

The work presented in this book was produced during
1981-82 within the Master of Fine Arts Course at The
Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania;
and it is together with the exhibition of paintings
catalogued in this book, a submission for the Master
of Fine Arts Degree, University of Tasmania.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Ellis' with a stylized flourish at the end.

NICOLE ELLIS

DECEMBER 1982

BOOK NUMBER

3

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
BIOGRAPHY	3
SOURCE MATERIAL	4
CATALOGUE	22
SEMINAR PAPERS	56
I. TOWARDS A CULTURAL CONVERGENCE ..	57
References ..	82
Bibliography ..	84
II. THE KILLING OF RAPHAEL ..	85
References ..	107
Bibliography ..	109

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STUDY:

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Aristotle in his essay on drama considered that all the arts aspired to the condition of theatre. In Modernism all the arts aspired to their emancipation from each other. Now I like the idea of painting as theatre again.







GREEK THEATRES

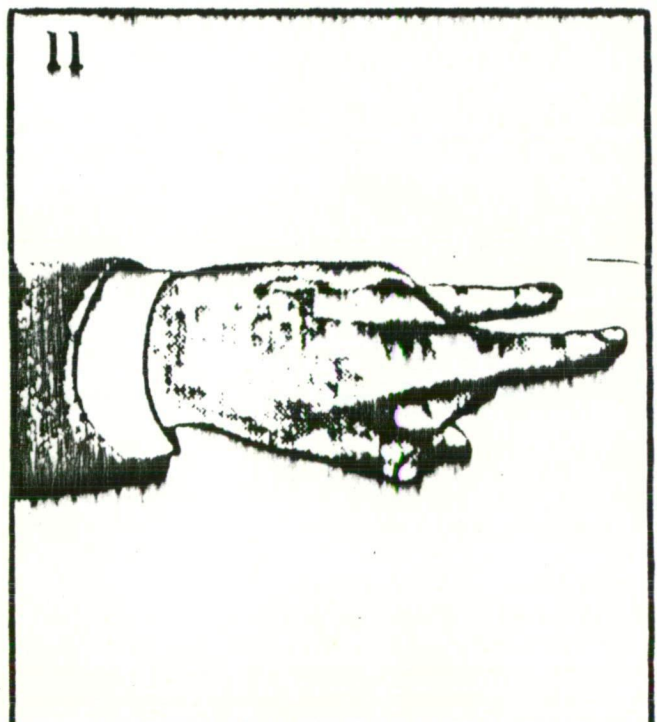
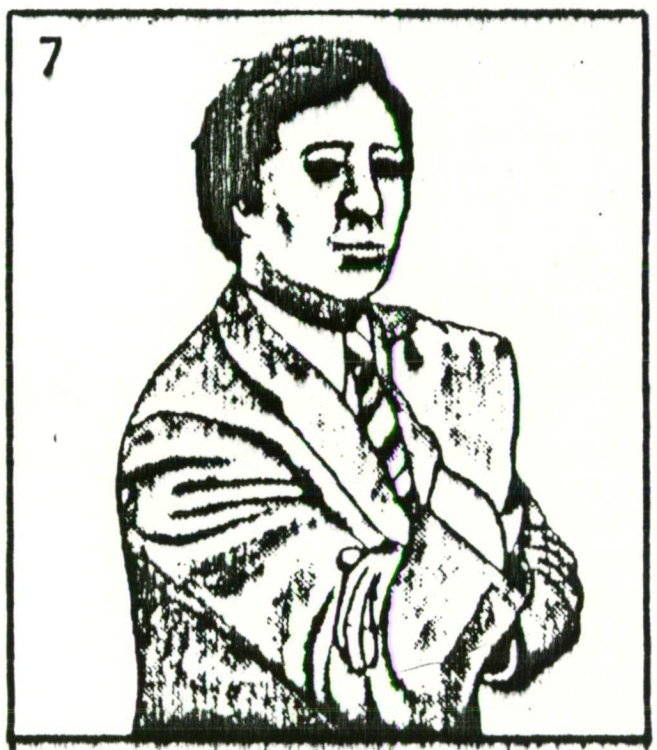
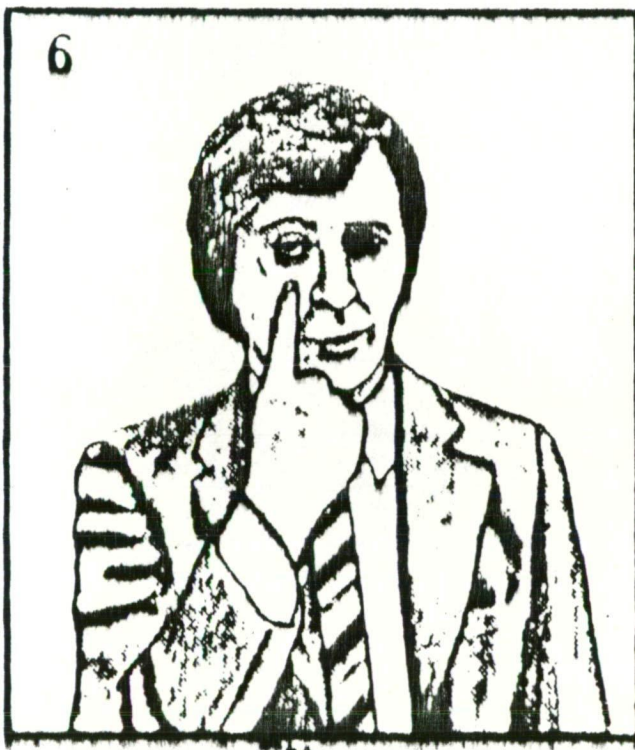
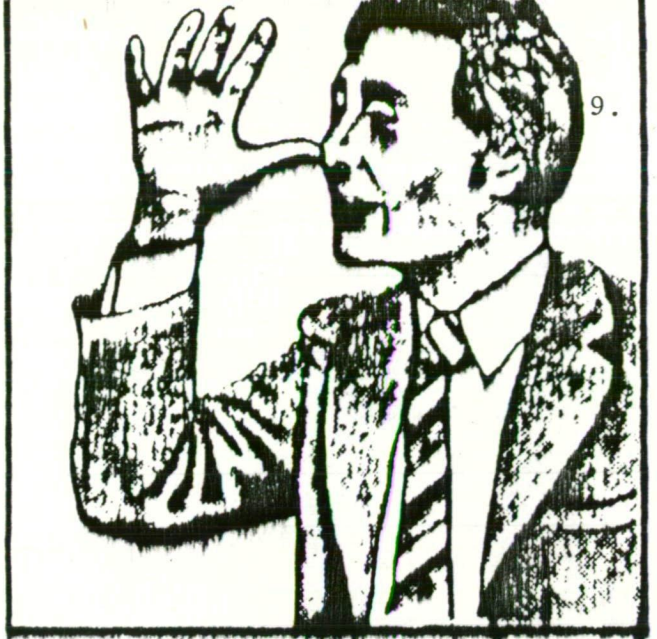
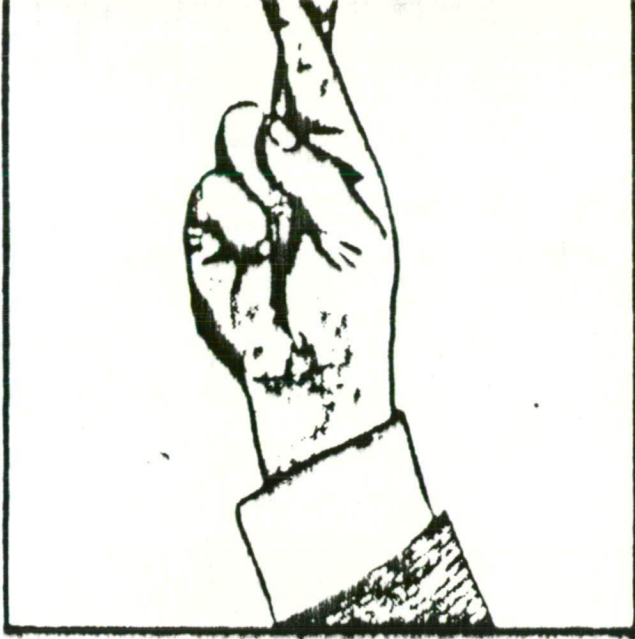
EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES

Theatre (*Theatron*) : a place for seeing.

The original setting for performances was a large dancing floor (*Orchestra*), to which a dressing room (*skēnē*) was later added then extended, permitting the use of revolving panels (*periaktoi*), bearing pictures announcing the place of action. There was no scenery in the modern sense of the word, but the stage wall provided an increasingly elaborate architectural background, with the *periaktoi* on either side of the stage. These were triangular prisms which could be rotated to indicate symbolically a change of scene by means of: a *painted tree*, a *column*, or *waves*. Everybody on stage wore a mask, and a crane (*méchané*) was used to introduce flying gods. A movable platform (*ekklēma*) suggested an indoor setting, but on stage actors chiefly talked and did not use properties to any great degree. There was also a machine for imitating thunder. The Greek theatre was symbolic, with men impersonating women and with place identified by some token.

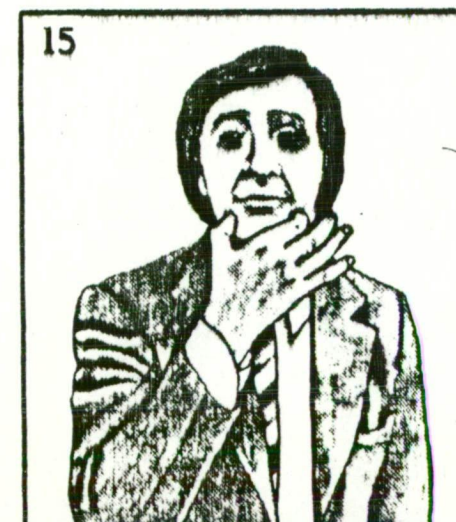
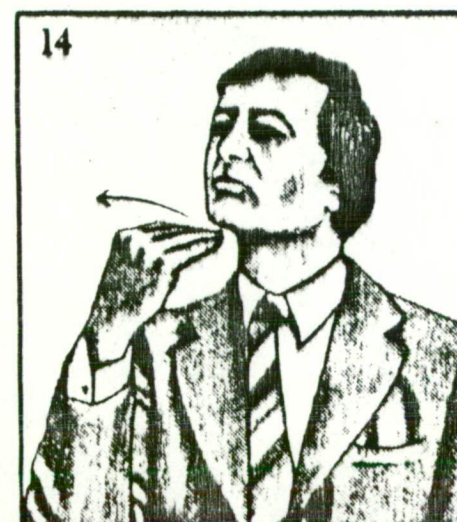
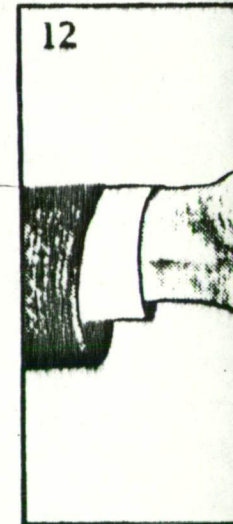
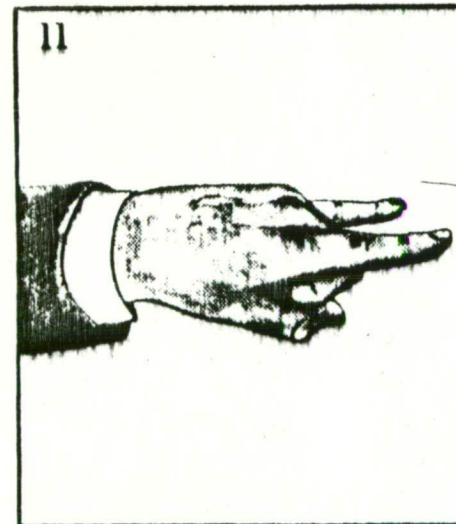
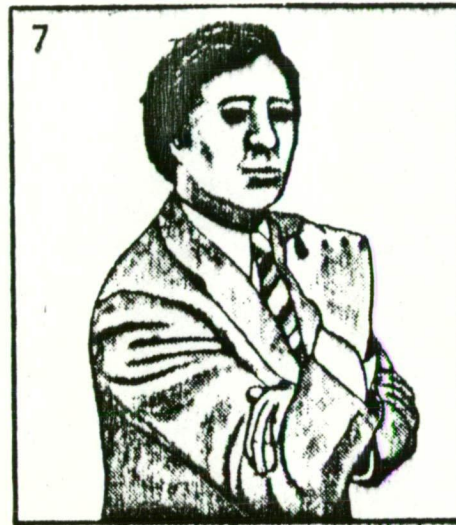
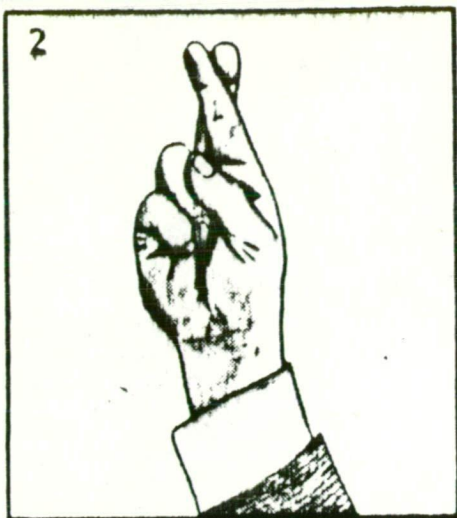
GESTURES

Every form of stage entertainment performed in keeping with long standing traditions inevitably develops special, stylized gestures, instantly recognizable to connoisseurs, though not always to persons seeing them for the first time. The gestures of the stage, when not directly imitative of universally recognizable phenomena (weeping with sorrow, shuddering with fear, and so on), are derived from the habitual gestures of the particular society of which the theatre is a part. The European or Japanese shakes his head literally to signify *no*; the Indian actor makes the same gesture to signify *yes*. Both reproduce on stage the normal daily gestures of their societies. Gestures performed by actors can be so restrained as to be almost imperceptible at times, yet retain their effect because of the unifying strength of the actor's personality. In puppet theatre however (e.g. Bunraku), the inability of the puppets to rival the subtlety of movement of a living person has led the operators to choose the opposite extreme: *They create an illusion of life by simplifying and intensifying human gestures so as to make the audience feel it is witnessing a distillation of emotions experienced by the characters on the stage.* The gestures in the Bunraku (Japanese Puppet Theatre) are intended to underline with broad strokes the central aspect of an utterance rather than to reproduce each word. Obviously, the more skilled an operator and the more advanced the mechanism of his puppet or marionette, the more convincing will be the illusion that a living creature is performing. If the operator is a master, his puppet can seem to be the very embodiment of the words of the play; the puppet is unlike the actor, who always retains something of his own

