A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

& nature
THE FOCUS OF THIS EXHIBITION IS ON HOW ART AND THE NATURAL WORLD HAVE INTERSECTED IN DIFFERENT CULTURES. THE MAJORITY OF WORKS ON DISPLAY WERE CREATED IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. SOME OF THE CONCERNS EXPRESSED IN THESE ART WORKS INCLUDE IMAGES THAT REFLECT A SPECIFIC ATTITUDE OR PERCEPTION ABOUT NATURE; NATURE AS SITE OR SETTING; NATURE AS SYMBOL OR METAPHOR; NATURE REFASHIONED; AND NATURE PORTRAYED. HOW THESE IDEAS ARE EXPRESSED CAN BE SEEN IN EXAMPLES FROM AFRICA, ASIA, THE SOUTH PACIFIC AS WELL AS THE EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN TRADITIONS. BOTH CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE VISION OF THE ARTIST PLAY A ROLE IN DETERMINING HOW NATURE IS ACTUALLY DEPICTED. YET, THE WORLD VIEW AND BELIEFS OF EVERY CULTURE STRONGLY DETERMINE THE WAY IN WHICH NATURE IS VISUALIZED AND PORTRAYED.

THE EXHIBITION ITSELF IS ORGANIZED AROUND FOUR MAJOR THEMES: NATURE AS A REFLECTION OF BEAUTY AND MAJESTY; NATURE AS SPIRITUAL OR ECONOMIC PROVIDER; NATURE AS A SOURCE OF POWER - EITHER POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE; AND NATURE NEEDING TO BE CONQUERED OR REFASHIONED. EACH THEME CLEARLY REFLECTS A DIFFERENT ATTITUDE ABOUT THE ROLE NATURE PLAYS IN HUMAN AFFAIRS. WITHIN OUR OWN WESTERN TRADITION, MANY ARTISTS HAVE CONSIDERED NATURE TO BE A CAPTIVATING SUBJECT FOR ART. FOR MOST TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES, NATURE IS REGARDED AS A POWERFUL AND SOMETIMES MYSTERIOUS FORCE THAT MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED AND RESPECTED. THERE IS USUALLY A BELIEF THAT NATURE AND SOCIETY ARE SEPARATE SPHERES OF EXISTENCE. IN ADDITION, A DEFINITE TENSION BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND NATURAL WORLDS IS RECOGNIZED. IT IS ONLY IN MORE RECENT WESTERN CULTURE THAT NATURE IS SEEN AS A FORCE TO BE CHALLENGED AND EVEN CONQUERED. THE WEST OFTEN VIEWS NATURE AS HAVING PROCEEDED CULTURE.
However, there is a long history of European and American landscape artists presenting Nature with fascination and respect, reflecting its peaceful or majestic qualities. Still, it has only been since the seventeenth century in Western art that landscape was viewed as an independent art form and not just a backdrop or setting for a central or more significant image. In Asia, especially in China and Japan, landscape art has long been considered to be an autonomous form of artistic expression. Many Japanese print makers, for example, depicted impressions of Nature with rich colors - full of life, emotion, and poetic beauty. Many European artists of the late nineteenth century were fascinated by the beauty and directness of the Japanese print.

In the past two hundred years, European and American landscape artists have also focused on either the transitory character or basic structure of Nature. There have been artists who wanted to express not just the physical aspects of Nature but its emotional impact as well. This attitude was found with artists in a variety of media. Some photographers, such as Timothy O'Sullivan and Ansel Adams, used filters, angles, dramatic compositions, or lightening conditions to create an emotional impact. Others like Edward Weston were strongly concerned with expressing the spiritual quality of Nature in their work.

Throughout Africa and the South Pacific, Nature was viewed as a source of great power that directly impacted on the well being of a society. There are many examples of African and Oceanic art that allure to the opposed realms of the wilderness and the human community. And unlike Western art, it is not the appearance of Nature that is duplicated, but the spirit world. The visual images are frequently geometric and stylized. Different types of Nature spirits exist, including those associated with cultivated plants, the bush, and the underwater realm. In the Maprik area of New Guinea, wicker masks are worn by tubular yams during a harvest festival. In this case, the mask-wearing Yam, which symbolizes the virility of the man who grew it, is seen as both a food crop and a spirit.

In various parts of Africa - such as Mali, Burkina Faso and northern Ghana, masks represent Nature spirits associated with hunting and farming. Probably the best known art form of the Bamana of Mali is the Chi Wara headdress that depicts either a male or female antelope. The Bamana concept of Chi Wara is connected with the notion of a good farmer and these headdresses appear right before the fields are cleared for planting. In Burkina Faso, the Ewa and related groups use wooden masks, representing Nature spirits, for funerals, initiations and agricultural festivals. The Nature spirits are participants at these events and provide spiritual support to the community. According to Martha Anderson and Chris Kreamer:

Nature spirits act as intermediaries through which people can negotiate with the wilderness and tap its powers. Art objects and rituals associated with nature spirits may appear to be aimed at placating or even controlling nature, or at least at maintaining the delicate balance of power between nature and culture (Wild Spirits, Strong Medicine, 1989). For a number of ethnic groups in southern Sierra Leone and western Liberia, bush spirits are affiliated with Poro, a powerful male association, and water spirits with Sande, a female masking and initiation society. Sande masks are characterized by a shiny black surface which alludes to the watery realm where the spirits are believed to reside and the river banks where the most important Sande ritual is carried out.

