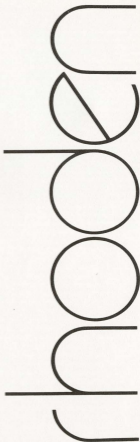




an exhibition of *sculpture* by john rhoden

The University of Pittsburgh, through its University Art Gallery and Department of Fine Arts, is honoured to exhibit a portion of the sculptural achievement of Mr. John Rhoden. These selected works belong to Mr. and Mrs. Rhoden and therefore represent a very personal contribution of the artist which goes beyond the creation of a work of art. In one sense, the collection of art is a creative process, so that in this exhibition it is possible to witness the artist's taste as well as his prowess. An attempt has been made here to give some idea of the quality and scope in style and technique through a variety of disparate pieces over nearly a twenty-year period of the artist's development. Thus, the students and faculty of the Fine Arts Department, as well as the general public, are provided with an opportunity to see the development of an artist through his work and to gain an appreciation of his own recognition of this development.



Acknowledgments

I should like to express my appreciation on behalf of the Board of Trustees and the Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh to the numerous people who have assisted in the preparation of this exhibition. Special thanks is owed to the Rhoden's, who worked so patiently with this University. My deepest appreciation goes to Mr. and Mrs. Harold Neal who worked tirelessly in supporting, organizing and co-ordinating the exhibition. I wish to thank Dr. Donald E. Gordon, Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts for his continued advice and assistance. I should like to thank Mr. Vincent Struzzi, the author of the catalogue. Also, I wish to thank Mr. Theodore Hazlett, Jr. and the A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Judge and Mrs. Homer Brown and Mr. Lawrence Huff for their outstanding support in making this exhibition possible. Thanks go to Mr. Richard Parise, Administrative Assistant to the State Majority leader, Mrs. Glenora Russell of the University Libraries, Dr. Lloyd Bell and his Office of Urban and Community Relations, Mr. James Hohman and Mrs. Anne Newcombe, who designed and printed the catalogue, and Miss Cecelia Brander, Assistant Director of Special Events.

Pamela P. Bardo

Curator of Exhibitions

September 10, 1970



John W. Rhoden was born on March 13, 1918, in Birmingham, Alabama, where he attended the public schools and, later, Talladega College. There was very little stimulation for the prospective sculptor in Birmingham during these years. While in college, he taught several private courses to assure a continued interest in the arts, but his formal training was, at this time, quite limited.

Upon his arrival in New York City in the late 1930s, Mr. Rhoden had the opportunity to study under Richmond Barthe, who had already acquired an important reputation. A three-year duty in the Armed Services interrupted his training, but his artistic talent was utilized well: he was commissioned to sculpt portraits of certain generals. After his tour of duty, he enrolled in the School of Painting and Sculpture of Columbia University, with Oronzio Maldarelli, Hugo Robus and William Zorach as his principal instructors. Mr. Rhoden received his first major award in 1947 as the recipient of a Rosenwald Fellowship. In the same year, he was awarded First Prize in sculpture from Columbia University, and was the recipient of two additional First Prizes between 1948 and 1950. As a participant in the exhibition of the Painters and Sculptors Society of New Jersey in 1950, he received a Prize and Honorable Mention. He was also selected for a Tiffany Award (one of two winners) and a scholarship from the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in the same year.

Between 1951 and 1954, two major awards were given Mr. Rhoden: a Fulbright Fellowship in 1951, and the coveted Prix de Rome Fellowship, which he maintained from 1952 to 1954. After completing his work at the American Academy in Rome, he returned to New York where he opened his studio at 23 Cranberry Street in Brooklyn. In 1955 he received a first prize from the University of Atlanta. It was at this time that he made his first major tour with sculpture under the auspices of the United States Department of State. During the year-long tour he exhibited in Iceland, Ireland, Finland, Norway, Italy, Germany, Turkey, Egypt, Kenya, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar. In 1959, he was further honored with a Rockefeller Foundation grant and made a second major tour to the Soviet Union, nine Soviet Republics, Poland and Yugoslavia as a member of a four-party artist delegation. He commenced another tour the following year, again under the auspices of the

Department of State, of India, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Korea, Japan and the Philippines.

