

Arts & Leisure

Section 2

MARGO JEFFERSON

Myth, Magic
And Us Mortals

Ricky Jay conjures up an old New York of con men and an ancient theater of gesture.

NOW that so many theater artists are revisiting the gods and mortals of ancient Greece and Rome (Phaedra, Oedipus, Apollo and Phaethon; Orpheus and Eurydice), we should revisit the Greek concept of "playwright."

In Athens, playwrights were not only creators like Aeschylus and Euripides; they were directors and musicians, too. "Playwright" is a down-to-earth word. Cartwrights build carts; playwrights build—construct, redesign, invent—plays from all kinds of material.

I say this not to diminish the playwright as a solitary creator of literature, but because we are seeing so many playwrights build new works from a common source of history, myth and tradition. It is as if they—and we, their audience—are on a scavenger hunt through the past. We are looking for treasure in the form of cultural continuity; old griefs and pleasures felt again and more clearly; revelations about who we are and whether we can (or cannot) change.

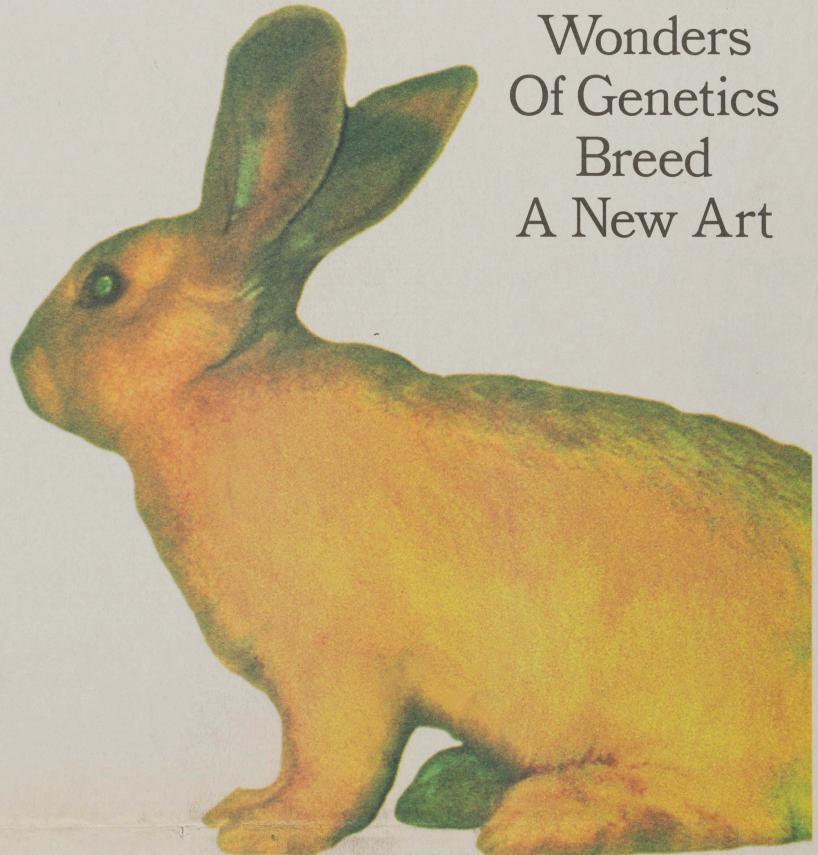
The Wooster Group's "To You the Birds! (Phœbe)," Derek Walcott's "Odyssey," Eileen McLaughlin's "Helen": I wouldn't call any of these

In a time hungry for revelation, gods and other tricksters are back onstage.

nostalgic or mystical. But they are all full of the uncanny and the supernatural; tricks and transformations of every kind. The magic may lie in the tales, as gods appear and the dead return to life. It may reside in the storyteller and the stagecraft, as when a single sheet of red fabric disappears and orange trees bloom in seconds. These playwrights know that the nonverbal—the contrast of movement and stillness, the angle of a gesture in space, the use of music or silence—matters as much as, sometimes more than, language. And I can't help noting, in a season marked by some extremely unimaginative and depressing Tony Award nominations, that most of these works originate—and often remain—Off Broadway and in regional theaters.

At the moment, the best known is

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Julia Friedman & Associates, Chicago

They Want
Their Mean TV

"Blind Date" is among the many shows that exploit the entertainment value of humiliation.

By KARAL ANN MARLING

THE traditional network TV season peters out every spring shortly before the summer solstice, leaving us with this professor-situation comedy has been O.K. this year—a B or a B-plus. But why trust me? I'm in that pathetic demographic nobody pays any attention to—the "early geezers" that advertisers write off or consign to a bleak celebration of incontinence products and denture cleaners beginning with the nightly news.

For what it's worth, though, I thought life was rosy on the major-network prime-time dramas that I follow much to the amusement of my cable-savvy students. Not until somebody's come to express necessitating an off-camera exit via brain tumor ("E.R.," "N.Y.P.D. Blue," "West Wing") and my other old favorites were satisfying because the formula guarantees speedy resolution of all life's problems. At the end of the day, the Constitution, common sense or good science has restored order. Life goes on, with a reassuring feeling that

Fogies have their comfort food while the young devour sterner stuff.

things always turn out fine in a nation governed by laws, rules and human kindness.

But for that other group of viewers, the younger ones, the channel-surfers, the 56 percent of American kids with sets in their own bedrooms—my students and their siblings!—must-see TV apparently doesn't cut it. They're made of sterner stuff; they tell me they prefer to troll on the dark end of the dial, where the larger numbers appear and where the bona-fide feeders play.

Worse, last week's "Jackass" subjected a guy wearing a cup to a series of kicks and whams in his most tender area courtesy of his so-called friends ("Don't try this at home!") read the disclaimers, aimed at preventing seventh-grade fans from maiming one another just for the fun of it. (Despite the copious

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COMBINATIONS
Eduardo Kac's "GFP Bunny" (1999), above, is a glowing live rabbit produced by genetically splicing rabbit and jellyfish genes. At right, three cibachrome prints of imaginary organisms made of substances like Play-Doh and lint; they're from the "Macro-Fauxology" series (2000) by Susan Robb. Both works are part of "Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics," an exhibition now at the University of Washington in Seattle.



By STEVEN HENRY MADOFF

In art in the broadest sense—digging into the mechanics of life, then an art dedicated to the structure of life itself—is of momental relevance.

That imposing premise informs "Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics," an exhibition that opened in April at the University of Washington's Henry Art Gallery in Seattle. At once clever and awkward, the show evokes the biblical loftiness of Divine Origin and an altogether cooler scrutiny of the practical and legal issues pulsing from the very nucleus of our genetic being.

There are 100 trillion cells and 30,000 to 40,000 genes in the human body, perfecting and destroying each of us in the relentless arc of living and dying. The expressions of our genes are so complex, so beautiful and monstrous, that to marvel at the heights of nature's ingenuity is to grovel before the mountain of our ignorance. Yet now that the initial map of human genome is complete, finished in June 2000, the government's Human Genome Project and its rival, Celera Genomics—our whole genetic code is spilt into the light. For the first time, this rough beast Homo sapiens is glimpsing the entire order written within that makes us and keeps us and kills us.

The genomic revolution changes everything, including our creative lives and the larger culture. Film plots, medical genetics, art of course. Music is plucked from DNA. Books about biotech abound. And then there are the visual arts. The exhibition at the Henry, which trav-

els through 2004, with stops at the Berkeley Art Museum at the University of California and the Frederick R. Weisman Museum at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, is only the latest of nearly a dozen shows on the topic over the last few years. Indeed, for more than a decade artists have stuttered, fumbled and wondered at the dazzling science of genetics and its darker questions.

