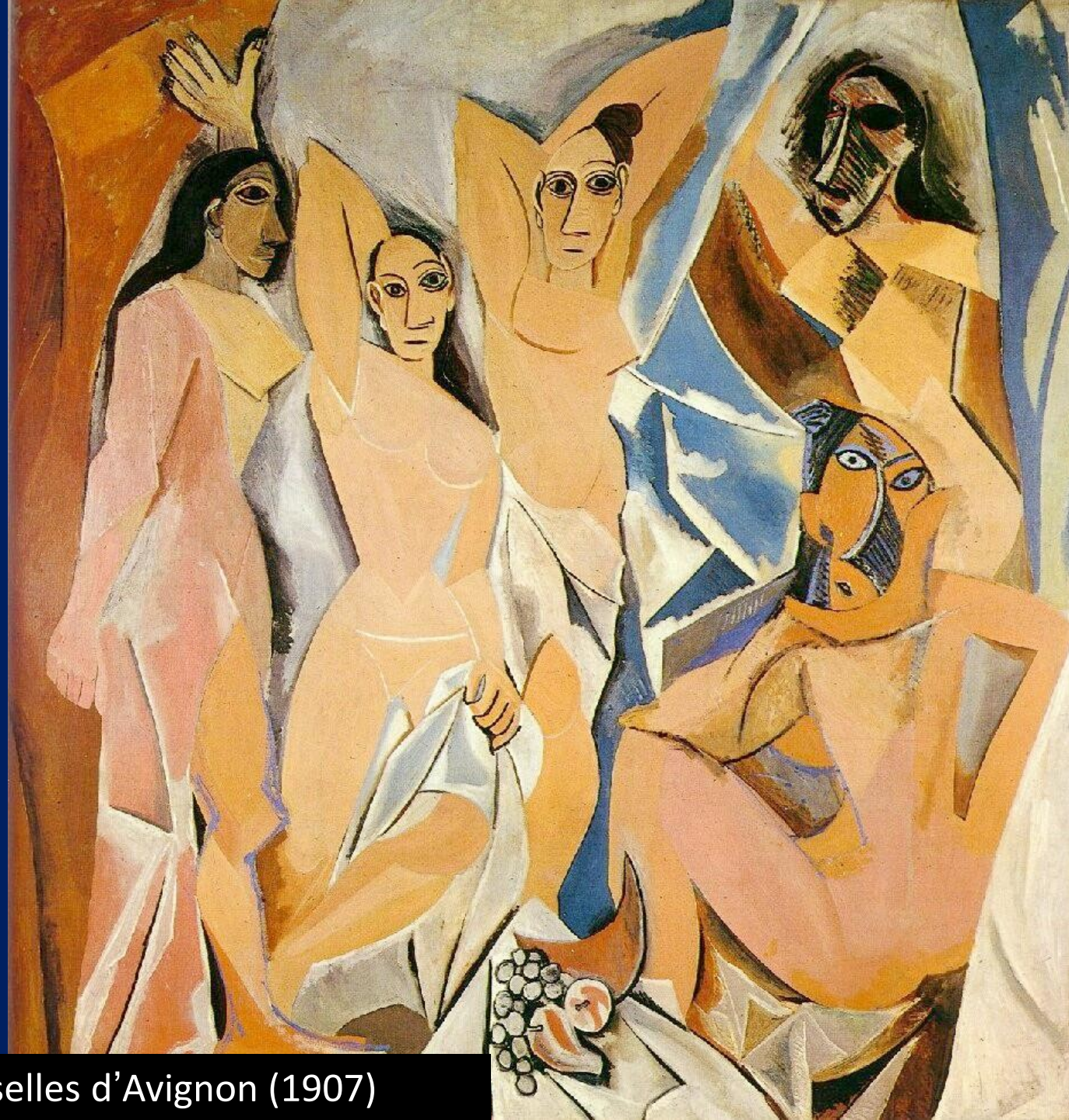
Paul Gauguin, Tahitian Women on the Beach (1891)





Paul Gauguin  
Two Tahitian Women (1899)



