



NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

FINE ART AND DESIGN

***ANCIENT NIGERIAN AND CONTEMPORARY
NATIVE AMERICAN ART IN THE CONTEXT
OF CULTURAL HEGEMONY***

BY

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INTRODUCTION

I feel no further guilt for colonization because only Europe had the means of visual communication.

This remark, made by a European after his visit to the "Circa 1492" Exhibition in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, USA, is the main reason for this study.

This particular exhibition, to commemorate the arrival of Columbus in America, was an effort to give a global view of art five hundred years' ago when European explorers forged new links among Continents and changed cultural perceptions forever.

The art on display from Europe was from the Renaissance period when naturalistic representational style was fashionable. Works by da Vinci, Dürer, Bosch and Pollaiuolo were exhibited and it was the sophisticated work by these artists which appealed to the European visitor more than the formal or schematic styles from the rest of the world.

In the first chapter, I expose the myth that, because representational art is a copy of nature, or mimetic, it must follow that it is easy to understand. Far from being a simple way of communication, representational art is like a mask, difficult to decipher, with the essential meaning often hidden under the distraction of copying techniques.

Schematic art, by contrast, presents its message in minimal form, without elaboration. This allows precise recognition, with the emphasis on simplicity of communication. It is a fallacy to believe that representational art, which is saturated with information concerning space, light, texture, colour, reflection and atmosphere is an easy means of visual communication.

It is my assertion that there is an underlying reason for European inability to understand and appreciate non-European Art.

Chapter two is the focal point of the thesis, examining why Europeans in general have difficulty appreciating non-European art. I contend that the reason for this phenomenon represents a style of thought which Edward W. Said calls "Orientalism". This is "based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the 'Orient' and the 'Occident'", and it is belief in this distinction which is responsible for the general lack of appreciation among Europeans of "Oriental" or non-European art. (SAID, 1978, P2.)

"Orientalism" and its effects are studied in the writings of Said, Fanon and Bernal. These authors are in no doubt that non-European countries were exploited by European expansion. Yet there are many who believe that these countries were crying out for development and the inconsequential inhabitants possessed "no real claim on the land and, therefore, no cultural or national identity" (SAID, 1978, P286) before colonization five hundred years' ago. This idea, that non-Europeans lack ability, is part of Orientalist theory, which posits furthermore that they benefitted from the experience of being colonized. Any suggestion that the visual culture of the colonies had artistic merit would imply that colonization was unnecessary and, perhaps, regrettable. This would call in question the integrity of the colonialists. Belief in the inferiority of non-European culture boosts the idea of European supremacy in comparison with the rest of the world, and it is this "cultural hegemony" (SAID, 1978, P7) which gives lasting strength to "Orientalism".

Chapter Three looks at non-European Art, focusing, in particular, on the bronzes of Benin, Nigeria. I selected these bronzes because I lived for some years in Nigeria and am impressed by Nigerian culture, the adherence to tradition, the costumes, the colourful festivals and funeral services. There is still an emphasis on creativity in Benin, where there is a thriving wood-carving and bronze-making industry. This follows on a long tradition of bronze-making since before the 15th century. It is interesting to see what respect is afforded to Nigerian Art, which has survived, like Renaissance Art, for five hundred years. In addition, some of the Nigerian pieces, in particular the bronze heads, are representational in style and, since Europeans seem to have a fascination with art which records actual appearance, their reaction to these bronzes would be informative. If their criterion for works of art is realistic representation, then the artistic merit of these Nigerian bronzes should be apparent. Yet, it is not unusual for art from non-European countries to be devalued in Western

Society. To appreciate the bronzes of Benin would be tantamount to an admission of guilt for colonisation.

The final chapter looks at contemporary America, where a community of mixed races live together. Because of the publicity surrounding the celebrations for the quincentenary of Columbus's arrival in America, there has been a greater than usual interest in Native Americans and their artworks. It is of interest to study how art created by an ethnic minority, living in Western Society, is viewed. These artists are challenging the stereotypical image of the 'Indian' which dates from the era of the westward expansion, when they were viewed as dark-skinned, pagan primitives who wore feathers and paint. These artists reflect the modern reality of the lives of Native Americans which is high "on the scale of pain, poverty and unemployment" (CEMBALEST, Artnews, Feb. 1992, P.88). Yet the artists complain that they are only included in Native American Art exhibitions but are not considered for exhibition for projects on photography, installation video, abstraction or the many other areas in which they are working.

Despite this, Jimmy Durham is one who is beginning to get recognition. Reviews of his work can be found in recent art magazines and in new publications.¹

People are beginning to realise that Native American culture is not dead or dying - that it should be taken seriously like any other culture. There is a move towards a greater sensibility as the theories of 'Orientalism' are challenged by the rising "political and historical awareness of the earth's people" (BERNAL, 1987, P.328). But there is still a long way to go before Native American Artists will be, as Durham says "discussed with the critical, conceptual and intellectual dialogue being generated by issues surrounding international contemporary art" (CEMBALEST, Artnews, Feb. 1992, P.90).

In a convoluted way, there is a link between the Art of Benin and the Native Americans. The bronze, which was used in the making of the Benin sculpture, was a byproduct of the slave trade - it being part payment for African slaves. These slaves, on their arrival in America, performed the duties which the nomadic native Americans could not do - labouring cotton fields and sugar plantations. Because the African slaves co-operated

¹For example, in Art Forum Summer 88, Art News Vol '91 No. 2 and in Lucy Leppard's latest book 'Mixed Blessings'.

with the colonialists, the progress of the Westward expansion was maintained. The ethnic races of America were then seen as an "excess in terms of capitalist production and reproduction" (FISHER, Artforum, Summer 88, P.101) and were subsequently hunted until their numbers were reduced. These attacks on the Native Americans, according to Bernal, were justified by the colonialists on the grounds that the "Natives" were not defending their property but "waste land" (BERNAL, 1987, P.203). The twin policies of enslavement of the Africans and extermination of the Native Americans were the extreme outcome of the hegemonic theories of 'Orientalism', or clear-cut racism, whereas the devaluation and non-appreciation of non-European Art are ongoing conditions of the same mental condition (BERNAL, 1987, P.201).

The effects of the latter have narrowed the imagination of the European and promoted distorted views of his own superiority. They have lumped together all non-European cultures into the category of 'Oriental' and disparage them merely because they are non-European.

CHAPTER 1

REPRESENTATIONAL ART - IS IT AN EASY WAY OF COMMUNICATION?

The birds in the story of Zeuxis, like the European visitor at the Columbus Exhibition, are of the opinion that an artist's job is essentially optical. They believe that art is

a rivalry between technicians for the
productions of a replica so perfect that
art will take the palm from nature
(BRYSON, 1983, P.1).

Given the importance of representation or mimesis in Western painting, it is a natural-enough attitude to assume that painting should be a copy of the world. Resemblance to nature was a challenging consideration for artists twice in history - from the time of the Renaissance to the beginning of the 20th Century and, earlier, during classical antiquity. Plato held mimetic art in low esteem, describing it as a great deception "a long way removed from truth" (PLATO, 1987, P.426). And, so too, in the Bible, the Third Commandment forbids the making of idols in the "form of anything in Heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters below" (Bible, Exodus, 20:4).

It is difficult to understand why artists persisted in perfecting copying techniques for such long periods in history. Equally difficult to understand is the reason why they developed in the first place. Gombrich suggests that there was a demand for correct visual evidence to communicate ideas in a more convincing way than those presented in the minimum form of the schema. He believes that art begins by presenting "minimum models which are changed gradually because of the viewers' expectations until they match the impression that is desired" (GOMBRICH, 1982, P.78). Particularly in the case of religious art, Gombrich feels that "the closer the code came to the evocation of a familiar reality", the easier it became for the faithful to believe the story being presented (GOMBRICH, 1982, P.23).

Many feel that art, when naturalistically represented, is more persuasive and, therefore, more easily understood.

This attitude seems to be peculiar to European thought - there is little demand for surface likeness in non-European cultures (GOMBRICH, 1982, P.20). Most cultures are quite happy with schematic representations. Fry believes that non-Europeans look at

things differently from Europeans. He contends that non-Europeans think in concepts and that it is this phenomenon which renders them incapable of perceiving things as they are. In 1919, an exhibition of African sculpture held in the Chelsea Book Club, London, was sufficient proof for Fry to confirm his view that the "Negro" remained "the lowest of savages" because of his "peculiar power of visualization" (FRY, 1937, P.67).

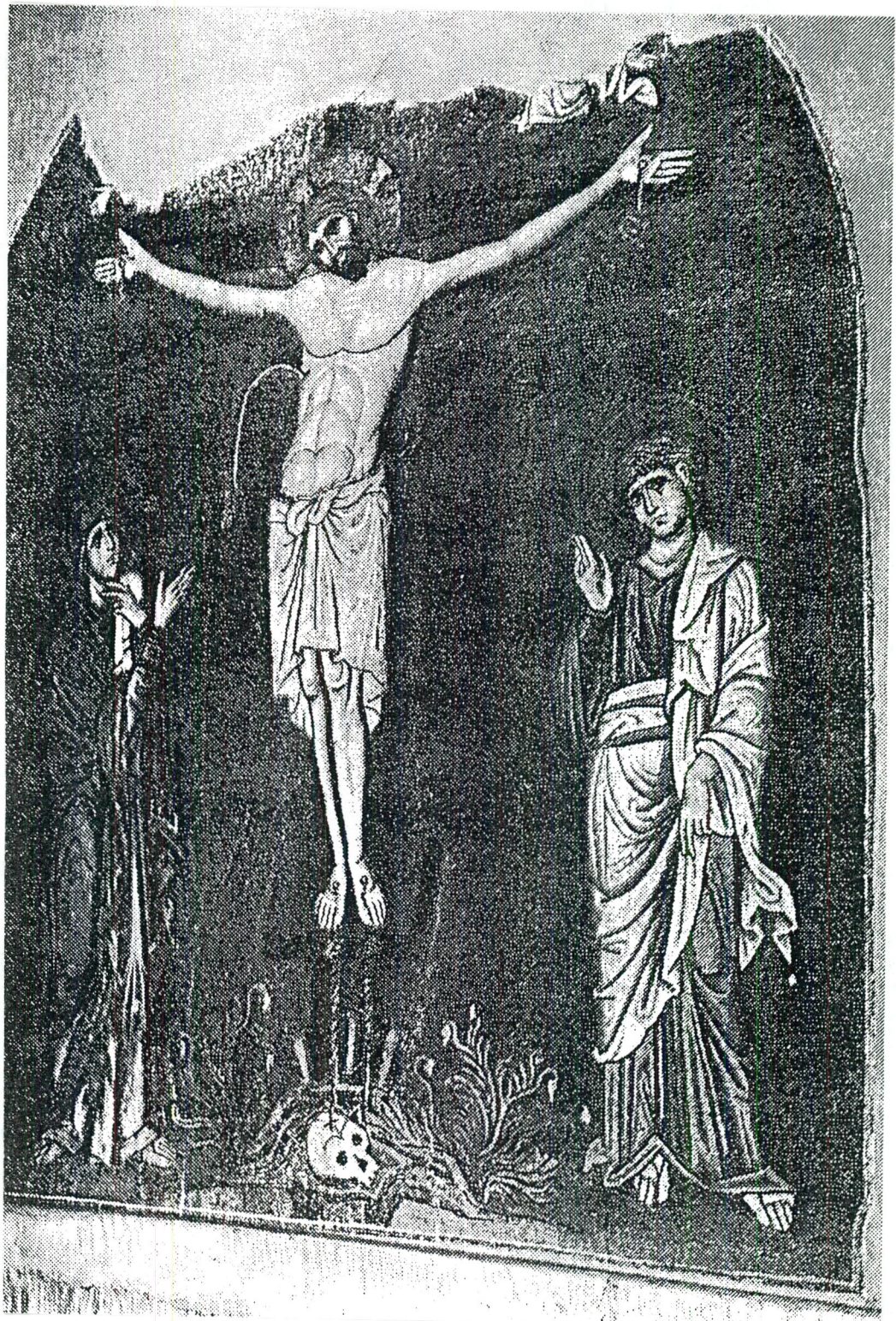
Yet, art in the Early Christian Church was schematic in style - being simple, with clear, defined figures and a story which was immediately recognisable. Art was used by the Church as a "pedagogic tool" (GABLIK, 1984, P.5) to illustrate religious events at a time when few people could read or write. The Eleventh Century mosaic of the Crucifixion, in a Church at Daphni outside of Athens, illustrates the simplicity of the schema (Fig. 1). The historical event of the Crucifixion is reduced to its essential terms. There is nothing to distract from the central importance of Christ's death. There is no evidence of bodily pain - his physical nature is not detailed. The pain expressed is that of the spirit, which is shared by the two onlookers, Mary and John.