What will it mean when your government, your employer, your prospective lover and your insurance company can know the fate at least potentially signaled by the machin-

In the face of dazzling science, artists are asking darker questions.

ery of your genes? What decisions will you make about your unborn child when you can wake here and there in the magisterial sequence of DNA to make a little Britney or Tiger or a Steven Hawking minus the genes that flaws? Cancer and Alzheimer's through genetic therapies would be astonishing triumphs. But if life can be durably prolonged, will the planet do with a population overrun by Methuselahs demanding food, shelter and something fun to do to idle away a cornucopia of Sundays?

It is only now, as the subject has moved into the hot zone of media obsession—with images of cloned sheep giving way to the specter of cloned neighbors—that this art has

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THEATER

Best performances by a featured skyline. Craig Lucas, and a friend, on friendship. PAGES 4, 5

FILM

Who's the man with the perfect Afro? Elvis Mitchell at the Cannes film festival. David Thomson on David O. Selznick. PAGES 11, 16

TELEVISION/RADIO

Aaron Brown: an anchor shares his pain. When the Amish let in the outside world. PAGES 18

DANCE

An era ends at the New York City Ballet, and Balanchine's ballets are in trouble. Exploring space with Elizabeth Streb. PAGES 22

MUSIC

A father figure in a free-jazz revival. Anthony Tommasini on the Met season. The Kinks: still heroes to the disaffected. PAGES 26

ART/ARCHITECTURE

In Los Angeles, another 'Great Wall.' Finland's self-taught 'protest' painter. PAGES 29, 31

ARTS & LEISURE GUIDE

Tuesday

CHAMBER PLAYERS OF THE LEAGUE/I.S.C.M. — Works by George Edwards, Yong Nan Park, Pierrot, Andrew Imrie, Robert Schumann and Ravel. Carnegie Hall, 129 W. 67th St., Rm. 8. (212-501-3330)

MACEJU MAZURKAZ — Pianist Works by Liszt, Chopin, Scriabin and Glinka. Well Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall, 8. (212-247-7800)

Wednesday

QUEEN'S CHAMBER BAND — New works by Ken Bianchi, Jon Custer, Joseph Penna, more, David Krane and William Mayer, and excerpts from Bach's "Art of Fugue." Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., Rm. 8. (212-501-3330)

SENIOR CONCERT ORCHESTRA — David Gilliland, conductor. Chamber music. Works by Glimka, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky and Richard Rodgers. Carnegie Hall, 3. (212-247-7800)

SHATHMERE ENSEMBLE — Blanche Myrow, conductor. Mitsuru Tsutoba, violinist; Hyunah Yu and Mary Westbrook, solo violins. Bach's Violin Concerto in E (BWV 1042) and more. Nos. 54, 179 and 202. Society for Ethical Culture, Central Park W. at 68th St., S. (212-874-5210)

NATALIA KHOMA — Cellist. Works by Beethoven, Brahms, Dvořák, Franck, Grimaux, Granados and Gaspar Cassado. Well Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall, 8. (212-247-7800)

DILLER-QUAILE STRING QUARTET — Works by Beethoven and Smetana. Diller. School of Music, 24 E. 95th St., S. (212-369-1164) Free.

Thursday

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC — Kurt Sander, conductor. Anne-Sophie Mutter, violinist; Bartók (Divertimento), Joseph Turin ("Hemispheres," premiere), Beethoven (Violin Concerto). Avery Fisher Hall, 8. (212-721-6300)

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES OF NEW MUSIC — Works by John Cage, Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Roger Reynolds, Tom Cipullo and Gregory Pinney. Eleash Auditorium, CUNY Graduate Center, 385 Fifth Ave., at 34th St. (212-749-1324) Free.

RHIANE SCHRADE — Plastic. Works by Schraude. Chamber music transcriptions of Strauss songs. Well Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall, 8. (212-247-7800)

LYCEUM — "The Lure of the Exotic." Chamber works by Rameau, Mozart, Brahms, Faure, Debussy and others, and discussion. Greenwich Village Playhouse, 46 Broad St., S. (212-242-4770)

COMPOSERS CONCORDANCE — Works by Albrecht, Justin Delmar, Joseph Drayer, Akram Khan, Jennifer Soltau, Paul Yitbarek and Patrick Hardwick. Frederick Loewe Theater, New York University, 35 W. Fourth St. (212-364-4899)

REBEL — Chamber works by Corelli, performances on period instruments. St. Francis of Assisi Church, 138 W. 31st St., 1. (212-987-9157) Free.

PAOLO BORDIGHON — Harpsichordist. Works by Handel, Bach and Gaspard Le Roux. Trinity Church, Bway at Wall St., 1. (212-982-0747)

BARGEMUSIC — Chamber works by Bernstein, William Schuman, Copland, Mozart and Brahms. Fulton Lyric Landing next to the Brooklyn Bridge, Bklyn. 7:30. (718-624-2030)

Friday

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC — Same as Thur.

AMERICAN FESTIVAL OF MICROTONEAL MUSIC — Improvisation with Bruce Cox, Daniel Moreno, Mat Fields, Lew Soloff, Mike Ellis, Rob Koach and others. Washington Square Church, Bway at 3rd St., S. (212-517-3550)

WEST WINDSOR AND PLAINSBORO HIGH SCHOOL CHOIRS — Brähms' "German Requiem." Carnegie Hall, 8. (212-247-7800)

BARGEMUSIC — Same as Thur.

Saturday

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC — Kurt Sander, conductor. Anne-Sophie Mutter, violinist; Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Symphony No. 4. Avery Fisher Hall, 8. (212-721-6500)

OPRHEA CHAMBER ORCHESTRA — Chamber works by Beethoven, Brahms, Korngold, Weill, Tansman, Schoenberg and Waxman. With Naoko Tanaka, violinist. Steinway Hall, 125 W. 57th St., 1. (212-587-5757)

AMERICAN FESTIVAL OF MICROTONEAL MUSIC — Works by Weber, Douglas Leedy, Johnny Reinhard, Skip La Plante, Jason Kao Hwang, Serval Pilyukov and Zora Madziviro. Carnegie Hall, 8. (212-517-3550)

ST. LUKE'S CHAMBER ENSEMBLE — New works by David Lang, Steven Burke, Alla Borzova and Daniel Bernard Roumain. Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. (212-594-8100)

that they really want to be there. It's all their fault, in other words; they're dumb and lazy. Meanness in the name of pop psychology is still meanness, even if Dr. Phil smiles like a crazed alligator while calling down anathema on the unhappy people who seek his help.

The medium might be the real message here. The media themselves. The undergraduates I teach often behave in what we foyges regard as a boorish manner, reminiscent of the residents of the "Big Brother" house. They wear their hats indoors. They chomp noisily on snacks during class. They fiddle with their backpacks, snicker with their friends; let their cell phones ring and their watches beep away. They are the ones who do this; this is meant to be irritating or disrespectsful; indeed, they are indignant if I point out that I'm not a TV set but a sensible, hard-working professor who is looking right at them. They have forgotten that a lecture is not a spectacle, a talk show minus commercials (a surprising number have to answer a call of nature about 20 minutes into a 50-minute lecture). That life is not a game in one's living room, where mindless activity, rustling, rib-poking — rather than quiet attention seems to be the norm.