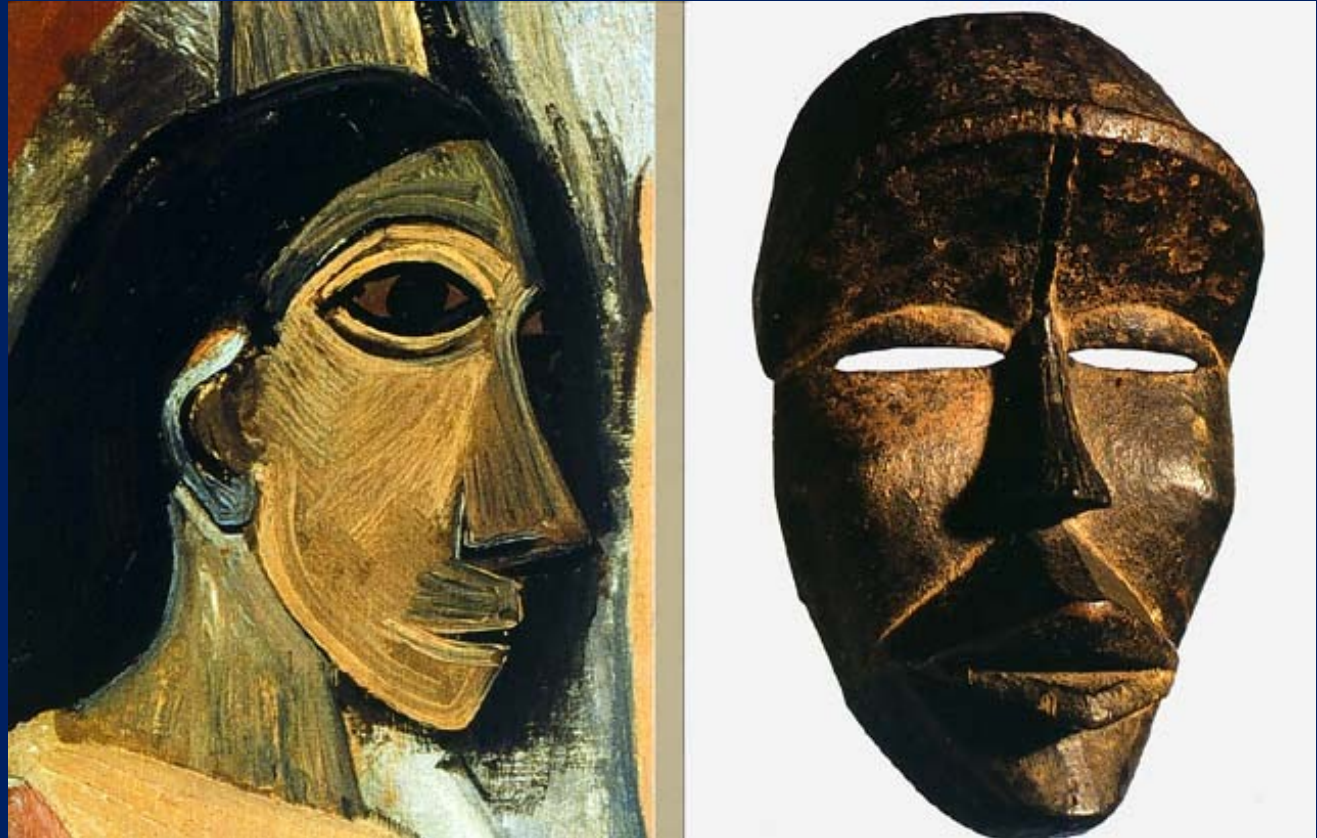


Pablo Picasso, Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.) (1935)





“The masks were unlike any other sculpture. Not in the least. They were pathfinders – the Negroes’ sculptures – against everything; mysterious, menacing spirits.”





Paris, Musée du Trocadéro,  
erected for Exposition Universelle of 1878



Berlin

Königl. Museum für Völkerkunde

**GERMANY**





‘In our own time every earthenware vessel or piece of jewellery, every utensil or garment, has to be designed on paper before it is made. Primitive peoples, however, create their works with the material itself in the artist’s hand, held in his fingers. They aspire to express delight in form and the love creating it. Absolute originality, the intense and often grotesque expression of power and life in very simple forms – that may be why we like these works of native art.’

Emil Nolde ‘Primitive Art’ (1912) in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds, *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, Oxford, 1992, 102.



