

Thesis Part Two

Why a Noble art?

Submitted by

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WE HEREBY RECOMEND THAT THE THESIS
PREPAIRED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION
BY DAVID SEAN JENDLIN ENTITLED,
A RELATIONSHIP WITH MY ART, BE
ACCEPTED AS FULLFILLING IN PART
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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“Why a Nobel art?”

Symbols are objects of art that contain subject. The subject is what an artist intends to paint and what the audience engages in. This is a form of communication leads to thoughts about something else. This something else is the activity of mental and cultural actions adhering to a meaningful association for viewer and painter alike. Primordial symbols are the meta-symbols of the human psyche and its relationship to nature; they are referred to as archetypes, a term coined by Carl Jung¹ to explain the reoccurrence of certain visual themes apparent in dreams. Archetypes are symbolic visual records of an experience found in the associations and meanings of nature. Because archetypes are aligned with natural ideals, paintings are relevant to the first primordial symbols onto which all others are crowded. The first human expression to take form in art was the symbolic representation of an archetype.

Symbols establish correct and meaningful associations by dynamically engaging all participants in a meaningful metaphor. Meaningful metaphors are important because they can provide a sensory experience which compels them to combine expression within expression, creating a purposeful path found in associations to an archetype. A symbol, according to Jungian psychologist Marrie-Louise Von Franz,² appears when there is a need to express what thoughts cannot fathom, or what is only derived or felt. Symbols are the result of meaningful connections between man and nature. Symbols are reinvented, evolutionary, and redirected according to societal meaning. A meaningful symbolic painting is comprised of cultural starting and ending points. Much like

a yo-yo, the connections a symbol has to an archetype starts with the relevant cultural meaning and the artist's choice of expression. The relevant connections start close at hand; the symbol's current intended meaning. As the meaning of that symbol drops, the string becomes the link to all past relevant symbols in time, ending in archetype symbols. As the yo-yo returns, the historical string of association binds themselves to archetypes, which returns the symbol to the original intent. An artist using archetypes can manipulate symbols like a trick, linking meaningful communications to cultural intent.

Within symbolic communication an alliance to cultural meaning is maintained as an association adherent to the painters intent and social identity. Three Flags, one image in a series of flags painted by Jasper Johns (see fig. 1), is a contemporary symbol with associations relevant to social meaning and comprehension. When participating with the symbol of an American flag, expressions come to mind of apple pies, hard work, Chryslers, and associations adherent to that symbol, until meanings about 'flag' identify with the viewer and appear pleasing within the culture context. To be an American is an archetype related to identifying ones self, and the identity of the self is an archetype relative to nature. This is our yo-yo again, a symbol relating back through time a perception of nature. Thus labeling it good or righteous the symbol maintains itself until presently it can be reinvented in a new cultural language. Today theories like quantum light, micro-bionics and cell biology point out a symbiotic relationship between our living organism and the infinite beyond. Ancient occult versions of this relationship come to some of the same conclusions about our

place in the cosmos. The contemporary sciences and philosophies are perceiving nature in a language identical to mathematics, meanwhile occult versions represented the infinite in a visual product of symbolic form. The cosmos is, at times, infinite, direct, incomplete, and unknowable in its associations to mathematics. The symbolic artist can express infinity in a figure eight and speak in a direct language what his intent is. Design is the mathematics of the visual language. Even the term visual language denotes a linear and direct reason for objects and a foundation to build upon. If art is to communicate something relative to nature it must move beyond design or design purposes. A flag can be meaningful if people associate art as symbolic of archetypes and not a product of design. Symbolic art is a righteous art, preserving our humanity and connection through history and our relationship to nature.