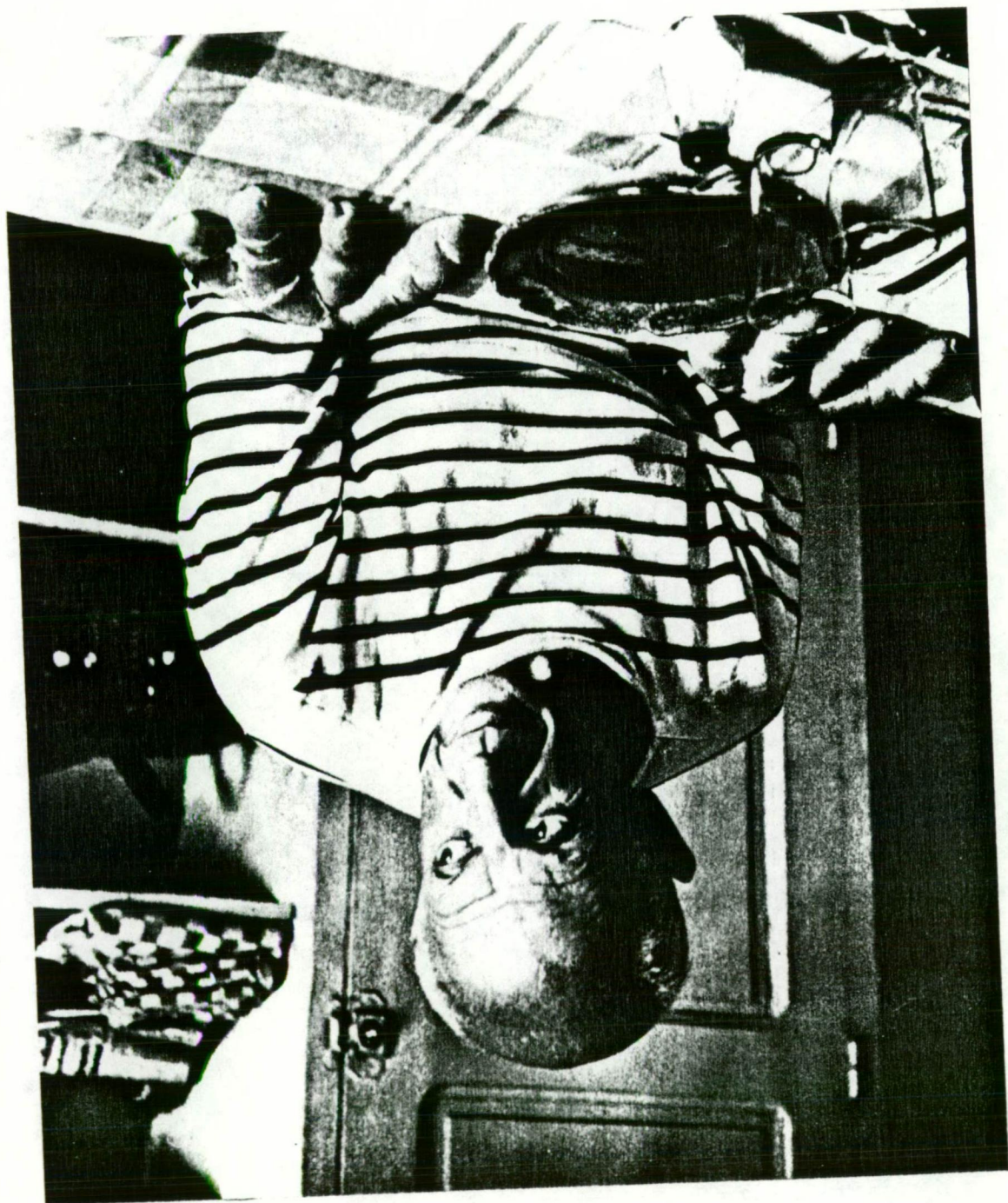


personality, regardless of the role. But the puppet forfeits its claim on our attention if it is not imbued with the mystery of the non-human being magically possessed of human attributes. It is conceivable that a marvellously talented operator could manipulate a doll of human proportions so adroitly that an audience would be incapable of distinguishing the doll from a human being. Such excessive realism, as Chikamatsu Monzaemon* noted, *far* from pleasing the audience would probably disgust instead; Chikamatsu insisted that stylization in art and not literal fidelity is what the audience craves. A puppet which was indistinguishable from a human being would certainly not be his equal, for it would lack intelligence and individuality. The danger of over-realism is present today in exceptionally skilful varieties of marionette shows, where, after our initial astonishment at the realism of the movements we are likely to grow bored with the expressionless little creatures so uninspiringly performing as Faust, Tamino, or the Queen of Denmark. Bunraku, is immune to the temptation known in certain theatres of the West in trying to persuade the audience it is watching reality and not a play. Attempts in recent years to employ a modern colloquial usually seem ludicrous, because the excessive realism violates the sense of distance necessary in a theatre poised between reality and non-reality as Bunraku. It is said to take a chanter eight years to master the art of weeping, the protracted sobs and incoherent gasps are scarcely imitative of human expressions of sorrow. They are instead an extraction and exaggeration of the essential qualities of the weeping characteristic of different kinds of people. Chikamatsu insisted that Art lay in

* Chikamatsu Monzaemon was Japan's greatest tragic dramatist.



the narrow area between realism and fiction. The stylization of gestures and continual awareness that we are witnessing a play make it possible to accept in Bunraku scenes which would be unspeakably horrible. The puppeteers not only make it possible for us to witness this scene without acute discomfort, but by daring to present such extremes of human feeling they may touch levels of emotion deeper than those of more realistic dramas.

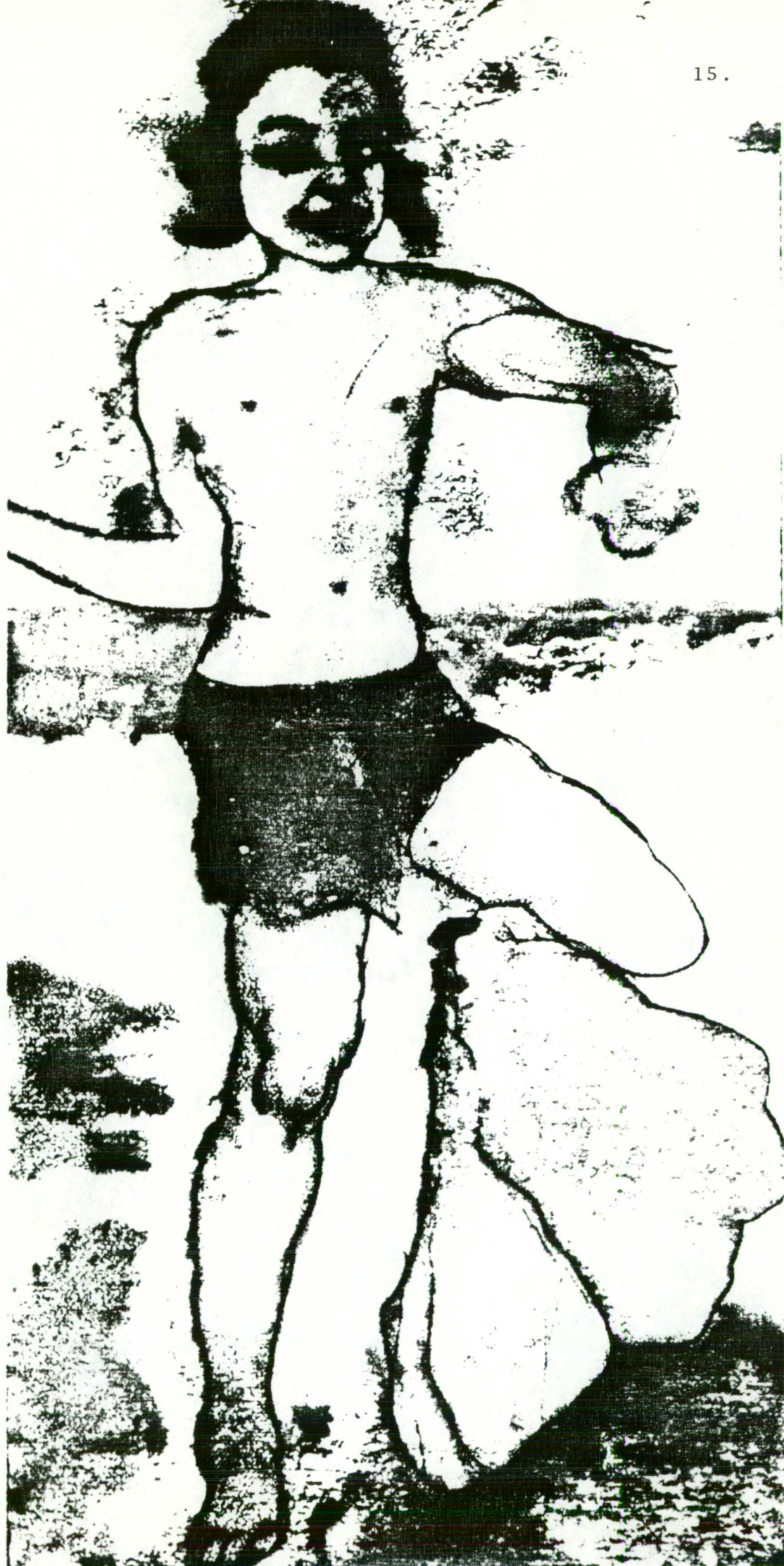


NŌ THEATRE

Very little scenery is used in the Nō plays. A pine tree is painted on the back wall, and props which are no more than evocative outlines of real objects are used, along with the musical accompaniment. This absence of scenery strengthens the symbolic unspoken beauty of the Nō plays. In Nō, *real* time is retarded to create a sensation of timelessness. The deliberate pace of the performer, the reiteration of the drum, and the unchanging facade of the stage all contribute to this impression. Here, again, the audience's awareness of real time passing accentuates the meaning of *illusory* time.

KABUKI THEATRE

The Japanese do not go to the Kabuki theatre in order to witness a suspenseful plot or a deep psychological study of character. The real appeal of the Kabuki lies in the actor's skill, particularly his skill in assuming a beautiful and forceful pose, which in Kabuki terminology is called *mie*. If a *mie* proves to be unusually striking, the audience will shout in approval. *This is what I've been waiting for!*



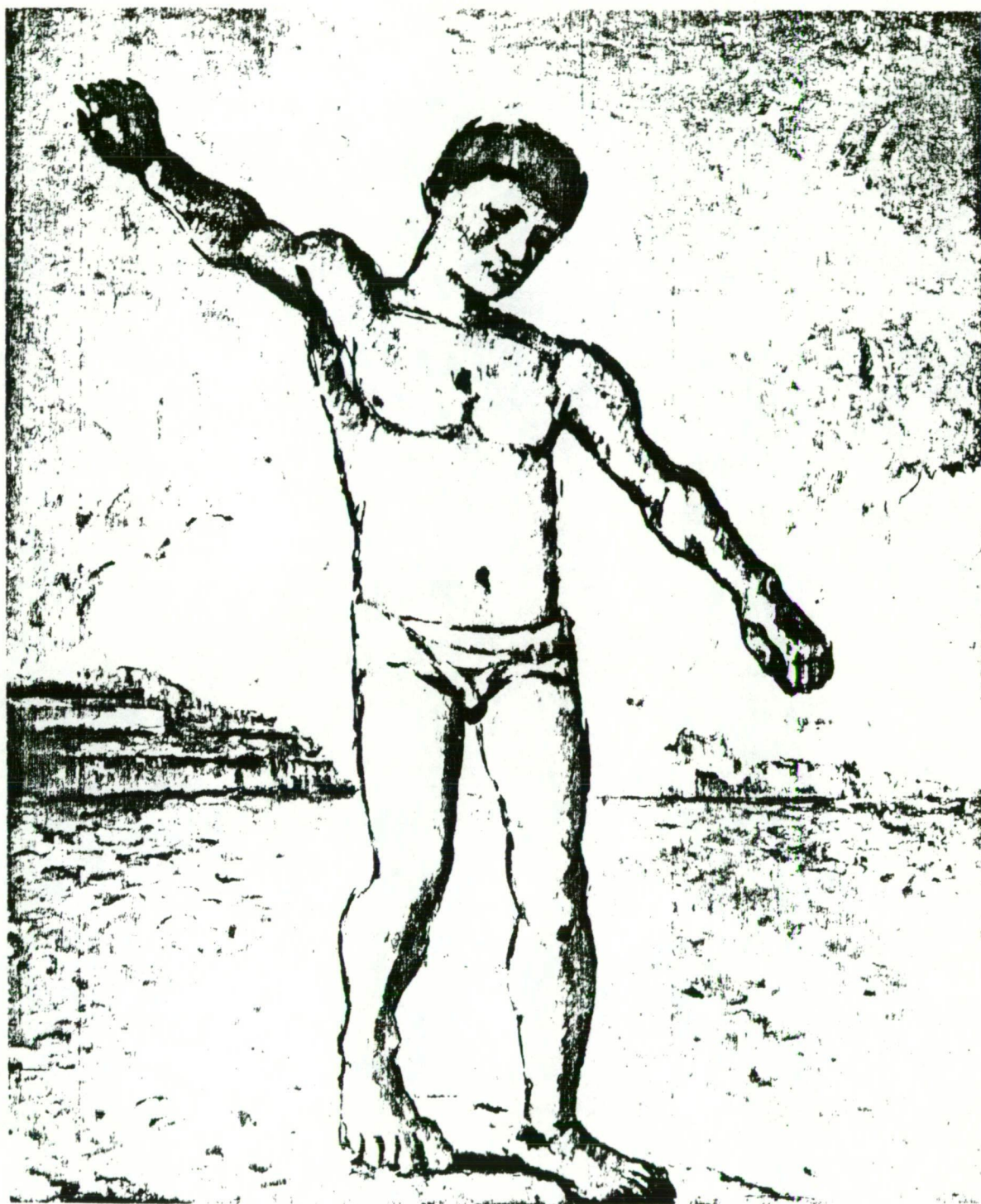
THE FAUVES

One of their most common themes is that of nudes bathing in a landscape, a scene neither new nor original, yet given a treatment, quite apart from the method of drawing and the handling of colour, which sets it off from anything that has gone before. An aspect of the artists' attitude toward the human beings of their pictures is embodied in the lack of psychological relation, or of any active demonstration of emotion in general which these display. The usual scene portrayed is just a group of figures which stand or sit or lie about, looking into or out of the picture, but almost never at each other. There is no unified action which brings them into mutual play (as in the bathing scenes of Renoir). The poses and gestures of the figures have no exterior determinant which can be grasped by the spectator, but are seemingly compelled solely by the interior mood of each figure. The feeling of mood thus created, of the rendering of a symbolic scene which is to affect the beholder by its symbolic qualities, by the suggestion of things outside itself, rather than a scene complete in itself and external to the spectator, is forcibly heightened by the filling of the frame by the figures. They reach from the top to the bottom of the picture, and are often incomplete at both extremes. Not being set back into the picture by any strip of foreground, lacking perspective depth and psychological distance, they impose upon the spectator immediately without any intervention of artificial setting, not bearing any relation to each other, but still partaking of a pervasive mood, they have an undetermined but apparently important, relation to the



spectator, e.g. Matisse's *Bathers* of 1907 and his *Women by the Sea*, 1908.