Emil Nolde, *The Prophet* (1912)



**DIE BRÜCKE  
DER BLAUER  
REITER**



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Bathers  
in a Room, 1909





Troadero



České Budějovice



Musee du Quai Branly, Paris

Dresden





RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE



EXPOSITION COLONIALE  
INTERNATIONALE



PARIS  
1931

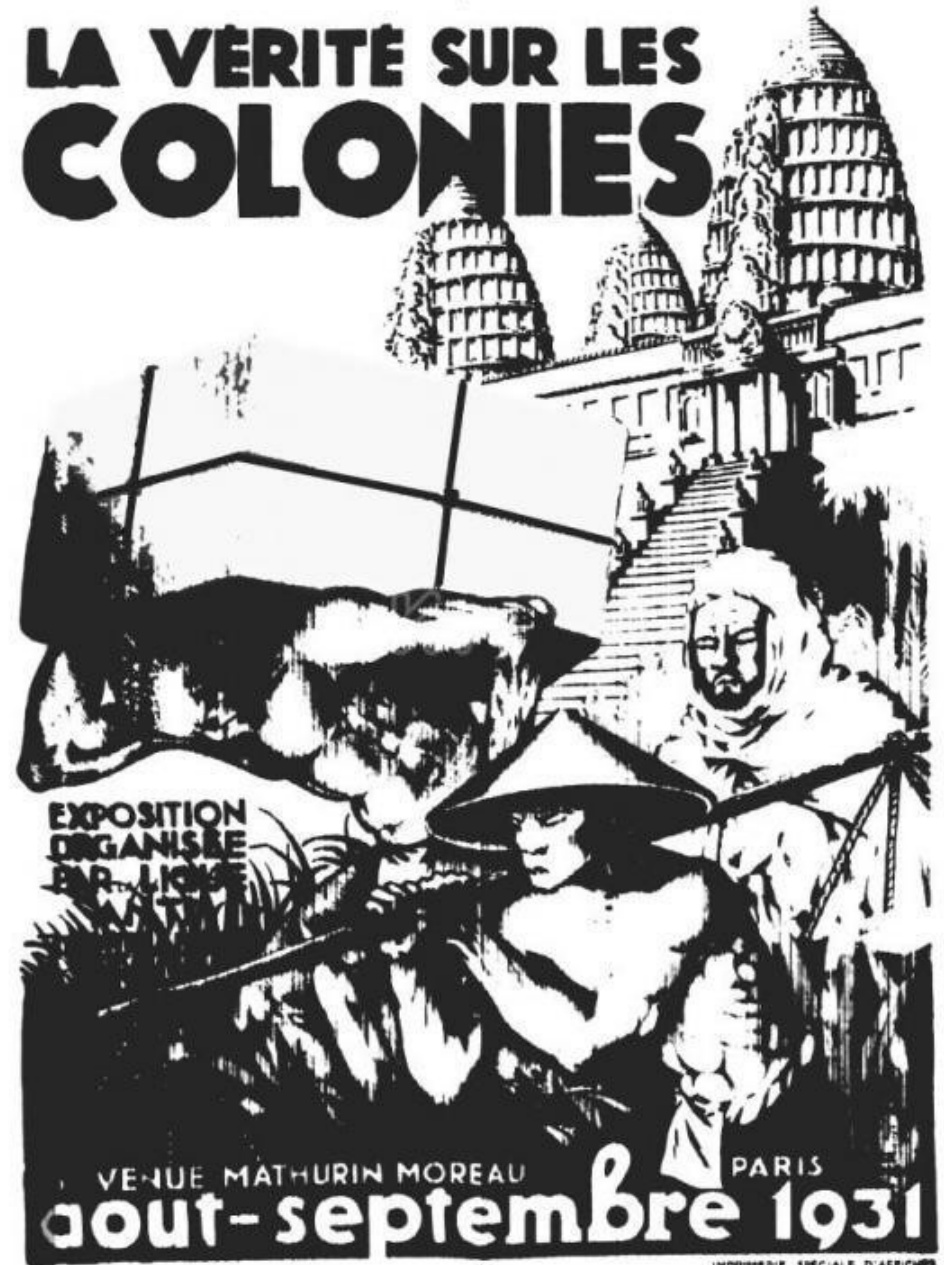


IMP. DE VAUGIRARD - PARIS - 1928

J. de la Nézière



LA VÉRITÉ SUR LES  
COLONIES



EXPOSITION  
ORGANISÉE  
PAR L'UNION  
FRANÇAISE

VENUE MATHURIN MOREAU PARIS  
août-septembre 1931

INDUSTRIE SPECIALE D'AFFICHES

# MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

*“Primitivism” in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* exhibition, curated by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe

