



# PRISM

YALE INSTITUTE OF SACRED MUSIC

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for musicians  
and ministers,  
for scholars  
and practitioners."*

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## Religion and Literature: A Christmas Story

— Lana Schwebel

*"Lord, how this weather is cold!"* One of the best-known dramas of the Nativity in fifteenth-century England doesn't begin with Mary or Joseph or the baby Jesus, but with a cluster of shepherds complaining about the weather. We're not told much about them, but we're soon made aware of the harsh conditions under which they labor; each one has a tale of an especially harsh master who shows no mercy.

Before we can get to the miracle of the Nativity, the anonymous dramatist of the *Second Shepherd's Pageant* means to take us through the trials and travails of a group of shepherds who have to work overtime in the winter. I suspect that this prefatory tale has personal meaning to many of my students, who have to step up their paper-writing efforts just as the holiday season approaches. (It also has personal meaning to me, as the weather outside as I type this is a brisk fifteen degrees Fahrenheit!) This past semester, students in the medieval English drama seminar have learned how to read Middle English; they've analyzed texts ranging from Corpus Christi cycle plays to morality dramas to modern texts; they have written analytical essays and bibliographies and given presentations.

*Not only are the shepherds of the pageant overworked and underpaid, they have to contend with the theft of one of their sheep.*

By contrast, literature students have lost not sheep but sleep, as they contended with the texts of a period so deeply foreign that I often say that it seems Martian. This past semester, both literature courses dealt largely with texts from the Middle Ages, with some examination of how they were transformed in the Early Modern period. In the first half of the Christian Allegory survey, we explored the poetry of the fourteenth century, with

Below: Mosaic, c. 425, Ravenna, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia



At left: Royal Portal – right bay, shepherds (detail), c. 1145-1155, Chartres, Cathedral of Notre Dame

students learning how to read Middle English in order to read *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Piers Plowman* in their original language. And in the Medieval English Drama seminar, we spent weeks on the fifteenth-century Corpus Christi and Whitsuntide cycle plays from northern England, as well as morality plays from the same period

such as *Everyman*, *Mankind*, and *The Castle of Perseverance*.

*Mak, the scoundrel who's stolen the sheep, attempts to hide it by disguising it as a child; the shepherds come to pay their respects. We can see here the suggestion of what's to come in this distorted presentation of the nativity; while the shepherds have no idea of the privilege that awaits them, the audience members are reminded here that things will get much better for these miserable men.*

Transformation has also served as a central focal point for the literature classes, as we examined the transformations wrought in the Early Modern period on earlier poetic modes. We saw, for example, how Spenser's protestant poetics translated medieval romance and allegory into courtly epic — and how Marlowe and Shakespeare transformed the fifteenth-century morality play by suggesting the interior life of characters.

*When the shepherds do, at last, catch Mak, they have mercy on him and punish him gently – even though his crime is great. The playwright uses this depiction of mercy to justify the selection of these shepherds as visitors to the baby Jesus.*

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## A Christmas Story *continued from page 1*

Below: Joachim in the Desert, Giotto, 14th century

In what might be seen as a personal choice of mercy (though you'd have to ask my students), next semester promises to go a bit lighter on the Middle Ages. As the Allegory course continues into its second part, we'll examine allegory's shift from being a marker of "high" literature in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period into its survival as a messy popular form, beginning with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. To extend the course into interdisciplinary work, we'll be looking at Blake's poetic and artistic works, as well as the poems of Christopher Smart, whose works are perhaps better known through their musical settings. Also in the works is a seminar on Milton; while Yale suffers from no scarcity of courses on Milton's poetry, our course will spend equal time on Milton's prose, as his theological and political works are often given short shrift.

