



IDA KOHLMAYER. American, 1912-1997
Composition 93-20 1993
mixed media on canvas
Museum Purchase: Charlotte Debutante Club Fund and donations
from Ida Kohlmeyer and Jerald Melberg Gallery, Inc.
1994.30

Symbolism at the Mint Museum of Art

From the earliest civilizations to the present time, symbols have been employed to convey status, position or religion. Over time, the symbol adopted a more allegorical, even ambiguous role. The Mint Museum’s collections hold examples of both the political and poetic natures of symbolism.

literally and figuratively. The four faces represent royal ancestors, emphasizing the lineage which justifies the King’s power.

Similarly, in Ancient American art status was displayed through symbology. In many Maya ceramic vessels and pottery, such as the *Tripod Plate with Enthroned Ruler and Mat Signs* (A.D. 600-900), rulers are shown sitting upon a low throne embellished with

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For centuries, peoples such as the Yoruba of Nigeria have employed symbolic materials and images in their clothing to reinforce social hierarchy. Pieces such as the 20th century *Beaded Hat (Orikogbobo)* distinguished the King from the commoner, as only priests and royalty can wear beaded objects. The hat protects the King’s head, considered his source of personal power, both



the skin of the jaguar, a sign of divine authority. The aristocracy was distinguished in death as well. *Burial Urn with Jaguars and Earth Monster of Guatemala* (A.D. 600-900) was created for a member of the nobility, whose body would be placed inside in a tightly flexed position and wrapped in cloth. Two jaguars embellish the urn, metaphors for death and resurrection. On the lid, a jaguar wears a scarf adorned with skulls, a symbol for human sacrifice. On the front of the urn, a jaguar emerges from the mouth of an Earth monster, possibly reflecting the Maya belief that the jaguar descended with the setting sun into the underworld, *Xibalba*.

Renaissance and Baroque religious paintings, such as Ridolfi Ghirlandaio's *Madonna and Child with Four Saints* (circa 1515), were teaching tools in European colonies and became models of composition and subject matter for the native artists of America. These transplanted traditions are most visible through the symbolism employed in Spanish Colonial art; for instance, the repeated use of the cross or the Christ child's blessing of the hand which form the Greek letters IC XC or *Iesous Khristos*. The *Virgin of Loreto* (circa 1680) exemplifies how indigenous deities were replaced with similar Christian figures to persuade and ease conversion. Introduced by Jesuit missionaries, the Virgin was associated with Pachamama, the earth goddess of Precolumbian lore, in the eyes of many natives. Here she is shown with the complexion of a New World Indian while wearing the divine attire of a Catholic saint. The Latin inscription at the bottom reads: "Do not gaze down upon me as I am swarthy because the sun has scorched me." The pieces in this collection offer a fine example of how religious symbology is used to equate, and even justify, political power.

Housed in the Federal-style building designed by William Strickland, it is only fitting that the Mint Museum of Art owns the finest public collection of gold coins minted at the old United States Branch Mint in Charlotte. The coin is perhaps the most potent power symbol, first employed when Alexander the Great pressed his own portrait into his currency. The Charlotte Mint produced over \$5,000,000 worth of coins, all adorned with symbols of government such as Miss Liberty, the 13 starred colonies and the famous "C" Charlotte Mint mark.

The Decorative Arts collection reminds one of the symbolic power and artistic poignancy to be found in the seemingly utilitarian object. The *Swan Service Plate*, circa 1737-40, is a fine example of Europe's earliest

porcelain work in Meissen, Germany. Part of the "Swan Service" made for Count Brühl, the plate is appropriately embellished with Brühl's family coat of arms. In the center of the plate, however, is the relief of two courting swans, sunlight spiraling behind them. The swan, a symbol of Venus, is found in much of Baroque art and Meissen porcelain. This piece is unique in its employment of both the political symbol of the arms and the two swans, a most allegorical couple.

The Museum's earliest American art represents a young nation and is often reflective of such in its poetic symbology. Later artists, such as those of the Hudson River School, were enchanted by the natural grandeur of America. Thomas Cole, for instance, painted his *Untitled (American Lake Scene)* in 1846 using symbols such as the lone American Indian to depict the insignificance of man when confronted with the eternal beauty of nature. In the 20th century, through the improvisational medium of collage, Romare Bearden also employed the symbol in landscape. In pieces such as the *Pepper Jelly Lady* (1975), *The Train* (1979) and countless others, the moving train on the horizon represents Bearden's memories of traveling between the North and South as a child. The image of a train is also central to many of the momentous events in African American history, such as the Underground Railroad and the Great Migration after emancipation.