<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1907>



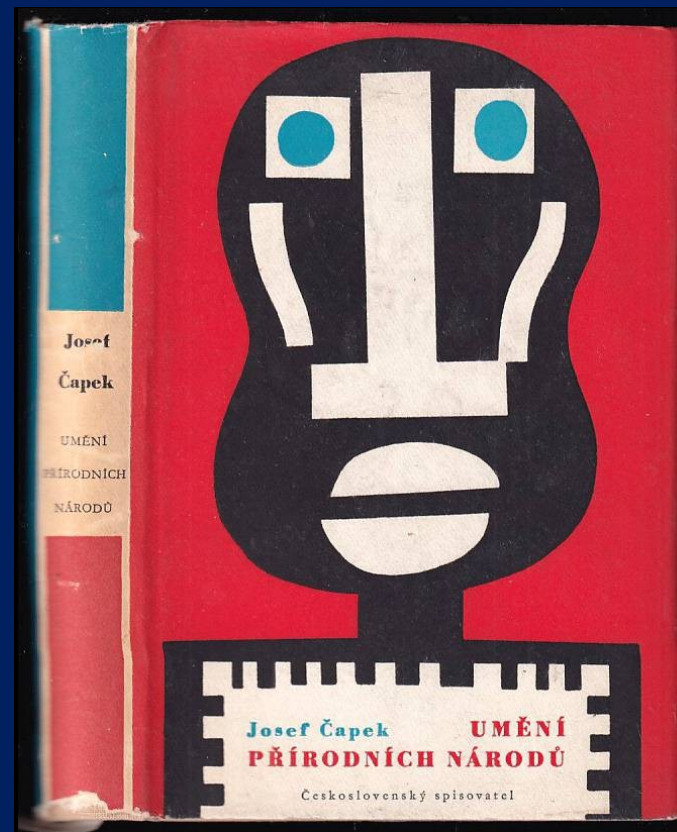
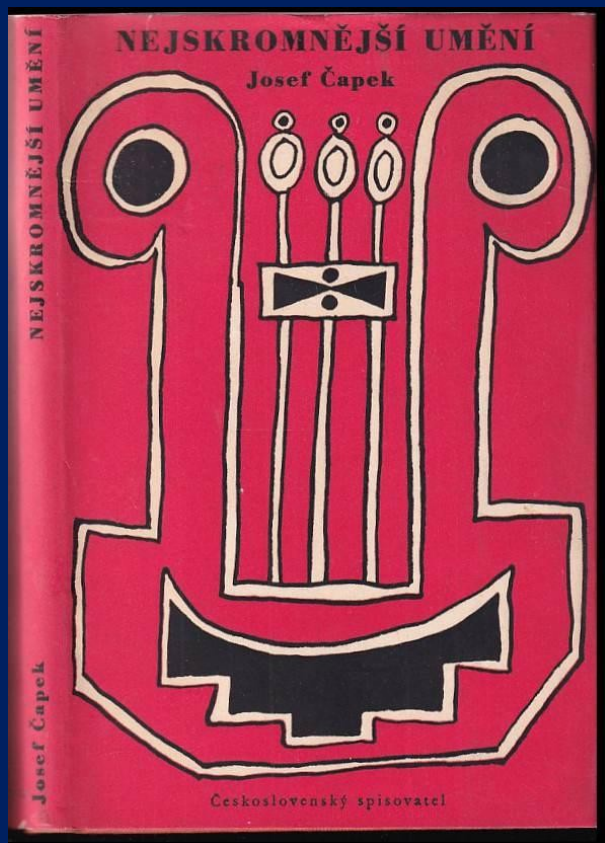
“absolute repression of primitive context, meaning, content, and intention.”

Thomas McEvilly, “Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief” *Artforum*, November 1984



# JOSEF ČAPEK (1887-1945)

- Nejskromnější umění (The Humblest Art), 1920
- Umění přírodních národů (The Art of Native Peoples), 1938



Henri Rousseau, The Football Players,  
1908



Hans Holbein the Elder, Christ on the  
Mount of Olives, around 1500





Josef Čapek, Singing Girls, 1938



Doggie and Pussycat, illustration, 1928





Jean-François Millet, *The Gleaners*, 1857

Paul Gauguin, *Vision After the Sermon* (1888)

