

NATIONAL MODERNISMS II

POST-INDEPENDENCE AFRICAN AND INDIAN ART

Key Concepts

- ▶ Impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on art
- ▶ Tradition versus modernity
- ▶ Building a national and cultural identity



MODERN INDIAN ART

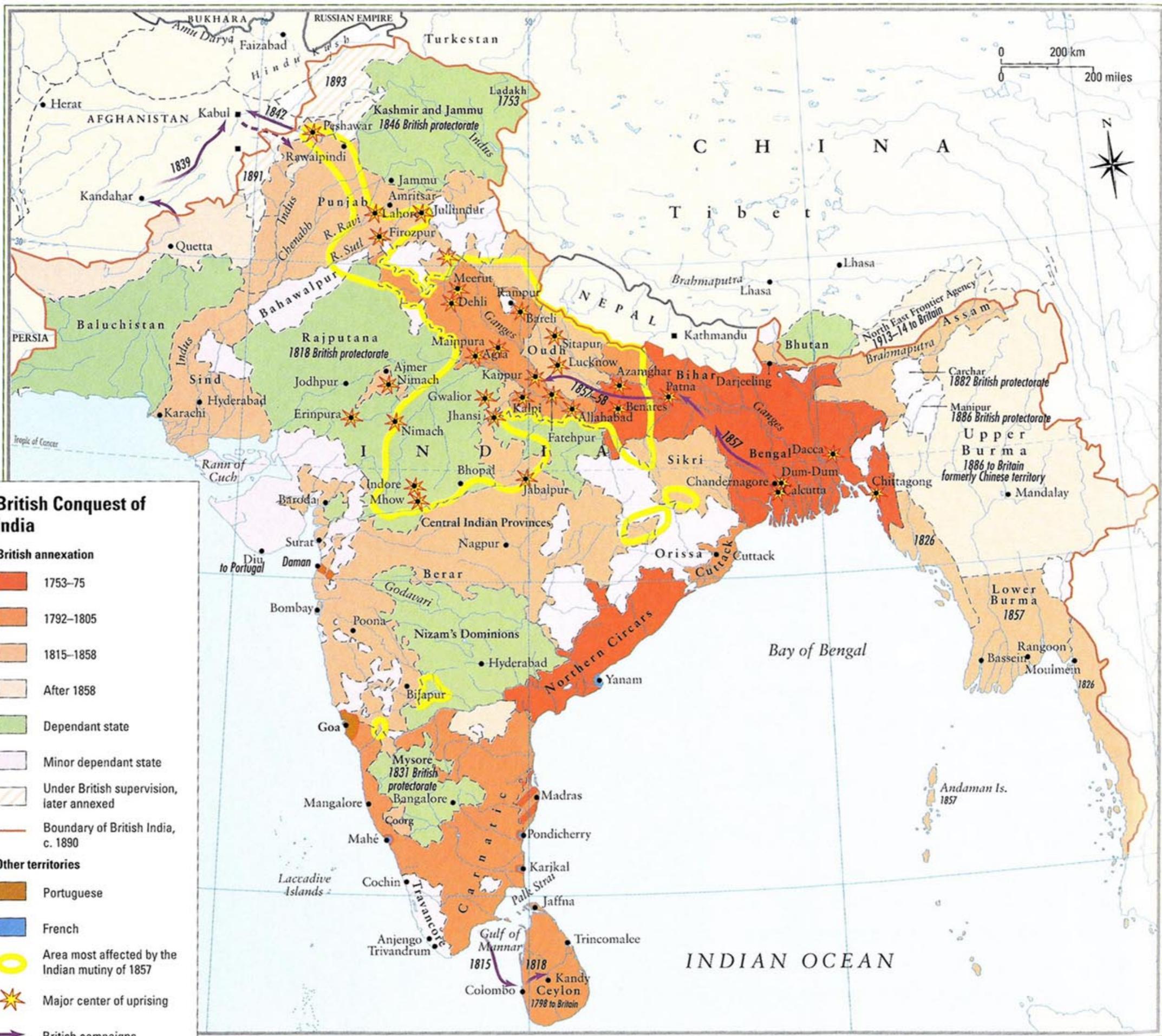
BRITISH RAJ IN INDIA

Imperialism: a policy of extending a country's power and influence through diplomacy or military force.