The combination of immediacy and remoteness, of direct, intense appeal and unlimited implication, is not a paradox. The symbolists (Gauguin, Munch, Hodler) had had similar intentions. Certain primitive or prehistoric work may be at times recalled. This may be explained by the effort to give the figures meaning beyond themselves, replacing by an emotional symbolism the natural and direct symbolism of the primitive (tribal) people. In that earlier religious context the single figure is quite naturally a self-sufficient, magically effective image of a kind that the allusive ramifications of later mythological and hierarchical developments prevent. Emotionally as well as in its formal structure, the picture becomes a symbol whose generality increases its possible meaning. This could perhaps be compared with certain anti-intellectual, anti-analytical attitudes which attempted to grasp reality by means of a return to something fundamental in the human being, to do away with a developed superstructure, with as Matisse has said, "The acquired means", in favour of something native and simple.

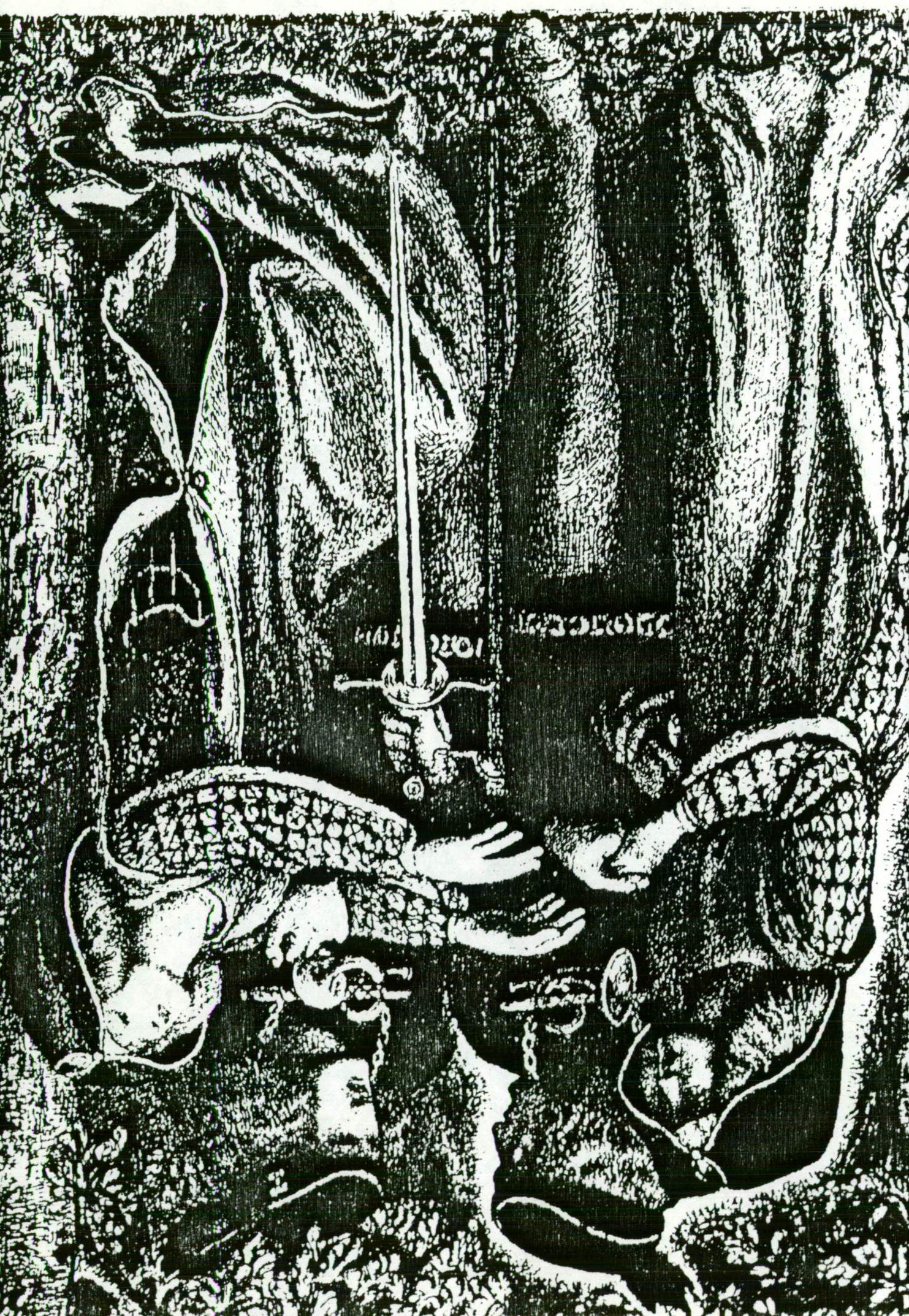


DIE BRÜCKE

In such a picture as Heckel's *Clown and Doll* (1912), the individuality of the figures, the existence of the actors as separate human beings, has almost disappeared in favour of the purely typical roles which they are playing. Their relation is made symbolic of a type relation, or a basic human situation. The figures are of course themselves types; the lack of modelling, the stiffness of gestures, and the compulsory absence of facial expression, emphasize still further their lack of individuality. Elsewhere, when such a clear symbol cannot be chosen, the particular, separate character of the subject is done away with by similar means. Above all the faces are never individualized, the features being given as large unmodelled spots of colour within the area of the head. Often, as in Nolde's *Comedy* (1920), it is impossible to tell whether or not certain of the figures are wearing masks, and the undetermined quality of the picture and its power to evoke meanings beyond itself are thereby greatly enhanced.



THE PAINTINGS PRESENTED IN THIS EXHIBITION WERE
PRODUCED DURING 1981-82 WITHIN THE MASTER OF
FINE ARTS COURSE AT THE TASMANIAN SCHOOL OF ART,
UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA.



CATALOGUE

Paintings: Acrylic and Oil on Canvas

Measurements: Height before width in centimetres

1. THE MARTYR
1981 152 x 176.5
2. THE CONJURER
1981 152.5 x 177
3. THE IDOLATER
1982 154.5 x 187
4. THE NIGHT STALKER
1982 154.5 x 187
5. THE MESOPOTAMIAN
1982 154 x 186
6. THE SOMNAMBULIST
1982 155 x 187
7. PAS DE DEUX
1982 154.5 x 187
8. DOPPELGÄNGER
1982 152.5 x 175
9. MOTHER AND CHILD
1982 175 x 152
10. LANDSCAPE, PARIS, SUMMER, 1907
1982 175 x 152
11. THE ART OF SPACE
1982 178 x 122
12.
1982 178 x 122



THE MARTYR

1981. 152 x 176.5 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas.

MARTYR

A person who willingly suffers death rather than renounce his religion. One who is put to death or endures great suffering on behalf of any belief, principle or cause: a martyr to the cause of social justice. It can be a person who undergoes severe or constant suffering, or a person who seeks sympathy or attention by pretending to or exaggerating pain and deprivation. Stephan was the first Christian martyr. He was stoned to death because he protested against the wickedness of his fellow citizens. Many early Christians became martyrs because the Romans persecuted them for not worshipping official Roman gods. The word *martyr* comes from the Greek meaning *witness*.



THE CONJURER

1981. 152.5 x 177 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas.

CONJURING is a form of entertainment based on pretending to do things everyone knows are against the laws of nature. *The Conjurer* is an especially trained actor. He depends on skill with the hands, psychology, and often, mechanical apparatus. He counts on the fact that the mind does not notice many things that the eye sees. The two most frequent terms for the art, conjuring and magic, have in their earlier meanings association with supernatural powers and beings. *A magician, a juggler*: to call, raise up, or bring into existence by, or, as if by, magic.

ELEPHANT/ANIMAL SYMBOLISM

Elephant symbolism is somewhat complex for it embraces certain secondary implications of a mythic character. In the broadest and universal sense, it is a symbol of strength and of the power of the libido (libido being the emotional craving or wish behind all human activity). Indian tradition has it that elephants are the *caryatids* of the universe (caryatids usually being a column in the form of a sculptured female figure). In processions they are the bearers of kings and queens. In Indian mythology *Ganesha* is the elephant-headed god of erudition, son of *Shiva* and *Parvati*.

According to Jung, the animal stands for the non-human psyche, for the world of subhuman instincts, and for the unconscious areas of the psyche. Identifying oneself with animals represents integration of the unconscious and sometimes rejuvenation through bathing in the sources of life itself.

MASK

All transformations are invested with something at once of profound mystery and of the shameful, since anything that is so modified as to become 'something else' while still remaining the thing that it was, must inevitably be productive of ambiguity and equivocation. Therefore, metamorphoses must be hidden from view - and hence the need for the mask. Secrecy tends towards transfiguration: it helps what-one-is, to become what-one-would-like-to-be; and this is what constitutes its magic character, present in both the Greek theatrical mask and in the religious masks of Africa or Oceania. The mask is equivalent to the chrysalis.

In the words of Wang Chung:

The chrysalis precedes the cicada; simply by changing its shape, it becomes the cicada. When the soul leaves the body, it resembles a cicada which leaves its chrysalis in order to become an insect.



THE IDOLATER

1981. 152.5 x 177 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas.

IDOLATER

A person who worships idols. An image or statue representing a god or some other sacred being. The word *idol* has come to be connected with the worship of many gods. In most cases however, people pray and make offerings through idols rather than to them. The potency of ceremonial objects of all creeds is at once both real and unreal. The celebrants of a cult might know that the figure of their god was a wooden carving but in a festival they worship the effigy as a living god.

Some of them have hidden the figure in the shrubbery, but they search with the others, they know where it is and know it not.

(Thomas Mann)

TREE

The tree is one of the most essential of traditional symbols. Very often the symbolic tree is of no particular genus, although some people have singled out one species as exemplifying *par excellence* the generic qualities. The oak tree was sacred to the Celts; the fig-tree to the Indians, and the lime-tree to the Germans. In its most general sense the symbolism of the tree denotes the life of the cosmos: its consistence, growth, proliferation, generative and regenerative processes. It stands for inexhaustible life, and is therefore equivalent to a symbol of immortality. At the most primitive level, there is the *Tree of Life* and the *Tree of Death*, the two trees being two different representations of the same idea. The *arbor vitae* is found frequently, in a variety of forms, in Eastern art. The apparently purely decorative-motif of *hom* (the central tree), placed between two fabulous beings or two animals facing each other, is a theme of Mesopotamian origin, brought both to the West and to the Far East by Persians, Arabs and Byzantines. The tree was worshipped among early peoples as a sacred object inhabited by a god.

CURTAIN

The action of parting curtains, rending veils or clothing, stripping off diadems, cloaks or bracelets, signifies a move towards an *arcanum* or the penetration of a mystery.



THE NIGHT STALKER

1982. 154.5 x 187 cms.

Acrylic and Oil and Canvas.

THE NIGHT STALKER

A person or animal who walks about at night especially with criminal intentions. To make a furtive approach with a view to killing or catching (game, enemy). Night is the period of darkness between sunset and sunrise. The dualism of light/darkness does not arise as a symbolic formula or morality until primordial darkness has been split into light and dark. Hence, the pure concept of darkness is not, in symbolic tradition, identified with gloom - it corresponds to primigenial chaos. It is also related to mystic nothingness. The gloom which preceded the *first light* always represents the state of undeveloped potentialities which give rise to chaos. Hence, the darkness introduced into the world, after the advent of light, is regressive and it follows that it is traditionally associated with the principle of evil and with the base, unsublimated forces. A state of time of obscurity, ignorance and misfortune, the decline of life: death.



THE MESOPOTAMIAN

1982. 154 x 186 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas.

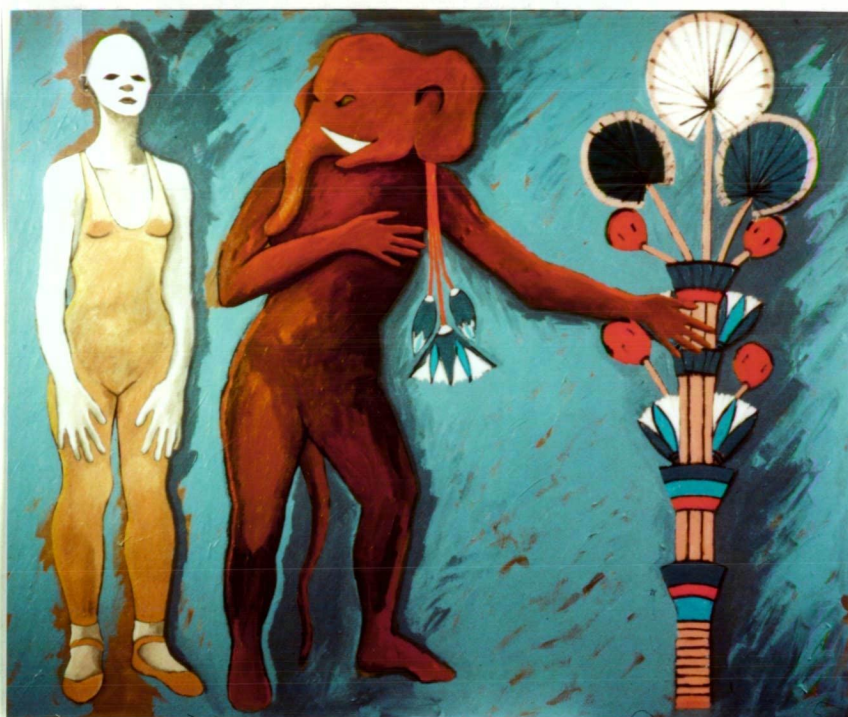
MESOPOTAMIA was an area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers now known as Iraq and South-eastern Turkey. Several ancient civilizations grew there. Mesopotamia is a Greek word meaning *between the rivers*.

Settlers from the north came into Mesopotamia before 4000 B.C. These settlers may have been related to early settlers of Turkey and Syria. But scholars have found no clear records to identify their language or their race.

Sometime after 4000 B.C., the Sumerians invaded Mesopotamia. They probably came from the mountainous regions of present-day Iran and Turkey. They moved south to the Persian Gulf and by 2700 B.C. they had developed a flourishing civilization in Mesopotamia. They developed cuneiform writing and used it to record their way of life.

With this growing civilization, the Semites moved in from the west and adopted much of the Sumerian culture but spoke Akkadian. The Semites made up nearly all the empires that controlled Mesopotamia between 2300 and 539 B.C. These included the Akkadian, Babylonian (Chaldean) empires.

In 539 B.C., the Persians made Mesopotamia part of their empire. Alexander the Great Conquered the Persians between 334 and 330 B.C. Later the Romans, Sassanians, Arabs, Mongols and then Turks ruled Mesopotamia. Iraq was created at the end of W.W.I when the Ottoman Empire broke up.



THE SOMNAMBULIST

1982. 155 x 187 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas.

