



Indian Krishna, Indian Buddha, Cambodian torso

## Light of Asia

The sumptuous John D. Rockefeller collection of Asian art—now on select display at the Asia House Gallery in New York City—spans a field so complex it boggles the mind. The extent of the span is defined by two major pieces: first, a female torso sculpted out of green stone in Cambodia in the tenth century, is shockingly simple in clean, full curves. Standing at the top of the gallery's stairs, it instantly conveys the message—of round, mellow beauty. The second piece, equal in commanding, dominates the second floor of the gallery. Carved out of black stone in India at roughly the same period in history, here too is a human figure—not the classical Cambodian beauty. This is Khasarpana-Lokeshvara, the Buddha of compassion, wrought in sinuous, complicated line, surrounded by tiny figures or deities, twisting, sinister vegetation and devoted attendants; beneath the figure there is a carefully chiseled inscription, as yet untranslatable. This is as difficult for the Western eye to read as the Cambodian figure is easy.

Rockefeller acknowledges the difficulty. "Asian art is relatively new to most people in this country today," he says. "As far as a historical and in-depth cultural focus for the works of art, we can't try to go too far too fast. The art stands on its own feet, without needing knowledge of the legend and history associated with it." His collection, garnered largely through more than fifteen trips to Asia since 1951, reflects this position, too Rockefeller's own home and office, which boldly mix the arts of ancient Asia with the contemporary Western world. A major concern in choosing art has

always been—in addition to quality—"what stirs and lifts me."

The result is a supremely personal and catholic collection. There is no historical or generic unity among the 70 works on display at Asia House, which celebrates its tenth anniversary with this exhibition, as well as the tenth anniversary of its parent organization, the Asia Society, which was founded by Rockefeller. There is a heavy emphasis on porcelain (all from China and Japan) and bronze, but this is largely because those materials "were available on the market," as Rockefeller says. The exhibition freely mixes styles and media at every step of the way across more than a thousand years of time and embracing civilizations located in India, Indochina, China and Japan.

**Writhing:** On these purely visual and physical grounds, the Rockefeller show is a winner. The pottery, most of it dating far back in time, plays exuberantly with bright, solid colors matched against the



Bernard Gotfryd—Newsweek

Rockefeller: Personal and catholic

peerless porcelain white. The standing earthenware horse, made in China during the ancient Tang dynasty, ranks with the loveliest such animals ever crafted. The writhing, dancing gods and goddesses are limned in metals such as bronze and copper, some of them inlaid with precious stones, by exceptionally skilled hands. Finally, there are two superb scroll paintings from Japan, one depicting brilliantly the goddess of wealth in florid and high fashion, the other skillfully interlacing silver and gold stalks of bamboo with dark, heavy calligraphic markings.

From this complex and often confusing mix, one distinct theme emerges of its own accord—a revelation to the layman if not the scholar: the sensuality implicit in many strains of Asian religious belief, particularly that centered in India. The goddesses on display at Asia House are unblushingly voluptuous, with full breasts and hips, their torsos provocatively twisted—as in the stunning copper rendition of the Indian goddess Parvati. She is a far cry from the saintly ladies depicted in Christian art, but she transmits with consummate ease a clear sense of the culture that produced her.

—DOUGLAS DAVIS

## The Jesus Artists

Both the sights and the sounds of an exhibition called "Revival!" seem out of place at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., or at any museum, no matter how informal or avant-garde. It takes place in a large room filled with old wooden chairs and one lone, empty lectern with a Bible spread open upon it; at the front of the lectern, nailed on its face, is a metal plate with a pair of wings, emblazoned with these words: "GOD IS MY CO-PILOT." Throughout the room, a deluge of tape-recorded sounds hits the ear. There are rhythmic bursts of clapping, shouting, singing, screaming. A husky voice suddenly roars: "Don't tell me the devil don't exist. Who owns those beer joints out on the highway? If that isn't the work of the devil, what is it? He doesn't like us to point the finger at him, no sir, to call out his name, and give his address!" More singing, chanting and clapping follows, interspersed with bursts of thunder.

Scattered around the wooden chairs there are worn, shredded hymnals, bearing titles like "Living Faith" and "Gospel Pearls," paper fans embellished with Biblical scenes and, tacked on old bulletin boards, scraps of paper covered with short prayers and fragments of hymns. At the very back of the room there are huge, battered roadside signs, some in wood, some in metal, fresh from the countryside. The largest and strongest is shaped like a cross, almost 8 feet high, and reads: "GET RIGHT WITH GOD!", the words intersecting each other on the cross. The most appropriate sign reads simply: "LORD SEND A REVIVAL."

By the term "revival" the Corcoran

means the emotion-charged evangelistic church meetings rooted in the rural, Protestant South. But the Fundamentalist movement is in fact flourishing invisibly throughout the land, according to Eleanor Dickinson, the San Francisco artist who organized the exhibition. "I thought these signs and the music and the books as art, that's all," she says, "but I'm turning into a kind of missionary myself. Sophisticated people come to the museum and say how strange, but if they look around they will see this movement right beside them. Wherever I go, even in the big cities, I hear revival music on the radio and see signs for meetings."