The Contemporary Art collection, comprised of works created post-1945, proves that the symbol is as potent today as it was four centuries ago. Ida Kohlmeyer, in her *Composition 93-20* of 1993, creates her own symbols of expression while Judy Fox uses a more universal symbol, the infant *Einstein* of 1988, to illustrate man's departure into an unknown future yet to be harnessed. Peter Halley's *Six Prisons* (2004), a seemingly straightforward geometric piece, is in actuality a reference to the prison cell and places of incarceration. The day-glo colors, framed by roughly textured black, remind the viewer of a world divorced from nature. At once, it suggests urban alienation, the polarization of nations, war prisons and corporate crime leading to imprisonment. However, the work also offers a critique of the lofty ideals of abstraction.

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In conclusion, the Museum's collections portray the shift of symbology from a political tool to poetic expression. Of course, the dual nature of symbolism has always existed, as mark-making is inherently artistic. However, it was when this poignancy was realized by the artist himself, outside of the political structure, that the symbol became a vehicle for the human soul.

~Sadie Starnes, Summer 2006 Intern

ART CORNER: MMA

Jerome B. Thompson was a master at combining landscape and genre, the two most popular categories of painting in the mid-19th century. Thompson began his career painting portraits despite the objections of his father, who was an itinerant portrait painter. Jerome began exhibiting portraits at the National Academy of Design in 1835, but turned to genre (scenes of everyday life) by 1850. Before the end of the decade his landscape paintings were displayed in at National Academy of Design exhibitions.

Noonday in Summer (1852) in the Alexander gallery presents teaching opportunities to bridge the portraits in that gallery with the landscapes in the Spangler Gallery. Thompson's skill as a portraitist is evident in the figures in the foreground. The people in the painting are having a picnic in the countryside. At first look the scene appears to depict farm workers taking a midday break. The young man resting on the scythe and the young girl with the basket are flirting. However, the people under the tree are dressed like city dwellers. The picnic theme alluded to by the picnic basket was a favorite of the

artist. To mid-19th century city dwellers, the wilderness was threatening and the city crowded, so the idea of a picnic was a safe escape for both the participants and the viewer. The artist's sense of rural charm and the natural landscape exudes the quiet beauty of Americana. With *Noonday in Summer* one is able to sense both the calming influence of the rural scene and the charm of both working-class folk and city dwellers captured by Jerome Thompson.

~Rosemary Glatzel

ART CORNER: MMCD

Contemporary Japanese Bamboo Arts

Bamboo has been as important as rice to the history and culture of Japan. It has found its way into almost every aspect of daily life in Japanese culture. The characteristics of bamboo make it possible to use as construction material, rope, fencing, fish and animal traps, bows and arrows, fly fishing rods, farm and garden tools, furniture, kitchen implements, musical instruments, religious articles, and, of course, baskets.

In the past there were thousands of bamboo artisans who created these articles, but in more recent years the aspiration for younger people to continue this trade has been in decline. The development of plastic and cardboard boxes has also made the necessity of these supplies less desirable, which makes it harder to make a living. Many young people start with an attraction to bamboo art but lack the patience to continue.

In order to be recognized and show artistic achievement today, an artist has to participate in either the Artists of the Nitten World or the Artists of the Japan Craft Arts Association. This is a different approach from the Western conventions. It takes many years- even decades- to become a full member.

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JEROME B. THOMPSON. American, 1814-1889
Noonday in Summer 1852
oil on canvas
Museum Purchase: Mint Museum Auxiliary Purchase Fund
and Exchange Funds from the Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. Herbert Bridges.
1998.15



There are several ways for a bamboo artist to get started. One could be born into a family with a background in the tradition of the bamboo arts. Iizuka Shokansai was hoping to pursue painting as a career. After the death of his elder brother during the war, Shokansai was pressured by his family to take his brother's place as a bamboo artisan. Once he made his decision, he nailed his paint box shut and to this day has not re-opened it.

Alternately, an aspiring artist could apprentice with masters. Apprenticing takes years. The apprentices are not able to touch bamboo for the first several years, and once they have developed trade skills they are required to create little flower baskets for a period of time. It is also common today to go to Occupational School.

Many people wonder about the time required to create one of these pieces. Depending on the complexity of the piece, it could take from a couple of weeks to many months. In essence, the correct answer is decades. The process of developing skills and building skill upon skill is time-consuming.