Four hundred years' later, the Crucifixion by Fra Angelico (Fig. 2) follows the same schema. The crucified body of Christ dominates the scene - the figures are dignified. There is no indication of physical anguish. Red lines trickle from hands and feet and a skull placed at the foot of the cross, in both pictures, give a clear message of death. There is no ambiguity. The schema adheres faithfully to the formula, resulting in direct communication between artist and viewer. Are these artists failing in their representational mission? Those who believe that mimesis is a means of visual communication might have the view that the simplified image is the result of "inertia of the perceptual apparatus or of the painter's executive skill". With this opinion, it would seem that failure to achieve mimesis is the result of "stupidity or incompetence" (BRYSON, 1983, P.50).

The Medieval Church artist adhered to the well-known schema to be sure that he communicated exact meaning. Neither the viewpoint of the individual artist, nor the individual spectator, needed to be considered. Quite the reverse - "for the schema to be guaranteed precise recognition" (BRYSON, 1983, P.96) it had to keep to its minimum form. The viewer was known to be a member of the Church who understood the meaning of the illustration.

Why then was there a demand for change? In Gombrich's opinion,

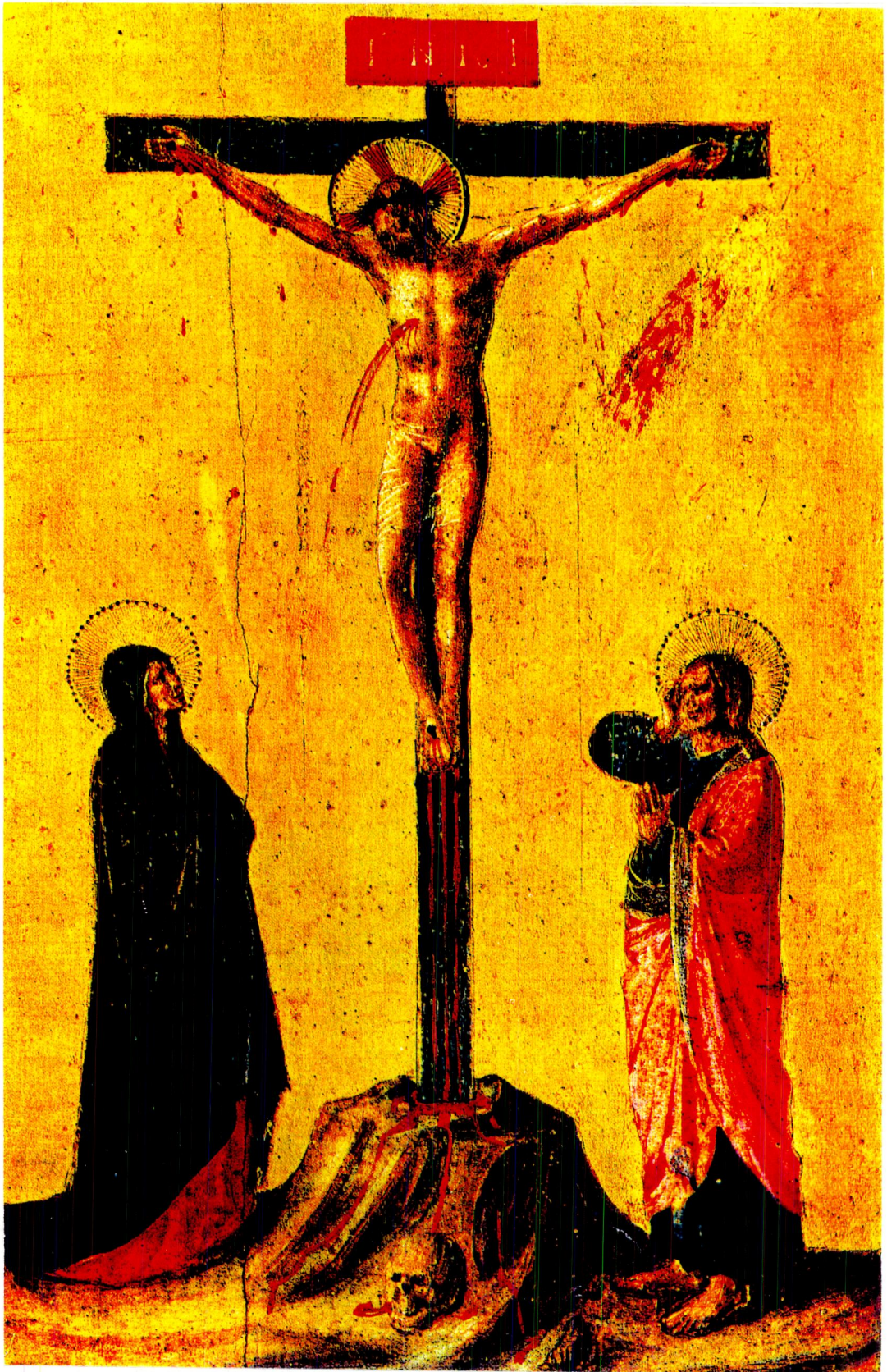
the discovery of illusionistic devices was not so much a general desire to imitate nature as a specific demand for the plausible narration of sacred events (GOMBRICH, 1982, P.20).



**Mosaic of the Crucifixion, 11th Century Church
at Daphni, Athens.**



FIG 2



FRA ANGELICO, Crucifixion, 1438 - 4
22.5 cm x 35.5 cm, Florence Museum of St. Mark



According to Bryson, the technical skills which led to the discovery of "illusionistic devices" were learned at the time of the Renaissance, as a result of knowledge of perspective, anatomy, physiognomics and atmospherics. As a consequence of these advances, the schema was overshadowed by the mimetic style. "The rigid armature of the schema" was dislodged by "empirical observation" and art became loaded with information concerning space, texture, colour, reflection and atmosphere. This style was popular in Europe from the Renaissance until the beginning of the 20th Century and an extensive body of representational works accumulated (BRYSON, 1983, P.65). Because of this, one could be forgiven for thinking that Representational Art is exclusive to Europe and that only Europeans had mastered the illusionistic skill - but this is not so. Some of the sculptured heads from Nigeria in the 15th Century (See Figs. 3 and 4) are mimetic in style and these would have been created without the benefits of the Renaissance discoveries.

For whatever reason mimetic style developed, the concern of the artist, whether s/he is European or Nigerian, is not only "the shifting cosmetic surface, but the underlying foundation which any society proposes and assumes to be its reality" (BRYSON, 1983, P.5).

There are elusive meanings in most representational pictures - which require personal study and investigation to unravel - "far more intimate and personally determined than the public activity of iconographic recognition" (BRYSON, 1983, P.65).

Take, for example, Rembrandt's '*Descent from the Cross*' (Fig. 5). It is a 17th Century etching in representational style. It follows the same schema as the 15th Century painting by Fra Angelico (Fig. 6), with the same arrangement of onlookers watching the body of the dead Christ being lowered from the cross. The dignity of Christ, illustrating his triumph over death, is obvious in Fra Angelico's painting. By contrast, in Rembrandt's etching, there is emphasis on physical pain and distortion, caused by death, in the twisted body of Christ and the suffering spectators. Rembrandt's '*Descent from the Cross*' keeps many traditional iconographic characteristics of the schema of Deposition, yet it "casts into the harshest relief its innovations in the presentation of Christ's body" (BRYSON, 1983, P.127), which, being cruelly destroyed, emphasises the destruction of the classical schema.

So too, the 16th Century German Artist, Grünewald follows the basic composition of the schema, but deviates by expressing his own tortured feelings in the grotesque shapes of the crucified Christ and the witnesses (Fig. 7).