SOMNAMBULISM, or sleepwalking, is a condition in which the sleeper leaves his bed and engages in some physical activity that is believed to fulfil a wish or release a tension. The sleeper may re-enact a past event, look for a lost object, or even write a letter. Most sleepwalkers cannot hear ordinary sounds. The Somnambulist cannot see, taste or smell, but generally has excellent control over his muscles. Often acts are performed that could not be done when awake and upon awakening these acts are only remembered as a dream.

Psychologists describe somnambulism as an extreme form of absent-mindedness. Something in the subconscious mind forces the sleepwalker to follow a single line of action. Many psychologists believe that sleepwalkers have really hypnotized themselves.



PAS DE DEUX

1982. 154.5 x 175 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas.

PAS DE DEUX

A dance or figure by two persons.

In early thought *two* became a *sacred* number, perhaps explainable by the mysteries long associated with duplication.

Animal-souls or fetish souls, external souls generally, are frequently described by observers under the term *alter ego*. Many tribal groups believe that each person has an *alter ego* in the form of some animal. It is believed that such a person's life is bound up with that of the animal to such an extent that whatever affects the one produces a corresponding impression upon the other, and that if one dies the other must speedily do so. It happened that a man shot a hippopotamus close to a native village; the friends of a woman who died the same night demanded and eventually obtained compensation for the murder of the woman. Many different tribal groups have individual totems which are *animal familiar*, a sort of *alter ego*. A man's spirit is in his animal totem and its spirit is in him. A medicine man can assume the shape of his animal totem.

DANCE

There is a universal belief that, in so far as dance is a rhythmic art form, it is a symbol of the act of creation. This is why dance is one of the most ancient forms of magic. Every dance is a pantomime of *metamorphosis* (and so calls for a mask to facilitate and conceal the transformation), which seeks to change a dancer into a god, a demon or some other chosen form of existence.

LANGER'S DANCE

The primitive phases of social development are entirely dominated by the *mythic consciousness*. From the earliest of times, through the late tribal stages, man lived in a world of *Powers* - divine or semidivine Beings, whose wills determine the courses of cosmic and human events. Painting, sculpture, and literature, however archaic, show us these *Powers* already fixed in a visible or describable form, anthropomorphic or zoomorphic - a sacred bison, a sacred cow, a scarab, a Tiki, and finally an Apollo, Osiris and Christ. But in the first stages of Imagination, no such definite forms embody the terrible and fecund *Powers* that surround humanity. The first *recognition* of them is through the feeling of personal power and will in the human body and their first *representation* is through a bodily activity which abstracts the sense of power from the practical experiences. This activity is known as *dancing*. The dance usually creates an image of nameless and bodiless *Powers* filling a complete, autonomous realm, a *world*. It is the first presentation of the world as a realm of mystic forces. When a dancer speaks of space, he does not only mean actual space, but space which signifies something immaterialistic, unreal, imaginary, which goes beyond the visible outlines of one or more gestures. At this stage the problems of the tribal or cult dance are similar to those of the modern ballet: to break the beholder's sense of actuality and set up the virtual image of a different world; to create a play of forces that confronts the percipient instead of engulfing him, as it does when he is dancing. The presence of an audience gives dance its artistic discipline. Both space and time

are implicitly created with the primary illusion of dance. The dancer, or dancers, must transform the stage for the audience as well as for themselves into an autonomous, complete virtual realm and all motions into a play of visible forces into unbroken, virtual time. The form must be organic and autonomous and divorced from actuality. Dance, the art of the Stone Age: its space is plastic, its time is musical, its themes are fantasy, its actions symbolic. Dance has been called an art of space, an art of time, a kind of poetry, a kind of drama. The substance of dance creation is the same power that enchanted ancient caves and forests but today it is invoked with full knowledge of its illusory status and therefore wholly artistic intent. The realm of magic around the alter was broken, inevitably and properly, by the growth of the human mind from mythic conception to philosophical and scientific thought.



" DOPPELGÄNGER

1982. 152.5 x 175 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas.

DOPPELGÄNGER

(GERMAN : double goer)

So I assumed a double part, and cried
 And I heard another's voice cry: 'What! are you here?'
 Although we were not. I was still the same,
 Knowing myself yet being someone other -
 And he a face still forming; yet the words sufficed
 To compel the recognition they preceded.

(T.S. Eliot)

In German folklore, a wraith or astral apparition of a living person, as distinguished from a ghost. The concept of the existence of a spirit double, an exact but usually invisible replica of every man, bird or beast, is an ancient and widespread belief. To meet one's wraith, or double, is a sign that one's death is imminent. This belief is derived directly from the theory of the soul. The soul itself constantly tends to be a counterpart or duplication, a spiritual-material double of the person. The reason for this tendency is to be found in the main source of the belief of the soul. It is called up most vividly in dreams, but also in waking memory; its general foundation is visual.

The Chinese hold that the soul may exist outside the body, as a duplicate having the form of the body, as well as its solid consistency. The analogy of the soul to the portrait, reflection and shadow has led to certain curious examples of the pictorial double. Early thought seems to have noted identity far more than difference, a tendency well exemplified in Chinese psychology.

The persistence of the belief in the apparition of the double is one of those cases which cannot be explained by any theory of survival or tradition. The belief is kept alive by hallucinations, and in uncultivated minds by the normal phenomena of visualization.



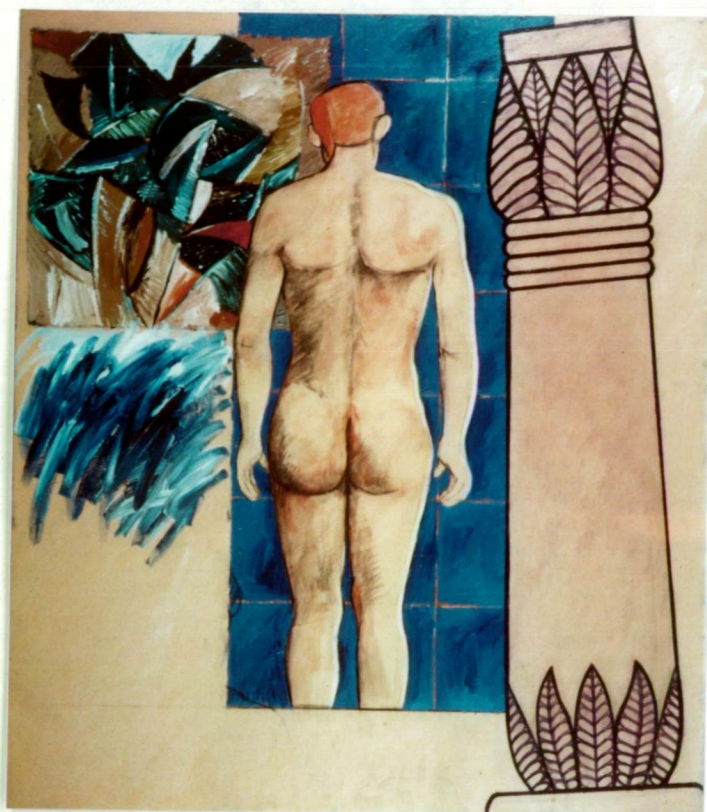
MOTHER AND CHILD

1982. 175 x 152 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas.

WOMAN

In anthropology, woman corresponds to the passive principle of nature. She has three basic aspects: first, as a *siren*, or enchantress who entices men away from the path of evolution; second, as the mother, or *Magna mater* (the motherland, the city or mother-nature) related in turn to the formless aspect of the waters and of the unconscious; and third, as the unknown damsel, the beloved or the *anima* in Jungian psychology. When represented as an image of the anima, she is superior to the man because she is a reflection of the loftiest and purest qualities of the man. In baser forms: the instinctive and emotional aspects - woman appears on a lower level than the man. The temptress, *Eve*, who drags everything down with her, signifying all that is transitory, inconsistent, unfaithful and disembling.



LANDSCAPE, PARIS, SUMMER, 1907

1982. 175 x 152 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas.

THE HUMAN COUPLE, by their very nature, must always symbolize the urge to unite what is in fact discrete. There is a Hindu image representing the joining of the unjoinable (analogous to the marriage of fire and water) by the interlinking of Man and Woman, which may be taken to symbolize the joining of all opposites: good, bad, high, low, etc. The attitudes which the body may take up are of symbolic importance, because they are both the instrument and the expression of the human tendency towards ascendance and evolution.

PABLO PICASSO, *MOTHER AND CHILD*, Paris, Summer, 1907.

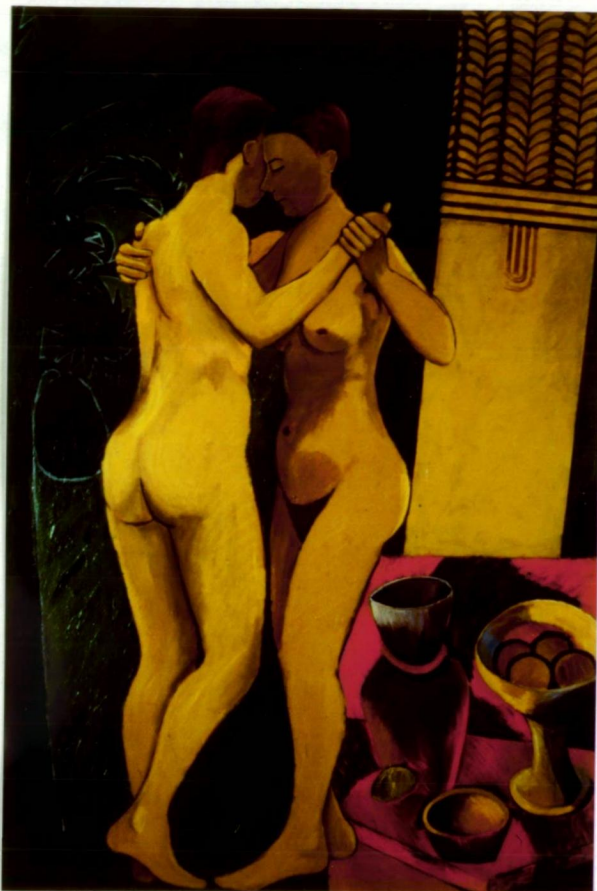
Around 1907 or slightly before Matisse introduced Picasso to African sculpture. At that time African Sculpture had been well known to curio hunters but not to artists. It is uncertain who was the first French artist to recognise its potential for modern art. It may have been Maillol who came from the Perpignan region, or Derain, or even Matisse himself, because for many years there was a curio-dealer in the *rue des Rennes* who always had many things of this kind in his window and Matisse passed by there to go to his sketch class. Picasso had just finished painting Gertrude Stein's portrait when Matisse drew his attention to the sculpture. In these early days when Picasso created Cubism the effect of the African art was purely upon his vision and his forms, his imagination was purely Spanish. It was only much later in his life that his imagination was affected by African sculpture and that may have resulted from re-inforcement by the Orientalism of the Russians which he came in contact with through Diaghilev and the Russian Ballet. In early March 1907 Picasso bought two Iberian sculptured heads from Apollinaire's secretary, G  ry-Pi  ret, who had stolen them from the Louvre. In May or June 1907 he visited the ethnological museum at *Palais du Trocadero* and had a "revelation" about African sculpture. Following this Picasso painted many "African" pictures, *Mother and Child* being one of them.

PABLO PICASSO, *LANDSCAPE*, Paris, Summer, 1907

The summer of 1907 Picasso went to Spain and came back with some Spanish landscapes. It is possible to say that these were the beginnings of cubism. In these there was no African sculpture influence. There was very evidently a strong Cezanne influence, particularly the late water colours, the cutting up of the sky not in cubes but in spaces. However the treatment of the houses was essentially Spanish and therefore essentially Picasso. The colour too was characteristically Spanish, the pale silver yellow with the faintest hint of green, the colour afterwards so well known in Picasso's cubist pictures, as well as in those of his followers. Gertrude Stein always said that Cubism was a purely Spanish conception and that only Spaniards could be cubists and that the only real Cubism was that of Picasso and Juan Gris. To understand this one has only to read the life and death of Juan Gris by Gertrude Stein, written on the death of one of her two dearest friends, Picasso and Juan Gris, both Spaniards.

In the shops in Barcelona instead of post cards they had square little frames and inside it was placed a cigar, a real one, a pipe, a bit of handkerchief etcetera, all absolutely the arrangement of many a cubist picture and helped out by cut paper representing other objects. That is the modern note that in Spain has been done for centuries.

(Gertrude Stein)



THE ART OF SPACE

1982. 178 x 122 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas.

COLUMN

The single column pertains to the universal group of symbols representing the *world axis* (such as the tree, the ladder, the sacrificial stake, the mast, the cross). But its vertical nature it may also imply an upward impulse of self-affirmation or the phallic. The isolated column is closely related to the symbolic tree. However in allegories and graphic symbols there are nearly always two columns. When situated on either side of something they represent supporters; the balanced tension of opposing forces. Taking them as separate symbols, the first unit corresponds to the masculine affirmative principle and the second, the feminine passive principle (comparable with the Tree of Life and the Tree of Death).



THE ART OF TIME

1982. 178 x 122 cms.

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas

SEMINAR PAPERS

1. TOWARDS A CULTURAL CONVERGENCE

2. THE KILLING OF RAPHAEL

(The rejection of the post-Renaissance
tradition of Western art:

'The clear and tasteless poison of the art
of Rapahel').

SEMINAR 1.

TOWARDS A CULTURAL CONVERGENCE



Coat of Arms of the City of Sydney

PREFACE

Throughout the paper I have grossly generalized on the nature of aboriginal art. There is a complex diversity of style and intent which I have neglected to comment on, but this has been a common attitude of whites to black art until fairly recent times. The scope of this paper does not allow for an explanation of the diversity of aboriginal art.

The emphasis has been on the social implications of the convergence for Aborigines. With the white artists I have tended to discuss the convergence more in terms of art because there are crucial social implications for the Aborigines but not for the white Australians.

The real emphasis of the paper concerns the growth of interest in aboriginal art by white artists with a view related to the aboriginal artists.

The idea and the title of the paper came from Bernard Smith's 1980 Boyer Lectures, *The Spectre of Truganini*.



TOWARDS A CULTURAL CONVERGENCE

If anyone is seeking evidence for the biblical warning that the sins of the fathers will be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generations, he or she need look no further than at the way in which the fate of the Australian aborigines has come back to haunt the white people in this country.

There are few issues which cause more division, bitterness and feelings of guilt than the misfortunes of the Aborigines. The record towards the Aborigines provides an ugly blot on Anglo-Australian history; a social order which has survived for millennia has been almost obliterated since the arrival of the first British settlers. In Tasmania one of the few thoroughly successful examples of genocide was accomplished by the efforts of our relatives. Some Australians when they learnt of Auschwitz said that it could not happen here. It did happen here and not all that long ago.

In other parts of Australia, the assault was as disastrous. Apart from a handful surviving in remote deserts, the Aborigines lost their land, their means of supporting themselves and their identities.

