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**PABLO PICASSO AND PRIMITIVISM: AN EXPLORATION OF “NON-WESTERN” AND  
MEDIEVAL INFLUENCES IN LES DEMOISELLES D’AVIGNON (1907)**

Erin Dianna Rothstein

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PABLO PICASSO AND PRIMITIVISM: AN EXPLORATION OF “NON-WESTERN” AND  
MEDIEVAL INFLUENCES IN *LES DEMOISELLES D’AVIGNON* (1907)

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2

by

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Graduate Program in Art History

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Art

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of London Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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The thesis by

**Erin Dianna Rothstein**

entitled:

**Pablo Picasso and Primitivism: An Exploration of “Non-Western” and  
Medieval Influences in *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907)**

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Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

## ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

Pablo Picasso's painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* (1907) achieved prominence as a hallmark of primitivism in twentieth-century art. While countless scholars have explored this work, no one has yet published a comprehensive survey of the mosaic of cultural contexts that underpinned Picasso's conception of primitivism.

This thesis will explore the complex nature of the primitivist ideologies that saturated Picasso's cultural experience, both in his early years as a developing artist in the Spanish province of Catalonia, and in Paris in the years leading up to his creation of *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*. These environments had each been shaped by drastic cultural and artistic changes in the nineteenth century, after industrialization, urbanization, and socio-political upheavals caused both Spanish and French citizens to become disenchanted with what they perceived as an over-mechanized and fragmented milieu. By the time Picasso created *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*, he had been exposed to artists and scholars who thirsted for artforms that were "primitive" and authentic, free from the perceived constraints and social artifices of their current civilization. These thinkers believed that such artforms could be found by looking backward to the medieval era and outward to the "non-West."

Although the subject of "non-Western" primitivism has typically illuminated Picasso's conception of *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*, this thesis will highlight the need to study this work within the context of Picasso's formative years in both Catalonia and Paris, which saw a pronounced revival of interest in the Middle Ages.

Keywords: *Pablo Picasso, Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O), Le Bateau-Lavoir, Primitivism, Medieval Revivalism, "Non-Western" Visual Culture*

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## INTRODUCTION

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) painted *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (1911-12) (Fig. 1.1) in the artists' residence Le Bateau-Lavoir in Montmartre, Paris, where he lived from 1904 until 1909. *Les Femmes d'Alger* portrays five prostitutes who were abstractly rendered on a canvas measuring ninety-six by ninety-two inches. This work achieved prominence in twentieth-century art and art history as one of the most important representations of primitivism in modern painting. While countless scholars have explored this work, no one has yet published a comprehensive survey of the mosaic of cultural contexts that underpinned Picasso's conception of primitivism.

This thesis will explore the complex nature of the primitivist ideologies that saturated Picasso's cultural experience, both in his early years as a developing artist in the Spanish province of Catalonia, and in Paris in the years leading up to his creation of *Les Femmes d'Alger*. These environments had each been shaped by drastic cultural and artistic changes in the nineteenth century. Industrialization, urbanization, and socio-political upheavals caused both Spanish and French citizens to become disenchanted with what they perceived as an over-mechanized and fragmented milieu. Artists and art patrons, in particular, were disenchanted with neoclassical visual languages, typical of the nineteenth century, which seemed to them inexpressive and rigid in their polished depictions of heroes from the Western canon. By the time Picasso created *Les Femmes d'Alger*, he had been exposed to artists and scholars who thirsted for artforms more primitive and authentic, free from the perceived constraints and social artifices of their current civilization. These thinkers believed that such artforms could be found by looking backward to the medieval era and outward to the "non-West."



The medieval era, or the “Middle Ages,” represented a time in European history that predated the constraints of modern civilization, when life was simpler and closer to the essence of humankind’s basic instincts. The term “Middle Ages” was coined by Renaissance scholars to denote the period that came before their modern era and after classical antiquity. Many nineteenth-century citizens identified more with the Middle Ages than with their current modern age, seeking to adopt this era as a symbol of their heritage. The idea that the modern West was endowed with a rich and pure heritage encouraged romantic fantasies about the sort of culture that might reappear could the constraints of civilization be lifted. These fantasies were not only projected onto the medieval era, but also onto the “non-West,” a concept used to describe any foreign territory whose cultures and traditions stood outside Western European conventions. This concept gained popular appeal in the nineteenth century, when Western European imperialism and colonialism were at their peak. Like the medieval era, the “non-West” was perceived as being uncharted, uncivilized, and essentially free.

New and imaginative contexts were fabricated around the visual cultures of the medieval era and the “non-West” which were reduced to simulacra of the broader cultural and historical frameworks to which they had originally belonged. These simulacra were romanticized and popularized, obscuring the cultural realities upon which they were based. “Non-Western” and medieval artifacts thus became objects of aesthetic contemplation for modern Western consumption, appreciated for their abstract motifs and for the ideas they spawned about the potential for modern art to become a vehicle of unrestrained creative expression. These artifacts were amassed by a multitude of collectors and in a multitude of venues, including museums, international exhibitions,

curio shops, cafés, cabarets, and personal living spaces. The aesthetics of “non-Western” and medieval artifacts also inspired many artists and architects, Picasso among them, to create their own “primitive” works based on their deepest emotions, experiences, and instincts. Picasso’s iconic masterpiece *Les Femmes d’Alger* was a prime example of this new artistic approach.

The massive size of the canvas on which *Les Femmes d’Alger* was painted gave Picasso the freedom to express his creativity with little restraint. Canvases of this magnitude had typically been reserved for neoclassical paintings and formal exhibition spaces. In Picasso’s quest for personal expression, however, he deviated from cultural norms by exhibiting this work before his own personal acquaintances in his own atelier in Le Bateau-Lavoir, recounting stories that related this painting to his own experiences.

Picasso added another layer of complexity to *Les Femmes d’Alger* by surrounding it with “non-Western” collectibles and prompting viewers and scholars to wonder about how these objects had influenced his new style. To date, *Les Femmes d’Alger* has often been perceived as a product of Picasso’s self-designed “non-Western” space, despite the fact that his perception of the “non-West” was inevitably coloured by the pronounced revival of interest in medieval visual culture that had surrounded him in Catalonia and continued to surround him in Paris. Picasso’s spectacle of “primitivism” at Le Bateau-Lavoir has tended to obscure the broader cultural contexts that in fact shaped his conception of the “primitive,” in much the same way that modern Western spectacles of “primitivism” obscured the broader cultural contexts to which their aesthetics had originally belonged. Ironically, Picasso’s creation of a new, unique, and highly personalized model of “primitivism” was framed by a broader cultural effort to incorporate the “primitive” into

a new Western identity. This dynamic simultaneously made Picasso a representative of his era and a cultural anarchist as he sought to create an aura of startling originality within an environment that, in its own way, sought to move away from neoclassical norms and toward more creative or authentic forms of expression.

This thesis will suggest that *Les Demoiselles* must be explored not only within the confines of Picasso's self-created narratives, but also as part of a meta-narrative in which nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists and scholars created their own personalized frameworks for objects that they considered to be primitive. In exploring *Les Demoiselles* in this manner, it will become clear that Picasso's personal expression of primitivism was inextricably linked to the medieval revivals that surrounded him both literally and nostalgically during his creation and initial exhibition of this iconic painting.

Chapter One will highlight the key cultural contexts that influenced Picasso's formative understanding of primitivism in Catalonia during a widespread revival of interest in medieval aesthetics, suggesting that the strong cultural and national heritage that he carried with him to Paris was tied to an idealized medieval past. Despite the apparent prominence of Picasso's "non-Western" collectibles in his Paris atelier, I will explore the ways in which his relationship with medieval visual culture continued, demonstrating this continuum in his artistic development leading up to and including *Les Demoiselles*. By the time Picasso settled in Paris, his earlier experience was deeply ingrained in him, making him receptive to the new primitivist environment that this milieu offered. "Non-Western" visual culture would have resonated with Picasso because it shared the aesthetics of medieval visual culture which had formerly shaped his identity.

This was an aesthetic that reflected freedom and spirituality in its abstract and exaggerated forms.

Chapter Two will explore *Les Femmes d'Alger* within the context that Picasso created for it, looking at how this context was specifically constructed and how popular notions about *Les Femmes d'Alger* emerged as a result. Specifically, this chapter will focus on Picasso's décor, which included both "non-Western" artifacts and his own utilitarian objects. The reactions of his personal acquaintance to his atelier will also be examined, as will the stories that would have been circulated by Picasso and his friends about *Les Femmes d'Alger* and the stimuli that inspired its creation.

Chapter Three will look at *Les Femmes d'Alger* through the lens of the Parisian environment that existed outside Picasso's personal framework, in order to demonstrate that the presence of medievalism was just as vibrant as the presence of the "non-West" in Picasso's Parisian milieu.

Throughout the mid- to late twentieth century, studies about the subject of primitivism in fin de siècle culture have typically been restricted to the subject of the "non-West," and have informed the context in which *Les Femmes d'Alger* has most often been viewed. Such studies have considered the cultural repercussions of modern artists and art collectors removing "non-Western" artifacts from their native contexts and reassembling them as art-objects that could instill a new vitality in modern culture. Examples of this early scholarship are Robert J. Goldwater's *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (1938), William Rubin's *Primitivism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984), James Clifford's "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern" (1985), and James F. Knapp's "Primitivism and the Modern" (1986).

Most recently, however, studies about primitivism in fin de siècle culture have begun to address the subject of the medieval era. Such studies have considered the prevalence of medieval revivalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when historians, collectors, architects, and artists looked backward to their own historical roots for symbols of primitive culture. Such studies have further considered the effects of disassembling medieval art and reassembling it in modern contexts. Among the prominent sources that explore this subject are Madeline Caviness' "The Politics of Taste: An Historiography of 'Romanesque' Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" (2008), Robert Maxwell's "Modern Origins of Romanesque Sculpture" (2006), Tina Waldeier Bizzarro's "'The Scattered Limbs of the Giant:' Recollecting Medieval Architectural Revivals" (2006), Laura Morowitz's and Elizabeth Emery's *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin de Siècle France* (2003), and Elizabeth Fay's *Romantic Medievalism: History and the Romantic Literary Ideal* (2002).

Madeline Caviness is one of the few scholars who has suggested that *Les Demoiselles* was linked to the medieval revival in Barcelona during Picasso's childhood, but this idea has never been explored within the context of the medieval revival that Picasso encountered in Paris, or within the context of his fascination with "non-West." My own research, by contrast, will suggest that *Les Demoiselles* cannot be fully understood without looking at the complex relationship between the cross-cultural and trans-historical discourses that saturated Picasso's ideas about primitivism. In shedding light on this relationship, this thesis will expand existing notions about primitivism in modern art, creating a dialogue between the art-historical categories to which the subjects of the modern, the medieval, and the "non-West" have often been confined.

## CHAPTER ONE

TRACING PICASSO'S CONCEPTION OF PRIMITIVISM IN *LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON*

This chapter will highlight the key cultural contexts that influenced Picasso's conception of primitivism in *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)* (Fig. 1.1). Many have proposed that this painting was inspired exclusively by the aesthetics of "non-Western" visual culture, by virtue of the fact that Picasso collected and exhibited "non-Western" objects in his Bateau-Lavoir atelier in Paris, where this painting was created and initially exhibited. Indeed, *Les Femmes d'Alger* was created during a surge of interest in "non-Western" visual culture, which to many in the modern West, represented a mode of expression more primitive and deeply creative than the current state of European culture. Picasso's fascination with "non-Western" aesthetics became a subject of popular interest around the time he first exhibited *Les Femmes d'Alger*. The first photograph of his "non-Western" inspired atelier was taken in 1908 (Fig. 1.2), one year after *Les Femmes d'Alger* was created, and four years after Picasso had moved away from the Spanish province of Catalonia where he was born and raised. In his young adulthood, Picasso would have been eager to establish himself in an environment that would bring out his independence and individuality, and his "non-Western" collectibles undoubtedly lent themselves to this objective.

Despite Picasso's apparent fascination with the "non-West" in his early Paris days, this chapter will suggest that his conception of primitivism in *Les Femmes d'Alger* extended not only to his interest in the "non-West," but also to his formative experiences during a prominent revival of interest in medieval art and culture. These experiences had

begun in Catalonia during his early artistic development, and continued in Paris when his conception of *Les Demoiselles* was more fully formed.

The art historian Madeline Caviness is one of the few scholars who has looked beyond Picasso's "non-Western" inspired studio to his early experience of the medieval revival in Catalonia. In her 2008 essay, "The Politics of Taste: An Historiography of 'Romanesque' Art in the Twentieth Century," she stated:

Picasso's completion in Paris of his famous abstract painting, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*... [was] inspired by the medieval paintings of his...homeland, and echoed the dramatic staring eyes, sharp features, and the shifting angled views of faces and bodies of the St. Martin altar frontal in the museum in Vich [Spain] that he could have known from recent publications, and possibly also in the original...Picasso's visual experiments eliminated all trace of quasi-classical training in favor of more strident and expressive forms that resonate with the Romanesque without being historicist. The modernists who have emphasized an inspiration from African masks, in the right hand figures of the *Demoiselles*, have overlooked the reference to an indigenous art that was also claimed as "primitive" in the sense of primacy (primitif in French encompasses both).<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will add a new dimension to Caviness' research, proposing that Picasso's memory of the medieval revival in Catalonia would have been sharpened and expanded by spectacles of both medieval visual culture and "non-Western" visual culture upon his arrival in Paris. Because Picasso's interest in the "non-West" surfaced in Paris, I will highlight some of the major spectacles of "non-Western" visual culture that he would have experienced in this city, emphasizing that his perception of these spectacles would have been coloured by the medieval revivals that surrounded him. This discussion will illuminate the complex primitivist ideologies that informed his creation and early exhibition of *Les Demoiselles*.

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<sup>1</sup> Madeline H. Caviness, "The Politics of Taste: An Historiography of 'Romanesque' Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," in *Romanesque, Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century: Essays in Honor of Walter Cahn*, ed. Colum P. Hourihane (Princeton: Index of Christian Art, 2008), 63.

### **i. Picasso and Medievalism: Resurrecting a Romanesque Past in Barcelona**

At an early age, Picasso received formal artistic training from his father, who taught him to emulate the classical masters. This approach to art followed Picasso to La Coruña, where he and his family moved in 1891. In 1895, the family moved to Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia.

In Barcelona, Picasso became increasingly less devoted to the disciplined artistic training that he received from his father as he became increasingly more exposed to alternative forms of expression that seemed to him more socially, culturally, and politically relevant to his urban environment. This environment, where Picasso lived from 1895 until 1904, was charged with social, cultural, and political turmoil that followed the industrialization, urbanization, and essential modernization of rural Barcelona.<sup>2</sup>

Barcelona's Spanish government industrialized pre-existing agrarian societies in the region. When the peasants lost much of their farm land, many of them engaged in anticlericalism and anarchy.<sup>3</sup> While Barcelona's modernization increased, so too did a growing disparity between those who had profited from industrialization and those who had not. A profiting middle class, or bourgeoisie as it was known, adhered to a capitalist culture that was steeped in conventional expressions of "high-class" living. Picasso's early neoclassical training was a product of this culture. Over time, many among Barcelona's bourgeoisie came to feel that neoclassicism did not express their

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<sup>2</sup> Patricia Leighton, "The Proper Subject of Art: Anarchism and Picasso's Barcelona Period, 1897-1904," in *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 16. In this context, "modernization" refers to traditions affiliated with industrialization and urbanization. See also Nigel Blake and Francis Frascina, "Modern Practices of Art and Modernity" in *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Francis Frascina et al. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in Association with the Open University, 1993), 127.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., 21.



fundamental human spirit. Thirsty for a cultural renewal that would reverse the effects of their own culture's perceived artifice and social constraint, they looked to the lower echelons of society from which they had risen, hoping to find a style more relevant to the essence of their humanity. As industrialization and urbanization expanded, so too did their search for primitive cultures that could "return" them to a purer state of being. These people, who endeavored to establish new artistic traditions for bourgeois culture, formed the avant-garde movement.<sup>4</sup>

Avant-garde activists and enthusiasts in Barcelona championed the urban peasantry, believing that its lack of capitalist culture made it more deeply able to connect with basic human emotions and instincts. Patricia Leighton discussed this idea in her book *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (1989), noting that the peasantry seemed to them an earlier model of human development, wherein people existed in a purer relationship with nature.<sup>5</sup> The urban peasantry was seen as a "dark" culture, outside the "light" of capitalism, but in its darkness — in its pain and suffering — there was something deeply real. As avant-garde activists and enthusiasts romanticized the plight of the poor, they projected this romantic vision onto their own lifestyles in order to revitalize and reassert their own traditions. As a result, they

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<sup>4</sup> Blake and Frascina, 127. In this context, the word "new" is interchangeable with "Modern," referring to avant-garde tradition, as opposed to "modern" tradition, which I have used in reference to traditions rooted in capitalist culture. Blake and Frascina made this distinction in the following statement: "By 'modernism' we refer to the new social practices in both 'high art' and 'mass culture' which engage with the experiences of modern life by means of a self-conscious use of experiment and innovation. The term modernism should not be confused with Modernism, which represents one particular, much contested account of modernist art practices, which stress 'art for art's sake,' artistic autonomy, aesthetic disinterestedness and the formal and technical characteristics of works of modern art."

<sup>5</sup> Leighton, 18. This book explores Picasso's early experiences in Barcelona, but it does not offer a detailed analysis, like Caviness' essay does, of his specific experience of a medieval revival. It is for this reason that, in my earlier discussion, I did not discuss this work along with Caviness' scholarship.

immersed themselves in spectacles of bohemianism, or of unconventional lifestyles, which displayed their cultural integration with the “primitive.”

As Barcelona’s citizens grew increasingly more devoted to the belief that the peasantry was primitive, so too did they grow increasingly more disconnected from modernized Spain. This feeling of disconnect was coupled with an already established movement of Catalan nationalism based on Catalonia’s unique history and geography. As a result, a separatist movement emerged in support of the ancient province of Catalonia as a motherland, independent from Spain. Catalan nationalists, bolstered by the philosophy of the avant-garde, looked for symbols of their own unique heritage that would express their basic values of truth, purity, creativity, and spirituality.

Catalan nationalism, otherwise known as Catalanism, was spawned by the effects of “La Renaixença,” an early nineteenth-century movement based on the idea that a revival of the earliest models of Catalan language and culture could restore Catalonia’s national identity. These earliest models had been formed during the twelfth century when the name “Catalunya” was first applied to the group of counties that comprised the Marca Hispanica, otherwise known as the “Spanish March” or the “March of Barcelona.”<sup>6</sup> The visual culture from the twelfth century appeared to offer Barcelona’s peasantry and its avant-garde enthusiasts a renewed cultural and historical foundation, and over time, narratives about Catalonia’s medieval past became increasingly more colourful, culminating in a nationalist outcry against the modern government’s suppression of the “medieval” spirit that informed Barcelona’s bohemian character.

