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- 1 If Baptiste Brun didn't exist, Jean Dubuffet and Art brut scholars probably would have invented him. His pioneering research has propelled the field forward, and filled in many gaps and lacunae along the way. To his credit, he has plumbed the archives and made a large number of previously buried primary sources available to a wider public. Baptiste Brun's two recent publications, *Jean Dubuffet et la besogne de l'Art brut : critique du Primitivisme*, a revision of his doctoral dissertation, and *Jean Dubuffet, un barbare en Europe*, the catalog for the eponymous traveling exhibition he co-curated with Isabelle Marquette, forge new ground and help us better understand Jean Dubuffet's paradoxical relation to primitivism, ethnography and anthropology in the immediate postwar period. "Primitivism" —Dubuffet avoided the word. He preferred "*sauvage*," in the Levi-Straussian sense, —"wild," "untamed," "undomesticated." To his mind, "*primitivisme*" was a pre-established, *passé* category which already had its own history within canonical modernism and the prewar avant-garde. He felt the same way about "*l'art des fous*." Yet, as Baptiste Brun effectively demonstrates, in the postwar period he continued to flirt with primitivism and use it as a foil or a ruse; as he simultaneously put his "discovery," collection, and theorization of Art brut to the task or "*la besogne*" of critiquing it. Baptiste Brun examines his subject through a lens beholden to the critical, self-reflexive, anti-hierarchical brand of ethnography practiced by Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris (and other contributors to the revue *Documents*), and later, Denis Hollier, James Clifford and Jean Jamin.¹
- 2 In the first book, Baptiste Brun ventures into uncharted territory and traces the critical reception of Jean Dubuffet's postwar paintings, which were at times associated with "*l'art nègre*," as well as the artist's purposeful conflation of his *Vénus du trottoir* (May 1946) with *Kamenaia Baba*, an ancient sculpture from the Russian Steppes, made famous in an article by Alfred Salmony (curator for the Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst in Cologne).² Additionally, Baptiste Brun brings to light the fact that Dubuffet's earliest efforts collecting Art brut were driven by a strong ethnographic impulse. In so doing, he undermines the commonplace notion that during the artist's first Art brut collecting expedition to Switzerland, with Jean Paulhan (once a student of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl) and Le Corbusier, in the summer of 1945, he not only contacted psychiatrists and visited

insane asylums, he also enlisted the help of Eugène Pittard, the Director of the Ethnographic Museum in Geneva, and Father Patrick O'Reilly, a missionary and expert on the art of the Solomon Islands, who had close connections to the musée de l'Homme. Baptiste Brun also focuses on Dubuffet's relationship with Charles Ratton, the Parisian African art dealer, and an erstwhile founding member of the Compagnie of Art brut in 1948. Perhaps more information in Baptiste Brun's study could have been devoted to Dubuffet's three extended trips to North Africa, 1947-1949, and the issue of Art brut in the face of France's decolonization. Baptiste Brun relies on Daniel Sherman's study, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire*, but unfortunately, he fails to mention the finest scholarship on this subject, Andrea Maier's chapter on "Dubuffet: In and Out of Africa," in her unpublished Berkeley dissertation."³

- 3 *Jean Dubuffet et la besogne de l'Art brut* also reconsiders ethnographic elements that were intended to be included in Dubuffet's single-volume *Almanach de l'Art brut* (planned for publication in 1948), such as an entry on the Masks of Lötschental and a "Petit courrier" section promising news on an Egyptian school teacher, Saad El Khadem, who encouraged his young students to draw. While we should not assume Jean Dubuffet agreed with Georges-Henri Luquet's "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" argument that "child art and the art of primitive adults is identical,"⁴ he did in fact (at first) find similarities between Art brut and children's drawings. Examples by Annie Chaissac, Gaston's daughter, were to be included as well. Jean Dubuffet's *Almanach of Art brut* never saw the light of day during his lifetime. However, thanks to the painstaking travaux of Baptiste Brun, and Sarah Lombardi and Vincent Monod at the Collection of Art brut in Lausanne, a facsimile of it is now available, and as such deserves to be mentioned here.⁵
- 4 The exhibition catalog, *Jean Dubuffet, un barbare en Europe* contains essays by the co-curators, and host of experts including Thierry Dufrêne, Maria Stavrinaki, Vincent Debaene, and Christophe David, as well as relevant writings by the artist himself. Baptiste Brun's own contribution, the insensitively titled, "*L'autisme cultivé ou la leçon de l'Art brut*" (p. 200-209) seems somewhat out of place, especially given the fact that Jean Dubuffet was bent on de-pathologizing Art brut. Maria Stavrinaki's essay, which looks at Dubuffet's "Usage of History" ("Circuit fermé : de l'usage de l'histoire et du mythe par Jean Dubuffet", p. 68-76) is undoubtedly the most important of these and connects the artist's obsession with Art brut to larger issues concerning what I have called, since 2007, his overall "*contre-histoire*" enterprise.⁶ Indeed, his "discovery" and promotion of Art brut, and use of it to critique *primitivisme*, is but one part of his larger effort to challenge reigning notions about history after the great historical caesura of World War II.
- 5 Throughout his postwar career Jean Dubuffet maintained that "history and the taste for history are the most pernicious things there are," and that he was an "actualiste, présentiste, éphéméraliste."⁷ This was not lost on critic François Pluchart, who, after seeing the Dubuffet's massive 1967 Art brut show at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris (featuring 700 works by 75 creators), rightly observed, "L'Art brut remet en question notre conception de l'histoire."⁸ According to Jean Dubuffet, Art brut is not only anachronistic; it is ahistoric. It has no progenitors and no disciples. In his 1947 entry on "The Barbus Müller," an anonymous sculptor associated with the Swiss collector O.J. Müller, Jean Dubuffet argued that it makes no difference if the artist is

