



Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 1923-1982 (Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Series in Latin American and L)

Lowery Stokes Sims

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With its signature style that marries Cubism and Surrealism with Afro-Cuban and Caribbean motifs, the art of Wifredo Lam occupies a unique position in the history of modern art. Like many modern artists, specifically Pablo Picasso, Lam participated in the primitivist movement, drawing inspiration and imagery from non-western, pre-technological cultures. Yet, unlike European and Euroamerican primitivists, Lam, who was a Cuban of Spanish, African, and Chinese descent, was engaging with his own cultural heritage in his works. His authenticity as both "primitive" and "primitivist" challenges the fundamental tenets of primitivism and makes Lam an ambiguous, fascinating figure in twentieth-century art.

This wide-ranging study explores Lam's enduring contribution to world art history—the reclamation and projection of an African identity within mainstream art. Lowery Stokes Sims surveys Lam's work, focusing on the period from 1947 onwards, in which he demonstrated the viability of nationalist pursuits within modernism to a new generation of artists. She traces his career and life and the critical reception of his work in Cuba and Latin America, the United States, and Europe as each locale predominated in his career.

This masterly assessment of Lam's later work demonstrates the evolution of primitivist concepts in modern art from the specifically ethnographic to the more psychic and existential. What emerges from Lam's story is the fate of Surrealism in the postwar era as it permutated into international artistic movements such as the CoBrA, the Group Phases, and the International Situationists.

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