

ART, HISTORY, AND SOCIETY:  
POPULAR PAINTING IN SHABA, ZAIRE

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## ART, HISTORY, AND SOCIETY: POPULAR PAINTING IN SHABA, ZAIRE

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Students of African visual art are slowly beginning to surmount aesthetic barriers which have prevented them from giving recognition to the products of contemporary artists working in materials and with techniques other than the ones that were canonized by Western scholars as "traditional." Although contributions have grown more numerous in recent years,<sup>1</sup> the kinds of art that catch outside interest are still limited to works which are pleasing to Westerners and therefore marketable, to "higher" art forms which are produced by recognized masters or schools and are acceptable by the standards of art criticism, and to the recently discovered socioeconomic significance of "lower" forms that came to be known as airport art.<sup>2</sup>

This paper reports on a vital and prolific art form hidden from tourists and even from most of the long-time resident foreigners by socioeconomic as well as cultural barriers.

Our own research on popular painting in the Shaba region of Zaire began with a discovery, almost by accident. From the moment that we first saw a strange creature, half woman, half fish, painted in oil on canvas and hung on the wall in a Zairean worker's livingroom, to the day when a collection of paintings left the country, our object of study continued to constitute itself, to expand and contract, take shape and structures, cause interest and revulsion—all this in a complex interplay between us, the artists, and their customers. Some of the images, topics, and scenes represented in these paintings seemed to be immediately recognizable; others were revealed to us by those who knew better. Still others begin to show themselves only now that we find the time to look at the paintings, to dissect and compare them, to listen to recorded statements about them, and to follow leads into history, ethnography, and folklore.

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For us, anthropological knowledge of this art form is neither mere classification of objects according to the schemes of a logic of inquiry, nor simply transformation of a presumed ethnographic domain into a structured system. Rather, the kind of knowledge we are seeking *constitutes* its object through confrontation with its material, visual, and observable manifestations, *and* through *Verständigung*, a process of understanding of, and of agreement about, these manifestations based on communicative interaction with their producers and consumers. In other words, we neither assume a "given" reality in the form of discrete objects ("paintings"), nor do we presume a domain of thought and action (such as "art").<sup>3</sup>

We will sketch the ethnographic context of Popular Art in Shaba (PAS),<sup>4</sup> trying to convey a sense of the kinds and quality of urban experience which these paintings *visually record* and, more importantly, which they help to *generate and explicate*.

We will then attempt to establish a system of *genres*, i.e., of complexes of form, content, and presentation which structure PAS in such a way that almost any given painting will be recognized as belonging to a known "kind," being systematically different from other kinds (and often referred to by generally accepted labels). Axiomatically, we define genres as comprehensive and recursive expressions of experience shared by producers and consumers of PAS. The concept has heuristic rather than strict classificatory value. As in any ongoing process, one cannot expect neat, unequivocal boundaries between units.

Finally we will concentrate on one genre and a sample of paintings representing it, trying to understand how discrete signs and symbols can create a coherent message, and how the visual message can become part of an ongoing discourse in which this society communicates and transforms its life experience.

### THE ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF PAS

The urban centers of Shaba, in the copper-producing south-eastern region of Zaire, are results of industrialization, of massive recruitment of labor and, later on, of massive immigration from other parts of the country.<sup>5</sup> Around commercial and (formerly European) residential core cities, most of the African population lives in "zones" (minimally planned and serviced communities), in workers' camps (totally planned and serviced by the mining company and its subsidiaries), and in "zones annexes" (huge squatters' towns almost without municipal planning or services). Although some subsistence gardening is important, the economy is thoroughly based on money. Most of the jobs are provided by the copper industry, by transportation and government, with an important but not exactly known proportion of the population counted as unemployed. Many people have lived here for an extended period of time; second to fourth generation urbanites become more and more frequent. Cultural and linguistic variations notwithstanding, these cities are pervaded by a distinctive style of life. The degree of uniformity of this style is obviously tied to similar socioeconomic conditions for most of the population, but it also has its historical depth and structure. Reaching well into colonial times (Lubumbashi was incorporated in 1911,

Kolwezi in the early 1940s) the population shares a common history marked by dramatic and traumatic events: World War II with revolts and strikes toward its end, Independence in 1960, the Katanga secession 1960-63, and other post-independence upheavals until Mobutu's rise to power in 1965.

For most city dwellers, life is hard by anybody's standards, but somehow many find sufficient means to aspire to an urban, *petit bourgeois* way of life, expressed in goods of consumption, in dress, leisure activities and, most important for us, in the way in which people arrange and decorate their homes. In a certain sense, PAS is a side product of the differentiation of living space resulting in the idea of a *salon* (living room) with its typical furnishings and decorations. While paintings probably were first found in many of the innumerable small shops and bars, more and more of them are displayed in living rooms (in fact, many of the small bars called *buvettes* are living rooms open to the public). Paintings (oil or acrylic on canvas over a stretcher, but seldom framed) sell for about \$1.50 to \$5.00, with portraits fetching as much as \$10.00. This represents between 5% and 25% of the monthly income for most workers and craftsmen. Given the cost of materials and the extremely small margin of profit, a typical artist must produce at least a painting a day to support himself and his family. There are no galleries, shops, or markets specializing in the sale of paintings; rather, they are peddled either by the artist himself or by some young people who work for a small commission. Occasionally, they are displayed in food markets and on the streets.

According to our estimates (based on the number of artists we have known to be working) at least 500 paintings are sold monthly in Lubumbashi alone. This is a conservative estimate and does not include second-hand sales, about which we have little information. All these transactions go on in the sections of the towns which are socially, if not legally, off limits for Western expatriates. In rare cases, popular artists will offer their works in the inner city, near places frequented by shoppers and tourists, but then they will only sell the kind of paintings which they perceive to be meaningful to these customers: landscapes, full-breasted

black beauties, and other souvenirs.

Until recently, PAS only had occasional ramifications into the curio- and airport-art trade. Although paintings produced in Shaba are exported into Zambia and are reported to have reached the East Coast, the bulk of PAS remains strictly for local African consumption.

PAS, at least in its present importance and degree of general acceptance, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although isolated popular artists are reported to have sold their works soon after World War II and a group of African painters working in Lubumbashi gained international fame as early as in the fifties,<sup>6</sup> what we call PAS seems to have had its explosive development coincidentally with the current political regime. The reasons for this are complex. Relative political calm and modest economic security, if not prosperity, may be one factor; another is the emergence of a distinctly post-colonial life style. But most important is what we should like to describe as the formation of a new kind of historical consciousness among the masses. It is this consciousness which found in PAS expressions for its myths, its experiences, and its contradictions. In ways which are not yet completely understood, these visual representations are integrated into a social discourse, the verbal culture of the cities of Shaba. Far from being mere objects of contemplation or decoration, popular paintings are distinctly labelled as to content and form, and the kind of distinctions which are expressed in everyday language provide more or less explicit links to a shared narrative lore. We doubt that there is a single adult inhabitant of these cities (short of cases of extreme isolation and deprivation) for whom one of these paintings could not become the object of a "story," a discursive statement on content, form and purpose which would be generally accepted, although not necessarily without corrections and contradictions.

The language of widest acceptance in the area is the Shaba variety of Swahili. Almost all the verbal information we collected about PAS was in that language. Given the recent establishment of Swahili in this region as well as the sudden rise of PAS, it is not surprising that many of the basic terms are loans from French and English. We give a preliminary list in Table 1.

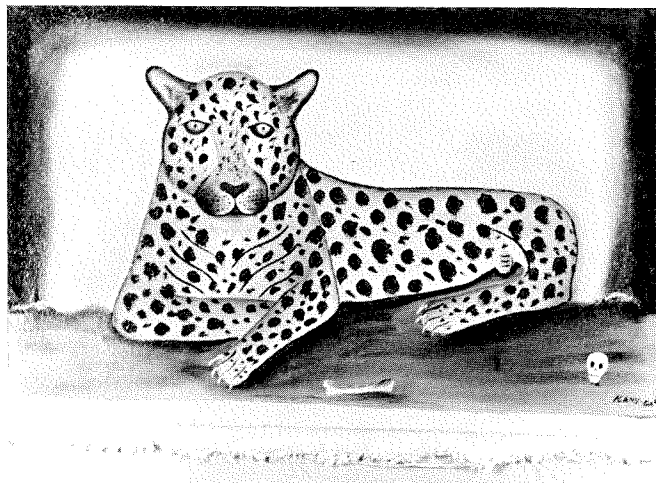


Figure 1 —things ancestral: the leopard (chui)



Figure 2 —things ancestral: the hunt

Asked, in the presence of a painting, questions such as "What is this?" a person will usually reply with a compound formed from one of the nouns signifying "a painting," a connective particle, and a noun or phrase referring to the content of the painting. Thus:

<i>tableau</i>	)	(	designation
<i>picha</i>	)	{ <i>ya</i> }	of content
<i>foto</i>	)	(	

However, the same question may be understood to be asking for the meaning or the purpose of a painting. In that case, the answer we heard most frequently was *njo ukumbusho* (lit. "it is a reminder," going on the prefix *u-*, a state rather than a thing causing to think, to reflect). This, incidentally, corresponds perfectly to the artists' consciousness of their source of inspiration which they often identified as *mawazo* 'thoughts', or *akili* 'intelligence'. Another statement we heard frequently when we asked why a particular painting was valued more than others was *iko naleta hadisi* (lit. "It brings a story").

If one approaches PAS with preconceived ideas of the visual, contemplative nature of aesthetic experience he must be surprised and perhaps disappointed by the pragmatic attitude among artists as well as among consumers regarding the relative value of a painting. "Likeness" in the sense of realistic representation is highly valued but not much talked about in abstract terms. Its importance is attested to indirectly by an almost general rejection of merely decorative or abstract painting. Asked what determines the price of a painting (which of course is only one indicator of its value), some painters and consumers would say that it is *uzuri*, its beauty. Most, however, would categorically state that it is *ibunene*, its size. Is this to be taken as a naïve, pragmatic, and "utilitarian" appreciation of the kind that was thought to be typical of the creators and consumers of "primitive art"? We think not. Precisely because the consciously recognized function of these paintings is an intellectual and spiritual one (*ukumbusho*), any particular painting may be valued as a material object. PAS does not hold the idea that the value of a painting resides primarily in the unique ways in which an artist transforms "matter" (pigments, surfaces, textures),

irrespective of the cost of materials that go into the product. There is nothing uncommon about this view. As late as in Renaissance art, quality and quantity of materials and size of the painting were decisive factors in the remuneration of painters. Only later do we get the paradoxical development

TABLE 1  
SOME TECHNICAL TERMS USED IN PAS

English	Terms Used in PAS	Derivation
painter	<i>peintre-artiste</i>	French
paint	<i>penti</i>	English*
a painting	<i>tableau</i>	French
	<i>sanamu</i>	Swahili (rare in Shaba)
	<i>picha</i>	English (picture)
	<i>foto</i>	French, English
drawing	<i>croquis</i>	French
to paint	<i>kufanya tableau</i>	Swahili, French ("to make a painting")
	<i>kupenta</i>	English (to paint), rare
	<i>kufwatula</i>	Swahili (SS <i>kufuatia</i> , to trace), now considered quaint and old-fashioned
to mix	<i>kufotola</i>	French, English ("foto")
	<i>kuchapa</i>	Swahili
to mix	<i>ku-melanger</i>	French
	<i>kuchanga</i>	Swahili
colors	<i>ma-couleurs</i>	French
	<i>rangi</i>	Swahili (rare in Shaba)
canvas	<i>nguo</i>	Swahili
	<i>amerikani</i> <sup>†</sup>	Swahili
brush	<i>pinceau</i>	French
stretcher	<i>mbao</i>	Swahili
to stretch	<i>kupopesha</i>	Swahili
frame	<i>cadre</i>	French

\*Instead of a generic term, artists often use brand names or terms for types of paint such as *latex*. Artist's oil paints are rarely used in PAS; they are referred to as *couleurs tube*.

<sup>†</sup>Two possible derivations: *amerikani* is used on the East Coast for a kind of undyed calico. In Shaba, many of the artists' pointed to the flour bags they ordinarily use as canvas; these came from U.S. aid.



