

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO OUTSIDER
SCULPTURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO D.C. VAN DER MESCHT**

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FOR MY PARENTS

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INTRODUCTION

It was both by luck and by accident that Dirk Charley van der Mescht's creations were discovered as a topic for research. Originally, the possibility of exploring Outsider art had not occurred to the researcher at all. Initial enquiries were based on the idea of writing on something topical in the Eastern Cape. For this purpose interviews with various artists took place in Grahamstown, Bathurst, Port Alfred, Kenton, Bushmans and Alexandria, all of these being in the immediate area. The majority of people whose work was viewed can be likened to that of 'Sunday painters', in the sense that these artists view their work as a hobby. Finally, after much travelling and many enquiries, Mr Ed Campbell of Bathurst School provided information about a recluse who lived out in what seemed to be the middle of nowhere. It was said of this man that he was a strange person who produced even stranger works. On investigation it was discovered that he was an Outsider sculptor by the name of D. C. van der Mescht. He and his family live at a small railway siding, known as Zuney, eighteen kilometres west of Alexandria. Isolated, uneducated and untutored, he had created an environment of sculptures for no apparent reason at all. The only explanation he appeared to be able to offer is that: he just does it.

The initial impression of Zuney, when visited after a very hot and dry Summer, was of a forsaken, dry, windy, dust-ridden place. Later it was discovered that in fact Zuney is situated amongst some of the wealthiest

farmlands in this area. It seemed strange and contradictory to find there this pensioner, poor and almost untouched by the time that had passed since he had settled there, to work as a railway porter and live in a humble house - albeit painted bright blue and yellow - surrounded by primitive corrugated iron shacks, in such affluent surroundings. In this 'wasteland', as it was originally viewed, there is a multitude of bizarre, brightly coloured sculptures, emitting that unsettling 'otherness' with which Outsider sculpture confronts one.

This work was viewed with keen interest as it seemed possible that knowledge of the original creative urge could be gleaned from it. Having the opportunity to get to know a true Outsider first hand, as well as being able to view his work, prompted a desire to discover the cause of this creativity. Was the work dependant on his isolation? If so - why? Thus, the researcher was confronted with the question of creativity in its most basic original form.

This, then, provided the impetus for further research, not only into the work of D.C. van der Mescht, but also into locally available literature about Outsider art in the Western world.

Here it should be stated that although this thesis deals with an example of South African Outsider art, it was nevertheless necessary to explore Outsider sculpture in relation to Western culture, as most of the literature deals with this and was the only means of gaining insight into

the subject. Also, it should be noted that research was confined to this one South African in relation to Outsider art. Extensive travelling, ample photographic documentation, as well as in depth research would be necessary to discover what else this country has to offer in this respect. Furthermore, Outsider sculpture is just one aspect of Outsider art. In South Africa it is still something of an unknown quantity. Very little research has been done here on Outsider art, let alone Outsider sculpture.

One of the rare 'known' examples of an Outsider sculptor is Helen Martins. Those who have heard of her conceive of her as a recluse - an eccentric - who spent the latter half of her life creating a bizarre and disconcerting environment of sculptures. But she is just one example, and it was only due to the publicity her strange works attracted, as well as her death, that anything about her became known at all. That she was an Outsider is unknown to many, as most people live in ignorance of this term and the concepts surrounding it.

Thus, not only is most of the literature on Outsider art concerned with that found in other countries, and neglectful of Outsider sculpture, but most information available on the subject is either out of print or written in foreign languages. Nevertheless, in this thesis, the understanding of Outsider art, or Art Brut as it is sometimes called, has been outlined together with case histories of various Outsider artists. But, on the whole, this has had to be of a very general nature, owing to

the lack of specific, detailed, analysis of Outsider sculpture as such.

In addition to the above limitations, much of the research is presented from a psychological perspective. One of the first to explore the subject, Dr Hans Prinzhorn, was both a psychiatrist and art historian. He was a pioneer in creating an awareness, through research, of the phenomenon. Amongst his discoveries about Art Brut, it seemed to him that he had come upon important information leading to an understanding of the original creative urge or *Kernvorgang*, and that this was particularly striking in Outsider art which is untouched by culture, especially the creations of psychotics. For this reason, his studies were based primarily on this group. Much of this, however, offers scope for study of other Outsiders, as well as the creative urge in general. It is also necessary to state that, according to the different schools of thought present in Psychology today, some of Prinzhorn's ideas and findings on the subject may appear outdated. Even so, it seemed necessary briefly to look at his theories in order to establish whether D.C. van der Mescht can truly be considered an Outsider.

Outsiders are an economic and sociological phenomenon. They know nothing about art or culture - nor do they appear interested. Their non-aligned creativity springs up in all sorts of settings, principally, though, alongside, or beyond the borders of social conformity. They live on the margins of our society, as lighthouse-keepers, railway porters, janitors, and even mental patients. They do not seem to be able to explain why

they create what they do. It appears that their sort of work is made with little or no conscious intention. They just do what they do, and their lack of knowledge seems to work in their favour. Taking this into account, together with the study of other Outsiders, it became clear that Van der Mescht could be seen as one of these marginal creators.

