

FRACTURE

Returning from complete immersion in a Balinese village, re-entry into western "civilization" comes as a distinctly unpleasant future shock. In departing Bali, one has left an integrated proto-urban human kaleidoscope in which all activities—except those of the clergy and rulers—are creatively, purposefully and practically shared and has instead re-entered a fractured western society of specialists and "stars" whose views often seem as narrowly circumscribed and as efficiently sterile as laser beams hitting an inert mass of increasingly non-critical consumers. As an historian in Bali one has traversed a millenium and has shared the life experience of a population which in Europe would have ranged from the Carolingian Age to the beginnings of urban capitalism. The mountain tribe of the Agas are animists and still barter. The villagers tending their rice paddies on the lower volcanic slopes have begun to understand paper money, and along the beaches the traders now sell erotic kitsch and nicknacks which the barbaric visitors value above the complex iconography of native artifacts.

Above all in Bali one learns again that "art" throughout much of pre-industrial history was and is a completely integrated, nonspecialized activity which expresses the full range of life through religious drama, music and a complete array of visual symbols. Creative expression, congenital in every child, remains an entertainment, a game of skill, a search for the reason of being and an explanation of death. Evil—and in a wider sense entropy—must be kept at bay through sacrifices, and innumerable sacred precincts guarded by the fanged face of the lion-headed Barong, which in Greece becomes the Gorgon, and then in Europe the gargoyles and warrior angels. There are or were no "artists," but simply folks who make accomplished objects or perform age-old dramas. Along the two, short dirt lanes of Penestanan on the plateau above Ubud about one hundred and fifty families congregated over time in large compounds to more conveniently share a communal experience. Among the rice farmers and duck-herds there are over seventy painters, perhaps forty gamelan players, sculptors making masks for the Ramajana plays, puppeteers who often double as exorcists, male and female actors and dancers, story tellers. Further south, around the communal hall of Mas with its carefully protected gamelan, there are perhaps a hundred sculptors, and further yet, around Celuk, accomplished gold and silversmiths. The homesteads of these farmers hunker around large courtyards containing pigs, chickens, the hut for the dead, the granaries, kitchen and always the exquisitely decorated family temple. Thatched roofs protect the living quarters, and the workshops of the craftsmen, painters, sculptors, musical whirling makers, the family gamelan or a clumpy, wide-lipped kerosene container used to illuminate puppet plays.

The conversations never include the word "art." They revolve around shaped objects: How reliable is jackwood? Which brush allows for firmer outlines? Is this color combination subtle enough? How can goldleaf be more permanently applied? One discusses the quality of the work of elders, uncles, cousins which one kept because it is 'ida bagus' very good. One doesn't discuss the work of siblings.

Talk has no frills, there is no hysterical heroization, no stars such as Nureyev, Warhol, no anti-heroes such as Van Gogh. There is simply a pleasant exchange of knowhow ranging over topics such as rice planting, building of dams, putting a good painting together, the safe undercutting of a stone or wood figure, the care to be lavished on a fighting cock, the choreography for a new dance, the safe number of improvisations strewn into an ancient play, the weaving of a subtler pattern in a bamboo wall. These activities are of equal weight and part of the fun and soft excitement of life. And, always, they will shape and decorate the communal persona, give it scale, variety, assert its stability and symbolically assure its survival against a threatening, sometimes violent universe. In 1963, when Mount Agung exploded incinerating villages and killing over two thousand people, the lava avalanche left the sixty-temple Pura Besakih precinct "unharmd." This cannot be questioned, since the destruction of the mother temple would have negated the nation's most sacred collaborative effort, namely the existence of an orderly city of the gods, who, deprived of it, no longer could have defended the people against formless chaos. Karnak, the Acropolis, Besakih, Chartres belong to us all because their builders dared to give awesome archetypal powers a shape which could link humanity to universal forces. In this sense they are truly awe-full.

In this context it seems fascinating that this issue of *Athanas* moves from the archetypal communal image, the Peruvian earth-mother Pachamama and her virgin Mamaconas, to the mysterious nature of Mary in Europe, and then in a perverse transformation to an equally powerful archetype, the female as a destructive force, Durga, consort of Shiva, mistress of witches, or Salome, the *femme fatale* of a society which had fallen from grace, and, finally, in a myth-less and fractured consumer civilization, to the new savior, the demiurge, the creative genius of heroic proportions.