Colonialism: The physical act of taking control over another nation by setting up colonies



Department of India. Dickinson's Comprehensive Pictures of The Great Exhibition of 1851, London, 1854.



British Conquest of India

- British annexation**
- 1753-75
- 1792-1805
- 1815-1858
- After 1858
- Dependant state
- Minor dependant state
- Under British supervision, later annexed
- Portuguese
- French
- Area most affected by the Indian mutiny of 1857
- Major center of uprising
- British campaigns



ART DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Company style: A hybrid Indo-European style of paintings made in India by Indian artists, many of whom worked for European patrons in the British East India Company or other foreign Companies in the 18th and 19th centuries.



Example of Company paintings



Yellapah of Vellore, "Three Ascetics" (early 19th-century), British Museum

COLONIAL ART EDUCATION



The Bombay School of Art (Main Building).

PRE-INDEPENDENCE MODERNISM



Raja Ravi Varma, *Shakuntala*,



Amrita Shergil, *South Indian Villagers Going to the Market*, 1937

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: INDEPENDENCE OF INDIA



Photographs from India's freedom struggle. India gains independence in 1947

PROGRESSIVE ARTISTS' GROUP



Members of the Progressive Artist's Group
(1st row, left to right) FN Souza, KH Ara, HA Gade
(2nd row, left to right) MF Husain, SK Bakre, SH Raza

What should a new art for a newly emerging nation look like?

How could the country's rich and diverse but also religious traditions be used to create a secular republic?

And finally, how could Indian artists establish themselves in the international art world?

THE PARTITION OF INDIA



Postcolonialism: the political and cultural condition of being a former colony

the theoretical framework for understanding the lasting impact of colonisation

The artists of the PAG profoundly believed in the liberating nature of art and ideas of secularism, unity and internationalism