It's unconsidered spectatorship. I think, that fosters the birth of these good-natured barbarians in my lecture hall. The young are perpetual onlookers to their own lives, thanks

ZOOM: COMPOSERS CLOSE-UP — John Zorn's "Chimeras." John Schaefer, host. 9. (212-501-3330)

NEW YORK WORKS — At 2: Skitch Henderson conducts a piano concert of works by Glória, Shostakovich, Ravel, Koršakov and Prokofiev. At 8:30: William Haynes, bassoon; Russell Watson, tenor. Carnegie Hall, 212-247-7800)

PETER HERBERT — Bassist and composer. Plays from Concerts, 438 W. 37th St., S. (212-442-6422)

BARGEMUSIC — Chamber works by Part, Khachaturian, Takemitsu, Schubert and Beethoven. Fulton Ferry Landing next to the Brooklyn Bridge, Bklyn. 7:30. (718-624-2028)

Pop/Jazz

In Concert

BEACON THEATER — Tues.-Wed., 8: Pink. Fri. 8:15, Sat., 8: Liza Minnelli. Bway at 74th St. (212-496-7078)

DOWNTOWN NYC RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL — Sheryl Crow. Battery Park, Slip 17. (212-496-8888)

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER — Russell Malone and Ronnifred. Guitars. Kaplan Penthouse, 15 W. 65th St. (212-231-4000) Thurs.-Sat.

CRAIG HARRIS AND JIMMY BOSCH — New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center St., Newark. (888-466-5722) Fri. 7:30.

KATIE COOPER — Tues.-Thurs., 8:30. Rock City, 10th St. (212-233-6480) Wed. 8:30

GREEN DAY AND BLINK 182 — Thurs., 7:30. Jones Beach, Wantagh, N.Y. (516-221-1000) Fri., 7:30. Madison Square Garden, 212-465-6700

MAKON — Thur. Skua Wainwright; Christopher Williams. Sat.: Ush. 178 Seventh Ave., S., 11th St. (212-255-4037) Tues.-next Sun.

ROBERT RANDOLPH AND THE FAMILY BAND — Bohemian Hall and Park, 29-19 24th Avenue, Astoria, Queens. (718-274-0255) Tues.

STRING TRIO OF NEW YORK — Rose Center for Earth and Space, American Museum of Natural History, 100 Central Park West at 81st St. (212-789-5100) Fri., 5:45 and 7:15

VISION FESTIVAL — The Center of Old St. Peter's Cathedral, 268 Mulberry St.

Tonight: Dame Eileen Barrigan; Ellen Quigley, Heather MacRae; Michael Gira, Tanya Donelly, Ron Sexsmith, Thur. Powderfinger; Vice. Fri.; Remmy Shand, 17 Irving Pl., 15th St. (212-501-3330)

JAZZ GALLERIE — Thur., March 28. Quintet. Fri.-Sat.: Orrin Evans Quintet, 290 Union Street, at Spring St. (212-242-1063)

JAZZ STANDARD — Ray Bryant Trio. 116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2227) Tues.-next Sun.

JOE'S PUB — Tonight-Mon.: J.C. Hopkins. Biggest Band with Victoria Williams. Tues.-Fri.: Bill Thompson, 10:30. Jim Chaplin and Stephan Crump. Wed. (tamm): Tammy Starkey and the Angels of Metal. Thur.: Michael Hedges. Fri.: Jim James. Sat.: Meshell Ndegeocello with Chocolate Genius. 42 Lafayette St., at Fourth St. (212-239-6200)

KATIE COOPER — Tues.-Thurs., 8:30. Rock City, River City Rebels, Daycare Swimmers. True: "Subversive School." With Heather B, Jean Grae, Krai C-Walz and DP On. (early). Elvert Sharp's Terraplane, with Heather B, Jean Grae, Krai C-Walz and DP On. Sun.: Wed. (late): Teachers; Flesh; Fever. Thur.: Neil Michael Hagerty. Fri. (early). Jill Dickey. Sat.: Michael Hagerty. Sun.: (early). Gossips Chromatics. Sat. (late). Dick Dale. 74 Leonard St. (212-218-3006)

MAKON — Thur. Skua Wainwright; Christopher Williams. Sat.: Ush. 178 Seventh Ave., S., 11th St. (212-255-4037) Tues.-next Sun.

MICKEY ROONEY — Mon. Irreversible Slacks; Boss Martians; Stand. Tux.: Brothers Creegan. Fri.: John Brown's Body; Blue Dogs. Sat.: Paul Ruderman. 217 E. Houston St. (212-465-6701)

NORTHSIDE — Tonight: Dead and Gone. Party of Helicopters. Wed.: Eliot; Pilot; Goon. Thur.: Liars; Chromatics. Fri.: Sex Mob. Sat. (early): Ades. Sat. (late): Kickovers; The Red and the Black. 60 N. Sixth St., Williamsburg. (718-389-3103)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM — "Black Fantasy." An exhibition of new work by emerging artists. Studio Museum, 145 W. 125th St., Thur.-Sat. 10:30-5. (212-260-3200) Tues.-Sun. 11:30-5

SUNNY SKY LIGHT FESTIVAL — Today. Franklin Square Park, at 3rd Avenue and 33rd Street. (212-265-8133)

DON'T TELL MAMA — Tomato Femia as Judy Garland. 343 W. 46th St. (212-757-0788) Sat.

AT THE REGENCY — John Pizzimenti, Traci Buckley, Patti LuPone, and Jessica Molaskey. Park Ave. at 61st St. (212-339-4995) Tues.-Sun.

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER — "Heart of Gold." Projects by six artists, including Hoppe Ginsburg and Eleanor Antin. 234 Second Ave. (between 14th and 15th Streets). (212-254-0000) Tues.-Sun. 11:30-5. (212-254-0000)

CAFE CARLYLE — Bobby Short. Carlyle Hotel, 234 Second Ave. (between 14th and 15th Streets). (212-254-1600) Tues.-Sun. 8-11

DANNY'S SKY LIGHT FESTIVAL — Today. Franklin Square Park, at 3rd Avenue and 33rd Street. (212-265-8133)

THEATRE AT THE BEACON — John Pizzimenti, Traci Buckley, Patti LuPone, and Jessica Molaskey. Park Ave. at 61st St. (212-339-4995) Tues.-Sun.

ART — Tues., 10-5; Thur., 10-7.

GROLIER LIBRARY — Bobby Short. Carlyle Hotel, 234 Second Ave. (between 14th and 15th Streets). (212-254-1600) Tues.-Sun. 8-11

SOLOMON R. GUUGENHEIM MUSEUM — "Reichert Whistler: Transcendent Spaces." New sculptures. Through June 1. (212-420-1500) Mon.-Wed., Fri. 10-4; Thur., 10-7; Sat., 10-8

AMERICAN CRAFT MUSEUM — "Crafting Art: A New Vision." Works by 100 artists from the Southwest. Through Sept. 20. (212-426-5335) Sun. on a week. 10-5. (212-426-5335)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART — "Room of Ridgeway." A photographic exploration by Yves Strom of the borough's Rom (Gypsy) community. Through June 1. (718-229-5100) Tues.-Sun. 11-5. (718-229-5100)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM — "Black Fantasy." A figurative impulse in contemporary African-American Art." Paintings by 30 artists. Through June 22. (212-260-3200) Tues.-Sun. noon-6. (212-260-3200)

TIBET HOUSE CULTURAL CENTER — "Between Elemental Divination Scripts." Illuminated Manuscripts from the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition. Through June 22. (212-257-0022) Tues.-Sun. 11-5. (212-257-0022)