FIG 3



Bronze Head, 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", Ife Museum, Nigeria



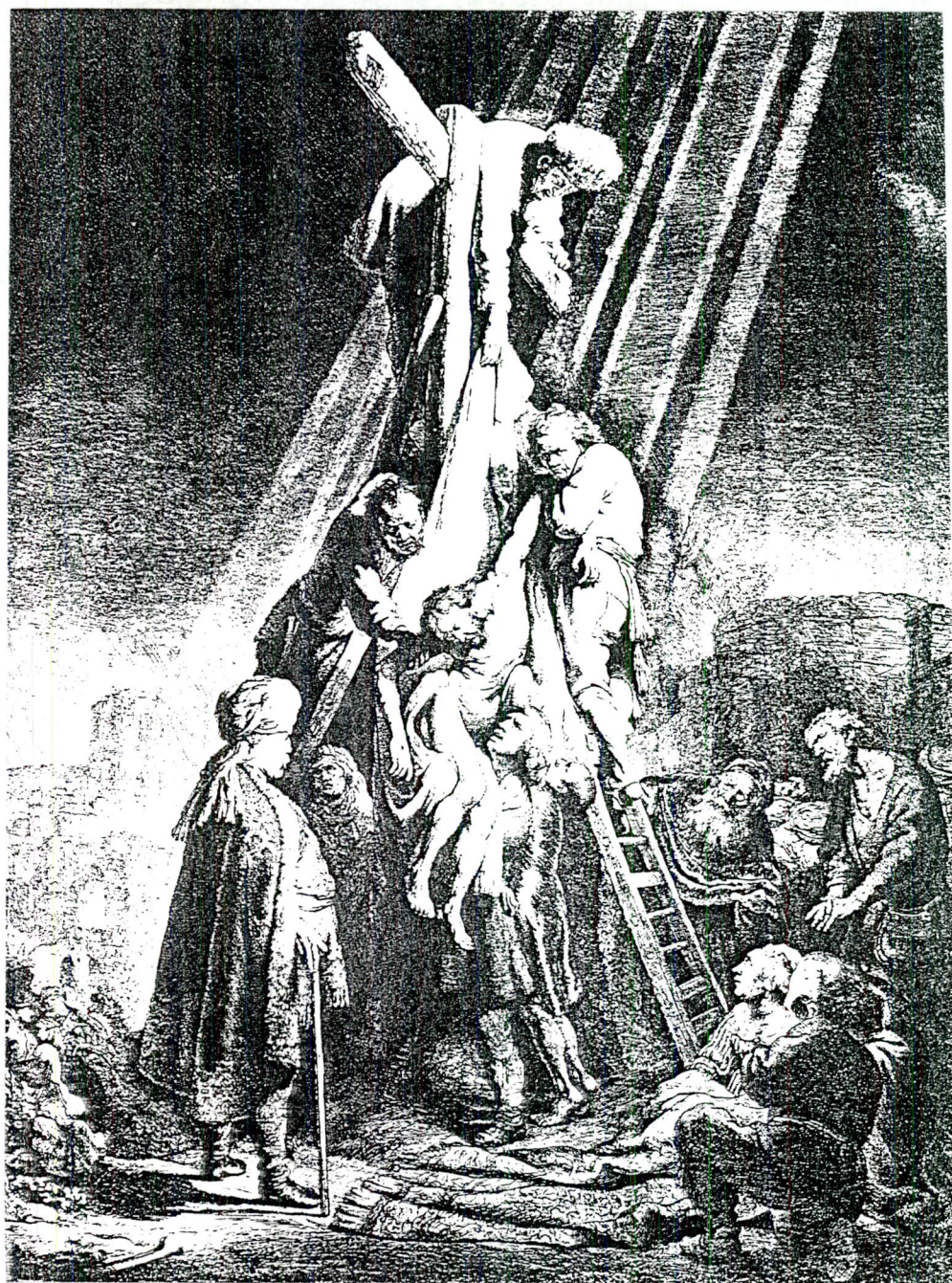
FIG 4



Bronze Head, 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", Ife Museum, Nigeria



FIG 5



REMBRANDT, Descent from the Cross,
Etching 1633, London, British Museum



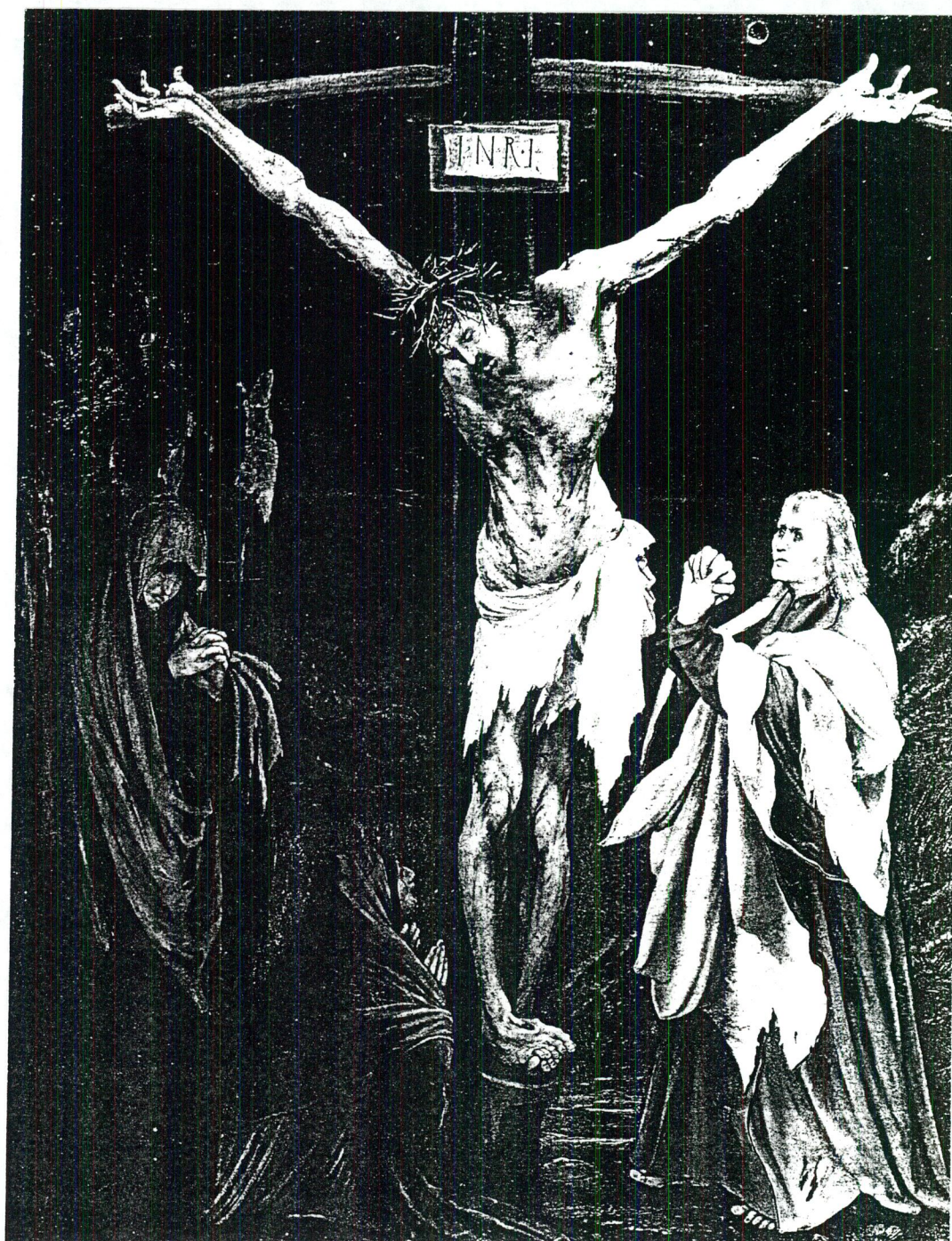
FIG 6



**FRA ANGELICO, Descent from the Cross,
1435, Florence, Museum of St. Mark**



FIG 7



**GRÜNEWALD, *Crucifixion*, 1519,
Washington National Gallery of Art**



Since the Renaissance, the purpose of art changed from being a simple means of telling a story to the illiterate to a role it played in Ancient Greece, which, according to Gombrich, was to "evoke" its meaning "in a convincing and imaginative way" to those who knew the story (GOMBRICH, 1982, P.95).

From this, it would seem that representational art is aimed at an exclusive audience - an audience of connoisseurs who are able to decode the meaning. Art, whether it is representational, non-representational, European or non-European, has meaning beyond the surface reality - meanings which sometimes require more than a glance to decipher.

If there is a power intrinsic to painting, it resides in the capacity of its practice to exceed the fixities of representation.
(BRYSON, 1983, P.170).

The role of the viewer is to interpret the painting - not just perceive it. When vision is aligned with interpretation rather than perception, it allows for understanding and communication.

Representational art, therefore, is not a simple means of visual communication. Viewing art is an activity, transforming what we see into meanings. This should happen whether we are looking at European or non-European Art. This begs the question - what is the reason for European incomprehension of non-European Art?

CHAPTER 2

ORIENTALISM - WHAT IT IS - THE REASON EUROPEANS HAVE DIFFICULTY APPRECIATING NON-EUROPEAN ART

It is my contention that there are many Europeans who are blind to the merits of non-European Art because of a phenomenon which Said calls "Orientalism". This he defines as

fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West. (SAID, 1978, P.204.)

In my thesis, Westerners, Europeans and Occidentals are interchangeable terms - likewise Orientals and non-Europeans. According to Said, the world is divided into two "unequal halves", (SAID, 1978, P.12) the Orient and the Occident. These are not strict geographical divisions, but exist only in the minds of those who research, teach and write about the Orient - namely the Orientalists who collectively identify all Europeans against non-Europeans.

It is no accident that this style of thinking exists. It is a deliberate policy by the West:

Not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice which, for many generations, there has been considerable material investment (SAID, 1978, P.6).

The people who hold these theories are workers from corporate business, foundations, foreign service, intelligence, community, military, oil companies and the academic world. Because of these beliefs, they feel that they have the authority to dominate and restructure the Orient. Their beliefs are fourfold.

Firstly, non-Europeans are different from Europeans. The latter are "rational, developed, humane, superior", while the former are inferior, underdeveloped and mentally peculiar.

Secondly, their knowledge of the East is learned from abstract notions based on texts representing classical oriental civilizations instead of direct evidence drawn from life in the Orient.

Furthermore, European opinion is unavoidable because it is believed that the Orient is "eternal, uniform and incapable of defining itself".

And the final point in compelling the West to control the Orient is fear. The West is afraid of the Orient (SAID, 1978, P.30).

Generalisations, like the four listed above, make it difficult to learn the truth about oriental matters, because each category is an evaluative interpretation instead of a natural description.

I will deal with each of these generalisations in turn.

Darwin believed that there was an anthropological difference between white people and other races. His was not a new idea. The slave trade was justified by that same belief.

By the 1680's, there was, in fact, a widespread opinion that Negroes were only one link above the apes (BERNAL, 1987, P.203).

This gave the European the "right" to study these "lesser" beings and explore their environment. Because there were so many of them, it seemed natural that they should be "harvested".

It is to be expected that societies have some degree of prejudice for (or more often against) people who are different in some way - either physically or mentally.

The Ancient Greeks despised other races and some, like Aristotle, had theories to prove a Hellenistic superiority based on the geographical position of Greece. Aristotle believed that people who lived in cold climates were courageous and passionate but lacking in skill and brain power. This accounted for their ability to remain independent, as they lacked, he felt, "political cohesion and the ability to rule others". The Asiatic races, he maintained, had both brains and skill but were weak-willed and cowardly, so they remained "enslaved and subject" (BERNAL, 1987, P.202).

The Hellenic race, by comparison, simply because they lived in a mid-location geographically, were graced with all the beneficial traits and subsequently they continued

to be free, to have the best political institutions and to be capable of ruling others, given a single constitution (BERNAL, 1987, P.202).