Imagery of the Border



Tyeb Mehta, *Diagonal XV*, oil on canvas, 1975



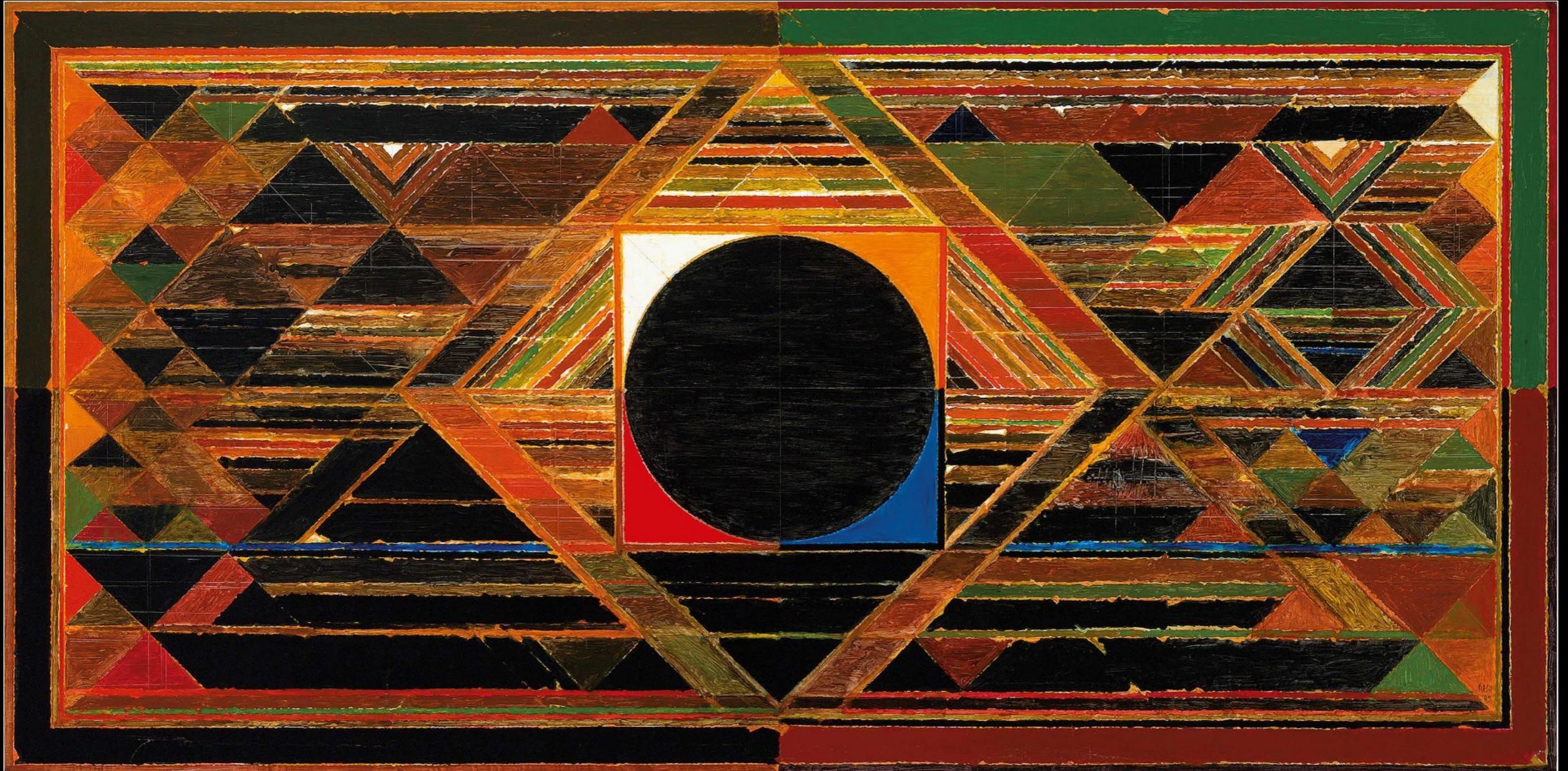
Tyeb Mehta, *Untitled (Diagonal)*, oil on canvas, 1975



Krishen Khanna, *Game*, oil pastel on paper, c. 1970

Reviving cultural roots and traditions

“Neo Tantric Abstraction”: The use of modern abstraction to depict tantric ideas of spirituality and mysticism



SH Raza, *Gestation*, 1989

Socio-political realities



M. F. Husain

Peasant Couple

1950

Oil on canvas



M F HUSAIN

Untitled (Gaja Gamini)

1996

The Modernist Impulse



F. N. Souza
Self Portrait
1949



MODERN AFRICAN ART

Ben Enwonwu, *Africa Dances*, 1971

Primitivism: the term used to describe the fascination of early modern European artists with what they considered to be “primitive” art- including tribal art from Africa, the South Pacific and Indonesia.



Left: Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*, 1907 (MoMA); Right: Fang mask, Gabon, 19th century (Musée du Louvre)

