

For years now, a number of us have been wanting to tip our hats in respect to Raoul Lehuard, just to show our affection and appreciation for him. Time has passed, and nothing has been done, so I'm taking the opportunity to write about my friend Raoul and about the passion he has shared with us over the years through *Arts d'Afrique Noire*, the celebrated magazine that first appeared in 1972, which has helped many of us to better understand the African continent and its customs. Indeed *Arts d'Afrique Noire* was founded at an opportune moment, a time at which the public was ready to be seduced by the forms of artistic expression it is devoted to.

As you can probably guess, I myself have been greatly influenced by Raoul and his writings. I used to read and re-read his articles in *Arts d'Afrique Noire*, always regretting that only four issues a year were published. Three months seemed such a long time to me then, and my desire to read and learn, as well as to discover the superb photographs that accompanied the articles in the magazine, was insatiable. Raoul often said to me: "In creating *Arts d'Afrique Noire*, I had no other ambition than to share knowledge with readers about what I knew, what I saw, and what I heard, and about what I understood and had learned. Africa and the Africans were my passion, and the sole function of *Arts d'Afrique Noire* was to express that passion."

Statues, fetishes, and other African objects had been a part of Raoul's daily life since childhood. His father, Robert Lehuard, had spent ten years in Congo-Brazzaville in the 1920s and 1930s, where he helped build the first radio and telegraph station and was in charge of laying the telegraphic line that would connect Brazzaville and Franceville. Robert was passionately interested in the people and cultures he encountered and acquired their artwork at every possible opportunity. He always endeavored to learn the local terminology for the objects he acquired and sought to have their functions explained to him. The objects he obtained from the Teke are especially well documented in his detailed and carefully compiled notes. He even learned Lingala, the local lingua franca, a mixture of Kiteke Kikongo and various other languages spoken in the Congo Basin. When speaking of this process, Raoul always insists on using the term "acquisition," because his father paid for all of the artworks he obtained. The Reverend Father Jaffré always reproached him vehemently for this, as he himself was in

# Raoul LEHUARD

By Alain Lecomte



Above: **Raoul Lehuard and Louis Perrois at the signing session of *Art Ancestral du Gabon* in 1979.**

Raoul Lehuard Archives



Left: **Raoul Lehuard and Charles Ratton.**

Raoul Lehuard Archives

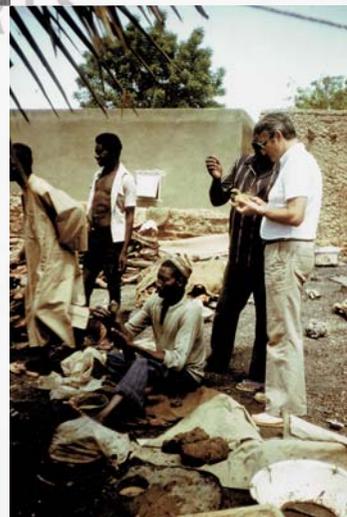


Above: **Robert Lehuard.**

Raoul Lehuard Archives

Left: **Teke figure collected in 1927 by Robert Lehuard.**

Raoul Lehuard Archives

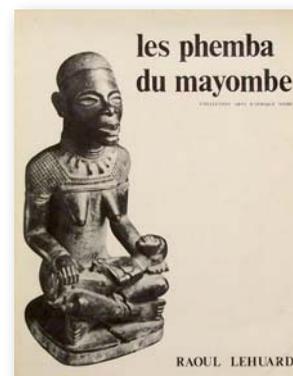


Left and following page: **Vintage photographs by Raoul Lehuard, end of the 1970s.**

Raoul Lehuard Archives

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the habit of systematically burning any and all sculptures he succeeded in confiscating in the villages he sought to evangelize. On occasion, Robert was notified by villagers that the missionary was preparing a large fire, the fuel being a pile of sculptures set in front of the men's house in the village square, doused with enough gasoline to demonstrate the wooden idols' inadequacy. Reluctant to oppose the white priest's will, the inhabitants sought to delay the preparations and decided to warn Robert. The latter jumped on his motorcycle, arriving at the last

minute to pull some sculptures from the pile to save, despite of the church representative's disapproval and threats. He returned some of the pieces to the villagers at their request, especially when they represented a deceased ancestor.



Above: **Queen Ngalifourou in Brazzaville, by Robert Lehuard, 1927.**

Raoul Lehuard Archives



And so the Lehuard residence at Vaires, in the Seine-et-Marne district of France, was filled with African sculptures that the young Raoul would ceaselessly look at and draw, all the while imagining himself in all sorts of adventures, as a lion or an elephant hunter, or as a sorcerer or an explorer. Living among these sculptures came naturally to him. On more than one occasion, when visiting neighbors and playmates as a child, he would be astonished by the absence of such objects and ask, "So where does your father put his fetishes?"

went elsewhere. At the end of the 1970s, the director of the Louvre, who had had no interest in these art forms, dismissed what had, according to Charles Ratton, seemed to him like a completely inappropriate proposition with the wave of his hand and a condescending smile. Times and minds change."



Later, in the mid 1950s, Robert had to separate himself from his fetishes in order to acquire land around his property. He turned for help to renowned expert Charles Ratton, who, upon examining the objects, recognized that they had great aesthetic qualities but warned that they would be difficult to place, which was perfectly true at the time. Now, and with the passage of many years, the seated Teke from the Robert Lehuard collection is considered a masterpiece of African art and resides at the Pavillon des Sessions in the Musée du Louvre.

It has been a privilege to have the opportunity to pay homage here to my friend Raoul, a simple yet erudite man, faithful in friendship, and with an insatiable curiosity for everything from painting to the antiquarian books he cherishes. His visits to my gallery are memorable moments of sharing. His conversation and his sense of humor always give me great pleasure. I have learned much from him and am thankful to him for that. A passionate aficionado of the art we cherish, this tireless worker spent thirty-three years developing *Arts d'Afrique Noire*, largely on his own, and has written works of major importance. Through his activities, he has produced a vital and essential legacy of incalculable value to all of us who love African art.



Raoul subsequently became good friends with Ratton, about whom he says, "The greatest disappointment in his