Figure 3 —things past: Chief Ngongo Lutete

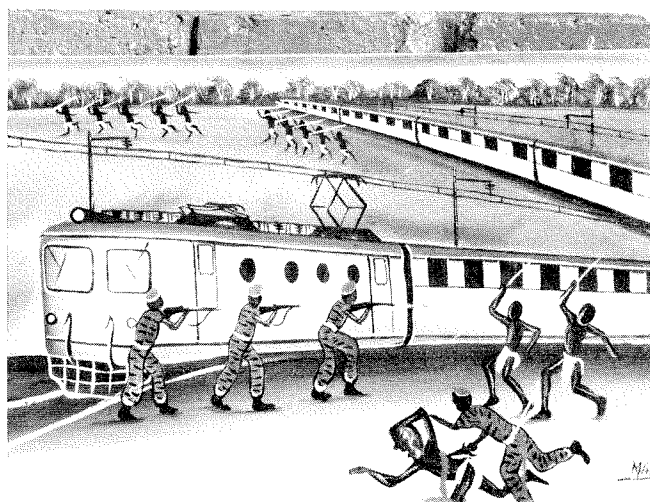


Figure 4 —things past: attack on train (mashua)

in which materials are downgraded as mere means, while certain paintings—material nonetheless—fetch astronomic prices because bourgeois thinking places the highest market value on the “unique” creation.

There are no signs of such thinking in PAS and this, we believe, also explains why artists of PAS feel no need to resort to “artsiness,” be it in the form of ostensive originality or in the use of pure-art idioms such as abstraction and the various -isms that mark the fads and fashions of Western bourgeois art.<sup>7</sup> Incidentally, with rare exceptions among artists and without any exception among consumers, our respondents thought that the *metier* of the painter was like any other. Given a list of professions to choose from, most compared the painters of PAS to craftsmen (“carpenter”) and to small shopkeepers and peddlers.

In PAS, then, “art,” “artists,” and “works of art” appear to be totally integrated in the processes of production and communication which make up the urban culture of Shaba. There is ample evidence in the survey and in interviews showing that artists enjoy no special privileges, works of art have no special “aura,” and “art” is part of a way of life.

### PAS AND ITS GENRES

If we assert that PAS is totally integrated in its sociocultural context, are we then not neutralizing its potential as a *distinctive* corpus of visual narrative whose recognized function it is to “make think,” i.e., to transcend, point beyond immediate realities? Not necessarily, because PAS reflects experience, but it also forms experience. While reflections of experience may be analyzed as *states*, or aggregates of structural isomorphisms between a society and an art form, the generation and transformation of experience can only be conceived as a *process*. Any attempt to see PAS as both expressive and constitutive of urban culture in Shaba must be capable of illuminating its processual nature.

Knowing what we know about the narrative orientation of PAS, about the circumstances of its production, of the ways of displaying it, and so forth, we are inclined to view PAS as a *process of communication*. As communication, PAS is not just a carrier of messages about some reality we tentatively called urban experience. We will try to show that PAS articulates and, in a sense, constitutes that reality. For the producer as well as for the beholder, any *particular* painting represents the *totality* of experience through dialectical mediation: a total and shared experience of urban life could neither exist nor be communicated except through particular “statements” (the particular, however, must not be confused with the unique). The social nature of PAS as communication lies in the structured relations between artists and buyers, between production and consumption. We view PAS, then, as objective products of communication-events mediating between the totality and particularities of urban life. In analogy to its use in folklore and sociolinguistics,<sup>8</sup> we shall take the term *genre* to refer to the structured nature of these complexes of conditions. Genre structures these relationships through differentiation and recursiveness. It makes it possible to identify a painting of PAS as such, to perceive it as a meaningful object, and to

recognize it as a “reminder” of a particular aspect, instance, or event of experience.

Abstract as it may sound, all this is but a more rigorous description of an approach perceived and accepted by a majority of anthropologists: the attempt to follow the lead of “folk categories” in order to understand a cultural system from within. We assume the basic cultural activity to be creation through differentiation and not just selection or ordering through classification. Therefore, any discovery and successful identification of a genre is more than just a step toward a complete catalog of PAS: it gives access to the very processes which bring forth paintings that are part of a *system* of expressions. For these reasons we want to emphasize that we do not think of “genre” as a mere classificatory device (and certainly not an arbitrary one). As an analytical tool, it is the analyst’s attempt to join, to comprehend a social praxis, a total process realizing itself through objectification and differentiation. Epistemologically, therefore, our notion of genre is closer to Marx’ concept of “classes” as differentiation of social praxis, than to the linguist’s grammatical “categories” as recursive formal properties of speech.<sup>9</sup>

Concretely, the researcher “joins” the process of PAS to the extent that he learns to identify the genre of any particular painting. Above and beyond such vague associations as, perhaps, “naïve” or “popular” art, “political” or “historical” painting, “portraits” or “landscapes,” the paintings will then convey specific and distinctive messages which, when verbalized, will allow the outsider to share and understand a significant aspect of urban culture in Shaba.

The following list of genres in PAS is far from being definitive. It is uneven in terms of linguistic information and, in some cases, of pictorial documentation supporting our claims. Most genres are labelled, but not necessarily such that all ambiguity would be excluded. Not all terms serving as labels are in fact “generic”; many have no obvious classificatory significance. All this is not surprising; what we are observing is an ongoing process, not a fully established system. Moreover, since nothing permits us to postulate that “urban experience” is uniform (i.e., without levels of consciousness in the individual, and without different kinds of consciousness among different groups of the society) we cannot expect that all identified distinctions of genres be strictly on the same logical level,<sup>10</sup> nor that they be shared by the total population. Allowing for all these sources of imprecision, we may now briefly comment on the main features of our chart (cf. Table 2).

Taking a lead from the expression *ukumbusho*, we found it useful to think of various genres as being located on three levels of thought or “memory.”<sup>11</sup> On the one we call “things ancestral” (see Figures 1, 2) we find genres which artists and consumers alike would consistently place in a collective or individual past, but without reference to specific events. Because they depict states, activities and sometimes objects associated with life in a village-past, one might be inclined to think of these paintings as “folkloric,” but since they are generalized they are among the products of PAS which are least likely to “bring a story.” Compared to other genres, they appear to be *evocative* rather than discursive-narrative. Tentatively we also included on this level a genre—religious paintings of Christian background—for which we found only

TABLE 2  
PRELIMINARY CHART OF GENRES IN PAS

"Low Class" Consumers		"Middle Class" Consumers	
Levels of "Memory"	Some Labels:		
<i>Things Ancestral</i>		ancestral	
The Bush	<i>pori, mawingu</i>	mamba muntu (the mermaid)	"Authentic" painting to express present status (from "memory" to "souvenir") landscapes village scenes hunting scenes, bushfires "traditional" people - chiefs - nudes Portraits
The Village	<i>mugini, kijiji</i>		
Hunting and Fishing	<i>kulumbata, kulopola</i>		
Powerful Animals	<i>chui, simba, tembo, kiboko, nyoka</i>		
"Chief," Mask, Elder	<i>sultani, kifwebe, muzee</i>	past	
?Christian Religious Paintings	<i>(mambo ya dini)</i>		
<i>Things Past</i>			
Arab slave traders	<i>Waarabu</i>	present	
"Suppressors"	<i>Ngongo Lutete</i>		
Colonie Belge	<i>Colonie belge, fimbo</i>		
"War" - Independence	<i>vita, mashua, tumbela, Balubakat, ba-para, ba-mercenaires</i>		
Katanga Secession			
Rebellion			
<i>Things Present</i>			
Portrait	<i>nsula, uso, picha</i>	future	
- political	<i>foto ya Mobutu</i>		
- family			
- personal			
"Commercial"			
- shop-signs			
- credit est mort			
- coiffures, food			
- nudes			
City-scape			
- smelting plant	<i>Gecamines, mumbunda na mampala, bulalo</i>		
- railway underpass			

Resident Expatriates

scanty documentation. This is an interesting fact in itself, considering that religious prints and objects of Christian (mostly Catholic) inspiration were the most important *objets d'art* displayed in African households prior to the rise of PAS.

On the level we called "things past" (see Figures 3, 4) paintings depict specific persons, localities, and events. This emphasis on *specificity* is expressed in dates, legends and inscriptions, both on the margins and on objects in the pictures, which are most frequent on paintings of this category. Most painters specializing in "things past" restrict their production to a limited number of genres in popular demand (usually not more than four or five). But we have met at least one artist who, while complying with the generic definitions of PAS, thought that his real vocation was that of a "historian." Given an opportunity to realize his ambition he did in fact paint a history of Zaire in 99 paintings, a fascinating corpus but too complex to be considered here.

Although it may not be appropriate to refer to "things present" (see Figures 5, 6) as a level of memory, the genres of this category clearly share the function of *ukumbusho* with the ones mentioned so far. Portraits, personal and political, views of the city (especially of the centrally located copper smelting plant in Lubumbashi) serve to remind the urban African of his present predicaments: life in the family, in the city, and in his country. In the genre we called "commercial" we find paintings that have caught the attention of observers in many African countries (barbers' signs especially). Being the kind of painting that a person would encounter outside his own house, they provide powerful and unifying expressions of a shared lifestyle—the

importance of drinking in bars, of bodily care and "beauty," of indebtedness at the grocer's.

Finally, there is one genre which contains clearly the most striking and the most widely appreciated paintings of PAS (see Figures 8-10). In fact, this account reverses our actual learning process. It was first *mamba muntu* 'the mermaid' which caught our attention and made us gradually discover the rest of PAS.<sup>12</sup> This is in many respects an extraordinary genre. It is, first of all, represented by an amazing number of paintings. In most households, *mamba muntu* is the first painting to be bought; in many it remains the only one. Although some variation in style, composition, and elements is clearly recognizable, these paintings are produced with a striking repetitiveness of paraphernalia, features of landscape, and color schemes. The human part of the mermaid (with few exceptions proving the rule) is always depicted as a non-African woman, most frequently as a European. In sharp contrast to the repetitiveness of pose, background, and paraphernalia, are obvious attempts in each of the paintings we have seen to achieve portrait-likeness for the face and for facial expressions.

In this paper we will not attempt to interpret the genre *mamba muntu*, but several remarkable facts necessary to understand its position in Table 2 should be mentioned. *Mamba muntu* seems to encompass all the levels of "memory" on which we located other genres of PAS: it connects past, present, and future. Not only is *mamba muntu* an all-encompassing genre, it also marks a clear boundary of taste and appreciation. While other products of PAS occasionally reach the emerging middle class among Zaireans and even expatriates, *mamba muntu* remains the one painting



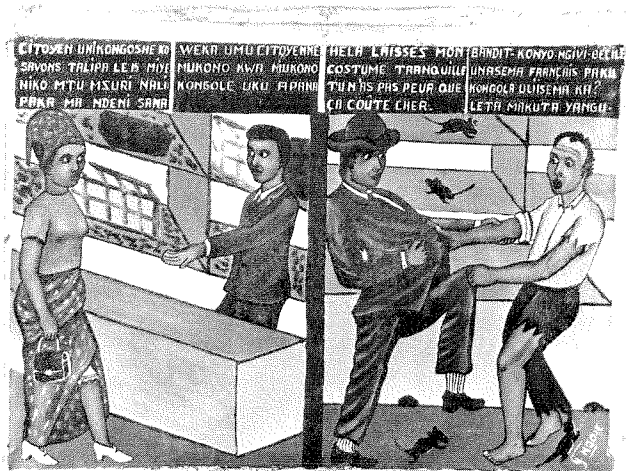


Figure 5 —things present: credit est mort

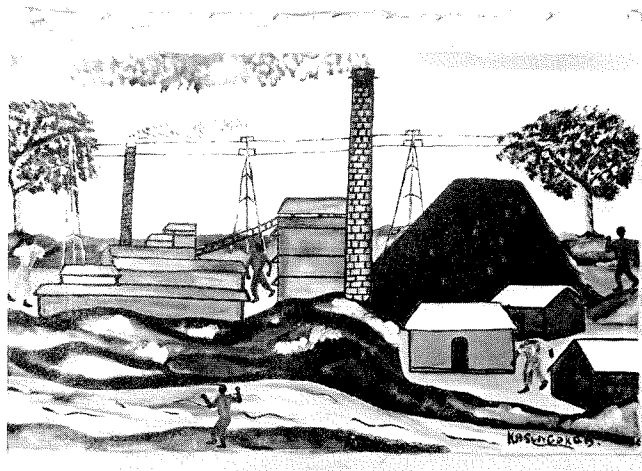


Figure 6—things present: the smelter (mumbunda na mampala)



Figure 7 —the mermaid (mamba muntu) (1)



Figure 8 —the mermaid (2)