There is a long tradition that proceeds artists, and it concerns the question of meaning in art. There is a new science in explaining why artful objects are used in ritual ceremony. Both disciplines of art and science, claim art is a communication that has a responsibility within society. Pietro Da Cortona in his Treatise on painting and sculpture in 1652 exhorts "...every artist to restrict himself to the production of sacred works alone, whenever the subject is left to his choice."³ This official church point of view is again taken up by Max Liebermann's credo in *Kunst und Kuenstler* (1912) as an axiom on aesthetics: "That every form, every line, every stroke, must be preceded by an idea: otherwise, though the form may be correct and calligraphically fine, it is not

recognizable as artistic, for artistic form is living form, engendered by a creative spirit.”⁴

(see fig. 2 and 3)

From Archaic times up until the twentieth century artists have argued which form of nature to paint- the observable or the spiritual. Meaningless paintings, like meaningless symbols, are a result of aesthetic formalism that has no relationship to the archetype. The observed natural world is not sufficient in making associations to archetypes unless it is infused with meaningful cultural connections about idealized nature. Jacques-Louis David, director of arts for the new republic of France, encouraged the study of nature for feeling, truth, and grandeur.⁵ His paintings are in line with France’s new cultural associations of virtue and patriotism (see fig. 4). David’s aim is to stomp out the established meaningless designs of rococo. His figures are superb beings, observed from life and infused with heritage.

Early studies on ritual behavior and the role ritual play in society has, are a relatively new science, only about 125 years old involving multiple disciplines and theoretical approaches. These theories try and place ritual in a role central to the behaviors of the groups studied. In an attempt at defining ritual as the core of all-human behaviors and disciplines the role ritual plays on art is also being questioned. To a Social Functionalist, ritual⁶ is a means to regulate and maintain group ethos, adjust its internal interactions, and acts as a social mechanism for maintaining the system. Social Functionalists like George Bataille view symbols, as the tools used in ritual and the result of expressions of knowledge gained

elsewhere and otherwise. As humans, we are at the threshold of two ways of being, according to Bataille, with one foot in the world of project and the other in the imminent immensity, a word coined in his book *Theory of Religion*. The Functionalist view places an emphasis on ritual being placed in the camp of project. Ritual is part of the machinery of deliberate actions, goals, and transcendence of individuals-- a tool used to reconnect humans with the "marvelous."

Culturalist theories of ritual⁷ broke with Functionalist ideas by analyzing a culture as the results of independent and language-like systems of symbols. Culturalist believe both language and religion are the result of a constant process interacting and shaping a society's structural pattern in order to maintain a world ethos. Two subsequent approaches to theory and ritual branched from the Culturalist thoughts focused on the textual and those focused on the displayed. That symbols and language describe social order by shaping rituals actions is the beginning of Victor Turner's arguments⁸. For Turner, the displayed symbol of ritual that allows luminosity to occur is the driving force behind change of an individual situation within a structured pattern. Births, weddings, circumcisions, are all established systems in most societies. It is the symbols in those rituals that bring society together in a sense of "communitas," making meaningful the actions taking place. Community participation in the meaningfulness of these ritual symbols is what maintains the correctness of that symbol. If over time those symbols have lost their original intent, but still maintain meaning by that community, that symbol is righteous. The symbol reaches out to universal human

values, chosen and carried over in meaning to the next symbol. So meaningful associations can be used as a bridge for that community's sense of being.

Combining thoughts about artistic intent and ritual theories, the argument for profound and meaningful art is that it shares the same qualities found in rituals- those qualities of community, history, religion, and social acceptance through evolution and enlightenment. In each of the following examples of a new image interfering with older meaningful images, the new metaphor is a compilation of older symbols rearranged to adhere to the new cultural context, abandoning the older symbol to human *comunitas*. Values carried over by the older symbol of liminality are chosen for their meanings and abilities to become meaningful associations behind the new symbols. These examples illustrate how symbolic art can relate to social changes due to their adaptability and degree of meaningfulness. In the first example, foreign art, or that which is newly seen, is more meaningful and acceptable in ritual than language. The first example of a successful evolution in symbolic meaning and relevance is found in the Mami Wata rituals of West Africa. The second example is a result of the late 19th century Native Americans ghost dance rituals. The symbolic design, based in a foreign language, which lead to a meaningless, and disastrous conclusions for many Indians and the life of Sioux chief Sitting Bull.