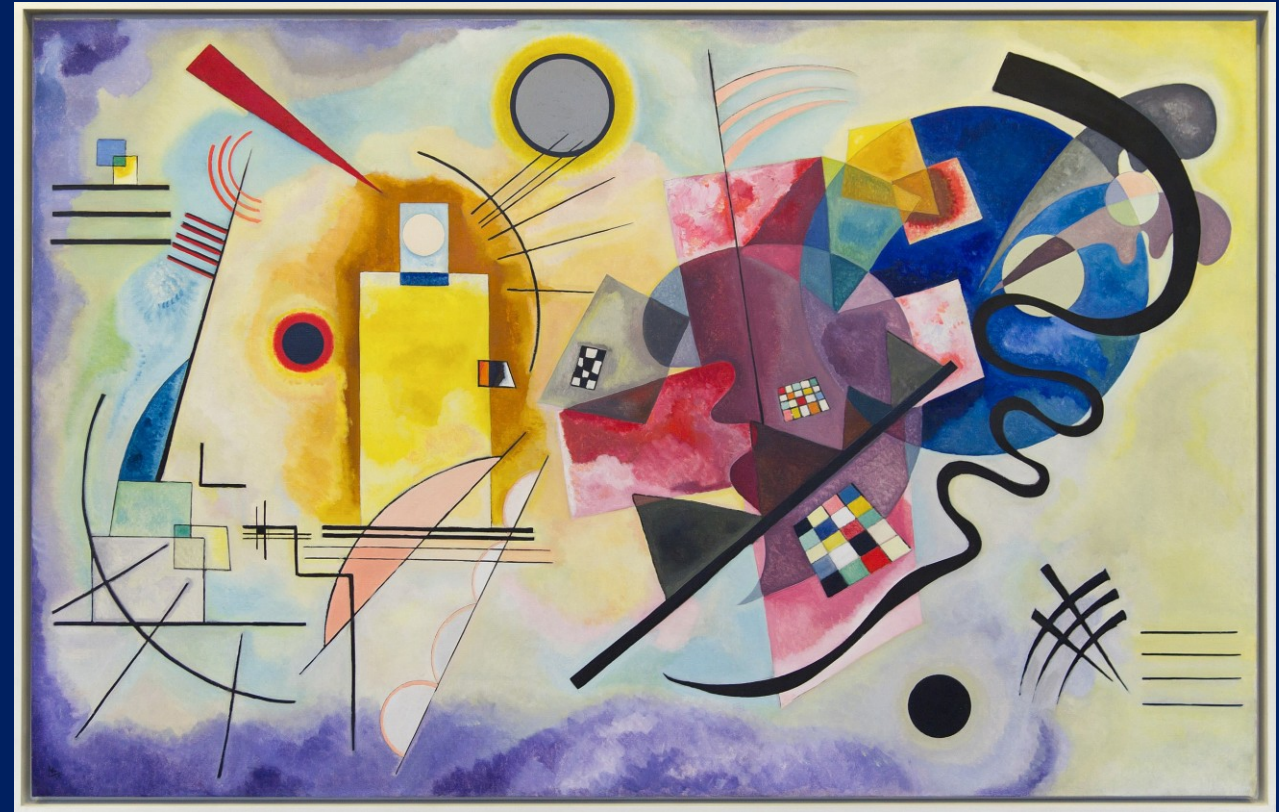




# VASSILY KANDINSKY



*Landscape with Factory Chimney, 1910*



*Yellow-Red-Blue, 1925*



*Song of the Volga, 1906*





*Couple Riding, 1906*







Joža Uprka, *Gravellers*, 1894



Gustave Courbet, *The Stone Breakers*, 1849

## JOŽA UPRKA (1861-1940)





Joža Uprka, *Young Man from Lanzhot*, 1910s



Joža Uprka, *Indian Summer*, 1927





Joža Uprka, *The Pilgrimage to St. Anthony*, 1894





Auguste Rodin in Moravia



**Hodonín, Gallery of the Fine Arts:  
Pražská Pallas a Moravská Hellas 1902:  
Auguste Rodin v Praze a na Moravě**





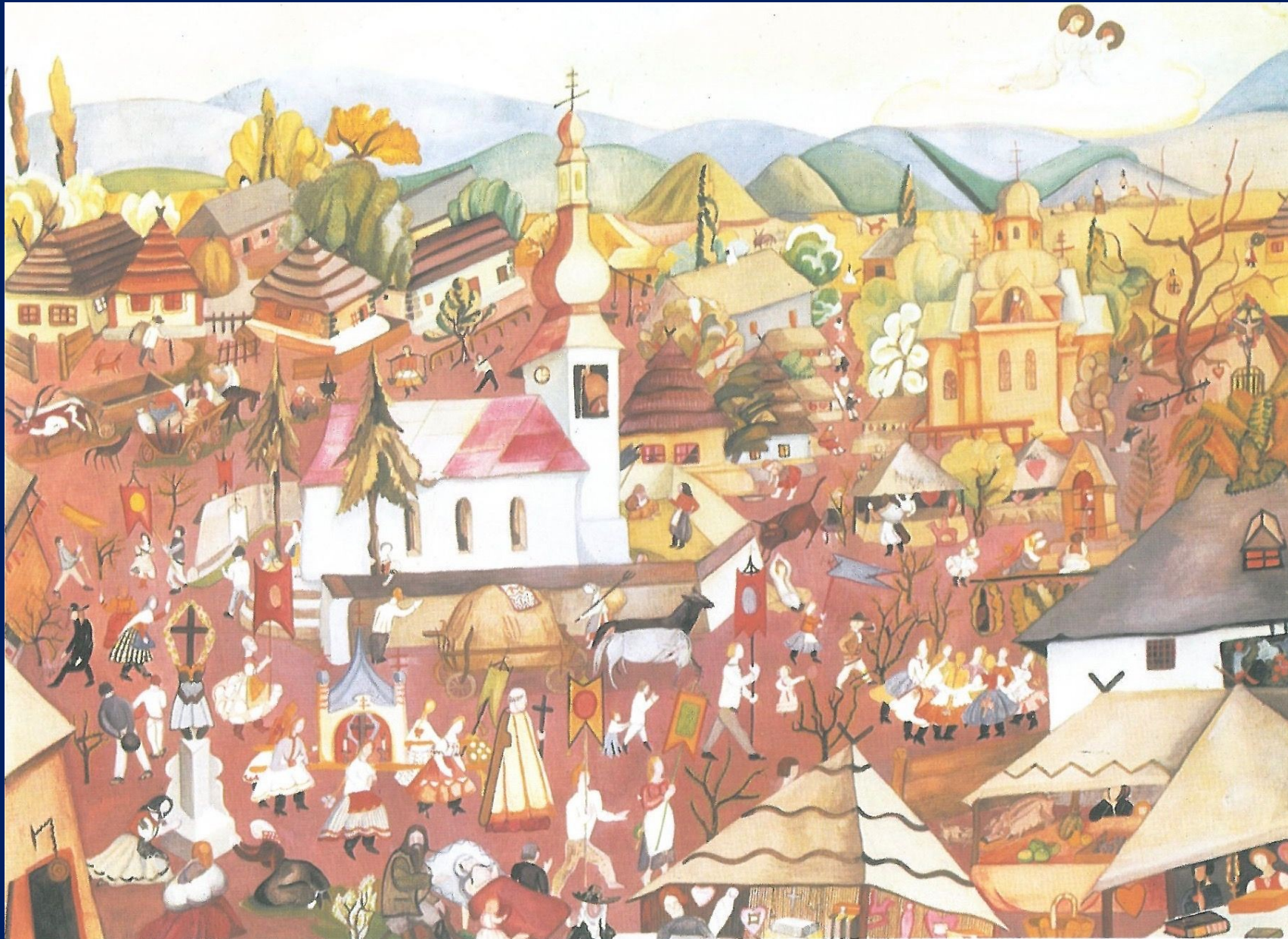
Joža Uprka, Ride of the Kings, 1897



# ANNA LESZNAI (1885-1966)







Anna Lesznai, *The Slovak Lourdes*, 1924



- Find out about these works and authors.
- What is primitivist about the work and why?



Paul Gauguin, *The Seed of the Areoi* 1892







Vassily Kandinsky, *Das Bunte Leben*, 1907



Natalia Goncharova,  
Haycutting, c. 1910





Henri Rousseau, Myself. Portrait  
Landscape, 1890





# Summing up PRIMITIVIST ART

- Goes against conventions
- References the idea of the 'noble savage'
  
- Contains a level of
  - Naivety
  - simplicity, sincerity
  - purity and instinct
  - timeless innocence
  - truthfulness
  - nudity
  
- Inspired by non-European works, art of children, amateur artists, historic precedents (Italian, Dutch primitifs, El Greco, ...)