

ON PETER WAYNE LEWIS

By Carl Heyward*, 1990.

Peter Wayne Lewis' work is illuminated by the triple suns of Jamaica, Africa and California. This trinity of light of light, when viewed beyond its surface luminescence and compelling arrangement of color and hue, reveal an tri-cultural sensibility framed by personal experience, against a backdrop of joy and anguish.

"It's about life and death issues," says Lewis, "an emergency that must necessarily be addressed. My work serves as a comment on the condition, the human condition, acting as a meditation on that condition and a prayer for salvation."

These concerns, "prayers," address the death of primitive cultures whose demise diminish us all, as well as, universal depictions of man filling the void, and fleshing out skeletal remains to a fruition of hope and promise. The plurality of cultures, of instincts, that course through Lewis' veins inform his paintings with a rare sensitivity, enhancing our perception of the here and now with insights both immediate and fresh.

Lewis' work has progressed from initial surrealist investigations to the more impressionistic broad-stroked pushing of materials and themes. His work is consistently concerned with the rendering of emotional and psychological states and is realized with a maturity and sense of clarity rare among painters of his generation.

Drawing from the familiar (familial) or universal (aboriginal) Lewis creates universes peopled by inhabitants experiencing peak moments of realization and/or in confrontation with a discontentment with a civilization that masks feelings and denies an essential nakedness. "I am a Modernist painter," continues Lewis, "and my art, at its heart is dissatisfied, rebellious, and volitive. I want to strip away superficial social conventions and reveal the true starkness of man's inner being."

In Lewis' work, the very act of painting is a journey into the nature of man's contemporary status as reflected by our primitive subconscious. This Jungian "collective tool" induces, dependent on the viewers' generosity of mind, an attitude of communion and contemplation, where the paintings live and die by the penetration of our gaze.

Lewis' diverse palette of influences; from De Forest to Dubuffet to Pollock to Wilfredo Lam (another multi-cultural hybrid of Chinese, African and Mexican derivation) are skillfully employed in each painting. Using his mentors as points-of-departure for his neo-primitive investigations, his paintings culminate in satisfying, singularly unique, creations; full of the sun and precision of his intellect and intuition.

Lewis' thickly painted oil surfaces reverberate with the energy and excitement of tribal dance and ritual situated in a timeless cosmogony of writhing abstract figures, both sacred and profane. Often, bold figures emerge from his Boschian orgy of activity, signifying a larger presence in the midst of chaos. His earth tones ground each painting in an arena of activity as diverse as birthing, sacrifice, hunting, sex and other cultural explosions. Lewis is a hunter, skewering social conventions in his orgiastic ruminations on an ideal universe.

*Carl Heyward is producer of ARTSPEAK a television talk-show with artists of interest and contributes frequently to High Performance, Artweek, Rolling Stone and Metier magazines.