

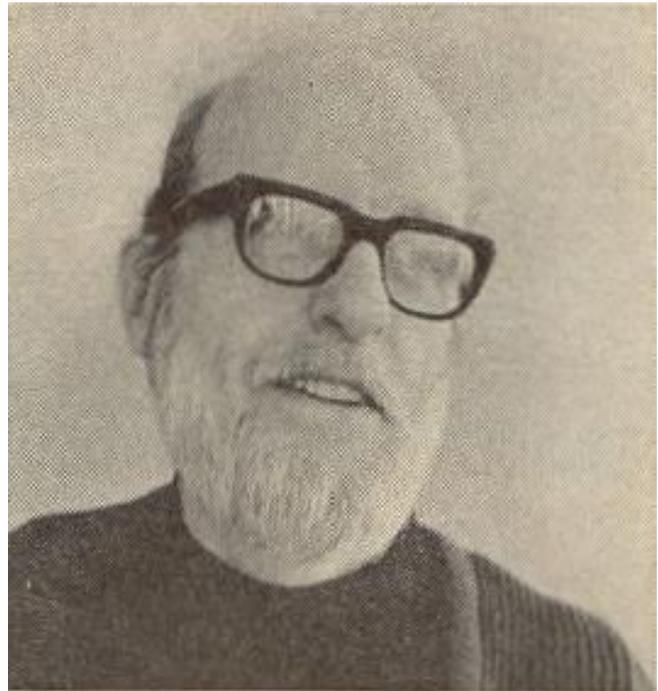
# *The Fabulous Llhuroscians*

Newsweek, February 28, 1972

To visit "The Civilization of Llhuros" at Cornell's Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art in Ithaca, N.Y., is to embark upon an archaeological magical mystery tour the like of which has never been offered before. Far-off sounds of primitive drumbeats accompany your entrance into the exhibition, where crude-looking ceramic, metal and wood objects—urns, votives, icons, various weapons—are mounted on walls or elegantly illuminated behind glass—all of them apparently corroded with great age. A remarkable collection of ancient esoterica, you think. But wait a minute. You surreptitiously run your finger across a "mural fragment" ("found at Houndee," it is labeled) and discover that you are touching not stone but Styrofoam. You stop before a "trallib" ("oil container found in the excavations at Vanibo"), and somehow its voluptuous shape reminds you of a bottle of liquid detergent.

Which is, in fact, what the trallib originally was—that is, until the detergent bottle came into the hands of artist Norman Daly who has spent the past five years fabricating the "remains" of an imaginary, undated, "lost" civilization, almost entirely out of industrialized debris of the twentieth century. The result is an outrageous spoof of archeological exhibits, a tour de force of craftsmanship and a provocative esthetic experience.

Encompassing everything from a site plan, to a primitive "computing machine," to a menstrual chart, the 130-odd artifacts of Llhuros—many of them highly sexual in connotation—are dazzling, witty and disturbing. Daly's ingenuity and his skill at "corroding" surfaces by the application of acrylic paints turns stove-lid holder from an old gas range into an "Early Archaic" sculpture of a "pair of



Daly: Piquing viewers

fornicating gods." Close inspection of a "photograph of a Pruii Bird"("similar to the sooty-footed humming-birds of Llhueros") reveals the inverted faces of two astronauts in a space capsule. A "Portrait of a Man," from the "Decline Period," is actually a "bronzed" plastic figurine of baseball great Honus Wagner. A set of "bronze' doors with bas-relief was contrived from packing boxes for a Honda motorcycle.

**Eerie:** Piped-in, evocative music (composed by Daly and electronically produced on a Moog synthesizer) sets an appropriately eerie mood. But more integral to Daly's scheme is his handsome, immensely "learned" catalogue, which amplifies the impression left by the exhibit that the Llhueroscians were a sex-obsessed, ultimately self-destructive people, and offers a devastating parody of pedantic scholarship, studded with examples of Llhueroscian erotic poetry. One "Pilkug love song" goes:

*If you want me  
As I want you,  
You would let me die  
Under a petal of your rose  
And you would bury me  
In the lobe of your ear.*