COLONIAL ART EDUCATION

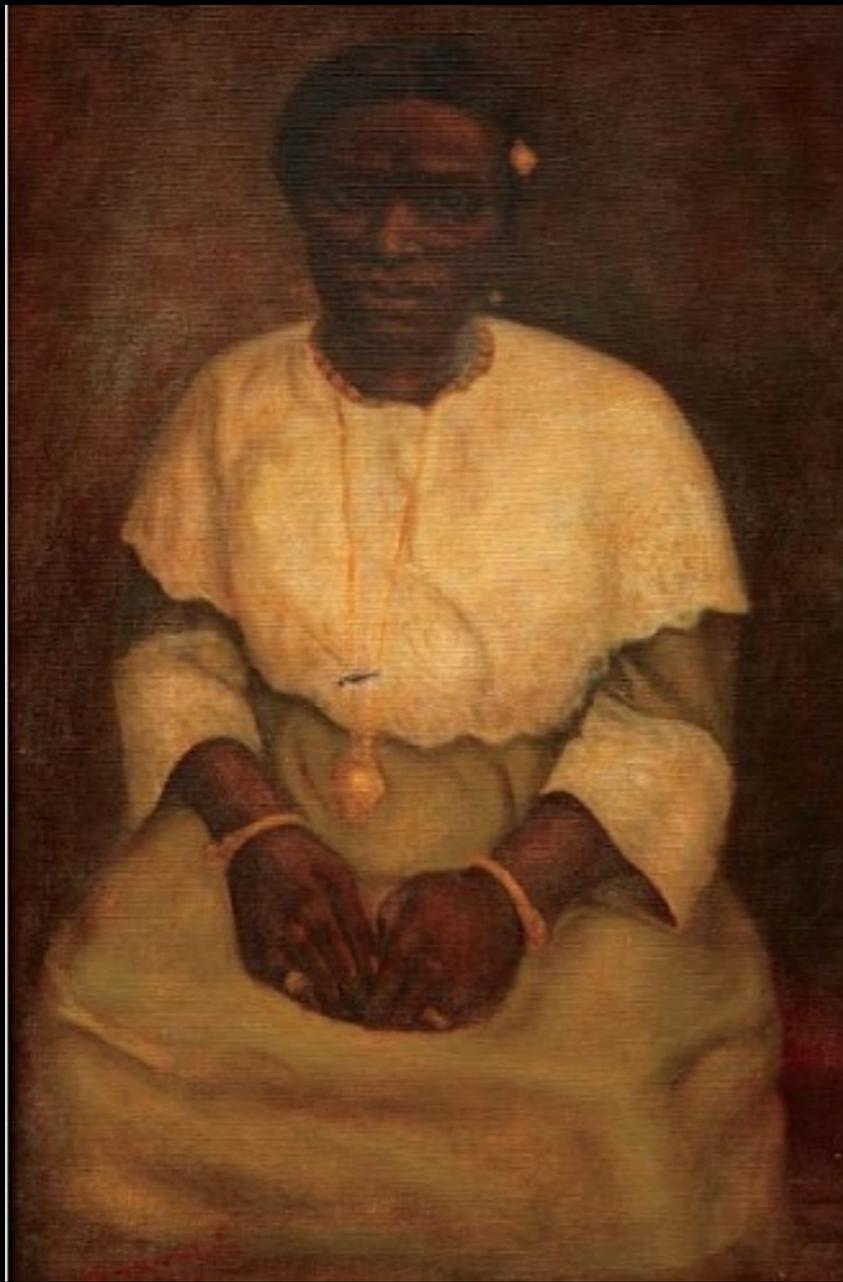
Art education, however, was not considered necessary or indeed useful. In his history of art education in Nigeria, Uche Okeke concludes that with the colonial Christian mission, 'cultural and creative education was not considered important for the converts'.

"teaching an African the art of a white man is not only a waste of time but also a misplaced value... rather than impose on them [Africans] what will end up being a torturing load, [i.e. art], they can be taught some aspects of European crafts which will be useful to various missions in the colony." -Goerge Fowler, 1938

For as long as the colonised was precluded from acquiring full mastery of colonial ways, for as long as difference was maintained, colonial dependence could be guaranteed.

PRE-INDEPENDENCE MODERNISM: THE QUESTION OF COMPETENCE AND SKILL

"[Onabolu's work is] clear, marvelous vindication of our struggle—a manifestation of our much repeated feelings that Africans are capable politically, intellectually and creatively."