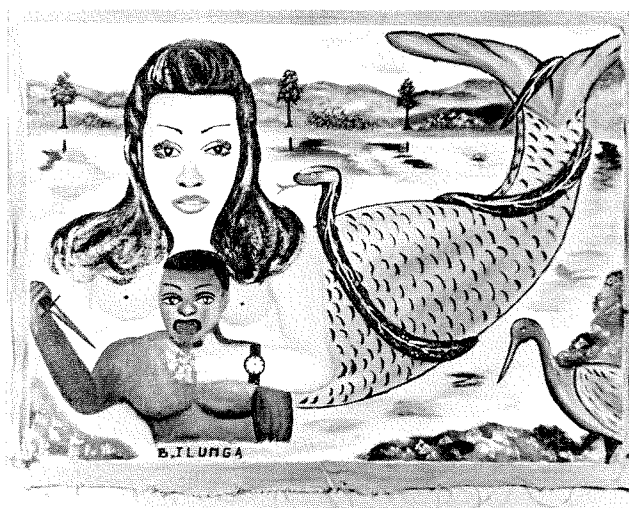


Figure 9 —the mermaid (3)

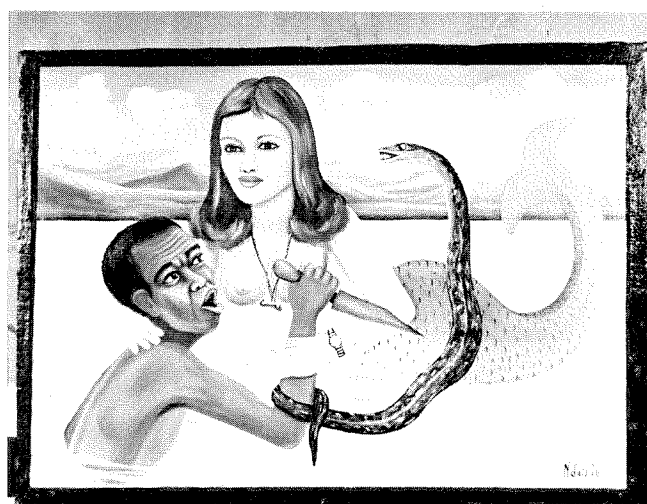


Figure 10 —the mermaid (4)

typical of the class to which most of the producers and consumers of PAS belong. *Mambu muntu* paintings are consistently rejected and even ridiculed by those who have attained higher socioeconomic status or by those whose aspirations to such a status have grown strong enough to create an ideological identification with the middle class. Thus, for the class it marks off against others, *mamba muntu* undoubtedly is a totalizing symbol, the kind of precious key every anthropologist hopes to find. We will return to these observations in our conclusions.

### THE GENRE COLONIE BELGE

PAS interests us as an expression of an African urban life experience and culture. What we have said so far was to convey our view of PAS as a total process being realized through generic differentiation. In a way, the fact that genres have such general acceptance and that they are relatively few (10-15, depending on whether one should give generic status to certain subdivisions) seems to limit the variety of expressable topics. It results, as structuralists would say, in a *selection*, a reduction of potentially unlimited aspects of reality to a system consisting of a few related elements. Such is obviously the case, although we prefer to think of this

"reduction" as a kind of bounding, i.e., a positive process of "collecting" rather than of (negative) selecting. PAS, as we shall see now, is not only bold, recursive, and generalizing; it shows itself to be surprisingly complex and subtle as soon as one considers how its different genres are realized by individual paintings.

The genre we should like to interpret in this paper is known (interchangeably) as *colonie belge*, *le temps colonial*, *état belge*, *wakati y waBelges* (the time of the Belgians), and *finbo* 'the whip' (see Figures 11-24). As a rule, the scene is a kind of yard or open plaza in front of a colonial prison. While one prisoner is being flogged by an African policeman, the white administrator looks on. Usually, other prisoners and guards are shown engaged in various activities and many paintings include other, outside persons. Paintings of the *colonie belge* are among the most widely appreciated works of PAS. In a survey among consumers of PAS designed to approach random sampling and conducted in six different locations in Lubumbashi, eight of 127 respondents actually owned a *colonie belge*, and 59 identified it as one of the preferred genres. Our sample contains a choice of 14 works by 13 different artists from four different locations in Shaba.<sup>13</sup> To the best of our knowledge (based on

TABLE 3  
SALIENT FEATURES OF THE GENRE COLONIE BELGE

Elements of Representation	Shared Features*			
	Primary	Frequency	Secondary	Frequency
<i>Actors</i>	White administrator	14	Other persons	8
	Policeman, Guards	14		
	Prisoners	14		
<i>Activities</i>				
White Administrator	Stand and watch	11	Smoke pipe	6
	Watch flogging	9		
Policeman	Flogging	13	Bugler	5
Prisoners	Being flogged	12	Fleeing	5
	Shorts pulled down	10		
<i>Setting</i>	Plaza/road	13	Village	8
	Colonial buildings	11		
	Bush	12		
<i>Signs</i>				
White Administrator	Military insignia	13	Tropical helmet	8
			White uniform and shorts	8
Policeman	Uniform (shorts & fez)	14		
	Leggings	9		
Prisoners	Striped shirts	10	Tools/Loads	6
	Shorts	12		
<i>Symbols</i>	Whip	13	Chains	6
	Belgian flag	13	Huts	7
	Colonial house	11	Letter/Book	6
	Bush	12	Road	8
<i>Inscriptions</i>	Artist's signatures	12		
	Integrated	9	On margin	6

\*Total number of paintings in sample = 14.