*"That was an exquisite voice, that ever I heard," proclaims one of the shepherds of the angelic voice that announces the nativity to him, signaling the shift of the drama from the world of sheep and cold and complaint to the world of miracles.*

As I reach the end of my first semester of teaching at the ISM, I'd like to indulge in a brief personal note. While I have always learned a great deal from my students in the past, rarely has my "reverse education" been so abundant or enriching: over the course of the semester, I've been taught a bit about African drumming, organ improvisation, and apocalyptic iconography, from students who are musicians and poets, aspiring scholars and ministers. It has also been my great pleasure to teach students who can make connections to worlds be-



yond the text, whether these ties are to Scripture, to contemporary church practice, or to a topic considered in another course. In fact, one of the pleasures of working within a multidisciplinary program has been in seeing students synthesize their classwork and render it relevant to other fields. For example, as we read Dante's *Purgatorio* in our Allegory class, students shared relevant material from Jaime Lara's Apocalypticism course. Thus, while I look forward to reporting on the progress of the Religion and Literature component of the ISM in the future, I also expect to recognize my own progress in teaching it.

*"We are bound to sing!" exclaim the shepherds at the drama's end, having experienced a miracle that they cannot describe in simple words. Their hymn would likely have been recognized by the members of the audience, who might have raised their own voices in song, as well. Thus, our somewhat fragmented tale is given a unified ending. The audience, after watching the shepherds enact their drama, would have felt part of that small group of embattled but privileged laborers, and would have witnessed the miracle with them.*

The protagonists of the *Second Shepherd's Play* begin with complaint but go out singing. I can't think of a more appropriate metaphor for the close of the fall term: it begins with the stress and overwork of final papers and projects, but ends with a time marked by celebration, light, warmth, and music.

Happy Holidays!

## ALUMNI & FACULTY NEWS

### ISM

**Mark Swicegood '00** was awarded an Honorable Mention in the 4th International Organ Competition of the City of Paris which was held November 8 - 17. The competition took place over a two-week period at various locations in Paris, notably the Royal Chapel at Versailles, Ste. Clothilde and St. Eustache. The jury, presided over by Marie-Claire Alain, comprised international personalities. No Grand Prix was awarded. Swicegood was the only American to pass the first round and the only American to place in the finals in the history of the competition.

### UTS

**Dr. Karl E. Moyer '59** has retired after a career spanning 51 years as a church organist. He began in 1951 at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade as organist at former First Lutheran Church across from the college church in Annville. His last post was as Organist/Director of Music at Grace Lutheran Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he and his wife **Carolyn Schairer Moyer '59** continue in the Senior Choir. Moyer retired from his recital career in 1998 but will come out of recital retirement for several programs in spring and summer 2003, most notably for the Organ Historical Society convention.

### FACULTY

**Professor Bryan Spinks** was a Discussant at the *Worship and World Christianity Colloquium* held at Yale on December 7<sup>th</sup>. On leave next fall, Professor Spinks has been elected a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Research at the Divinity Faculty, Cambridge University, and an Overseas Fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge for the Michaelmas Term 2003. He has also been awarded a Conant Fund Grant by the Episcopal Church to fund research for a proposed book, *Enlightenment, Evangelicalism and Eclecticism: Sacramental Theology and Liturgy in England and Scotland 1662-1800*.

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Photos: Pages 1 and 2, slides courtesy of Jaime Lara and the ISM; Pages 3 and 4, photographs of artwork courtesy of Ray Dirks; Page 4, reception photo by Melissa Maier; Page 5, staff photo by Robert A. Lisak; Page 6, winter scene by Robert A. Lisak.