The Australian Institute of Criminology has demonstrated their rate of imprisonment is phenomenally high, resulting from offences relating to alcohol. Unlike other non-European peoples the Aborigines had little experience with this drug. It was not, in the main, a part of their culture and many of them are still unable to handle it without tragic consequences.

Likewise because they had no beasts of burden nor crops which they could cultivate the Aborigines were victims of the spread of European style agriculture to which they were unable to adapt.

Albert Namatjira, a full-blooded Aranda man, was one of the first artists to adapt. He explained to his white art teacher, Rex Battarbee, that before he took to painting "no matter how hard he worked at ... carpentry, blacksmithing, building stockyards, or working ... as a camel boy, the most that he could ever get was rations and clothes, not even a sixpence".¹

Namatjira became a highly successful painter of watercolour landscapes in the European style, thus escaping his earlier condition. His tragic end is well known. In sharing alcohol to which he was legally entitled, with others of his tribe, who were not, he was caught between the laws and customs of two cultures. His trial and death within a year are now a part of the history of both cultures.

Some critics felt that Namatjira should have been working within the traditional form of central Australian art, not in a European style that was already becoming outmoded. According to Bernard Smith in his essay, 'Black Voices', "such a view failed to grasp the social reality of the situation. Namatjira was seeking to show that he was a man of his time not that he was a man of his tribe...",² a quote which belies the myth of the Aborigines' inability to learn to compete in a capitalist-based European society. In any capitalist system the making of art is the manufacture of yet another commodity for marketing.

In the seventies there emerged popular acceptance of aboriginal art, which surpassed even Namatjira's popularity. The re-emergence



Sir William Dargie (b. 1912)
Portrait of Albert Namatjira

of the aboriginal culture came out of the black activist movement. As the Aborigines regained their land, their art was strengthened, because their art is inextricably related to their tribal lands.

The Namatjira trial in 1959 and his subsequent death caused a national scandal and was seen as such by a broad spectrum of our society. The disgrace of it in a sense saved the aboriginal culture from Europeanization. It was in the late thirties, forties, and fifties, that it appeared aboriginal art would die out, or become Europeanized. The Namatjira case effectively stopped any interference with the aboriginal culture, people ignored it out of embarrassment or shame.

There were two main points when the land rights struggle started which caused aboriginal art to be revived. The first one being that their art was closely connected with land ownership, lifestyle and tradition, and secondly, the Europeans saw their lifestyle as exemplifying a non-materialistic and highly spiritual society. The Rousseau-dream of the 'noble savage'; the idea that the Aborigines represent a lifestyle now seen as highly desirable by many people. This could be called the ecological balance in the aboriginal way of life.

Many contemporary western artists have not seen modern primitive man but have seen in his place, the fashionable version of Rousseau's 'noble savage'.³

Two European painters, Arthur Murch and Russell Drysdale, honestly attempted to realistically depict the Aborigines. Drysdale and Murch treated the Aborigines with the same degree of realism as any of their other models. Their failure to capture the truth of the Aborigines' situation is really a failure of the medium; painting does not have the capacity to capture a high degree of

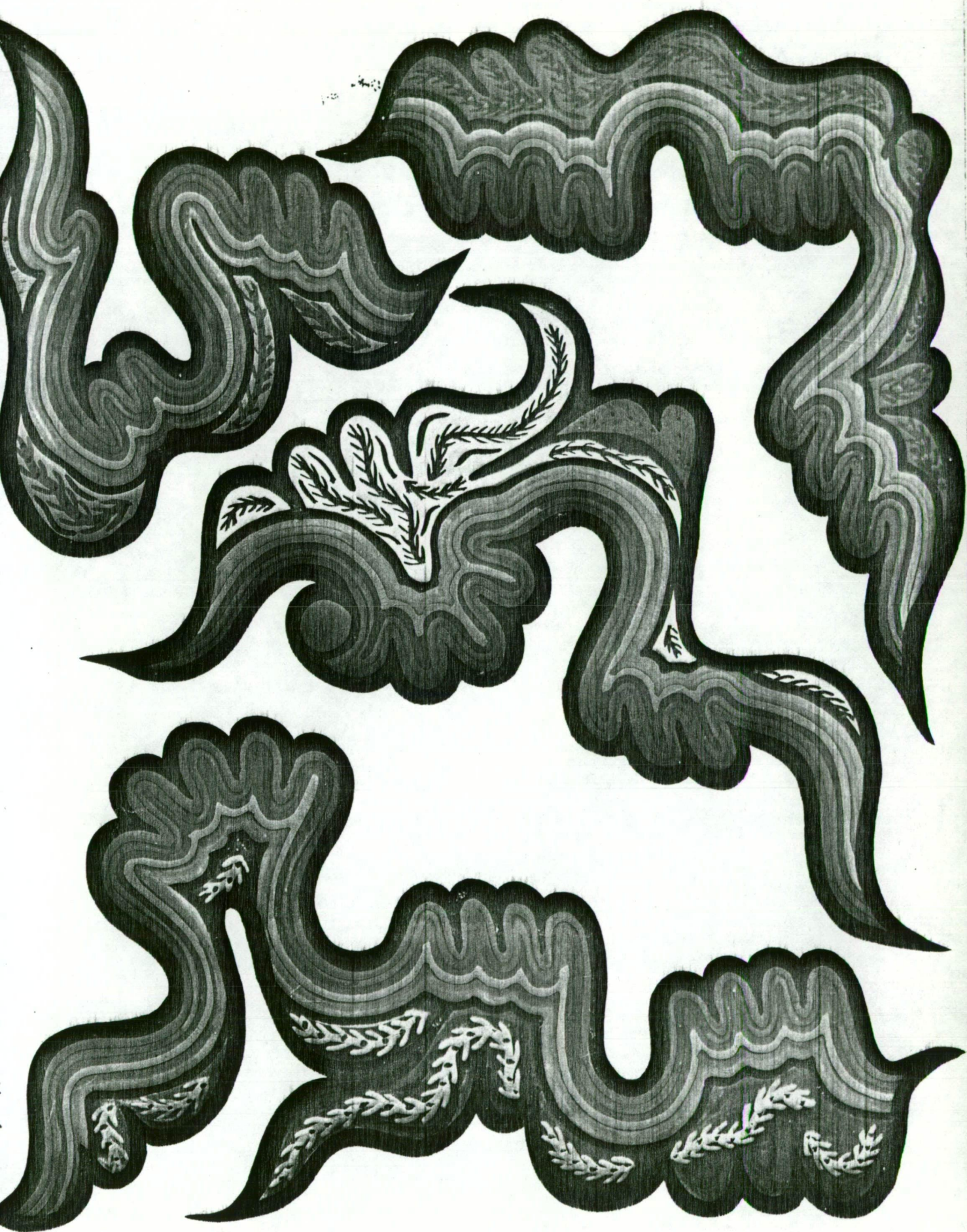


Arthur Murch (b. 1902)
Alpullurgna

reality. It always presents a somewhat sweeter view.

The ever increasing pressure of capitalism to make aboriginal art a marketable commodity has resulted in 'plasticizing' the art by (in some cases) presenting the work in a more acceptable form, so that it conforms to the taste of white society (for instance the so-called 'Batik Project' introduced to the women at Ernabella Mission about ten years ago, on the Utopia Cattle Station; in 1976, the Utopia Pastoral Lease became the property of four hundred or so Aboriginal people living there who subsequently claimed freehold title). The Batik project was described as 'an extraordinary cultural merger between the ancient Asian technique of Batik and the timeless vision of tribal dreaming'.⁴ The women use rolls of silk and commercial dyes, and their designs depict a range of subjects from floral patterns on their dresses to 'bush tucker' and in some cases their dreaming. The results are highly marketable and provide the Aborigines with an important supplement to their economy, and to quote one of the organizers of the project, Jenny Green, "we hope for a fresh and exciting contribution to Australian Art".⁵

The new romantic view of the tribal Aborigines is similar to the old romantic myth of the noble savage, in that it has a strong tendency to aestheticize Aborigines and their existence. The Aborigines are seen to have an ideal lifestyle, by those seeking meaning in a spiritual sense in our highly materialistic society. In the same way aboriginal art is particularly attractive to artists looking for meaning and authenticity and identity which seems to be lacking in contemporary art, and appears to be just the qualities expressed in the Aborigines' 'purity of vision'; an art full of meaning and purpose, spirituality and authenticity. And in the mode



and tradition of modernism and capitalism, white artists have attempted to appropriate what they can from aboriginal art, particularly in the search for nationalism.

An example of this was the Jindyworobak Movement so called by its founder, the poet Rex Ingamells, partly for its shock value. He stated, "I took the name Jindyworobak because of its aboriginality, its meaning, and its outlandishness to fashionable literary taste".⁶

Started around 1936 its aim was "to link Australian thought with its natural environment". The manifesto goes on to state "it treats as alien everything that owes its being directly to origins in other cultures - English cultures, Irish cultures, Dutch or American".⁷ This suggests returning to the state of nature (parallel here with similar movement starting in the early seventies): here again the Aborigines were the perfect symbol of that desired state. Ingamells went as far as to include aboriginal words in his poems. He later stopped this and sought Australian words and images rather than grafting on aboriginal words in an attempt to achieve a quick authenticity.

A comment made by the poet, Douglas Stewart:

The simple African negro had at least the will to perceive that never during the centuries of his culture had he been able to devise a work of art so elegant as the top hat.⁸

This suggests that racial prejudice could have been one of the reasons why the Jindyworobak Movement was so derided.

The extremes of Jindyworobakism became highly fashionable between the wars. The turn of the century Gummut Art Nouveau was the precursor of the style that spread throughout the arts

A black and white illustration of a gallery filled with various framed pictures and a large central mirror. The pictures depict different scenes, including people in various poses, animals, and abstract designs. A large, ornate mirror is in the center, reflecting the scene. The gallery is crowded with people looking at the art.

and crafts and was particularly popular in book publishing, in the illustration of childrens' books. Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding*, and May Gibbs, *The Complete Adventures of Snugglepoot and Cuddlepoot* (the gumnut babies) remain two of the most popular books ever published in Australia.

The Kitschness of Jindyworobakism has had an almost permanent place in Australian culture. The seventies nostalgia Kitsch Kick of Australian pop, readily incorporated the visual remnants of Jindyworobakism. I asked Martin Sharpe, the major pop Jindyworobaker about his concern with this mode, and he stated:

I don't think I've ever included much aboriginal work in my own -- in a couple of collages, using a Wandjina set in a McCubbin landscape. Of course I've always adored May Gibbs. I think she created one of the total visions of the bush and of course *The Search for the Golden Boomerang* was a childhood favourite on radio. One painter who I laughed at originally but liked later used Abo motifs in his paintings on tile, which are used as murals in public places around Sydney, his name is (Mansell?*) I forget. I never saw much by the Jindyworobak painters but he would have been amongst them. Perhaps the most successful because his murals are still there for all to see. I think pop art has in a way helped make these artists palatable again. One has to admire their concept because of its genuine sympathy.

Of the Australian painters Margaret Preston had been exploring aboriginal art from the mid twenties, as a way of escaping the imitation of designs and patterns from other places. She thought aboriginal art could provide this alternative to overseas designs, and began a search for "a truly national art". As a Modernist she felt that Australians should welcome mass production, as a part of the machine age but not become a slave to it by contrived overseas imitations. This she called 'meccano'. What appealed to

* Bryan Mansell

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THE ART OF MARGARET PRESTON



Preston in aboriginal art were its architectural forms. "The gum-leaf of a sharp triangle and the boomerang with circles."¹⁰ According to Humphrey McQueen, these were: "her indigenous equivalents to the cylinder, sphere and cone".¹¹ Its spontaneity removed it from the 'meccano'. She said: "it is never repetitive. The geometrical designs are balanced, but are never duplicated."¹²

Margaret Preston limited her palette to the aboriginal colours of clay, ochre, brown, black and white, because a wider palette would conceal the true nature of Australia which she saw as: "sharp forms and dull colours".¹² Preston wrote in an article on the lines of an aboriginal shield: "firstly notice that every design by our own Aborigines is irregular, this is the true essence of their beginnings, for the minds of very primitive beings are not capable of working on set lines."¹⁴

Aboriginal art presented Preston with problems of the Australian light, colour, and shape, especially the last. The following is quoting Preston's article in the Society of Artists' Book, 1945-1946, showing her view of the relationship between European and aboriginal influences in establishing a national art:

My 'Dry River' is another example showing the form that is peculiar to this country. I know the work is objective and has no emotional value, but what is emotion if the artist does not know that art has certain definite rules and how to obey them? The construction of national art can't be 'made' because it must come from the subconscious and the national characteristics and temperament; but the growth of such an art must be slow and begun from the conscious before the sub-conscious. This aboriginal art, that seems easy, is not so in essence; it should be used as a starting post. The artist must do his own work, and the study of our native art used to clear the mind of European standards, but not of training which is part of our civilization. ¹⁵

In 1941 Rex Ingamels the founder of the Jindyworobak Movement,

encouraged Margaret Preston to write for the magazine *Cultural Cross Section*. She then joined the Movement and from 1943 provided illustrations and writings for several of their publications. Towards the end of the forties Preston fell into literal Jindyworobakism, producing stencils that illustrated biblical events in Australian settings.

It is the great Modernist slur to be called decorative and in Margaret Preston's case the accusation of being 'merely decorative' at times fits. There *is* no fine line between the acceptable decorative elements in a painting for the purpose of contributing to the unique emotional response of a painting, and making a purely decorative picture for the sake of making a lovely object. To be merely decorative is to be concerned with functionless ornament. By decontextualizing aboriginal art, Preston exposed its subject matter in such a way as to make it merely decorative or functionless ornamentation. In her strategy to give new meaning to the source material she appropriated it for sophisticated modern decoration, like art deco: the high stylization of nature.

While it is possible to be sympathetic to what she says at times, there is no time when her work correlates to her written views, and I quote her again from *Art in Australia*.

I am trying to find even one form that will suggest Australia in some way. I am trying to simplify my colour to my form - to work as simply as to all appearances my country is.

Australia is a country that gives the impression of size and neutral colour on canvas or woodblocks, I find it necessary to eliminate 'dancing' colour and to heap my light and shadows. I have abandoned the regulation yellow colour sunlight and made form explain light, because I feel that Australia is not a golden-glow country but a country of harsh, cool light. In my efforts to give a feeling of sharp

flatness, I force my compositions with as much solid light as possible. I am trying to suggest size, and to do this I am eliminating distracting detail.