In 1961, he received an Honorarium and Medal Pro Sculptura Egregia from Howard University, as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship. As a Consultant at the Institute Teknologi Bandung Indonesia in 1962, Mr. Rhoden rejuvenated earlier interests in carved wooden sculpture since fine woods were easily accessible.

On his return to New York, he received a commission for a bronze sculpture for Harlem Hospital from the City of New York Department of Public Works. This he executed between 1963 and 1965. The years 1967 and 1968 brought him three additional awards: an Honorarium from Fisk University in 1967, a Life Membership in the Municipal Art Society of New York, and an Honorarium from the University of Georgia in 1968. He was again commissioned in 1968 by the City of New York to execute a work for the Metropolitan Hospital. His work also stands as a permanent installation in the Philadelphia-Sheraton Hotel, a zodiacal structure and curved well of universal symbols executed in different metals. He is currently formulating plans for a project for the New York Public Schools. In addition to his world tours, Mr. Rhoden has exhibited extensively within the United States at the Metropolitan Museum, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the National Academy, the Chicago Art Institute and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has also appeared in group and one-man shows in numerous university and private galleries. He has most recently exhibited at the Black Artists Show at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. His works are included in the permanent collections of the Carl Milles Museum in Stockholm and the Delaware Museum and in many private collections throughout the country.

Vincent Struzzi

Vincent Struzzi is a graduate of Saint Vincent College, Latrobe, Pennsylvania. He is currently a Mellon Pre-Doctoral Fellow in Art History at the University of Pittsburgh, and intends to specialize in modern sculpture.

introduction

Mythology, the cult of the ideal and the other-worldly or supernatural, has intrigued man since prehistoric times. The Greek Koros, the Byzantine Icon, Romanosque Beatareus, Gausuis's Tahiti, Picasso's pre-Roman, Iberian and African sculpture, Aup's biomorphism and Emri's phantasmagoria offer only a few examples of man's relation to, and often dependence upon, the unknown. This infatuation ultimately rests on his yearning to align himself once more with the uncomplicated and naive existence of primitive man or primary life forces.

What is myth? What is the primitive, the folkloric? How does legend, implanted primordial hallucinations about the nature of reality, regulate and govern our way of acting, our decisions, even in this age of great technological and scientific advance? Why does man in the most advanced culture yearn for the primitive, the exotic, even the savage and grotesque? How can the sculptor, working in wood or metal, express through simple formal configurations the modern myth? It is to these questions that John Rhoden addresses himself in his sculpture.

The art of Rhoden is essentially figurative. It thus shares in a long tradition of representational sculpture. For our purposes, it can be most easily interpreted in terms of the modern sculptor's use of the human figure for both formal and iconographic ends. Since he carries on many investigations begun by his immediate predecessor, Rhoden's art is not, as such, mainstream. That is, he is not primarily interested in the most current explorations, such as minimal, light, cybernetic, junk or robot sculpture. Nor does Mr. Rhoden contend to be, strictly speaking, mainstream. He has shunned current trends which may often back artists against a wall, resulting in repetitions and clichés in their works. Rhoden has shown that modern need not necessarily imply the mechanical, the technological or scientific. Nor does it necessarily imply that the artist must assume the role of political or social activist. He examines a problem more far-reaching: man's everyday experiences and their relation to mythology. To Rhoden, myth is the basic source of life. Rhoden has drawn his formal vocabulary mainly from primitive sources. His own personal interest

in primitive folk art became intensified through his wife Richards, an American Indian deeply intrigued by her folk tradition. During their travels, they had occasion to examine first-hand primitive art forms and folk tradition, not only in Africa but throughout the world. Even while studying at the American Academy in Rome, Rhoden sought out the classical in its more primitive forms, those in which the artist based his work on simple, straightforward formal relationships. He has commented that he and Richards were particularly impressed by the similarities in folk beliefs, and the artistic expression of these beliefs, between one country and another.