YIN TING MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART — "Through the Eyes of a Camera in Conflict, 1987-92." Photography and video images. Through Sept. 15. (212-232-3200) Sun. 10-5; Mon.-Wed., 9-8. (212-232-3200)

JEWISH MUSEUM — "New York: Capital of Photography." Works by Jeff Mermelstein, Norman Mailer, Garry Winogrand, Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, etc. Through Sept. 15. (212-423-3500) Sun.-Wed., 9-8. (212-423-3500)

ARTISTS' ROOM — "Art Against Art." Prints by 30 artists. Through June 15. (212-257-0022) Tues.-Sun. 11-5. (212-257-0022)

WHITEHORN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART — "A Different Reality." Works by 10 artists. Through June 15. (212-257-0022) Tues.-Sun. 11-5. (212-257-0022)

ARTISTS' ROOM — "As It Happened." Photographs from the Gilman Paper Company Collection. (212-257-0022) Tues.-Sun. 11-5. (212-257-0022)

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ARTS & LEISURE GUIDE

THEATER



Nadia Dajani, left, and Carrie Preston are in the play "Boys and Girls" by Tom Donaghy, opening Tuesday at the Duke of 42nd Street.

Approximate running times are given at end of Broadway and Off Broadway listings.

Opening This Week

"BOYS AND GIRLS" — A new play by Tom Donaghy, based on Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury*. Set in a New England prep school, it follows the lives of George, Peter and Robert Sella. Playwrights Horizons, at the Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. (212-779-4200). (2 hours) Opens June 1. Closes June 9.

"THE HOUSE OF CARENESS" — Directed by Craig Lucas and David Schubin. Directed by Mr. Lucas. Theater Company, 336 W. 28th St. (212-239-6200). (1-20) Opens Thur. Closes June 16. A related article is on Page 5.

Recent Openings

"HOUSE" and "GARDEN" — Manhattan Theater Club presents two new plays by Alan Ayckbourn, set on the same day. The first, "House," is a comedy about a couple moving back and forth between two auditoriums. With Veanna Cox. "House," Stage 1. 131 W. 55th St. (212-239-6200). Each show runs two hours. Closes July 14.

"ONE SHOT, ONE KILL!" — A new play by Richard Vetere, set in a Marine Corps training school in Virginia, directed by Joe Brian. Provincetown, 524 W. 42nd St. (212-333-4052). (1-30) Closes June 9.

"ROOM" — A one-woman play based on the writings of Virginia Woolf, adapted by Joyce Carol Oates. Directed by Howard Da Silva. The Biggs Classroom Theater, 155 E. 13th St. (212-677-4210, Ext. 2). (1-25) Closes June 18.

"SELLING A RATT" — Mike Leigh's 1986 play. Directed by Scott Elliott. The New Group, at the Samuel Beckett Theater, 410 W. 42nd St. (212-279-6200). (2-00) Closes June 18.

"THE TIGER WHO HAD ALL THE LUCK!" — Grahame O'Donnell's new play in a revival of Arthur Miller's 1944 drama. Directed by Scott Ellis. With Samantha Mathis, Mason Adams, James Rebhorn and Michael Cerveris. Roundabout Theatre, 2 W. 45th St. (212-239-6200). (2-15) Closes June 30.

"INTO THE WOODS" — A revival of the Stephen Sondheim-James Lapine musical. Directed by Mr. Lapine. With Bernadette Peters and Robert Sean Leonard. Playwrights Horizons, at the Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. (212-779-4200). (2 hours) Opens June 1.

"MAMMA MIA!" — A new musical with book by Catherine Johnson, music and lyrics by Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus, based on the songs of the Swedish group ABBA. Directed by Phyllida Lloyd. With Louise Pitre, Judy Kaye and Karen Mason. Winter Garden, 100 W. 45th St. (212-239-6200). (2-15) Closes June 30.

"METAMORPHOSIS" — A play written and directed by Mary Zimmerman, based on the myths of Ovid. Circle in the Square, 1633 Bway, at 50th St. (212-239-6200). (2-15) Closes June 30.

"NOISE'S OFF!" — A revival of Michael Frayn's comedy. Directed by Jeremy Sams. With Patti LuPone, Peter Gallagher and Katie Finneran. Provincetown, 524 W. 42nd St. (212-307-4100). (2-15) Closes June 28.

"OKLAHOMA!" — Trevor Nunn directs the Rodgers and Hammerstein production. Chorus, Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!," choreography by Suzanne Stramon. With Patrick Wilson, Jennifer Josefa, Andrea Martin and Shuler Hensley. Gershwin, 1633 Bway, at 51st St. (212-239-6200). (2-15) Closes June 30.

"PRIVATE LIVES!" — Alan Rickman and Lindsay Duncan are in the Noel Coward play. Directed by Howard Davies. Richard Rodgers, 22 W. 46th St. (212-307-4100). (2-15) Closes June 30.

"REHEARSAL" — A new play by Alan Alda. Rehearsal, 150 W. 55th St. (212-239-6200) (2-00) Closes Sunday and Monday evenings only. Closes June 10.

"SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS!" — John Lithgow and Brian Benbenitsky star in the musical comedy of the film of the same name. Book by John Guare; lyrics by Craig Carnes, music by Marvin Hamlisch; directed by Michael Berresse. The Lyceum, 14 W. 45th St. (212-239-6200). (2-15) Closes June 10.

"THREE'S A COMPANY" — A musical comedy by Jeanine Tesori. Directed by Michael Mayer. With Sutton Foster, Gavin Creel, Harriet Thorpe and Leanne Cope. The Lyric Theater, 1535 Bway, at 46th St. (212-307-4100). (2-25) A related article is on Page 5.

"TOPDOG/UNDERDOG" — The Pulitzer Prize-winning drama of Suzan Lori Parks. Directed by George C. Wolfe. With Jeffrey Wright and Mow Affane. Broadhurst, 218 W. 49th St. (212-239-6200). (2-15) Closes June 10.

"URINETOWN: THE MUSICAL!" — A comedy by Mark Hollman and Will Eno. Directed by John Rando. With John Cullum, Spencer Kayden, Nancy Opel and Jennifer Laura Thompson. Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. (212-239-6200). (2-15) Closes June 10.

"WIT" — Directed by Mark Medoff. Scenarist and Denise Fennell, Culture Club, 179 Varick St. (212-352-3101). (1-40) Opens June 7. Closes June 23.

"FREE TO BE... YOU AND ME!" — The Diana Ross presents a musical by Mario Thomas and friends, based on the album, book and television special. Directed by Douglas Carter Beane. The Diana Ross House Theater, 27 W. Barrow St. (212-239-6200). (2-00) Closes June 8.

"NEW YORK STORIES IN BLACK AND WHITE!" — The American-Italian-American company presents three one-act plays: "Breakdown" by Bill Bozzo, "In the Garden at St. Luke's" by Stan Lachow. — The

"SPELLING Bee" by Philip Vassallo. Bank Street Theater, 155 Bank St. (212-206-1151). (1-20) Previews begin Wed. Opens next Sun. Closes June 23.

Broadway

"THE CRUCIBLE" — Lynn Neeson and Laura Linney star in a revival of Arthur Miller's drama. With Brian Murray. Directed by Richard Eyre. Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. (212-238-6200). (2 hours 45 minutes) Closes June 9.