# African Art: “The Eye Is Not Satisfied with Seeing”

— Lamin Sanneh

In 1950, nearly a half-century after African art - *l'art negre* - had been “discovered” by avant-garde artists and critics, Marcel Griaule wrote:

In reality, Negro art is beyond our horizons. It is steeped in a climate of which we have no experience, and about which, in spite of appearances, we have only a minimum of factual data . . . As with everything else concerning the country, our documentation about the manifestations of art is considerable on the surface, but in reality rather shallow: so shallow that it would seem superficial to wish to deal with it. (*Folk Art of Black Africa*, 1950, 16,17)

Since Griaule published that rather dispirited view, there has been a remarkable burst of interest resulting in a great number of valuable works on the subject. Well over eighty percent of the output of articles and books on African art found in any major reference work appeared after Griaule's remarks. Much of what has appeared in the generation since the end of colonialism has stemmed from genuine admiration for African arts, and particularly the sculpture of Africa, and from an increase in general scholarly engagement with the arts and their role in all societies. That admiration has led to the increase in the number of private collections, and so impressive has this sector grown that it amounts to a revolution in taste and appeal. Scholars have refined their categories of appreciation and understanding, and have developed helpful styles of art appreciation that bring African art within the general scope of art appreciation worldwide.

## Theory of Esthetics

A few words are necessary on esthetics, or the theory of art appreciation, and its relevance to non-Western cultures. What is needed is imaginative immersion to break down barriers of time, space, habit, and expectation. For that reason, we should stress the role of any viewer of art who, confronting art, participates in it as an act of imaginative identity. The temporal and spatial boundaries lying between the art object in its original setting, the artistic representation of it, and the viewer are removed with the awareness the viewer brings to the art. Only the viewer is aware of the effects a work of art achieves at the moment of apprehension. In the public setting of an exhibition, private space is created to make such immersion possible.

## The Experience of Africa

The ISM exhibition of Ray Dirks's art work entitled *Africa: Made in God's Image*, is not African art as such— that is to say, art produced by Africans— but, rather, images of Africa as represented by a Western artist. The exhibition introduces

most of us, including this reviewer, to Dirks's paintings for the first time. By any standard, Dirks's work is striking for its subject matter as well for the skill with which he exploits the particular medium he employs. The subject matter is ordinary Africans in ordinary situations, from the sweeping Cape-to-Cairo panorama of “Rise with the Sun: Women of Africa” in watercolor and acrylic, to poster reproductions, with the faces lined from routine chores, from the burdens of life and memory, from the dignity of labor. The artist depicts with skill, with care and devotion, hands as used to support and promote life or as symbols of faith and trust, not grasping hands. The lines, colors, shapes and contours depicting these ordinary hands and faces hint at their extraordinary strength and humanity.

The batik-like quality of the paintings, for example, suggests the deep imprint men and women leave on the tapestry of life. Even when they do nothing more than struggle with the demands and challenges of life, they make patterns imbued with their own deep humanity, and with their connection to an invisible but enduring power. The spirit seems to stir in the midst of people who are just standing or sitting still. This resilience and dynamism form a running thread in the works on view, and I do not know Dirks's work at all apart from this exhibition to be able to say how representative the present collection is. But what the collection shows is a deep abiding humanity in the African people we encounter. Africans are depicted in their individuality, not as stereotypes; in their connectedness in society and in faith, not as tribal cameos; as resolute and committed persons, not as sideshow freaks. We admire without patronizing; we come respectfully to the figures as bearers of life, wisdom, hope, and dignity, rather than going to them condescendingly as exotic colorful relics left over from a remote and savage past. Prejudice has little room in the paintings.

There is one particular painting that might stand as metaphor for the whole. This is the painting of the textile weaver weaving the famous Kente cloth of Ghana. In textile design the weaver is an artist in his or her own right. By blending color, thread, and the patterns of everyday life, the weaver thematizes life's recurring narrative, with the Kente cloth rehearsing and memorializing the passage of life in its highs and lows. As Marcel Griaule has pointed out in his classic work *Conversations with Ogotommeli*, the universe itself was imbued with passion when it was fashioned at the Divine Weaver's loom. Accordingly, festive and solemn occasions are featured in the themes of Kente, including bereavement, pain, sorrow, trouble, consolation, kinship, reconciliation, success, and generosity. There is no entanglement the web of life can devise for us that cannot be gathered and restructured in the warp and woof of the weaver's craft. The colors, patterns and shapes that come cascading from the weaver's loom allow people to stamp life with their own signature theme, and that way to elevate existence with dignity and meaning. Kente has many names, so that no situation goes unacknowledged.

