

**Richard Hawkins**

"Urbis Paganus – Part I + III"

1 September – 4 October 2006

opening reception on Friday, 1 September, 7-9 pm

Urbis Paganus

Now let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one. This would mean that in Rome the palaces of the Ceasars and the Septizonium of Septimius Severus would still be rising to their old height on the Palatine and that the castle of S. Angelo would still be carrying on its battlements the beautiful statues which graced it until the siege by the Goths, and so on. ... Where the Coliseum now stands we could at the same time admire Nero's vanished Golden House. On the Piazza of the Pantheon we should find not only the Pantheon of to-day, as it was bequeathed to us by Hadrian, but, on the same site, the original edifice erected by Agrippa... And the observer would perhaps only have to change the direction of his glance or his position in order to call up the one view or the other. – Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents". (NY: 1961, pp. 16-18)

A project in 5 parts, with one introductory section, a proposed index and subsets, consisting primarily of photo-collages but also including books, folios and ceramics. As follows:

Introduction (5 collages)

I. Lapis Niger: Pater Paedegogyrastica (5 collages, one book, 2 ceramic tiles)

II. Magna Mater / Eros Asiaticus / Attis / syncretism (one collage, other works in production)

III. The Masculine Son (The Cult of Masculinity) (19 collages, 2 books, 5 folios and other works proposed or in production)

IV. The Effeminate Son (Favorinus, Baubo, Archigalli, Heliogabalus, castration, the callipygian backside, Orientalism) (proposed)

V. "The Cabinet of the Hermaphrodite" (proposed)

(Index)

"The City of Pagans" began during a short one-month stay in Rome 2 years ago. Though the purpose of my stay was to research a lecture on Caravaggio, I quickly became distracted by the myriad classical sculptures in the Montemartini, Capitoline, Borghese and Vatican museums and soon began indulging a connection between my attraction to these and various contemporary readings I'd been doing on gender diversity.

As the project eventually organized itself into 5 interrelated sections and, as outlined above, took as a model the construction of gender through familial and substitutional acculturation, I thought it needed a title like "Urbis Paganus" to lend the allusion of a subject's generative and reactive journey through a cityscape of seductions and determining influences. In short it's a kind of bildungsroman where the final chapter, "The Cabinet of the Hermaphrodite", is meant to offer an expansive opt-out of the determinism expressed in the preceding sections.

(Notes: The use of photography and collage in relation to sculpture ... reproductions, doubly old, twice-distanced ... accumulative, one window opens onto several more ... decontemporize

An old dynamic, middle-aged aesthete on a Grand Tour or Journey to the Orient and finds a mirror of his desires in either the distant past or exotic East. He Otherizes...)

Part I. Lapis Niger: Pater Paedegogyrastica: Property and Prohibition

The Lapis Niger, literally "the black stone", is a section of paving stones at the NE corner of the Roman Forum between the Curia Julia and the Arch of Septimius Severus. In its original state it would have been distinct from the rest of the otherwise white stone grid pavement of the Forum by color as well as alignment – it was off-kilter. It pre-dates the Forum and, even by the time of the latter's construction, its original use and purpose had been forgotten. Though rumored to be the grave of Romulus, founder of Rome, it was generally (and significantly) both preserved and avoided as a location of ill omen.

Excavations underneath the Lapis Niger uncovered a stone pillar with an inscription in a Greek so archaic that its translation is in dispute. It seems to be a marker placed by a pre-Roman king along the path of the Palatine valley to warn any future sons of the king to 1) stay off the so-marked path, 2) not defile it with any refuse and 3)

stay away from any property of the king's, including wives and daughters, otherwise, 4) you will be turned into a slave or 5) killed.

What I found interesting was that the Lapis Niger performs the dynamics of both phylogenesis and taboo: an initial command from a father, intended for his sons, threatens subjugation or death to anyone crossing the boundary into the father's sacred property. By extension, the marker-as-law prevents incest by prohibiting interaction between sons and the father's wives and/or daughters. Phylogenesis, an actual event occurring in a specific though long-forgotten past but relaying an affect on contemporary behavior, is illustrated by the fact that at some moment in pre-Roman history the father's initial command went into effect, over millennia it was covered with sediment, eventually re-marked with black paving stones and, though no-one would have remembered or known its actual long-buried purpose, it was effectively still evident and, just like a taboo, the sentiment of ill omen caused Romans to both preserve and avoid it.

The term "Lapis Niger" also carries an allusion to Rome's perhaps other famous black stone, the apparently fist-sized piece of meteorite imported from Pessinus as the incarceration of the Magna Mater.