West African's relationship to water has been one of wealth and prosperity. They associate symbols of water things as relevant identifiers of power and status. Because relationships of power are very much a part of their surroundings and everyday occurrences, the West Africans have an awareness of

symbols associated with status. Turner claims that if there is a need to express what thought cannot describe, a new appearance of a symbol promotes change in the community. The colonies from Europe brought with them new thoughts and changes unimaginable to the West African shores in the early part of the 17th century. Eventually ways to express this new outside and powerful influence brought change in the associations of power and power symbols. The power of the sea comes symbolically to W. Africans in the form of divinity, currency's and identity. The bows on the colonists' ships struck a primordial cord with the W. Africans, and a new relevant symbol of social status was born from the sea in the image of a mermaid. Mami Wata, a type of mer-creature, is the denizen from the sea bringing wealth from across the water. European images of the mermaid circulated and symbols of mirrors and combs became connected to ideals about the spirit- self (see fig. 5 and 6). According to some European artists, mermaids spend long hours combing their luxurious hair in front of mirrors. Mirrors, in Mami Wata rituals, are symbols appropriated as a tool for seeing into the spirit realms. Big hair in Africa is a status symbol so an immediate association to power came from the western images of beauty through the mermaid's luxurious hair. Two other sources of images were used by the W. African to complete the transfer of older traditional symbols of wealth and power to new interpretations due to changing social structures. One image that helped form the Mami Wata compilation is of a German advertisement that depicts a woman cut off at the waist by the frame, holding two snakes above her head. She has gold bracelets around her arms and big hair. The hair, gold, snakes, and suggestion that her

lower half, the fish half, is connected to the unseen world, together appeal to the visual recognition of power. The other symbols appropriated by the W. Africans for Mami Wata worship come from Indian posters of snake goddess standing by the sides of a river or other bodies of water. These symbols in total share appropriate relationships with status and identity already existing in W. African traditions. These symbols were never placed together in a composite image until Mami Wata found form. The snake, for example, was generally associated with male deities by these societies.

Wealth to W. Africans was restricted to kings and his entourage. Now, because of industrial and Westernization, W. African social structure is changing and Mami Wata reestablished relevance of power coming from abroad and the unseen world. The symbols of Mami Wata are employed by W. Africans to promote their cultural understanding of where power comes from. They look at how to employ foreign objects and rituals in ways of connecting with archetypes of status. Mami Wata is the result of a visual image containing symbols relevant for the transformation of status issues in W. Africa.

Motivation to adapt to a changing social situation is a component in my second example of a new symbol and its purposed intent. Desperately trying to reclaim their land from the U.S. Government, the tribes relocated to the Dakota reservations and recognized the apocalyptic nature in which their society had become. In 1888, a Paiute man, Wovoka, spawned a religious movement called the Ghost Dance.⁹ The people, being forced to accept Christianity as a viable religion, sought associations to their state of affairs. Themes of the apocalypse

became relevant through the teachings of the Book of Revelation. The Ghost Dancers believed that the world would soon end and the tribes and ancestors of the past would inherit the earth. Behind Christian liturgy are the expressions of rebirth and the dead rising at the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the world. These Christian ideas about rebirth seemed appropriate to the Ghost Dancers for employing traditional metaphors about ancestors. Wovoka tried to bring a foreign expressions to the society's already existing archetypes on ancestors, the dead, and death. Active participation on the part of the dead is somewhat different in Native American mythology than the participation of the dead in the Bible. The rituals of the Ghost Dancers feed from the designs, or words, of a Christian apocalypse. The Ghost Dancers relied heavily on the sermons and preaching of the apocalypse, which follow in a design like patterns when taken literally. The form and design of Christian theology was not sufficient enough to become righteous symbols within Native American mythos and self identity, and so it failed as a viable source of symbolic relationships.