Portrait of Sisi Nurse, Aina Onabolu, 1922
credit: Arthouse Contemporary Ltd



Self Portrait (through the mirror), Aina Onabolu,
1947, Pencil on Paper/credit: National Gallery of Art

Socio-political realities

Pan Africanism: the idea that peoples of African descent have common interests and should be unified

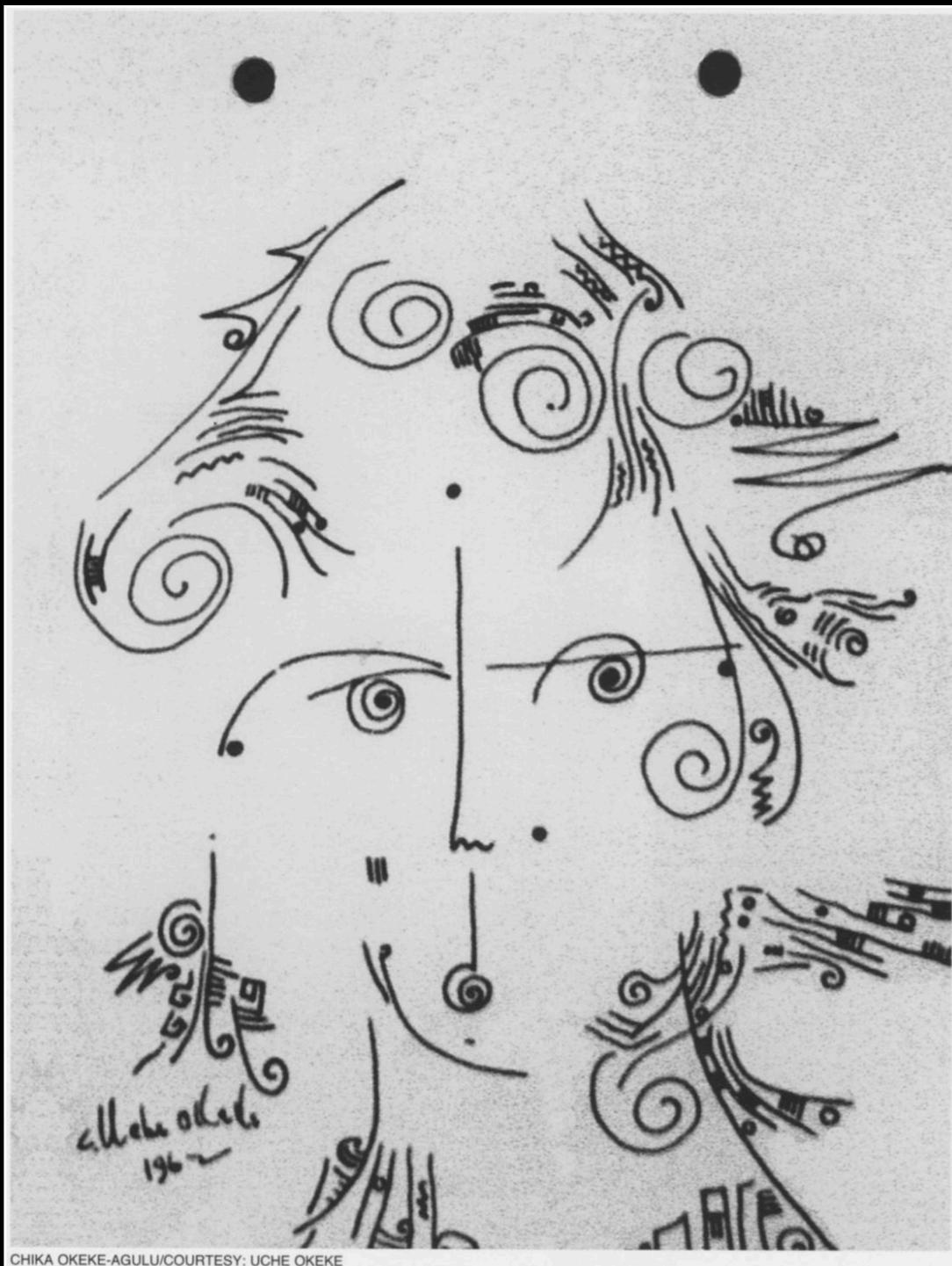
Negritude: Theoretical and literary movement developed by scholars in the 1930s against French colonialism: promoted Pan Africanism and black consciousness