Patience and tenacity play a major role in bamboo arts. In order to succeed, the artist has to be in it not for the money but for the deep connection and love of the material and the process.

As times have changed, the bamboo arts have attracted women to the craft. Older men who are in their 50s and 60s have also become interested through the work of their fathers.

An additional resource is the website textilearts.com/bamboo/.

Source: Coffland, Robert T. Contemporary Japanese Bamboo Arts. Chicago, IL: Art Media Resources, 1999.

~Joane Laguitan, Spring 2006 Intern



STANISLAV LIBENSKÝ. Czech, 1921-2002
 JAROSLAVA BRYCHTOVÁ. Czech, 1924
Metamorphosis V (double) 1998
 cast glass
 Gift of Lisa S. and Dudley B. Anderson
 in honor of Laura Park-Leach and Mark Richard Leach. 2001.82.3

ARTISTS' TIDBITS

Glass Artists of the Czech Republic:

Stanislav Libenský and Jaroslava Brychtová

- Museums around the world display the architectural sculpture of this duo, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, Museum Bellerive, Zürich; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Yokohama Museum of Modern Art, Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, Japan; and Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.
- Libenský was originally a painter who taught art and started his career in glass after becoming renowned in painting and design.
- Stanislav Libenský and Jaroslava Brychtová worked together as artists and eventually married in 1963.
- The work of these talented artists is instantly recognized by the clarity of color and simple block shapes. While using only one color, the

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work is rarely, if ever, monotone. Shape, thickness and depth utilize light to provide the viewer with a dramatic experience.

- The Mint Museum of Craft + Design owns the last American commission for Czechoslovakian glass from these extremely talented artists.

~Alex Ketchpaw

NEW IN THE GALLERIES: MMA

I am *very* pleased to be able to introduce two “faces” in the American galleries: one quite large, the other quite small (regular visitors to the galleries will surely have spotted at least one of the two already!). It is always exciting to be able to build our collection, and these two recent additions will help us to fill gaps in our holdings and tell a fuller, richer story of American art.

Upon entering the Alexander Gallery, it’s hard to miss *Mrs. Richard Crowninshield Derby*, who hangs immediately to your right. She’s an imposing presence, residing on a canvas that’s approximately eight feet by five feet! Mrs. Derby was painted by one of America’s most important artists in the late 18th and early 19th centuries: John Singleton Copley. Copley was born in 1738 and made a name for himself as the colonies’ most accomplished portraitist before leaving for England in 1774. He remained there for the rest of his life. Mrs. Derby, like Copley, was an American citizen. She had come to London from Boston to establish her reputation in London society. Copley pulled out all the stops in this life-size portrait, casting Mrs. Derby in the guise of the patron saint of music, Saint Cecilia. He sent it to the Royal Academy of Art’s annual exhibition in 1804. It returned to America with its sitter a few years later and remained in her family until the 1970s, when it was acquired by Dr. and Mrs. Henry Landon. It is the first painting by Copley to enter The Mint Museum’s collection.

Venturing further into the American collection, one will find the second new face in the Spangler Gallery, in the form of the captivating bust *Gamin*. *Gamin* is the French term for a street urchin. This little (just 9 ½ inches high!) fellow was created by Augusta Savage—a talented sculptor who was an important part of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s. *Gamin*, which sensitively captures the inquisitiveness and determination of one of many children trying to make their way on the streets of Depression-era New York City, is easily Savage’s best-known work and is regarded as one of the

icons of the Harlem Renaissance. It shows the enduring power of the ideas introduced a generation earlier by the artists of the Ashcan School and also provides a link to the work of Romare Bearden. Savage was a mentor to many young artists, including Bearden. Late in his life, Bearden recalled the impact of visiting her studio as a teenager. He came away thinking of Savage as an ideal role model—a mentor who was “open, free, resisted the usual conventions of the time, and lived for her art, thinking of success only in terms of how well her sculptures turned out.”

For more information about both Copley and Savage, be sure to look on the reserve cart in the Library and on the Mint’s wiki page online: mintwiki.pbwiki.com

~Jon Stuhlman, Curator of American Art



JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY. American, 1738-1815
St. Cecilia, a Portrait (Mrs. Richard Crowninshield Derby) 1803
oil on canvas
Partial and Promised Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Henry C. Landon III.
2008.50

STAFF PROFILES

Allison Taylor and Chris Lalley



The Docent Wranglers

We docents interface regularly with Allison Taylor, Adult Programs Coordinator, and Chris Lalley, Tour Coordinator. I thought it was time for us to get to know them even better.