With this theory, Aristotle justified slavery, but not to the same extent as the "intense and pervasive" slave trade carried out by Europe and America since the 17th Century.

Since most of the slaves were taken from Africa, the position of Egypt, geographically on the same continent, was a problem for the Europeans. How could they justify slavery on the grounds of biological difference when everyone knew of the advanced civilization in Ancient Egypt?

Bernal says that there were three solutions for the Europeans' dilemma. Firstly, to deny that the Egyptians were black, secondly to deny that the Ancient Egyptians had created a "true" civilization, and thirdly

to make doubly sure by denying both.
The last was preferred by most 19th
Century and 20th Century historians
(BERNAL, 1987, P.241).

Not wishing to be indebted to Africa, this theory retained Europe's cultural pride and justified the continuation of the slave trade.

The slave traders, the explorers, the missionaries, the scientists, the soldiers, all set out on their travels with very fixed ideas about the Orient, "its sensuality, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness". (SAID, 1978, P.205.) The Orientalist taught that for the Oriental self-expression, self-enlargement and liberation are not important issues. Expressing his Oriental interpretation of Islam and presupposing the Muslims, the Orientalist emphasises the Muslim resistance to change, to mutual understanding between East and West and to the development of their people out of "archaic, primitive, classical institutions" (SAID, 1978, P.263) into the modern world. Their fierce reluctance to change, their fear of modernity, according to the Orientalist, causes a greater anxiety for the Muslim than the apocalypse itself.

The curious thing about these assertions is that they are made about Muslims

not on the basis of evidence internal to
Islam but, rather, on the basis of a logic
deliberately outside Islam (SAID, 1979,
P.280).

Gibbs is an example of one who believed that the Orient was

something one read about, studied, wrote
about within the confines of learned
societies, the university, the scholarly
conferences (SAID, 1979, P.275).

He dominated Western thinking until 1960 and his advice would have been sought by national policy-makers, businessmen and the new generation of Oriental scholars. Since World War II, the esoteric languages of the Orient are no longer a requirement, instead an Orientalist begins as a trained social scientist and "applied" his science to the Orient or elsewhere. (SAID, 1978, P.290.)

This brings me to the third point - that the Orient is incapable of defining itself. Only the Western expert knew about the Orient. From the beginning of Western speculation it was understood that there was no way that the Orient could represent itself.

According to Said:

Evidence of the Orient was credible only
after it passed through and had been
made firm by the refining fire of the
Orientalist's work. (SAID, 1978, P.283.)

The Orient was represented from the distinctive viewpoint of the representor who, always being European, could illustrate what the Orient could and could not do. Furthermore, he could contest someone else's view and censor what should be known.

Representations have purposes and they are effective in keeping the Orientalists' theories unchallenged.

The language used, the style, figures of speech, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances - contribute to the theories.

An example from an essay by Bernard Lewis illustrates this point. The subject is *Islamic Revolution* and Lewis describes how in Arabic-speaking countries, a different word - THAWRA - is used for revolution.

I quote Said's version:

The root th-w-r in classical Arabic meant
to rise up (e.g. of a camel) to be stirred or
excited and, hence, especially in Maghribi
usage, to rebel. (SAID, 1978, P.314.)

It is perfectly reasonable to ask, why the idea of a camel rising to his feet is introduced to describe an ethymological root for a modern Arab revolution. These words, according to Said, are deliberately chosen "as a clever way of discrediting the modern". They are selected purposely to belittle the revolution - to suggest that the Arab uprising is as important as a camel getting to its feet.

Furthermore, the words Lewis uses to describe the revolution "stirred", "excited", "rising-up" are sexual terms. By implication, he is comparing the revolution to the sexual excitement of a camel. Said feels that these words are not selected accidentally.

For, since he (Lewis) is a writer and, as such is "sensitive to the nuances of words, he must be aware that his words have nuances as well" (SAID, 1978, P.316).

This brings me to the final reason why Orientalist theories are supported. The West is basically afraid of the Orient - afraid of their large population. When George Orwell visited Marakesh in 1939, it was the great number of 200,000 inhabitants which left a marked impression on him. He described the crowds as "merely a kind of undifferentiated brown stuff about as individual as bees or coral insects" (SAID, 1978, P.253).

The West is outnumbered three to one. The Orientalist acknowledges this and, with the Arab population in mind, he writes:

The only way in which Arabs count is as mere biological beings: institutionally, politically, culturally they are nil, or next to nil. Numerically and, as producers of families, Arabs are actual. (SAID, 1978, P.312.)

In newsreels and newsphotos, the Arabs are shown in large numbers, rarely individually. This reflects the Western fear of their numbers.

Fear also comes from the myth that there is a link between dark skin colour and evil and inferiority. Gypsies were hated and feared both for their darkness and their "alleged sexual prowess" (BERNAL, 1987, P.201).

The First World War brought a change in thinking and, during the worldwide recession between the wars, Egypt, in particular, was making demands for independence. In 1931, Gibbs had an urgent cultural message for Westerners. He advised them to take heed of the Orient because of

Its use to the Western mind in the struggle to overcome narrowness, oppressive specialisation and limited perspectives (SAID, 1978, P.257).

It was sound advice, even though his motives were not the noblest.

Modern Orientalists are beginning to recognise the danger of accepting theories

without question, and advise new scholars of Oriental Studies to be "on guard against idées reçues all too easily handed down in the profession" (SAID, 1978, P.326).

This is a change of attitude for the Orientalists, but damage has been done both to the European and the non-European. The latter has been forced to believe that his culture is inferior to the West:

to recognise the unreality of his nation
and, in the extreme, the confused and
imperfect character of his own biological
structure (FANON, 1967, P.190).

The Europeans, on the other hand, have suffered too. They are unable to appreciate the merits of three-quarters of the earth's people. They have distorted opinions of their own ability and are unaware of the propaganda they are spreading. Because of Western training, the Orientalists feel that their writing is fair and impartial:

This is the culmination of Orientalism as
a dogma that not only degrades its
subject matter but also blinds its
practitioners (SAID, 1978, P.319).

The writings on Africa are more disparaging than toward other non-European countries. According to Bernal, despite independence, Africa is still seen as hopeless and "Blacks" are deemed to be the lowest form of humanity (BERNAL, 1987, P.403).

CHAPTER 3

NIGERIAN BRONZES - WHY THEY ARE RARELY APPRECIATED BY EUROPEANS? - ARE THEY WORKS OF ART?

It is for want of a conscious critical sense and the intellectual powers of comparison and classification that the Negro has failed to create one of the great cultures of the world, and not for any lack of the creative aesthetic impulse, nor from lack of the most exquisite sensibility and the finest taste. (FRY, 1937, P.73.)

This quotation is taken from *Fry's Essay on Nigerian Art* and is typical of "Orientalist" thinking. Fry, a science graduate from Cambridge, believed that there were strong links between science and art - so too, between science and the ability to rationalise.

Gombrich is of the same opinion, saying that the decisive reasoning powers characteristic of Western Society are the result of a knowledge of science

...the birth of critical rationalism in Greek culture gave mankind a new tool towards the shaping of its own destiny - a tool that other cultures lack - we call it science. (GOMBRICH, 1982, P.27.)

Since the 19th Century, Europeans have refused to believe that non-Europeans could be "scientific" in the way that they themselves are - or that any race could have contributed to the culture of Europe. Even the influence of Egypt was denied. Eliot Smith, Professor of Anatomy in Cairo, in 1901 was convinced that the Egyptian Pyramids were built by an "influx of broad-skilled-non-Semitic-Asiatics" (BERNAL, 1987, P.270). His ideas were well received by most Europeans at the time, firstly, because his theories on "diffusionism" fitted in with Imperialism; secondly in that he "proved" that Egyptians were not Africans, and, lastly, his views could be respected because he was an anatomical scientist.

This way of thinking is difficult to understand - especially among scientists - who must have been familiar with the work of Newton. He, himself, had complete faith in the Prisca Sapientia, or original wisdom of Ancient Egypt. It was the conventional view of the 17th Century that the Great Pyramid enshrined perfect units of length, area and volume as well as geometric proportion, such as Π and the "the golden mean" ϕ

Newton was further convinced that "atomic theory, heliocentricity and gravitation had been known there" (BERNAL, 1987, P.167).

The 17th Century was a time of great discovery. The chronicler, Dapper, visited Benin in Mid-west Nigeria in 1640 and described in detail the palace buildings.

The King's palace is square... as large as the town of Harlem and entirely surrounded by a special wall like that which encircles the town. It is divided into many magnificent palaces, houses and apartments of the courtiers and comprises beautiful and long square galleries, about as large as the Exchange in Amsterdam, but one larger than the other, resting on wooden pillars from top to bottom covered with cast copper on which are engraved the pictures of their war exploits and battles. (ROTH, 1968, P.160.)

Sixty years' later, the Dutch traveller Van Nyandzel, describes the same complex of apartments and galleries and there is no suggestion that the buildings were constructed by other than the native people.

A drawing (see Fig. 8), made by an English officer in 1897, illustrates the town plan and careful layout of the building in the city. It seems obvious from the sketch that the citizens of Benin lived in an organised society.

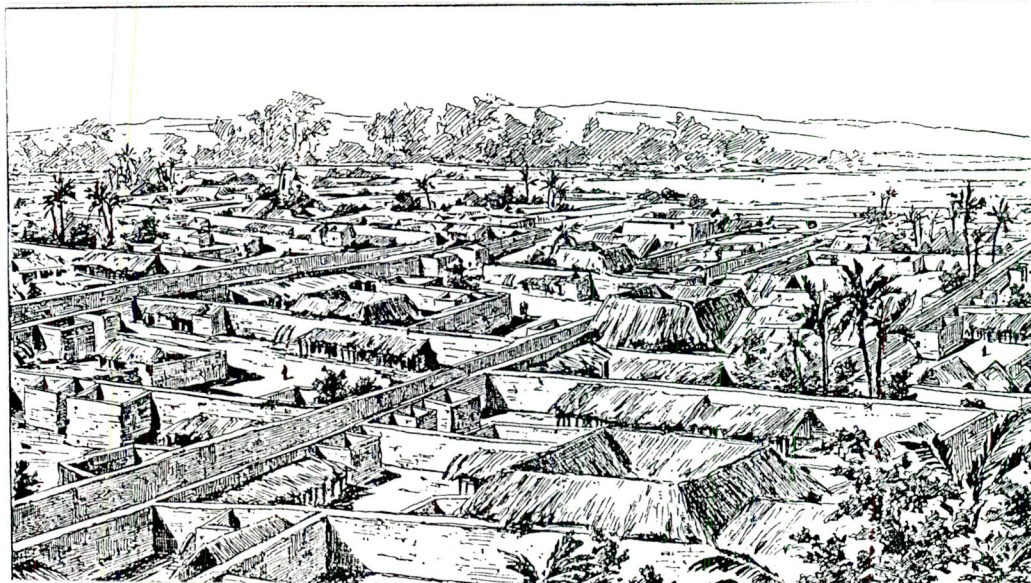
It is with the expansion of Europe and the rise of racism in the 18th and 19th Centuries that the ability of non-Europeans is seriously questioned.