One could say from these two examples that whenever an archetype of content and vital importance is consolidated, either by social need or conscious evolution , it tends to become the central symbol of a new religion. One could also say that the symbol or idea at first must be grasped; for visual meaning is what makes people take notice and change.

There is a camp in art, which stakes its claim in the perceptive validity of "formalism," and its dominance in interpreting artistic ideas about beauty, which, in turn, brings up associations about nature. Nicholas Poussin, in the 17th century,

wrote that Beauty would not descend into matter unless it is prepared as carefully as possible. The dissension of beauty is a reflection of the late Renaissance theories that all visible objects are descendent from God and his original thought. Poussin goes on to explain that this preparation of matter is the interdependence between arrangement, measure, and form. “Arrangement means the relative position of the parts; measure refers to their size, and form consist of lines and color.”¹⁰ He even goes as far as to label these designs as incorporeal preparations. These are the designs of the physical world, unidealized and presented as fact.

I mentioned previously when talking about Functionalist theory that the grammatical rules of ritual spurred off and away from thoughts about the intent and manufacturing of visual tools involved in ritual. The study of most researchers in this field fell on the action and the verbal direction ritual structures produce. It questioned the power of the spoken word, and whether it was ritual action which promoted language or the contrary. James Boyd and Ronald Willams, two professors of mine, and authors of *Ritual Art Ritual Knowledge*, look at the similarities between Fritz Staal’s theories of what he calls Transformational Grammar, and what art theorist call Formalism. From my notes on a lecture given by Dr. Willams in 1998, I see he is referring to formalism as the “grammar” rather than the meaning of an artwork. Art’s value is intrinsic, and in its presence we experience pure delight of pattern and design. This is Poussin preparing the matter to receive beauty. Formalism, to Willams, is an autonomous exercise maintaining anti-instrumental judgement- whether it is representational, political, or religious in purpose.

Skeptics of formalism ask “why do we create something for its own sake?” To the a fore mentioned theorist in formal art and ritual practice it has become rather a question about how the whole process begins and how can we copy it. Formalism has its place in art; today most artists who have been through an art school claim as Dr. Willams that formalism is the foundation in any class. It provides us with a way of speaking about art. Formalism is taught in school today as the verbal component of art needed to express relevancy and purpose due to education. Most classical painters claimed that it was the Greek copies of ‘idealized’ form that should be learned and not the crude details of reality. Formalism, in theory, tries to explain beauty, agitation, tension, and other physiological responses the viewer has as a result of participating with art. For visual art, the concepts of beauty and what was believed to be beautiful promoted Arnheim’iean’ formalism. This type of ‘meta’ design layout by Roudolf Arnheim in the 1950’s is said to be ‘the way we see things’. As a study of visual perception formalism claims that nature, and the result of depicting nature, produces desired or undesired visual responses.¹¹

I claim that intent and idealized social change must be the primary source in creating a meaningful connection to nature. Nature is the only worthy intent in art, and symbolic art, if righteous, communicates the human predicament-awareness of the self and the sacred. Through this awareness the language of art can be employed to communicate a function of its design. Symbolic art is more powerful as a visual tool at changing ritual behavior than language; symbolic art creates the changes in what a society calls meaningful.

Occult art is both symbolic and formal. Occult art is loosely defined as art based on a hidden language rich in symbols about the sacred and sometimes unobservable. Occult art does two things, which escape artists today due to twentieth century society's skepticism on organized religion. First, occult art is the art of an organization, doctrine, myth, and stories known deeply by few and only stereotypically by many. Occult art of the past still remains rooted in its symbols today, even if the knowledge and the experience of participating with those symbols are forgotten. This history surrounding Occult art makes it part of Turner's ideas about symbols creating and binding a society due to their correctness. Occult art is the result of participating with the divine and is therefore a product and tool of liminal experiences. Occult art teaches us how to get back in touch with nature and Batailles' 'imminent immensity'.