Allison's multiple duties include coordinating docent recruitment and training, recruiting and placing the college interns, as well as managing many of the adult education programs such as the Sunday lectures, Artists' Forum and Taste of Art. Allison conveyed to me that this collection of responsibilities definitely challenges her multi-tasking skills. Meanwhile, her partner in education, Chris, books all of The Mint Museum's tours (from pre-school up to those for "seasoned citizens") along with scheduling the appropriate number of docents and ensuring the gallery tote bags and DIGS classroom are in good order. Chris confided that with her assignment the devil is in the details. Admittedly, both Allison and Chris are flexible and know how to adjust to the flow of changes that do come up among the docents and tours. Thus, they sometimes feel like "cowgirl wranglers" in controlling the herd!!

Interestingly, their backgrounds and previous experience differ from what you might expect. Prior to coming to The Mint Museum, Allison spent 16 years with *Piedmont Airlines*, subsequently *US Airways*, in customer service assignments. That is also where she met her husband, Greg. For 30 years, before financial "credit-default swaps" mucked up the economy, Chris held a number of human resource management positions with *First Citizens Bank*, both in Raleigh and Charlotte. Allison, who grew up in Rock Hill, has her B.A. degree in Art History from Winthrop University and plans on obtaining a Masters Degree in Liberal Studies (Humanities) come May 2009. Chris, who was born in Rhode Island, graduated from Russell Sage College in Troy, New York, with a B.A. degree in Economics.

Chris informed me she has three "girls" – Rosie Dundee, Sterling and Skye, the Meow-Girls. Chris has learned to weave baskets since coming to the Mint where she started out as a volunteer in the gift shop. One of Chris' favorite works of art is "Soft Stones" by Sheila Hicks, the colorful balls of yarn currently displayed in the Harris Gallery. Allison has been consumed with working on her Masters Degree at UNCC, and between work and studies has had little time left except for sleep and a good movie. She professes that her preference in art leans more to the contemporary.

I also found it interesting that both Allison and Chris have spent a year or more of their lives in Europe. From ages 4 to 11 Chris lived in Dumfries, Scotland, while her father managed the *North British Rubber* plant there. Before returning to her studies at Winthrop, Allison took off with her "backpack" and toured various European countries for a year. You could almost say our leaders over "Docentville" have a world of experience!

~John Mussman

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STUDENT ARTIST GALLERY

Discover the Student Artist Gallery

Or “I Feel Like A Real Artist Now”

One of my favorite places to start or end a student tour is the Student Artist Gallery. Wrapping around the Van Avery Auditorium, this very special gallery always proves to be a hit with young people touring the Mint Museum of Art. There is also a small CitySTAR space off the mezzanine at the Mint Museum of Craft + Design. Recently I spoke with Joel Smeltzer, School Programs Coordinator, who shared his enthusiasm and thoughts on this very unique gallery.

As I shared my enjoyment of the STAR (*ST*udent *AR*tist) work, Joel and I talked about how the partnership between local schools and the Mint started. Per Joel, during expansion in the 1980s Education Director Cheryl Palmer and a previous staff member advocated for a place to showcase local young artists’ work. By providing a dedicated gallery for student work, this clearly showed the value the Mint and staff have for the up-and-coming artist. Selection for school display is highly competitive and the body of work displayed is truly a “big deal” for the local students, art teachers, and (I hope) the docents who have the pleasure of touring groups through the STAR Gallery.

Currently there are wonderful Warhol-inspired works on display. I love to listen to the students who immediately recognize the theme—and the very special youngster who recognizes Ozzy Osbourne, of course! It’s a gallery that showcases art teachers’ skills, and it’s a place where the students get to experience an “haute art” venue.

Docents have the unique opportunity to share the STAR Gallery as we tour groups throughout the wonderful Mint. Please take this opportunity to showcase our youth artists and provoke discussion as to the value of retaining the arts in schools. The value which we place on the youthful artists truly reflects our respect and expectations for the future of Carolina Art!

~Alex Ketchpaw



TOUR TIPS

Types of Questions

Questions can be generally classified as:

1. **Memory** – these relate directly to what is seen – facts, names of things, precise recall, exact definitions of objects or events. Memory questions are concrete and the easiest to formulate. There is usually only one right answer. Such questions may be prefaced by the words “how many...,” “what is the...,” “name the...,” “which one...”
2. **Convergent** – these seek the most appropriate answer or best answer. They focus on specifics. Convergent questions and answers zero in on what visitors already know or perceive. Although people may suggest different answers to questions, each question has one best answer.
3. **Divergent** – these encourage multiple answers. They are sometimes called “open-ended” questions because visitors are encouraged to think of many possibilities. The questions may be prefaced by “what if...,” “how many ways...,” “imagine that...” These questions demand imaginative thinking and exploration of all facets of an issue. They do not encourage the one “right” or most appropriate answer.
4. **Judgmental** – these stimulate each visitor to evaluate and to choose, that is, to formulate an opinion, value or belief that is personal, and perhaps, unique.