## Part II. Magna Mater / Eros Asiaticus / Attis / syncretism

During Hannibal's invasion of Rome in 204 CE, the Sybilline oracles prophesied that Rome's enemies would be defeated if the Mother of All Gods were brought to Rome from her seat in Pessinus. An envoy was then sent to Phrygia to bring back to the city the sacred artifact (a fist-sized piece of anthracite?, essentially a black stone) and cult figures of the goddess and her son Attis and was to become the primary religion of Rome until the time of Claudius and the end of the Augustan reign.

Cybele was most often represented as a multi-breasted matriarch whose role as fertility goddess was quickly abandoned for the sake of synthesizing existing Roman cults. Here eunuch priests and orgiastic rites (related to Part IV) were perhaps the last expression of the polymorphous before Christianity disbanded the perverse and marginalized concepts of Otherness into the forbidden and pagan. Under the rites of Cybele, sexuality and carnality were acts of worship.

Though the research and works in this section are not yet complete, following are a number of intended topics:

On syncretism: In reference to religion, syncretism is an attempt to reconcile disparate and even opposing beliefs and attributes of previously separate gods or practices into one, both existing simultaneously rather than. To use an example from Part III, by adding the role of Bacchus onto the cult of Antinous, neither lose integrity, rather they both gain dimension. I find also some relationship between syncretism and the aggregate aspect of collage.

On matriarchal ideologies: When pre-Christian matriarchal religions are talked about in contemporary society outside Classics and Theology departments, it is usually in the realm of the more spirit-minded strains of feminism. I would hope to steer my intentions away from Earth-goddessness and into some of the ideas I find in post-structuralism, specifically, desire-driven acts as not only a contrast to but an alternative to societal norms and patriarchal legal/legacies.

On psychoanalysis: ...

1. The Great Mother disappeared, missing mother (1 collage)

## Part III. The Masculine Son (one collage each unless otherwise noted)

1. culti masculin

2. Some houses, some quarters, very odd indeed. All necklaces and bows – yet not a mother's daughter in sight, just cross-dressed miscreants, tailfeathers waving, mixing wine and pig's guts and placing remnants of their manhood on an altar, spreadeagled to the penetratorial Praetorian lance in service of the Magna Mater. In perverted rituals – no Sybilline priestesses here, only men may approach the altar of the Mother of All, "Away! Unclean!", they shout, "No invaginated flutists can play here." Such secret men's houses, bachelor's cults and sacred bathhouse brothels come from the East – Greek, you know, and even farther afield (Persians, Turks, what have you). Her Great Mother's sons, this one at an eyebrow pencil, this one plucked and tonsured clean, that one supplicant, poised to receive the offering of a healthful young and brawny novice Adonis (sacred prostitution, you know, though the sacrificial whore is more likely to be a senator and the worshipful congregation a horde of slaves and day-laborers). The sacred chalice, of course it's shaped like a prick. One fanciful priest can't even steer (a telling misuse of the term) a moment's glance away from the mirror. And here's something else to record in the annals (!) of our times: a veritable private mirror reflecting a civil war. A general must really be quite accomplished to be able to both vanquish his rival as well as keep his complexion fresh. Lead forth onto the battlefield, General, and 'neath your war helmet a rejuvenating, exfoliating cucumber mask. (It's probably best not to ask where that pretty cucumber's. But fair warning to parents of pretty young virgin boys and escorts of buxom blossoming lads, steer (that word again) clear of the Palatine gardens lest your boy progeny lose a thing (or two) to the castrati acolytes of the Great Mother. – freely adapted from Juvenal, "The Satires", related to Part IV