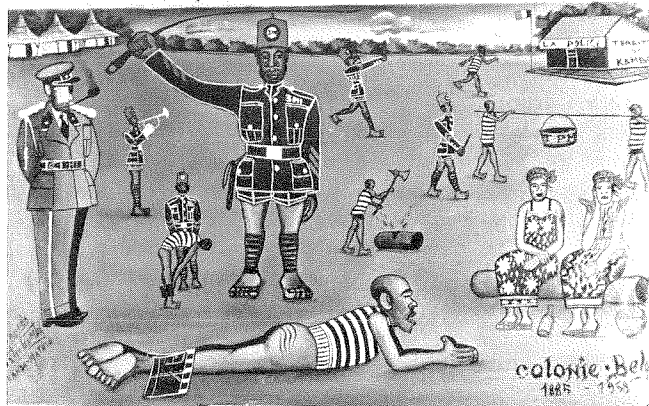


Figure 11

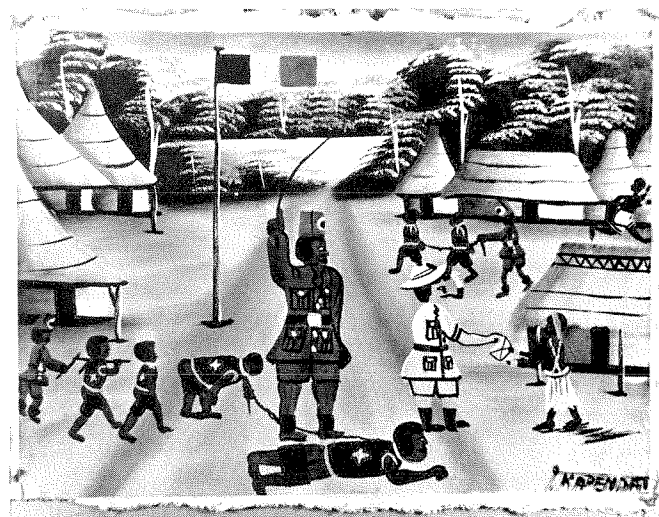


Figure 12

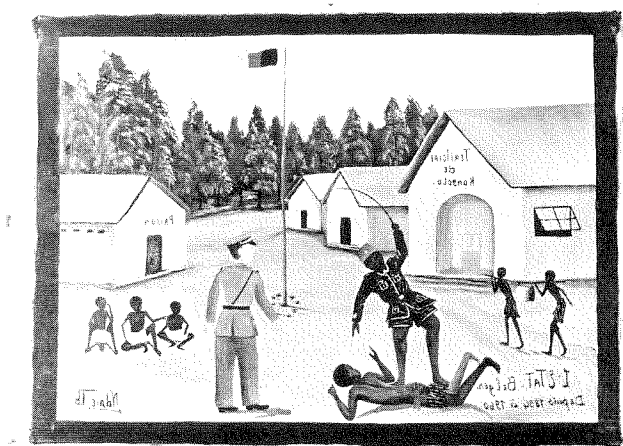


Figure 13

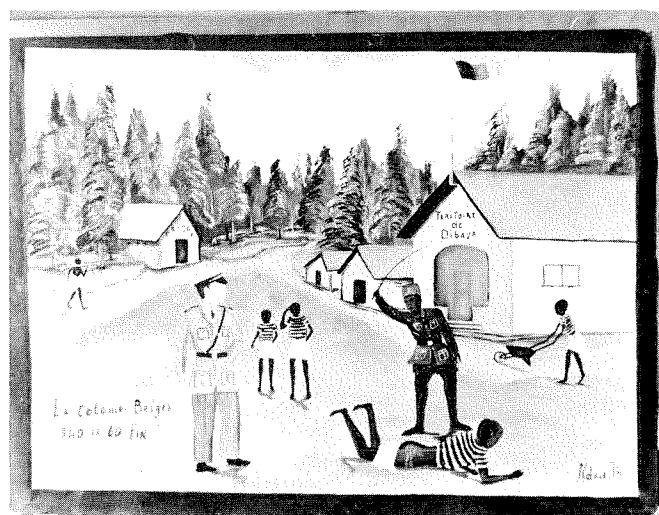


Figure 14



Figure 15

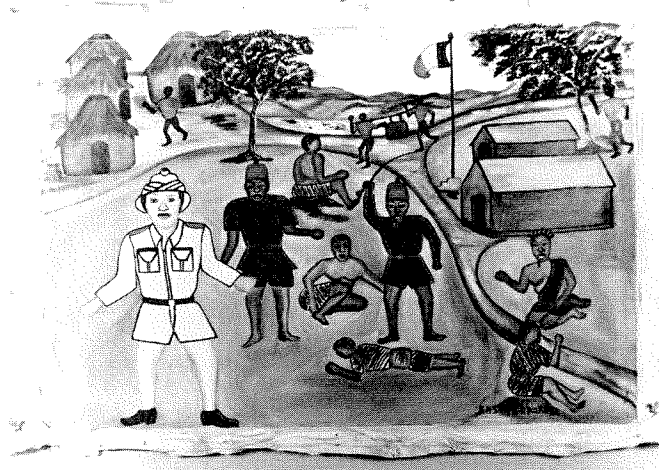


Figure 16



Figure 17

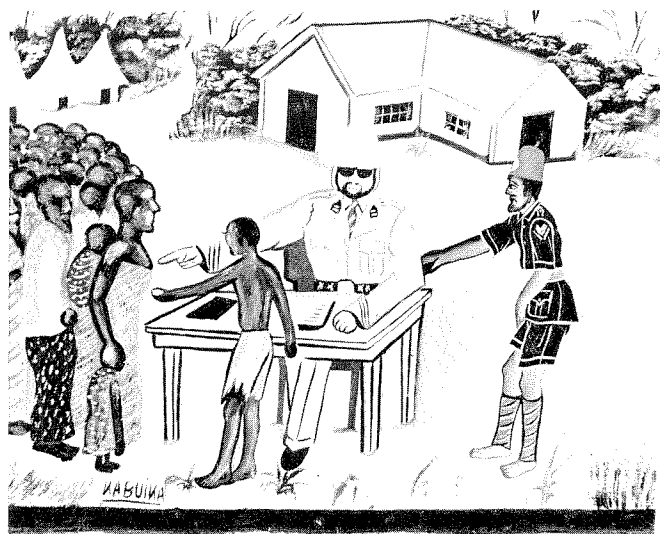


Figure 18

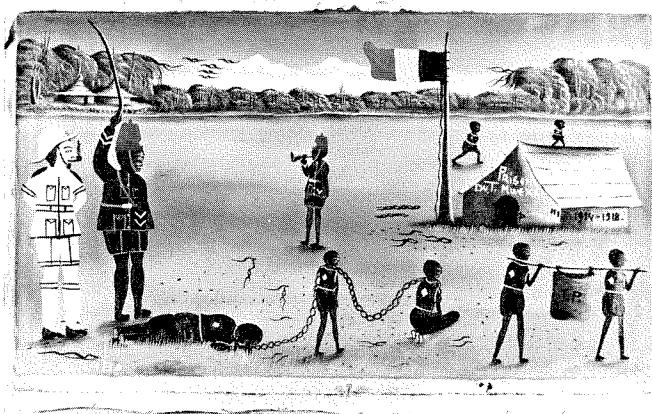


Figure 19

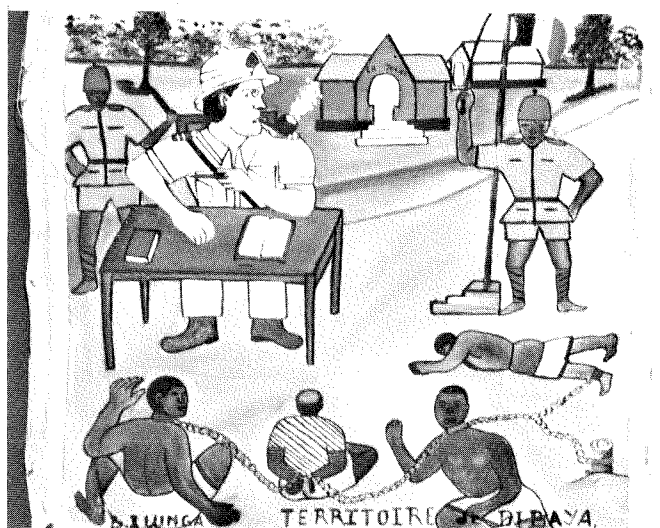


Figure 20

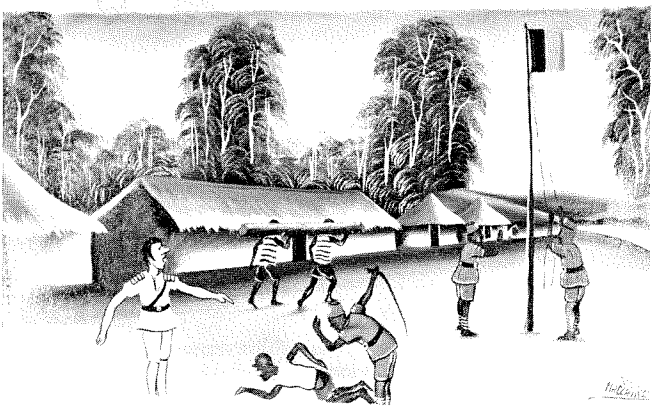


Figure 21

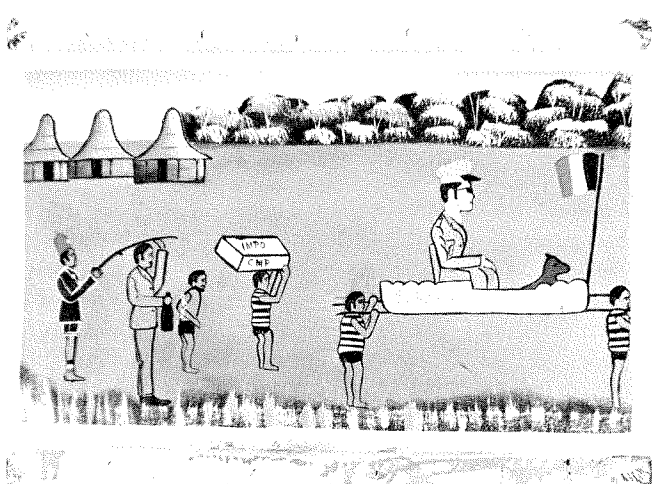


Figure 22



Figure 23

acquaintance with many other examples) these represent a fair range of variability in this genre.<sup>14</sup>

For the purpose of such quick identification, we compared the paintings in our sample in terms of the following elements of representation: actors, activities, setting, signs and symbols (roughly differentiating between denotative and connotative iconic signs), and linguistic messages in the form of inscriptions. The results are listed in Table 3 where, in order to show some degree of variation, we distinguished between primary and secondary features. That distinction is based on an arbitrary cut placed at a certain frequency of occurrence. Primary features are shared by nine or more paintings, secondary features are found in five or more paintings. Notice that some elements, such as the bush, huts, and the road, are listed both as parts of the setting and as symbols. The reason for this will become clear in later comments.

Obviously, similarities such as the ones listed in Table 3 are useful for quick, preliminary identification. But it would be contrary to our dialectical conception of PAS if we were to conclude that the genre *colonie belge* generates its message simply through aggregates of conventionalized iconic elements. As a kind of pictorial rhetoric, it uses such elements in ways which convey both, similarity and difference, agreement and contradiction. The signified content of *colonie belge*, far from being simply an equivalent response to a standardized stimulus, must be seen as *the result of a process* of elaboration which involves artists as well as viewers. It is in this sense that we postulate that the experience of *colonie belge* is constituted and not merely depicted. Thus, analysis must go beyond identifying what one might call a *factual* genre (through an inventory of features, elements, etc.); it must attempt to reveal its *operative* nature.

We shall examine three contexts apt to illuminate the dynamic processual character of PAS. First, we will show how different painters use variation in similar basic elements to create specific expressions. In a second step, we will apply a semiological model to the corpus under consideration in order to show how a given painting in fact achieves its



Figure 24

significance by articulating several "planes of expression." Finally, we will once more consider the process of generic differentiation in PAS in the light of insights gained so far.

#### *Composing colonie belge:*

##### *Artistic Variations*

To illustrate the first point—how individual painters use generic elements to construct a specific message—we will examine four aspects of composition: the uses of "perspective," of spatial arrangements, of cultural symbols, and of colors.

All painters in our sample respect one rule which may occasionally be verbalized: objects near to the viewer appear larger, objects farther removed appear smaller. All the scenes depicting life in a colonial compound have depth. Some artists concentrate on activities in the prison yard; others, by the way they place the horizon, suggest the vastness of these administrative and punitive establishments (see Figures 11, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22). What surprises is the absence of walls or other containing structures. The scene is an open plaza, and, in more than half of the paintings, a road running through the center or along the periphery suggests a kind of boundless, peripatetic presence of colonial rule. The same idea is expressed in paintings where the colonial administrator has set up his table in the plaza, and especially in Kayembe's picture of the colony on the road—the administrator and his dog being carried past the viewer (see Figure 22).

All these painters, then, master some techniques of creating the illusion of depth. On the other hand, none of them seems to make attempts to relate the picture to the viewer by means of "scientific" perspective (requiring an imaginary but definite vantage point). Cubic objects such as houses appear in parallel perspective, a kind of presentation which is often said to be typical of "primitive" painting. Furthermore, these paintings show little or no concern with relating depicted objects to a source of light. Most buildings, trees, and people cast no shadow, and where they do it is erratic, contributing little toward structuring the composition.

All this, however, is insignificant as soon as one discovers that these painters have in fact ingenious ways of suggesting "perspective"—if one defines the term as the means to link the viewer with the presented scene.<sup>15</sup> Several of them achieve this effect by violating the very rules of academic presentation which they basically respect. Invariably this heightens the realistic and dramatic quality of these paintings. Such dramatization through violation is most striking when principal actors are depicted larger than life. What surprises perhaps is that the African policeman, at least as often as the colonial official, is chosen to express the might and oppressiveness of colonial rule in this way. Without doubt, this is the case in Figures 11, 12, 15, 17, 19, 20, 22, and 23; only 13, 14, 21, and 24 make no use of this device.

Deviation from expected (or prescribed) size is but one way of dramatizing the central message of the *colonie belge*. With the possible exception of three (Figures 19, 22, 24), these paintings exhibit yet another effective way of getting the viewer involved in the scene: some or all actors are shown with their regard fixed on the central event, the beating of the prisoner. Thus the viewer, who might be tempted to contemplate individual persons separately, is constantly directed to the dramatic core and, in some cases, this is reinforced by gestures such as outstretched arms or a pointing index finger (see Figures 11, 13, 14, 17, 20, 21, 23, 24).

About half of the paintings use a device not uncommon in Western painting and film: one or several actors disregard the confines of the depicted scene and look into the eyes of the viewer. This may have different effects in the hands of different painters. In Tshibumba's *colonie* (see Figure 11), the two women on the right seem to address a silent plea to the spectator. Forlorn, motionless amidst the food and drink they brought for their relative (husband?), they project a mood of despair in stark contrast to the detached self-confidence of the colonial official on the left, puffing on his pipe, arms linked behind his back. The same motif is found in Nkulu's painting (see Figure 15) but here much of the dramatic effect is lost or altered. His peculiar way of depicting eyes frontally, regardless of the direction of the face, has all actors looking at the viewer. The entire painting forces itself on him through this common stare, yet it remains strangely lifeless, hieratic, without room for individual attitudes or emotions. Kasongo shows a prisoner framed by two guards (see Figure 16) with the official on the left and a woman on the right, all of them looking at the viewer. The impression is that of a staged scene, a kind of exhibit or *tableau vivant*. The same theatrical quality appears in details such as the contrast between the woman who squats on the ground and the oversized White in an aggressive, almost obscene pose echoed almost exactly by the African policeman behind him. In two of the paintings (see Figures 10, 13) only the prisoner(s), the victims, face the viewer. This produces a strong effect because in the same paintings most of the actors watch the beating. It is as if some of the victims were allowed to comment on the scene.

How the story of the *colonie belge* is told depends not only on the ways in which the painter leads the viewer's eyes, causing him to have a specific perspective on the scene. Subtle meanings may be expressed by arranging its components (most of them defined and standardized generically)

in spatial relations to each other. Again, possibilities of interpretation are almost infinite, depending on the degree of attention one wishes to pay to detail. We will consider only two dimensions of comparison.

The first one is the position of actors or objects with respect to the geometric center of the picture. The assumption is that, by either centering or decentering an element, the artist, consciously or unconsciously, conveys a message. Let us begin with a negative observation. The Belgian flag, a symbol which certainly is central to this genre, is centrally placed only in three of the paintings (see Figures 13, 17, 23). Perhaps this is so because its symbolic significance need not be underlined by spatial arrangements. On the other hand, the road and/or some kind of open space are always centrally placed. This may be due to a characteristic tendency in this genre to "stage" the scene of colonial domination (see our remarks in the preceding section) but it also strongly evokes the public, political nature of the experience depicted in *colonie belge*.<sup>16</sup>

The only other element that matches the road/plaza in its central position is the prisoner being beaten, often together with the policeman who does the beating. Only in one painting the colonial official is clearly in the center (see Figure 18); in all others he is either slightly off center, or clearly on the side of the picture (for some reason on the *left* side in 9 of the 14 paintings). Together with the fact that he is mostly depicted as an onlooker (his strongest gesture is an outstretched arm) this off-center position makes the colonial official seem strangely remote from the beating which is the dramatic core in almost all of the paintings. To be sure, the White is associated with powerful symbols evoking colonial times<sup>17</sup> and may not need a central position for the same reasons as the Belgian flag. On the other hand, none of the painters bestows on him the kind of meanness and active cruelty that make the African policeman a target of rejection. One wonders whether this is not meant to evoke the remoteness and abstract nature of colonial power so often discussed in colonial times.

Positioning with regard to the geometric center of the picture is not the only means to evaluate a painter's use of space (if only, because the notion of a center and of symmetrically extended space around it is not a proven cultural universal). Equally important, and more interesting, is the position of *elements in relation to each other*. Significance, in this case, will be created through opposition, contrast, alignment and any number of spatial arrangements resulting in (or disturbing) a balance of iconic elements. Arrangements of this kind presuppose a kind of decomposition of the principal theme into discrete elements or clusters of elements. This is apparent in the setting (road/plaza, bush, colonial buildings, village huts) and even more so with regard to actors and activities. The paintings in our sample contain an average of almost ten persons and, with the exception of two (see Figures 18, 22), the actors are shown to be involved in a number of sub-plots to the main scene. For instance, Tshibumba's *colonie* is composed of seven distinct scenes: flogging (official, policeman, prisoner), a bugler, a policeman chasing a prisoner who runs away, a policeman guarding two prisoners carrying water, a prisoner chopping wood, and the two visiting women (see Figure 11).

In what way are elements arranged in spatial relation to



each other and what is the significance of these arrangements? Three possibilities can easily be recognized:

*Upper vs. Lower Part.* This should not be confused with perspectival presentation. In this section we consider segments of a picture's surface, not (the illusion of) depth. It appears that only two or three of the paintings are structured by an emphasis on a horizontal division of space. Both Mutombo and Kayembe (see Figures 19, 22) oppose the *colonie* in the lower part of the picture to the symbols of what the colony controls—village and bush—in the upper part (for reasons of perspective the Belgian flag in Mutombo's painting reaches into the upper portion but this does not affect the basic division). Ilunga (see Figure 20) introduces a kind of proscenium with three prisoners in the lower portion. This is in keeping with other paintings of his in which he likes to reserve this place for actors who, either through their attitudes or through the direction of their regard, seem to comment on the scene.

*Left vs. Right.* Opposition and contrast along a vertical axis is predominant in only one painting (see Figure 18) where the villagers on the left face the colony on the right. Notice that space is allocated in such a way that the villagers appear crowded together and pushed to the side by the *colonie* occupying three-fourths of the space.