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<sup>6</sup> Josep R. Llobera, *Foundations of National Identity: From Catalonia to Europe* (Berghahn Books, 2005), 59. See also Jordi Camps and Manuel Castineiras, *Romanesque Art in the MNAC Collections* (Museu Nacional de Catalunya, 2009), 9.

As the avant-garde imagination combined medieval culture with bohemianism, it produced a model of primitivism based on an idealized expectation of what lay beyond the bounds of modern civilization. People fantasized that if they inserted themselves into this model of primitivism, they would become primitive and pure by osmosis. This concept laid the foundation for artists to look backward to the primitive in order to form “new” conceptions of modern art.<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Fay discussed the irony of this logic in her book *Romantic Medievalism: History and the Romantic Literary Ideal* (2002), explaining “medievalism” as an obscure past, and “Romanticism” as an implication of hope for a utopian future. Romantic medievalism, Fay explained, “is a Janus-faced movement, always looking back as it looks forward, anachronistically replaying and revisiting history.”<sup>8</sup> Fay’s statement highlights the tensions that underlay primitivism in modern art, which combined backward- and forward-looking strategies to enrich modern culture. This idea was no stranger to Catalan nationalism, as becomes evident from an article written in the 1880s by the Catalan activist Santiago Rusinol and published in a periodical called *La Renaixença*:

The trend of *Modernisme* [his emphasis] in art is to drink in the primitive springs, where the water [that is] pure and free from all mannerism abounds... if we want to have our own decorative style, it is necessary to get our inspiration from the style of our heritage, from this residue of the past.<sup>9</sup>

As per Rusinol’s statement, Barcelona’s avant-garde found its “own decorative style” in the earliest phase of Catalan visual culture, described by nineteenth-century scholars as the “Romanesque.” The term “Romanesque” was used to designate the period in European history comprising roughly the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This term was

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<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., 127.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Fay, *Romantic Medievalism: History and the Romantic Literary Ideal* (Palgrave, 2002), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Leighton, 39.

initially adopted in the nineteenth century to denote the reappearance of Roman-inspired art and architecture in medieval Europe. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there was an upsurge in travel as society sought to become more spiritual, social and worldly.<sup>10</sup> An incredible exchange of ideas took place along pilgrimage routes, and an international building style developed. Because of Catalonia's geographical position along this route, it was influenced not only by France, its closest neighbor, but also by other cultural centers further afield. Four roads linked Santiago de Compostela with select cities in France, and three roads merged at Roncesvalles in the Pyrenees mountains: one from Paris through Poitiers, a second through Vézelay, a third joining Conques and Moissac, and a fourth road through Toulouse.<sup>11</sup> These roads encouraged a dialogue between artists of many different nations, which persisted into the modern age. The avant-garde imagination romanticized the Romanesque era, just as it had romanticized the plight of the urban peasant. As a result, avant-garde enthusiasts inserted themselves into an obscure Romanesque past which they used to reconstitute their own culture.

To these citizens, the Catalan Romanesque marked a time when art represented the common man's experience – an experience that was deeply spiritual and pure, with its social, political, and cultural discourses entwined with the piety of the church. The Romanesque was also considered a “dark age,” when people were more deeply and truly connected with the intensity of their passions, their terrors, and their desires. In Romanesque art and architecture, this intensity was typically represented through exaggeratedly abstracted and flattened forms that portrayed otherworldly figures. These

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<sup>10</sup> Marilyn Stokstad, *Medieval Art* (Westview Press, 2004), 202.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

figures were often fantastically distorted and shown to be in the throes of major passions and spiritual struggles.

The Barcelona avant-garde identified with Romanesque visual culture and appropriated it as a medium that could challenge prior cultural norms. Although many Romanesque murals and sculptures survived in Catalonia, nearly nothing was known about who the artists were or what their technical training would have involved. These works were thus exclusively appreciated in the modern West for their aesthetics, and for their potential to represent and reinvigorate the spirit of modern art.

In their original contexts, Romanesque works of art were fundamentally part of the church, and Catalonians would have been exposed to them in this context. To popularize Romanesque art as a symbol of Catalonia's "new" national identity, organizations like the *Associació Catalana d'excursions* were set up in the 1870s to tour people around Romanesque churches.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in the 1880s, two exhibitions held in Barcelona displayed Romanesque altar frontals that had been displaced from their native contexts and reframed within modern settings. The first exhibition in 1882, *Álbum de detalles artísticos y plastic-decorativos de la edad media*, organized by the *Sociedad artístico-arqueológico Barcelonesa*, exhibited reproductions of altar frontals complete with commentaries.<sup>13</sup> At the second event, The Universal Exhibition of 1888, the researcher Josep Puiggarí produced the first *catalogue raisonné* of these items.<sup>14</sup> The year 1891 marked the opening of the the *Museu municipal de belles arts* in the *palau de belles arts* in Barcelona, the arts pavilion built for the Universal Exhibition, which displayed

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<sup>12</sup> Camps and Castineiras, *Romanesque Art in the MNAC Collections* (Museu Nacional de Catalunya. 2009), 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Romanesque altar frontals. That same year, most of the altar frontals in Puiggarí's catalogue were installed at the Museu episcopal de Vich, north of Barcelona.<sup>15</sup> Two such works portrayed preternatural figures, rendered in a highly unnaturalistic manner. One portrayed Saint Martin dividing his cape in two and giving half to a poor man (Fig. 1.3), and the other portrayed a scene from the Book of Job, a tale of a man who was tested by God to see how pious he could still be if all of his material possessions were destroyed (Fig. 1.4). To members and supporters of the avant-garde, these subjects would have seemed *au courant*, in light of their focus on humankind's spirituality instead of his material possessions. Stylistically, these works were more simplistically and abstractly rendered than traditional styles in the modern West, and they therefore seemed more true to the basic essence of Catalan culture. These works were to become Catalan icons, and Picasso would likely have been aware of them.<sup>16</sup>

In some instances, spectacles of Romanesque visual culture became entwined with a broader international movement called "Art Nouveau," which shifted art and architecture away from traditional methods of representation and toward organic and curvilinear forms that closely resembled nature.<sup>17</sup> Art Nouveau artists concerned with the Catalan Romanesque exaggerated Romanesque motifs and incorporated them into everyday architecture so that they would be more accessible to visitors or inhabitants of these structures. This strategy to democratize art was reflective of Romanesque art, which was embedded in the architecture of the church and thus rendered accessible to everyday worshippers.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Caviness, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Jeremy Howard, *Art Nouveau: International and National Styles in Europe* (Manchester University Press, 1996), 7.

Antoni Gaudi, Josep Puig i Cadafalch, and Lluís Domenech i Montaner were leading Catalan architects who contributed to the Art Nouveau movement in Barcelona by incorporating Romanesque styles into modern buildings for Barcelona's middle class.<sup>18</sup> This development is exemplified in Gaudi's Episcopal Palace at Astorga (1887-93) (Fig. 1.5), Puig i Cadafalch's Casa Martí (Els Quatre Gats) (1896), (Fig. 1.6) and Montaner's Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau (1901-1930) (Fig. 1.7).<sup>19</sup> Gaudi, Puig i Cadafalch, and Montaner portrayed Romanesque art and architecture as being wildly abstract like the forces of nature, often using motifs based on fish scales, water waves, and peacock feathers. These motifs were rarely used in original Romanesque structures, but they suited the artists' expectations of how different the Romanesque would have been from the stringent and deadened culture they came to affiliate with capitalism and the representational conventions it espoused.

In his formative years, Picasso would have been keenly aware of this Romanesque revival, which, by 1895, had saturated Barcelona. Although many revivalist structures were built in the early twentieth century, plans for these structures would have been brewing much earlier. Picasso would also have been strongly affected by Spain's loss of Cuba in the Spanish American war of 1898, which caused working conditions and unemployment rates all over Spain, and particularly in Barcelona, to weigh more heavily on the proletariat. This development would have intensified Picasso's empathy for the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 48, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Although Gaudi's Episcopal Palace is in Astorga, it was built by a Catalan architect in a Romanesque style. This site, along with the others listed, would have been inspired in part by the architectural ambitions of Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), a French architect and theorist whose "restorations" of medieval structures have often been understood as creative reinterpretations.

urban peasantry, and more broadly, it would have intensified Catalonia's need for a new national identity and strong cultural revival.<sup>20</sup>

As spectacles of Romanesque art multiplied, they would have embedded Picasso in a total environment or *tableau* of medievalism that tailored to the idea of a simpler and more sublime lifestyle. This visual culture was not restricted to the Salon, where "high-class" works were typically exhibited, but to newly established institutions such as the Museu municipal de belles arts, or to bohemian environments where avant-garde activists and enthusiasts would rendezvous. These environments would have demonstrated to Picasso that artists could appropriate "primitive" cultures and use them to construct their own "primitive" fantasylands, away from the conventions of modern culture. Gaudi, Puig i Cadafalch, and Montaner were three such artists, who designed these fantasylands according to their own cultural proclivities. People could come and go from these sites as they pleased, but once they entered them, they were engulfed by the primitivist vision of the artist who designed them. Picasso spent much time in one of these sites in particular: the Barcelona café Els Quatre Gats. Open from 1896 to 1903, this rendezvous was built by Puig i Cadafalch in a Romanesque style in order to bring the Catalan Romanesque to the bourgeoisie.

Picasso's awareness of such environments would have been heightened by his reading of Catalan newspapers and periodicals, which advertised the Romanesque revival in Barcelona and further afield in Europe. These publications contained Romanesque images and contemporary interpretations of this imagery, as well as writings about the plight of the urban peasant and the desire to return to an idealized past. There were Catalan daily newspapers, and at least eleven periodicals, including *La Renaixença*, *La*

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<sup>20</sup> Leighton, 19.



*Publicidad, Joventut, Catalunya Artística, Els Quatre Gats* and *Pèl & Ploma*.<sup>21</sup> These periodicals published works by artists and writers in Barcelona, including Pío Baroja, Miguel de Unamuno, Alfred Opisso, Pompeu Gener, Joan Maragall, Jaume Brossa, and Alexandre Cortada.<sup>22</sup> These periodicals also included works by international artists and writers, including Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Leo Tolstoy, Friedrich Nietzsche, Wilhelm Richard Wagner, and Stéphane Mallarmé.<sup>23</sup>

By reading such publications and by living in Romanesque revival surroundings, Picasso increasingly identified himself with a bohemian culture that empathized with Barcelona's "primitive" or "Romanesque" peasantry. He and his comrades went so far as to call themselves the *Colla Sant Martí* or the Sant Martí Group, after one of Barcelona's poverty-stricken districts.<sup>24</sup> As a member of this group, Picasso produced drawings and paintings of Barcelona's working class in 1899 that resonated with Romanesque revival motifs; they were brashly rendered, oversimplified and highly emotive to suit his understanding of the "primitive" or "medieval" urban poor.

A number of these drawings serve to underscore this point, portraying a violinist, a woman with a baby, and a little girl, all begging on a street corner. In one such drawing, *Caridad (Charity)* (Fig. 1.8), a worker gives charity to the child. Another drawing, *The Street Violinist* (Fig. 1.9), portrays a violinist, a little girl, and a small dog standing next to a tree trunk on the left, while a bourgeois carriage passes behind a group of pedestrians and cyclists in the center of the image. These images portray the urban poor as a lower class than the bustling bourgeoisie. Picasso positioned this "lower class" at the forefront

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 21.

of his images, rendering his figures in a loose and emotional style in order to express his empathy for its social circumstance. This style, in which Picasso would ultimately portray the figures in *Les Femmes d'Alger*, seemed primitive in comparison to tightly and pristinely rendered neoclassical works. Furthermore, the subject matter of Picasso's works were inspired by real people and environments he witnessed and encountered in his daily life, making his depictions of them all the more personalized and emotive. Like the Art Nouveau artists, who looked to the primitive foundations of Catalan culture and used these foundations in their own unique cultural contexts to refresh modern art, so too did Picasso begin to do so, applying his new understanding of the primitive foundations of his culture to his artwork, which could only truly be understood within the context of his own personal experiences.

While recording the spiritual triumph of the urban peasantry, Picasso moved to a small Catalan village called Horta de Ebro, where he lived from June 1898 to February 1899.<sup>25</sup> This new rural environment seemed more inviting than Barcelona's urban landscape. Accordingly, this place inspired Picasso to sketch the rural working man, as in *Landscape with a Peasant* of 1899 (Fig. 1.10), in which the peasant-protagonist seemed deeply connected with nature's sublime energy. This romantic scenario would likely have been influenced by the Romanesque revival attempt to return man to the basic essence of nature. Picasso positioned his figure amidst an unruly wilderness in desperate need of control, much like how Romanesque revival architects positioned their subjects within spaces steeped in otherworldly and often overwhelming symbols of nature.

Picasso's works from this period were often exhibited in avant-garde periodicals. His first published drawings appeared in an edition of *Joventut* from 1900. One of these

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<sup>25</sup> Palau i Fabre, *Picasso, the Early Years, 1881-1907* (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), 142.

illustrated a mother and child enveloped in darkness and poverty (Fig. 1.11).<sup>26</sup> The idea of poverty in this image is portrayed through its raw and chaotic rendering, which Picasso used to reflect the supposed primitivism incarnate in both the urban peasantry and the Romanesque era. Another published study from 1900 depicted a brashly rendered mother and child, completely surrounded by rolling hills, fantastic-looking animals, and intensely angular and over-simplified forms (Fig. 1.12). These works marked Picasso's early effort to construct his own unique prototype of primitivism – a primitivism that was strongly rooted in the Romanesque revivalism that saturated his Catalan milieu. The profound influence of this milieu on Picasso's conception of primitivism cannot be over-emphasized, especially as one endeavors to understand how his conception of primitivism helped inform his creation of *Les Femmes d'Alger*.

The five prostitutes in this painting of 1907 represented the plight of the urban poor, which would have seemed to Picasso dark and foreboding, and also capable of returning humankind to its primal instincts. The style of this work echoed and exaggerated Romanesque visual culture, with its figures being anatomically distorted to the extent that they were all but reduced to a series of geometric shapes. Their facial features were oversimplified, heavily contoured, and unnaturally positioned. These figures dissolved into a geometric backdrop, just as Romanesque sculptural programs with their distorted figures dissolved into the architecture of the church. Like the Romanesque, *Les Femmes d'Alger* represented the raw, energetic power of art, rather than its superficial finesse. Picasso's vision of these artistic qualities became increasingly complex as his travels outside Barcelona led him to discover further spectacles of primitivism.

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<sup>26</sup> Op. cit.

## ii. Picasso in Paris: Medieval Revivalism and the “Non-West”

In 1900, Picasso first visited Paris, and from 1901 to 1904 he travelled between Paris and Barcelona before settling permanently in Paris in 1904.<sup>27</sup> Picasso was drawn to Montmartre, a suburb that mirrored the poverty and social circumstances he had witnessed in Barcelona. Picasso’s contemporary, André Salmon, described Montmartre as a place of “Workers without work; cripples fuddled with cheap wine; housewives beaten unmercifully; beggars of Sacré Coeur; child vagabonds; poets dead from cold...they reign over Montmartre, they possess it, they the poor nourish the imperishable blood of martyrs within their veins.”<sup>28</sup> To Salmon, Montmartre was a bohemian environment, fit for avant-garde artists who identified with the plight of the urban peasant. Picasso thrust himself into this environment as if it were an extension of the bohemia he occupied in Barcelona.

This Parisian environment had been drastically changed over the course of the mid- to late nineteenth century. During the Second Empire, from 1852 to 1870, Napoleon III hired Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809-91) to modernize “medieval” Paris. Haussmann leveled entire districts of Paris’ winding streets in order to create a landscape comprising wide avenues and neoclassical façades.<sup>29</sup> This new landscape complemented and facilitated the technological developments that emerged as a result of the Industrial Revolution, but such developments paralleled a growing gap between an affluent bourgeoisie and a lower class. France was especially fraught with social unrest in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The country had lost the Franco-Prussian War (1870-

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 45.

71), only to see more citizens killed in the aftermath of the Paris Commune (1871). Government scandals, the Panama Canal Company bankruptcy (1891-92), anarchist bomb attacks (1892-94) and the Dreyfus Affair (begun in 1894) made the French feel as though their society was collapsing, and they experienced a continued struggle for national solidarity.<sup>30</sup>

While the bourgeoisie reaped the benefits of their modernized landscape, which had become an important center of technology and trade, they also understood that it was the product of an over-industrialized and fragmented nation.<sup>31</sup> To make modern Paris a more united and spiritually intact place, nineteenth-century scholars emphasized the importance of restoring a connection between the modern landscape and its medieval past.<sup>32</sup>

As in Barcelona, representations of the Middle Ages corresponded to opposing ideologies: some imagined that this era was religious age of piety and simplicity, while others imagined that it was an age of heroic battles and revolts, where everyday adventures involved daring deeds of good against evil and valiant struggles by heroic knights for maidens in distress. Such theories were conflicting, but they satisfied the desire for a more primitive and true culture with which Paris could identify.<sup>33</sup>

Spectacles of medievalism dominated the Parisian landscape, and would have influenced Picasso in two separate ways: they would have shown him that Parisian culture was rooted in a “primitive” medieval era, and they also would have caused him to

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<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin de Siècle France* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 20.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

become nostalgic about his own primitive beginnings in Barcelona, where he grew up amidst a revival of interest in Romanesque art and architecture.

When Picasso travelled from Barcelona to Paris, he carried with him memories of Romanesque visual culture, based on real artifacts in the churches he would have visited, and of replicas or simulacra to which he would have been exposed. When Picasso arrived in Paris, the spirit of medieval revivalism that also predominated there would have added a new dimension to his already complex understanding that his own cultural heritage encompassed the “primitive.”

This understanding would have been further exaggerated once Picasso encountered exhibitions of medieval visual culture, similar to those in Barcelona, which created a spectacle of Paris’ own cultural integration with and mastery over its own medieval traditions. These exhibitions were largely connected with Paris’ own Art Nouveau movement, which prompted architects like Hector Guimard to use “primitive” or nature-like motifs in order to transform everyday spaces into sublimely aesthetic experiences with a sense of renewed naturalism, much like Gaudi, Montaner, and Cadafalch had done in Barcelona.<sup>34</sup>

On a certain level, Paris became a sort of cabinet of medieval curiosities, wherein religious artifacts were reduced to aesthetic symbols of national harmony and cultural authenticity. Curators, collectors, and artists went to great lengths to simulate the Middle Ages in modern Paris, and to decorate the city with a veritable mosaic of medieval accoutrements, based on false nostalgias and cultural fantasies. The Parisian author Charles Morice described this phenomenon in his introduction to the book *Les*

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Schmutzler, “Paris and Nancy,” in *Art Nouveau*, ed. Ellen Grand (Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, New York, 1978), 94.