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At left: *Maasai Moment*, by Ray Dirks

African textiles represent a particular medium of artistic expression. The making and use of cloth are not just for practical reasons. A bride is conveyed to her new home adorned in woven and dyed cloth frilled and tasseled with embroidered silk; a mother cradles her child with a cloth wrap of ancestral power; a hunter girds his loin with braided strips of consecrated cloth; a dancer's colorful headdress moves and flows to pulsating chant; the spirits of the departed return in patterned costumes festooned with Madonna medals; and old and young celebrate life in garments designed for the purpose. Weavers and dyers accordingly employ their craft to explore forms and idioms in terms of concepts and ironies. Textiles exist not just to make clothes and accessories for people to wear and to use but to display forms and skills for people to admire and appropriate, from the Ghanaian *kente*, *adwinasa*, and *adinkra*, the Yoruba *adire* and *aso oke*, to the Malian *bogolan* and East African *kanga*. Thus have tapestries, costumes, and *batik* designs, with a dynamic range covering the ethnic and vernacular as well as the abstract and cosmopolitan, proliferated in all parts of Africa. (See John Picton, *The Art of African Textiles: Technology, Tradition and Lurex*, London: Barbican Art Gallery: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995.) Made in the people's image, art is a living testament of humanity's perennial spirit, and from the loom of his own sensitive hands, Ray Dirks has shown the range and durability of that perennial theme.

### Viewing and the Gift of Seeing

In the *New York Times* review of the Baulé exhibition held some time ago at the Yale Art Gallery, called "Beyond Beauty, Art that Takes Action" (*New York Times*, Sunday, September 28, 1997), the point was made that the exhibition was "a gathering of astonishingly beautiful objects; a radical rethinking of



Above: Market Watch, by Ray Dirks

traditional museum presentations of art; and, perhaps, most important, a suggested model for a new kind of art history in which the very act of seeing art is redefined." The reviewer then shifted the focus to the value of Baulé art, saying the Baulé have no single word for *art* as a privileged class of objects set apart for contemplation. They value the work they make far less for what it looks like than for what it can do, socially or spiritually, to assure stability or positive change within the community. "This sense of spiritual animation," the review went on, "invests a visual culture with a rich emotional charge."

In the West, a typical art audience is an economic critical mass, a unit of market value, not primarily a community of appreciation and understanding. Art reinforces what John Ruskin otherwise infelicitously called the tendency towards "academical discrimination," towards that kind of formal abstraction that ends up tearing up art from its roots in society and commitment. It has been a long time since Western art turned its back on the holy and transcendent.

The *New York Times* review proceeded to talk about African visual culture and its notions of emotional charge, conflict,

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## PLACEMENT LISTINGS

### Connecticut

**St. Stephen's Episcopal Church**, PO Box 464, East Haddam, CT 06423, *Organist/Choir Director*. Part-time position, approximately 10 hours per week. One Sunday morning service, weekly choir rehearsals, and occasional special services and church meetings. The organ is a recently refurbished seven rank, two manual, 1936 Moeller pipe organ with chimes. A 2000 Technics Digital Piano is also available. Salary in the range of \$9K - \$12K (negotiable) and includes benefits. Contact Linda Taylor at 860-873-9460 or [LCTaylor@snet.net](mailto:LCTaylor@snet.net). Send resume and references to the above address.