This is highlighted at the end of the 19th Century when the Benin treasure was taken to London in 1897. The standard of workmanship and the quality of design of the four thousand pieces amazed and perplexed the art collectors. The technical skill and modelling of the bronzes was of such

delicate refinement that they could stand comparison with the sculptures of Europe's own classical antiquity (ATTENBOROUGH, 1976, P.72).

It was immediately suggested that Africans could not possibly have developed such high skill for themselves, that they must have been taught by foreigners. It was known that the Portuguese traded with the Kings of Benin, exchanging slaves for ingots of bronze or copper. Since a great number of slaves were transported - resulting in huge quantities of metal being taken to Benin - was it not likely that the Portuguese, at the same time, introduced the technique of casting? (ATTENBOROUGH, 1976, P.77.)

FIG 8



**Sketch of Benin City by an English Officer,
Globus, Vol IXXII, 27th November, 1897**



Roth, whose brother was the surgeon with the expedition responsible for the removal of the treasure from Benin, dismisses this idea. There was no tradition of bronze-making in the Iberian Peninsula at that time and he concludes that the Portuguese could not have taught the bronze-making skill (ROTH, 1968, P.232).

The people of Benin, known as the Binis, believe that the bronze-making technique came from Ife, the sacred town of the Yoruba people, 110 miles north-west of Benin. According to their tradition, when the Oba, or King of Benin, died, his head was sent to Ife for burial. The Oni, or King of Ife, would commission a bronze portrait of the dead Oba and send it to Benin to be placed on an altar. Legend tells how the fourth Oba - Oguola - requested a master smith to be sent to Benin to teach the bronze casting skill. (ATTENBOROUGH, 1976, P.77.)

Igueghae, a bronze smith, was sent as a teacher and a guild of bronze casters was set up. However, since there was no evidence of bronze-making in Ife, the Bini legend was discredited.

An accidental discovery in 1938 gave credence to local popular belief. Eighteen bronze heads were unearthed (Figs. 3 and 4) close to the palace in Ife. From work done on them, it seems certain "that they date from several centuries before the arrival of the Portuguese" (ATTENBOROUGH, 1976, P.79). But, at the beginning of the 20th Century, there was no such proof and Nigerian ability to produce the bronzes was questioned.

Yet, at the same time, the Europeans were interested in the Benin work, not only because of the technical skill of the bronze-casting, but also because they were attracted to the representational style of the work - a style which was fashionable in Europe. It is interesting to note that realistic representation of this degree occurred in Nigeria, where there was no history of "Science". This calls in question Gombrich's opinion that "experimentation in the study of anatomy, projective geometry and of optics" (GOMBRICH, 1982, P.27) led to the production of recognisable images in art. The Nigerians succeeded without the "benefits" of science.

It was against the representational or mimetic style that European artists reacted at the beginning of the 20th Century. Discovery of African Art gave them "an exit from the maze of Western tradition" and opened the way for non-naturalistic versions of natural forms. It broadened the possibilities of Western Art, teaching the European "the ability of abstract and geometric forms to convey emotional force" (LIPPARD, 1971, P.35).

This led to the development of Cubism, made popular by Picasso and Braque. Gombrech writes that, in 1906 or 1907, when Braque saw the composition "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon" by his friend Picasso, he is reported to have said:

It is as if you asked us to drink petrol.....
and I confess that I have come to like
drinking this petrol - the so-called
experiment of Cubism (GOMBRICH, 1982,
P.243).

African sculpture contributed to the European development of "an assemblage aesthetic" by showing the way foreign materials were used on tribal masks and fetishes.

Leppard acknowledges this debt, but adds that the African ideas were used by European Artists to "liberate, advance or create artistic change" (LIPPARD, 1971, P.47). The claim that the "borrowed" aesthetic is embellished occurs in Western thinking -

Cultural pride needs to be maintained in
the face of foreign borrowing that is so
massive that it cannot be denied.
(BERNAL, 1987, P.198.)

particularly when "borrowings" run in the opposite direction to the ideas of racial superiority. This clear cut, extreme notion of superiority did not exist until the 19th Century and we are still feeling the effects of it in the 20th Century.

The first time I saw these bronzes was in Benin City where I lived for two years. Their meagre collection is prominently displayed in a little museum, surrounded by a garden, in the centre of the city.

In 1992, when I visited London (see Appendix I), I saw what is considered to be the finest collection of Benin Bronze plaques worldwide, arranged in a magnificent display dominating the main stairway of the British Museum. It is only the plaques which are on display, the bulk of the treasure - portrait heads, standing figures, animal sculptures, masks, etc. - are housed in the reserve collection of the Museum of Mankind, London, where they can be viewed by appointment.

A number of these bronzes were on display at the Columbus Exhibition. One of them was a head of the Queen Mother. There is a similar one in London in the Reserve Collection of the Museum of Mankind. The head is beautiful, with large expressive eyes, rounded dimpled chin and vigorously modelled nose and mouth. The flattened ears are the most stylized feature. The "chicken beak" head is decoratively presented

with overlapping diagonal bands in contrast to the horizontal lines of the coral bead collar around the neck (Fig. 9).

The weight of the head is unexpectedly light, because the thickness of the casting is between 1 and 3 mm thick, which proves that it is the product of a refined and mature technology. The method of casting used is known as the "Lost Wax Process".

But it is the bronze plaques, in particular, which in a very graphic way "provide testimony to court life at the time" (BEN-AMOS, 1980, P.27).

There are many war plaques, but the majority represent kings, chiefs and courtiers in ritual costume (Fig. 10). Their story has been lost, but through identification of costume, the rituals can be partially reconstructed and should "provide the armature on which we shall eventually erect the art history of this part of Africa" (FAGG, 1990, P.30). These are the plaques referred to by Dapper in 1640, which were attached to the pillars in the King's palace.

The Bini creation myth is recorded in the background design on many of the plaques. Generally, it is a quatrefoil pattern - on a minority of plaques there is a circled cross. The cruciform is a basic cosmological form in Benin thought.

Called 'Ede Enene', it represents simultaneously the four cardinal directions, the four days of the week and the unfolding of the day - morning, afternoon, evening and night. (BEN-AMOS, 1990, P.29.)

The religion of Benin teaches that it is unnecessary to appease good Gods, because they are incapable of harm, whereas sacrifice to the wicked Gods is obligatory in the hope of averting evil (ROTH, 1968, P.51). In 1897, there were many human sacrifices in the hope of averting the British invasion.

The Oba, or King, of Benin is not only God's representative on earth, but is revered as a God himself, although his adoration arises more from fear than love, as Capt. John Adams reports in the beginning of the 18th Century "cases of heresy, if proved, are followed by decapitation". (ROTH, 1968, P.62.)

A poignant fact came to light with the study of the bronzes. Because a great number of slaves were traded, bronze became plentiful and, as a consequence, the bronze heads became "heavy and coarsened in both conception and execution" (ATTENBOROUGH, 1976, P.80). (Fig. 11.) Thus, the bronzes - especially the later examples - are a byproduct of a thriving slave trade.

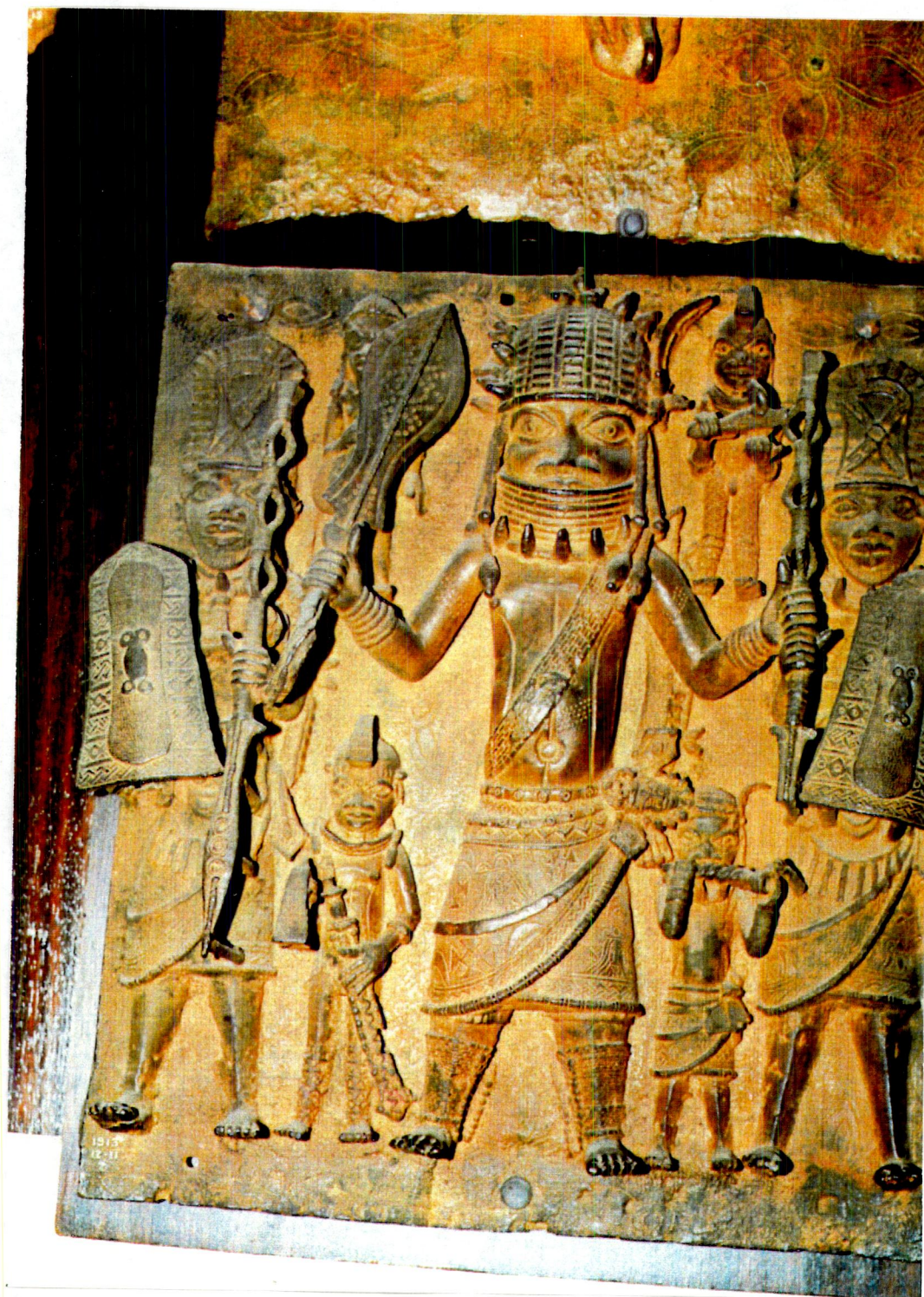
FIG 9



Head of Queen Mother Bronze 13½",
15/16th Century, Museum of Mankind, London



FIG 10



Plaque of King and Courtiers in Ritual Costume,
Bronze, 13½" x 11", 16th Century,
London, British Museum (from a photograph)



FIG 11



**Bronze Head, 11½", Late Period mid 17th Century,
London, British Museum**



If art should be a portrait of who people are - a mode of visual communication - then these bronzes fulfil that function and deserve recognition.