This fascination with the primitive can be most readily detected in his monumental wooden sculptures, his Indonesian series from the early 1960s. In these works, Rhoden has attempted to express personally the erotic, convulsively contorted rhythmic quality which is identifiable with primitive wooden sculpture. "The Offering" of 1963 is indicative of a more refined, more subtle rhythmic pattern. The smooth, bulbous masses with which the upper portion of the torso is composed produce a slow, gentle rhythm suddenly interrupted by the bold, angular forms at the base. The closed, hierarchic quality is seemingly contradicted by the chaotic grouping of masses. A bold contrast is provided by "Topeng" of 1962, where a totally different rhythmic quality is produced by the rough-hewn angular shapes.

Rhoden's most personal contribution is his bronze sculpture. It is in these works that his artistic purpose reaches its fullest expression. Technically, the works are executed through the combination of the lost wax casting process with a welding technique which seems to be exclusively his own. Although currently working with rougher, more crudely welded surfaces he has proven his great technical proficiency in bronze casting. It is obvious through a work like "Quarter Horse" that Rhoden was once impressed with classical bronzes which he viewed in Rome. Compared to the wooden sculptures, the bronze works are approached in a reductive way. The



THE OFFERING 1963, Teak Wood 9'



emphasis shifts from mass to line, to the interaction of form with its surrounding space and to the play of silhouette. The "Adam E Eva" of 1956 is most indicative of this reductive process. The two figures are conceived in terms of the linear, with emphasis on the symbolic union of the couple through joining of the arms. The particular stress on curve and reduction is somewhat reminiscent of Matisse's concern in his "La Serpentine" of 1909 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). The light-catching protuberances on the surface add to the overall vitality.

Rhoden's concern with form, and more specifically with those forms which can best express the mythological basis, is the main issue in his bronze works. The problem of discovering and creating forms which could best conjure up a spontaneous suggestion of the hallucinatory has been the central concern of the modern artist ever since the early investigations of the surrealists in the 1920s. Giacometti's imaginary relationship between his idol-like figures and their surrounding space and Ernst's spontaneous suggestion through his hierarchic, geometricized figures offer only two examples of the elementary simplification in the archaic and surrealist modes

TOPENG 1962, Rosewood 51 1/2"





HIPPIE PARADE 1970, Brass and Jewel Glass, 25" x 17"



GEMINI 1957, Rosewood, 20"

of expression. The surrealists themselves aimed at discovering the myth of the time by delving into the dark channels of the subconscious and the imagination. Can Rhoden's purpose be interpreted, therefore, merely in terms of the surrealist tradition?

Surrealism is a clever escape hatch. It does not aim at discovering the present and coming to terms with the imagination and everyday reality, but rather uses the imagination and myth as a means of escaping from the complexities of the contemporary crisis. Rhoden has set out, however, to penetrate the imagination in order to comprehend the basis of myth and explain it as an actual part of reality. In that way, metaphysics is not dead. His art does not shun the present.

Although he approaches numerous subjects in his works, many of the themes are specifically contemporary: "Hippie Parade," "Gemini," "Population Explosion" and "Laika, Russian Space Dog." These embrace the irony, the excitement and often the humor in contemporary types and situations. This is clearly the case in works like "The Audience" of 1969 and "Hippie Parade," a recent work. To express these themes, which are quite different from earlier ones, he has adopted a new vocabulary of shapes and forms and has attained a provocative relation between one form and the other. Not only has Rhoden concerned himself with pure form, but his primary interest has been the interplay of forms and their rhythmic patterns, which he perceives in terms of music. In many of his recent works, he has exploited color through the use of mineral glass framed with bronze. Mass is thus further decomposed. The use of color, moreover, often complements the theme. As early as 1957, "Sandpainting" escapes the realm of the totem to become a whimsical, jewel-like creation of



ADAM E. EVA. 1956, Bronze, 14"



THE AUDIENCE 1970, Bronze, 34" x 17"

floating caricatures. The whimsical, flamboyant characters of "Hippie Parade" are enhanced through color to make more apparent the garish spectacle at hand.