### Out of State

**Bethany Covenant Church**, 1 Covenant Way, Bedford, NH 03110, *Organist*. Two Sunday services and a Wednesday evening rehearsal; occasional special services and Saturday rehearsals. Lead congregational song in a variety of styles from classic to contemporary. Strong organ and piano skills are necessary as well as ability to work with other instruments (brass groups, strings, woodwinds, a rhythm section) and with a conductor; must be flexible and able to work with last minute changes. \$10,000 - \$15,000/yr. commensurate with skill, experience, and education/training. Complete job description

can be found at [www.BethanyCovenant.com](http://www.BethanyCovenant.com). Candidates should submit a resume to the attention of Rick Kopituk, Minister of Music at the above address or fax to 603-472-8821, E-mail: [Rick@BethanyCovenant.Com](mailto:Rick@BethanyCovenant.Com). Call 603-472-5545 for more information.

**Second Presbyterian Church**, 3701 Old Brownsboro Road, Louisville, Kentucky, 40207. *Full-time Director of Music Ministries*. Organist, 30 member Sanctuary Choir, Children's Choirs, youth music, youth and adult bell choirs. 1400-member church formed in 1837 with heritage of excellence in traditional sacred music. Endowed music budget. Outstanding acoustical sanctuary with 3 manual, 44 rank Casavant organ (1981, fully renovated in 2001); Schlicker 2 manual 7 rank organ in Chapel; Steinway concert grand, harpsichord, 5 octave set of Schulmerich hand bells, 3 octave set of Malmark hand chimes. Experience in working collegially with church staff, volunteers, and musicians is essential. Graduate Degree preferred in choral conducting or organ performance, or Sacred Music. Salary and benefits package commensurate

with qualifications and experience. Send resume to Music Search Committee [2ndpres@bellsouth.net](mailto:2ndpres@bellsouth.net) or fax to 502-897-9025. Call 502-895-3483 for information.

### Another Facet of African Art



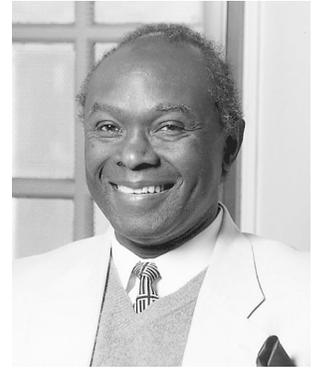
Tiensa Teshome enjoys the mesneko music of Settegn Atenaw at the November reception for the Africa: Made in God's Image exhibition.

tension, and wariness, yet talked about these things only in relation to the viewer, not in relation to the objects themselves. But once we shift to the objects as such, we notice something so obvious it scarcely needs pointing out. As we look around the Dirks exhibition we notice the attention the artist has devoted to the human face, and particularly to the eyes. In a significant number of paintings, the eyes are restrained, held in thoughtful suspense, shaded by a turban or headscarf, or turned away in contemplation. In some the open eyes are superseded by a blank stare, and in others they reflect meaning and purpose. The pieces “Guardian of Forgotten History” and “Proud Maasai,” for example, show the eyes full of pride and knowledge. In “Souk Silence” depicting a market scene, the eyes are not even marked, though the figures in close encounter suggest presence and awareness. In “Amina and Her Daughter,” the eyes speak eloquently of the bond of life and family. In the other paintings, the face in its suggested mass and weight submits with a poise or with reverential stillness to the focus maintained by the eyes. Wisdom is in the eyes, and the head concurs with the need for it. Thoughts are legible and voices audible in the eye. Notice what little space is given to speaking or talking in the paintings, as if we do not have to be loquacious to be truly human. In the typical worship scene, the mouth is closed while communication of the most urgent and fundamental kind is taking place. This is not silence as worship, or worship as silence, but the silence of the communion of

life, in which we pause to receive from God ourselves as we never knew us. “Souk Silence” would make a natural transition to a pause for Friday worship in the mosque, for example. As stated in the calligraphic inscription of a cotton appliqué by an Egyptian textile artist, “Say it to the one who knows it all: you might have comprehended something, but many things remain hidden to you - *hafizta shay'an wa ghābat 'anka ashyá'u.*” (Cited in Picton, *The Art of African Textiles*, 1995, 61.) It is, I think, this deft contrast of seeing as sacred knowing, and speaking as profane distraction, that so much of African art in its spiritual intention exists to convey.