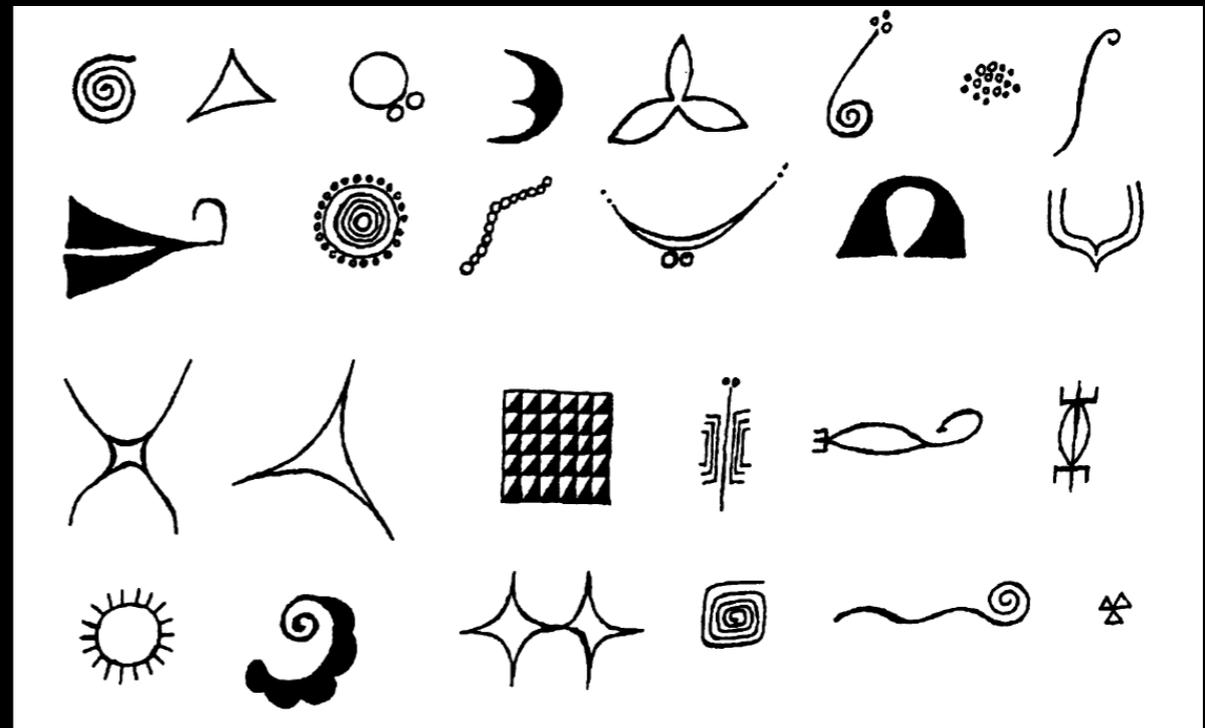
Ben Enwonwu, *Going*, 1961

Reviving cultural roots and traditions

“Natural Synthesis”: merging the best of indigenous art traditions, forms and ideas with useful ones from Western cultures to create a uniquely Nigerian aesthetic perspective.