*Cathédrales de France* (1914), in which he reflected on the air of medieval revivalism that had developed in Paris since the mid-nineteenth century:

Painters and Poets... whatever their gifts, saw in the Middle Ages a shop of unworn accessories, and they took from it picturesque artistic and dramatic elements, handsome wall hangings and gestures, without restraint, without criticism, and their Middle Ages were not true... The men from the second half of the last century were overcome by an immense need for truth [and they] created the science of our national archeology. They revealed it to artists and scholars, introduced it in classical teaching methods, interested high society, familiarized even the masses with our artistic past.<sup>35</sup>

Medieval artifacts were taken from churches, palaces, and monasteries, and exhibited as art-objects at world's fairs, antique stores, museums and even bourgeois homes.<sup>36</sup> Such places included the Musée de Cluny, the Musée de sculpture comparée, the cabaret Le Chat Noir and the homes of Emile Zola (1840-1902), Pierre Loti (1850-1923), and J.-K. Huysmans (1848-1907).<sup>37</sup>

Paris became a sort of heterochronic landscape where the past and the present collided. This idea is represented in an 1893 etching by Emile Rondeau, entitled *La Décor de la vie (Autrefois, aujourd' hui)*, or in English, *The Setting of Days of Old, Today*, portraying a modern Parisian landscape draped in medievalizing apparel (Fig. 1.13). One must imagine that this was the way in which Picasso would also have conceived this landscape. As he lived between both Barcelona and Paris and felt a strong sense of personal allegiance to each city, he also would have felt connected to the legacy of the Middle Ages that each city claimed, and his imagination would have combined their visual cultures.

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<sup>35</sup> Op. cit., 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 70.

At roughly the same time as the medieval revival in the nineteenth century, and in response to the very same cultural need for a more deeply authentic form of expression, Paris witnessed the development of a colonial project for which European explorers were sent to “non-Western” places in order to learn about and document their traditions, which were understood as being more primitive than those of Western origin. Colonial explorers often brought “non-Western” artifacts to Paris and exhibited them as agents of an exotic and decisively un-modern realm.<sup>38</sup> These artifacts were more abstract and raw-looking than conventional works of art in the modern West, and they therefore enticed modern audiences, who craved a “darker” and more authentic culture than that which modernism and industrialization offered.

The culture that greeted Picasso in Paris identified with “non-Western” visual culture and appropriated it as an artistic medium through which to articulate its bohemianism. Although at least some of the colonial explorers would have had access to information about the artifacts they appropriated — who had created them, where exactly they were from, what their functions were, and so forth — they often paid little attention to these details, combining them with their own expectations that they were heathen, magical, mysterious, and primitive.

Exhibitions of “non-Western” objects provided European audiences with spectacles of their own cultural integration with and mastery over the “primitive,” and came to influence Picasso’s cultural framework through the introduction of ethnological museums in Paris, which commoditized the “non-West” for Western consumption. As early as 1850, for example, the Musée naval had been established in the Louvre,

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<sup>38</sup> Jill Lloyd, “Emil Nolde’s Ethnographic Still-Lives: Primitivism, Tradition, and Modernity,” in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991), 92, 93.



showcasing close to 500 objects sent by overseas companies that operated under the protection of the navy. Among these objects were weapons, agricultural tools, headdresses, and musical instruments.<sup>39</sup> By 1878, these objects were exhibited at the Musée d'histoire naturelle, Musée ethnographique des missions scientifiques, Musée permanent des colonies, Musée d'artillerie, Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro, and Bibliothèque nationale.<sup>40</sup> The year 1878 also marked the opening of the Hall of Voyages and Scientific Expeditions at the Exposition Universelle, and of an exhibition entitled "Ethnographic Objects of Peoples Outside Europe" in the right wing of the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro, showcasing artifacts that had been collected on colonial expeditions to Asia, the Americas, Oceania, and Africa.<sup>41</sup>

In 1879, the Musée African was installed in the lobby of Paris' Théâtre du Châtelet. Its displays were based on the 1878 play, *La Venus noire*, written by the French Romantic author, Adolphe Belot. The play recounted the tale of the German naturalist, Georg August Schweinfurth, who journeyed through Shilluk, Dinka, Bongo, Zande and Manbetu.<sup>42</sup> Schweinfurth's article "Im Herzen von Afrika," published as "Au coeur d'Afrique" in 1874 in a Parisian magazine entitled *Le Tour du monde*, revealed that at the interior of Africa there existed an artistic culture, free from the perceived limiting boundaries of Western civilization. The Musée African was sponsored by the geographical societies of Marseilles and Paris, by the Zoological society, and by representatives of commercial firms in Marseilles that had established themselves on the

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<sup>39</sup> William Rubin, "Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: *Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 126.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. See also Nicholas Thomas, "Introduction: Tupaia's Map," in *In Oceania: Visions, Artifacts, Histories* (Duke University Press, 1997), 1-23. The boundaries of "Oceania" are usually defined to Australia, New Zealand and all or part of the Malay Archipelago (between mainland southeast Asia and Australia). The islands in Oceania are divided into the sub-regions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

African coasts.<sup>43</sup> In 1887, a private collection of African objects formed over a period of almost thirty years was put up for auction in Paris. Among the purchasers at this auction was Emile Heymann, who, in 1896 opened a curiosity shop in the Rue de Rennes in which he sold “non-Western” objects (Fig. 1.14).<sup>44</sup> Another major purchaser in this auction was the president of the executive committee of the Société de géographie, Prince Roland Bonaparte, who facilitated the expansion of the Oceanic collection at the Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro (Fig. 1.15).<sup>45</sup>

The Exposition Universelle of 1889 further advertised France’s colonial project. The Palais des arts libéraux celebrated Western Europe’s “scientific” expeditions, which had gone to Africa under its sponsorship. The Exposition du travail et des sciences anthropologiques exhibited collections of East and South African art, as did the Palais central des colonies.<sup>46</sup> During this time, *Le Tour du monde* published numerous engravings of the regions crossed during Western expeditions to “non-Western” lands, and the exotic cultures that were “uncovered” there (Figs. 1.16, 1.17).<sup>47</sup>

Picasso would have been closely familiar with these colonial spectacles, which removed “non-Western” objects from their native contexts and exhibited them as art objects that were closely allied with the forces of nature. Many of these objects were never in their own cultures used as art, but they were portrayed as such in response to the Western expectation that “non-Western art” was radically divergent from conventional art in the modern West. European imperialists designed their own “non-Western” environments by selectively appropriating motifs from “non-Western” traditions and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

interpreting them according to their own inclinations. These environments offered Western audiences a chance to partake in highly personalized spectacles of the “non-West,” or what might be construed as microcosmic colonial projects, in which they could “uncover” “non-Western” objects that had been “salvaged” from their obscure native origins and re-contextualized in new combinations.

Early twentieth-century Paris witnessed a continued collecting of “primitive findings” by self-endorsed anthropologists and colonial officials.<sup>48</sup> When Picasso came to Paris, he thus became entwined in its colonial mission to locate and adopt a rich and faraway culture that would accommodate the avant-garde spirit. Spectacles of the “non-West” added a new dimension to Picasso’s already complex experience of the “primitive” environments in which he could position himself and his artwork.

### **iii. Picasso Between 1901-1904: Combining Spectacles of Primitivism**

Picasso moved frequently between Paris and Barcelona from 1901 to 1904, and as a result, he found himself surrounded by spectacles of primitivism for which diverse symbols of urban poverty, medieval visual culture, and “non-Western” visual culture were extrapolated from their native contexts in order to rejuvenate the modern West. These projects were often tailored to suit everyday spaces, such as homes or cafés, and Picasso likely appropriated and exaggerated these projects in his own drawings and paintings and ultimately, in his own studio, in order to create his own unique version of primitivism.

Picasso’s Blue Period is one case in point, in which he depicted an anonymous urban peasantry in a style that echoed symbols of both the medieval and “non-Western”

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 128

visual cultures he experienced. *The Blind Man's Meal* and *The Old Guitarist* (Figs. 1.18, 1.19), both painted in 1903, depicted inward-looking figures that likely would have been known to Picasso, engrossed in spirituality and music rather than in capitalist culture. These works used flattened and highly stylized forms for a mode of representation that was more emotional than conventional representations in the modern West. Aesthetically, these works might be compared to medieval art in both Barcelona and Paris, (Fig. 1.3), to medieval revival art (Fig. 1.7), to “non-Western” objects (Fig. 1.16), or to Western depictions of the “non-West” (Fig. 1.17). Picasso exaggerated this approach when he began to draw portraits of hybridized men and demons. In *Self-Portrait and Other Sketches* of 1903 (Fig. 1.20), Picasso likely selected from stereotypes of both medieval and “non-Western” visual cultures for a personalized model of primitivism on which to base his own self-portrait. The bottom left corner of this work was signed “*Picasso par lui meme, 1903,*” indicating that he took pride in being able to design and represent primitivism in a style that was uniquely his own. Picasso’s works of this period assumed increasingly wild variations and combinations of “primitive” symbols as his conception of *Les Femmes d'Alger* drew near. In April of 1904, during the last phase of his Blue Period, Picasso settled in Montmartre, where three years later he conceived and exhibited this painting.

#### **iv. Spectacles of Primitivism Inside and Outside Picasso's Studio**

By now it should be clear that Picasso’s conception of primitivism was shaped by spectacles of primitivism in both Barcelona and Paris, based on the medieval era and the “non-West.” Picasso’s imagination combined these spectacles, which he projected onto

his works from 1901 to 1904, and which he would continue to experiment with until 1907 when he created *Les Femmes d'Alger*.

When *Les Femmes d'Alger* was first exhibited in Picasso's studio at Le Bateau-Lavoir in Montmartre, it was positioned among an extensive collection of "non-Western" artifacts (Figs. 1.2, 1.21). Picasso wished to create an aura about himself that was new, mysterious, and bohemian. The "non-Western" artifacts in his studio fulfilled this end without revealing the entire formula for Picasso's model of primitivism, which, as we have seen, was also strongly influenced by the medieval revivals he had witnessed. In this sense, Picasso was truly the product of a culture that used "new," mysterious, and bohemian styles to produce a sense of originality. This culture would have been deeply embedded within him from his early experience in Barcelona, whether or not he was conscious of its influence.

Accordingly, those seeking to uncover the cultural underpinnings of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* have mostly understood the work in terms of Picasso's "non-Western atelier." This deduction has led *Les Femmes d'Alger* to be celebrated as the forerunner for Picasso's "African Period." William Rubin was one such person, who interviewed Picasso at length about his creation of *Les Femmes d'Alger* before curating the 1984 Museum of Modern Art exhibition "'Primitivism' in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern." Rubin linked Picasso's painting to his experience of "non-Western" artifacts and restricted any mention of Picasso's experience of medieval revivalism to several short phrases in the exhibition catalogue.<sup>49</sup> Rubin primarily celebrated the "non-

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 254. "Picasso had gone...to look at the plaster casts of Romanesque sculpture in the Musée de Sculpture Comparée, which occupied one wing of the Palais du Trocadéro. He had been there before, and the fact that he was drawn back to an art considered "primitive" in those years is probably symptomatic [of] the kinds of solutions his instinct told him were needed [for] the *Femmes d'Alger*. He had, however, never

Western” primitivism in Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*, among other works by other avant-garde artists, for displaying “unpredictable human creativity in leading tribal art [to] transcend the intentions and conditions that first shaped it.”<sup>50</sup> The exhibition made it seem that the “non-West” was the primary source of inspiration for Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*, and Rubin’s enthusiasm about Picasso’s borrowing of “non-Western” motifs triggered a debate about whether the “non-West” could be considered independently from its native context.

In her book *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* (2001), Lynda Jessup discussed the surge of publications during and after Rubin’s exhibition.<sup>51</sup> These publications were generally limited to an investigation of avant-garde art and the “non-West,” focusing on Picasso’s “non-Western” proclivities and ignoring his full experience of primitivism. This point is demonstrated by works such as Hal Foster’s “The ‘Primitive’ Unconscious of Modern Art, or White Skin Black Masks” (1985), Patrick Manning’s “Primitive Art and Modern Times” (1985), James Clifford’s “Histories of the Tribal and the Modern” (1988), and Marianna Torgovnick’s *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (1990), which discussed the cultural complexities of primitivism in avant-garde art when it appropriated motifs from the “non-West.” James Clifford, for example, wrote:

The MOMA exhibition documents a *taxonomic* [his emphasis] moment: the status of non-Western objects and “high” art are importantly redefined, but.... The

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before visited the Musée d’Ethnographie, which occupied the other wing of the Trocadéro, and as [Picasso] described it, his entering that wing was virtually serendipitous. In retrospect, however, it seems a logical continuation of the search that had taken him to the Musée de Sculpture Comparée. Further, though Picasso described himself as virtually stumbling upon the ethnological material, the configuration of the building was such that he had to exit entirely from one museum to enter the other.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>51</sup> Lynda Jessup, “Around and About Modernity: Some Comments on Themes of Primitivism and Modernism,” in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 2001), 13.

appreciation and interpretation of tribal objects takes place within a modern “system of objects” which confers value on certain things and withholds it from others. Modernist primitivism, with its claims to deeper humanist sympathies and a wide aesthetic sense, goes hand in hand with a developed market in tribal art and with definitions of artistic and cultural authenticity that are now widely contested.<sup>52</sup>

Another review about Rubin’s exhibition, displaying a similar concern about his representation of the “non-West,” was written in 1986 by Sally Price of John Hopkins University. Price explained that Rubin was disenchanted with anthropological studies of the “non-West” because they rejected aesthetic considerations for being “unscientific and...alien to their discipline.”<sup>53</sup> Her review argued that Rubin drew his own anthropological conclusions based solely on aesthetic considerations. She quoted him as stating “Most Oceanic and Northwest Coast sculpture seems to have a more visible symbolic relation to narrative statement than African art... I would hazard the generalization that...Oceanic and Northwest Coast art leans toward the expression of myth, while that of Africa leans toward that of ritual.”<sup>54</sup> Price attributed this sort of statement to an “of course-rhetoric,” wherein the arts of the “non-West” were consolidated and interpreted as Rubin pleased.<sup>55</sup> One of Rubin’s exhibition labels, for example, read, “of course, the purpose of accumulative tribal objects was religious, rather than aesthetic.”<sup>56</sup> Price responded to Rubin’s “of-course-rhetoric” by explaining that its importance resided in the extent to which it piqued the interest of those concerned with the types of assumptions that could or could not be made about “non-Western” visual culture:

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<sup>52</sup> James Clifford, “Histories of the Tribal and the Modern,” *Art in America* 73 (April, 1985): 170.

<sup>53</sup> Sally Price, “Review: ‘Primitivism’ in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art by William Rubin. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Aug., 1986): 579.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

We can be grateful to Rubin in particular for singing so loudly when he is off-key and for presenting his aria in such a magnificent and centrally located theater. For he has made even potentially sympathetic members of the audience hear and analyze the tones that do not ring true. Rubin's catalogue, together with the rash of responses it has engendered, is reading that no one interested in modern art or views of the other can afford to neglect.<sup>57</sup>

But Rubin's primitivism exhibition, and specifically his account of Picasso's conception of primitivism, excluded more than the anthropological views on which Price focused: it also excluded the subject of medieval revivalism, central to Picasso's experience in both Catalonia and Paris. Price explained that "it was avant-garde for Picasso to treat African tribal masks seriously in 1907, [and] it was still considered avant-garde for the Museum of Modern Art to do the same in 1984."<sup>58</sup> Her writing focused exclusively on Rubin's dismissal of "non-Western" histories and traditions, but did not posit that Rubin also dismissed the impact of medieval revivalism on Picasso's *Les Demoiselles*.

Rubin and Price were not alone in this dismissal. In her book *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (1998), Sieglinde Lemke explored Picasso's *Les Demoiselles* through the "vogue of *art nègre*," a concept which caused the modern imagination to combine the arts of Africa, Oceania and Native America.<sup>59</sup> She explained that Picasso would have interpreted "non-Western" artifacts subjectively, interested in them for their potential to overcome modern Western conventions, rather than to illuminate foreign histories. To illustrate her point, Lemke quoted the art dealer and collector Paul Guillaume (1891-1934), who said "the negro

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 580.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 579.

<sup>59</sup> Sieglinde Lemke, "Picasso's Dusty Manikins," in *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 39,40.



mask-maker [was free to] select from the given data to emphasize a certain recurrence, and eliminate whatever would not fit in with it.”<sup>60</sup> Lemke then quoted Picasso, who expressed to his friend Leo Stein that “a head was a matter of eyes, nose [and] mouth, which would be distributed in any way you like – the head remained a head.”<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, Picasso asserted his artistic license to pick and choose how he wanted to portray the primitive. In superficial terms, he took the liberty of rearranging and combining the anatomy of his figures in any manner he desired. In deeper terms, as Lemke demonstrated through Guillaume’s assertion, Picasso also rearranged “non-Western” motifs in inventive new combinations. But looking more deeply still, Picasso’s primitivism was also based on a strategy of picking and choosing among motifs based on the medieval era and the “non-West,” and projecting these motifs onto contexts that were familiar to him. By discussing Picasso’s primitivism in exclusive accord with the “non-West” like Rubin and Price did, I argue that Lemke, too, “picked and chose” among Picasso’s possible stimuli for *Les Demoiselles*, looking to the narrow context that he constructed around his work, rather than looking to the broader context of primitivisms that would similarly have impacted his artistic production. Picasso would have delighted in Lemke’s discussion because he knew that his “non-Western” collectibles could not be flatly analyzed. They each had a personal story to them, containing his memories and experiences of the “primitive,” which no one else could truly understand. Thus, these collectibles would have remained an enigma. This idea cannot be overemphasized. Picasso was brought up in a context of many different spectacles of primitivism, and these spectacles inspired him to create and present his own spectacle in his studio and in

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<sup>60</sup> Op. cit., 39.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 40.

*Les Demoiselles*. This spectacle pointed audiences to the “primitivism” of the “non-West,” but left room for mystery. The implications of uncovering Picasso’s “mysterious” process allow for a more insightful reading of *Les Demoiselles*. Although this work has often been seen as the product of an artist who drew his artistic inspiration exclusively from the “non-West,” *Les Demoiselles* was actually the product of Picasso’s attempt to write himself into history by creating a new and personalized lens through which his work could be seen. This attempt was intricately linked to the presence of medieval revivalism in his formative years as an artist.

While this chapter introduced the idea that Picasso’s inclination toward the “non-West” was influenced by the primitivist ideologies that surrounded his formative experience of medieval visual culture, Chapter Two will provide a more in-depth analysis of how Picasso steered his audiences to focus on the theme of the “non-West” in relation to *Les Demoiselles*. Picasso’s “non-Western atelier” titillated these audiences, who delighted in experiencing the exotic “non-West” within the parameters of Picasso’s atelier in Le Bateau-Lavoir, situated at 13 Rue Ravignan, Montmartre.