Dirks entered the world of Africa a stranger, but has emerged a stranger no more. The scrutinizing eyes of the paintings, accordingly, make retreat uncomfortable and recognition inescapable. Perhaps the message of the paintings for all humanity is to replace the stranger with the image of recognition, and physical retreat with imaginative sympathy.

*Lamin Sanneh is D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale Divinity School, and Professor of History at Yale. For his academic work he was made Commandeur de l'Ordre National du Lion, Senegal's highest national honor.*



## Notes on the Staff

There have been several changes and additions to the ISM staff recently.

**Sarah Hare** (ISM/YDS '02) joined the staff on a temporary basis back in August. In addition to working at the ISM, Sarah is a pastor at Pilgrim United Church of Christ, and she is currently seeking ordination in the Methodist Church. Sarah hopes to pursue a career in non-profit management. According to those who share her office, Sarah often bullies them into attending various Happy Hours, dabbles in painting and enjoys playing with her dog.

**Robert Honstein**, on leave from Yale College where he studies composition, has been the ISM/YDS AV guru for the last several months. He is a member of the Whiffenpoofs, and recently traveled with them to Los Angeles to shoot three scenes for the Christmas episode of TV's *The West Wing* (episode airing Wednesday, December 11). The group also appeared on NBC's *Today Show*. In the future, he will be returning to his Yale studies (unless he succumbs to Hollywood's siren song).

**Louise Johnson** joined the ISM staff temporarily after moving with her husband to Connecticut to pursue a law career in New York City, having recently received her JD from the University of San Francisco. While job-hunting and eagerly awaiting the results of the NY Bar Exam (which she passed with flying colors), she keeps the ISM office running smoothly. Her predilection for pink and her Martha Stewart-like perfectionism add a tinge of joyful drama to the office atmosphere. She loves cats and has rescued many, including the seven that live with her. Some day soon, Louise hopes to be a hotshot NYC securities regulation lawyer so that she can be close to her third love: The Polo Store.

**Jenna-Claire Kemper**, who has been and administrative assistant with the ISM for over two months now, is a recent graduate of the Yale School of Music. She is a native of Salem, Virginia, and came to New Haven after having received a Bachelor's degree in Music from Salem College, and a Master's degree in Music from the North Carolina School of the Arts. A dedicated church musician, Jenna currently sings in the choir at Christ Church Episcopal. Recently mar-

ried, Jenna and her husband, also a graduate of the Yale School of Music, currently reside here in New Haven.

**Trish Radil** joined the staff in October to support the Marquand Chapel program and the ISM faculty. A New Haven native, she has always had a great love for art and music. “Yale has always been a big part of my life, especially in regards to music: from my piano tutor at age ten to my present classical guitar teacher, who are both Yale graduates. Currently I am in college studying art education, and I still enjoy practicing visual arts, guitar, and vocal music.”

**Sachin Ramabhadran** joined the ISM this month as the new ISM/YDS Media Tech. Sachin recently graduated from Boston University with an undergraduate degree in Communications with a concentration in video production. Aside from his video skills, he is also an avid musician with interests in audio recording and drums. He reports that he is an avid hockey fan and World War II buff.

The ISM staff also includes **V. Lynette Mitchell**, Business and Facilities Manager and Administrator for Student Affairs; **Terese Cain**, Audio-Visual Producer and Director; **Melissa Maier**, Manager of Projects and Publications; and **Gale Pollen**, Senior Administrative Assistant.

The ISM welcomes its new staff members to the team! And watch for more additions to our growing staff in the coming months.



Left to right: *Trish Radil, Sarah Hare, Terese Cain, Margot Fassler, Lynette Mitchell, Gale Pollen, Robert Honstein, Louise Johnson, Sachin Ramabhadran, Jenna-Claire Kemper, and Melissa Maier*



*The faculty, students, and staff  
of the ISM  
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the blessings of  
the Christmas season!*

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