"THE ELEPHANT MAN" — Billy Crystal is in the title role of the David Lean classic. With Kate Burton and Rupert Graves. Directed by Steven Mathias. Broadhurst, 245 W. 45th St. (212-239-6200). (1-40)

"FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD" — A new play by Edward Albee. Directed by David Esbjornson. With Bull Pennington and Mercedes Ruehl. Golden, 252 W. 42nd St. (212-239-6200). (1-40)

"THE GRADUATE" — Kathleen Turner, Jason Biggs and Alice Silverstone star in the drama adapted and directed by Terry John from the novel of the same name by Charles W. Web. With Calder Willingham and Buck Henry. Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. (212-239-6200). (2-15)

"HEDDA GABLER" — Alan Bates and Fiona Shaw star in a new adaptation by Mike Poulton of Ibsen's comedy. Directed by Arthur Perna. Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. (212-239-6200). (2 hours) Opens June 1.

"THE KITE RUNNER" — A new play by Khaled Hosseini. Directed by David Hare. With Tony Kania, Sami Gayle, Shabana Mahmood, Shabir Minney and Zainab Merchant. The Old Vic, 13 W. 55th St. (212-239-6200). (2-15) Closes June 30.

"LITTLE WOMEN" — A new musical with book by Lynn Ahrens, music and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens and Jule Styne. Set in 1860s Concord, Mass. Directed by Diane Paulus. Roundabout, 106 W. 45th St. (212-239-6200). (2-15) Closes June 9.

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"NOISE'S OFF!" — A revival of Michael Frayn's comedy. Directed by Jeremy Sams. With Patti LuPone, Peter Gallagher and Katie Finneran. Provincetown, 524 W. 42nd St. (212-307-4100). (2-15) Closes June 28.

"RENT" — Netherlander, 208 W. 41st St. (207-4100). (2-15)

"ROSE" — Orpheum, 162 Second Ave. (212-239-4777). (1-30) Closes June 1.

"THE SYRINGA TREE" — Playhouse 91, 316 E. 81st St. (212-307-4100). (1-30) Closes next Sun.

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"INTO THE WOODS" — A revival of the Stephen Sondheim-James Lapine musical. Directed by Mr. Lapine. With Bernadette Peters and Robert Sean Leonard. Playwrights Horizons, at the Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. (212-779-4200). (2 hours) Opens June 1.

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Weavers of Genius, Long Peru's Secret

By RITA REIF

THE motifs have all been woven out before thin and fat stripes, medallions, diamonds and sticklike figures, some with two heads. But none are quite so compelling as those in "Hidden Threads of Peru: Q'ero Textiles," a dazzling exhibition of 39 color-splashed shawls, ponchos, wrapping cloths, hats and festival bags on view here at the Textile Museum.

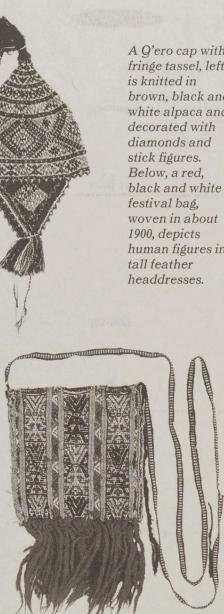
The show, the first comprehensive review outside Peru of Q'ero weaving, demonstrates the Q'ero's mastery of the craft. It also shows how their weaves evolved over less than a century from figurative to abstract, about the same time that paintings by Western artists — Picasso, Braque and Mondrian — happened to be making the same journey.

Q'ero is 100 miles east of Cuzco in southern Peru and 30 miles from the nearest road. It takes two days by foot or horseback, up the rocky eastern slopes of the Andes, to reach the six hamlets where about 400 Q'ero Indians live. Centuries ago, the Q'ero carried out a self-sufficient way of life that continues today: raising alpacas, llamas and sheep in pastures at 15,000 feet, growing potatoes and corn in fields at 6,000 feet, and producing their own clothing and building stone houses with thatch roofs.

Now as then, the men knit the hats and the women weave the fabrics that they all wear but rarely allow others to acquire. They work on looms, sometimes taking months to create cloaks distinctive for their embroidery patterns, vibrant colors, glistening surfaces and rugged textures. The Q'ero Indians' mastery of pre-Hispanic weaving has long been superior to the weaving of other indigenous Andean groups, yet their work was rarely seen.

Much of what is on display at the Textile Museum was collected over decades by John Cohen, the photographer, documentary film maker and author. In 1970, he was a 24-year-old graduate student at Yale University who was eager to research the textiles of the 20th-century descendants of the ancient Paracas weavers. He had admired their masterworks from 300 B.C. at the Brooklyn Museum and wanted to see if the visual richness and technical excellence of the Paracas embroideries had survived

A Q'ero cap with fringe tassel, left, is knitted in brown, black and white alpaca and decorated with diamonds and stick figures. Below, a red, black and white festival bag, woven in about 1900, depicts human figures in tall feather headdresses.



In the work of contemporary weavers, Edmundo by the painter Jose Albers and his wife, the weaver Anna Albers, as Junius Bird, who was curator of South American archaeology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York at the time, Mr. Cohen went to Peru. He had an introductory letter from Jose Albers to the director of Lima's archaeological museum, who gave him a map of indigenous weaving areas, which did not include the Q'ero.



Photographs from the Textile Museum

A Q'ero shawl in red, black and white by Nicolasa Quispe Chura.

"None of their weaving could be found in the stores in Cuzco where tourists shopped," Mr. Cohen said. "But an archaeologist there told me of a place where they weave from the left."

Mr. Cohen knew that was impossible, because weaving is done from the right and the left. But the misstatement made him curious. "I asked him, 'How do you do it?'" he said. "He said, 'Well, you just spin from the left but spinning from the left, which the Q'ero do. They spin from the left and from the right to create spin stripes in remarkable herringbone patterns.'

Mr. Cohen traveled up the Andes and, with the help of a wealthy young man who lived in a hacienda nearby, arrived there several weeks later. He found that textiles woven as early as 1900 had images of ch'unchu,

Hidden Threads of Peru

Textile Museum, 230 S Street NW, Washington. Through Aug. 18.

a tall mythic Indian man wearing a towering feather headdress. That image, seen in the show in a 1900 fringed red cocoon bag and several early shawls, changed slowly over time. Shawls produced decades later, also in the show, are embellished with abstract faces, rectangular eyes and a mouth, topped by bold angled stripes, the last traces of the feathers.

On that trip, Mr. Cohen acquired only a few pieces for the Museum of Natural History in New York and a few for himself, one of

which is in the show. "I traded my harmonica for the beautiful red knitted hat," he said.

Only much later, in 1977, on the fifth of eight trips he made to Q'ero to study weaving, photograph the people, record their music and make documentary films, was he able to buy a work by the most accomplished of the weavers, Nicolasa Quispe Chura. "She finally agreed to let me buy one of her stunning shawls," Mr. Cohen said. It is a red shawl, a design, a red, black and white pattern of 18 diamonds with rays — abstract symbols of the sun — that look alike but are all different.

The shawl is also a feast of craftsmanship. Like all the weaving on view, this shawl has no hem, because the edges were completed on the loom, a trick easier to achieve on textiles that have less pattern than one like this, with all its radiating diamonds. Nicolasa Quispe Chura finished her shawl by darning it so subtly that only experts can

Dazzling works by the isolated Q'ero Indians emerge from obscurity.

see the hand weaving, giving them one of many reasons to regard her as a master.

