

VALUES

Twentieth century society has overall been more stingy in its support for the public arts than in any previous periods except for those of the northern, reformed city states and the early, puritanical American colonies. Even if the Fascist governments spent considerable sums for "Artige Kunst" they also expended a great deal of energy trying to destroy the works and creators of asocial(ist) art. Most governments and cities have been indifferent or even hostile to innovative, contemporary imagery and architecture such as Le Corbusier's projects and more recently Serra's steel wall in New York. Politicians correctly view the perceptive honesty of the arts as antithetical to power because they often mirror flaws of the system and permit citizens to graphically view their intentions. The imagery of Beckmann, Dix, Jacob—once considered perverts creating "Entartete Kunst"—consequently became more abstract with Klee, Kandinsky and others and reached an intense climax in the works of Pollock which are as unsettling as the compositions of Georg Grosz.

The verifying human panoramas presented by intelligently analytical, socially committed men and women (lately called liberals) thus went underground in abstractions which also, but more holistically, mirrored the disarray of societies unable to handle overwhelming scientific and technological advances or rational global planning. The harshly committed art movements were treated with benign neglect, sidelined by wars and the economic mayhem which they had foreseen, and equally efficiently pushed aside by intermittent periods of material saturation never before experienced on such a large scale. Those of us who kept watch over the mirror images of our societies—such as the existential despair of Dada, and later, under similar circumstances, of Warhol, Indiana and others—wondered who or what would look at us once the figure and representational art reemerged.

Human imagery and landscapes did return in the women of de Kooning, the dessicated bodies of Kienholz, the lost, urban dwellers of Segal, the attack creatures of Charles Hook and La Grasse, the stuffed non-persons of Hanson and the ravaged lands of Anselm Kiefer. There is no overt censorship of these images, and no need for oppression. The icons of the '80s are simply being drowned by the pervasiveness of network television with its Ramboesque farces which encourage couch potatoes to replenish their personal arsenals, and to ignore global and human ecology. Thus are ethical choices replaced with primitive mythologies, and comfortable mediocracies elected. In this ever more monotone panorama of slowing human dynamics millions are sluiced through mega-collections such as that of the Louvre or the Metropolitan Museum. The art machine—with its investor galleries, auction-fairs, the carousel of mammoth exhibits accompanied by reams of mannered deconstructive criticism—has become a brilliantly-staged spectacle of cultural consumerism.

What then is the role of art periodicals, including ATHANOR, within this rather dismal scene which usually excludes a raw confrontation with new information presented by the avant-garde in small galleries? Can truly contemporary works or ideas, absorbed by less than one millionth of the population, radiate beyond this small group and thus reshape the *polis*? What will an increased understanding of ideographs DO to a viewer/reader and will a new concept influence any but a small number of like-minded people? Can this issue of ATHANOR clarify trends useful for the understanding of the present, and point toward future needs?

Three of the essays deal with visual literacy based on mythology. Whittington describes the transference patterns of the bear-mother myth of the Haida people on the Queen Charlotte Islands due to contacts with American traders. Carol Ventura, herself a weaver, describes the adaptation of Mayan hairsash patterns which originally denoted status, ancestry, lightning, cardinal directions, etc., to German ribbon decorations and decorative motifs no longer identifying tribal standing. Murray's essay on the cooperation between Picasso and Iliasz recounts the creation of a highly inter-personal imagery and typography based on ancient stories and myths. These essays deal with the attempts to preserve weakening group identities and the replenishing of the void with a limited, exclusive iconography.

The same fading of a broader societal substance is evident in the sequence of the other papers. Kelly analyzes the Guthlac scroll with its precise legal status and religious implications, Currence's David and Abigail allegory still celebrates a group deliverance while Mattson's paper on Inness defines a highly personal quest for enlightenment through the creation of a single, God-inspired painting which resolves world wide disparities through a basically neoplatonic image. With Freeman's discussion of the Tiffany-LaFarge conflict we ultimately observe an art where opalescent, pre-Raphaelite ideals ended in petty squabbles and a quest for money.

In sum the essays demonstrate a movement toward an increasingly personal entertainment through a quest for originality and thus, simultaneously, the loss of a widely understandable and cathartic confrontation with the super-ego or a shared social consciousness. The desperate recent desire of artists to tie into long lasting traditions through borrowings from the past, the reintroduction of large figural compositions and allegorical landscapes, or the almost painful resurrection of Classical motifs in architecture from Soleri to Boffil, point to a reversal of the personalization of art which the student authors have tackled. The value of this issue of ATHANOR therefore lies in an analysis of a progressive loss of mythological substance which the arts of the last decade of this century must recapture for a public which needs to reinvent itself.