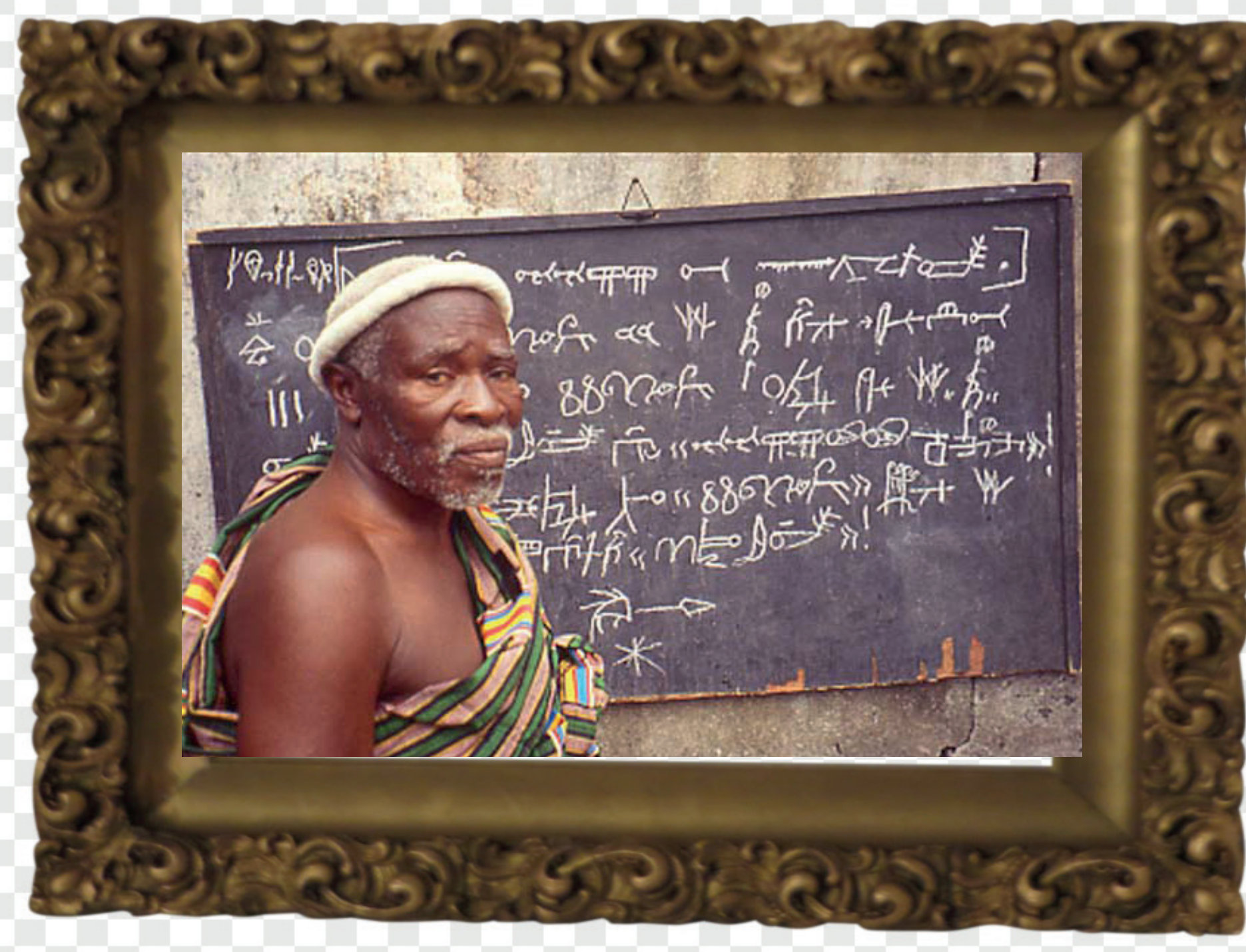


How does Frédéric Bruly Bouabré subvert the colonial construct of race in his early 21st-century drawings, in the Cantor Arts Center collection, Stanford University?

Issues

* Art History was founded in the 19th century by German-speaking scholars and has always had a strict **canon** based on Ancient Greek beauty ideals

* Even when African art is considered, it's often as part of a grand narrative in which ethnic arts' aesthetics are considered as **accessory** to Western Modernism's "progress".



Project significance

* By **challenging** mainstream evaluations of Bouabré's legacy and consider the artist's subjectivity and agency, I aim to **empower** marginalised voices and diversify art history.

* By publishing my research in The ISIS, Europe's oldest student magazine, I aim to make art history more **accessible** and **engaging** to those outside the field.

Who was Frédéric Bruly Bouabré?