## FIGURES FOR CHAPTER ONE



Figure 1.1. Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.K. R. 1909)*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 243.8 x 233.7 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York. [Wayne Andersen, *Picasso's Brothel: Les Femmes d'Alger* (Other Press, LLC, 2002), 3].



Figure 1.2. Picasso in his studio in Le Bateau-Lavoir, 1908.  
[William Rubin, *“Primitivism” in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 299].



Figure 1.3. St. Martin Dividing his Cloak, detail of the altar frontal from Sant Marti, Puigbó, eleventh century. Vich Episcopal Museum, Spain. [Madeline H. Caviness, "The Politics of Taste: An Historiography of 'Romanesque' Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," in *Romanesque, Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century: Essays in Honor of Walter Cahn*, ed. Colum P. Hourihane, 57-81 (Princeton: Index of Christian Art, 2008), 62].



Figure 1.4. Gregory, *Moralia in Job*, eleventh century. Biblioteca Episcopal, MS 26 (I), fol. 171. Vich, Spain.  
 [Madeline H. Caviness, "The Politics of Taste: An Historiography of 'Romanesque' Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," in *Romanesque, Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century: Essays in Honor of Walter Cahn*, ed. Colum P. Hourihane, 57-81 (Princeton: Index of Christian Art, 2008), 62].

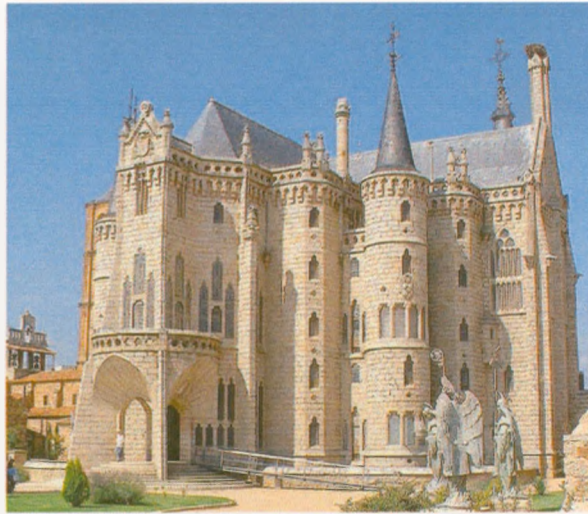


Figure 1.5. Antoni Gaudí, Episcopal Palace, 1887-93. Astorga, Spain.  
 [Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, Pere Vivas and Ricard Pla, *Gaudí: An Introduction to his Architecture* (Triangle Postals, 2001), 127].



Figure 1.6. Josep Puig i Cadafalch, Casa Martí, 1896. Barcelona.  
 [[http://gaudimon.an3.es/photos/Casa%20Mart%ED%20\(Els%20Quatre%20Gats\).jpg](http://gaudimon.an3.es/photos/Casa%20Mart%ED%20(Els%20Quatre%20Gats).jpg)].



Figure 1.7. Lluís Domenech i Montaner, Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau, 1901-30. Barcelona.  
[<http://www.worldheritagesite.org/picx/w804.jpg>].



Figure 1.8. Pablo Picasso, *Caridad (Charity)*, 1899. Conté crayon on paper. 23.2 x 33.8 cm. Museu Picasso, Barcelona.  
[Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 78-79].





Figure 1.9. Pablo Picasso, *The Street Violinist*, c.1899. Conté crayon and watercolor on paper. 23.6 x 33.6 cm. Museu Picasso, Barcelona.  
[Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 78-79].



Figure 1.10. Pablo Picasso, *Landscape with a Peasant*, 1898-1899. Conté crayon on paper. 24.2 x 31.8 cm. Museu Picasso, Barcelona.  
[Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 78-79].



Figure 1.11. Pablo Picasso, Drawing for *Joventut*, 1900. Ink on paper. 23.8 x 31 cm. Museu Picasso, Barcelona.

[Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 78-79].



Figure 1.12. Pablo Picasso, Poster for *Caja de Previsión y Socorros*, 1900. Watercolor on paper. 13.4 x 17.4 cm. Museu Picasso, Barcelona.

[Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 78-79].

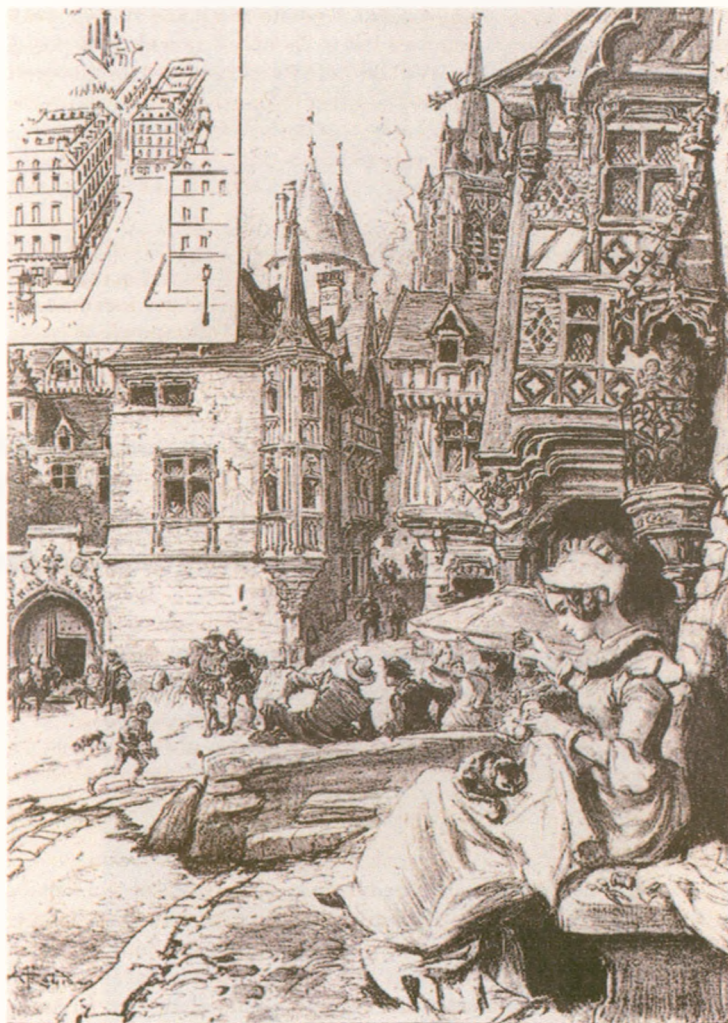


Figure 1.13. Emile Rondeau, *Le Décor de la vie (Autrefois, aujourd'hui)* or *The Setting of Life (Days of Old, Today)*, 1893. [Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin de Siècle France* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 199].

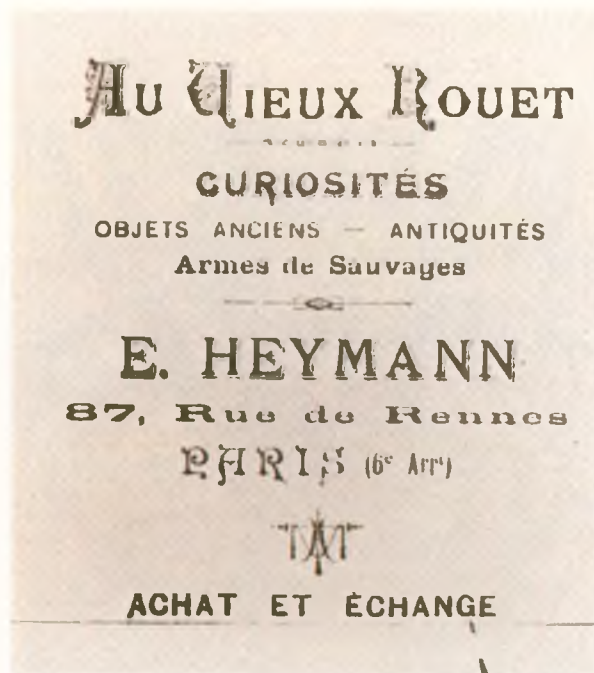


Figure 1.14. Advertisement for Emile Heymann's curiosity shop, *Au vieux rouet*, Paris, 1909.  
 [William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 126].



Figure 1.15. Three Fon Figures as installed in the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro, Paris, 1895.  
 [William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 139].

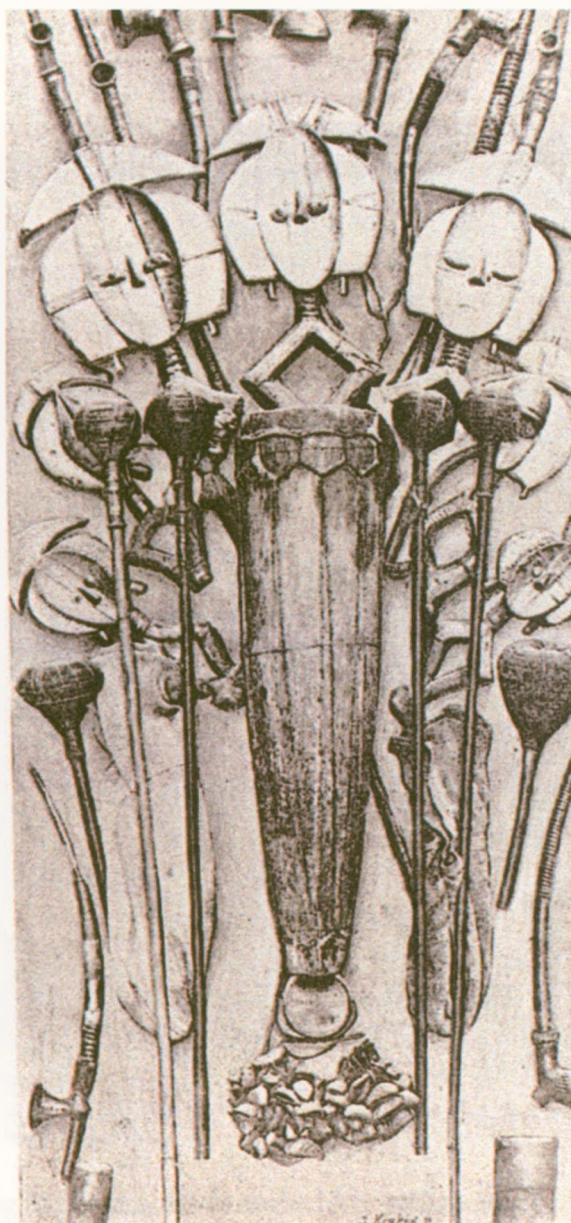


Figure 1.16. Kota objects, including reliquary figures, acquired by the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro between 1883 and 1886. Image published in *Le Tour du monde*, 2e semestre, 1888. [William Rubin, "Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 128].



Figure 1. 17. Drawing of documents brought back by Jacques de Brazza from the West Africa Expedition. Published in *Le Tour du monde*, 2e semestre, 1887. [William Rubin, "Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 128].



Figure 1.18. Pablo Picasso, *The Blind Man's Meal*, 1903. Oil on canvas. 95.3 x 94.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.  
[Josep Palau i Fabre, *Picasso, the Early Years, 1881-1907* (Rizzoli International Publications, INC., New York. 1980), 354].



Figure 1.19. Pablo Picasso, *The Old Guitarist*, 1903. Oil on canvas. 121.3 x 82.5 cm. Art Institute of Chicago.  
[Josep Palau i Fabre, *Picasso, the Early Years, 1881-1907* (Rizzoli International Publications, INC., New York. 1980), 358].



Figure 1.20. Pablo Picasso, *Self-Caricature and Other Sketches*, 1903. Pen and ink on paper. 11.8 x 10.7 cm. Museu Picasso, Barcelona.  
[Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 78-79].



Figure 1.21. A group of Picasso's "non-Western" objects, 1908.  
[William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 267].



## CHAPTER TWO

## PICASSO'S "NON-WESTERN" ATELIER

In preparation for the 1984 exhibition, "'Primitivism' in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern," William Rubin interviewed Picasso about the models of primitivism that inspired his conception of *Les Femmes d'Alger*. Picasso led Rubin to associate this painting with the idea of "non-Western" primitivism by recounting stories about his experience of "non-Western" spectacles upon his move to Paris, and by releasing photographs of his Bateau-Lavoir atelier, decorated with "non-Western" artifacts. Picasso was able to write himself into history in this manner, and he did so selectively, narrowing Rubin's exploration of *Les Femmes d'Alger* to a historical context that he himself controlled. As a result, Rubin engaged in a detailed study about Picasso and the "non-West."

We have seen that such scholars as Lynda Jessup, Hal Foster, James Clifford, Patrick Manning, Marianna Torgovnick, Sally Price, and Sieglinde Lemke responded to Rubin's exploration by publishing their own ideas about modern appropriations of "non-Western" aesthetics. In their publications, they accompanied other scholars and viewers who have attempted to understand Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* in the narrow historical context that Picasso built for himself by decorating his atelier with "non-Western" collectibles, by establishing a network with other artists who collected "non-Western" artifacts, and by sharing stories about his "discovery" of "non-Western art."

This chapter will look at *Les Femmes d'Alger* in this personalized context in order to understand how Picasso's inclination toward the "non-West" would have distracted

scholars from considering his broader cultural milieu in both Barcelona and Paris, where medieval revivalism also contributed to his conception of primitivism.

Le Bateau-Lavoir (Figs. 2.1, 2.2) was a block of one-story buildings in Montmartre that had emerged as an artist's residence in the early twentieth century. Picasso lived and worked in this space from 1904 until 1909, two years after *Les Femmes d'Alger* was created. His neighbours included Max Jacob, Amadeo Modigliani, Lucien Genin, Georges Guyot, Pierre Dumont, Auguste Herbin, Juan Gris, Kees Van Dongen, Jacques Vaillant, and Pierre Riverdy.<sup>1</sup>

In 1907, while he was living in Le Bateau-Lavoir, Picasso was known to have visited the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro. The African and Oceanic Room (Fig. 2.3) in this museum showcased African and Oceanic artifacts that were removed from their native contexts and placed together in new combinations. In a subsequent interview with French author André Malraux, Picasso noted that he had been attracted to the abstract and raw aesthetic of African and Oceanic art, which represented a reprieve from Western paradigms. "For me," Picasso explained, "the tribal [objects]...were not just sculptures... they were magical objects... intercessors... against everything — against unknown, threatening spirits... They were weapons — to keep people from being ruled by spirits, to help free themselves."<sup>2</sup> Picasso mentioned nothing about how these objects reminded him of the Romanesque revival he had experienced during his youth in

<sup>1</sup> Jeanine Warnod, "The Birth of *Les Femmes d'Alger*," in *Washboat Days*, ed. Carol Green (Grossman Publishers, New York, 1972), 35. As these artists moved in and out of Le Bateau-Lavoir, its population constantly shifted. Warnod's text provides floor plans of this complex during Picasso's settlement there, suggesting that Picasso lived in two studios, one in the basement and one on the first floor. The distinct use of these studios remains unclear, and the majority of scholarship about Picasso's experience at Le Bateau-Lavoir has simply referred to Picasso's "studio" in a general sense.

<sup>2</sup> William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 255.

Barcelona, and nothing about the medieval revival he would have experienced in Paris, which, in similar ways, represented reprieves from Western paradigms. He was focused on the idea of “non-Western” primitivism, and thus, so too have most Picasso-enthusiasts narrowed their focus to this subject.

Indeed, Rubin’s exploration of Picasso’s conception of primitivism relied heavily on the idea that beyond Picasso’s assumption that tribal objects had to do with rituals concerning fertility and death, he knew nothing of their original contexts or meanings except that they represented the “non-West.” He conceived of them as being primitive because they seemed to stand outside classical conventions, and to represent societies that were deeply connected with nature and spirituality. He imagined that they would have been mysterious, magical, luxuriant, and sublime in comparison to the modern West, and that they would have been haunted by the savage spirits of heathen tribes.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Picasso saw the “non-West” as an alternative canon of visual culture that would free bourgeois viewers from their European, classical traditions. This fantasy came alive in the African and Oceanic Room of the Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro.

Next to this room was La Salle de France (Fig. 2.4), which showcased tableaux of late nineteenth-century French society. This self-promoting display of national identity, positioned beside the African and Oceanic room, reinforced the dichotomy between Western and “non-Western” paradigms. The West was identified with the self, and the “non-West,” with “the other.”<sup>4</sup> The juxtaposition of the African and Oceanic Room with La Salle de France served to justify the transformation of “non-Western” objects into commodities, as a means of rescuing them from their “primitive” origins. In exchange for

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<sup>3</sup> James F. Knapp, “Primitivism and the Modern.” *Boundary 2*, Vol. 15, No.1 (1986): 368.

<sup>4</sup> Jill Lloyd, “Emil Nolde’s Ethnographic Still-Lives: Primitivism, Tradition, and Modernity,” in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991), 95.

this heroic rescue, “non-Western” objects presented viewers with the suggestion of exotic spaces, freer than those that had constituted Western Europe.

The displays in the Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro provided Picasso with a spatial prototype of the “non-West.” Among the art that Picasso would have seen in the African and Oceanic Room were copper reliquary guardian figures of the Kota and Hongwe peoples (Fig. 2.5). These figures were exceedingly abstract and unpolished compared to the polish of classical art in the West. Other “non-Western” relics in the museum were similarly distorted anatomically and brashly rendered (Figs. 2.6, 2.7). As we have seen in Chapter One, many of these figures had been marketed in curio-shops like Emile Heymann’s since before the turn of the century, promoting a vision of the “non-West” that could be commoditized for the Western home.<sup>5</sup>

We have also seen that Picasso was an avid collector of tribal objects, which he candidly and haphazardly displayed around his Bateau-Lavoir studio (Figs. 1.2, 1.21). A more detailed understanding of this collection can be gleaned by looking at some of the individual objects he owned (Figs. 2.8, 2.9). Rubin explained that because of the rarity of fine “primitive” sculptures on the market around 1907, and because of Picasso’s lack of financial resources at this time, his tribal acquisitions were “mediocre,” at best. Picasso, however, was less interested in the quality of his “non-Western” works, and more so, in the exotic ambiance that they would produce for his studio. In an interview, Picasso noted of his collection, “[I] don’t need the masterpiece to get the idea.”<sup>6</sup> Picasso’s “non-Western” collectibles and statements about them led Rubin, along with others interested in Picasso’s conception of primitivism, to believe that his atelier was a sort of microcosm

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<sup>5</sup> Rubin, 256.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

of the displays in the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro. In this sense, his atelier was understood as constituting a utopian vision of the "non-West," just as the museum had done.

