

ANDREW DICKSON WHITE MUSEUM OF ART

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Norman Daly - The Civilization of Llhuria

The Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art at Cornell University announces a remarkable exhibition experience, the "discovery" of a previously unknown civilization, "Llhuria." Amazingly, all of the fragmentary remnants of the Llhurian culture -- its utilitarian and ritual objects, its scientific instruments, its architectural ruins, -- are in fact the product of the unique conception of a single contemporary artist, Norman Daly. Daly, who has been a Professor of Painting and Sculpture at Cornell since 1942, has worked within this pseudo-anthropological framework for the last several years. Besides creating "artifacts," he has written Llhurian poetry and music and has established a considerable body of Llhurian scholarship. It is critical to note that the exhibition will present Llhuria as a "real" ancient civilization for archaeological, anthropological and aesthetic study and will not expose the work as that of an individual artist.

The exhibition, on view at Cornell from January 25 to March 5, 1972, will consist of over one hundred objects, including sculpture, paintings and facsimiles from temples, photomontages, etc. Larger pieces include temple doors, huge fragments of frescoes, and two full-scale, spectacular works: a thirty-six foot wall, nine feet tall -- a full temple wall, decorated in bas-relief; and the reconstruction of the priests' circle of effigy chairs within the Temple of Holmeek. These dramatic works will be reached after the viewer has travelled through a maze-like passage in which the smaller works are displayed. At various points on the way, taped sound will provide introductory information, music, and translations of ritual chants.

The implications of the exhibition and Daly's concept go well beyond imitation and parody. The "artifacts" are, most importantly, quite beautiful; their qualities endure independent of the Llhurian context. Many are ingeniously constructed out of found objects, carefully patinated to suggest an ancient origin. The degree of disguise varies, offering constant challenge to the visitor's innocent assumptions of the reality of the ancient culture and of the reliability of his own senses. This ambiguity is heightened through the use of real stone and marble pieces appearing among those of heavily encrusted styrofoam, plastic, etc. Similarly, the chants of human voices are interspersed with electronically-generated sounds. Thus, the unsuspecting visitor first

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Norman Daly - The Civilization of Llhuria -- 2

enters to receive straightforward information, to see works of logically varied scale and purpose, to sense a consistency of style and ancient surfaces -- all factors which permit him to make an initial leap of faith, to willingly suspend disbelief and accept the civilization as authentic. Presented also with innumerable contradictory clues, fragmentary evidence, and planned interferences, he is provoked into actively participating in rediscovering and synthesizing the idea of the culture for himself.

"The simulated anthropological milieu," writes Daly, "provide an appropriate ambience for the gallery-goer to involve himself in mentally reconstructing the disassembled sculpture and shards by responding to the visual clues provided in the frescoes and paintings." The complex environment of music, painting, sculpture, crafts, sounds, costumes and writing are meant "to engage the gallery-goer on visual, auditory, and tactile levels -- all vital supplementary aids for fuller audience involvement. But the artist's full objective will not be achieved unless the foibles, follies, superstitions, cruelties, fears and anxieties of this mythical culture are recognized as having disquieting resemblance to our own civilization." His parodies of the analytical methods of anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and art-historians are hilariously funny, once the total scheme is understood. Using these disciplines to inform and deceive us, Daly widens his tragi-comic social criticism.

Interpretations of Daly's work will necessarily have to deal with issues on several levels: his ingenious formal and satirical use of the found object; his vast conceptual scheme paradoxically realized in meticulously-wrought art objects; his position as an environmental artist intent on deception so as to urge the viewer into perceiving intensely and thinking associatively (i. e. , creatively). He shows us, through our senses, how history and art can teach us. If this is a large metaphysical project, it is nevertheless uniquely expressed in vivid material forms.

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