My subject as subject I ignore ... I want stark realism without imagery; the element of my compositions are not literary symbols. ¹⁶

Aboriginal art uses an open format which creates a light similar to Pollock's all-over paintings, in direct contrast to Margaret Preston's pictures which are closed compositions going into the centre like good European cubist pictures. She uses a European format and scale. In doing this she copied aboriginal art's decorativeness and misread it, using neither their light nor their scale - she aestheticizes their art. "Margaret Preston saw herself as the only really original painter in Australia."¹⁷ Her contemporaries she labelled a "bunch of copyists", of European styles.¹⁸

In an article on recent abstract painting in Australia, Janine Burke made this comment, "... there is a respectable abstention from referring to that most accessible of symbolic abstraction: Australian aboriginal art. The relationship between the black and the white cultures is still sufficiently scarred and uneasy for any rapprochement through Modernist art".¹⁹

But even now the recognition and identification of the Aborigines by white artists, is taking place. Throughout the history of Australian art the "Great Australian Silence"²⁰ about the Aborigines has prevented us from seeing them as anything but a curiosity. They were "the invisible man".²¹ The few instances of the emergence of the Aborigines in Australian art that I have mentioned in this paper, the Namatjira case, the Jindyworobaks, have resulted in reinforcing their invisibility.



Phil. May (1864-1903)

A curiosity in her own country

The political emergence of the Aborigines and its attendant cultural resurgence in the seventies coincides with changes in the politics and taste of Australian art, which have allowed for a greater convergence of the two cultures than ever before. The hang-over of Jindyworobakism: the stigma of Kitsch aboriginal decoration may have died because Kitsch doesn't seem to be an issue in our pluralist art, where anything is acceptable.

Recently some artists have sought to revise their ethical stance in terms of meaning and authenticity. The difference between the nature of the integration of ideas in our art and in aboriginal culture, is that ours is based on wholesale pirating of ideas whilst in aboriginal art, the ideas are solely related to the Aborigines' mode of living and their dreaming. For some white artists the Aborigines' art seemed to have greater meaning and authenticity because of its connections.

The Revisionists' romantic view of aboriginal life, sees the return to the land, to be at one with nature, as a rejection of our capitalist urban culture, for the 'noble savage life': an aesthetic moral choice.

In reality, life with nature was horrificly savage for the aboriginal people, although they had wonderfully adapted to the harshness of the land.

The difficulties of adapting from a hunter-gatherer to a herdsman, was the most successful modern transition for the tribal Aborigine. The cowboy was the proper first step to 'civilization'. Almost no evidence of modern transition is seen in the subject matter of aboriginal art.

While there have been changes in technology, the presentation



Alex. Gurney (1902-55)
Cartoon (from series 'Bluey and Curley')

and dispersal, of aboriginal art, in bringing it to our culture, the outsiders who have orchestrated these adaptations may be accomplices in the killing of the culture; because the art will be perpetrated against its meaning and purpose, which is to explain the horror of their traditional way of life in more acceptable terms. Aboriginal art explains the reasons why things are as they are, to mitigate the horror of nature, for the survival of the people.

The art will become homeless if the Aborigines fail to make new myths to explain the content of their changing lives. If the art does not change, it will die through a lack of meaning and authenticity.

White artists are attracted to this art because it seems to have all the attributes that have been spent in Modernism. Their attitude is in keeping with the Modernist tradition, to attempt to incorporate those qualities into their own work. The real ethical issue for white artists concerns the degree of physical intervention in aboriginal society to borrow from their culture.

In the developing years of Modernism when artists in Europe began using the ideas of other cultures, they did it by proxy, through museums, unlike the nineteenth century romantic tradition of actually going to exotic places to look for subject matter, such as the Orientalists, and later the archetypal artist-gone-native, Gauguin. Given this licence a horde of European artists like latent missionaries went to the last outposts of primitive man, and could not restrain themselves from preaching the gospels of Modernism and Capitalism. This aspect of the artist invading the territory of the culture they are interested in, and actually interfering with, and influencing that culture, now looms as a possibility in Australia with more and



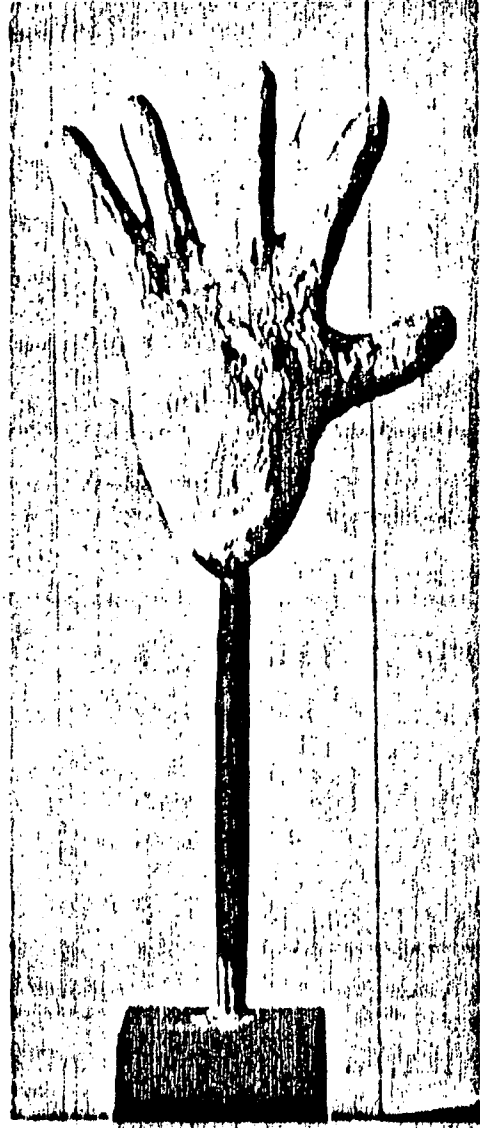
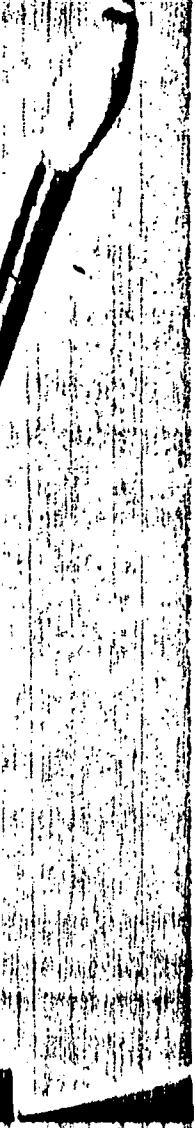
more artists intruding into tribal lands.

Artists that are now going into tribal areas, unlike their predecessors, like Drysdale and Murch, who were merely looking for models, are attempting to emulate the ethics and aesthetics of aboriginal art. By setting-up a dialogue on these issues there is a danger of corrupting the aboriginal art(ists) with the sophisticated values of contemporary art; and vice versa: contemporary artists producing pseudo-primitive art.

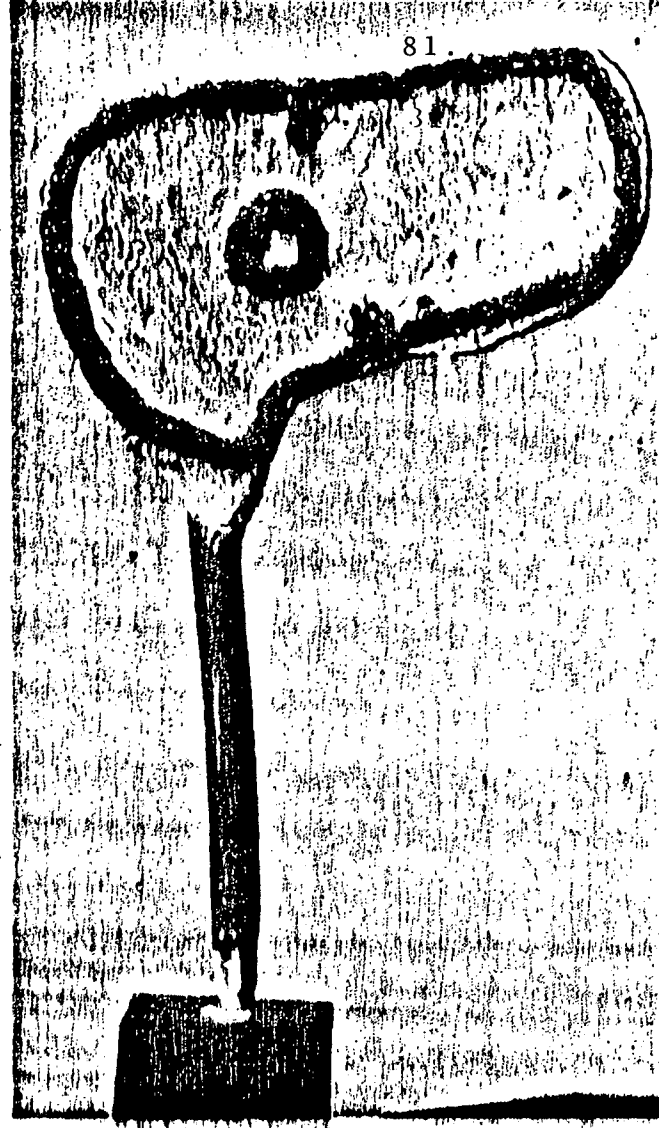
It seems that the best white art using aboriginal culture as a source, is made by those artists who have remained apart from that source. These artists have tended to synthesize the influence to such an extent that it becomes incorporated into universal systems of signs, or symbols, or decorations; like in Tony Bishop's use of Toas, they become immersed in the Modernist sculpture tradition, and a myriad of other sign systems. In Painting, Ian Fairweather's work during the sixties is still the most convincing assimilation of aboriginal art into Modernism. It is fundamentally linear, like most aboriginal painting, to which he has married Chinese calligraphy (it is interesting that most writers on Fairweather, emphasize the Chinese or oriental connection, and minimize the influence of aboriginal art).

In the end, it could be seen that the threats to aboriginal art are the same as to our own: both are in danger of losing their meaning and authenticity. In sharing a common threat, the convergence may come as an emancipation.

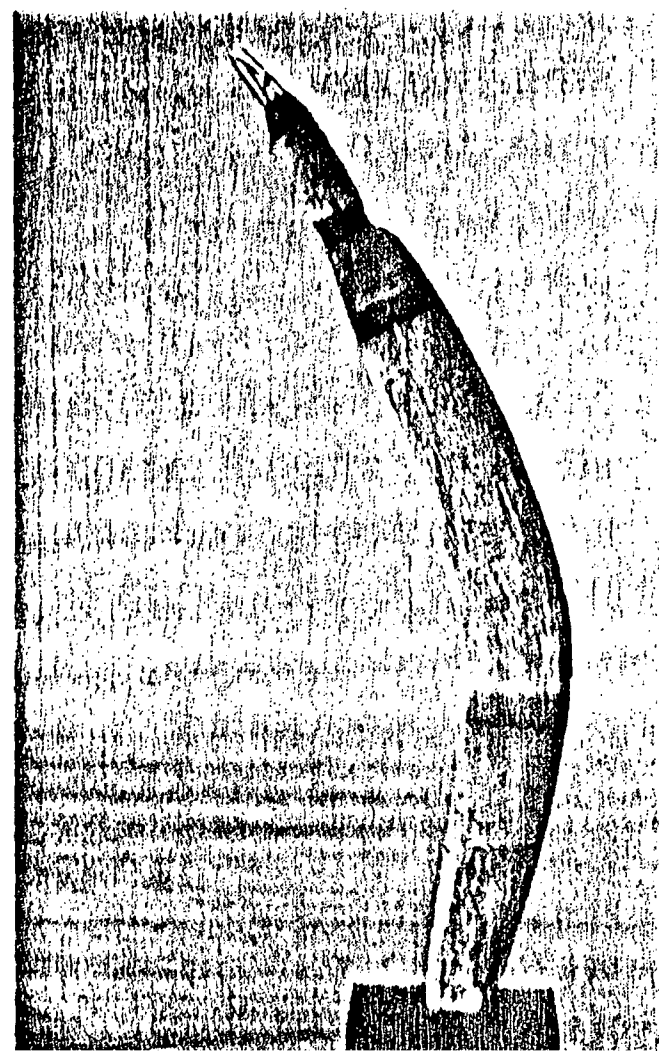
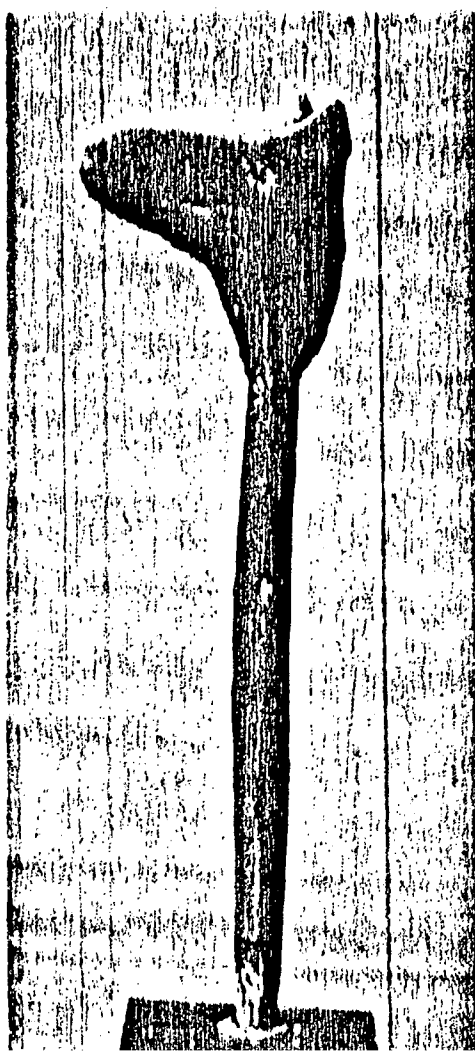
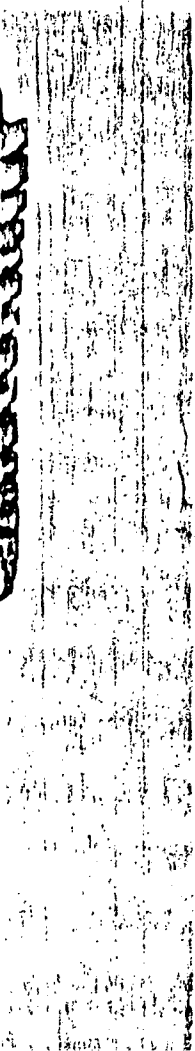
It is through Art and through Art only, that we can realize our perfection; through Art, and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence. 22



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TOWARDS A CULTURAL CONVERGENCE - NOTES

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SEMINAR 2.

THE KILLING OF RAPHAEL

(The rejection of the post-Renaissance tradition
of Western art:

'The clear and tasteless poison of the art of
Raphael').



THE KILLING OF RAPHAEL

The development of modern art could be seen as an attempt to free art from the restriction of rigid thinking, over-categorization and the fetters of inhibition, where various artists have explored alternatives, believing with Dubuffet that "the characteristic property of an inventive art is that it bears no resemblance to art as it is generally recognized, and in consequence - and this is more so as it is more inventive - that it does not seem like art at all".¹

These investigations often fundamentally challenged the accepted notion of what art is. Artists have traditionally looked at the art of so-called 'primitive' cultures for inspiration and solutions to formal aesthetic problems. But later investigations were made into child art, the art of the mentally ill, and the art of the untutored, that is all the manifestations of 'primitive' art.