Because Picasso's conception of primitivism was associated with his experiences of the "non-West," it also came to be understood that these experiences extended to his artistic production of 1907. His studies in *Le Bateau-Lavoir*, which seemed to have exclusively appropriated and hybridized the aesthetics of "non-Western" artifacts, culminated in *Les Femmes d'Alger*, which in turn came to represent the pinnacle of his "non-Western" style. While the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro presented a utopian vision of the "non-West" which Picasso seemed to have emulated in his studio, his primitivist artwork exaggerated this vision.

In *Sheet of Studies* (Fig. 2.10), Picasso's own hand is prominently rendered and reiterated, suggesting that he invented his abstract figures without any prototype. The disembodiment of his hand mirrors the disembodiment of his figures from a prior context, and more broadly, the disembodiment of Picasso's work from any artistic precedent. The disembodied hand further implies that Picasso's figures were blindly drawn, shaped by raw instinct, rather than processed logic. Rubin emphasized this drawing in his exploration of Picasso's primitivist inclinations toward the "non-West." Beyond the symbolism of the drawing itself, Rubin's interest in the work as a testament to the "non-West" is symbolic of the extent to which viewers and scholars have been mesmerized by the unique "non-Western" context that Picasso created around his conception of primitivism, which seemed to stand outside any specific time or place. Although appropriations of "non-Western" visual culture had become a cultural trend among avant-

garde artists and scholars, this trend was based on using the “primitive” to articulate a highly personalized and deeply instinctual mode of expression.

The earliest large ensemble study of *Les Femmes d'Alger* (Fig. 2.11), created in March 1907, depicts the reception room of a bordello, in which a seated sailor is surrounded by five prostitutes, while a medical student enters from the left. At the time of its creation, this study subverted prior norms in its title, *Medical Student, Sailor and Five Nudes in a Bordello*, which stood outside the bounds of social propriety. Because this study was created in Picasso’s “non-Western” atelier, it was understood as having appropriated the abstract aesthetics of “non-Western” artifacts for a portrayal of social perversion, so as to incite a return to basic instinct and raw expression. This understanding illuminated Picasso’s attitude toward the “primitiveness” of the “non-West.”

Two subsequent studies for *Les Femmes d'Alger*, *Bust of a Sailor* (Fig. 2.12) and *Head of a Medical Student* (Fig. 2.13), were seen as having further appropriated the abstract aesthetic of “non-Western” artifacts, so as to incite a return to humankind’s primitive character. Picasso’s caricature-like figures were brashly contoured and coarsely rendered with asymmetrical features and abstract backgrounds.

By mid-May 1907, following a multitude of studies, Picasso created the final template for *Les Femmes d'Alger*, entitled *Five Nudes* (Fig. 2.14), in which the two male figures were eliminated. Picasso further eliminated the potted plant, the table, and any trace of recognizable clothing, replacing smooth, continuous lines with coarse and jagged ones. Instead of constructing a narrative around the relationship between a medical student, a sailor, and five nudes in a bordello, Picasso simply depicted five abstractly

depicted nudes, suspended from any recognizable setting and repositioned in their own invented space. This invented space, as in *Sheet of Studies*, reflects the context that Picasso invented for *Les Femmes d'Alger* when he positioned them within the invented “haven” that was his “non-Western” atelier.

*Les Femmes d'Alger* was first painted on canvas in late May or early June of 1907, and was revamped shortly thereafter, when Picasso repainted the two right-hand figures in the work, and that on the far left (Fig. 1.1). In this work, Picasso’s figures are anatomically distorted, and positioned so that they confront the viewer directly. The figure on the far left is represented in profile, and her left leg and upper body are reduced to a series of geometric shapes. Her facial features are oversimplified, and her right hand is heavily contoured and unnaturally tossed back. The two figures in the middle are sheathed in drapery. Like their comrades, they are abrasively angular, heavily outlined, oversimplified, and elongated. The two figures on the right are more abstract than the others. The body of the standing figure, more geometric than anatomic, dissolves into an equally geometric backdrop. Her mask-like face is elongated with holes for its eyes and mouth, her cheek is streaked with diagonal lines, and her head is ominously haloed.<sup>7</sup> The second figure is impossibly crouched. Like her standing companion, her extremities dissolve into a geometric backdrop and her face is remarkably abstract.

Picasso characterized *Les Femmes d'Alger* as his “first exorcism picture,” because he “exorcised” his unbridled passions and deep primal instincts and projected them onto this painting.<sup>8</sup> By doing so he created a physical representation of his psyche. The use of the term “exorcism” may also be interpreted to refer to Picasso’s removing from *Les*

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<sup>7</sup> I use the term “ominously” because the halo around her head is black.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

*Demoiselles* the constraints of social propriety that would otherwise have deterred these figures from their pure and free display of nudity. It may also be said that he exorcised any vestige of the classical that would otherwise have inhibited the brash and raw technique in which they were rendered. More broadly, it can be said that Picasso exorcised any external context to which *Les Demoiselles* could be pinned.

*Les Demoiselles* challenged the supremacy of neoclassicism, which had long been championed by the Paris Salon, and by the state-sponsored Académie des beaux-arts. Works of an unconventional genre were usually exhibited at the Salon des refusés, instituted in the 1870s and 1880s to host the works that the regular Salon rejected. *Les Demoiselles*, however, was not initially showcased in the official Paris Salon, nor in the Salon des refusés, but in Picasso's Bateau-Lavoir atelier. Because this space was filled with "non-Western" artifacts, it came to be understood as an unofficial Salon in which spectacles of neoclassicism were replaced by self-driven spectacles of the "non-West."

Picasso's atelier stood for the artistic authority of avant-garde artists, who deserved to be included in Parisian high-culture. Picasso's studio thus served to personalize "high-art" by reforming the formal standards with which this art had come to be associated. Because Picasso commoditized and exhibited "non-Western" artifacts in his atelier, so too did *Les Demoiselles* come to be seen as an exhibition of "non-Western" visual culture. Visitors to Picasso's atelier became enmeshed in this new way of experiencing art, aspiring to the advantages of the aristocratic Salon, but in Picasso's own framework.

Picasso's studio functioned as a storehouse and exhibition space for both his artwork and his collection of "non-Western" objects. Picasso used these objects as



“props,” both in his artwork, and in his studio space. These “props” bridged the artistic and utilitarian aspects of Picasso’s atelier, producing a viewing mechanism in which art would be considered through a utilitarian lens, and utilitarian objects through an artistic lens. Janelle Watson explores this idea in her article, “The Fashionable Artistic Interior: Social (Re)Encoding in the Domestic Sphere” (1999). Watson explains that by the end of the eighteenth century, the field of art was thought to be divided between two domains: the fine arts, linked with form, and the decorative arts, linked with function.<sup>9</sup> Picasso’s atelier highlighted the utopianism of this divide, combining the form of the “non-West” with the functionality of the home. The section of Watson’s essay, entitled “From Antiquarianism to Aestheticism: The Collector at Home,” is of particular interest to Picasso’s atelier, highlighting how the practice and perception of collecting shifted from a traditional mode of antiquarianism to a modern mode of aestheticism.<sup>10</sup> These developments underpinned Picasso’s atelier as a host environment for “non-Western” objects, which established for visitors the opportunity to engage in a new genre of exhibition in which a new visual language was showcased.

The earliest known photograph of Picasso’s Bateau-Lavoir studio was taken in 1908 (Fig. 1.2) suggesting that his collections of “non-Western” objects were prominently displayed for the viewing pleasure of those who attended his private showings of *Les Demoiselles*. In his collections and artistic reiterations of these objects, Picasso transformed his atelier into an immersive environment that would foster a mental escape from Western paradigms. Picasso’s guests took flights of fancy in this

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<sup>9</sup> Janelle Watson, “The Fashionable Artistic Interior: Social (Re)Encoding in the Domestic Sphere,” in *Literature and Material from Balzac to Proust: The Collection and Consumption of Curiosities* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 57.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

environment, which enabled them to experience the exotic and mysterious “non-West” without having to leave the comfort and familiarity that the bourgeois interior provided them. In this respect, Picasso’s atelier was like a portal to a “non-Western realm.”<sup>11</sup>

Picasso’s atelier also served as a recreational simulacrum – a reenactment of the “non-West,” which provided a fictional vision of Africa and Oceania. This atelier, in other words, served as a “non-Western” fantasyland where the boundaries between artificiality and reality were blurred. Visitors to this fantasyland submitted to its artificiality, experiencing a false sense of nostalgia for a “non-Western” realm that never was.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, Picasso’s studio involved its visitors in a total montage of “non-Western-ness” in its appropriation of tribal objects, using the colonial project to create an uncanny environment in which avant-garde audiences could feel both at home and away from home at the same time.

Picasso’s atelier has often been understood as a microcosm of the “non-West,” and of the colonial project, which fit neatly inside the bourgeois lifestyle. In reducing the parameters of the “non-West” to the parameters of the home, Picasso simulated a foreign world that could be controlled according to his own criteria. While he invited visitors to interact with this world as a site of exhibition that was supposedly freer than the official Salon, these visitors constituted guests in a private, domestic space. Since Picasso owned and understood this space to an extent that was unattainable to his visitors, he was able to maintain a sense of omnipotence in the artistic sphere that he had fashioned for himself.

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<sup>11</sup> Lloyd, 98.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Wentinck, “Picasso and Negro Art,” in *Modern and Primitive Art* (Phaidon Press Limited, Oxford, 1979), 14.

Picasso mixed public and private modes of voyeurism, inviting formal artistic critiques in an informal artistic space. Picasso's use of tribal objects in this space thrust his visitors into a subjective framework in which the fanciful spirit of the "non-West" was associated with the fanciful spirit of the artist's personal life. This framework presented visitors with a vision of the "non-West" that they could relate to more easily than that presented in formal museum spaces.

Picasso's "non-Western" atelier was replete with clues that enticed curious viewers and preserved the mystery of his invented spaces. Not only would visitors to Picasso's studio encounter "non-Western" tribal objects and studies, but also vestiges of Picasso's personal life that offered them further insight into the meaning of his work. Picasso exploited this dynamic, devising guessing games to be played among his friends, based on questions about who *Les Femmes d'Alger* had been modeled after and how his creative process unfolded. He pointed these friends to a broad range of possible stimuli for the work, but to no specific model.

Thus, just as Picasso's studio shed light on *Les Femmes d'Alger*, so too did *Les Femmes d'Alger* shed light on Picasso's studio. Visitors to this studio understood Picasso's life and work according to superficial displays of the "non-West" that Picasso himself had created and controlled.

In her essay, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism" (1992), Beatriz Colomina compares this sort of atelier to a detective novel for the bourgeoisie.<sup>13</sup> Picasso's atelier may also be compared to a theatrical set that owed its vivacity to the involvement of the viewer. This "set" framed the viewer's gaze, inciting a controlled environment in which

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<sup>13</sup> Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 2.

this viewer would assume a fixed role. Picasso's atelier thus relied on a mutual interaction between the animate and the inanimate.

As viewers were pointed to a broad network of clues about Picasso's artistic process, they generated an equally broad range of hypotheses about it. As these hypothesis multiplied, they spawned a network of conflicting narratives about Picasso's conception of *Les Femmes d'Alger*. These narratives obscured and mystified Picasso's artistic process. To further obscure his artistic process, Picasso himself spawned a network of conflicting dialogues, wherein he continually shifted his explanation of the painting.

Picasso's justification of the title *Les Femmes d'Alger* is only one case in point. In a discussion with his art dealer, Daniel Henry Kahnweiler, Picasso allegedly noted that even before coming to Paris, Avignon was a familiar name to him. Years later, Picasso allegedly told his cataloguer, Christian Zervos, that he painted his memory of a brothel on Calle d'Avinyó in Barcelona. This explanation of the work, however, contradicts the assertion of Picasso's friend, photographer Roberto Otero, who quoted Picasso as saying, "Would I be so pathetic as to seek revelation in a reality as literal as a specific brothel in a specific city on a specific street?"<sup>14</sup> Max Jacob claimed to have identified one of the women in *Les Femmes d'Alger* as his grandmother, who lived in the southern French city of Avignon. He suggested that Picasso's model, Fernande Olivier, was also featured in the work, along with the French painter and printmaker, Marie Laurencin. To these allegations, Picasso responded:

The worst thing is that, when asked about this matter and I say it isn't true, people go on saying that the *chicas* [chicks] are from a brothel in the *carrer d'Avinyó* [Picasso's emphasis]. In fact, as everybody once knew, Max Jacob or André

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<sup>14</sup> Wayne Andersen, "Problems with the Title," in *Picasso's Brothel: Les Femmes d'Alger*, 17-33 (Other Press, LLC, 2002), 19.

Salmon or someone else in our group invented the story — it does not matter whom — and it was a reference to a grandmother of Max, who was from Avignon, where his mother also lived for a time. We said, jokingly, that his grandmother owned a brothel there — an invented story, just like the rest.<sup>15</sup>

In reference to this assertion, it must also be noted that brothels in other cities were not uncommon along streets named after Avignon. Rome, for example, had a red-light district called *via degli Avignonesi*, and the receiving room of Paris' Hôpital Saint-Lazare, where women with venereal diseases were kept under deplorable conditions, was widely known as the Pont d'Avignon. The title *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* combined references from various times and places, alluding to Picasso's source material without committing to it.

The subject matter of Picasso's studies for *Les Demoiselles* also provided "clues" about Picasso's source material. In *Medical Student, Sailor and Five Nudes in a Bordello*, Picasso depicted a *porrón* or a Spanish wine vessel, which suggested that the brothel might be Spanish.<sup>16</sup> Although this sort of "clue" was removed from the final version of the work, its studies were accessible to those who visited Picasso's studio. The "non-Western" objects in this studio were perhaps the most obvious "clues" about Picasso's creative process, which visitors endeavoured to decode.

Thus, the avant-garde viewer became an actor within Picasso's "play," adopting the role of "explorer" and venturing through the mysterious landscape that was Picasso's atelier.<sup>17</sup> Picasso created a set, directed a scene, produced a narrative, and performed a role. While Picasso envisioned and fabricated scenes in which audiences would insert themselves, he also cast himself as the mysterious maker of these *tableaux-vivants*.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>17</sup> Wentinck, 14.

In order to better understand Picasso's theatrical proclivities, one must consider those of his contemporaries, who influenced conceptions about his "non-Western" atelier. Picasso's artwork was preceded and eventually accompanied by that of Maurice de Vlaminck, André Derain, and Henri Matisse, a group of French artists who came to be known as the Fauves. Not only were these artists Picasso's artistic contemporaries, but also his neighbours, living alongside him in Montmartre. Fauvist paintings were characterized by their wild brushwork and piercing colors. Their subject matter was highly simplified and abstract. Fauvism was inspired by Gustave Moreau, a Symbolist painter at Paris' École des beaux-arts. Moreau's students were inspired by his open-mindedness about the expressive power of art. Matisse said of him, "He did not set us on the right roads, but off the roads. He disturbed our complacency."<sup>18</sup> Following Moreau's death in 1898, "non-Western" visual culture became a major catalyst for the artistic development of the Fauves.

While the role of "non-Western" explorer was esteemed by the Fauves, even more so was the role of "discoverer." Vlaminck, for example, claimed himself as the lone "discoverer" of "non-Western" works after he realized the aesthetic value of African art sometime between 1903 and 1905.<sup>19</sup> Allegedly, Vlaminck discovered three African objects at a bistro in Argenteuil, France. So impressed was he by the force of these objects that he convinced the owner to let him have them in exchange for buying everyone in the bistro a drink. Subsequently, Vlaminck presented these works to a friend of his father's, who in turn gave him three additional African objects: two statues and a large white Fang mask (Fig. 2.15). Once Derain saw this mask hanging above

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<sup>18</sup> Amy Dempsey, *Styles, Schools and Movements: An Encyclopedic Guide to Modern Art* (Thames & Hudson Ltd., London, 2002), 67.

<sup>19</sup> Rubin, 213.

Vlaminck's bed, he offered to pay twenty francs for it. Derain then took this mask to his studio (Fig. 2.16, 2.17) on Rue Tourlaque in Montmartre, where Picasso and Matisse supposedly reveled in its "non-Western" sublimity.

Vlaminck's tale of "non-Western" conquest became increasingly elaborate. According to the French author, Francis Carco, Vlaminck showed an African sculpture to Derain, noting that it was "almost as beautiful" as the *Venus de Milo*. Derain supposedly replied that it was "as beautiful" as the *Venus*. The two men then showed the sculpture to Picasso, who replied that it was "even more beautiful."<sup>20</sup> This narrative emphasizes that "non-Western" art was consistently measured in relation to the Western canon. Artists collected these objects and echoed them in their artwork, assembling at each other's studios, or at local cabarets, and comparing their aesthetic discoveries. In boasting about their discovery of a "new" art form that rivaled or trumped the *Venus de Milo*, Vlaminck, Derain, and Picasso situated themselves on the flipside of the artistic canon, or on the flipside of La Salle de France in the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro. In this sense, their "non-Western" ateliers hosted dialogues that were used to support the avant-garde aims of the modern West.

Matisse was deeply involved in these dialogues.<sup>21</sup> In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, published in 1933, art collector Gertrude Stein stated that "it was Matisse who was first influenced...by the African statues and it was Matisse who drew Picasso's attention to [them]."<sup>22</sup> Matisse later elaborated upon this account in an unpublished 1941 interview:

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>21</sup> Philip Larson, "Matisse and the Exotic" (*Arts Magazine*, May 1975): 72,73.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit., 216.

I often used to pass through the Rue de Rennes in front of a curio shop called “Le Père Sauvage” and I saw a variety of things in the display case. There was a whole corner of little wooden statues of Negro origin...these Negro statues were made...according to invented planes and proportions. I often used to look at them...and then one fine day I went in and bought one for fifty francs. I went to Gertrude Stein’s house on the Rue de Fleurus. I showed her the statue, then Picasso arrived. We chatted. It was then that Picasso became aware of Negro sculpture. That’s why Gertrude Stein speaks of it.<sup>23</sup>

The interviews that artist and art critic Gelett Burgess conducted during the winter of 1908-09 further suggest that it was Matisse who first discovered the aesthetic value of African sculpture, which so influenced Picasso and his atelier. Burgess explained:

Since Matisse pointed out their “volumes,” all the Fauves have been ransacking the curio shops for Negro art...I had mused over the art of the Niger and of Dahomey, I had gazed at Hindy monstrosities, Asian mysteries and many other primitive grotesques; and it had come over me that there was a rationale of ugliness as there was a rationale of beauty; that, perhaps, one was but the negative of the other...Man had painted and carved grim and obscene things when the world was young. Was this revival a sign of some second childhood of the race, or a true rebirth of art?... It was Matisse who took the first step into the undiscovered land of the ugly.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Matisse was an avid collector of “non-Western” objects, which he echoed in his work. This tendency is highlighted in his 1906-07 study, *Still Life with African Sculpture* (Fig. 2.18), which depicts a Vili Figure he owned (Fig. 2.19). Furthermore, Matisse’s sculptures pointed to the otherworldly aesthetic of “non-Western art,” and were likely inspired by objects in his studio. *La Vie* (Fig. 2.20) and *Standing Nude* (Fig. 2.21) demonstrate this possibility.