In all, Mr. Cohen bought or bartered for dozens of woven or knitted Q'ero pieces, 50 of which went to the American Museum of Natural History and 28 to the Textile Museum.

"I've almost always given them away and for good reason," Mr. Cohen said. "These textiles are not just commodities, because they communicate the spirit of their makers. As Josef Albers used to say, 'To distribute spiritual things diminishes them.'

Alvin Pollio, the director of the Western Hemisphere collections at the Textile Museum, said that Mr. Cohen's gifts had finally made it possible for the museum to put on a Q'ero exhibition. Ms. Rowe organized the show and wrote the catalog with Mr. Cohen, whose photographs also illustrate it. (His photos can also be found in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Corcoran Gallery of Art.)

In the catalog, a photograph by Steven Webster captures a Q'ero Easter celebration. Although the Q'ero are nominally Roman Catholic, many celebrations incorporate indigenous rituals and their textiles.

"On Easter Sunday, before the communal feeding, the Q'ero paint their bodies with their fabrics," Mr. Cohen said. They take the finest women's shawls and men's vicuna scarves produced in the previous year and raise them up on long forked poles to the top of an arch of timbers. Then the townspeople move in a procession through the arch bearing crosses and banners to bless the weavings, he said, "marching to the music of two flutes and a drum."

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The Wonders of Genetics Breed a New Art

Continued From Page 1

moved closer to the mainstream. "I've tried to create an exhibition that's not about shock value or sensationalism; the artworks consider these powerful issues — and in some cases reacting with the deepest ambivalence," said Robin Held, the curator of the Henry show. "The goal isn't to translate scientific concepts for a lay audience but to ask where those concepts are taking all of us, do we trust those concepts, how do artists respond and how should we respond?"

In the process, Ms. Held and her 26 artists explore every avenue of representation — from painting, performance and sculpture to installation, video, Internet-based art and performance. The art reflects the bliss as well as the pangs accompanying a science so full of portent that we can't even name all its possibilities.

There is Shawn Brixey and Richard Rinehart's quirky "Chimera Obscura," a vast image of a maze drawn from a thumbprint and navigated remotely by Internet visitors, which addresses, however metaphorically, the notion of finding one's way nearly blindfolded through life's twists and turns.

There is Daniel Lee's more reverent we-are-all-one approach in "Family Tree II," with its towering trunk suspended from the ceiling and pierced by a network of tubes populated by yeast, whose DNA, scientists have discovered, is surprisingly similar to our own.

Daniel Lee's digitally twisted portrait photographs are darker meditations. Crossbred and proud, they stand before us: cat people, simian people and Lord knows what else.

Yet more intriguing still, and more troubling, are the artworks of Bill Scanga, who has gone the next step beyond traditional media and adapted the tools of genetic science itself. Every artist dreams of breathing new life into art. These artists, quite literally, are doing it.

Eduardo Kac's "GFP Bunny" is an albino rabbit whose DNA was spliced with that of a Pacific Northwest jellyfish — convenient if you want to make sure your pet glows in the dark. No more fumbling around at midnight with a carrot, crying: "Here, Alba! Here, Alba!" But Mr. Kac and a team of geneticists at the University of Buenos Aires created to this illuminating hare for a higher purpose: reckoning with transgenics, with crossing species characteristics and what that bodes when the map of the human genome and the genome of other creatures are fully at hand.

"It's easy to fear what we don't know, that the transgenic is monstrous," Mr. Kac said. "But when the transgenic is sitting in your lap, looking into your eyes, then the meanings change. We have a duty as a kind of obligation to consider that makes it realistic how close we really are. Asian? African? Surface racial traits are nothing compared with transgenic beings. With genetic therapy, humans are given genes they didn't naturally have. And now we're approaching the imminent emergence of human clones. You don't watch it will happen? I wonder who will watch out for their civil rights."

In the grandest work at the Henry, "Genesis," Mr. Kac took the Old Testament passage, "Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea," translated it first into Morse code (an earlier example of a language of

'The closer designer organisms are to us, the more uncomfortable we're going to get.'

symbols invented to capture the substance of our world and circulate it) and then into the four-letter alphabet, A, T, C, G, which stands for the chemical base pairs along the ladder of our DNA. In the bizarre journey from public domain of the divine and creation, this literary DNA was then synthetically made, mixed with a sample of Mr. Kac's own, placed in a petri dish under a microscope and projected in all its purple, molecular majesty onto a darkened wall.

Of course, Mr. Kac's piece does prompt the thought that perhaps some omnipotent translator led the artist (and the rest of humankind) to this level of handiwork; that once upon a time we were encoded with a system of meaning that we could not comprehend and interpret as an alphabet written into our very core. Now that we've picked up the code, we've begun our own translations. With increasing ease in our genomic age, the script of life is revised, science fiction becoming science fact. But what will we write?

"When you start making rabbits as visual objects, using flamboyant genetic methods, it raises powerful questions," said Dr. Maynard Olson, the director of the Genome Project at the University of Washington and an adviser to the Henry show. "Artists are using living organisms to make a point: the closer designer organisms are to us, the more uncomfortable we're going to get."

The look of the work in Seattle more often than not heightened that sense of chill. True, there were humorous works, such as Bill Scanga's clownish taxonomy of pickled frogs in different colored pants and Susan Robb's paradoxically gorgeous photographs of imagined organisms made from highly refined materials, such as plastic and wire, the artist's spit. But in the expanded field of contemporary art, in which sociology, politics, technology and now health science are as crucial to artistic intent as aesthetics, the "beauty hook," as Ms. Held put it, was apparently not the point. Lab equipment, images of lab mice and lab refrigerators, precision machinery, vials and tubes, whiteness and brushed metal lowered the temperature while spooking the mind. Paul



Courtesy of the artist and OK Harris Works of Art, New York
"Leopard King" from the "Judgment" series, 1994, by Daniel Lee.

Vanouse's "Relative Velocity Inscription Device" used live DNA to mediate on his mixed-race heredity and the prospect that genetics, with its ability to cull genetic types and potentially deselect those not deemed "qualified," continues the time-worn bigotry of eugenics.

"GenFerra," a performance piece put on by the Art Ensemble of Chicago, invited the audience with a dose of satire and a dose of dread. The artists, in white lab coats, invited viewers to sit at computer stations beaming information about genetics, which they were instructed to read carefully. Then participants who signed health waivers played Russian roulette with petri dishes on a revolving platform that released transgenic bacteria into the air — if they chose the right (or was it wrong?) specimen. Critics Art Ensemble's lab-brewed bacteria as fastidious. Yet there was a palpable edge amid the playful science fair atmosphere — and it raised a very different kind of specter, as Ms. Held had already discovered.

In organizing the show, she found herself dealing at length with the university's Institutional Biosafety Committee and its sanguine — a wonderful Brave New World-ish job title — who tracks potential health issues on campus. Not the usual judges of an art show's fitness, and the works ultimately passed muster. But in the heightened anxiety over bioterrorism, the specter of the "weaponization" of anthrax, as Ms. Held said, it became obvious that it is impossible to show art evoking and practicing genetic manipulation without it creeping into our fears of bioterrorism, of toxic bacteria descending on us to murderous effect.

Yet the science at the heart of the art isn't all darkness, as the scientists themselves are eager to note. Dr. J. Craig Venter, the path-breaking geneticist who accelerated the decoding of the human genome and co-founded Celera Genomics, is circumspect when he's told about this latest show. "The problem with so much of this work is that it takes the view of genetic determinism, that we're just the sum total of our genes," he said. "But the linear sequence of the genome, while it's an astounding piece of knowledge, can't alone explain who we are and what will happen to us. We are a complex business of a complex mystery."