*Complex Oppositions.* Quite clearly, the majority of the paintings show complex arrangements such that both a vertical and horizontal axis may have to be considered. The best example for this is Tshibumba's *colonie* (see Figures 11, 25). Here the central scene depicting prison life and culminating in the flogging, appears to be enclosed in a circle of symbols in relationships of opposition ( $R_1, R_2, R_3, R_4$ ) which may be "read" by starting at any point. Notice that this is basically achieved by diagonally arranged relations of equivalence ( $R_{11}$  and  $R_{22}$ ). Without pushing interpretation too far, we would suggest that the position of the bush (as country contested between village and colony) and of the beaten prisoner (man contested between relatives and bureaucracy) is not accidental. As a relation, they express an opposition between man and nature ( $R_5$ ). As terms of a relationship, they can be conceived as mediations between opposites, but as "mediations" which dramatize and do not reconcile. Thus, humiliation, toil and violence which make the substance of the *colonie* are framed and contained by a kind of meta-statement consisting of discontinuous symbols in opposition. This creates an impression of balance and of inescapability which seems to us more powerful than could be conveyed by prison walls.

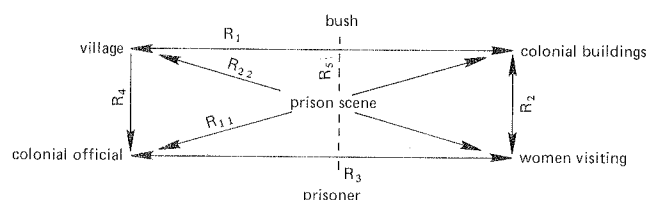


Figure 25—spatial arrangements in Tshibumba's *colonie belge*

The devices and techniques discussed so far have been of a general order; they can be identified and described with the help of a number of geometrical and art-historical concepts (although professional students of perspective and art history would be expected to give a more thorough analysis than ours). Because they result in establishing arrangements and relationships, they tend to affect the picture as a whole; this is why we approached them as aspects of "composition." In our search for ways in which individual artists arrive at creations which are both generic and unique, we will now consider the use of symbols which, by virtue of their powerful cultural connotations, add a dimension to PAS that could easily escape the outside observer. Because our knowledge of African culture in Shaba remains imperfect we are certain to overlook a number of them; others we have been able to identify through experience, and often with the help of the artists.

*Take gestures.* Although it is a commonplace that people who do not understand each others' language resort to gesticulation, anthropologists have become increasingly aware of the fact that gestures are culturally coded. For instance, placing one's chin in the cupped hand while the elbow rests on the knee or on a thigh (see Figures 11 and possibly 15) probably suggests thoughtfulness to us. In Shaba it expresses grief. So do hands clasped over or behind one's head (see Figure 23). Arms crossed on the lap not only suggest inactivity but also attentiveness, a gesture by which women show their submission (see Figures 11, 15). The person on the right side of Kasongo's painting (see Figure 16) is an almost exact copy of another of his paintings in which he (according to his comments) depicts the bereavement of a divorced or abandoned woman. To use the index finger, pointing at a person, or flexing it to call a person, is an insult by the standards of this culture (see Figures 13, 18, 21). Consider also the scene on the right side of Kapenda's painting (See Figure 12). The administrator and a person marked by his attire as the village chief are seen exchanging a letter. It is not clear who gives and who receives the letter, unless one knows that the culturally appropriate gestures are one hand for giving and two for receiving an object.

We were also intrigued by the frequency with which prisoners are depicted as being bald or balding (see Figures 11, 14, 15, 16, 17). An obvious explanation would be that prisoners were shaved as in many other places of the world. But this conflicts with the fact that the painters in our sample use baldness selectively. Natural baldness is relatively rare and it would thus be an even stronger sign of maturity or old age than in our culture. On the other hand, to shave one's head (among women as well as men) is a custom associated with mourning. We may assume, then, that baldness, as a cultural symbol, accentuates the degree of humiliation and evokes a diffuse sense of sadness.

Similarly, some of the activities depicted have cultural connotations beyond their obvious significations. On several paintings (see Figures 11, 13, 16, 19), prisoners carry water, a task traditionally reserved for women. To impose it on men implies shame and humiliation.

Color, similarly to perspective and the spatial arrangements of the composing elements of *colonie belge*, is used to convey information and accentuate the pictorial message. The colors of the Belgian flag (black, yellow, and red) are

systematically repeated as composing elements of the clothing of the policeman (see Figures 11, 12, 18, 19, 22, 24) or of the policeman and the prisoners (see Figures 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 23). In some paintings (see Figures 13, 17, 21, 23) black is replaced by dark bluish-gray, which may indicate a change in colonial uniform, or simply a lack of black paint. Here again, it is the policemen and the prisoners, and not the white colonial official, who carry, symbolically, the colors of the colonial rule. The majority of the paintings (see Figures 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 24) depict the white colonial officer in white, some in gray uniforms (see Figures 11, 13, 14, 22, 23), indicating a different historical period as well as the intensification of colonial rule in the transition from white-clothed administrative (missionary?) to gray-clothed military types. Most important for us is that color distinctions in the clothing of the colonial officer and the policeman and prisoners are systematically maintained, even if, as in one painting (see Figure 23) they are reduced to the red fez of the African policeman.

In our work on PAS we have not come to a point where we could offer more detailed and conclusive observations on the use of colors, but we feel fairly confident in stating that, on a conscious level, colors play a minor role in composition. In interviews, several artists insisted on the primacy of *dessin* (design) over color. Notice that, with the exception of Ndaie, Laskas, Mutombo, Kalema, and perhaps Matchika, all painters use lines to mark the contours of all or some objects and persons, often coloring the surfaces thus created evenly without much regard for shades. An extreme case is Nkulu whose technique approaches brush drawing (see Figure 15).

On the other hand, skill in mixing colors is recognized as a mark of craftsmanship. This may have to be seen in contrast to a tradition which is accustomed to the use of plain colors and which values a basic triad of black, white, and red. From conversations with the painters we got the sense that "mixing" was felt to be a modern accomplishment and that the ideal is to approach the natural colors of the objects depicted. Occasionally, though, one finds interesting deviations from that ideal. One of them reflects the socio-economic context of PAS. Almost always when we pointed out deviations from an expected color scheme, the artists would tell us that they ran out of a certain color, or had no money to buy it, or that it was not available on the market. Some found ingenious solutions<sup>2</sup> (to paint the sky, Tshibumba mixed ball-point ink with a white base on the canvas); all of them were constantly concerned about their supply. Thus, cultural traditions and economic conditions, as well as a canon developing in the context of both, limit the use of colors in PAS. By implication this puts artistic weight on design and content.

This brings us to a final observation immediately relevant to our genre. In one painting (see Figure 15), colonial official and Africans are not distinguished in terms of skin color. The same color is used for the uniforms of official, policeman and prisoners, and the painting is extremely reduced in other respects. We also know, from the circumstances of its acquisition, that the painter thought of himself as a beginner. But quality is not at issue here and we take "inferior" paintings of this kind to be powerful indicators of the degree to which *colonie belge* has become standardized and firmly imprinted in the minds of people in Shaba. It has become a

message which may be coded almost without redundancy. We will return to this point in the following section.

Let us summarize the suggestions and conclusions resulting from our attempt to compare the ways in which individual painters create specific realizations of *colonie belge*. In their uses of perspective, most of them depict colonial rule as a vast and peripatetic presence. The prison is not a place where some people are locked up; it invades the lives of people. Several artists consciously violate rules of perspective to dramatize oppressiveness and brutality although, strangely enough, the white administrator is rarely shown as the chief villain. Almost all the paintings have a staged, theatrical quality, and several use devices that involve the viewer with the scene: *colonie belge* is anything but "monumental" historical painting; it claims immediate, present relevance. Subtle shades of meaning are conveyed by spatial arrangements. The logic of relationships between iconic elements may thus project a sense of the inescapability of colonial rule, expressing at the same time its remote and abstract bureaucratic nature. Cultural symbols highlight humiliation and grief and create an overall feeling of cultural intimacy. *Colonie belge* is not any kind of oppression; it has a special meaning for the artists of PAS and their customers. And finally, paintings of this genre have become powerful evocative messages that need little elaboration because they are manifestly embedded in common understandings.

#### *Decomposing colonie belge: Semiological Structures*

The majority of the paintings of *colonie belge* contain linguistic messages of various kinds. Leaving aside the artist's signature, numerous inscriptions, either on the margin, or on objects depicted, contain information about topic, time, place, functions of buildings, and so forth. What is the purpose of these messages? Our analysis up to this point has clearly shown that both, the generic content and the specific intentions of individual artists, are unambiguously rendered by iconic means. Are linguistic messages simply redundant? Or are they the kind of embellishments one expects to find on naive and childrens' paintings as if inscriptions and titles were to make up for a lack of precision or for the artist's insecurity about his capacities? For several reasons we doubt that it is as simple as that.

Even a casual glance at the inventory compiled in Table 4 shows that, perhaps with one exception (where the painter includes his address), all inscriptions provide a commentary on the subject as a whole rather than on specific items. This is evident when the artist designates the genre (e.g., "Colonie Belge") and the historical period (e.g., "1885-1959"). The same intention may be inferred when he selects a salient aspect of colonial administration such as the most important territorial subdivision ("territoires de . . .") or one of the most obvious repressive institutions (e.g., "police," "prison"). It even applies to seemingly cryptic signs such as "IMPO" (for *impôts* 'taxes') and "TP" (for *travaux publiques* 'public works', often involving labor conscription). Our claim that these messages aim at the total subject is reinforced by the fact that it makes apparently little difference where exactly they appear, on objects or on the margin. Generic title, dates, locations, all occur in both ways (see Table 4).

An even stronger argument may be derived from the fact



that inscriptions are in French. As linguistic messages they are addressed to a population which uses an African language in daily life and French mostly in contacts with various bureaucracies. This gives them a connotative significance: colonial language symbolizes the colony as such.

If it is true that these linguistic messages aim at the totality of the iconic message and, through it, at the totality of the designated content, we should conclude with R. Barthes that

the words as much as the images are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is achieved on a higher level, the level of history, of anecdote, and of interpretation [1964:45; our translation].

In the essay from which we just quoted, Barthes analyzes an advertisement consisting of iconic as well as linguistic elements. Many suggestions and conclusions flowing from his semiological approach could be applied to the corpus under consideration. We, too, distinguished in substance, if not terminologically, "denotative signs" (those that are in an immediate analogous relationship to objects depicted) and "connotative symbols" (those that demand for their interpretation what Barthes calls "*un savoir presque anthropologique*," 1964:42). Undoubtedly, the specific cultural significance we try to elaborate for the genre *colonie belge* is found where connotation takes off, so to speak, from denotative signs. As regards the inner coherence of connotative symbols, we agree with Barthes that it reflects a "common domain,"

that of ideology which can only be unique for a given society and history whatever the signifiers of connotation may be... [1964:49].

Finally, we also think that specific expressions of a given ideology may constitute a kind of "*rhétorique*" (1964:49),

and this is perhaps the point where iconic signification rejoins linguistic signification. The linguistic messages on the paintings of *colonie belge* do in fact "anchor" (1964:44) the images in a social discourse about the colonial experience and with Barthes we may see in this "a technique . . . to fight the terror of uncertain signs" (1964:44).

Of course, the cardinal principle in a semiological analysis is that the signifiers must be discontinuous so as to be codable and to be—true to structuralist dogma—convertible into "culture" (1964:42, 48f.). In this context, it matters little whether or not we agree with structuralist nature-culture dualism.<sup>19</sup> Our material invites us, though, to take a further step in applying semiological analysis which, if we may anticipate the result, will lead us to identify a surprising connotation of *colonie belge*.