The word 'primitive' has so many applications that to use it without qualification is to be almost meaningless. The term is used to describe the work of the early nineteenth century painters in the United States; it has been applied to such artists as Rousseau in Europe; it is mostly used now, with the term 'naive', to describe untutored painters all over the world with a strong naive design sense and basic ideas - folk art.

It was used early in the nineteenth century, when artists became interested in those painters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy, France and Flanders. The word 'primitive' was commonly used in the mid-nineteenth century, referring somewhat indiscriminately to all painters of the Italian and Netherlandish

schools before fifteen hundred and all Italians before Raphael: the Italian Primitives. These painters came to be admired for their 'honesty', lack of complexity and sophisticated illusionism, which were characteristic of Post-Renaissance painting. They inspired such groups as the Barbus Sect (1800), the Nazarenes (1830) and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (1848).

Throughout the western classical tradition there has been a taste for exotic art in utilitarian and interior design, e.g. decoration in weaving, ceramics and landscape design. This was particularly strong in England with its extensive empire. The English had Chinese and Japanese gardens in the eighteenth century and were also influenced by and copied Chinese styles for ceramics. An even older influence was in carpet design; Europeans incorporated elements of oriental carpet designs in their own compositions. This taste for the exotic remains constant throughout the entire European tradition and increased with new geographical discoveries and with imperialism. There was a constant influence of the Orient through the eastern European countries and the Middle East; the strong oriental influences in Venice were due to the fact that it was the gateway to Europe's oriental trade; and the multi-racial Middle Eastern Moors were a dominant factor in Spanish culture.

In the eighteenth century the idea of the 'noble savage' (based on the ideal of the American Indian being seen as close to the Greek aesthetic ideal by the romanticists), marks the change from merely appropriating design to a more humanitarian, romantic view of the 'primitive lifestyle. Artists like Joshua Reynolds recognised the intrinsic values of exotic and tribal art and had, from Leonardo throughout the classical tradition, including Durer

and Ingres, been aware of, lectured, and wrote about other possibilities for art. Reynolds, in his seventh discourse, stated:

If a European, when he has cut off his beard, and put false hair on his head, or bound up his own natural hair in regular hard knots, as unlike nature as he can possibly make it; and after having rendered them immovable by the help of the fat of the hogs, has covered the whole with flour, laid on by a machine with the utmost regularity; if when thus attired he issues forth, and meets a Cherokee Indian, who has bestowed as much time at his toilet, and laid on with equal care and attention his yellow and red ochre on particular parts of his forehead and cheeks, as he judges most becoming; whoever of these two despise the other for this attention to the fashion of his country, whichever first feels himself provoked to laugh, is the barbarian. ²

The premature beginnings of modernism arose when artists began looking again at the European primitives: the Barbus Sect, the Nazarenes, and particularly the Pre-Raphaelites were based on an established tradition of theoretical writing on art, decoration and design. (Like Ruskin whose ideas were eclectic, traditional, coming out of a broad range of sources from Rousseau and Reynolds, the Greeks and Leonardo.) What Ruskin did was to popularise this theoretical tradition, and by doing so, educated the new middle class to look at other art, thus helping to break down the tradition of classical Western art. The shift of interest for Modernist Painting, from the England of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, to the rise of Impressionism in France and the dominance of Paris, coincided with the revolutionary political, scientific and philosophical thought of Darwin, Marx and Freud, so radical when compared to the ideals and dreams of Ruskin and Morris, which now appear merely cosmetic. Elements of the puritan Victorian ethics of Ruskin have persisted in painting, and painting has resisted those restraints and developed radically in spite of those demands, especially in France. That is,

the English attempted to put moralistic ideas into their painting, while the French Impressionists seemed to be concerned with just painting ideas.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century exotic art was increasingly appropriated for new art (Modernism). The rise of European Imperialism caused a flood of exotic art to pour into Europe as 'booty', which continued to broaden the traditional fashion for exotic aesthetics in all aspects of design (carpets, pottery, furniture, wallpaper). It was sold to the rising middle class and became common fashion. At the same time the sciences of the study of exotic cultures arose: anthropology and archaeology; and the study of the less aesthetic artefacts (primitive) from Africa and Polynesia, formerly considered to be useless, ugly curiosities, started. The first ethnological museums were set up and about the same time the theories of the scientists of the mind like Freud were developed and published.

The Impressionists in France, and Whistler and Rossetti in England, collected and were influenced by Japanese and Chinese art; of particular importance was the Japanese woodblock from which, in a formalist sense, they copied the distribution of flat space and from where line was skilfully combined with the reduction of objects and figures to their simplest form. They minimised the illusion of depth, and began using colour more arbitrarily rather than just to denote the real world.

In the early twentieth century artists such as Picasso, Braque and Matisse followed Gauguin's attraction to primitive carvings and masks, because of their directness and simplicity. Although in the case of Gauguin it goes deeper, representing a rejection of

bourgeois living and morality "cutting both his life and his art to the bone in order that he might find and express reality".³ A return to a more natural way of life as advocated by Rousseau (Jean-Jacques).

As with the earlier artists they first collected artefacts and were later influenced by them. Primitive art acted as a kind of stimulus, the direct using or borrowing was slight. It did, however, help the artists to breakdown the systems of the Renaissance tradition which were too limiting and restricting, and helped them to move towards a more uncontrived expression of reality - to see things freshly again. The value was the same as that of the medieval 'primitives' for the Pre-Raphaelites. In Medieval paintings, scenes were superimposed in a total disregard for distance; that which the artist regarded as important, he exaggerated. The Pre-Raphaelites also felt that during the Renaissance the freshness and honesty was lost through over-development of formal devices and the laws of perspective. It was possible for them to combine their admiration of the early Italians with a professed wish to paint realistically, and to claim that in doing so they were following the precedent of their forerunners. In the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, clear influences of ancient Egyptian painting can be found together with those of African tribal masks and sculptures of the Iberian Peninsula. Picasso saw nothing incongruous in combining all these influences with a drapery style that was reminiscent of El Greco, in the development of his advanced ideas. This enthusiasm for using primitive and historical modes coincided with the rejection of classical art, which had moved earlier artists, in favour of archaic art. The Barbus Sect which arose in the studio of David around 1800 wished

to go back beyond their supposedly classical Greek basis (to Pre-Pericles), and they derived their style from the newly discovered Etruscan vase paintings, with their linear design and flat relief stylization of form.

In Modernism no one art has been considered more 'primitive' than any other and there was a great variety in preferred choices. Gauguin admired the Egyptian, and the Indian and the Polynesian alike; the *Fauves*, certain phases of African Sculpture (the *images d'Epinal*) for the Brücke and the Blaue Reiter, the sculpture of exotic peoples generally, the drawings of children, and their own provincial folk art. For Picasso 'primitive' meant, Ivory Coast sculpture, the paintings of Henri Rousseau, children's art and later, Australian aboriginal art. In his book, *Modern Painting*, Hugh Adams stated:

Throughout this century artists have sought to emulate the unspoilt naivety of 'primitive' art, that of the 'mentally ill', and child art, all terms which Jean Dubuffet has described as 'patronizing', giving the impression that they are clumsy attempts at 'cultural art'. In the case of child art this is particularly so in England as its whimsicality has commended itself to English taste. ⁴

Artists such as Paul Klee, Miro, Chagall, Dufy and Picasso have tried to recapture the freshness and innocence of child art. As Paul Klee has said:

I want to be as though new-born, knowing absolutely nothing about Europe, ignoring poets and fashions, to be almost primitive. ⁵

Klee also used forms which have their clear analogies in the drawings of the 'mentally ill' and are probably derived from this source. It was Freud who opened up the area of the unconscious for the Surrealists, and a whole range of other artists, who began exploring the more primitive areas of the collective unconscious

using 'automatic' writing and images. Some artists were seen to belong to what Roger Cardinal called 'Outsider Art' and it would be reasonable to say that there was a prejudice against these artists from more conservative mainstream groups. Dubuffet in his article, 'Art of Nonconformity' (1970), stated that there was a need in all people to create art, but that inhibiting social pressures resulted in the few who 'broke through' being classed as 'alienated'. The barriers of mainstream fine art in most cases proves to be impenetrable. The Surrealists who admired Freud's theories saw madness as creative rather than destructive and in 1945 *L'Institute Brut* was started. It consisted of those artists working outside the accepted cultural mainstream, and later in 1948, the *Compagne de L'Art Brut* was founded. To quote Hugh Adams:

... however much practitioners may have extolled the virtue of artistic anarchy and repudiated critical and aesthetic value judgments, the eventual outcome was generally the emergence of a clearly identifiable cohesive group or school who made something susceptible to being called 'art' and mostly criticised or marketed as such.⁶

What was so important about these movements was the radical changes in psychological attitude which caused a revolution in the expressive potential of art. It was not merely a change in form but a change in attitude, art became something more expressive and inventive. It led eventually to the alternative to formalism which began with the Symbolists and Expressionists and then the Dadaists and Surrealists up to today. It is in a sense the essence of primitivism and is an expression of man's condition before it is explained by magic or ritual.

Here it is important to return to the source of the breakdown of the Renaissance tradition. The Pre-Raphaelite movement signified

the break with the post-Renaissance tradition of European painting. The Barbus Sect (only one painting remains) and the Nazarenes, predated the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood however, my choice for regarding the Pre-Raphaelites as more significant rests on the importance of the theoretician/critic Ruskin who backed the group. It was largely due to Ruskin's influence that the group assumed such importance and it was because of his writing that people went back to look at artists such as Fra Angelico and other 'primitive' pre-Renaissance Italian painters. In his book on the Pre-Raphaelites Timothy Hilton commented:

By 1850 art was generally held to be more important than in 1840. Ruskin had led the way, asserting that the practice of art had more to it than the mere production of pictures, that it was always a significant activity, that it contained the possibility of both good and evil, that it could be the instrument of immense moral power. No previous writer on art had ever said this so forcibly, or at such length, or had made so many people believe it. ⁷

It is possible to say that Ruskin was responsible for this change of attitude by the way he promoted the public debate and helping .. to change the patronage of art from the landed gentry to the merchant classes; and using Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites as an illustration of his socialist ideas - art could educate and morally enlighten the people.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood formed in 1848 by Rossetti, Holman Hunt and Millais, was proto-avantgarde, and modernist in seeking newness, and in their anti-establishment art. The first two volumes of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (published in 1843 and 1846) inspired many of the aims and attitudes of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He was vehemently anti-classical; he saw the post-Renaissance tradition of European painting as stylized, formulaic and untruthful to the facts of nature. He disliked Claude, Poussin,

the classical masters of the landscape tradition, the religious painters of the High Renaissance (especially 'the clear and tasteless poison of the art of Raphael')⁸ The genre painters of the Dutch School were attacked and very few schools of European painting between the Renaissance and the Romantic era were excepted.

In 1850 when the public woke up to what the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood stood for there was an almost unanimous castigation of the return to "all the objectionable peculiarities of the infancy of art".⁹ ("A reaction that has been a continual feature of the responses to the phrases of modernist painting, up to 'dumb art' now.")¹⁰ It was after a Royal Academy exhibition in 1851 which received extremely bad press that Ruskin wrote his famous letter to *The Times* "...an event which has often been taken as a most significant turning-point of the Pre-Raphaelite fortunes".¹¹

Even though Ruskin spoke in praise of the Italian Primitives in *Modern Painters*, he did not like the Pre-Raphaelites' choice of name. He wanted them to be thoroughly modern in technique "without reference to conventional or established rules".¹² He wanted them to paint "stern facts" rather than "fair pictures" to return not to 'archaic art' but to 'archaic honesty' and urged them to paint nature as it is around them, with the help of modern science.¹³ By modern science he meant the advances being made in colour theory colour chemistry, colour psychology and colour physics. However the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was far less science-orientated than Turner, they rejected or ignored colour theory for just looking and copying exactly what they saw. Under Ruskin's influence the Pre-Raphaelites reacted strongly against conventional painting and set out to be more inventive, realistic and more concerned



with human emotion. Their modernistic notion of newness meant that the paintings should look new, clean and fresh. They achieved this look of newness through their technique of putting down colour.

This could be seen as the beginning of modernism. Not that individuals had not worked like this previously. Rembrandt, Goya and Turner in their late stages are examples of those great individuals along the mainstream of classical art who seemed to be unconventional, more inventive, realistic (did not follow the formula, which is what Ruskin objected to), and more concerned with human emotion. So primitivism in a sense always existed, but the classical was the conventional.

The development of the break with the classical tradition appeared more subtle in Europe than in Britain. The English considered themselves to be more modernistic and avant-garde than the French; they thought that the Barbizon School was just a re-hash of the seventeenth century Dutch Landscape School, and equated even the Impressionists with that tradition - a tradition that had not even caught up with the English Landscape School, culminating with Turner (English watercolourists, Cousins, Cotman, etc.).

The late nineteenth century begins the influx of tribal primitive art, from the nationalist Empire builders, and sees artists starting to go out to the Empires (Nolde, Gauguin); (this coincides with the art of the Post-Impressionists, which later gave rise to formalist theory - Fry and Bell) and re-arranged the whole of Western painting giving particular regard to 'primitivism' according to Ruskin, namely being modern. The Europeans, especially the Paris School, stuck plainly to developing the tradition of Western painting by innovation and reform; while the English sought a

Brudelare



revolution (moralist and socialist) for radical change, a transformation of art that has proved impossible - it was a literary, formalist idealism, as well as being moralist and socialist.

The real revolution was to come about when the whole of western art began to be re-analysed through the theories of psychoanalysis and psychology, with particular regard to the unconscious, giving new meaning to the primitive. The formalists and aesthetes sought significant form in modern art, the psychologists and surrealists sought the significant dream. Psychology and Psychoanalysis therefore influenced a further breakdown of the classical technical tradition, through analysis of their themes.

