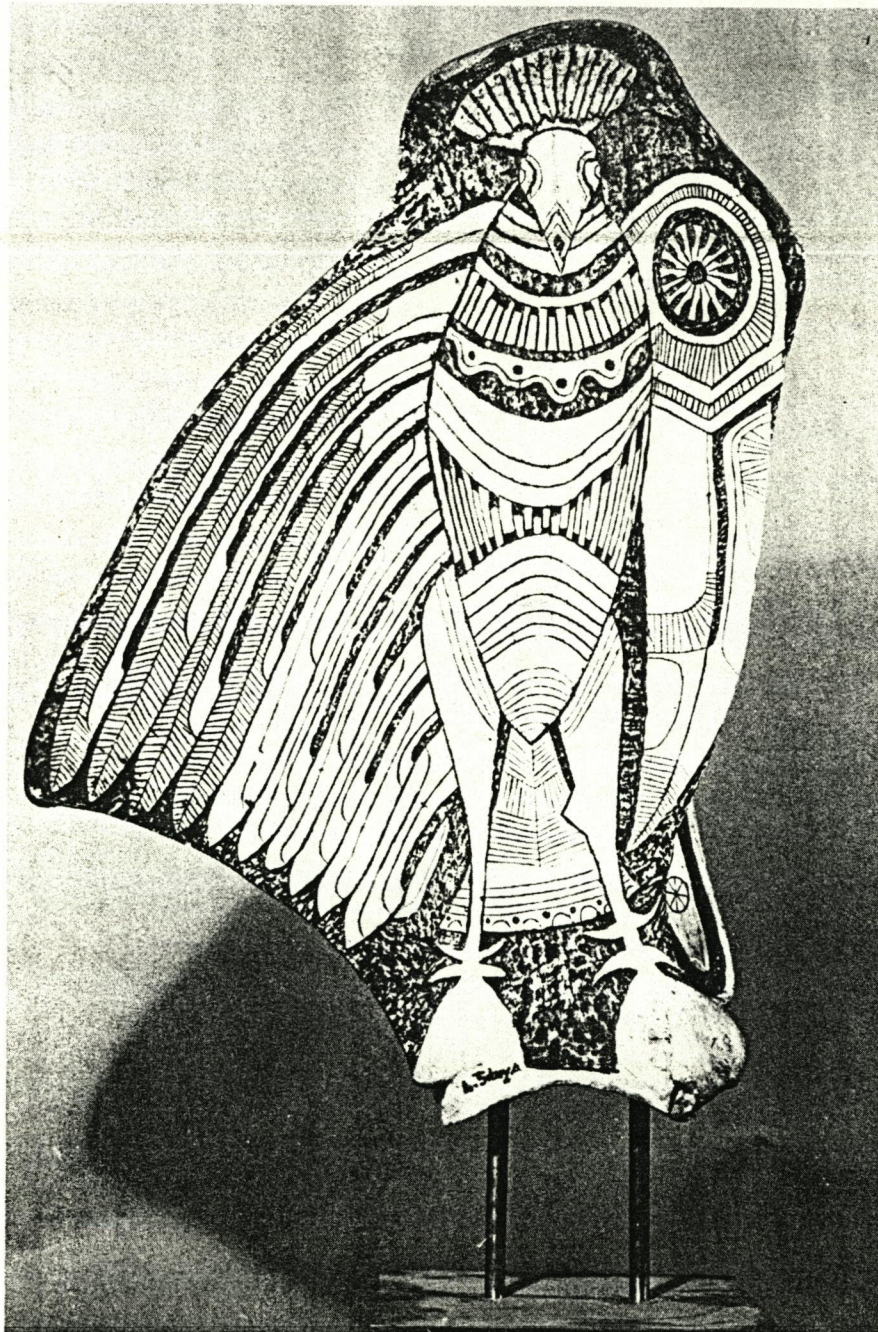


View of Meneghelli dining-room with Lipkin, Skotnes in foreground.



Lucky Sibiya (1972) Untitled. Carved elephant scapula.

casa meneghelli

High above the regimentation of Johannesburg's suburbia stands the home of Paolina and Vittorino Meneghelli. Unlike the museum-like approach of many collectors, the home and collection are one. Lipkin, Sibiya, Skotnes, Villa, rub shoulders with Viani and anonymous carvers from Central and West Africa.