"Revival!" turns this invisible phenomenon into a resounding visual and aural fact. Protestant Fundamentalism has its own music, its own forms of liturgy, its own direct—and ambitious—approach to the symbol and the sign. Among its prime artisans is the legendary Brother Harrison Mays of Middlesboro, Ky., the creator of the 8-foot cross, who seeds the American countryside with thousands of homemade "Jesus" signs; in his backyard there are rows of 1,400-pound concrete crosses, marked for delivery to each of the planets. "The exhibition began with my drawings," says Miss Dickinson, a native of eastern Tennessee who still summers there, "but as I sketched the people I saw at revival meetings I decided I had to add their music and preaching and signs, all these rich artifacts."

**Trip:** Miss Dickinson's drawings, simply and professionally rendered, pale next to her artifacts, her music and the film that attends the exhibition, displaying the bizarre rites of extreme Fundamentalism. The show is not universally popular; it has an intensity and a crudity that clearly bothers the normal museum audience, used to a lower key in both religion and art. "The young people get it better," Miss Dickinson says. "They understand the emotion as another kind of trip, similar to their own experiences, in music and drugs." What young and old are responding to in their own ways is a movement that generates more cultural power than anyone yet acknowledges, even the movers themselves.

—D. D.



Wally McNamee—Newsweek

Roadside sign: Beating the devil

## Queen High

What must have been one of the most remarkable operatic performances anywhere anytime was given last week by Beverly Sills, the first lady of practically everything. Now that she has made "Lucia" and "Manon" seem like child's play, she has been lying in wait like a hungry tigress for a part that would challenge her dramatically. Last week she found it as Elizabeth I in Donizetti's "Roberto Devereux."

The opera—the 57th of the 70 Donizetti composed—is a demanding, imperfect masterpiece whose production last week by the New York City Opera was apparently the first staged version in America since 1851. It is based on a tale of relentless suffering and vindictiveness crammed into 24 hours, as Devereux, Earl of Essex, comes home from Ireland to face charges of treason—and worse, the jealous suspicions of the Queen who loves him. He secretly loves Sara, the Queen's lady-in-waiting, who in his absence has been forced to marry the Duke of Nottingham, an ally of Essex. The discovery of the forbidden love of Essex and Sara causes the house of cards—of love, friendship, marriage and power—to topple.

In spite of some operatic hanky-panky, the intricacies of the tightly knit plot are closely reasoned and, for a change, the power of the heart to alter the course of history is utterly believable. The story is all the more credible because of Donizetti's genius for making song seem the inspired and natural expression of feeling as well as his inexhaustible store of melodies to express love and hate, jealousy and compassion. The score is astonishingly modern in the tight relationship between music and words, in its unusual intervals, its quick-changing dynamics and its swift and surprising leaps up and down the scale.

**Passion:** The New York City Opera fielded its first team for the production—director Tito Capobianco, set designer Ming Cho Lee and costumer José Varona who imparted to the English court a rather Spanish opulence. As usual the orchestra and chorus under conductor Julius Rudel were exemplary, starting from the downbeat in full flight and stopping on dimes, and, in between, mixing passion and precision in approximately equal measures. The cast was especially strong, with tenor Placido Domingo as Essex, mezzo Beverly Wolff as Sara and baritone Louis Quilico as Nottingham.

The high-flying pyrotechnics of the famous Sills coloratura were tossed off not only as if they were incidental but almost as if they were irrelevant. When she wanted, the voice was light and beautiful, strong in her first act cabaletta as she awaits her lover's return, languishing in the final "Vivi Ingrato," his perfidy now exposed. But her goal, she made



Beth Bergman

Sills as Elizabeth: Hanky-panky

clear, was not to sing the role but to be the Queen.

This was no "Lucia" or "Manon" with its tradition and precedents: Sills had to conceive and build the complex, tough but human and vulnerable character of Elizabeth with no help but Donizetti's music. She chose first to sacrifice her own beauty by hiding her youthful skin under a grotesque mask of heavy white make-up, suitable to the insatiable vanity of an aging Elizabeth. Her gestures and her walk became burdened with years and even more with the effort not to appear burdened. And musically she sacrificed those glistening pear-shaped tones to scream and shrill to capture the savagery of a queen scorned in love. At Essex's death she holds herself back from weeping, saying, "Let no mortal say, 'I have seen the Queen of England weep.'" By executing Essex she ends the war within herself; the vigorous Queen has become a tired old woman.

"I decided on the make-up," said Miss Sills, "because this is one of the few times that I've played someone who actually lived. Manon or Lucia or Violetta could have any color hair. But everybody knows Elizabeth was bald and wore a red wig. What I end up with is Bette Davis with high notes."

This is the first of the Donizetti British queen trilogy that Miss Sills has projected. In 1972 she will play "Maria Stuarda" and the year after "Anna Bolena." With those three Queens for openers she's bound to draw a full house.

—HUBERT SAAL