An example of Occult art that is both powerful in meaning and deliberate in design is the cathedral. Today, people can still feel the awesome power of these solar-oriented structures though most of the original intent is lost to our historical perspective. It is the genius in design that followed intent, which created the profound experience I had when entering one cathedral in Italy.

Once a year in Florence, the Christ in Glory mosaic at the Basilica of San Miniato receives a light from a cloister window set above. This light travels until it lights up the 'foot' of the Christ exactly before dissipating and dissolving into the mosaic (see fig. 7). The astonishing part for some is not the spectacle of lights, but the meaning in the symbol of lighting up just Christ's foot.¹²

This symbol of the foot, and its associations to the human body, the human spirit, the zodiac, the departure of the soul, and the final symbol in a sequence of fish symbols throughout the church all come cascading together in this one solar event. A profound statement about Lego's, popular in thought by the time San Miniato was built. Most tourists find it a beautiful sight.

The symbols of this whole event are grasped by the most ardent of students in theology and those studying occult and sacred images today. The interesting thing about the San Miniato group of fish is that, instead of facing in the traditional zodiac orientation for Pieces (two fish swimming in opposite directions), they face in the same direction as the subsequent pairs do. The whole orientation of the church is pointing towards this transcendental spectacle. In fact, this odd configuration of the fish was the first thing I noticed when looking at the zodiac on the church floor. The information I went looking for only yielded up facts about the solar event.

The second part of Occult art related to ritual art is malleability of the given social situation because of visual righteousness. The mason who laid in the design for the church floor wanted to communicate something unique to his organization. Occult art gives an allowance of a personal interpretation and expression through its traditional symbols. Occult work uses formalism as a tool only after intent for change is ensued. This creation of a new symbol makes individual interpretation of an older symbol possible due in part to the everlasting occult ideals. This is what allows Mami Wata to be visualized in unique and individual ways. The student and artist of Occult art can individualize the

experience and liminal quality he has with nature freely. He can choose how best to represent or stress certain points. And to ensure a group carries it over to the next level of acceptance, he can manipulate the desired participation through design increasing its acceptability through design.

Occult art requires that you speak about nature in an idealized form, much like the painters speak about religious subject matter in the 16th century. “The painter must so paint each of his works ...sacred and to noble thoughts...Thus he will please the painters with design, the learned with the composition, the simple with the colors, the religious with the devoutness, and the men of honor with the magnanimity.” (Da Cortona)¹³. These reasons alone should be sufficient in the pursuit of meaningful art. Today, art is losing its nobility among the people, relating only to itself and the formal issues it claims to create. Creating Occult art brings the artist back into society by fashioning a link to nature and not ‘artful’ objects. The Occult artist will please his peers with aptitude of design because he learned a tradition of meaningful symbols that speak clearly of his intent. His composition is meaningful and appropriate for cultural acceptance. An Occult painter today might not speak of religious subject matter, due in part to the overwhelming amount of works done on the profoundness of light and the subconscious, but he may participate in a communion with nature at the ‘religious’ level. His commitment to this theme puts him and his community in direct communication. And the men of honor? They might be the few who read the symbols more clearly than the rest. Moving them out of the world of project and into liminality for just a moment.

Endnotes

1. Jung, Carl. *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing. 1964), 31-32.
2. Von Franz, Marie-Louise. *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc. 1973), 97.
3. Murray, John. *Artist on Art* (London: Pantheon Books, Inc. 1976), 132.
4. Murray, *Artist on Art*, 447.
5. Murray, *Artist on Art*, 204.
6. Bell, Catherin. *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford university Press, Inc. 1997), 27-29.
7. Bell, *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions*, 67.
8. Grimes, Ronald. *Readings in Ritual Studies* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1996) 512-513.
9. Davis, Kenneth. *Don't Know Much About History* (New York: Avon Books.1990), 194.
10. Murray, *Artist on Art*, 150.
11. Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkely: University of California Press, Ltd. 1974), 96-161.
12. Gettings, Fried. *The Occult in Art* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc. 1979), 47.
13. Murray, *Artist on Art*, 132.