"our contemporary," or someone from the last century, or a companion of Clovis or the big prehistoric reptiles.⁹

- 6 Baptiste Brun's efforts to rethink Jean Dubuffet and Art brut from an ethnographic perspective coincides with, and is theoretically akin to, two other recent shows, *Neolithic Childhood: Art in a False Present, c. 1930* (April 13-July 9, 2018)¹⁰ and *Préhistoire: une énigme moderne* (May 8-September 16, 2019).¹¹ Brun's essay, "Jean Dubuffet: 'pré-humain,'"¹² figures prominently in the latter catalog. He focuses on the complex and curious case of one of Dubuffet's early favorites Art brut artists, Mr. Juva, who carved sculptures out of a "prehistoric" material — silex (flint). Jean Dubuffet and Jean Paulhan both raved about him in texts written in 1948. Things get more complicated when we learn that Mr. Juva was really Alfred Antonin Juritzky-Warberg a Viennese aristocrat, art historian, and art collector, born in Weissenbach an der Triesting, Austria, who in 1938, fleeing from the Nazis, relocated to Paris. In 1953, he authored the book *Prehistoric Man as an Artist*.¹³
- 7 The key question all of these publications raise is, why history, why now? They appear at the very moment history is so omnipresent it's about to disappear, as are its material archives. At a time when we think we can get in touch with our deepest ancestral past with the click of a button. The answer to the "why history, why now?" question remains to be seen. In the meantime, I will conclude with a prognostication: the next new major contribution to this literature will likely be the publication of Hal Foster's 2018 Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery, Washington D.C., *Positive Barbarism: Brutal Aesthetics in the Postwar Period*, and Raphael Koenig's Harvard Dissertation, "Art Beyond the Norms: Art of the Insane, Art brut, and the Avant-Garde from Prinzhorn to Dubuffet (1922-1949)".

NOTES

1. See *Documents* (Skira, 1929-1930); Michel Leiris, *Phantom Afrique* (Paris : 1930 [L'Afrique fantôme]); Denis Hollier, "Surrealism and Its Discontents," *Surrealism* #7 (2007): 1-16; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); and, Jean Jamin, "L'ethnographie mode d'emploi : de quelques rapports de l'ethnologie avec le malaise dans la civilisation," in Jacques Hainard and Roland Kaehr, eds., *Le Mal et la douleur* (Neuchâtel : Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel, 1986).
2. Salmony, Alfred. "La Sculpture en pierre de la steppe eurasiatique occidentale," *Cahiers d'art*, vol. 7, no. 1-2, 1932, p. 259-263
3. Sherman, Daniel. *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire, 1945-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Maier, Andrea. "Chapter 5: In and Out of Africa," *Dubuffet's Decade*, Berkeley: University of California, 2009, p. 210-264 (doctoral dissertation)
4. Luquet, Georges-Henri. *Children's Drawings* (1927), London, New York: Free Association Books, 2001. Translated by Alan Costall
5. *Almanach de l'Art brut*, Milan : 5 Continents Editions, 2016. Edited by Sarah Lombardi, Baptiste Brun and Vincent Monod

6. Minturn, Kent Mitchell. "Contre-Histoire: The Postwar Art and Writings of Jean Dubuffet," New York: Columbia University, 2007, (doctoral dissertation)
 7. See Jean Dubuffet, letter to Jean Paulhan, dated September 22, 1947, in *Dubuffet-Paulhan Correspondance*, Paris: Gallimard, 2003, p. 466. Edited by Julien Dieudonné and Marianne Jakobi; and his "Author's Forewarning," to *Prospectus I*, 1967, p. 25.
 8. Pluchart, François. "L'Art brut remet en question notre conception de l'histoire," *Combat*, April 10, 1967
 9. Dubuffet, Jean. "Les Barbus Müller et autres pièces de la statuaire provinciale" (1947), in *Prospectus*, no. 1, p. 498-499
 10. *Neolithic Childhood: Art in a False Present*, c. 1930, Berlin: Diaphanes, 2018. Edited by Anselm Franke and Tom Holert
 11. *Préhistoire : une énigme moderne*, Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2019. Edited by Cécile Debray, Rémi Labrusse, Maria Stavrinaki
 12. Brun, Baptiste. « Jean Dubuffet "pré-humain" », *Préhistoire : une énigme moderne*, *ibid.*, p. 138-140
 13. Juritzky-Warberg, Alfred Antonin. *Prehistoric Man as an Artist*, Amsterdam: Nederlandsch Museum voor Anthropologie, 1953
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Dr. Kent Mitchell Minturn is a New York-based art historian and critic. He has published widely on Art brut and Jean Dubuffet, including a recent essay in *October* on the artist's relationship with the late French philosopher Hubert Damisch. In the spring of 2019 he taught a seminar on « Modernism's Reception of the Art of the Insane » at The Institute of Fine Arts (New York University).