In each of these categories, questions can be concrete or abstract. Concrete questions are about facts and concepts that can be defined, identified or seen. Abstract questions and answers relate to ideas, values, expressions of feeling, interpretation of events, and so forth. The different types of questions can be used during tours to encourage observation, knowledge recall, and foster imaginative ways of thinking about objects and relating ideas to them.

Source: *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents and Tour Guides* by Alison L. Grinder and E. Sue McCoy

FROM THE PRESIDENT

As you may already know, the docents have been accumulating surplus funds over the past several years. These dollars have come primarily from money not fully spent for budgeted expenses over time. At the September docent board meeting, the board voted to distribute these funds to the education department for the following purposes: \$300 to purchase a digital camera for the education department; \$500 for support of family days; \$1000 to bring John Bullard from the New Orleans Museum of Art to the Mint to speak to the public and for docent training in March about the touring exhibition; and \$1200 to pay for the docent staff liaison to attend the National Docent Symposium to be held in Toronto in October 2009. After dispersing these funds, the docent treasury continues to hold a few thousand dollars as a cushion for emergencies and unbudgeted expenses.

There have been a few changes to the docent board this fall. Marilyn Dix, Recording Secretary, has moved to Seattle to be closer to family. Jackie Stevenson has volunteered to add these duties to her responsibilities as Vice President through this spring. Martha Woods has graciously agreed to serve as a hospitality chair for the remainder of the docent year after Libby Schroeder's death.

At present there is no language that addresses making changes to the docent board after spring elections. In September, when changes were necessary, I, as president, nominated individuals for the open positions and the board approved these substitutions. It is recommended that this procedure become part of the docent By-Laws in the future. Here is language proposed for the Docent By-Laws to be on the spring ballot.

“When vacancies become available on the docent board, after elections have been completed by the membership, the President will nominate a candidate to complete the term of the open position and the Docent Board will vote to confirm the appointment for the remainder of the current term.”

~Judith Toman

TRAINING SCHEDULE

Veteran Docents of The Mint Museum

Monday, December 15 – MMA

10:00 AM Training – Holiday Luncheon to Follow *Cowboys and Indians* with Carla Hanzal, Curator of Contemporary Art
Spanish Colonial Art with Dr. Bonnie Noble, UNCC Art History Professor

Sunday, February 15 – MMCD

3:00 PM

From the Melting Pot into the Fire: Contemporary Ceramics in Israel with artist Yael Novak

Monday, February 16 – MMCD

9:30 AM Coffee; 10:00 AM Training

From the Melting Pot into the Fire: Contemporary Ceramics in Israel with artist Yael Novak

Sunday, February 22 – MMCD

3:00 PM

The Miniature Worlds of Bruce Metcalf with Bruce Metcalf

Monday, February 23 – MMCD

9:30 AM Coffee; 10:00 AM Training

The Miniature Worlds of Bruce Metcalf with Bruce Metcalf



FAN MAIL

“My thanks to you for providing exceptionally knowledgeable docents for our visit to the Mint yesterday. The students learned so much about Warhol and your collection. We had 12 parents with us and they too were amazed by the quality of the docent tours, the facility, the permanent collection, and the traveling Warhol Exhibition. Your docents provided rich information and such positive experiences that I heard students and parents planning return excursions.

In our classroom recap today the students also demonstrated that they studied composition, color, and techniques which I am convinced will surface in their personal art making and AP Studio Portfolios. Hats off to you and to your dedicated docents. We appreciate you and look forward to our future fieldtrips and collaborations with the Mint.”

~*Brenda Beard-Bostian and Elaine Patterson*
(*Forestview High School*)

ART QUOTE

“There are moments in our lives, there are moments in a day, when we seem to see beyond the usual. Such are the moments of our greatest happiness. Such are the moments of our greatest wisdom. If one could but recall his vision by some sort of sign. It was in this hope that the arts were invented. Sign-posts on the way to what may be. Sign-posts toward greater knowledge.”

~*Robert Henri*

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