Illustrations

Figure 1, Jasper Johns, Three Flags, 1958.

Figure 2, Pietro De Cortona, Rape of the Sabine Woman (detail), 1629

Figure 3, Max Liebermann, Terrace of Restaurant, 1902

Figure 4, Jacques-Louis David, The Death of Marat, 1793

Figure 5, Ivory Coast- Baule sculpture, Mami Wata, modern (unknown)

Figure 6, East African- Zaire print, Mami Wata, modern (unknown)

Figure 7, Basilica of San Miniato, Mosaic of Christ (detail), 12th century

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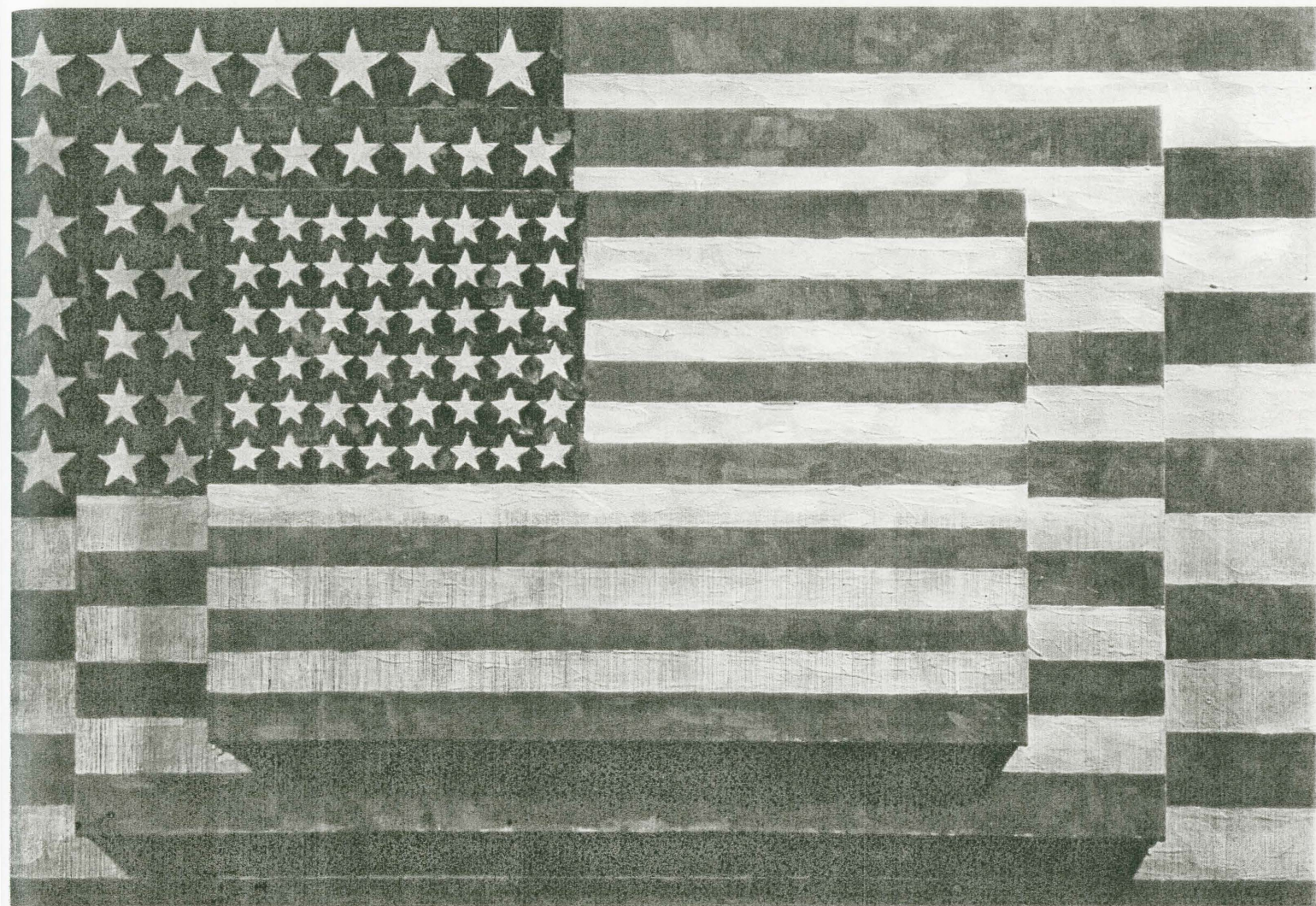


