This chapter argues that the key technical innovation of Modernist sculpture—the switch from clay modelling to direct carving in stone—was prompted by the desire of London sculptors such as Epstein, Gill, and Gaudier-Brzeska to break free from the classical Greek tradition and base their work instead on the artistic conventions of various extra-European culture provinces. Epstein and Gill are shown to have created their first directly carved pieces in imitation of Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain work from India, after which Epstein diversified into Assyrian and Egyptian approaches for his Tomb of Oscar Wilde. Gaudier-Brzeska, unable to afford the raw materials for such large-scale experiments, is shown to have drawn instead on the techniques and aesthetics of miniature Japanese netsuke carvings in the British Museum.

This chapter shows that the British Museum was deliberately designed to position European art above that of other culture provinces, and that this damaged the ability of artists and writers based in London to appreciate works from elsewhere. It demonstrates that the exhibition strategies of the Museum and even its layout were derived from the neoclassical
theories of the European art academies, and investigates the labelling of extra-European exhibits as anthropology rather than art. The young Jacob Epstein's training in clay modelling at two of the Paris academies is considered, as is his imitation of James Havard Thomas—a radical experimenter in the Greek tradition. These early influences clashed with Epstein's simultaneous fascination for Indian, African, and Egyptian museum exhibits produced by direct carving in stone and wood, and it is shown that he did not allow such enthusiasms to affect his work at this time.

Social Experiments with Modernism
Darby English

in 1971: A Year in the Life of Color

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the book's main themes. This book focuses two exhibitions that brought modernist painting and sculpture into the heart of United States cultural politics: Contemporary Black Artists in America and The DeLuxe Show. Of the book's questions, the largest are simply, what did these exhibitions do to color, actually and conceptually? And how did this doing both reflect and affect the ways the larger culture was metabolizing color? The activities studied occurred at the fringes of modernist culture, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and revived a social dimension from which modernism had been almost fully decoupled. As a result they mattered in ways that will have to be reconstructed.

‘The More Serious Art that One Likes’
Rupert Richard Arrowsmith


This chapter shows that the development of T. E. Hulme's mature philosophy was highly dependent on alterations in the way he interpreted the art of various periods and cultures. His early fixation on the ideas of Henri Bergson is seen to go hand in hand with a belief that Renaissance
painting, with its implied emphasis on progress, represented the highest form of visual culture. New evidence is presented showing that an encounter with Jacob Epstein's Tomb of Oscar Wilde, based on Assyrian and Egyptian aesthetics, was what suggested to him that stasis—both in art and in society—was an attractive and desirable attribute. Hulme saw Epstein's work as a positive reawakening in twentieth-century Europe of an attitude compatible with the hieratic modes of government he admired in certain Asian civilizations of the past, and proposed a new definition of the word ‘classical’ to reflect this attitude.

1971
Darby English

This book explores the year 1971, when two exhibitions opened that brought modernist painting and sculpture into the burning heart of United States cultural politics: Contemporary Black Artists in America, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and The DeLuxe Show, a racially integrated abstract art exhibition presented in a renovated movie theater in a Houston ghetto. The book looks at many black artists' desire to gain freedom from overt racial representation, as well as their efforts—and those of their advocates—to further that aim through public exhibition. Amid calls to define a “black aesthetic,” these experiments with modernist art prioritized cultural interaction and instability. Contemporary Black Artists in America highlighted abstraction as a stance against normative approaches, while The DeLuxe Show positioned abstraction in a center of urban blight. The importance of these experiments, the book argues, came partly from color's special status as a cultural symbol and partly from investigations of color already under way in late modern art and criticism. With their supporters, black modernists—among them Peter Bradley, Frederick Eversley, Alvin Loving, Raymond Saunders, and Alma Thomas—rose above the demand to represent or be represented, compromising nothing in their appeals for interracial collaboration and, above all, responding with optimism rather than cynicism to the surrounding culture's preoccupation with color.