Like Picasso, the Fauves wrote themselves into history such that they would occupy a crucial role in the “discovery” of a new branch of art. While “non-Western” objects had already been “discovered” and reoriented in Western museums, it was not until they were brought into the bourgeois interior that their aesthetic appeal peaked.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 216, 217.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 220.



Vlaminck explained that in museums, the objects seemed no more than “barbaric fetishes” of no particular aesthetic interest, “sealed off” in glass cases.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, the Argenteuil bistro, in which he later discovered similar objects, was cool and dark like a mysterious cave. From within the depths of this “cave,” the prestige of these objects were ostensibly his to discover. Vlaminck, in this sense, “rescued” the sculptures from the darkness of the bistro, and more broadly, from their “cultural abyss,” reorienting them within the sanctuary that was his studio. This “heroic” endeavor mirrored that of the colonial project, in which “non-Western” works were “rescued” from their “primordial” origins and thrust into the modern West.

The Fauvist conquest of “non-Western” aesthetics entwined Picasso in a network of anecdotes about how primitivism in the modern West was initially conceived. Regardless of the extent to which these anecdotes are true, they confirm that the propagation of “non-Western” discoveries remained at the forefront of early twentieth-century artistic aims. In lieu of extensive documentation, strings of hearsay and clips of images have informed art historians about the role of the “non-West” in the Fauvist studio, and ultimately, in Picasso’s work.

As the “non-Western” atelier blurred the boundaries between artificiality and reality, so too did tales of “non-Western” conquest. Avant-garde artists and art historians constructed complex narratives about their own practices in relation to the “non-West” so that viewers would remain intrigued by the involvedness of their work. These artists subscribed to the philosophy of French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), who famously declared that “to define is to kill, to suggest is to create.” The more

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 214.

ambiguous their artistic ambitions seemed, the more the viewer would endeavor to decode them.

This philosophy applied to those artists working alongside Picasso in Le Bateau-Lavoir. Instead of verified facts, informed assumptions dictate historical accounts of how Jacob, Modigliani, Genin, Guyot, Dumont, Herbin, Gris, Van Dongen, Vaillant, and Riverdy, among others, conceived and received the “non-West” in their studios, and how their practices came to influence Picasso. In subscribing to these accounts, the art historian becomes a gossipmonger, an editor, and an author, drawing on clues about Picasso’s possible inspirations and deciding which of them narrate the most publishable history of his artistic aims.

These clues extended beyond Picasso’s experience at the Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro, beyond his Fauvist ties, and beyond the other artists who lived and worked in Le Bateau-Lavoir, to Picasso’s broader social sphere, drawing the art historian into an unsolvable mystery of “who inspired whom.” It is known through a scarce collection of photographs, for example, that Kahnweiler collected “non-Western” works in much the same fashion as Picasso did (Fig. 2.22). In the same vein, it can be determined that Picasso’s good friend, the French writer and critic Guillaume Apollinaire, decorated his library with “non-Western” artifacts (Fig. 2.23). These sorts of “clues” beckon to the art historian, who attempts to track Picasso’s creative process. They offer as “bait” a sense of historical resolve, and once the art historian is caught, they are thrust into an even more involved saga of who inspired whom *and when*. Conflicting narratives and meager collections of dated photographs obscure the exact moments when Kahnweiler and

Apollinaire began collecting “non-Western” works, just as they obscure the exact moment that Picasso’s “non-Western” atelier was born.

Indeed, the power of the “non-Western” atelier resided in its ostensible “rootlessness.”<sup>26</sup> When the phenomenon of “*art nègre*” or “non-Western” art became a sensation in the media, Picasso denied that it had anything to do with his atelier, or with *Les Femmes d'Alger*. He wanted his work to appear unprecedented, and his artistic process to remain impenetrable. Picasso noted of his visit to the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro, “[I was] all alone in that awful museum, with masks, dolls made by the redskins, dusty manikins. *Les Femmes d'Alger* must have come to me that very day, but not at all because of the forms, no; but because it was my first exorcism painting – yes, absolutely.”<sup>27</sup> In other reports, Picasso altogether denied that he had gone to visit the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro before the creation of *Les Femmes d'Alger*, and that he had not recognized the aesthetic value of the “non-West” until much later.<sup>28</sup> Ironically, Picasso was surrounded by artists and art historians who were propagating the same claims. The “non-West” was only valuable to them insofar as it would be pursued but not pinned. This attitude characterized the avant-garde milieu in which Picasso’s work took form.

Today, Le Bateau-Lavoir is closed to the public, preserving the mystery of Picasso’s spaces, even posthumously (Fig. 2.24). In this sense, Le Bateau-Lavoir serves as a mausoleum for Picasso’s creative secrets. While the interior of the building is considered “off-limits” to the public, its exterior is prominently labeled and includes a

<sup>26</sup> Malin Zimm, “Writers-in-Residence: Goncourt and Huysmans at Home without a Plot,” *The Journal of Architecture*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2004): 306.

<sup>27</sup> Andersen, 62.

<sup>28</sup> Rubin, 260.

window display in which photos of *Les Demoiselles* are displayed alongside brief didactic labels. This display echoes the manner in which Picasso's atelier was approached during its lifetime: it was high-profile, but also mysterious. It was alluring on the outside and ostensibly unknowable on the inside.

In the contemporary museological sphere, Le Bateau-Lavoir is situated amidst a host of other house-museums that showcase the crossroads at which utilitarian objects and art objects intersect. House-museums like that of Sir John Soane in London, or that of Gustave Moreau in Paris, for example, are more conspicuous in their museological aims, sponsored as "public bodies." In exchange for a small fee, visitors earn the right to explore these spaces that have been curated and maintained exclusively for them. While Picasso's atelier, in its contemporary state, provides visitors with a curatorial window display, its interior remains private property, never to be accessed by the public. Today's Bateau-Lavoir constitutes a museological space whose visitors are positioned on the outside, looking in. These audiences are confronted by the curious surfaces of Le Bateau-Lavoir and by the suggestion of the artist's studio that lies beyond its curtained windows and locked doors.

Rather than studying Picasso's work-space by looking exclusively at the narrative that Picasso created around it, Chapter Three will look outward to the medieval revival in Paris, which complemented Picasso's formative experience of Romanesque revivalism in contextualizing his "non-Western" atelier at Le Bateau-Lavoir.

## FIGURES FOR CHAPTER TWO



Figure 2.1. Le Bateau-Lavoir, 1907.  
[Jeanine Warnod, "The Birth of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*," in *Washboat Days*, ed. Carol Green (Grossman Publishers, New York, 1972), 36].



Figure 2.2. Alternate view of Le Bateau-Lavoir, Paris, 1907.  
[Jeanine Warnod, "The Birth of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*," in *Washboat Days*, ed. Carol Green (Grossman Publishers, New York, 1972), 37].



Figure 2.3. A corner of the African and Oceanic Room. Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro (now Musée de l'Homme), Paris, 1895. [William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 258].



Figure 2.4. La Salle de France. Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro (now Musée de l'Homme), Paris, 1895. [Jeanine Warnod, "The Birth of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*," in *Washboat Days*, ed. Carol Green (Grossman Publishers, New York, 1972), 15].



Figure 2.5. Reliquary figure, Kota, Gabon or People's Republic of the Congo. Wood, copper and brass. 57.2 high. Private collection. [William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 268].



Figure 2.6. Mask, Malekula, Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides). Painted palmwood. 63.5 cm high. Field museum of Natural History, Chicago. [William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 256].



Figure 2.7. Section of the African and Oceanic Room. Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro (now Musée de l'Homme), Paris, 1895. [William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984,) 286].



Figure 2.8. Mask, Shira-Punu, Gabon or People's Republic of the Congo. Painted wood. 28 cm high. Musée Mougins. Formerly Collection Pablo Picasso. [William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984,) 300].





Figure 2.9. Mask, Fang, Gabon. Painted Wood. 33 cm high. Collection Jacqueline Picasso, formerly Collection Pablo Picasso. [William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 300].



Figure 2.10. Pablo Picasso, *Sheet of Studies*, 1907. Charcoal. 59.7 x 40 cm. Private Collection, France. [William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 250].



Figure 2.11. Pablo Picasso, *Medical Student, Sailor and Five Nudes in a Bordello*, 1907. Charcoal and pastel. 47.7 x 63.5 cm. Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett.  
[William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 268].



Figure 2.12. Pablo Picasso, *Bust of a Sailor*, 1907. Oil on canvas. 55 x 46 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris.  
[William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 250].



Figure 2.13. Pablo Picasso, *Head of a Medical Student*, 1907. Gouache and watercolor. 60.3 x 47 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
 [William Rubin, "Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: *Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 251].



Figure 2.14. Pablo Picasso, *Five Nudes*, 1907. Watercolor. 17.2 x 22.2 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, A.E. Gallatin Collection.  
 [William Rubin, "Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: *Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 252].



Figure 2.15. Mask, Fang, Gabon. Painted Wood. 48 cm high. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Paris. Formerly collections Maurice de Vlaminck, André Derain. [William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 225].



Figure 2.16. Corner of the studio of André Derain, Paris, c.1912. [William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 225].



Figure 2.17. Detail of object in Derain's studio. Reliquary figure, Fang, Gabon. Wood and metal. 64.8 cm high. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection. Formerly collections André Derain, Jacob Epstein.  
[William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 214].



Figure 2.18. Henri Matisse, *Still Life with African Sculpture*, 1906-07. Oil on canvas. 105 x 70 cm. Private collection.  
[William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 214].



Figure 2.19. Figure, Vili, People's Republic of the Congo. Wood. 24 cm high. Private Collection.  
 [William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 214].



Figure 2.20. Henri Matisse. *La Vie*, 1906. Bronze. 23.2 cm high. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alfred Stieglitz. Formerly collection Henri Matisse.  
 [William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 222].



Figure 2.21. Henri Matisse, *Standing Nude*, 1906. Bronze. 48.2 high. Private Collection.  
 [William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 222].



Figure 2.22. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and his wife in their apartment, Rue George Sand, Paris, 1912-13.  
 [William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 222].



Figure 2.23. View of Guillaume Apollinaire's library, Paris. Photographed c. 1954. [William Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 312].



Figure 2.24. Le Bateau-Lavoir, 2010. [[http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1264/565163135\\_8ef5bf26c2\\_o.jpg.html](http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1264/565163135_8ef5bf26c2_o.jpg.html)].



## CHAPTER THREE

## CONTEXTUALIZING MEDIEVALISM AT LE BATEAU-LAVOIR

We have seen that outside Picasso's Bateau-Lavoir atelier, Parisian culture was shaped by attempts to ally modern art with an aesthetic that could represent a more authentic vision of the French nation. As shown in Chapter One, this desire was the driving force behind diverse spectacles of the Middle Ages and of the "non-West," which were anchored in subjective fantasies and expectations of what lay beyond the bounds of modern Western civilization.

This chapter will portray with greater specificity the medieval revival that surrounded the creation of *Les Demoiselles* outside the confines of Picasso's atelier in Le Bateau-Lavoir. This revival would have sharpened and expanded Picasso's memory of his early experience of the Romanesque revival in Barcelona. As this memory was so deeply ingrained in him, he would have been primed to readily absorb the primitivist ambiance that Paris offered. Thus, I will suggest that Picasso's unique appropriation of "non-Western" visual culture was in large part shaped by his immersion in the Parisian medieval revival.

The year 1904, which marked Picasso's move to Le Bateau-Lavoir, also marked the opening of the Exposition des Primitifs français in Paris. The exhibition showcased French medieval artifacts, including paintings, drawings, manuscripts and tapestries.<sup>1</sup> These works, which were displayed at the Pavillion de Marsan at the Louvre and the Bibliothèque nationale, showed audiences that primitivism existed in the foundations of

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin de Siècle France* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 13.

French traditions, and that these foundations had been rediscovered and were being relived. As the catalogue pointed out, the Middle Ages “belonged” to France, and the French masters of this age “had nothing to learn from anyone.”<sup>2</sup> The Exposition des Primitifs français produced a spectacle of French medieval visual culture in the public sphere, which contributed to a social, political and cultural environment that Picasso was already made familiar with during his earlier experiences in Barcelona. As in Barcelona, this environment had been shaped throughout the course of the nineteenth century, when artists and scholars established a trend of appropriating symbols of medievalism for new and inventive artforms that could thrust modern culture forward.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Parisian public could visit an array of museums that celebrated the theme of the French Middle Ages. Two such museums, mentioned briefly in Chapter One, were the Musée de Cluny and the Musée de sculpture comparée. These museums were established in the early to mid-nineteenth century, marking a developing interest in the medieval foundations of Parisian culture. Interest in these museums gained momentum in the last decades of the century, as social unrest triggered an increasing nostalgia for the nation’s “primitive” past. As a result, these museums became popular sites of “pilgrimage” to the Middle Ages.

The Musée de Cluny, officially known today as the Musée national du Moyen Âge, was formerly a fourteenth-century townhouse for the abbots of Cluny, which had been converted into a public museum by Alexandre du Sommerard in 1834.<sup>3</sup> This museum established a tangible vision of medieval history for bourgeois visitors who could walk in and out of the Middle Ages as they pleased. The building’s medieval

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 69.

façade (Fig. 3.1) complemented its interior which immersed visitors in a total environment of medieval visual culture. This environment was divided into thematic rooms brimming with furniture, sculpture, tapestries, paintings, and enamels from different periods.<sup>4</sup>

There is no definitive record of Picasso having visited the Musée de Cluny when he arrived in Paris, but it can be surmised that he would have at least known about this museum, having been brought up in a culture that identified strongly with medieval visual culture and which used it as a medium through which to communicate its own values. This theory becomes more plausible when looking at the layout of the museum and the visual culture it displayed, which in many ways mirrored Picasso's own atelier in Le Bateau-Lavoir.

Medieval aesthetics in this museum were exemplified in objects as ordinary as candlesticks or hand-washing basins. Such objects were arranged in *tableaux* that mirrored modern living spaces, to which visitors could easily relate.<sup>5</sup> One such *tableau*, which combined artifacts from different periods, was staged in the Chambre dite de François 1<sup>er</sup>. This whimsical environment was the subject of an etching in Sommerard's book *Les Arts du Moyen Âge* (Fig. 3.2), demonstrating that the Middle Ages could be displaced and reformatted at will. This environment shared many of the same qualities as Picasso's atelier in Le Bateau-Lavoir, which appropriated "primitive" artifacts and used them as decorations for a utilitarian space.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>5</sup> Musée National du Moyen Âge. [http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home\\_id21273\\_u112.htm](http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home_id21273_u112.htm) (Musée National du Moyen Âge – RMN), Edmond Haraucourt, *L'Histoire de la France expliquée au Musée de Cluny : Guide annoté par salles et par séries* (Librairie Larousse, Paris, 1922), 7-15, Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye, *L'orfèvrerie Gothique au Musée de Cluny* (Ministère de la culture, de la communication, des grands travaux et du Bicentenaire, Paris, 1989), 5-14.

Stylistically, the artifacts in the Musée de Cluny, ranging from architectural capitals and elaborate enamels, to objects as ordinary as bedposts and floor-tiles, were more abstract and “wild” than classical Western visual culture. These artifacts demonstrated that everyday living in the Middle Ages would have been a sublimely aesthetic experience. Foliate and figured capitals from the Abbey Church of Saint Geneviève in Paris, for example, portrayed abstractly rendered scenes of otherworldly figures adorned with symbols of foliage, with zodiac signs and with scenes from the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Visually these representations drew on angular and twisting motifs, and in addition to portraying images and symbols alluding to the wildness of nature, they were made not of modern man-made materials such as steel and chrome, but of organic materials that, in themselves, brought viewers back to a more natural environment. Symbols of foliage in one capital (Fig. 3.3) were often used in another to depict fire emerging from the mouths of dragons (Fig. 3.4). These same motifs were often also used to depict the pure and natural environment that constituted the Garden of Eden, the first ever natural landscape (Fig. 3.5). The multiple uses of these symbols would have demonstrated to viewers that medieval visual culture was versatile, and that it could be used to express the natural and “primitive” nature of a broad range of environments.

Viewers in the Musée de Cluny would have understood this notion based on other medieval sculptures that they encountered there, such as the *Christ on the Cross* from a twelfth-century church in the south of Auvergne (Fig. 3.6). This work would have shown them that medieval visual culture included spiritual figures that were unpolished, geometric, and anatomically distorted. Medieval enamels such as the *Christ in Majesty Binding Plate* (Fig. 3.7) from a twelfth-century church in the Limousin region of France

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<sup>6</sup> Op cit.

would also have shown them that medieval visual culture was highly stylized, flatly rendered, and brightly coloured.<sup>7</sup> The figure of Christ in this particular work might easily, in its aesthetic qualities, be compared to Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*. Although he is more rounded and smooth than *Les Femmes d'Alger*, he floats preternaturally in his mandorla, surrounded by mythical creatures.<sup>8</sup> Like *Les Femmes d'Alger*, he confronts his viewers directly. He is a haloed figure, rendered through geometric blocks of color.

In 1906, the year before Picasso created *Les Femmes d'Alger*, the museum acquired several works that displayed an aesthetic similar to Picasso's work. These included a *Christ in Majesty* "plaque de croix" (Fig. 3.8) from late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century Catalonia. This work would have reminded Picasso of the Catalan Romanesque, both because of its exaggeratedly abstract and oversimplified aesthetics, but also because of its provenance.

But perhaps the most important point about the possible impact of the Musée de Cluny on Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* is that, in 1906, the museum also acquired several Gothic works from the Palais des Papes d'Avignon, the well-known papal palace in Avignon in southern France and one of the largest and most important medieval Gothic buildings in Europe.<sup>9</sup> Such works included a fourteenth-century casket decorated with figures that might broadly be compared to Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* in their caricature-like rendering (Fig. 3.9, 3.10). This would have been a standard iconographic system for this type of casket which was widely distributed throughout Europe. It is therefore possible that the title *Les Femmes d'Alger* may also refer to a medieval place.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The symbol of the mandorla typically symbolized the coming together of heaven and earth.

<sup>9</sup> Taburet-Delahaye, 129, 130.

While the Musée de Cluny might thus be seen to have impacted *Les Demoiselles* in a number of ways, so too might the Musée de sculpture comparée in the Palais du Trocadéro, which Picasso is known to have visited in 1907 before arriving at the Musée d'ethnographie.<sup>10</sup> This museum of plaster casts was instituted after the architect Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc presented the idea to the Minister of Culture in 1879. This idea had initially been put forth in 1848 by artists in the molding industry who sought to better understand the foundations of Parisian culture.<sup>11</sup> Under the Commission des monuments historiques, the museum opened to the public in 1882. Instead of exhibiting real medieval artifacts, as the Musée de Cluny did, it exhibited plaster-cast replicas of them.