FIGURE 1



Fig. 2

FIGURE 3

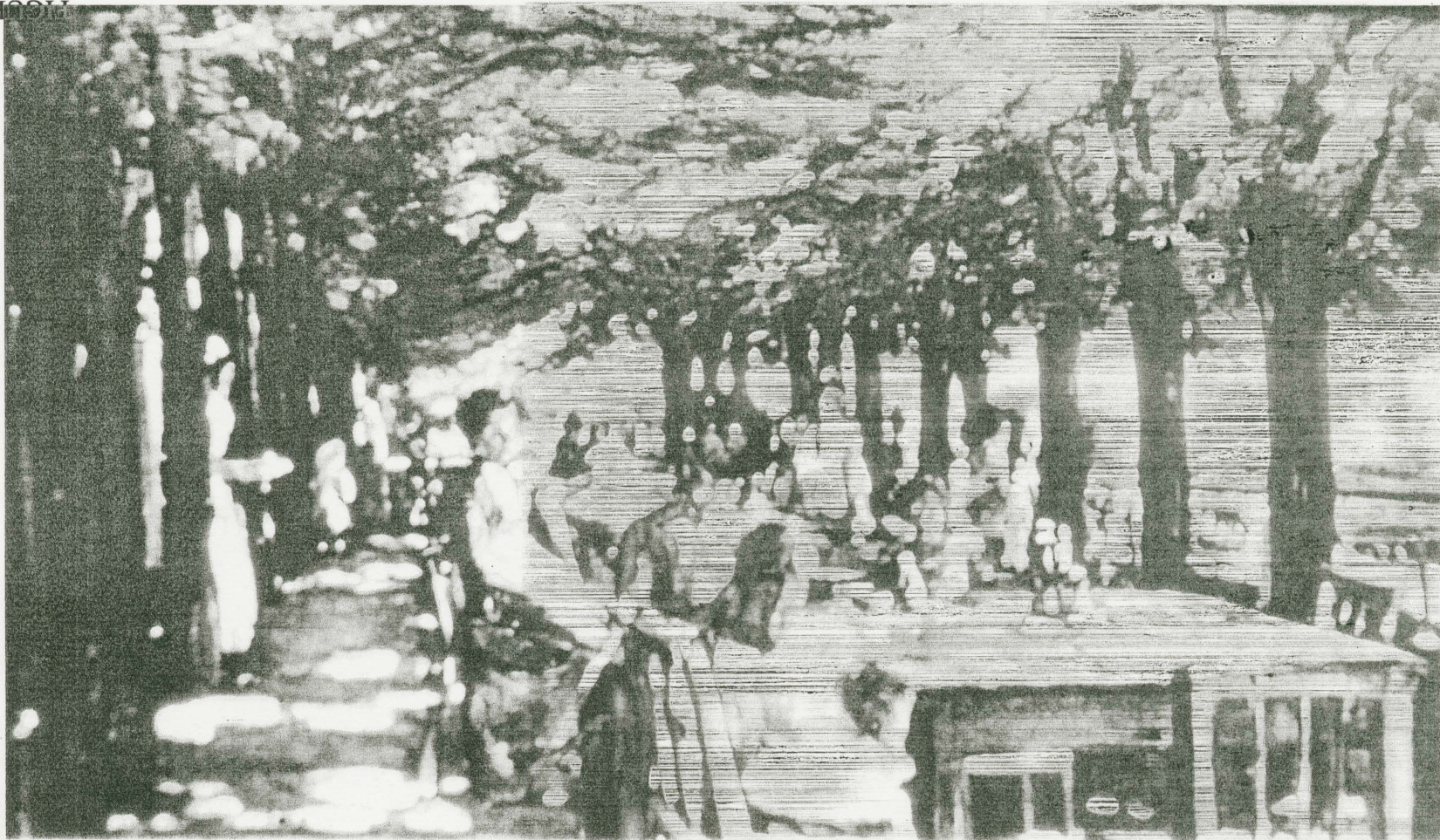


FIG. 3





FIG. 5

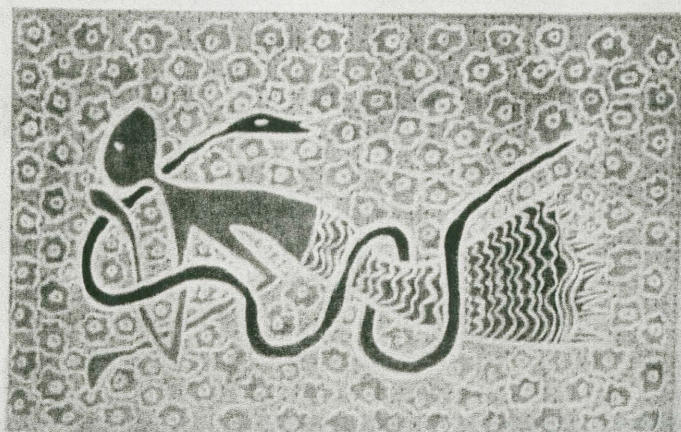
