

We Are All Stilt Walkers

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Binghamton News | David Bernstein - 'Plain Talk' Column

"In the rite of stilt-walking, the pilgrim moved toward a shine on uneven stilts and carried a bird on his head as an expression of contrition. The degrees of intensity, of self-denial and masochism that determined the quality of contrition were gauged by the instability and height of the stilts and the size and waywardness of the bird. The supplicant's vacillant tone of self-mockery "We are all stilt walkers," said Norman Daly, with a curious expression on his face that made you wonder whether he was a very wise man or a pixie, or a little of both.

He is the Cornell art professor who has created the charming, bewildering, stimulating, annoying, fascinating, beautiful, ironic exhibit at Roberson called "The Civilization of Llhuros."

He not only created the exhibit, he created Llhuros itself, an imaginary civilization of the distant past, all of whose art relics were fabricated by him out of anything from styrofoam - to orange juice squeezers.

Mr. Daly will lecture at Roberson Monday evening, and having heard him expound on the meaning of Llhuros I can advise anyone with an inquiring mind that Roberson at 8 o'clock is the place to be on Feb 4.

The exhibit itself reveals the incredible flight of creative fancy in this man's mind.

He has made "found objects" into works of art.

He has also created his ancient civilization with a disarming precision, and in doing so he has incidentally, put down, the archaeologists and scholars who reduce the human life of the past into an arcane, moribund language of their own.

You can look at the exhibition on many levels. You can imagine that there was once a real Llhuros, and you will thereby have an educational experience. You can marvel at the beauty in the art of that ancient culture, even when it seems to resemble an aerosol container, or an electric iron. You can find your kicks in the intellectual preoccupation with sexual imagery that Mr. Daly relishes.

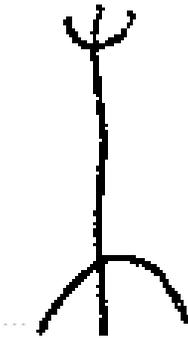
Or you can go along with his serious mood and see in Llhuros the other side of our own culture, our own time, our own hang-ups.

We are all stilt walkers, he says. And he writes in his catalogue:

and-petty defensiveness and his heretical dubiety have an oddly familiar reverberation or contemporary re-echo in (a poem) found at the Temple of Uoyab. They may bring to our mind the behavior of certain close relatives and friends whose self-imposed martyrdoms conceal destructive role-playing family and social life today;”

Translated into English from Mr. Daly's delightful pedantry, he is saying that a stilt-walker might be, for example, his own mother.

I have made a rubbing of one of his artifacts, the earliest extant image of a Llhuosian stilt-walker, which was clearly incised in the left section of an Early Archaic Petroglyph. It looks like this:



Mr. Daly's mother, he says, must have been a modern stilt-walker herself. She was constantly swarming over her children, telling them what clothes to wear, what they should eat, when they should do their homework, what time they should be in bed, a martyr to her family, parading her martyrdom as she overwhelmed her children.

To find the stilt-walkers within ourselves, we must go back to Llhuos with Norman Daly, and if you are in the right receptive mood you will never be the same when you return.