Roman, Greek, Merovingian, Carolingian, and Gothic works, and models of the entryways of many French cathedrals, were replicated in this museum.<sup>12</sup> Although not “authentic,” these works would have shown Picasso that the spirit of medieval visual culture could stand apart from its native origins and be given a new life in a changed cultural context. This idea was reflected in Picasso’s atelier in Le Bateau-Lavoir, as the aesthetics of “primitive” objects gained a new meaning in their association with Picasso’s utilitarian space. Furthermore, the aesthetics of the medieval objects in the museum may have contributed to Picasso’s conception of *Les Demoiselles*. In the reproduction of the twelfth-century sculptural program from The Abbey of Vézelay (Fig. 3.11), for example, the central figure of Christ would have reminded Picasso that medieval visual culture expressed the human form through unnaturally twisted, flat, and oversimplified motifs. A replica of part of the twelfth-century sculptural program from Bourges Cathedral (Figs.

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<sup>10</sup> The Palais du Trocadéro is an area of Paris, France, in the 16<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, across the Seine from the Eiffel Tower. See Chapter One, page 30, footnote 49.

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit., 71.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 71.

3.12, 3.13) would have shown him other medieval-like figures that were wildly abstract and deeply sublime. Representations of men with wings, and with vines sprouting out of them, made the Middle Ages seem like a time when physical realities could be dreamed away. Indeed, this was precisely the case at Musée de sculpture comparée because medieval artifacts from diverse periods and regions were combined and exhibited in this new and fanciful environment.

In 1883 the first inventory of the Musée de sculpture comparée was published, written by Paul Franz Marcou.<sup>13</sup> The museum library opened in 1889, and until 1914, Anatole de Baudot, Vice-President of the Commission des monuments historiques, taught courses on French architecture there, emphasizing the creative genius of medieval French architecture.<sup>14</sup> Through its courses, its catalogues, and its collection, the Musée de sculpture comparée offered viewers a visual culture that could support and expand the scope of modern art.

Picasso noted that he had been attracted to the abstract and raw aesthetic of African and Oceanic art, which represented a reprieve from Western paradigms, but this attraction may have stemmed in part from his deep personal connection to the abstract and raw aesthetics of medieval visual culture. This connection would have been fortified in the Musée de sculpture comparée, which would have offered him the experience of wandering outside reality and coming upon a lost medieval realm that had somehow escaped being locked into history. This medieval realm might be seen as belonging either to his own youth, or more broadly, to his Catalan heritage.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Despite the fact that Picasso ultimately decorated his atelier in Le Bateau-Lavoir with “non-Western” artifacts, which mirrored the dynamics of the Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro, his atelier also mirrored the dynamics of the Musée de sculpture comparée and the Musée de Cluny. He amassed artifacts from a broad range of periods and places that, regardless of their material quality and authenticity, appealed to his cultural memory of a “primitive” past. He rearranged these artifacts in inventive new combinations and appropriated their aesthetics for *Les Femmes d’Alger*, just as the museums he visited appropriated the aesthetics of medieval artifacts. Indeed, in looking at Picasso’s atelier within the context of fin de siècle Paris, it becomes evident that he was only one among many who used their own medieval past to identify with a more primitive culture.

While the Musée de sculpture comparée used plaster-cast replicas of medieval artifacts to satisfy the Parisian interest in medieval culture, and while the Musée de Cluny decontextualized and reassembled medieval artifacts in imaginative new combinations to achieve a similar goal, the Middle Ages in modern Paris was not confined to the museum. World’s Fairs also adopted medieval themes, advertising that Paris’ medieval past was acutely relevant to its modern culture. These fairs popularized the Middle Ages by rendering them visible to a broad Parisian public, rather than restricting them to a smaller network of museum-goers, historians, and connoisseurs. Thus, even the urban peasantry in Montmartre and the bohemian artists who lived there could partake in the Middle Ages as an integral part of their daily lives.

At the 1884 World’s Fair, which was organized in large part by Antonin Proust, President of the Union centrale des arts décoratifs, many French church artifacts were



displayed as part of a large exhibition of medieval visual culture.<sup>15</sup> These artifacts had stemmed from a broad range of medieval periods and took the form of different artistic media, including sculptures, paintings, and altar frontals. Many of these artifacts came from private collections and large provincial museums.<sup>16</sup> The catalogue for the retrospective declared, “Here are the most ancient treasures of our churches and our abbeys. The monastery is our first *atelier*.”<sup>17</sup> To complement this statement, the exhibition’s chief curator, Edmond Bonnafée, noted:

For those of us who live among dead things, working without cease to reconstitute their chronology, their nationality, their family, the Trocadéro will be an abundant mine of revelations. Never have the treasures of our churches been presented in such an ensemble and never have we reunited them, neither side by side, nor with these similar specimens from our Parisian *cabinets* (his emphasis). Among the monuments borrowed from private collections and from provincial museums, a large number are exhibited here for the very first time and have never before been seen at any exhibition.<sup>18</sup>

Bonnafée propagated the already popular idea that present citizens could magically and heroically revive medieval artifacts, or “dead things” of an ancient past. This could be done by realizing the aesthetic value of medieval visual culture, just as the medieval peasants had supposedly done. This premise united the sacred medieval monastery and the secular modern atelier.

Bonnafée noted in the catalogue accompanying the retrospective that the first “masterpieces” of French art were fashioned within religious establishments during the medieval era.<sup>19</sup> His exhibition, which put the Middle Ages on a pedestal, was meant to offset the fair’s emphasis on Paris’ technological achievements. The entrance to the

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<sup>15</sup> Emery and Morowitz, 75.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 76.

Galerie des machines was decorated with six stained-glass windows designed by the French glassmaker Charles Champigneulle (1853-1905).<sup>20</sup> These windows drew heavily on Renaissance motifs in their use of perspective and in their inclusion of classical architecture, yet their subject and technique suggested a continuity between medieval and modern France.<sup>21</sup>

Although Champigneulle's windows would not have been familiar to Picasso within the context of the 1884 World's Fair, similar medieval-like windows contributed to the total environment of medieval revivalism that he encountered upon his move to Paris. These works would have shown him a new cultural language that drew on a variety of prior "medieval" eras, used to make the modern West a more sublimely aesthetic place. Striking similarities would have existed between medievalizing stained-glass windows and Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*. Both portrayed a mosaic of vivid colors partitioned by angular geometric forms in their depictions of otherworldly figures. While modern renditions of medieval stained glass were often based on biblical or spiritual figures, Picasso based his work on a faction of the urban peasantry that he understood as existing in a realm beyond material or worldly constraints, free to express the unbridled passions of humankind. Just as "modern medieval" stained glass windows literally shed light on the spaces they adorned, so too did *Les Femmes d'Alger* shed light on Picasso's Bateau-Lavoir atelier.

As the century came to a close, Paris saw an ever-increasing revival of the visual culture of the Middle Ages. In 1896, the artists' colony called Haute-Claire was founded. Situated in what had formerly been a cloister in the Loire valley, artists joined this colony

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

in order to participate in medieval art-making practices.<sup>22</sup> The colony confirmed the possibility of resurrecting a new generation of “medieval” artists, while also providing a prototype of the cloistered environment to which these artists belonged. The artists at Haute-Claire sold their art to a public that sought to affiliate itself, in as many ways as possible, with a visual culture that could help restore the primitive foundations of their cultural milieu. Because the objects from Haute-Claire were handcrafted by “neo-medieval” artists, rather than being mass-produced by machines, a hungry consumer population rationalized that these objects were primitive and pure, and that it would therefore be laudable to buy them. This was the same rationale that justified Picasso’s own acquisition of “non-Western” objects, which, he believed, were bought and sold in a more “primitive” context than mass-produced objects. Although Picasso might not have tended to buy medieval objects, he was an integral part of a consumer culture that was driven by a quest to locate and commoditize “primitive” symbols. While his appreciation for “primitive” symbols was cultivated in Barcelona, his tendency to purchase “primitive” objects occurred in Paris. Medievalizing artistic colonies such as the one at Haute-Claire contributed to the atmosphere that promoted such tendencies.

Displays of medieval revivalism extended beyond the museums and even beyond the World’s Fairs, entering fin de siècle cabarets and cafés. The cabaret Le Chat Noir (Fig. 3.14), for example, in operation from 1881 until 1897, was scattered with medieval artifacts, both real and reproduced.<sup>23</sup> The bourgeoisie could then absorb these artifacts into their imaginations and exaggerate them even further. This point is demonstrated by an 1886 etching *Cabaret au Moyen Ages (Cabaret in the Middle Ages)* (Fig. 3.15),

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>23</sup> Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Lewis Shaw, *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (Jane Voorhees Zimmerly Art Museum, 1996), 10-12, 18-25.

portraying a café like *Le Chat Noir*, “consumed” by an idealized vision of the Middle Ages; customers and servers are fully clad in medieval attire and they are surrounded by medieval-style décor. In this sort of environment, in which medievalism was projected onto routine activities, Parisian citizens could become enmeshed in a total environment of medievalism even without realizing it. *Le Chat Noir* was often thought of as the Parisian version of Barcelona’s *Els Quatre Gats*, and this is precisely the way in which Picasso would have seen this sort of place when he arrived in Paris in 1900.<sup>24</sup>

That year, another World’s Fair adopted the use of medieval visual culture, and it seems likely that Picasso visited this exhibition, given that he was eager to become acquainted with Parisian culture. An exhibition of stained glass was situated in a pavilion on the *Espanade des invalides*, featuring works from “the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century.”<sup>25</sup> The exhibition also included bronzes, gold-works, enamels, tapestries, ivories, and glassworks, which had their roots in a broad historical expanse including the thirteenth century, the fifteenth century, and even in the Rococo. Each work was displayed individually so that viewers had an opportunity to recognize the aesthetic achievements of France’s “primitive” past. As art-objects, they could be more easily commoditized by the bourgeoisie, and indeed, they were.<sup>26</sup>

By the early twentieth century, people could read about medieval revivalism in a wide range of publications, including exhibition catalogues which had become available for purchase. As explained by the medievalist Michael Camille, people began to buy their own reproductions of medieval manuscripts so that they could enjoy the Middle Ages at

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<sup>24</sup> *Op. cit.*, 111.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

home.<sup>27</sup> Journals like the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, *L'Illustration* and *Le Figaro illustré* offered the latest discourses on medieval visual culture, as did the daily newspaper *Le Temps*, which kept people informed about the proliferation of medieval revivalism.<sup>28</sup>

Illustrated periodicals including *La Revue des arts décoratifs* (1880-1902), *Art et décoration* (1897-1914), and *Art décoratifs* (1898-1914) presented the public with easy and inexpensive ways to reproduce the Middle Ages within the comfort of the bourgeois home, so as to make medieval revivalism an integral and convenient part of their everyday lives, more so than it had already become. Parisian journals like *L'Enlumineur* (1899-1900) and *Le Coloriste-Enlumineur* (1894-1895) provided instructions about how to make one's own manuscript illumination. Images of modern-day "at-home" manuscript illuminators were published to inspire such activities (Fig. 3.16). The at-home collector of medieval objects was held in increasingly high esteem for his active engagement with the medieval past, which seemed to rejuvenate the essence of Parisian living. Thus, while formal museum displays made medieval visual culture accessible to the Parisian public, and while cabarets and cafés brought medieval visual culture even closer, Paris was also the site of a growing trend of bringing medieval visual culture straight into the home. I would argue that this development figures prominently in the ideological background of Picasso's display of "primitive" aesthetics in his *Bateau-Lavoir atelier*.

The democratization of medieval visual culture was accompanied by a surge of self-acclaimed collectors and interior-designers, hungry for medieval objects that would imbue their homes with a primitive aura. While wealthy home-owners could afford to

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 77. See also Michael Camille, "The Myth of the Medieval Craftsman," in *The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame: Medievalism and the Monsters of Modernity*, 59-66 (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 60.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 118.

buy real artifacts from churches or palaces, those less wealthy often resorted to “do-it-yourself” medievalizing techniques. Companies such as Les Vitraux Franchis or Les Vitraux Glacier sold translucent sheets with stained-glass patterns that could be affixed to regular windows in order to simulate a medieval environment.<sup>29</sup> A poster for the Vitraux Glacier (Fig. 3.17) advertised this effect, portraying two bourgeois women and a little girl concealing the industrial landscape outside their window and transforming their dwelling into a sort of private medieval cathedral.<sup>30</sup> As people looked through reproductions of medieval windows, it was as if they were looking through rose-colored glasses, which lent a soft romantic vision to a hard industrial reality.

Some people also paid for professional decorators to transform their homes into “medieval” sanctuaries. Department stores like Le Bon Marché sold inexpensive replicas of medieval furniture, incorporating medieval icons into their advertisements to help them sell better.<sup>31</sup> Such reproductions were medieval-looking in their abstract and nature-like motifs, which had ostensibly predated the conventions of neoclassical representation.

The most elaborate “medievalizing” homes were featured in journals, giving their owners a sort of celebrity status.<sup>32</sup> This status was based on the extent to which they could successfully or cheaply bring medieval visual culture into their domestic routine. As the celebrity status of medieval collectors increased, so too did the extent to which photographers and journalists visited and documented their homes. Such documentation was published in European and American journals such as *Nos contemporains*, *L'Illustration*, and *Harper's Weekly*, making these homes increasingly less private and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton University Press, 1981), 238.

<sup>32</sup> Op. cit., 78.

more ostentatious as a “modern medieval” showpieces. The homes of Emile Zola (1840-1902), Pierre Loti (1850-1923), and J.-K. Huysmans (1848-1907) became icons of primitivist collecting.<sup>33</sup> These renowned writers were somewhat older than Picasso and while he might not have known them personally, he certainly would have been exposed to images and articles featuring their medievalizing ateliers.

An 1887 etching (Fig. 3.18) portrays Zola seated in a chair decorated with medieval-style motifs; his desk is cluttered with medieval artifacts, and there is a stained glass window, a shield, and a pair of swords at the back of his room. Zola amassed whatever medieval artifacts he could find — many of them reproductions — in an effort to make the Middle Ages come alive in his atelier. Author Maurice Guillemot commented on his collection:

Triptychs of *Primitif* [his emphasis] paintings, displays of suits of armor, old fabrics, stained-glass windows...and it is not that Emile Zola is an amateur; when one questions him about it, he does not dwell on the objects, one does not feel that he is like Goncourt or Anatole France, who take pleasure from the rare bibelot that one caresses with one's fingers, that one turns over and over, that one fondles, no, he has accumulated all of this to create a décor that suits him, his instinctive Romanticism sharpened by medieval church things.<sup>34</sup>

Loti's décor was similar in its appropriation of medieval motifs (Fig. 3.19), which made him seem more closely connected with his cultural roots, and with the spiritual essence of the artifacts he collected.

Huysmans was renowned in the media for describing the collecting of medieval artifacts as a “primitive” activity. In his view, the “bohemian” peasant hunted through church relics until he found an object sublime enough to express his raw emotions, and cheap enough for him to afford:

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<sup>33</sup> Op. cit., 62.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 82.

I see that in Hamburg one can still find *Primitifs* at far less costly prices! Here the prices are crazy, absolutely prohibitive. It is true that there are quite a few fakes — it is Zola who buys those — and at top prices. In contrast, bibelots from churches are still affordable. I bought heaps, old St. Sacrement, cencers, chappers — I carried off what I could from the liquidation of a convent — And relics!<sup>35</sup>

Huysmans also published the novel *À Rebours* or *Against Nature* (1884), the story of a collector named Des Esseintes who carefully amassed medieval objects in order to create a total environment that was more primitive than fin de siècle Paris. Huysmans noted of Des Esseintes' character:

[M]ost of the precious objects catalogued in the Musée de Cluny, having miraculously escaped the vile brutality of the sans-culottes, are from the old abbeys of France. Just as the Church preserved philosophy, history and literature from barbarism in the Middle Ages, so it has saved the plastic arts, protected until now those wonderful models of fabric and jewelry that manufacturers of old objects spoil as much as they can even through they are unable to alter their initial, exquisite form. It was thus not surprising that he had sought out these antique bibelots, that he had, like many other collectors, taken these relics away from the Paris antique stores and the country secondhand shops.<sup>36</sup>

Like Des Esseintes, Huysmans sought to escape consumer culture by retreating to self-designed, one-of-a-kind sanctuary filled with medieval artifacts. He predicted that his novel would be ill-received among the consumer public, noting, "It will be the biggest fiasco of the year – but I don't care a damn! It will be something nobody has ever done before, and I shall have said what I want to say."<sup>37</sup> When the novel was released in 1884, however, it generated a surge of publicity among a young generation of aesthetes. This was to be Picasso's generation.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Baldick, *The Life of J.-K. Huysmans*, ed. Brendan King (Clarendon Press, 1955), 131. Conversation reported by Francis Enne in 1883.



Huysmans paralleled his protagonist, Des Esseintes, who began a spiritual journey by amassing “primitive” medieval objects that would set him apart from materialistic trends, and who, ironically, ended up in another materialistic trend wherein medieval collectibles were exploited for their aesthetic allusion to the “spiritual” past. Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz remarked on this irony, noting that Des Esseintes “parodied and perverted the religious spaces he recreated by secularizing them: he preached a sermon on dandyism from the pulpit, and used the altar to display special editions of Baudelaire’s poetry. He subverted religious artifacts by appropriating them for private use, while replacing religious values with commercial.”<sup>38</sup> Des Esseintes’ collection might be understood as a microcosm of fin de siècle Paris, in which an increasing number of collectors detached medieval visual culture from its native origins and used it to support the growing trend of primitivism.

While Picasso has been praised as an artist who “uniquely” left his cultural milieu behind, inventing new cultural narratives in his Bateau-Lavoir atelier and writing himself and his artwork into them, it should now be clear that he was part of a milieu where this sort of “inventing” was a popular trend. His atelier was physically part of the medieval revivalist landscape in Paris, which convinced him that his cultural roots, extending back to his youth in Barcelona and even further back to the Middle Ages, were primitive. As the models of medievalism he encountered combined many different cultures and time periods, so too did his own experiences and artworks. These cultures and periods included the Catalan Romanesque and its revival, the French medieval era and its revival, and of course, the “non-West.”

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<sup>38</sup> Emery and Morowitz, 84.

In Picasso's world, both medieval visual culture and "non-Western" visual culture were used as art-objects by bourgeois citizens who sought to create an air of primitivism and authenticity in an increasingly mechanized and fragmented world. These two visual cultures, with their original contexts and functions obscured, were both understood as being raw, abstract, basic, spiritual, instinctual, and emotional.<sup>39</sup> Picasso would have considered both the Middle Ages and the "non-West" to be physically and chronologically remote from the ills of modern Western culture, and closer to the foundation of his identity. If modern conceptions of medievalism extended to medieval reproductions as far removed from the "real" Middle Ages as cut-out and paste-on stained glass windows, then so too could they have extended to "non-Western" visual culture, which Picasso believed could contribute to his own "primitive" artistic realm.