He may be right. Dr. Francis S. Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health's National Human Genome Research Institute, seems to take off from Dr. Venter's point, though he had not heard it. "I know the artist's role is to provoke, and I welcome a consciousness-raising art, but I wish more of this work would convey the mystery, the elegance, the beauty of what the genome is about," he said. "The way in which this is instructive book is put together, the way within the genome that it can microsecond in response to thousands of different circumstances and makes the right decision to keep cell healthy. It's stunning. There are plenty of ethical issues to address, but I wish more of that sense of awe was honored."

Both men invoked Andrew Niccol's 1997 cult classic "Gattaca." The movie follows Ethan Hawke as a biologically average guy in a world ruled by genetically perfect superhumans. He's a fugitive from disease, drink and murder, though they look awfully good doing it). Through an elaborate hoax, using the "superior" body fluids and DNA of the character played by Jude Law, Mr. Hawke's character trumps them all. Mr. Niccol's new movie, "Simplon," due out in August, turns the notion of recombinant DNA into digital farce, when Al Pacino creates a computer-generated movie star composed of the greatest attributes of the greatest stars of the silver screen and adds

Mr. Niccol's films are yet another instance of the flood of works, far beyond the visual arts, that demonstrate how DNA, genetics and the genome have surged into our culture. From the mere title of the new Star Wars juggernaut, "The Attack of the Clones," to "Technolust," the English actress Tilda Swinton's new movie about a scientist and a trio of bad-girl clones, the movie is a testament to software programs, like Bio2Midi and ProteinDesigner, used to take DNA sequences and turn them into melodies. Jonathan Tolins's play "The Twilight of the Gods," about an unborn child with a hypothetical "gay" gene and parents' decision to abort or not, has toured the country. Stacks of novels and nonfiction, even an illustrated manual for kids called "The Cartoon Guide to Genetics," by Larry Gonick and Mark Wheelis, are part of a



Courtesy of the artist and Jay Grimm Gallery, New York
"Eighteen Frogs With Pants Categorized by Color," 1994, by Bill Scanga. The frogs, taxidermied, are on view in Seattle.



"Genesis," a transgenic installation linked to the Internet, by Eduardo Kac.

publishing boomlet — with the most recent high-profile entry, Francis Fukuyama's "Our Posthuman Future," plying the same ethical and existential issues that dominate the Henry show.

All of these productions, like so much contemporary art, reflect the way we view

the power of genetics — for good or otherwise — to create new, extended and possibly transformed lives for us. Yet what underlies these fantasies and fears is a simple and unsurprising fact. As Lisa Vincler, a bioethicist and assistant attorney general in Washington State, put it bluntly, "Our culture just

Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics

Henry Art Gallery,
University of Washington, Seattle.
Through Aug. 25.

doesn't have an attitude that's very accepting of death." Billions of dollars in new genome-based drugs will be made on the principle that we are impatient with nature's judgments. And for all its wariness, this new gene art now finds itself pulled into the colossal force field that science and money have made. The questions are: Is this new art more than novelty? Will it lead to a single artwork of such eloquence that it summarizes the condition of our being? Will it add in an essential way to the vocabulary of art — as Giotto's frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy, did or Picasso's "Demoiselles D'Avignon" or Pollock's "One," No. 31, 1950?

Maybe. From a genomic perspective, why shouldn't the genes and proteins that miraculously combine to create a genius make one who likes to play with DNA? But no artist at the Henry can yet claim that triumph. That is still the prize of science, not art. The discovery of the DNA's double helix and the brilliance of deciphering the genomic sequence are Eurekats of imagination and creativity. They shift the world. What comes after — whether great art or law or a social order remake — is only beginning to emerge. Those glimmers are still out there on the edge of the tidal force wrapped inside our genes.



Where Miles of Murals Preach a People's Gospel

By BARBARA TANNENBAUM

LIN a tree-shaded building at the University of California campus here, Judith F. Baca, 56, sits for a minute with students in her seminar "Beyond the Mexican Mural." Ms. Baca, a professor and muralist, is illustrating a lecture with examples of her own works, created over more than 30 years. Today she is focusing on "The Great Wall of Los Angeles," 1976-83, choosing it from among many other projects that range from "La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra," her recent commission by the Denver International Air-

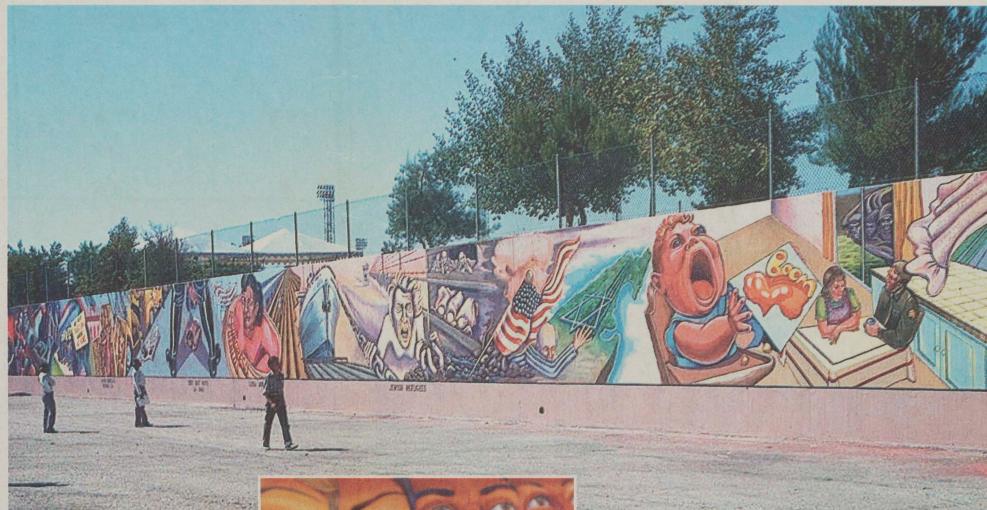
**In Los Angeles, disciples
of the great Mexican
muralists ply a fragile art
and strive to preserve it.**

port, to her "World Wall" panels that have toured the globe.

"Murals embody certain qualities of visual storytelling," says Ms. Baca, who grew up in Pacoima, a Los Angeles suburb. "First, there is the difference between public voice and private voice. Murals are pulpits: what you say in the pulpit is different from what you say to an intimate. Next, you must consider their scale. Scale is about amplifying the voice, about making it the voice of people who were excluded from history. This mural, 'The Great Wall of Los Angeles,' is a people's mural."

Stated in the Tujunga Flood Control Channel in North Hollywood, "The Great Wall," more than 13 feet high and unspooling for almost a half-mile, is thought to be the longest mural in the world. It depicts a multiethnic history of Los Angeles, from prehistoric times through the post-World War II era. Commissioned by the Army Corps of Engineers, which also transformed the flood channel into a sylvan park with an adjacent pedestrian walkway, the mural is also considered by many to be the flagship for a vast collection of outdoor artworks that sprung up throughout the city beginning in the early 1970's.

Slides of "The Great Wall" reveal the social context in which the mural was created. It was begun in the summer of 1976, with 400 underprivileged teenagers executing the designs, and was completed seven summers later after hundreds of residents, academics and social activists were interviewed about the history of the city. Teams of artists, including Judy Chicago, Christina Schlesin-



ger, Gary Tokumoto, Yreina Carvantez and Patti Valdez, contributed ideas and images.