How, then, does Rhoden escape the modern threat of reducing man from myth-seeker to cold rationalist? Possibly by comprehending that man is not a syllogism, but a product of history, which, according to Metta, is nothing but the story of man's hallucinations. Then, what, ultimately, is reasonable or unreasonable? Metta's statement in his essay on hallucinations offers a most provocative consideration:⁶

"The native African who believes in certain kinds of, let us say, supernatural voices actually hears such voices; his myth, his hallucination, is perhaps no more unreasonable than the present day one that every house ought to have electric refrigeration so that pop can be served chilled."

Then perhaps Rhoden's "Laika, Russian Space Dog," is no less "reasonable" than the Lions of the Mycenaean Gate.

Vincent Struzzi

⁶See Metta's essay on hallucinations in the catalogue of the Max Ernst exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (Garden City Doubleday, 1967).



LAIKA (Russian Space Dog) 1950, Bronze, 24" x 10"



POPULATION EXPLOSION, 1962, Teak Wood, 5'2"



SANDPAINTING 1957, Bronze and Jewel Glass, 20" x 17"

catalogue

- Angels Teasing Taurus**
1952, Bronze and Jewel Glass
36" x 10"
- Three-Headed Lion**
1954, Bronze
36"
- Adam E Eve***
1956, Bronze
14"
- Dao Torso**
1957, Welded Aluminum
18"
- Gemini***
1957, Rosewood
38"
- Sandpainting***
1957, Bronze and Jewel Glass
80" x 17"
- Dedicated Public Servant**
1958, Bronze and Jewel Glass
40" x 12"
- Eve**
1958, Bronze
46"
- Laika, Russian Space Dog***
1958, Bronze
24" x 18"
- Maji**
1958, Bronze and Jewel Glass
50" x 30"
- Quarter Horse***
1958, Bronze
12" x 16"
- Seated Figure**
1958, Bronze
28" x 15"
- Sky Father, Earth Mother**
1958, Bronze
10"
- Safari**
1958, Bronze
27" x 38"
- Spirit Regarding Order**
1958, Bronze
10"
- Salmon**
1961, Bronze
4"
- Mother and Child**
1962, Rosemalla Wood
44" x 12"
- Population Explosion***
1962, Teak Wood
53/2"
- Portrait of Richards**
1962, Teak Wood
Over Life-Size
- Topeng***
1962, Rosewood
53/2"
- Agilite**
1963, Bronze
18" x 28"
- Hosanna**
1963, Bronze
14"
- The Offering***
1963, Teak Wood
9"
- Oriental Lady**
1963, Nanka Wood
7"
- Reclining Figure**
1963, Bronze
12"
- African King and Queen**
1968, Bronze and Jewel Glass
18" x 12"
- Abstraction OOJ**
1969, Bronze
21" x 10"
- Cathedral**
1969, Bronze and Jewel Glass
73/2"
- Confrontation**
1969, Bronze
8"
- Confrontation (Fragment)**
1969, Bronze
9"
- Hommage d'Africa**
1969, Bronze and Jewel Glass
8"
- Soul Catchers**
1969, Bronze and Jewel Glass
48" x 30"
- The Audience***
1970, Bronze
34" x 17"
- The Garrison**
1970, Bronze and Jewel Glass
28" x 16"
- Hippie Parade***
1970, Bronze and Jewel Glass
25" x 17"

*Illustrated.

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