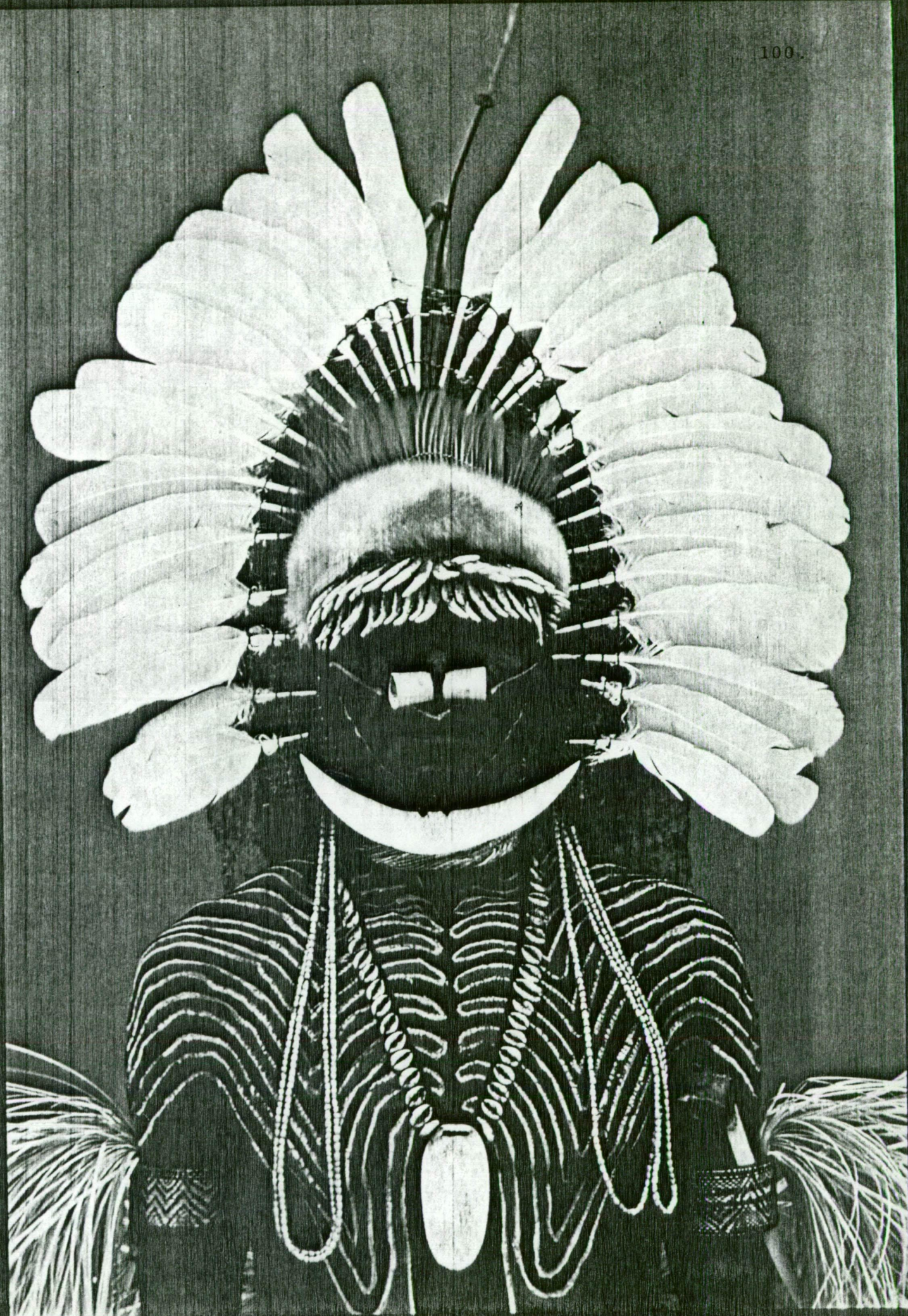
The English Victorians under the incredible influence of Ruskin, saw painting in sociological and political terms rather than aesthetical art ideas (that became formalism). What the English had missed was Baudelaire and imagination: *The Queen of Faculties*; to take Ruskin's instruction to be thoroughly modern in technique, "that is to be without reference to conventional or established rules"¹⁴ and to reject his demand to paint 'stern facts'¹⁵ (straight realism, painting exactly what you see in nature), and to listen instead to Baudelaire's *Imaginative Man*:

I regard it as useless and tedious to copy what is there in front of me, because nothing of that satisfies me. Nature is ugly and I like the figments of my own fantasy better than the triviality of material reality. ¹⁶

Baudelaire's 'doctrinaire',* who could well have been Ruskin said, "copy nature and nature only. No greater enjoyment, no more splendour did triumph can exist than an outstanding copy of nature".¹⁷

Baudelaire 'questioned' Ruskin as to the existence of external nature and to his extravagant and boastful affirmative reply,

* Baudelaire's opposite to his *Imaginative Man*.



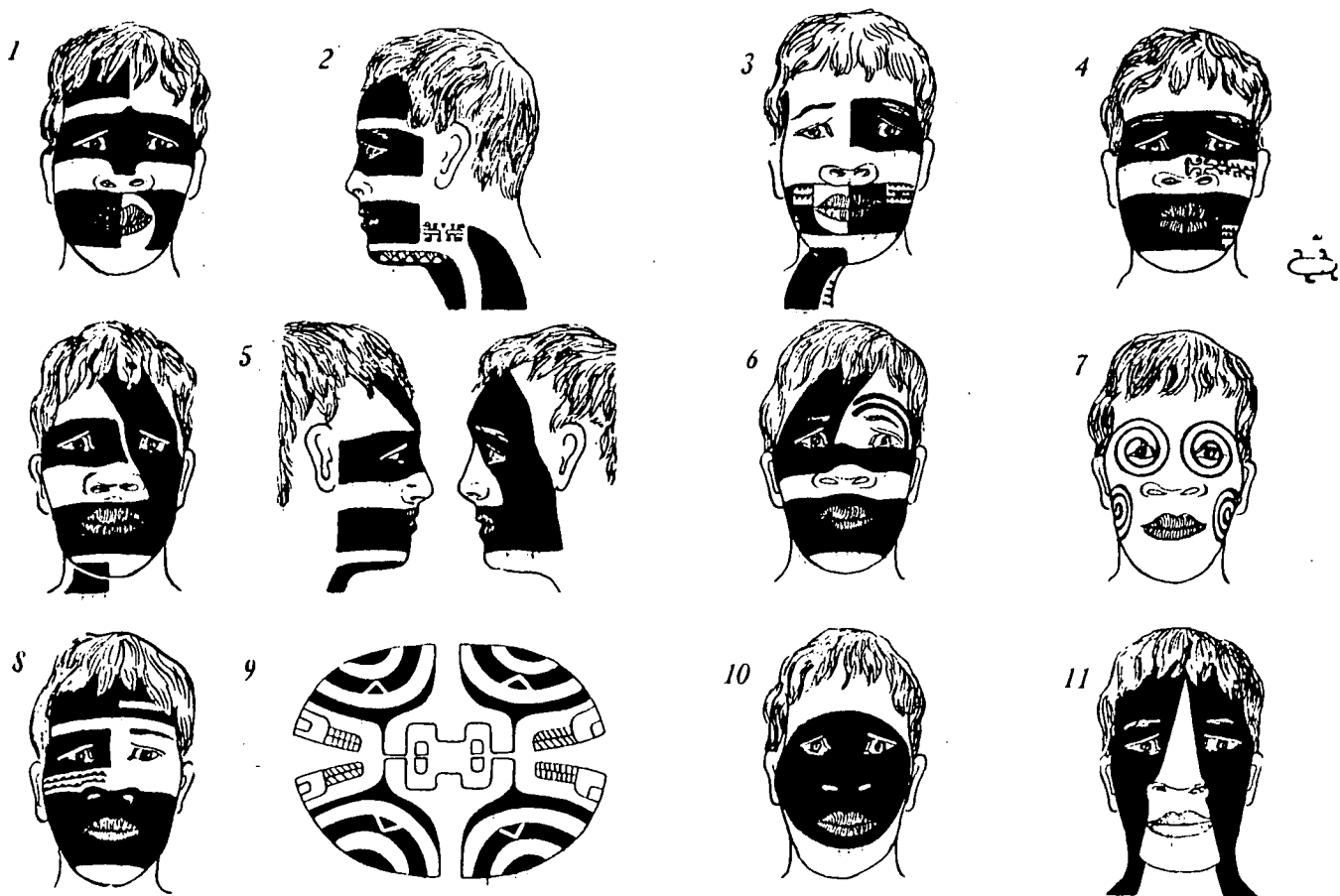
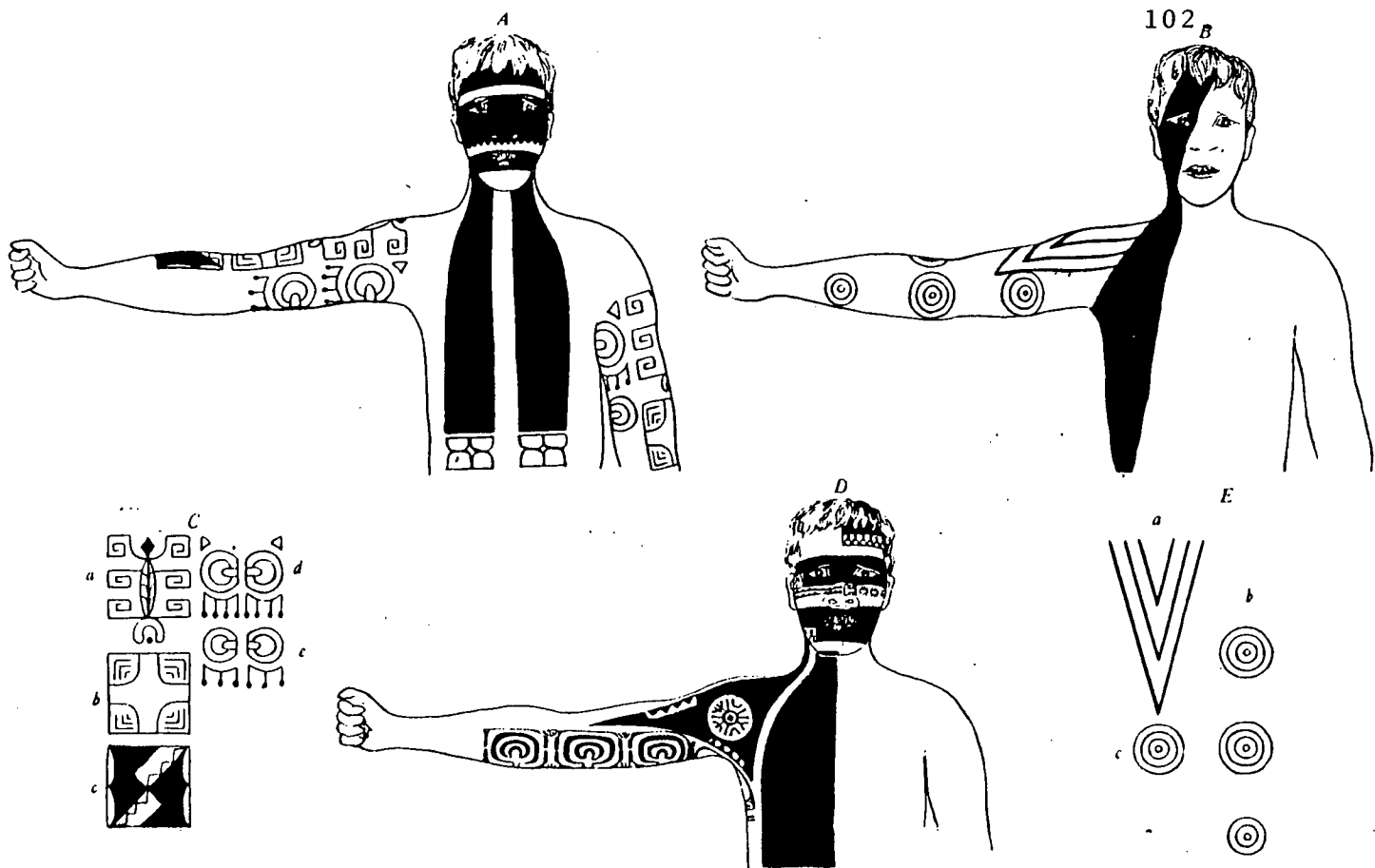
Samo-Mann aus dem Gebiet des Nomad River in der Westprovinz Neuguineas mit dem Schmuck des Haupttänzers beim Hobora-Zeremoniell. Schultern, Brust und Knie sind mit natürlichen Erdfarben sorgfältig in einer skelettähnlichen Zeichnung bemalt.

Baudelaire gave Ruskin the benefit of the doubt, supposing he really meant -

the artist, the true artist, the true poet, should paint only in accordance with what he sees and feels. He must be really faithful to his own nature. He must avoid, like death itself, the temptation of borrowing the eyes or the feelings of another man, however great, for in that case the production he gave us would be a pack of lies, relatively to himself, not realities. 18

"Nature was taken as a basis, source and prototype of all possible forms of good and beauty."¹⁹ Hence the earlier comment by "the doctrinaire" in Baudelaire's writing the *Queen of Faculties*, 'copy nature and nature only',²⁰ Baudelaire himself replied, "Review, analyse everything that is natural, all actions and desires of absolutely natural man: you will find nothing that is not horrible".²¹ As Baudelaire points out, history and current affairs from the public media, show us, "that nature teaches nothing or nearly nothing; in other words, it compels man to sleep, drink eat and to protect himself as best he can against the inclemencies of the weather. It is nature too that drives man to kill his fellow-man, to eat him, to imprison him and torture him; ...", and he goes on to say that nature produces "a thousand other abominations, which modesty and nice feeling alike prevent our mentioning..."²² He reminds us that philosophy demands that we "succour our poor and enfeebled parents", while "Nature (which is nothing but the inner voice of self-interest) tells us to knock them on the head".²³

"Everything that is beautiful and noble is the product of reason and calculation."²⁴ Baudelaire believed that virtue came from the 'artificial', the supernatural, because we have always needed gods and prophets to teach us to be good. Man is not strong



enough to discover it by himself, evil is so easy and natural, while "good is always the product of an art".

Baudelaire came to the conclusion that nature was no guide for ethics or reason, or, therefore, beauty.

"Thus I am led to regard adornment as one of the signs of the primitive nobility of the human soul. The races that our confused and perverted civilization so glibly call savage, with a quite laughable pride and fatuity, appreciate, just as children do, the high spiritual quality of dress. The savage and the infant show their distaste for the real by their naive delight in bright feathers of different colours, in shimmering fabrics, in the superlative majesty of artificial shapes, thus unconsciously proving the immateriality of their souls." 25

In the end art's role is to distort nature in a constant effort to reform nature.

The New Painting then, could be seen to be Baudelairean in the view that it seeks to reform their condition of contemporary society. So that rather than seeing it as a decadent art form it is an attempt to escape from the decadence of an unworkable consumer society (e.g. Punks and Neo-Romantics, etc.).

In my previous paper I developed from Baudelaire's idea of nature being horrific, that the Australian aboriginal art based on the Dreamtime, was an explanation and escape of the horror's and harshness of their existence. This correlated with Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (*Abstraction and Empathy*), published in 1906 in which he says, "abstraction is the stylistic mode of an alienated and frightened populus".²⁶

Paul Klee furthered the idea that abstraction was more than a symptom of societal circumstances, in that the stylistic mode was a weapon that he envisioned could psychologically remove him



from the surrounding chaos, and escape to the dreamtime. He wrote in 1915 ...

one deserts the realm of the here and now to transfer one's activity into a realm of the yonder where total affirmation is possible. Abstraction. The cool Romanticism of this style without pathos is unheard of. The more horrible this world (as today, for instance) the more abstract our art, whereas a happy world brings forth an art of the here and now. Today is a transition from yesterday. In the great pit of forms lie the broken fragments to some of which we still cling. They provide abstraction with its material. A junkyard of inauthentic elements for the creation of impure crystals. That is how it is today.

Paul Klee, 1915 (from his *Diaries*)



THE KILLING OF RAPHAEL - NOTES

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