

Artificial 'World' A Mirror Of Reality

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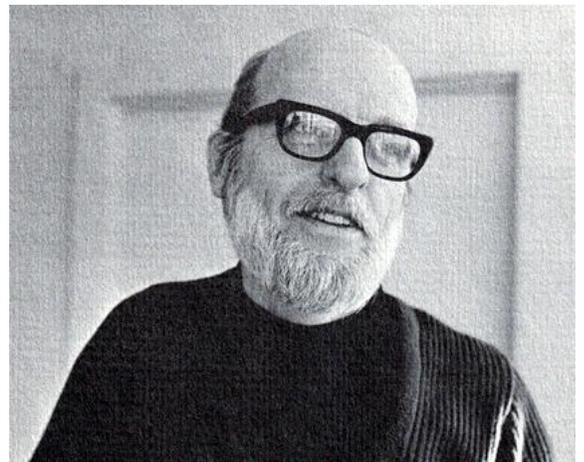
Indianapolis Museum of Art | November 7 – December 16, 1973

ITHACA, N.Y.—“some people call me a dirty old man,” Norman Daly was saying. He certainly didn’t seem to mind. His most recent work has been called a fraud and he has been called an over eager ego tripper.

He was lounging serenely in the Rathskeller of the Statler Inn on the Cornell campus where he has been on the art faculty for 32 years.

Daly resembles a skinny, mannerly Old Testament type and when he talks his rich white bird waves vagrantly like the trailing end of Spanish moss teased by the wind.

Glints of amusement, even mischief, stipple eyes behind the lenses of prominent black-rimmed glasses as he recalls what people say about his latest work, “The Civilization of Llhuros,” a warehouse of synthesized artifacts that, at least to Daly, make up a parable that finds 20th Century civilization with an immeasurable deficit of morals and integrity, discovering it to be hypocritical, double-crossing, oppressive and cruel.



PROFESSOR NORMAN DALY
...a 'dirty old man?'

And there’s sex.

“Some say it is unnecessarily sexual,” Daly said. “There is a lot of phallic imagery, but what do you see when you go to a Fellini movie? How are

you going to mirror today without sexuality? It would be hard to over-stress the sexual aspect.”

In Daly’s imagined primitive kingdom of Llhuros, over whose archaeology and anthropology he labored for five years, in his studio and in an abandoned Quonset hut at the old Ithaca Airport, life was a little different than it is in the world today.

It was just as disheartening as the world Daly observes these days from his studio windows.

Allegory is a stuffy word. Parable probably is too pat. What Daly has done is to have dreamed up a world, a culture that never was, that reminds him of contemporary life.

He fantasized it from its archaic stages to its middle period to its decline and disappearance.

He reconstructed its archaeology, as though those pieces had been dug up and interpreted to paint a picture of a whole people.

The pieces look like the real McCoy. You might think you’re looking at the authentic crop of a dig, but what you’re apt to be seeing is an old fashioned stove lid lifter, or a 19th Century flatiron holder. Daly is in love with “found objects,” and fuses them into a whole and makes unknown worlds with them. They look real. People believe them. That kills Daly.

Even though everything is found, or manufactured by him, he has found visitors to his exhibit taking it literally. “People are so gullible,” he said. “It’s incredible.”

Is Daly spoofing? A put-on?

“Absolutely not,” he said.

He wants people to look at his synthetic world and say, as a man in Akron, Ohio said, “Why, that is me!”

“He recognized.” Daly said with satisfaction. “What this does is draw parallels with our own condition. It is an archeological charade and from what we see and what we deduce from what we see tells us a great deal about ourselves.”

There’s something for everybody—women’s libbers, people who don’t like the ethics of some doctors or lawyers, people who feel smothered by religious strictures, people appalled by the maltreatment of the young, and of course, people bemused by sex.

Daly even has swung a roundhouse right in his massive exhibit at which he considers one of today’s major malaises—the inability of anyone to be shocked at anything from velvet-lined corruption to genocide. One of the archaeological finds, for instance, is direct evidence that the Llhuroscians practiced a ritual that involved the forced death by starvation of children followed by mass sodomy.

Gratuitous? Not at all, says this whip-like little philosopher with concepts that lash him as a modern artist.

Murder plus necrophilia would seem to be a shock commodity, but Daly says, discouraged, no. The gallery gazers who are hit with the point don’t, he said, seem shocked at all. This he puts down to the shock-proof encrustation built around us by the death and corruption of modern life.

Even though Daly has told a horror story of a dead civilization, it is hard for him to abandon a puckish role. He even identifies himself in the exhibit catalog as “Director of Llhuroscian Studies, Cornell University.”

Because he loves the intrinsic beauty of such devices as can openers—and he uses these and other found-objects by the bale—his synthesized artifacts have an almost comic identity once it is known.

There is a “trallib” on display, for instance, an example of the kind of vessel the Llhuroscians used to hold oil.

If you look closely, it will appear also to be a detergent bottle similar to the ones on your kitchen shelf. It is.

A portrait of a man found the mythological ruins is actually a small plastic figure of Honus Wagner, the old-time baseball player, but Daly says, it fits.

He manages to upset some gallery walkers with such figures as fornicating gods. One professor pronounced, “It is a fraud!”

Another, Daly, said, grinning, had received a lot of publicity for research he had been doing and when Daly’s accomplishment started cropping up in the likes of Newsweek, the professor barked at him, “Daly, you’re on nothing but an ego trip!” This pleased him greatly.

And is anyone as sensitive as a jock? In portraying the athletics of the Llhuroscians, he established they lobotomized athletes who then were controlled as human robots by intellectuals running the competitions.

“The Llhuroscians liked athletics and these athletes with the lobotomy surgery,” Daly said deadpan, “and one of the warnings issued to protect athletes was, “Don’t kill an athlete. He is brainless.”

By this time Daly had walked out of the Statler Inn to a parking lot in the shadow of Schoellkoff Stadium where the mighty Big Red football players strive.

Daly had a sly smile. "I got some feedback from the Athletic Department on that, too."

As long as Daly was in up to his neck depicting a culture that never was, he decided to go all the way and composed his own music, had it filtered through Robery Moog's electronic synthesizer—backwards. An awed, or unawed, or simply befuddled guest at the exhibit next week will be accompanied by eerie strains.

"You're a composer, too?"

"I was armed," Daly said with simple magnificence, "with musical ignorance. Therefore I composed."

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By TOM CRAWLEY
Gannett News Service

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