While Picasso has often been seen as an artist who left his own Catalan culture to pursue French culture, his experience of medieval revivalism followed him to Paris, where it was heightened and intensified. This parallels the idea that Europeans left their current environments to pursue "non-Western" places, but they never truly left themselves behind. They rather, tailored their ideas of primitivism to suit the European self, and later projected these ideas onto other cultures.

In considering the overwhelming prevalence of medieval revivalism in fin de siècle Paris, this chapter has endeavoured to highlight that Picasso's conception of primitivism was continuously shaped by the nostalgia for a utopian medieval past, even when this nostalgia was projected onto the "non-West." This revelation is key to art historical studies that have looked at *Les Demoiselles* through the lens of Picasso's "non-

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 65, Emery and Morowitz introduce this idea, but do not pursue it, stating: "medieval objects should be studied along with the acquisition and display of other kinds of displaced objects."

Western” atelier in Le Bateau-Lavoir, because it positions this “self-controlled” space within a much broader historical, geographical, and cultural context.



Figure 1

Figure 1: A large, very faint and blurry rectangular area, likely a placeholder for an image or a very low-quality scan of a photograph. The content is illegible due to the blurriness.

## FIGURES FOR CHAPTER THREE

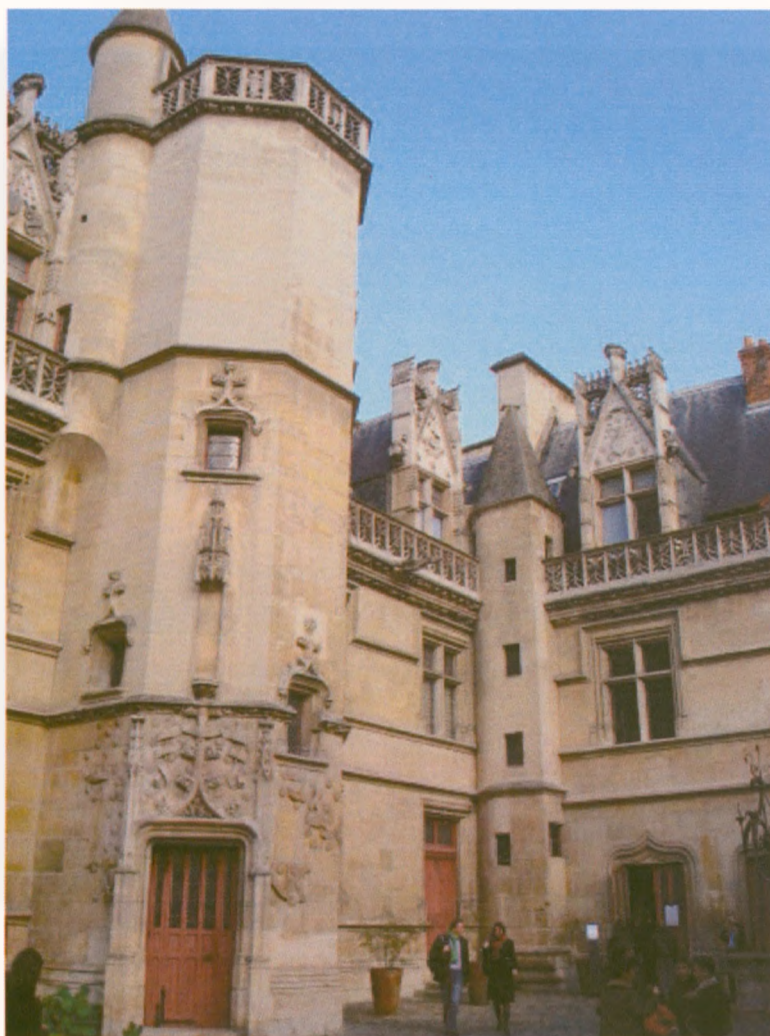


Figure 3.1. Entrance to the Musée de Cluny, Paris.  
[<http://www.visoterra.com/photos-5eme-arrondissement-de-paris/musee-de-cluny.html>].

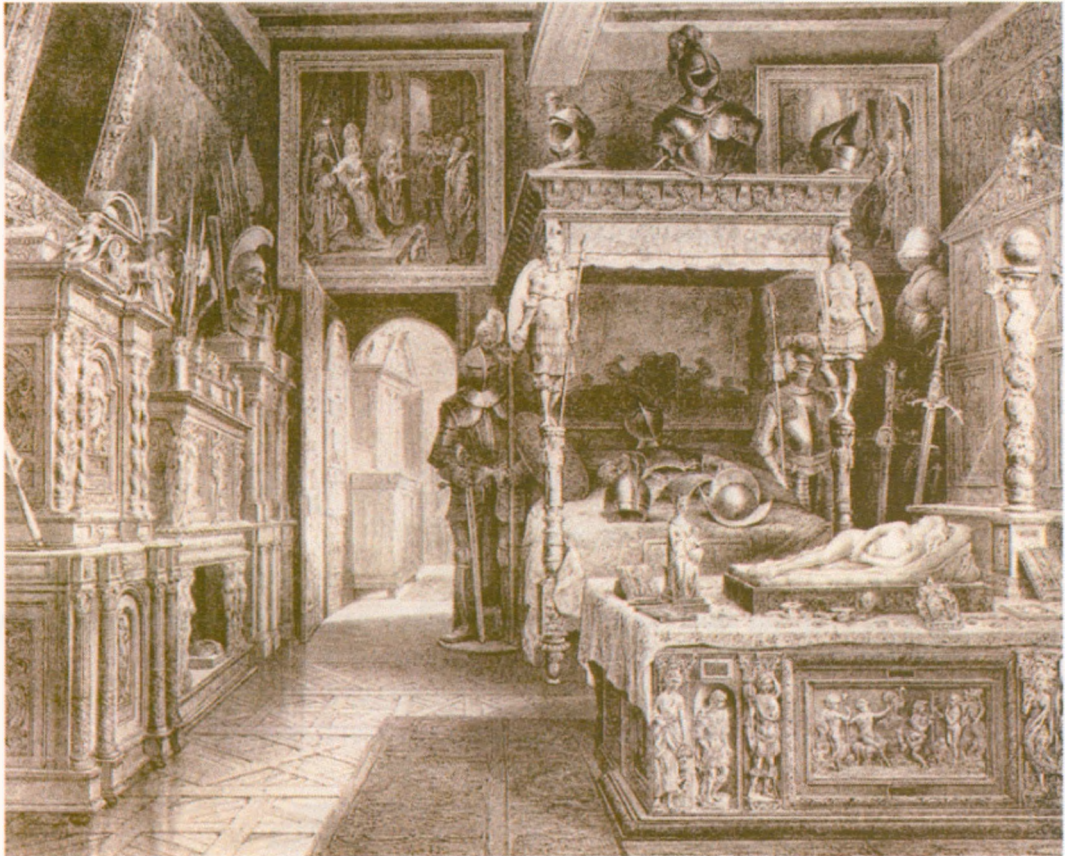


Figure 3.2. *Chambre dite de François I<sup>er</sup>, Musée de Cluny* in *Les Dispositions actuelles (1840) de la collection de l'Hotel de Cluny*. From Alexander de Sommerland, *Les arts du Moyen Âge*, 1840. Etching. Album chap. II plate III. New York, Art and Architecture Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation. [Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin de Siècle France* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 68].



Figure 3.3. Capital depicting foliage from the nave of Saint-Geneviève, Paris, twelfth century. Musée de Cluny, Room 10: Romanesque Sculpture. [[http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home\\_id21273\\_u112.htm](http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home_id21273_u112.htm)].



Figure 3.4. Capital depicting zodiac sign (Aquarius) from the nave of Saint-Geneviève, Paris, twelfth century. Musée de Cluny, Room 10: Romanesque Sculpture. [[http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home\\_id21273\\_u112.htm](http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home_id21273_u112.htm)].



Figure 3.5. Capital depicting scenes of Genesis (Adam and Eve) from the nave of Saint-Geneviève, Paris, twelfth century. Musée de Cluny, Room 10: Romanesque Sculpture. [[http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home\\_id21273\\_u112.htm](http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home_id21273_u112.htm)].



Figure 3.6. Detail of Christ on the cross from Auvergne, twelfth century. Musée de Cluny, Room 10: Romanesque Sculpture [[http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home\\_id21273\\_u112.htm](http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home_id21273_u112.htm)].



Figure 3.7. Christ in Majesty binding plate, twelfth century. Musée de Cluny, Room 16: Enamels in the Middle Ages. [[http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home\\_id21273\\_u112.htm](http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home_id21273_u112.htm)].



Figure 3.8. Christ in Majesty, *plaque de croix*, silver *de basse-taille* covered with translucent enamel (blue, green, yellow, brown, pink). 5.6 x 5.6 cm. Late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, Catalonia. Added to Musée de Cluny in 1906.

[Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye, *L'orfèvrerie gothique au Musée de Cluny* (Ministère de la culture, de la communication, des grands travaux et du Bicentenaire, Paris, 1989), 208].





Figure 3.9. Casket, mid-fourteenth century, Avignon. 21 x 28.4 x 14.2 cm. Added to Musée de Cluny in 1906.

[Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye, *L'orfèvrerie gothique au Musée de Cluny* (Ministère de la culture, de la communication, des grands travaux et du Bicentenaire, Paris, 1989), 127].

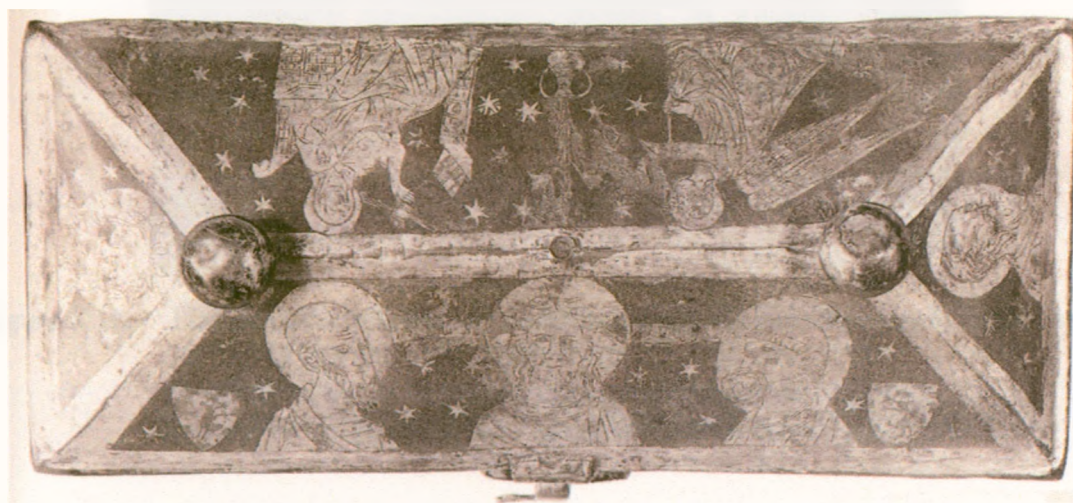


Figure 3.10. Alternate view of casket.

[Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye, *L'orfèvrerie gothique au Musée de Cluny* (Ministère de la culture, de la communication, des grands travaux et du Bicentenaire, Paris, 1989), 127].

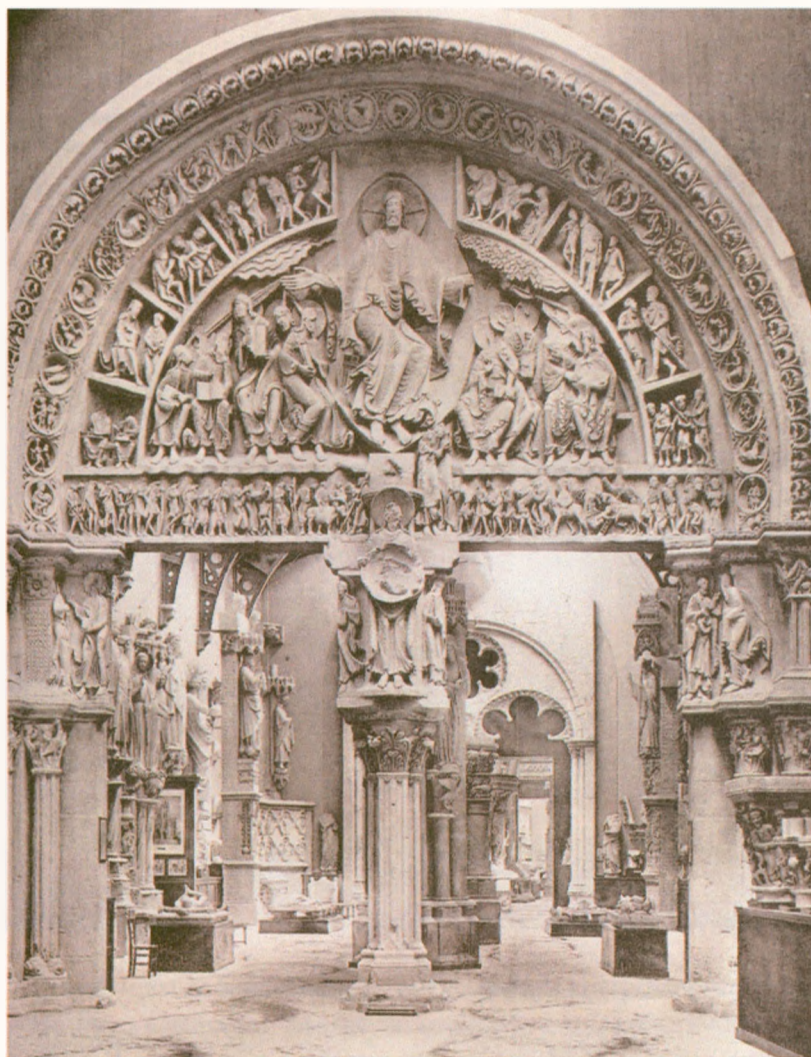


Figure 3.11. Plaster-cast replica of the twelfth-century sculptural program from The Abbey of Vézelay. Musée de sculpture comparée, 1900. [Jules Roussel, *La sculpture romane au Musée de sculpture comparée du Trocadéro à Paris* (Armand Guérinet, Paris, 1900), 7].



Figure 3.12. Plaster-cast replica of the twelfth-century sculptural program from Bourges Cathedral. Musée de sculpture comparée, 1900. [Jules Roussel, *La sculpture romane au Musée de sculpture comparée du Trocadéro à Paris* (Armand Guérinet, Paris, 1900), 25].



Figure 3.13. Plaster-cast replica of the twelfth-century sculptural program from Bourges Cathedral. Musée de sculpture comparée, 1900. [Jules Roussel, *La sculpture romane au Musée de sculpture comparée du Trocadéro à Paris* (Armand Guérinet, Paris, 1900), 25].



Figure 3.14. *Le Chat Noir: A Cozy Corner*, photograph from *The Burton Holmes Lectures: Round About Paris*, vol. II. Battle Creek: The Little Preston Company, Ltd, 1901, 54.  
[Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin de Siècle France* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 116].



Figure 3.15. Henri Pille, *Cabaret au Moyen Âge* (*Cabaret in the Middle Ages*). Etching from John Gand-Carteret, *Raphaël et Gambrinus ou L'art dans la brasserie, Paris*. L. Westhausser, 1886, 5. [Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin de Siècle France* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 117].



Figure 3.16. *L'enlumineur dans son atelier* in *Le Coloriste Enlumineur*, June, 1893. [[http://www.enluminor.com/outils/atelier\\_coloriste\\_1893m6n2.jpg](http://www.enluminor.com/outils/atelier_coloriste_1893m6n2.jpg)].



Figure 3.17. Poster for the Vitraux Glacier. Colour lithograph. Musée de la publicité, Paris.  
 [Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin de Siècle France* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 80].





Figure 3.18. Fernand Desmoulins, *Zola dans son cabinet à médan*, 1887. Drawing. [Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin de Siècle France* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 62].



Figure 3.19. Dornac, *Pierre Loti, Nos contemporains chez eux*. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. [Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin de Siècle France* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 63].

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has endeavored to shed light on the complex nature of the primitivist ideologies that informed the creation and exhibition of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*. These ideologies were closely entwined with nineteenth- and early twentieth-century spectacles of Europe's integration with and cultural mastery over medieval visual culture and "non-Western" visual culture. These symbols of primitivism gained momentum at the very same moment, and in response to the very same bourgeois desire for a more deeply authentic cultural and national spirit.

We have seen that Picasso's formative years were strongly influenced by the Romanesque revival in Catalonia, which, indelibly etched within his psyche, heightened and solidified his experience of the medieval revival in Paris. This experience made Picasso extremely receptive to "non-Western" visual culture, which, like medieval art, had appeared more primitive and free-spirited than neoclassicism in the modern West. Picasso amassed "non-Western" objects in his Bateau-Lavoir atelier, an environment that embodied his own unique vision of primitive aesthetics.

Many viewers and scholars seeking to understand *Les Femmes d'Alger* have narrowed their focus to this environment, but it is only by looking outside Picasso's atelier that his personal experience of primitivism can truly be understood. This experience was profoundly influenced by Paris' complete obsession with a medieval revival that animated the city's cultural and historical memories of a truer and more primitive time, and it is within this environment that Picasso became inspired to animate his own personal experiences, memories, and artistic instincts. *Les Femmes d'Alger* and the narrative that Picasso created around it cannot fully be understood outside of this context.

The impact of medieval aesthetics on Picasso's work, and indeed, on works by other primitivist artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will require further investigation in order to expand present ideas about primitivism in modern art, and to enrich the dialogue among the "partitioned" subjects of modern visual culture, medieval visual culture and "non-Western" visual culture. The effort to preserve the neat and careful categorization of these respective subjects has allowed scholars to understand, in a basic way, how art history has "developed." At the same time, this classificatory framework has often prevented scholars from perceiving the complex relationships that exist between diverse fields of study. It is important to understand that Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* was not exclusively "non-Western" for the same reason that it is important to understand that the term "non-West" does not apply to a specific land, and that the term "Middle-Ages," invented during the Renaissance, does not apply to a specific cultural moment. These terms cannot be wrapped up and concisely packaged, nor can Picasso's atelier. It is vital to engage in cross-historical research in order to understand these subjects with more insight and, indeed, with more accuracy. It is also important to understand why these subjects have been neatly partitioned, so that we can better understand how to approach them in the future. As suggested in this case-study of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, cross-historical and cross-cultural explorations are key to opening up new vistas into the rich and multidimensional impact of medievalism on early twentieth-century modernism.

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