The potentially dangerous aspect of Nature spirits in Africa is also recognized in African societies. For example, material elements from the world of the bush spirits can be added to Dan-We masks of Liberia and Ivory Coast to greatly enhance their power so that they may be more effective in carrying out their social control responsibilities. In Nigeria, Shango, the Yoruba deity of thunder and lightening, is seen as being both generous and dangerous. Devotees of Shango dance with small wooden staffs that symbolize the deity's positive nature as well as his aggressive and volatile side. The following praise song emphasizes Shango's destructive abilities:

Shango kills without warning.

After eating with the elder of the compound, Shango kills his child at the gate. Shango is a troubled god, like a cloud full of rain.

Nature is a source of power for those individuals and communities courageous enough to confront the potential dangers. Nature is not to be conquered but respected and worked with for the betterment of humanity.

Fred T. Smith, Director
School of Art Galleries
and Professor of Art History.

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Thomas Bajackas, Stow OH
Chuck Basham, Medina OH
Ben Bassham, Kent OH
Rand Cheadle, Washington DC
Allen Davis, Mount Vernon VA
Roy Sieber, Bloomington IN
Fred T. Smith, Kent OH

Galleries:
Kent State University School of Art Gallery, Kent OH
AFRICA, Washington DC
beauty
majesty

UNKNOWN
UNTITLED JAPANESE PRINT
COLLECTION OF KSU SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY

EDWARD WESTON
UNTITLED PHOTOGRAPH
COLLECTION OF KSU SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY

ANGEL ADAMS
MOON AND CLOUDS
1970
COLLECTION OF KSU SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY

CHARLES BASHAM
BETWEEN SHADOW AND LIGHT
COLLECTION OF CHARLES BASHAM
conquered

ROBERT GLENN KETCHUM
I LIKE THE LOOK OF A CLEARCUT...
COLLECTION OF KSU SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY

ELMER NOVOTNY
CHEYENNE
COLLECTION OF KSU SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY
power

LAMIDE FAKYE
SHANDO FIGURE
YORUBA
COLLECTION OF KSU SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY

SHANGO SHRINE
COLLECTION OF FRED T. SMITH

AFRICA
DAN WE MASK
COLLECTION OF RAND CHEADLE
GENERAL LIST OF WORKS IN THE EXHIBIT

PAINTINGS BY:
CHUCK BASHAM
BEN BASSHAM
HAROLD KITNER
ELMER NOVOTNY
WILLIAM QUINN

PRINTS BY:
HIROSHIGE, NINETEEN CENTURY JAPAN
HOKUSAI, NINETEEN CENTURY JAPAN
UNKNOWN ARTISTS, NINETEEN CENTURY JAPAN
BEN SHAHN
JOSEPH PENNEL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY:
ANSEL ADAMS
WALTER CHAPPELL
ROBERT GLENN KETCHUM
TIMOTHY O’SULLIVAN
EDWARD WESTON
MINOR WHITE
IRVING OLSON

GLASS BY:
THOMAS BAGIACKAS

SCULPTURE FROM/BY:
ABELAM (MAPRIK AREA), PAPUA NEW GUINEA
BAMANA, MALI
BAMUM, CAMEROON
BASSA, LIBERIA
BWA, BURKINA FASO
FRAFRA, GHANA
FON, THE REPUBLIC OF BENIN
DAN WE, LIBERIA AND IVORY COAST
TEKE, CONGO
KUBA, CONGO
MENDE, SIERRA LEONE
MOSSI, BURKINA FASO
SEPIK RIVER, PAPUA NEW GUINEA
YAKA, CONGO
YORUBA, NIGERIA
YORUBA (DIASPORA), CUBA
LAMIDI FAKEYE, CONTEMPORARY YORUBA ARTIST
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE HAS BEEN A CREATIVE ENDEAVOR INVOLVING MANY PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS. THE IDEA TO EXPLORE CROSS CULTURALLY THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND NATURE IS A BY-PRODUCT OF MY TRAINING IN ANTHROPOLOGY; BUT IT ALSO RELATES TO A TEXT BOOK (VISUAL CULTURE: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE) THAT I AM CURRENTLY WRITING WITH JUDITH PERANI AND PEG DELAMATER. HOWEVER, I MUST ASSUME FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SELECTION OF ART AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS EXHIBIT.

I WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNIZE THOSE WHO MADE THIS EXHIBITION POSSIBLE. FIRST OF ALL, I MUST ACKNOWLEDGE BOTH THE ARTISTS WHO PARTICIPATED AND THE LENDERS TO THE EXHIBIT. WITHOUT THEM THERE WOULD BE VERY LITTLE TO SEE IN THE GALLERY. FINANCIAL SUPPORT CAME FROM THE OHIO ARTS COUNCIL AND THE FRIENDS OF THE GALLERY. BOTH ORGANIZATIONS HAVE ASSISTED THE SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY WITH NUMEROUS PROJECTS OVER THE YEARS, AND FOR THIS THEY DESERVE MY SPECIAL THANKS. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK JOHN FORREST FOR DESIGNING BOTH THE CATALOGUE AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT; LISA BINDER AND SCOTT HEISER, ART HISTORY GRADUATE ASSISTANTS FOR THE GALLERY; AND THE ENTIRE GALLERY STAFF FOR THEIR HELP WITH THE INSTALLATION AND RELATED ACTIVITIES. CAROL SALUS AND CHUCK BASHAM GENEROUSLY AGREED TO JOIN ME IN A PANEL DISCUSSION THAT ACCOMPANIED THE OPENING RECEPTION. ALL OF THESE INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS GRACIOUSLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT, AND I AM GRATEFUL TO THEM.

FRED T. SMITH, DIRECTOR
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PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY
AUGUST 5, 2000
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