The pieces are lived with, handled, discussed and explored with a loving interest akin to that for children or pets. One is aware at all times of the works about one. But one never feels that they are on display. Vittorino relates to ARTLOOK how his collection started and continued to grow.

Notes on My Collecting

While my collecting fever dates back to my youth, collecting the real thing — ART — became for me an obsession only in the early forties. I used to meet frequently in Venice with that group of painters and sculptors who would later form the *Fronte Nuovo della Arti* (the new frontier of the arts.)

Instrumental in bringing together this *avant-garde* of the Italian art scene was the sculptor Alberto Viani, with whom I had established a deep friendship which has not changed to this day.

Viani is a man of extraordinary humanistic and philosophic culture, gifted with clarity of thought and expression. He articulates the essentials of his proposition, converging them to an inescapable, mathematically formulated conclusion, all the time projecting the warmth of his gentle and compassionate nature. Like his speech are his sculptures, where the original anthropomorphism is often condensed in the fundamentals of a geometric axiom, but the flow of the volumes, and the intensely modulated surfaces, communicate a feeling of vibrant sensuality.

I remember watching him sketching endlessly over any available scrap of paper, the profiles of his next creation, until every possible facet was mentally under control. Sometimes I tore a piece of the newspaper where he had been busy noting his ideas — usually the "Roman Observer", the Vatican mouth-piece, Viani is a very religious man — and I would jealously treasure it in my collection.

When he was working on his plasters, filing, rasping, polishing in the unending search for perfection, I would often join him in his studio at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Venice, giving an helping hand and discussing the sculpture, the topics of the war, the anguish of the human race, the work of our artist-friends who were operating in the same atmosphere of expectation and fear.

The company of these people, and the visits of critics and writers to the house was a vital part in my introduction to the sacred world of the figurative arts. So, indeed, between spaghetti parties

and endless discussions on art topics, I started collecting as far as my lean budget would allow me.

There was an air of conspiracy when we gathered in our house, as long as Mussolini ruled the show. He had dictated that no culture should infiltrate Italy from 'barbarian' countries like France or England. Each foreign word had to be substituted with the Italian counterpart: if this did not exist, one should be invented. So we would not drink Cognac or Brandy anymore: the chosen Italian name was Arzente. Still, books would come through bringing that flavour of things big and mysterious, especially from the very soul of art in Europe — Paris.

It was in those days that for the first time we realised the existence of that particular kind of art called primitive, and of African art having played such an important role in the development of Cubism, that form of art which was hinted in some of Cézanne's late work, and which came to full bloom later, in the work of Picasso, Braque, Gris.

I outline as best I can what collectors mean by African art. By a process of elimination, it is not paintings or sculptures made by contemporary African artists. Furthermore, it is not the type of craft produced all over Africa for the tourist trade. It could perhaps be defined as comprising any functional object made for use (and used), in the tribe, by the African tribal sculptor, within the tribal stylistic tradition. Its aesthetic merit plays a very important part in the assessment of its value, while age is not entirely a determining factor. However, older objects, supposedly produced in a more isolated and genuine condition, have greater collector's value.

African art comprises masks and various objects used in religious and social rites, ancestor figures, functional objects such as house pillars, doors and locks, stools and chairs, loom pulleys, pots and bowls, spoons, combs. The most frequently used material for carving is wood, with ivory and stone in smaller proportion. There are also many brass casts and wrought iron objects. Decorations vary endlessly, from pigmentation of paint to shells, feathers, hair textile, leather.

Mussolini in '43 lost his job, and later his life. The war ended in a destroyed Europe. My artist friends started to travel around and to court the rich American collectors streaming to Italy. Among them was the great Peggy Guggenheim, who came to eat spaghetti in a white lace dress, with decorations of real monkey nuts. In her superb collection of modern art were included many pieces from Africa.

The myth of African art was growing in our minds. In '49 I decided to travel to this country to see if I could settle here, since Italy was still ailing from the wounds of war. My friends expect-

Photographs by Melvyn Penn



Fetish. BA-SONGYA. Wood hide, copper, feathers, beads.