In *Elements of Semiology*, Barthes introduces the notion of "staggered systems"—ways in which relationships between expression and content may be represented as interlocking "planes." Let us briefly recapitulate the principles (cf. Barthes 1970:89ff.):

A system of signification can be described as a relationship R between a plane of expression E and a plane of content C: ERC. In two ways, systems of this kind can become in turn part of higher-level systems. Either ERC becomes the plane of expression of a second system—(ERC)RC—in which case the second system is the plane of *connotation* of the first, or the first system becomes the plane of content of a second system—ER(ERC)—in which case the second system is a *metalanguage* of the first. Figure 26 shows how this might be applied to our corpus. Although the cut-off point is somewhat arbitrary, let us assume that the series of staggered systems is grounded in what Barthes calls the "real system" (1970:93), i.e., a first-level system in

TABLE 4  
INSCRIPTIONS ON COLONIE BELGE

Figure/Painter	Marginal	Integrated	Signature
11 Tshibumba	Colonie Belge 1885-1959 <sup>18</sup>	La Police, Territoire de Kambove	x
12 Kapenda	—	—	x
13 Ndaie (1)	la Colonie Belges. Depuis 1940 à 60 Fin	Prison, Territoire de Dibaya	x
14 Ndaie (2)	L'ETAT Belges Depuis 1894 à 1960	Prison, Territoire de Kongolo	x
15 Nkulu	Colonie Belge 1889-1959	La Police, Territoire de Kasenga	x
16 Kasongo	—	—	x
17 Laskas	artist's address	Territoire de Kabalo	x
18 Kabwika	—	—	x
19 Mutombo	—	Prison du T. Mwaka 1914-18, T.P.	x
20 Ilunga	Territoire de Dibaya	La Police	x
21 Matchika	—	—	x
22 Kayembe	—	IMPO, CMP	0
23 Anonymous	—	—	0
24 Kalema	—	Congo Belge	x

which the contents of experience are *denoted* by continuous (analogous) images and by discontinuous (digital) linguistic signs. The next higher level would then be constituted when these fundamental relationships are absorbed by second-order systems as their planes of expression and of content respectively. Thus, while  $ER_1C$  describes basic iconic expressions and their contents,  $(ER_1C)R_2C$  would be the level on which we locate a given *painting* as the realization of an iconic system. In this case, the plane of expression would no longer be considered as an agglomerate of images; it is now an ensemble of discontinuous signs and symbols expressing similarly discontinuous elements of experience (persons, objects, acts, attitudes, moods, etc.). To the extent that such discontinuity reflects cultural coding,  $R_2$  is to  $R_1$  in a relationship of connotation (but keep in mind that there is no connotation without a denotative "rest"; cf. Barthes 1964:50). A painting of *colonie belge*, therefore, never simply depicts colonial experience(s). Even at this lowest level of interpretation—taking a painting as a discrete object and disregarding its context within PAS—it points to specific *forms of experience* which are mediated and constituted by a culture.

However, our entire approach rests on the assumption that paintings of PAS are not perceived and valued as individual objects but rather as collective "reminders" of *kinds* of experience or knowledge. The notion of genre was introduced to express this. We can now understand its function more clearly if we hypothesize that the painting ( $ER_2C$ ) becomes the plane of expression of a higher system— $(ER_2C)R_3C$ . This opens up a highly interesting perspective. What would in this case be the content signified by the genre *colonie belge*? Clearly, it could be neither actual, individual experience as in  $ER_1C$ , nor simply any kind of culturally coded experience as in  $ER_2C$ . We surmise that it must be a significant and especially meaningful kind of collective memory of colonial experience. As memory it is an aspect of *present consciousness* and that means that it is, historically, embedded in *post-colonial experience*. According to semiological rules, *colonie belge* as a genre of PAS connotes a level of present consciousness—a "level" because it seems that  $ER_3C$  might be linked to a still higher level,  $(ER_3C)R_4C$ , in which case we would have reached the totality of urban experience in Shaba (of which "post-colonial experience" would be an aspect).

Semiological analysis, then, gives valuable confirmation to our findings in that it provides us with an inverse "reading" of the levels we distinguished when we introduced the notion of a process of generic differentiation. Beyond this, it has a revelatory, critical function in that it exposes a non-obvious fact. Colonial experience, although chronologically a thing of the past, remains an active element of present consciousness. Paintings of *colonie belge* express the omnipresence of powerful, organized, and bureaucratic oppression of the little man as he feels it now, in a system whose decolonization remains imperfect and which constantly uses the former oppressor as a negative counterimage. *Colonie belge* is an eminently political genre. It may lack characteristics usually associated with political art (posters especially), such as concrete agitatorial messages, a clear separation of good and evil forces.<sup>20</sup> Despite this (or because of this?), it conveys a powerful political message. The colony (symbolized by the

African policeman as much as by the White) is present now; the little man is still being kicked around, while the society to which he feels close (symbolized by his family and the village) remains as impotent as before.

Interviews with painters and customers confirm our interpretation that *colonie belge* concerns the present through the past. Here is but one of the many statements that could be cited:

Q: What is the name of this kind of painting?

R: This kind of painting, that is to say, the name of these paintings is *authenticité*.

Q: *Authenticité*. Don't some call it *colonie belge*? But you thought of it as . . .

R: *Authenticité*.

Q: How is that, *authenticité*?

R: . . . our things of old, the ones we used to have.

Q: When people order such a painting, how do they ask for it? Make me a . . .

R: *état belge*.

*Authenticité* has been (since 1972) the key slogan of President Mobutu's politics of cultural independence. It calls for a positive attitude to the African heritage which was suppressed by colonial domination. The meaning given to it by a popular painter is both ironic and profound. True independence must be able to face the shadows of the past.

How does PAS as a visual form relate to verbal expression? In Figure 26 we indicate that relationships between the two may be conceived as levels of metalanguage. This presents little difficulty as long as one considers only the two intermediate levels in our schema. We have already shown that PAS and the genre *colonie belge* specifically are connected with popular speech through a terminology (terms for materials, techniques etc., cf. Table 1; labels for genres, cf. Table 2). This can be expressed as a relationship,  $(ER_2C)R_{22}E$ , implying that such a terminology serves to make statements about the elements of the lower system. On a higher level, *colonie belge* is linked to an (as yet not fully known) body of narrative lore. Remember that the sign of a good painting in PAS is that it "carries a story." This relationship would then be rendered as  $(ER_3C)R_{33}E$ , and folklore, or at least a specific kind of folklore (stories about colonial times), could be interpreted as a metalanguage which permits one to speak about representations of colonial experience.<sup>21</sup>

At this point, semiological analysis runs into insurmountable difficulties. If the relations are in fact as shown in our schema, we cannot see exactly how linguistic signs relate to iconic signs unless one subscribes to the untenable assumption that, even on the level of the "real system," linguistic signs and symbols are meta-signs of iconic signs (this was rejected above). It is equally inconceivable that, on the highest level, "social discourse"—the totality of speaking about life experience in urban Shaba—could be a "metalanguage." According to Barthes, metalanguage is a decipherer's language; society "holds the plane of connotation" (1970:94).

An alternative would be to start semiological description on the level of the "real system" with two, not one, systems;

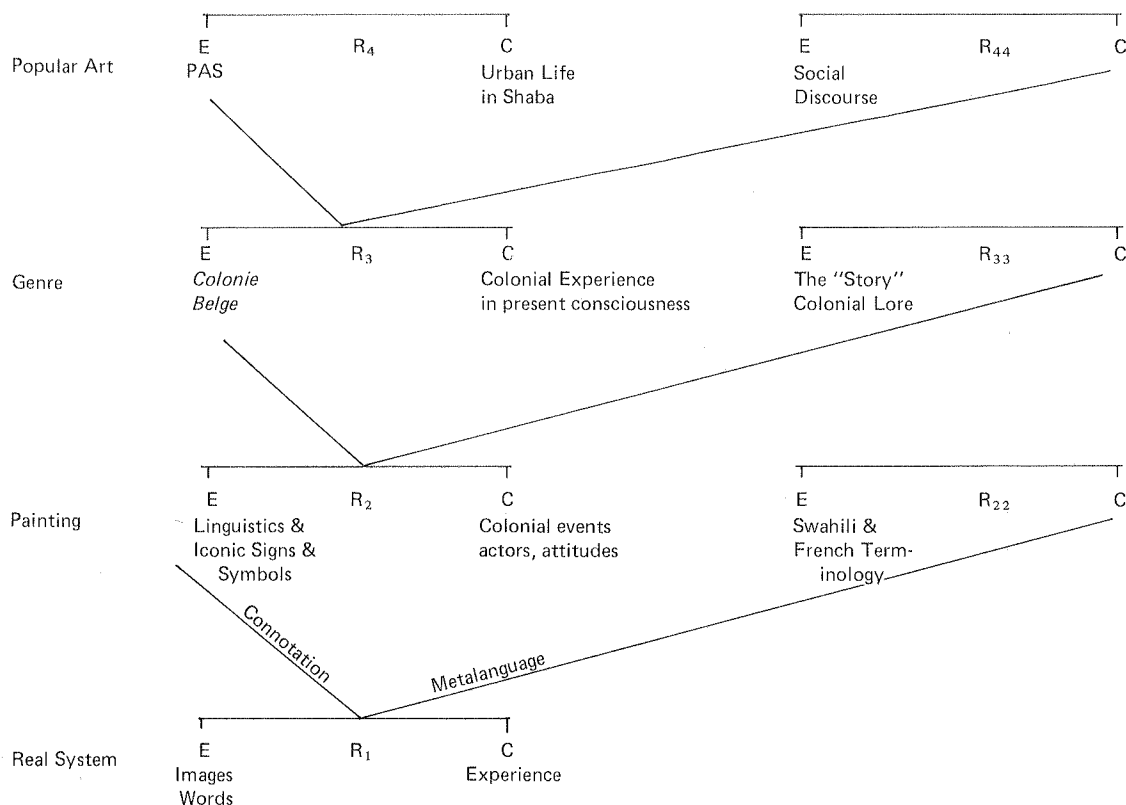


Figure 26 —“staggered systems”: the semiology of colonie belge

one would be iconic presentation, the other language. From these two systems one might then develop two series of staggered systems. Such a parallelism, while not without interest in itself, would be in contradiction to our findings as well as to Barthes' own assertion (cf. quote p. 14). Contrary to his professed belief, Barthes' semiology does not contain in itself a theory permitting one to understand iconic and linguistic expressions as constitutive of a “higher syntagm.” He is correct when he states that this ought to be the case, but it does not follow from his premises.

One reason is that semiology, as much as other structuralist approaches, is “decompositional”; it reifies oppositions such as analogous and digital, continuous and discontinuous, syntagmatic and paradigmatic, nature and culture. This can be useful descriptively and may even reveal deeper relationships hidden from superficial inspection. But it fails to anchor its series of systems of signification either in individual realizations (e.g., the creation of a painting) or in social process (e.g., urban life in Shaba). It does not allow us to conceive of iconic and linguistic expressions (and many others, one might add) as *constitutive* of a synthetic and historical consciousness which we presented as a process of transformation of sign systems. We shall briefly return to this point in our conclusions.

#### CONCLUSIONS: STRUCTURE AND PROCESS IN PAS

This paper has been an attempt to present as a continuous process and coherent system a kind of cultural expression we encountered in the form of paintings which depicted strange

topics, showed up in unexpected places and, initially, seemed to have little significance beyond the charming and endearing qualities that naive painting has for those who have grown tired of “big” art.

We will formulate some conclusions presently, but before we do this, we should indicate that we are very much aware of problems and areas which this attempt does not cover. Some lie beyond our competence, such as a more “technical” analysis of composition, techniques, and materials, and more thorough art-historical comparison. Others simply demand further study of our materials or further research in the field. We had to be selective in choosing only one genre for detailed interpretation. We made little use of recorded interviews and conversations with artists and of field notes documenting the circumstances in which we encountered individual paintings. A questionnaire-based survey among consumers of PAS in nine localities and/or groups awaits more rigorous analysis.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, we must eventually place PAS in a wider context and explore its contrasts to colonial *art populaire*, and contemporary “academic” painting, its relationships to similar forms in other parts of Zaire and of Africa, and its place among other popular arts—oral lore, popular writing, theater, live and recorded music, and dance. All these are very much alive in Zaire, and many are more vigorous and visible than popular painting, especially to the outsider.<sup>23</sup>

#### Structures and Contradictions

We maintained that one way in which PAS reveals its identity is its class orientation. In Table 2, we suggested that a definite boundary marks off preferences of the Zairean

middle class (and of the expatriates) against those of the urban masses. Is PAS, then, simply the cultural correlate to socioeconomic structures of the wider society? Is it, since it belongs to the masses, "proletarian art"? As we said at the outset, we do not think that there exists in present Shaba a kind of cultural (and not just socioeconomic) alienation and a kind of antagonistic consciousness which would make "proletarian" a meaningful attribute. If there is at all a process of proletarianization, it is an incomplete one, as Mwabila (n.d.) has argued in his recent work on class consciousness in Lumbumbashi.

It is true, however, that socioeconomically, there has always been an enormous gap between the working masses and those Africans who came to occupy managerial or other leading positions in government and industry. Mukenge (1973) has shown that this was the case in colonial times and that it continues to influence, as a pervasive pattern, the distribution of wages and even the size of independent enterprise since independence.

On the other hand, extensive research among wage earners in Shaba convinced us that the objective conditions which separate the masses from the privileged few are not just passively "reflected" in their consciousness. Many workers, craftsmen, and small clerks constantly hope for a chance to accumulate a small initial capital and free themselves from dependent labor. The artists of PAS themselves are but one example of this. Of course, for most people this remains a goal they never attain and is easily transformed into a kind of collective reverie. We think that PAS expressed this in the all-important genre of *mamba muntu*, the mermaid. It is impossible to render the complex meaning of these paintings in a short formula. At this juncture, however, we must briefly speak about the mythical-magical set of beliefs associated with them.