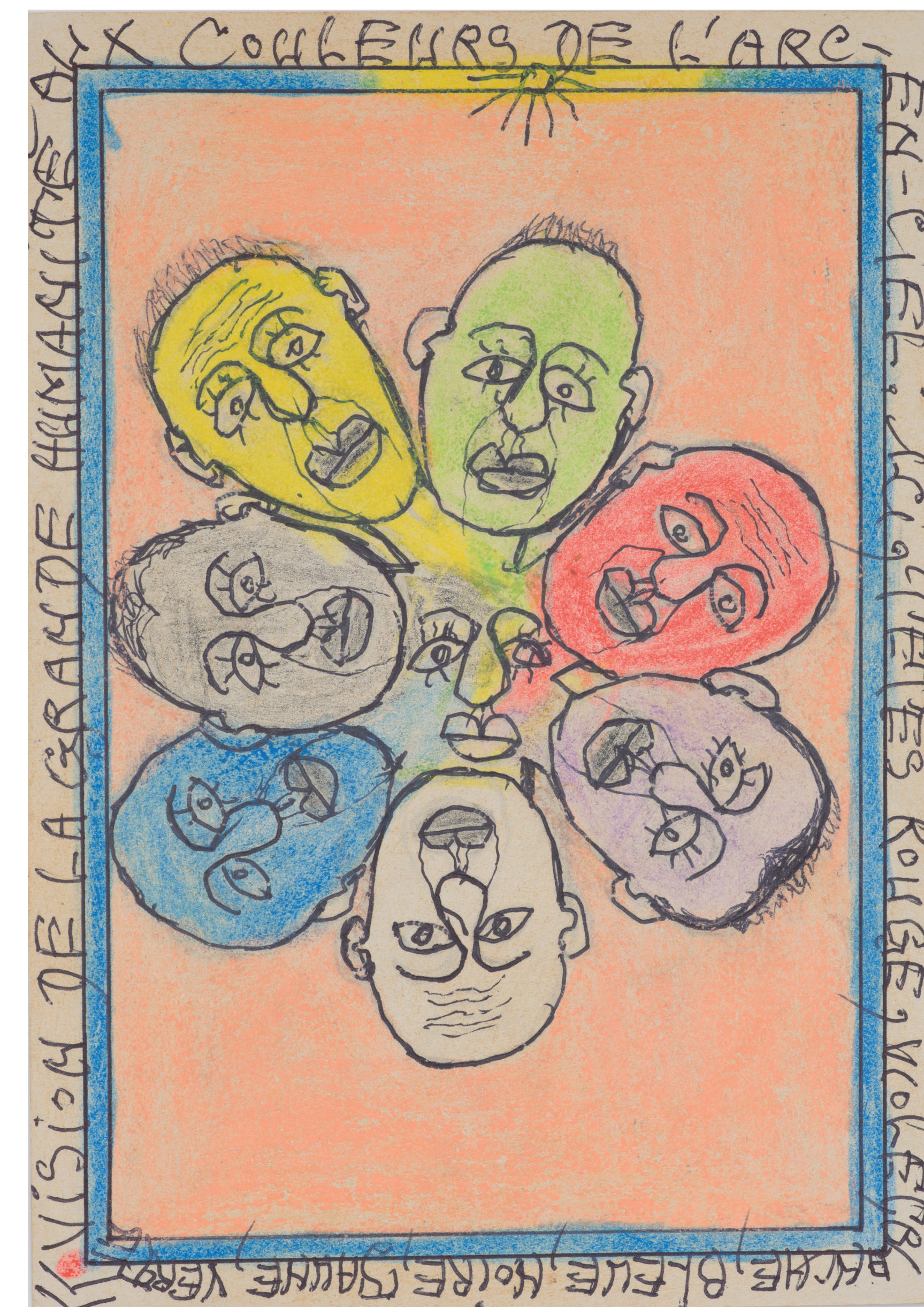
* Bouabré (c. 1923-2014) was from the Bété tribe of the **Ivory Coast**. He worked in his nation's French colonial government as a clerk and translator. He had **no art training**.

* In 1948, he had a **religious** vision and declared himself the prophet of a new faith. His moniker: Cheik Nadro, "the one who never forgets".

* He first rose to fame when he sent French **anthropologists** the alphabet that he had invented for the Bété language using 453 image and text combinations. He then began to make small post-card-sized drawings using ballpoint pen and colored pencils, for which he is famous today.

* He was included in the seminal 1989 exhibition "**Magiciens de la Terre**" which showcased Western conceptual art as well as "primitive" art. Guess which category he was in?

* Although **successful** in the contemporary art market, Bouabré is largely appreciated precisely because his work conforms to Westerners' **stereotypes** of Africa and Africans. As Nigerian critic Okwui Enwezor wrote in 1995, "His is the kind of art we African writers and critics wish to **disown or disinherit** [...] [His pictures] supposedly threaten to leave us naked, as objects of scorn for the jeering western art world, who would wish for nothing more than a **servile grinning primitive**."



Sources

* First-hand access to Cantor collection of drawings and semiotic analysis of use of text, symbols, colors, repetition.

* Reading about postcolonial theory, semiotics, and Ivorian history; secondary readings on Bouabré.

* Interview with Amanda Maples, curator of the Cantor's recent exhibition on Bouabré.

Limitations and how to expand research

* Unfortunately Bouabré passed away in 2014 so I could not interview him, but it would be useful to visit his home and studio in Abidjan and to speak to his collaborators, to see how he thought.

* Semiotics is about how meaning is constructed and the relationship between image and viewer; mass surveying visitors might help us understand Bouabré's reception.