It is true that the conquest of Africa was achieved at a time when ethnography and art history were still completely oriented towards Europe (BIHALJI, 1978, P.149). But has the situation changed in today's world?

CHAPTER 4

CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN ART - HOW IT IS VIEWED - PARTICULARLY THE WORK OF DURHAM

A navigational error by Columbus in 1492 resulted in the invasion of America. Thinking that he had reached India, Columbus called the Native Americans "Indians".

A term that homogenizes what was, in fact, a heterogeneous population, as diverse in language and customs as Europe and Africa (FISHER, Artforum, Summer 1998, P.101).

The invaders were unable to recognise or understand the cultural differences and their fear is reflected in their behaviour. The words of Requerimiento a document drawn up by the Spanish, twenty years after Columbus's arrival, to be read aloud to the Native Americans, summarises their attitude:

We shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses 'the King and Queen of Spain' may command, and we shall take away your goods and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey. (SAID, 1978, P.22.)

This period of history is foremost in people's minds at this time, with the celebrations for the Quincentenary of the "discovery" of America. This was highlighted at the Columbus Exhibition in Washington. The reaction by the Native Americans was prompt. They organised their own exhibitions - "The Submuloc Show" ("Columbus" read backwards) - to make a political statement counteracting the "perception of Indian Artists as conservative and decorative" commented a Native Artist, Jaune Quick to See Smith (CEMBALEST, Artnews, Feb. 1992, P.87). A wide variety of exhibitions were organised to tour the country (see box).

Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the 20th Century. On view at the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa (to April 13); Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon (June 30-August 16). Travels to the Minnesota Museum of Art, Saint Paul; the National Museum of the American Indian, the U.S. Custom House, New York.

Our Land/Ourselves: American Indian Contemporary Artists. On view at the University Art Museum at SUNY Binghamton, New York (to February 17); Myers Gallery, SUNY Plattsburg Art Museum (March 17-April 18); and then at several other venues.

Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts. On view at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming (June 15-August 16); The Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (September 19, 1992-January 3, 1993); the Gilcrease Institute, Tulsa (February 6-April 11, 1993).

The Submuloc Show. On view at the Museum of Art, University of Oregon, Eugene (to February 23); the Collier County Museum, Naples, Florida (April 17-May 22); the Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D.C. (June 5-July 10); and then at other venues.

Fifth Biennial Native American Fine Arts Invitational. Juried exhibition of 12 artists' work at the Heard Museum, Phoenix, through August 30.

Haudenosaunee Artists: Common Heritage. Twelve members of the Iroquois Confederacy. On view at Tower Fine Arts Gallery, SUNY College at Brockport, New York (February 26-March 27).

Throughout America today, there is a growing body of Native American Artists who wish to be taken seriously as contemporary artists and considered for projects about photography, installation, video, abstraction, or the many other areas in which they are working. Bob Haozons, a Chiricahua/Apache, is a sculptor who believes that, since his people "are the highest on the scale of pain, poverty, alcoholism, unemployment", his art should reflect their condition. He, and other artists like him, are challenging the stereotypical "Indian" - a redskin with feathers, arrows and tepees. (CEMBALEST, Artnews, Feb. 1992, P.88.)

Lucy Lippard, in her latest book "*Mixed Blessings*" writes on the "cross-cultural process" in America. According to her, the Native Americans are the last to receive "commercial and industrial attention in the urban artworlds" (LIPPARD, 1990, P.6). They have been excluded from the realm of "high art" despite the profound contribution their culture has given to the country. It is widely felt that there is a limited demand for Native Americans whose work is an honest reflection of their lives (CEMBALEST, Artnews, Feb. 1992, P.90).

Haozons's work contains grim reminders of the anxiety he faces as an Indian - Native American - skulls, barbed wire, barriers - see '*Border Crossing*' (Fig. 12).

FIG 12



BOB HAOZOUS, Border Crossing, 1991



The challenge of border crossings as related by Jeff Keily, an art critic and writer for *Artforum*, in a recent lecture in I.M.M.A., describes a performance on the Mexican border. A group, made up of artists and local people, assembled on the border and marked the frontier between the USA and Mexico with a line drawn with a mixture of rice and flour. Then, forming a human chain, they rotated "like the blades of a helicopter" and erased their newly formed borderline with their feet. This performance on the Mexican border, with the symbolic blending of rice (Orientals) and flour (Occidentals) and the co-operative removal of the borderline, is an expression of hope for change.

But, is there any hope for change while the curators of art "are overwhelmingly white, middleclass and, in the upper echelons, usually male"? (LIPPARD, 1990, P.7.)

There is a belief that art must be of certain standards or qualities which are identifiable by those in power.

According to this lofty view, racism has nothing to do with art; quality will prevail, so called minorities just haven't got it yet. (LIPPARD, 1990, P.7.)

The notion that there is only one standard for good art in a mixed community is a very narrow view but, according to Lucy Lippard, it is still being taught in the educational system with disastrous results.

Rightly, she feels that it is absurd to judge all art by the same standard. There are huge differences among classes, cultures and gender. Yet, this notion of a "single criterion for good art" (LIPPARD, 1990, P.7.) is enshrined in educational and artistic circles which, in her opinion, produces audiences who are afraid to think for themselves.

Occasionally, powerful work by a non-European Artist gets publicity which is greeted with amazement. These Artists do not expect to be given the attention afforded to European Artists. Durham is one, in particular, who, in an interview with Fisher for *Artforum*, says

I am assuming there is an audience interested enough in American Indians to read this.... Maybe they'll pass over this article without reading it. So, actually, I make the assumption only as an excuse to myself for writing. (FISHER, *Artforum*, Summer 1988, P.99.)

Durham is a contemporary artist - living in "self-imposed exile" in Mexico. He is a man of many parts being

a founder of the American Indian Treaty Council, member of the Executive Committee of the American Indian Movement, a water rights activist, a poet, an essayist, a cowboy, a mechanic, an Arts Administrator, a performer, a polemicist, a rabble-rouser. (LIPPARD, 1990, P.208.)

He describes his art as "neo-primitive, neo-conceptualism". He builds his sculptures from ordinary materials constructed in extraordinary ways. Usually, they are made of wood - assembled with something dead - a human or animal skull, stones, shells, fur, feathers and a little paint (See Fig. 13). When completed, they take on a new life - like the human skull, which he found near a beach in Texas where the Karankawa tribe once lived. Durham enhanced the skull with a nose, etched with powerful symbols, wrapped the neck in feathers and decorated the forehead with inlaid turquoise. He left one socket empty - which looks inwards - the other he filled with a shell which is outward looking (See Fig. 14). This may be a comment on the custom of the dominant culture to disinter Indian bones and display them in "white" museums.

Ethnologists and collectors who believed in the "Vanishing Red Man Theory" - that Native Americans were doomed to extinction because of white man's expansion - saved millions of objects:

Household utensils, hunting implements, masks, dolls and games but also bones dug up from sacred burial sites and objects necessary for religious ceremonies by cultures still very much alive (CEMBALEST, Artnews, Feb. 1992, P.88).

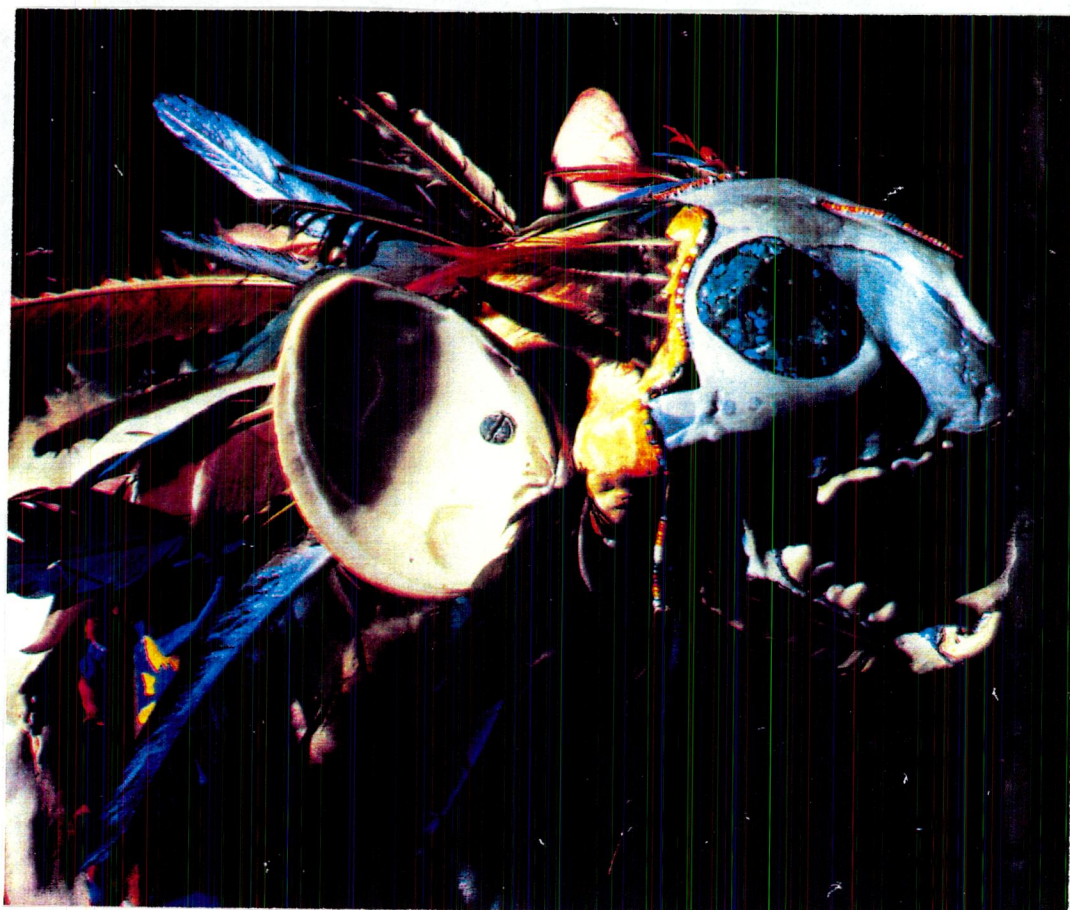
This feeling, that he is being pursued and observed by the dominant race, is the reason that Durham makes art which is hard to define:

As prey and as artist, he has decided to set an erratic course, to double and redouble, engage and separate (LIPPARD, 1990, P.211).

