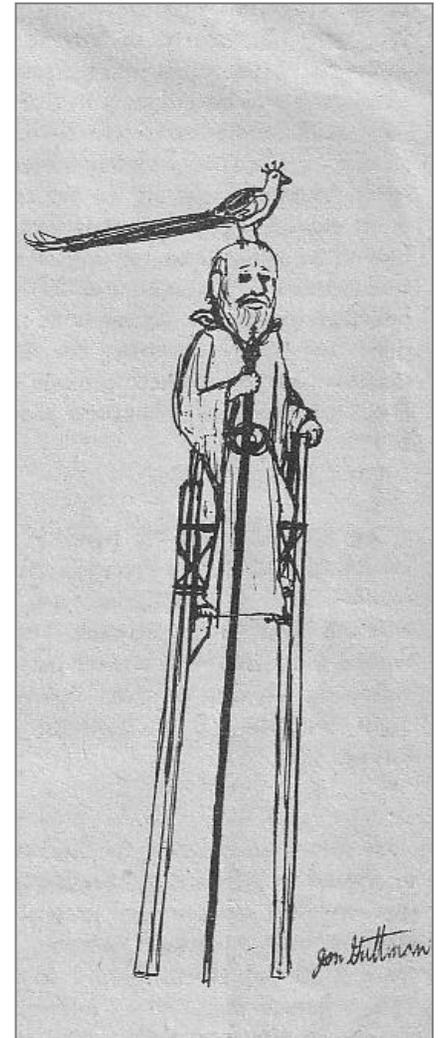


The Elaborate Joke

Gallery at New York State University at Albany | January 15-March 11, 1973
Albany Student Press | Bill Brina | February 6, 1973

The "discoverer" of Llhuroscian civilization, Norman Daly of Cornell, is a pleasant bearded artist who recently made the astounding discovery that he walks around on a pair of wobbly, uneven stilts with a large bird perched atop his head, or so he informed an attentive, capacity audience in the Art Gallery last Thursday evening. His remarkable display, a parody of a museum exhibit of ancient civilization, has drawn the most intense response that the gallery has seen in some time, so perhaps it was only natural that a personal appearance by the artist himself brought forth such disparate types as the two highest administrative officers of the university and the two largest cocaine merchants in the Capital District (presumably the former were not aware of the latter).

Mr. Daly spoke for some time, explaining his fascination with the effects of set and setting on the way man views art, and on his own reflections on the remarkably consistent ways in which man's culture inflicts injury on man's psyche. Llhuroscian civilization as a medium is a product of Norman's interest in alternative settings for art; the exhibit as a message is the product of his concern with the way man mangles himself. We all walk around with the uneven stilts and perched bird of the Llhuroscian priest, and the artist himself has a particularly nasty fowl to contend with.



None of this is exactly new ground. The way Mr. Daly has assembled this, however, and the deftness with which he flays assorted sundry academic hides make this exhibit a delight to romp through. But is it really art?

One viewer was heard to remark. "This is all one elaborate joke. It's amusing at first but it wears thin quickly." Is this exhibit the world's largest one-liner? I don't think so. The crucial distinction between art and discourse lies in the deliberate, ultimately indecipherable ambiguity of the former. Critics can ponder, analyze, and dissect, but

what ultimately makes art is its ability to emerge from the analytical with its mystery intact. Why is the Mona Lisa smiling? What makes *Bitches Brew* more than a collection of tones with specified pitches, volumes, durations, and so forth?

Where can this ambiguity be found in the Llhuroscian exhibit? The key to that question can be found in the plaque on which the rationale for the collapse of Llhuroscian civilization is stated: Perfect birth control and stupefying apathy! When the first cracks in the Belief in Reason that categorized the period of the Enlightenment and of the nineteenth-century edifice of science appeared in the late 1800s, there also appeared the fore-runners of those schools of belief that suspect that our Western Civilization is dead or at least dying. And certainly the twentieth century has provided ample ammunition for such arguments. Are we the Llhuroscians?

And if so, why? Here the prophets of doom are hopelessly divided. One school basically maintains that our physical abundance has led us to lose touch with the old verities, the old morality (generally anti-sexual), truth and righteousness. This is the classical "explanation" of the decline and fall of Rome, and it is an explanation that on first glance, the obituary of Llhuros lends credence to. Yet another school basically maintains that the fall of a civilization is generally due to the persistence of obsolete customs, values, and modes of action in a life in which the objective circumstances of a culture have been transformed. A careful examination of the remainder of the exhibit would seek to lend credence to this theory.

And so the ambiguity. Why did the Llhuroscians collapse? Norman Daly doesn't tell us; he throws back mirrored images of our culture's contradictory beliefs, and he sets those images up in an unending oscillation. You can take it as you will, but no matter how you take it, there'll be a large *slyly poking about in the ruins of any logical, orderly* approach to the problem. That is but one of the complications of dealing with a world in which we all walk around with wobbly, uneven stilts ... and large birds perched atop our heads.

Illustration by Jon Guttman

Norman Daley:

The Elaborate Joke

By Bill Brina

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Mr. Daley spoke for some time, explaining his fascination with the effects of set and setting on the way man views art, and on his own reflections on the remarkably consistent ways in which man's culture inflicts injury on man's psyche. Lihuroscian civilization as a medium is a product of Norman's interest in alternative settings for art; the exhibit as a message is the product of his concern with the way man mangles himself. We all walk around with the uneven stilts and perched bird of the Lihuroscian priest, and the artist himself has a particularly nasty fowl to contend with.

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