3. (praying boy + old man)
4. old/young – ephobic type)
5. "Young marriageable men these days have fallen under the spell of a soporific called "whole and equal love". I would say though, in defense of an apparently "fragmented and unbalanced love", that it seems you blind yourself to a fair amount of adventure and experience by balancing the scales in such a way. Time was I was paid rather fairly by a rich banker, loved rather squarely by an ugly old arithmatist, loved rather soundly by a charming young flute player, needed rather firmly by the baker's wife, chained to the hearts of many a slave, saluted by troops, preyed upon by priests and generally made my way through my loves in myriad varied and lopsided ways. It's only in old age that I've settled down to my old twin of a hag wife and it's with remorse that I see the young men of today acting like the old man of me today rather than the green boy of me yesterday. Times have changed - I know all too well – but, young bachelor, you forget that the heavens are ruled by a whole pantheon of squabbling and wonderful gods. Why must you settle on just one inordinately fair one? – An Old Poet of the Late Republic
6. (masculine old/young)
7. (a precursor to Part III.11.)
8. Antinous Lasvici, lasciviousness and vividness (related to III.13. and III.14 below)
- A.-E. Antinous (5 folios of 10 cards each)
9. (old/young)
10. "They divide and conquer, old Vibennius and that faggot son of his. Anything under 40 has had to swat away the sticky claws of the former and anything above, the snapping hungry boytwat of the latter. The time has passed when your kisses were best when furtive and sneaky, old man. Lately they announce themselves from half a block away. (Said a young boy in a dark sauna, "Jeepers, what a smell. You'd think some old cunt had shit a fishmarket in here". "Oh that", says another, "Don't worry. It's just old Vibennius trying to steal a kiss"). And as for you Junior, if that flabby ass of yours gets any hairier ... "Yikes! Was that a possum or the world's fattest housecat just rumbling past?" "Careful you don't let him up to have a look. If you'd like young Vibennius to sit on your lap a while there's one price. But there's an even higher price just to keep him off it." – freely adapted from Catullus XXXIII
11. (old/young favorite)
12. Antinous Eros Asiaticus (related to Parts II and IV). This collage features a charcoal-on-paper rubbing of an inscription from a marble fragment exhibited on the grounds of the American Academy, Rome.
13. Stone Sculpture, Godliness and Effeminacy (a precursor to Part IV). "Take a look at the sculptor's art and see what a fine throng of fleshpots the gods must be. The stone does often find a masculine form, muscled, tight and lean but these statues are of a general type, ephebes and athletes mostly; portraits of handsome Antinous are an exception. They are gods rarely, for the stoneworker models them on our more effeminate sons, luscious, delectable and ripe – Dionysus', Apollos, Bacchi – with rounded bellies and even plumper rumps. But, then again, what a godly paradox: soft, comely flesh from hard, impenetrable stone. And here the head of Nero as another example: stern and immutable, fleshly and perverse, a quite good portrait of a god."
14. "A Statue of Bathyllus". (related to III.13.) (6 collages completed and 1 book in production). The collages in "a Statue of Bathyllus" began as research into the Archaic Smile, a specific trait of Greek sculpture dating from about 600 to 480 BCE. This strikingly winsome characteristic is seemingly in contrast to the boxy, rigid stoicism of the rest of the stone figure and literally appears within a decade, continues consistently for over a hundred years and then disappears just as suddenly into a period called "the Severe Style". Scholars differ on what the smile may have meant; some believe that it marks a change from the Egyptian phenomena of statuary as after-life embodiment and thus the smile becomes a reminder of the mutability of lived experience. Others simply assert that the smile is anomalous and cannot be explained. One further interpretation – and one I quite prefer – is that the smile, though crude, is intended to add "vividness" to what is otherwise a canonical ideal. This research led me into poetry of the period (in search of "vividness", I suppose) and this is where I stumbled onto the character Bathyllus, purportedly the most beautiful boy in the court of the tyrant Polycrates of Samos and subject of many odes and verses by the poet Anacreon. Polycrates himself was so enamoured of the youth that he erected a statue of him in the Temple of Hera. This sanctuary and most of its statuary and embellishments are now lost but what I find interesting is that of the two primary regimes of temple sculpture: personifications of gods and memorial statuary of heroic warriors, a statue of Bathyllus would've been neither. Bathyllus was a contemporary non-dead, non-hero and his only major contribution to society was his willingness to - and apparent worthwhileness of - being looked at.
- A.... Bathyllus ...
- B. "Sculptor, look to the sunny apple for the velvety down on his cheek. And if your failing art can capture so much, look there again for its perpetual flush. While, for his mouth – no, it's too much to ask – even words elude its witching charm. Make it then the veritable seat, the penultimate throne that Poetry would claim its own. The lips – ah! – though silent, let a smile wear there on it, as if secrets and flowers were hidden inside". freely adapted from Anacreon, "Ode 17"
- C. In a culture where death alleviates suffering, a smile holds back death's secrets – the smile is unnaturalness and will be gone with the Severe Style.
- D. "Steady your chisel, so exacting, so right, to grasp the rapture of my eye's delight or else it'd ere to show that ivory neck of pale, sunless snow which now in hair-veiled shadow lies removed from all but Fancy's eye". freely adapted from Anacreon, "Ode 17"
- E. Taking off from Egyptian influence, by the Archaic period, the kouroi steps off, away from the wall – to be looked at by the living, the sympathetic (as opposed to the Egyptian dead). As he gradually gains "interiority" and "naturalness" – so say historians – the drunken smile gives way to gravity.
- F. Bathyllus, Greek beauty, beloved of the poet Anacreon. So beautiful that Polycrates erected a statue to him in the Temple of Hera.

15. The Masculine Son (1 book, 32 pages)

16. "The Bust of Patroclus: Henry Fox Talbot, sculpture, photography, stillness, time and light". (1 book, in production)

17. Second and Third Generations. (miscellaneous collages on syncretism, in production).

- Richard Hawkins, August 2006