In a 1985 performance called "*Giveaway*", Durham told stories - accompanied by slides, of a series of maps, charting the progress of the white man across the Continent of North America. He illustrated how much the Native American had lost and then "emphasizing the still integral role of the 'give back' in Native Culture", he proceeded to give everyone in the audience a gift -

A handsome traditional ribbon shirt, a woven vest, stones, feathers and postcard announcements of his show - saying 'these were things he had gathered in his life'.... The mostly white audience squirmed with guilt. (LIPPARD, 1990, P.209.)

FIG 13



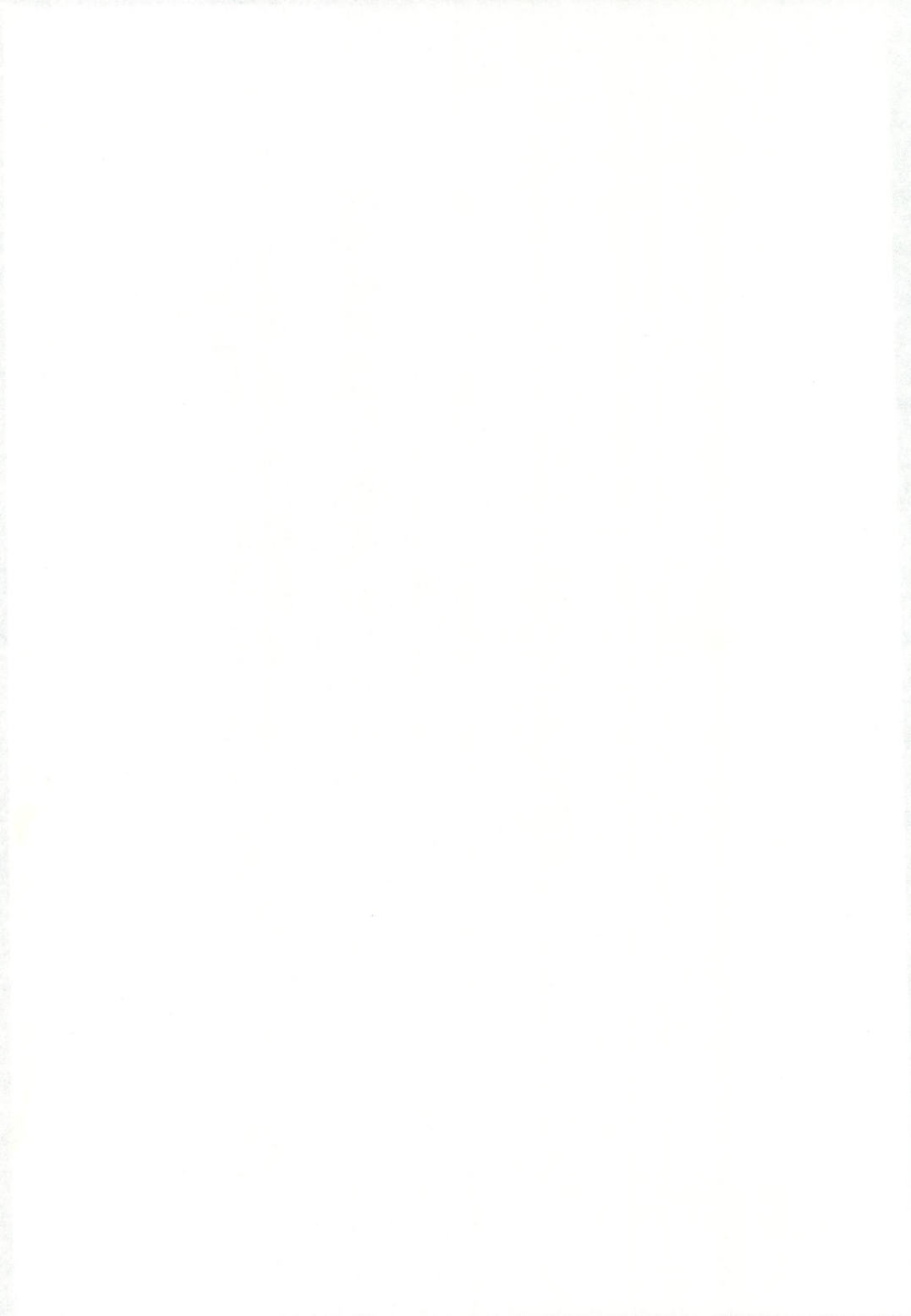
**JIMMIE DURHAM, Tjunh Datsi, (Panther [Detail]) 1984,
Mixed Media, Private Collection**



FIG 14



**JIMMIE DURHAM, Karankawa, c. 20" high,
Mixed Media, Private Collection**



In another performance in 1987, as Durham solemnly told Coyote Stories to a mixed audience, he was heckled, with racist comments, by a white man. Horrified members of the audience threatened to throw the white man out when Durham revealed that he was part of the performance.

Durham's works are conceived "in the spirit of progress towards radical change" (LIPPARD, 1990, P.208).

There is humour and sadness when he mocks himself and his work in his self-portrait 1986 - a full-length body nude, like a hide hanging on a wall - a red skin with a star branded on his forehead, fish stencilled on his thighs, seashells for ears, bits of animal fur for hair, one turquoise eye and large psychedelic genitals (Fig. 15). "An open chest cavity reveals some feathers, which imply a certain 'lightheartedness'". By this, Durham is mischievously claiming that he is "willing to do a wide variety of jobs because, as Fisher points out:

Indigenous America has never been fully appropriated to the forces of labor and, as such, exists in an untenable excess in terms of capital production and reproduction (FISHER, Artforum, Summer 1988, P.101.).

In a capitalist society, it is necessary to produce profits and, since the Native Americans could not co-operate with the colonialists and labour the cotton fields and sugar plantations, they became an excess which could not be maintained. Habermas believes -

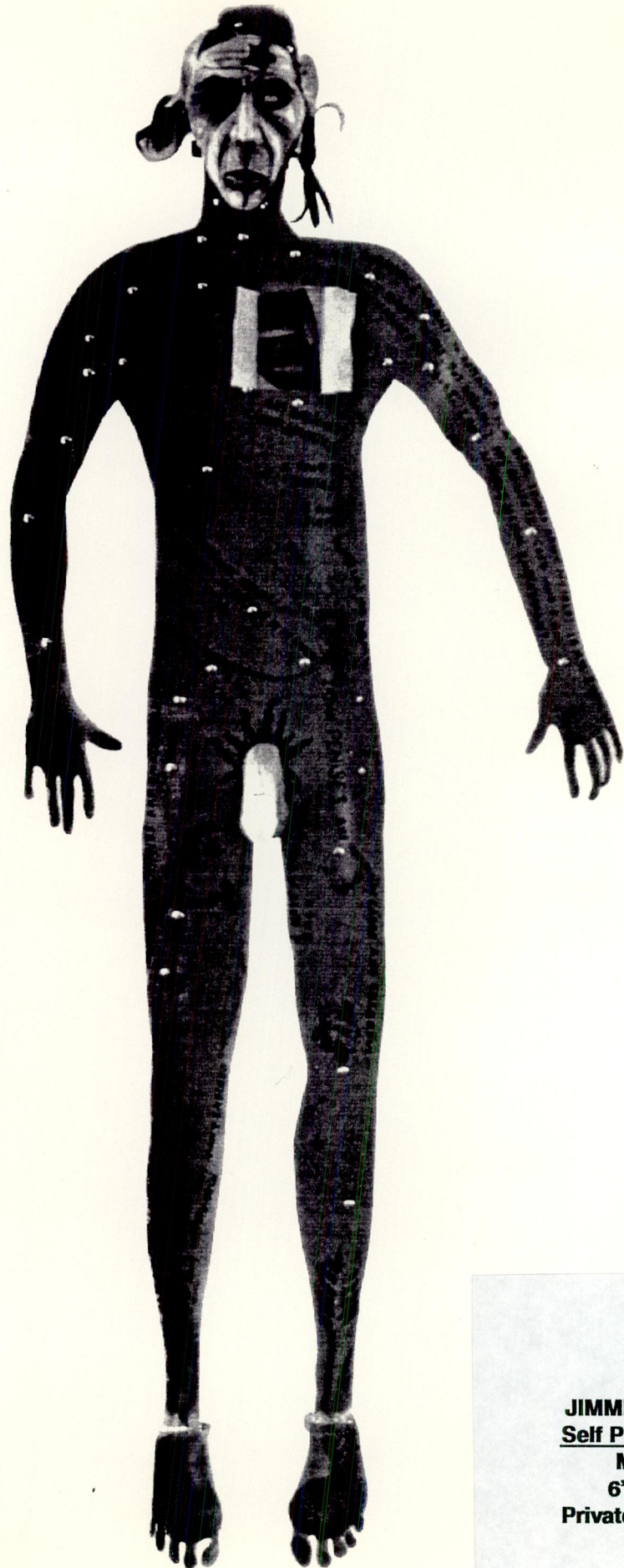
At the stage of development of primitive society, there seems to be no systematic motive for producing more goods than are necessary to satisfy basic needs, even though the state of the productive forces may permit a surplus (HABERMAS, 1976, P.18).

It was because of the inability of the dominant race to utilise the talents of the Native Americans that reservations came into being -

The reservation, part prison, part natural history museum in its effect, was an instrument of surveillance in which the native body, hitherto evasive and inscrutable, could be studied and moulded into the white man's image (FISHER, Artforum, Summer 1988, P.103).

When it was found that isolation from the white community strengthened Native American identity, then rules were introduced to prohibit certain traditional customs. The white man still feared the cultural differences.

FIG 15



**JIMMIE DURHAM,
Self Portrait, 1986,
Mixed Media,
6'4" x 30" x 4",
Private Collection**



In November, 1969, a group of Native Americans took over the Island of Alcatraz - the old prison site, which was deserted except for a few caretakers. They claimed the land, by right of discovery, in the name of all Native Americans. Because of its lack of facilities, they felt that it would make a perfect reservation - as determined by the white man's standards. See Appendix II for a copy of the text of their proclamation to the US Government. Even this space was denied to the Native American - they were evicted in June, 1971.