*Mamba muntu* is not so much a person as a generic being which is said to live in many lakes and rivers of the country (although a given account may insist on a specific locality). Sometimes, *mamba muntu* comes to the shore to rest and to comb her hair. The one who is lucky enough to obtain a lock, her comb, or any object associated with her, may expect to see her soon in a dream. He may then use these objects as a pawn and in addition he may have to promise absolute fidelity to *mambu muntu* (to the exclusion of other partners) and silence about his encounter in which case he will become suddenly very rich.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever the many implications of this story are, as a myth it bridges the gap between absolute poverty and relative ease. It "explains" (of course it doesn't, it only expresses a fact of life) why this society offers little opportunity to work one's way up, and why wealth always appears to come suddenly and in a massive form.

In any attempt to understand the social significance of PAS, the genre *mamba muntu* must play a key role. It is, as we said when we first introduced it, a "totalizing" genre. Yet it is not the only one, nor is it the only one which lends itself to interpretation in terms of a class-orientation. Paintings of the *colonie belge* are less numerous but they, too, are only found among the masses. In fact, we rarely saw any painting of the genres classed as "things past" (cf. Table 2) in middle-class homes. We will have to say more about this later on.

The situation is different when it comes to genres classed as "things ancestral" (cf. Table 2). Two observations can be made. First, the landscapes and some other genres (village life, hunting scenes, perhaps also chiefs and other traditional symbols) are the only works by artists of PAS which may occasionally be sold across socioeconomic boundaries, to the middle class and to expatriates. Second, even if this may be relatively rare, the middle class and the expatriates appreciate the *contents* of these genres, although they tend to buy their paintings from artists who work in academic and "decorative" styles and cater only to this class.<sup>25</sup>

If both the formation of classes (and of class ideologies, including aesthetics) and the emergence of PAS are to be conceived as processes, this raises an interesting question. Should the *paysage*, the generalized, exotic, folkloric "African" painting be on a higher level of aesthetic development as (or because) the class that prefers it is on a higher socioeconomic level? Obviously not. Historically, pirogue-and-palmtree paintings were around *before* the other genres of PAS appeared. This confirms to us that PAS is fundamentally a process of *differentiation* and that, in this respect, it surpasses the arts of the upper class. It has been creative in that it developed new forms and contents. Urban life in Shaba is richer in visual expressions (and presumably also in topics of discourse related to these expressions) than it was in colonial times. If PAS is accepted as a document, urban mass culture in Shaba shows few signs of impoverishment and alienation.

#### *Processes and Contents*

PAS, then, is not a mere reflex or echo of socioeconomic structures. It is a complex process in which a society articulates and communicates its consciousness of its origins, its past and its present predicament. Anthropologically, it is a phenomenon of great importance, a key to understanding culture and ideology in these towns. All this, however, should not create the impression that this art is essentially a concentrated, strained, and organized effort to attain certain societal and individual goals. The painters of PAS are not thinlipped ideologues; they paint to make a living. Their customers are not *engagé* seekers of deep historical meaning; they buy a painting because there is an empty wall in their living room, because they like what they see, or because they want to spend, finally, a buck on something that is not absolutely necessary for survival. Similarly, that PAS is so manifestly structured in terms of genres and individual efforts at composition, should not project an image of stylistic rigor. PAS is playful and imaginative, it has room for irony and humor. Because it values content more than form and competence, new subjects may be introduced at any time. Anyone may try his luck as a painter, and there are no sharp distinctions between full-time professionals and "Sunday painters." Especially in the workers' settlements, many hold a regular job and derive an additional source of income from painting mermaids, Belgian colonies, and portraits.<sup>26</sup>

These observations may be better understood if we return to our initial thesis: PAS is part of communicative processes in contemporary Zairean society. Within that society, it functions as a vehicle, effectively transmitting messages

about common understandings and agreements on the meaning of urban life in Shaba. But it also forms and transforms to a considerable extent modes of perception. In this sense, PAS mediates and articulates experiences. We think that it is theoretically important to realize that it is this mediating function, rather than simply its expressive and "signifying" nature, which allows the researcher to enter, so to speak, the system of PAS. This is why we found semiological analysis to be an insufficient epistemological basis for *inter*-cultural interpretations. Semiology elegantly describes sign-systems that may be presumed to be "given" (and we cannot discuss here the question whether such givenness can ever be presumed, see also note 3). But sign-systems in other cultures are never simply given, they must be translated and it seems to us that only common mediations provide the ground for valid translations.

This is why we proposed to approach PAS like a language with all that this implies—the possibility to describe it in a systematic way, to translate its "propositions," and to interpret its "texts." We say "like a language" and use "propositions" and "texts" in quotation marks because, at this point, we hesitate to commit ourselves to a less equivocal position. Three possibilities could be considered, though: "art as language" in a literal sense, "art like language" in an analogous sense, and "art *is* language" in a metaphorical sense.

The first one—art as language, literally—is represented in Barthes' Saussurean attempt to understand language as the sign-system *par excellence* to which other sign systems, such as iconic systems, would be in a subordinated relation.<sup>27</sup> In view of what we had to say about semiology we must discard this first possibility.

Analogies between art and language can be made in more specific ways and may result in highly interesting heuristic notions. An example is Paula Ben-Amos' analysis of tourist art (exemplified by Benin ebony carving) in the light of recent insights about structures and functions of pidgin languages. Both have in common that they "originate and function in situations of contact between mutually unintelligible communicative systems" (Ben-Amos n.d.:8). In a way, this is a tempting analogy. PAS is coextensive with the Shaba variety of Swahili, a language which has vehicular functions and is characterized by pidginization (although not a pidgin in itself). Shaba Swahili has provided a medium of communication in a situation of pronounced multilingualism and of contact between Africans and expatriates.<sup>28</sup>

But: PAS is *not* a tourist art. It is not a "simplified" traditional art form (there was no representational painting prior to colonial contact). Perhaps we should extend Paula Ben-Amos' idea and seek our analogy in what linguists have described as creolization (as opposed to pidginization), i.e., a development from a reduced vehicular form to a language which can have the same communicative functions as any other developed language although it may be restricted in use to socially defined situations. This certainly comes closer to our case. However, as long as we cannot draw on detailed linguistic studies of Shaba Swahili, we can expect little clarification from art-language analogies.

What if we take PAS as a metaphor of language? Two specifications are immediately in order: metaphors are not vague, intellectually disreputable figures of speech—they are

among the most creative means to extend the limits of what can be known and said; second, "language," as it is used here, is not the linguist's descriptive construct, but rather the act of speaking—production of discourse. As a society articulates its culture through discourse, it may extend and intensify it through metaphoric communication. Visual art may have that function, especially if it is, as we hope to have shown, intimately linked to verbal communication. Metaphors, unlike analogies, are not merely stated; they must be invented, elaborated, and (again unlike analogies) they often have a critical, contentious sting (e.g., when feminists refuse to be the "niggers of this society"). And this, incidentally, is why the *colonie belge* may denounce all forms of oppression, not only those of the past.<sup>29</sup>

If PAS, as a metaphor, is invention, elaboration, i.e., *process*, what can be said about the directions, or perhaps better: intentions, of that process? There is in recent anthropological literature a study which invites comparison. In his *Rites of Modernization*, J. Peacock analyzes a form of "proletarian drama" in a Javanese city (1968). In these *ludruk* plays, actors and audience explore and dramatize life in a modern city against the background of village—and traditional high culture. Here an art form becomes the vehicle of a changing consciousness much as we have claimed it for PAS. This basic similarity could be shown in much more detail. On the other hand, our work has made us somewhat doubtful about the guiding model in Peacock's approach. Javanese society is seen to be on a linear course of transition from a traditional to a modern situation. *Ludruk* plays "help," "seduce" and "involve" participants on the way to modernization (1968:6). Although we cannot do justice to Peacock's very interesting and detailed analysis of the communicative functions of drama, his general model deserves a critical comment. A decade lies between his and our field research. Many things happened in this period. "Developing" countries have developed in ways that defy linear models of modernization, and theories of modernization have become more complex and sophisticated.<sup>30</sup> In the context of all this, we find that PAS is best conceived, not as a transitional phenomenon but as expression of a synthetic consciousness. Artists and consumers of PAS neither define the forms and contents of this art *against* a tradition nor *toward* modernization. Their ordinary existence is in the middle of both, making it a daily task to transform seemingly disparate elements into coherent and consistent action. PAS objectifies achieved synthesis (to which it contributes); it is the medium of a kind and state of historical consciousness in which remote mythical origins, a traumatic past, and a troubled but hopeful present are fused in a vigorous urban culture and lifestyle that has little resemblance to the disturbed, aimless, and degenerate existence that was once thought to be the fate of African villagers moving into town.

Furthermore, because PAS differentiates and articulates contents of consciousness, it should provide a kind of profile of urban consciousness in Shaba. Not all kinds of experiences have crystallized as genres, and those that have, became elements of a system the meaning of which is not simply a sum of the significations of its parts. But an interpretation of the whole system will have to wait until other genres have been examined as it was tried here for the *colonie belge*. Tentatively, we can say that attention seems to be con-

centrated on *mamba muntu* and on the category of "Things Past." The former provides a mythical frame; the latter expresses attempts to forge events and experiences of colonization and decolonization into consistent *history*, a view of the past as it continues to bring forth the present.

## NOTES

*Acknowledgments.* This paper reports on research carried out, in Shaba (Republic of Zaire) between fall 1972 and December 1974. In its initial stage, it was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (RO-6150-72-149, for research on "Work and Communication among Swahili-Speaking Mine Workers in Shaba [Zaire]"). Later on, we received support from the Rockefeller Foundation Program of aid to the National University of Zaire. Both contributions are gratefully acknowledged. Our special gratitude is due to the artists named in this paper and to many others, all of whom agreed to contribute their works and thoughts with the understanding that we planned to write about them.

<sup>1</sup> Most of these publications tend to be general surveys of developments in contemporary African arts and crafts (see Brown, Beier, Ikpaiko, Mount, Newman, Washington).

<sup>2</sup> On contemporary African artists who, by training and artistic expression are within the major European artistic traditions, see the editions of *African Arts*; on tourist/airport art as acculturation phenomena, see Ben-Amos (n.d.), Graburn (1964, 1970, n.d.); on contemporary African art as "naïve" art, see *Die Kunst der Naïven*.

<sup>3</sup> We think that such an epistemological position will advance investigations of "exotic" art beyond the pessimistic (and nominalist) view recently expressed by Anthony Forge in his introduction to *Primitive Art and Society*:

The accessibility of such systems to the anthropologist or other outside observer remains a problem. Most work so far, as indeed much of the work on the interpretation of myth and ritual, has been based on the explanatory power of the proposed analysis (Occam's razor) and indeed, since for the systems to work effectively it is supposed that their operation is not totally conscious to members of the culture concerned, it is difficult to see what other sorts of proof are available . . . [1973:xix].

Our approach is aimed at (emerging) consciousness, and seeks good translations, not valid "proofs."

<sup>4</sup> At one time, we considered adopting the attribute "proletarian." For reasons which should become clear in this paper, we think that this would not be a meaningful term. On the other hand, PAS should not be confused with the products of a European-inspired school of painters in this area which came to international fame as *art populaire* in the decade before independence (1960). See also note 6.

<sup>5</sup> Population estimates for 1974, based on older census figures and extrapolation from sketchy surveys of squatters' towns: Lubumbashi 600,000-800,000; Likasi 150,000; Kolwezi 200,000-220,000. These figures exceed the conservative estimates of De Saint Moulin as reported in Monnier (1974). Monnier approaches reality with the population figure for Lubumbashi, multiplied by a rank-factor: 864,000 (1974:285, Table 1). The earlier development of Lubumbashi (then Elisabethville) was studied by Bruce Fetter (n.d.).