CHIKA OKEKE-AGULU/COURTESY: UCHE OKEKE



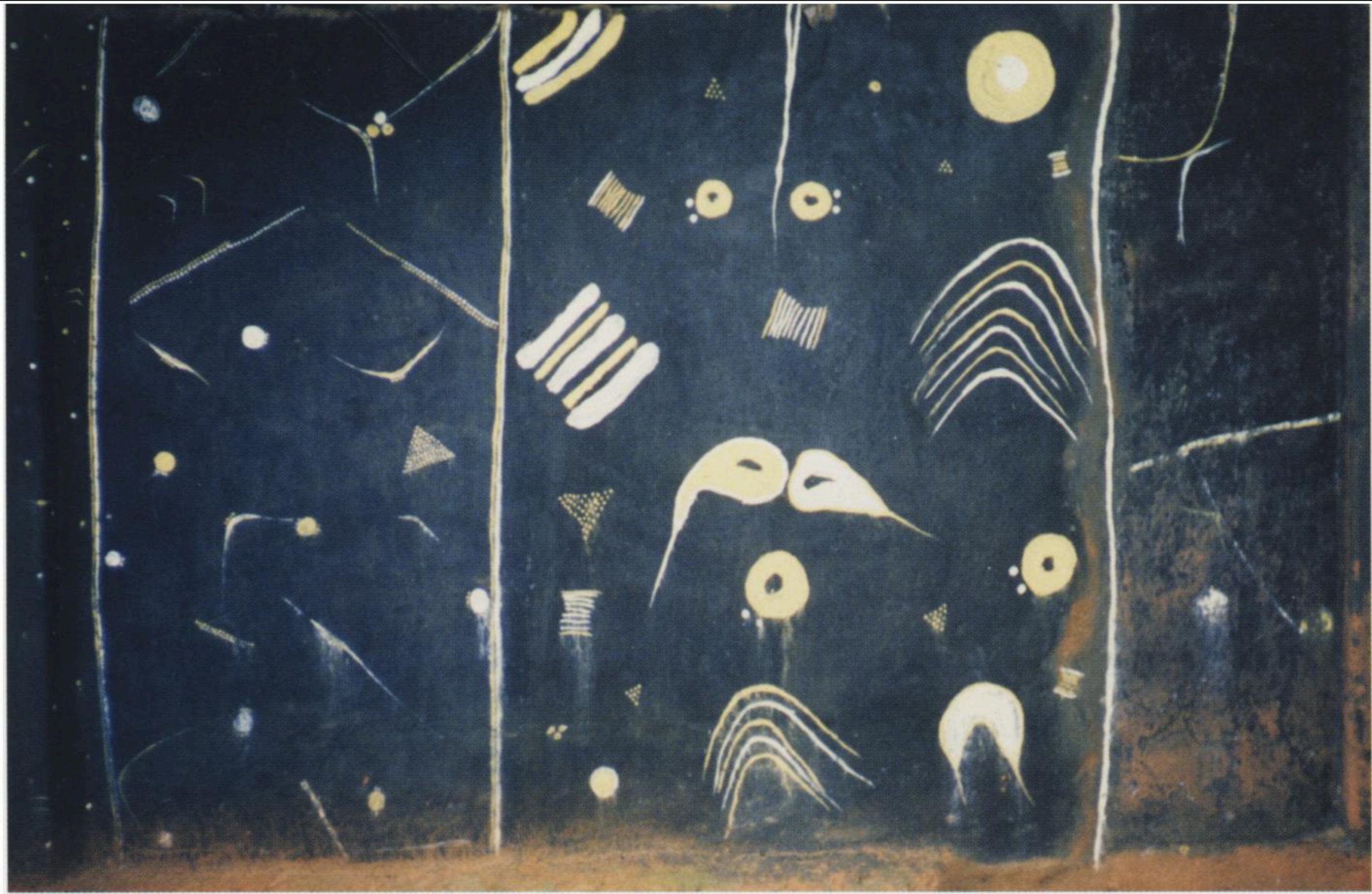
Examples of Igbo Uli motifs

Uche Okeke

Head of a Girl

1962

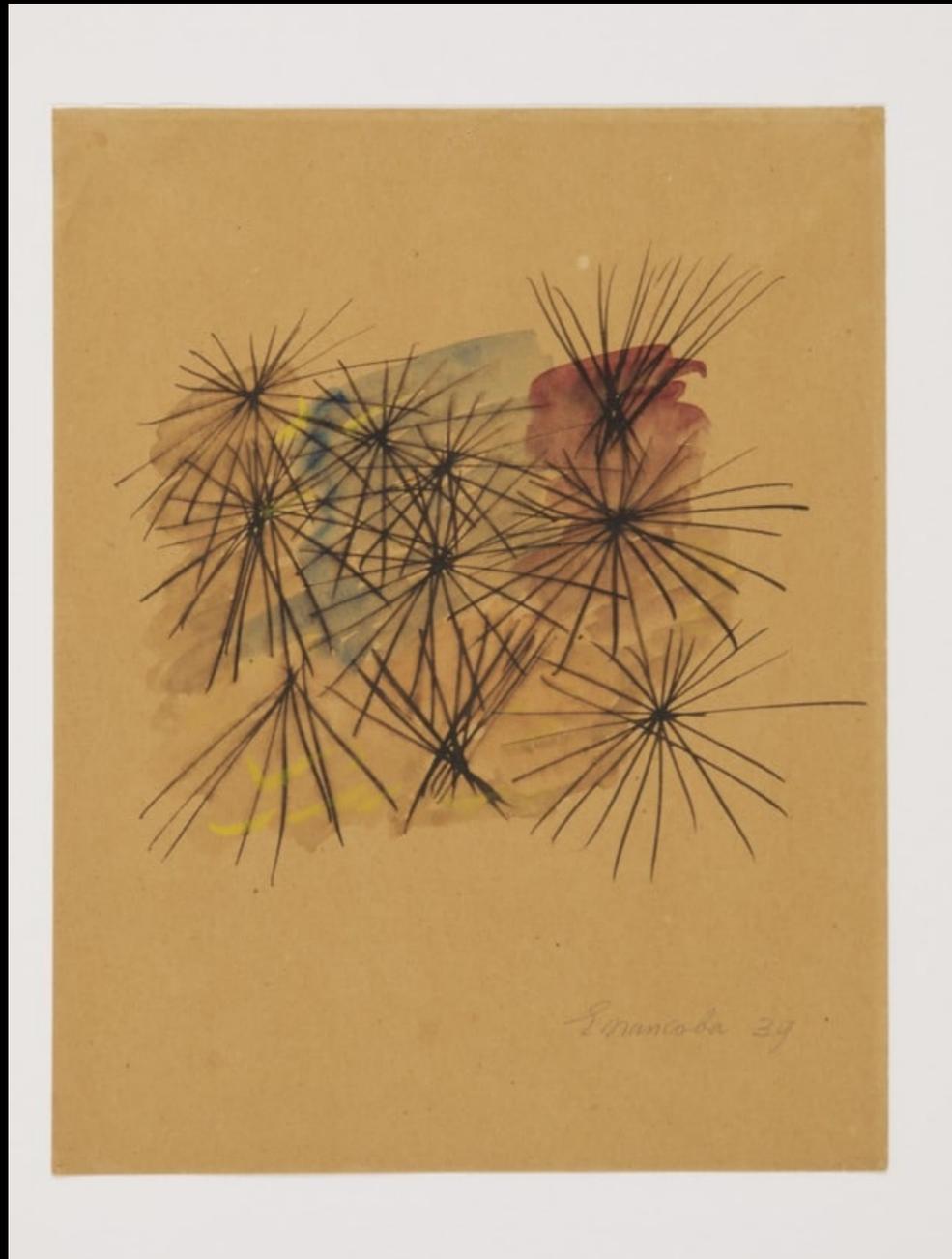
Pen and ink on paper



Igbo Uli mural, Uke, c. 1989

The Modernist Impulse

Whereas Euro-American art genealogies tend to be discussed in terms of ideas and imagination, art from outside that realm still often gets pegged to artists' identities, and framed as the product of experiences marked as "other." -Joshua Cohen



Ernest Mancoba. *Untitled*. 1939. Ink and watercolor on paper, Museum Jorn, Silkeborg



Ernest Mancoba. *Untitled*. 1939. Ink and watercolor on paper, Museum Jorn, Silkeborg

Questions to explore

- ▶ How were these artists seeking to create an identity for their newly formed nations?
- ▶ How did they depict the social and political realities of the time in their work?
- ▶ How were they influenced by modernist movements in Europe, while also trying to create an art style specific to their own national culture?
- ▶ How did their work reflect the tension between wanting to be modern and progressive, while also holding on to their traditional values?