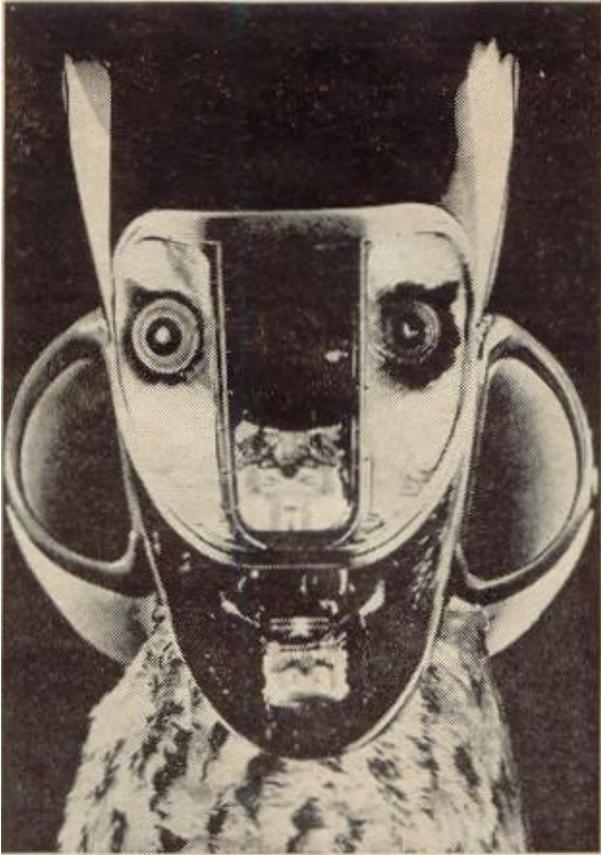
An impish, wiry man of 60 who has taught art at Cornell since 1942, Daly conceived his idea for the exhibit six years ago while attending a concert of avant-garde music. "I was struck by how hard the audience was working to understand the music," he says, "and I thought if only I could achieve the same involvement with my work. One idea was to setup a series of planned interferences that would pique the viewer—the name 'Honda,' for example, is clearly visible on the bas-relief. My other idea was to induce the viewer into a mental reconstruction of what he was seeing. I'd been doing found-object art out of junk, so the anthropological guise seemed perfect."

**Serious:** "It's such a burlesque!" says Daly, who is delighted with the outrage expressed by some fellow academicians. "Why, after the opening," he reports gleefully, "one English professor stormed into the office of Tom Leavitt [the museum's director] and accused me of perpetrating a monstrous fraud!" But Daly is deeply serious about his work as well. "On one level," he says, "the show is meant to appeal to people's need to suspend reality, to their nostalgia for things they've never experienced. And by using objects of modern civilization, I've tried to get people to rediscover the beauty of our own industrial designs.

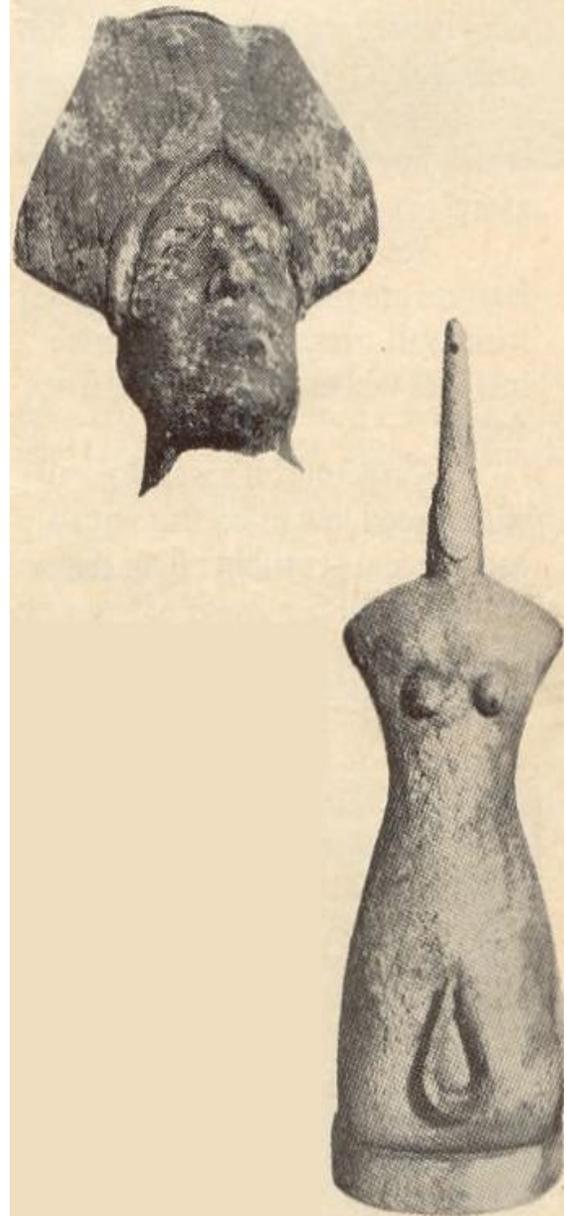
"I really don't think Llhueros is fictitious at all," says Daly, who plans to add more "remains" to his civilization before the show moves on to other Eastern museums. "I

consciously avoided reading books about imaginary civilizations or primitive cultures. Llhuros is here and now—a recasting of my 60 years of experience. You know, people won't listen if you talk to them seriously. My show is like that Pennsylvania Dutch expression 'half in jest and all in earnest'."

—CHARLES MICHENER



Pruu bird: Revealing two astronauts' faces



'Portrait of a Man' and an oil-container  
'trallib' (right) : A tour de force of craft



Llhuroscian monument: A witty parody of archeology