<sup>6</sup> The names of these artists (Bela, Mwenze, Pili-Pili, Kaballa, Kipinde) are generally associated with that of Pierre Romain-Desfossés, the founder of one of the first and most important art schools in Francophone Africa. Desfossés, a French nobleman, traveller, amateur anthropologist, writer, and marine-painter settled in Lubumbashi (then Elisabethville) in 1944 and established what later came to be known as "*Ecole d'Art Populaire Indigène*." Desfossés' intention was to create an "authentic African" artistic expression in painting, unhampered by formal training and Western artistic values. He claimed to have provided only the most essential skills and materials to the students, to allow the "genius of the race," the "life force" of the "Bantu soul" to manifest itself. A study dealing with the wider historical and ideological framework of this school (i.e., pan-Africanism, Negritude, Tempels' Bantu Philosophy, post-colonial anthropology, etc.) is planned in the future. Apart from this

anthropological dimension, the remaining artists (Mwenze, Pili-Pili) and their work continue to be of great interest to us in and by themselves as representatives of contemporary African art as well as paradoxical counterpoints to the genuinely "authentic, popular and indigenous" art form in PAS. In this context, a reference should be made to the fate of this art school. After the death of Desfossés, the school became the foundation for the new *Académie des Beaux-Arts*, and although the *Académie* became a regular art school under the directorship of L. Moonens, a Belgian painter, the influence of the Desfossés tradition continued through Mwenze and Pili-Pili, who were employed as instructors at the *Académie*. The most notable students of this period are Kamba, Mwembia, Muvuma, and especially Mode (Muntu), who recently won a second prize in the *African Arts* annual contest (see *African Arts*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, Winter 1975). On Desfossés, see DeDeken, Mount, Van Herreweghe, Vanden Bossche.

<sup>7</sup> Here we are touching on complex problems concerning relationships between social process, artistic form and content, and materials and techniques. But at this point we can do little more than express our awareness of these relationships. We found several recent studies useful, and shall explore them in future work on PAS. Highly interesting comparisons with the subject under study are contained in M. Baxandall's sketch of a social history of Italian Renaissance art (1974). On a more abstract level, we think of the theory of artistic work offered by Hoffman-Axthelm (1974) and of an analysis of art in the context of late capitalism by Holz (1972).

<sup>8</sup> See Dan Ben-Amos' paper on "Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres" (1969). Its French translation contains a more extensive and updated bibliography (1974). For an attempt to study an emerging oral tradition in terms of generic differentiation, see Fabian (1974).

<sup>9</sup> We are aware that in art-historical parlance "genre" is not a strictly analytical concept. It suggests a certain kind of topic—"ordinary" scenes from daily life—and a certain style of minor quality with a tendency of repetitiveness. Historically, it is most closely associated with Dutch painters of the 17th century. However, since the origins of "genre" are closely linked to socioeconomic processes of *embourgeoisement* (see Hoffmann-Axthelm 1974:73), we expect that more detailed comparisons between "genre" and PAS may eventually lead to interesting results.

<sup>10</sup> An example is the term *paysage* (used either in Swahili or in French). It may refer to a genre (landscapes) or to broad stylistic categories (frequently, artists of PAS identify their style as *paysage* in contrast to decorative and semi-abstract painting which is *art moderne*).

<sup>11</sup> Our distinction of *levels* is a heuristic one. It fits conceptualizations of history as they appear in generic labels, and especially in conversations with artists. At this point, however, we cannot claim that our distinctions are in fact culturally and consciously recognized.

<sup>12</sup> In Shaba, we found the French expressions *sirène* and (apparently only in the Kolwezi area) *madame poisson*. In the Kasai, the motif is known as *mami wata*, the same name under which it is popular along the West African coast. See also note 24.

<sup>13</sup> The artists come from Lubumbashi, Kipushi, Likasi and Kolwezi. The fact that we name the artists poses a problem of ethics of which we are keenly aware. But unlike "informants," painters of PAS express their views and visions in public (and signed!) documents. We did not think that we had the right to impose anonymity on them. This does not, of course, apply to their verbal statements. We also remind the reader that interpretive statements, by definition, are entirely our responsibility.

<sup>14</sup> To avoid introducing premature judgments into our comparisons, the 14 figures are not arranged in any particular order. The number assigned to each painting is for reference only.

<sup>15</sup> Such a definition may seem somewhat unusual, but it is not without respectable precedent. E. H. Gombrich, for instance, offers the following observation:

It is surely no accident that the tricks of illusionist art, perspective and modeling in light and shade, were connected in classical antiquity with the design of theatrical scenery. It is here, in the context of plays based on the ancient mythical tales, that the re-enactment of events according to the poet's vision and insight comes to its climax and is increasingly assisted by the illusions of art . . . In the whole history of Western art we have this constant



interaction between narrative intent and pictorial realism [1961:131].

Clearly, the paintings of *colonie belge* show ample evidence for both theatrical and narrative intent.

<sup>16</sup>Notice also that all the scenes are set in full daylight. In interviews, several artists said that it is the hour of the morning call when work and punishment were meted out. This explains the presence of a bugler in five of the paintings.

<sup>17</sup>These are the pipe, dark glasses, beard, and colonial dress and uniform. We suspect that beard and pipe were more typical of missionaries than of administrators—an interesting way of broadening the symbolic connotations of the white official. We should also point out that pith helmet and shorts have (with rare exceptions among old dignitaries) disappeared in post-colonial Zaïre which makes these paraphernalia definitely symbols of the past.

<sup>18</sup>The official dates are: Congo Free State 1885-1908, Belgian Congo 1908-60. Among the place names, Kambove, Kongolo, Kasenga, and Kabalo are in Shaba (former Katanga), Dibaya and Mwaka are in the Kasai region. Variation and inconsistency of dates and places are again valuable indicators of the processual nature of PAS. History is not simply depicted and reported, it is constructed in each painting as an event. Place names are chosen by the artists, either to point to their own origins and experiences with the colonial system, or to make a painting more meaningful as a "reminder" to customers who come from these regions. Dates do not simply reflect "objective" chronology (whose, the colonizer's or the colonized's?) but express meaningful periods. Thus, Ndaïe, depending on mood and occasion, may choose to indicate the *depth* of colonial rule by placing its origins in the 19th century (see Figure 14), or its *intensity* by identifying the period between the defeat of the metropolitan power in World War II and its formal abdication as a colonial power in 1960 (see Figure 13). Incidentally, 1959 (see Figures 11, 15) is correctly identified as the year when the Léopoldville riots (January 4-6) *de facto* achieved political independence before it was "granted" on June 30, 1960 (cf. Young 1965:152; his authoritative study should be generally consulted for background information on decolonization and independence). Mutombo, who gives as dates 1914-18 (see Figure 19) is the oldest among these painters. To him (as he confirmed in a conversation), World War I symbolizes the greatest intensity of colonial rule.

<sup>19</sup>We do not think that structuralist nature-culture metaphysics is of help in elucidating the processes of PAS. In this respect, our treatment differs from Burnham's (1971) structural analyses of modern art (also inspired by Barthes, among others).

<sup>20</sup>It is a striking feature of political painting in PAS that artists refuse to take sides by depicting one force as evil and the other as good. This is even more evident in genres other than the *colonie belge*, such as in paintings of war, of rebellion and secession.

<sup>21</sup>Already in *Rhétorique de l'image* R. Barthes suggested that the problem of relationship between image and text might be approached historically through the study of book illustration (1964:43). More recently, this was taken up and developed in a very interesting way by Bassy (1974). However, his overall approach to an integrated semiology of image and text seems to rest on an evolutionary view in which emblematic images where the "figure is its proper noun" (1974:302) precede (necessarily?) modern illustrations which demand a "recourse to the text" (1974:302). Interestingly, his example for an emblematic image is a mermaid (1974:329, Fig. 1). In PAS, "emblematic" images and "illustrations" (of oral texts) are simultaneously present and, more importantly, they are integral parts (genres) of one and the same process. Therefore, we do not think that Bassy has made the case for a *rhétorique* encompassing image and text. The problem of the constitution of the uniting syntagm is not solved by dividing it into "*étapes*" (historical-evolutionary stages).

<sup>22</sup>We have also consistently avoided raising the question of aesthetics. As regards aesthetic criteria, conscious or non-conscious, operating *within* PAS, we have ample documentation from conversations with artists and viewers. But, at this point, we are not ready to give a consistent and reasonably complete account. Such an account would have to be based on lexical and semantic analyses of terminologies and concepts, as well as on a more thorough study of sociolinguistic rules that govern communication about PAS. We also think that this must be done before we can consider the aesthetic

status of PAS in general (is it "art"?). In his review of problems posed by that general question, J. Maquet concludes that there "cannot be an anthropology of art" (1971:17) because the concept of "art" is inseparable from our Western traditions. It remains to be seen whether his own proposal—a kind of transcendental aesthetics combined with a "materialist" model of culture (1971:19f.)—will be accepted.

<sup>23</sup>There are two highly interesting studies of African popular culture, one on popular writing in Nigeria (Obiechina 1973), the other on dance societies in East Africa (Ranger 1975), which came to our attention after this paper had been written. Both document striking resemblances (and some revealing differences) between PAS and manifestations of popular consciousness expressed in different media and developed in regions spanning the width of the continent. Especially Ranger's conclusions (1975:164-166) are remarkably convergent with our own interpretations of PAS.

<sup>24</sup>The culture history of *mamba muntu* is complex, to say the least (see the important paper by Fraser 1972). Undoubtedly, there are links to the West African *mami wata*. Most of our respondents insisted that *mamba muntu* paintings were introduced to Zaïre by the *senegalais*, a generic term for West African (Hausa) traders. Another influence may come from literary sources introducing Zaïrean schoolchildren to the classical Mediterranean motif of the *sirène*. This could easily be interpreted in the light of Central African traditions about female water spirits and perhaps a kind of werewolf theme—sorcerers changing to dangerous animals (literally *mamba muntu* translates as "crocodile person"). The closest iconic parallel outside of Africa we know of appears in Haitian popular painting (see e.g., the *sirène* on p. 101 in *Die Naïve Kunst*, but notice that she is *black*). Finally, we may mention that the motif persists in Black American lore (see Dorson 1967:250-254).

<sup>25</sup>Some of these painters are named in note 6. By far, the most successful painter working at Lumbumbashi and selling mostly to Zaïrean and expatriate upper crust is Chenge Baruti (formerly B. Berquin). An interesting detail: We never found in PAS the motifs of the bushfire and the ant-hill-in-the-savanna which, probably through the influence of European painters working in the 1950s, became almost obligatory pieces of decoration in colonial homes.

<sup>26</sup>In our sample, Laskas (see Figure 17) and Kayembe (see Figure 22) hold full-time jobs as miners.

<sup>27</sup>To be accurate, in *Elements* Barthes speaks about sign systems, and in *Rhétorique* about iconic sign-systems *in general*. He does not address himself to the question of how to establish criteria by which some of them could be identified as "art." For a recent attempt to do this from a semiotic (not semiological) point of view, see Shapiro (1974).

<sup>28</sup>The language situation obtaining in Lubumbashi at about the time when PAS appeared was described by Polomé (1971).

<sup>29</sup>For recent uses of metaphor in anthropological theory, see Fernandez (1971, 1974) and Wagner (1974).

<sup>30</sup>To cite but one example from one area of research—language development—see Whiteley (1971).

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## LIST OF PAINTINGS

(painter, date of acquisition, measurements)

- Figure 1 — Kaniga, June 1973, 45 x 70 cm.  
Figure 2 — Kalema, June 1974, 57 x 67 cm.  
Figure 3 — Matchika, March 1974, 39 x 72 cm.  
Figure 4 — Matchika, March 1974, 41 x 72 cm.  
Figure 5 — Ngoie, Nov. 1973, 49 x 70 cm.  
Figure 6 — Kasongo ka B., Jan. 1974, 36 x 59 cm.  
Figure 7 — Matchika, May 1973, 45 x 70 cm.  
Figure 8 — Kasongo, May 1973, 46 x 67 cm.  
Figure 9 — Ilunga, Nov. 1973, 42 x 57 cm.  
Figure 10 — Ndaie, Nov. 1973, 46 x 64 cm.  
Figure 11 — Tshibumba, Nov. 1973, 41 x 69 cm.  
Figure 12 — Kapenda, Dec. 1973, 44 x 60 cm.  
Figure 13 — Ndaie, Sept. 1974, 48 x 65 cm.  
Figure 14 — Ndaie, Sept. 1974, 48 x 64 cm.  
Figure 15 — Nkulu, Nov. 1973, 40 x 55 cm.  
Figure 16 — Kasongo ka B., Jan. 1974, 49 x 74 cm.  
Figure 17 — Laskas, Sept. 1974, 44 x 55 cm.  
Figure 18 — Kabuika, Oct. 1974, 44 x 60 cm.  
Figure 19 — Mutombo, Feb. 1974, 39 x 68 cm.  
Figure 20 — Ilunga, Dec. 1973, 47 x 49 cm.  
Figure 21 — Matchika, Mar. 1974, 41 x 72 cm.  
Figure 22 — Kayembe, Sept. 1974, 30 x 50 cm.  
Figure 23 — Anonymous, 1974, 47 x 78 cm.  
Figure 24 — Kalema, June 1974, 52 x 76 cm.