Ms. Baca's slides also show the extent to which "The Great Wall" has deteriorated. The color is not rich and vivid now. Exposure to sun, sunbathers, heat and flooding has produced bubbling and peeling on the older segments. The mural, like many of its outdoor contemporaries, is in need of restoration, and it offers a good example of the problems Los Angeles faces in caring for its mural heritage.

"To the extent that people outside of Southern California know about the mural tradition here, they have to know about Judith Baca's 'Great Wall of Los Angeles,'" said Howard Fox, the curator of modern and contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. "It is the largest, most ambitious and articulated of all the projects. It was conceived and produced in the spirit of public service and community celebration. It has an exalted status, and it has



Robert Gauthier/The Los Angeles Times

earned it."

Influenced by César Chávez and the social ferment of the early 70's, Ms. Baca and a number of predominantly Hispanic artists took up where Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros — the three great Mexican muralists of the early 20th century — left off. The renewed movement, which soon grew to include African-American, Asian and white muralists, has generated at least 3,000 murals on exterior

surfaces throughout Los Angeles, the greatest creation of public art in an American city since the Work Progress Administration, earning the city a reputation as the mural capital of the world.

But murals are a fragile artform, and only a small number fall under the protection of government agencies or nonprofit organizations. The Social and Public Art Resource Center, which Ms. Baca helped found in Venice, Calif., in 1976, received

Mural photographs from the Social and Public Art Resource Center

money from the mayor's office and the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department between 1988 and 1996 and has commissioned 100 murals. In the early 80's, Mayor Tom Bradley commissioned 47 murals along the Los Angeles freeway for the 1984 Summer Olympics. The fall under the administration of CalTrans, the California State Department of Transportation. The city's Cultural Affairs Department is responsible for an additional 300 murals, a municipal collection that overlaps with the artwork produced by the Art Resource Center.

The practices by public agencies in the past "show that there's been no thought attached to what it means to take care of public art," said Bill Lasarow, who helped found the Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles in 1989.

"It has long been city policy to make the artists responsible for upkeep and maintenance of their murals," he added. "Now, how easy is that to do on the freeway with

Continued on Page 34



A Social Critic Who Makes the Ordinary a Weapon

By EDWARD M. GOMEZ

SINCE the Finnish painter Tyne Esko began making art 30 years ago, at the age of 52, she has created a body of work full of biting social commentary simply by recording aspects of everyday life in the port city of Kokkola, where she lives, some 300 miles northwest of Helsinki. Now, with her first solo show in New York, at the Luise Ross Gallery in SoHo, an audience far from Finland can examine an intriguing selection of 18 paintings that have been as controversial in their homeland as their maker has been unknown beyond it.

"I started with flowers, then I painted old, beautiful buildings," is how Ms. Esko described, in an email message, her first forays into painting. Her work began to evolve, she said, under the influence of the Swedish poet-painters Dan Andersson and Nils Ferlin, on the radio. Their early 20th-century verses, which were known for their metaphysical tone, championed the downtrodden and prompted Ms. Esko to begin making what she calls "protest paintings."

Those canvases, which criticized soulless government bureaucrats and smug bourgeois attitudes, have generally been coolly received in her own country. Magazine articles have described the artist's efforts, sometimes a bit dismissively, as "earnestly naive" or as directing "a protest toward the establishment." Ms. Esko says that academically trained artists and their supporters have felt envious of the creativity and resiliency of the gumption of a grandmotherly painter with only a fourth-grade education who has dared to present her work professionally and to address serious subjects.

"I was considered the village idiot," she said. "Critics didn't know how to classify me, but I had an internal fire. I simply had to paint." (Poor health forced her to stop painting about a decade ago.)

Ms. Esko was born in central Finland and grew up in a poor farming family. At 20 she married to Kokkola, where she worked in a laundry and as a cleaning woman. She struggled to rear four children and to cope with her husband, whom she called "disabled, sick and alcoholic" and whom she eventually divorced. When her own health worsened, she retired and began to paint.

Ms. Esko taught herself to paint in oil on canvas, developing a style both naive and finely detailed. While her political messages are hardly subtle, her compositions are neatly balanced, and the forms she depicts —



"A New Law," right, 1985, an allusion to paper-pushing government functionaries, by the self-taught Finnish artist Tyne Esko, left. Ms. Esko is having her first New York solo show of what she calls her "protest paintings."

Clas-Olov Slote

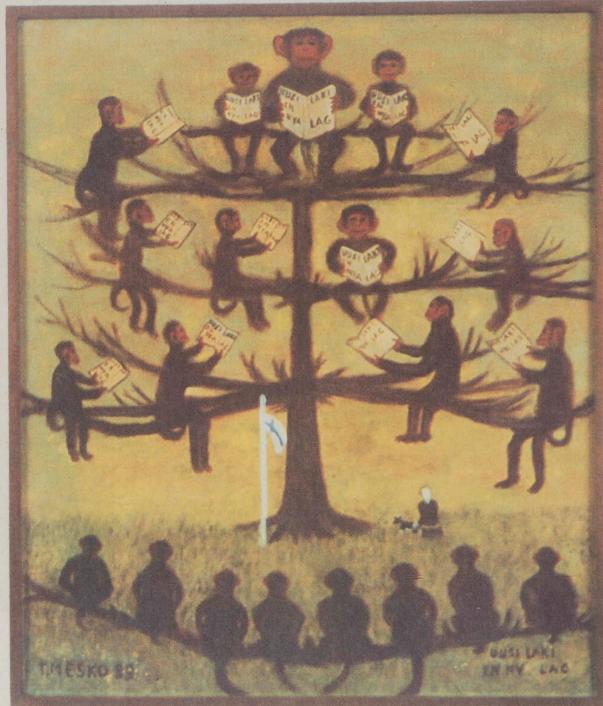
townspeople in plain dark suits, traditional architectural structures, farm animals — are strongly vertical, even rigid, and bring to mind compositions by European symbolists like the Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler (1853-1918).

Ms. Esko sometimes attached verses by her favorite poets to the backs of her paintings or wrote her own comments right into them. Their philosophical themes can give her more sentimental images something of an edge. For example, "Weeping Cow" (1988-89), which, indeed, has a cow shedding tears in a blue-green field, carries the phrase, "Creature's sorrow is greediness of the people," expressing her concern about a disappearing rural landscape.

A NEW LAW" (1985), in an allusion to paper-pushing government functionaries, shows a throng of monkeys seated in the branches of a big tree; each holds a handbill labeled with the picture's title while, beneath the tree, more monkeys and the artist herself, accompanied by her dog, look on. (Ms. Esko often painted herself into her pictures as a witness to the scenes they documented.) "The Bread Thief" (1984) depicts a poor villager who has been jailed for stealing a loaf of bread while well-to-do burghers stand in line to receive favors from government officials. "The Bread Thief" is signed "Tyne Esko '84" and "little thieves are thrown in jail," says its inscription.

"If you're not formally trained, you usually don't get the recognition your talent and ideas deserve," said the art dealer Luise Ross, who discovered Ms. Esko's work last year at an exhibition of modern Finnish folk art at a museum in Helsinki, a setting in which, she recalled thinking, such overtly political art did not exactly fit.

Of her first show in America, Ms. Esko said: "I'm happy that New York City is far from Finland. The audience will be free from prejudices and will be able to concentrate on the messages of my paintings, not on my person."



TYNE ESKO '85

Tyne Esko: Paintings, Poetry and Protest

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