Carol Damian's essay addresses the largely unsuccessful resistance of the Incas against the cultural genocide of Francisco Pizarro and his successors, and the pathetic pockets of resistance offered by the Andean population which still hides mummified remains of the Inca under the robes of a processional Virgin Mary who thus remains the earth mother and symbol of fruitfulness. In the more anthropocentric and urbanized West, the Godmother as Madonna della Misericordia becomes the protectress of suppliants. Carol McCall Rand traces the disintegration of the 'misericord' who, under her mantle for humanity, increasingly protected special groups such as the Cistercians, the Dominicans, pious confraternities and finally, flanked by military saints, the Marquis of Mantua and his family commemorating a victory. Scientific perspective, realistic scale, and the rational outlook of Protestantism eventually destroyed this numinous image. In the Annunciations of the South, Mary remained a woman touched by a momentous mystery. At the same time, beginning with the Flemish painters and Robert Campin—as Michaela Merryday proves—she also becomes the instrument of Christ's future sacrifice as symbolized in the Mass.

In an age-old reversal Woman is also seen as a destructive force. Lyn Bolen deals with this transformation and shows how the ritualistic, Dionysiac round dance of women around the generative life force can turn into a hypnotic and malevolent dance of death. Moreau's Salome wearing a bracelet with a Gorgon face and accompanied by the black panther of the evil huntress symbolizes Huysman's concept of decadence, which literally means fall from grace, in a "material society which was suffocating the sublime." Wilde, Strauss, Beardsley, Flaubert, Apollinaire, the newly tragic artists eagerly took up the theme of a collapse of the sacred cohesion of life. Victoria Beck writing on Kandinsky describes the second but last stages of the artist in society: his role as genius saint. Kandinsky felt that the artist offered spiritual bread to an epoch "in tragic collision between matter and spirit." The tradition of glorification of the creative mind began with Vasari; Jean Arp, Hugo Ball, Thomas Mann and others saw Kandinsky transform Schwabing, where he lived, into a pilgrimage center "where beauty reigns." The world of fractured, specialized, industrial man had become drab and art was to replace "life itself" through its secular magic. At a time of "terrible, inescapable vacuum" as Kandinsky states, the heroic *homo creator* would eventually become a hermit such as Motherwell who contemplated an obscene death—that of Garcia Lorca, a writer martyr—over and over again in his "Elegies to the Spanish Republic." Alice Brooker describes these reminiscences as a process of personal transcendence. And, finally, having exhausted all possibilities an artist may have to become a social-gadfly-recluse, a brilliant alchemist who meditates on the Empire State Building for 24 hours or turns a soup can into an icon of...yuppydom. He thus becomes a hero of sophisticated consumerism, who magically soothes the fears and ennui of a jaded and terminally bored public.

Recently paintings of many artists which have graced the walls of the Whitney Museum—such as Eric Fischl's

voyeuristic canvases, Kim MacConnel's haphazard arrangements with rabbits, rockets, torsos, spirals, or shows of the langorous Italian Anachronists with their accomplished pseudo-neo-classical iconography—indicate that painters have run out of images transcending personal dreams, nightmares and memories. Even in Kassel's mammoth Dokumenta of 1987 works such as the bone games of Komar & Melamid, serial art gadgetry, and complex videos—all of the highest aestheto-technical virtuosity, demonstrable talent and even beauty—were stunningly bland. The few exceptions such as Anselm Kiefer's huge panorama of a junked world which has not survived self-inflicted disasters, the last works of Beuys, and a domed room in which Fabrizio Plessi created a Piranesi-like industrial prison including the televised memory of a gushing brook, seemed to stem from an earlier epoch.

Like tectonic plates, inventiveness and cultural energy seem to be edging toward Asia. The recognition of the need for a clear, identifiable form, place and direction to achieve cultural self-definition is surfacing in China, Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia and Korea where artists are beginning to respond more fully to the societal needs and aspirations of highly integrated cultures.

In Bali the desire to graft an exquisitely shaped human environment on the beauty of nature is honed by the perception of life as a series of personal and communal creative acts. On the rare occasion when a Balinese feels asocial, he says "Saya makan angin" [I am eating the wind], which states "I have no name, I come from nowhere in particular, I am not going anywhere—in short—I am shapeless, leave me alone."

Having lost a poetic pleasure in society as a creative community, the western world seems to be eating the wind.

François Bucher, Faculty Advisor
Professor of Art History, Florida State University

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