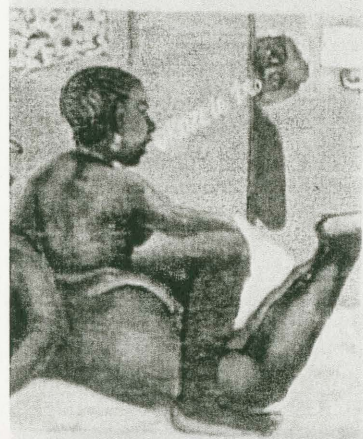
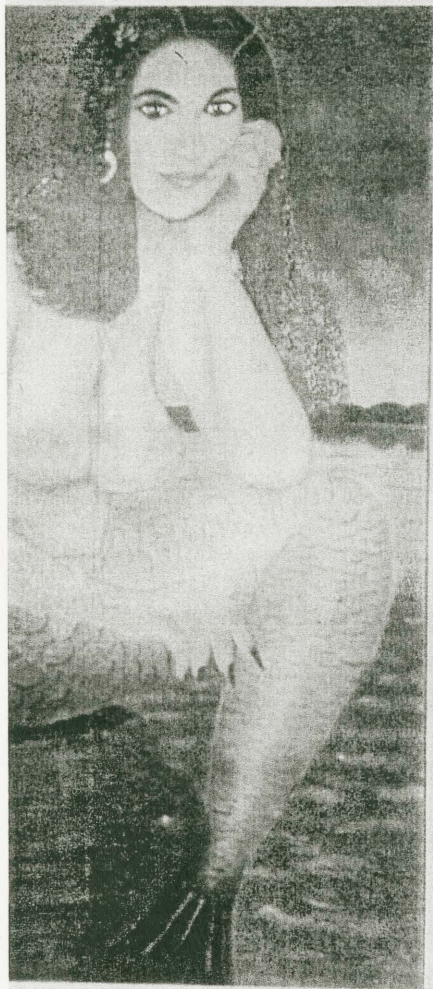




FIG. 7.