The injustice suffered by the Native American people is often reflected in the artwork of Durham in a darkly humorous way. (Fig. 16.) He was of the tribe of the Cherokee Nation of Georgia, who were highly civilized with their own complex legal and commercial system. Furthermore, the Cherokee possessed a syllabary through which it wrote its language in books and newspapers. (FISHER, Artforum, Summer 1988, P.103.)

In 1987, an exhibition called "*We the People*" which was held in "the Artist's Space" in New York, referred to the fact that the names of many of the two thousand Native American tribes living in North America were words in their own language meaning "the people" (LIPPARD, 1990, P.212).

This information upsets the image of the "savage" Indian in need of education, salvation, etc. Yet, to preserve the integrity of the dominant race, it is essential to perpetuate the "cowboys and indians" fiction:

The sign of racial difference must remain visible precisely because their function is to ensure the integrity of the sovereign subject. (FISHER, Artforum, Summer 1988, P.101.)

The image of "savage indians" is perpetuated in language of every day use - the Washington Redskins are a ball-team, Cherokee is a brand name for casual wear, Comanche Chief is a Jeep - Chief among Pick-ups. This abuse of language is a recurrent theme in the work of another Native American Artist - Edgar Heap of Birds -

A mockery is made of us by reducing our tribal names and images to the level of insulting sports team mascots, brand name automobiles, camping equipment, city and state names and various other commercial products by the dominant white culture (FISHER, Artforum, Summer 1988, P.105).

In an effort to counteract a different sort of abuse against Native Americans, Ben Nighthorse Campbell, the only Native American in Congress, sponsored an Art and

FIG 16

IN THE EARLY DAYS WE BENT OVER BACKWARDS TO ACCOMMODATE
THE WHITES. ULTIMATELY, HOWEVER, OUR EFFORTS PROVED
DISTAYOH', BECAUSE TLUNH TLUNH YUNH, ANI' YOSGI UNADU'LI'
SQUATS', DLA YADI'. DAN'TUNH SGA, NA?

JIMMIE DURHAM, Untitled, Private Collection



Crafts Act in 1990. It is a bill requiring that art sold as "Indian Art" must be made by "Indians". The penalty for non-compliance with the law, which demands written proof of Native American identity, can be five years in gaol, or a \$250,000 fine. This has had unfortunate repercussions by drastically reducing exhibition opportunities for Native American Artists.

Because Jimmie Durham lacks documentation proving his ethnic identity, a show of his work was cancelled in 1991. There are others like him who have difficulty registering, because their ancestors left home to get work or, indeed, their tribes may not be officially recognised by the Federal Government (CEMBALEST, Artnews, Feb. 1992, P.91).

This emphasis on documentation confuses ethnic identity with artistic identity and the result is continuing victimisation by the dominant culture.

CONCLUSION

The preference for European Representational Art, and the lack of guilt expressed by the European visitor, are the result of racism and not, as he implies, the incomprehensibility of non-European Art.

The belief that European Art is easy to understand, simply because it is representational, is false. It is quite the reverse. Mimetic, or Representational style of art, is sophisticated and requires study to unravel its meaning. Yet, if by some chance, Representational Art had a clear message and, further, was a standard of judging art, then the bronzes of Nigeria, many of which are representational in style, would have been understood and appreciated by Europeans. Even the fact that some of the bronzes are five hundred years' old does not earn esteem for them.

Bernal's research into the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilization explains why Europeans are prejudiced against non-European cultures. During the time of European colonial expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries, the theories of racial differences helped the colonialists to justify the slave-trade and, further, made it intolerable for them to accept that European civilization might have gained culturally from Africa. To preserve European pride, a more acceptable version of Ancient History was written, which questioned the antiquity of Egypt and denied European cultural "borrowings" from Africa.

Said's detailed analysis of the literature of Oriental scholars focuses on how and why the myth of European superiority was advanced. The myth was promoted through the writings of the Orientalists who, according to Said, taught, wrote about and researched the Orient. They had a purpose which was to document, restructure and ultimately to have authority over the Orient (SAID, 1978, P.3).

Said cites four reasons for the bias in their work. The Orientalists believed in the "absolute and systematic difference" between Europeans and non-Europeans. Secondly, the Orient was not studied from direct evidence from Oriental realities but, rather, from texts "representing 'classical' Oriental civilizations". Thirdly, only a European scholar of Oriental studies was capable of defining the Orient. Lastly, the

Europeans feared the Orient. (SAID, 1978, P.300.) These reasons influence the attitude of Europeans towards non-European Art - including the ancient bronzes of Nigeria.

These bronzes are not held in the same esteem as European Art - the bulk of the Bronzes of Benin, Nigeria, is housed in the Reserve Collection in the Museum of Mankind, London. The critics, Fry and Gombrich, echo "Orientalist" theory, expounding the view that "Negroes" have a different way of looking at things.

The Bronzes of Benin, the slave trade and the history of the Native Americans are closely linked. The success of the policy of enslavement of the African forced the colonialists to exterminate the Natives of America.

Despite their history, contemporary Native Americans are making radical and robust art. A touch of humour and due consideration for the environment are characteristic of their work. Richard Long admires then more than contemporary land artists who use bulldozers to build large earthworks. By comparison, the Native American is a "custodian of nature, not an exploiter of it" (GABLIK, 1984, P.44).

Contemporary Native Americans are struggling to be perceived as subject rather than object. They have not lost their identity in the "melting pot" and cultural heterogeneity still survives. Over-emphasis on original identity and questions about their authenticity by the American Government led to false representations and stereotypes. Too much focus on them confines them to an "anthropological present or an archaeological past" (LIPPARD, 1990, P.12). This attitude denies them a modern identity and a political reality which people of European origin take for granted.

This is a time of great cultural awareness, combined with a pride in roots. According to Lippard, there is a desire for cultural democracy, respect for differences and a wider definition of art in America today. This should make art accessible to more people (LIPPARD, 1990, P.8).

This new sensibility is recorded in a feature in *Artnews* Feb. '92 - when the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, returned a Zuni War God to the Zuni people in Autumn '91. According to Cembalist (*Artnews*, Feb. '92, P.88), the writer of the feature, the War God was returned to be placed in a shrine in order to deteriorate. Edmund Ladd, a member of the Zuni Nation and Curator of the Museum of New Mexico, helped to negotiate the return of seventy such objects. He believes that the 1990 Federal Law, mandating the return of skeletons and other sacred and ceremonial objects, has helped him in this regard. He adds that "non-Indian" Curators have finally accepted a new concept - that the War Gods belong to no one.

I wrote to the North Carolina Museum in October, 1992 to get more information on the return of the Zuni War God. I received a reply in February, 1993 and their reasons for the return of the sacred object do not reflect the "sensitivity" referred to in the feature. The Museum Curator replied that they "do not do much with Native American Art", which is one of the reasons the War God was returned (See Appendix III for letter).

This calls to mind Jimmie Durham in his interview with Jean Fisher, and I conclude with his words:

I feel fairly sure that I could address the entire world if only I had a place to stand. You have made everything your turf. In every field, on every issue, the ground has already been covered. (DURHAM, Artforum, Summer 1988, P.101.)

APPENDIX I

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Department of Ethnography
Museum of Mankind

Ms Sarah McShane
26 The Rise
Malahide
60 Dublin
Ireland

21 November 1991

Dear Ms Mc Shane,

Thank you for your letter of 11th November.

You would be most welcome to view selected pieces from the Museum's Benin collections during your visit to London in January. If you are planning to be here a few days it would be helpful if you could make an initial visit to the Museum's Students' Room to go through the various photographic files, registers and computer printouts relating to the collection, to make a selection of the specific pieces that you would like to see. The Students' Room is open Monday to Friday, 1.00 - 4.45 pm and an appointment to view the Benin pieces themselves would be made at the Museum for a weekday morning. Similarly, an appointment to view the video 'Igue Oba' can only be made for a weekday morning, Tuesday to Friday.

I would be grateful if you could 'phone either myself or Hans Rashbrook in the Students' Room so that dates for the two appointments can be made.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Posey.

APPENDIX II

In November of 1969, a group of Indians seized the island of Alcatraz, the old prison site, which was occupied only by some caretakers. The Indians refused the orders of government officials to leave and were forcibly evicted in June, 1971. The following statement explains their claim to the island.

PROCLAMATION: TO THE GREAT WHITE FATHER AND ALL HIS PEOPLE.

We, the native Americans, re-claim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery.

We wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land, and hereby offer the following treaty:

We will purchase said Alcatraz Island for twenty-four dollars (\$24) in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man's purchase of a similar island about 300 years' ago. We know that \$24 in trade goods for these 16 acres is more than was paid when Manhattan Island was sold, but we know that land values have risen over the years. Our offer of \$1.24 per acre is greater than the 47 c per acre that the white men are now paying the California Indians for their land. We will give to the inhabitants of this Island, a portion of that land for their own, to be held in trust by the American Indian Affairs and by the Bureau of Caucasian Affairs to hold in perpetuity - for as long as the sun shall rise and the rivers go down to the sea. We will further guide the inhabitants in the proper way of living. We will offer them our religion, our education, our life-ways, in order to help them achieve our level of civilization and thus raise them and all their white brothers up from their savage and unhappy state. We offer this treaty in good faith and wish to be fair and honourable in our dealing with all white men....

We feel that this so-called Alcatraz Island is more than suitable for an Indian Reservation, as determined by the white man's own standards. By this we mean that this place resembles most Indian reservations in that:

1. It is isolated from modern facilities, and without adequate means of transportation.
2. It has no fresh running water.
3. It has inadequate sanitation facilities.
4. There are no oil or mineral rights.
5. There is no industry and so unemployment is very great.
6. There are no health care facilities.
7. The soil is rocky and non-productive; and the land does not support game.
8. There are no educational facilities.
9. The population has always exceeded the land base.
10. The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others.

Further, it would be fitting and symbolic that ships from all over the world, entering the Golden Gate, would first see Indian land, and thus be reminded of the true history of this nation. This tiny island would be a symbol of the great lands once ruled by free and noble indians.

Richard S. Schneiderman, Director

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James G. Martin, Governor

Patric Dorsey, Secretary

Department of Cultural Resources

Curatorial Department

N O R T H C A R O L I N A M U S E U M O F A R T

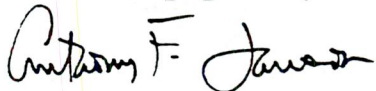
February 9, 1993

Sarah E. McShane
26, The Rise
Malahide
Co. Dublin
Ireland

Dear Ms McShane,

I'm sorry not to reply sooner but I have been swamped. We really don't do much with native American art, which is one of the reasons we returned the Zuni God. The account in Art News was quite complete, and there is little to add. I am therefore returning the five dollars. I regret that I am not of much service to you.

Sincerely yours,



Anthony F. Janson
Chief Curator

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