

ANTHROPOLOGY

African Wall Painting Dying

THE DYING ART of house-wall fresco painting among African peoples may die out entirely without leaving any examples for posterity unless museums interested in African art take steps in time.

The paintings are of two types: geometric paintings done by women on their houses, and figure paintings done by men on the temples and chiefs' houses. Dr. Herta Haselberger, of the School of Technology, History of Art Institute, Vienna, reports in a new journal, *Current Anthropology*, 1:79, 1960.

If individual works are not secured by museums, the geometric paintings will disappear within the next five to ten years. This art is practiced today by only a few old women artists, and the decorated houses can only stand about ten years, Dr. Haselberger said.

The geometric paintings are found in West Africa. Similar paintings are done in Southern Nigeria, the Congo Basin and South Africa. These paintings contain various geometric designs, including circles, triangles and checked patterns. They resemble paintings of the late stone and early metal ages of the Eastern Mediterranean.

The figure paintings done by men have a common trait with prehistoric paintings in Europe and Africa. They portray figures floating freely in space, without consideration for perspective or background detail. Figure painting is found in the Northern Niger area, the central Guinea Coast, the Congo Basin and East Africa.

In areas where the outside world has had no influence, the colors in the paintings are mainly white, red and black. White is for spirits and for the dead. Red is the color of rejoicing and pleasing to the gods. Black is for sacrifices to evil spirits. Blue and green are said to be due to Egyptian influence when they occur.

The painting is done on a "canvas" made of ant hills and cow dung. The white paint is made from kaolin earth, chalk, a tropical plant and mud. Red paint is derived from red earths, red lice and the bark of red trees. Black paint comes from black earth, graphite, soot, charcoal and carbonized plants. Brushes are made from leaves or berries, but some of the painters simply use their fingers.

Science News Letter, April 2, 1960

CONSERVATION

Mountain Gorillas Periled

SACRED COWS may bring about the destruction of the 350 mountain gorillas remaining in the Virunga volcano area of the Belgian Congo's Albert National Park if conservationists do not intervene.

The refuge lies partly in the Belgian Congo and partly in bordering Ruanda and Urundi, United Nations Trustships. It is from Ruanda that the threat to the future safety of the Albert Park mountain gorillas emanates.

In Ruanda, worship of the cow, introduced by the Watusi, is still practiced. Because the social standing of cow owners depends on the number of heads they own, no cows are killed and forage area is utilized wastefully to keep them alive.

Useless grazing has led to total depletion of forest vegetation and to erosion in a country where there are few wooded districts. One of these covers the slopes of the Virunga volcanoes.

An increase in the cattle population and demand for more grazing ground have caused shepherds to push herds deeper into Albert Park, damaging the natural habitat of the gorilla.

At present, habitat destruction by cattle is mainly confined to sectors at altitudes below 3,000 feet. An extension of this destruction and an invasion into the Hagenia forest, where the most abundant food supply for the vegetarian gorillas is found, could well prove fatal to the perpetuation of the wild life of the Virunga area.

For several years, the Institute of the

National Parks of the Belgian Congo, headed by Dr. Victor van Straelen, has vainly sought to stop this destruction of habitat, but the Institute no longer enjoys "the support of the administrative and judicial authorities."

He attributes the passive attitude of the authorities to political considerations in anticipation of the Belgian Congo's independence, scheduled for June 30.

Dr. van Straelen is appealing to international opinion to protest the useless destruction of gorilla habitat which, he says, can only result in the gorillas being wiped out. A possible solution, he thinks, is to put such unique sanctuaries as Albert Park under international control.

The mountain gorilla is one of two subspecies of the gorilla genus, the other being the lowland gorilla. According to best possible estimates, there are something over 3,000 mountain gorillas in existence in Africa.

Science News Letter, April 2, 1960

ROCKETS AND MISSILES

Artificial Moon to Probe Upper Part of Ionosphere

A GOVERNMENT LAB and a private firm will work together to develop satellite systems for probing the upper part of the ionosphere, an area that begins 25 miles above the earth. The ionosphere bounces back to earth many radio waves, permitting long-distance radio communications.

But the satellite will orbit above the ionosphere and send radio waves down to it, instead of up. By sounding the upper layer of the ionosphere in this manner, the satellite should determine the density of electrically charged particles there.

Because of the ionosphere's importance in radio communications, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration has contracted with the National Bureau of Standards' Central Radio Propagation laboratory in Boulder, Colo., to plan and design the experiment for the satellite.

The private Airborne Instruments Laboratory on Long Island, N.Y., has been awarded a contract for the design, development and manufacture of the satellite payload and ground controls.

It is planned that the system, when completed, will be tested at Wallops Island, Va., and eventually launched from the Pacific Missile Range in California.

Plans call for the payload to send data for from six to 12 months. The Bureau of Standards has announced no target launch date yet.

Science News Letter, April 2, 1960

GEOLOGY

World Geology Covered By Array of Journals

WHETHER NEW discoveries about the crust of the earth are published in Russian, Chinese, Japanese, English or other languages, geologists have a chance to learn about them from an array of journals.

Latest is a cover-to-cover English translation of the Russian publication that reports Soviet research. This is issued by the American Geological Institute as the "Doklady of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., Earth Science Sections." It is a running mate to another similar complete translation of the Soviet original research journal, issued as the *Izvestiya of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R.*

Earth sciences information out of the more difficult languages including Russian, Chinese and Japanese, is published monthly in the form of translations, reviews and symposia in *International Geology Review*. Another publication devoted to the geological literature of North America in abstract is *GeoScience Abstracts*. A feature of this publication is reporting on new geologic maps and also abstracting available Russian translations.

The American Geological Institute consists of member organizations, including American Association of Petroleum Geologists, American Geophysical Union, American Institute of Mining Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers, Association of American State Geologists, Geochemical Society, Geological Society of America, Mineralogical Society of America, National Association of Geology Teachers, Paleontological Society, Seismological Society of America, Society of Economic Geologists, Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists, Society of Exploration Geophysicists and Society of Vertebrate Paleontology.

Science News Letter, April 2, 1960