The way in which the research for this thesis has been arranged has, therefore, had to be divided between general remarks about Outsider art and Van der Mescht, as well as more specific analyses of both. The first chapter attempts to establish what an Outsider is, and Outsider sculpture as an aspect of Outsider art. Chapter two deals with Van der Mescht's history and attitudes with a view to placing him within this definition. Chapter three provides a closer look at Outsider sculpture with actual types of Outsider sculptors and examples of their work. The last chapter links Van der Mescht's work stylistically with Outsider sculpture.

When it comes to the fundamental motivation behind this research, it can be said that it constituted a quest. Through extensive interviews and research, it was hoped to gain an understanding of the source behind this creative urge. Choosing Van der Mescht was deliberate as he is an Outsider and it was possible that he could provide a key to the mystery that surrounds Outsider art, and, perhaps, in the process, something would be discovered about the creative urge in general.

As, no doubt, previous researchers on the subject thought, it was hoped

that contact with an Outsider in person, and personal observation of his work, would bring about an understanding of the mysteries behind Outsider creation. All the new-found knowledge thus gained did not, however, make this any clearer, as one mystifying contradiction after another was confronted. It was realised that behind such creation there is a mystery that not only applies to Outsider creation, but also to Westernised art today. In short, when we ask ourselves why artists create, we are, perhaps, no closer to an answer than was Ernest Becker when he said that **"the distinctive human problem from time immemorial has been the need to spiritualise human life, to lift it into a special immortal plane, beyond the cycles of life and death that characterise all other organisms."** (Robbins, 1984: p.0).

CHAPTER ONE

Who are the Outsiders?

"Art does not lie down on the bed that is made for it; it runs away as soon as one says its name; it loves to be incognito. Its best moments are when it forgets what it is called." (Dubuffet, 1979: p.1).

When asked whether he considered the work that he had done as art, Dirk Charley van der Mescht replied: "Ek weet nie of my werk wel kuns is nie. Sommige mense noem my werk 'kuns', maar ek het nie so iets in gedagte gehad het nie. Ek geniet dit net om te doen." Further questioning revealed that he created his works on sudden impulse; and in a manner totally unrelated to art in the sense of the informed approach based on training and education, otherwise referred to as 'Mainstream art' or the 'Fine arts'. This attitude, and lack of knowledge regarding art is peculiar to Outsider artists and is reflected in their work. As Dubuffet says: "the characteristic property of an inventive art is that it bears no resemblance to art as it is generally recognised and in consequence - and this is all the more so as it is more inventive - that it does not seem like art at all". (Cardinal, 1972: p.6). This is true of the work of Outsider sculptor Van der Mescht.

But who are the Outsiders? The term does not describe a school or a movement. 'Outsider art' is an English translation of the concept of

'Art Brut' (ie. 'raw' or 'unrefined' art). The term was coined by Jean Dubuffet. He used it to describe the visual expressions of the untutored, for example those of certain psychotics and so-called 'primitive' painters. He considered it **"the art of the alienated"**. (Cardinal, 1972: p.24). Outsider Art as a whole includes psychotics, mediums and innocents. These are not meant as strict delineations because, amongst Outsiders, there are no stylistic trends or conscious groupings of modes of artistic expression. Basically, they are works which have escaped 'cultural conditioning'. They constitute **"an art without precedent or tradition"** (Musgrave, 1979: p.8). The Outsider artist, furthermore, is a phenomenon of a particular economic and social situation. S/he has no definition in Art History.

The question of terminology has always been uncertain. Various authors have used different terms for this type of art. For example, Wilhelm Uhde, Jaques Guenna and Anatole Jakovsky have referred to it as 'naive art'. Jean Lipman called it 'primitive painting', and Robert Goldwater and Oto Bihalji-Merin termed the artists 'modern primitives'. The term 'naive' has the disadvantage of being confused with 'naifs', ie. 'Sunday painters'. The latter produce works naively imitative of Mainstream art that cannot be viewed as Outsider per se. In a narrow, literal sense, Outsiders can be seen as 'modern primitives'. There are, however, professional artists who reject all they know in an attempt to imitate

the work of the Outsiders¹. These are the real Modern Primitives. In a sense they are akin to the Naifs, as both deny personal vision in an attempt to produce what they conceive of as fashionable art. The difference between the two lies in that the Modern Primitive will feign ignorance, while the Naif will fake knowledge. The phrase 'primitive painting' used by Jean Lipman is also confusing, in that it brings to mind the tribal arts. Vladimar Melekvic's 'primal arts' is somewhat better than the above. Other terms include 'grass-roots' artists, 'autodidacts', 'marginal artists' and 'the irregulars of art'.

The gist of the matter is that Outsider art lies outside the confines of Mainstream art. Expressions such as the 'Singulars of art', 'Isolate art', 'Art Extraordinary', are simply attempts to classify a basically indefinable art. It is **outside** classification in terms of style. Therefore **"the line encompassing the world of the Outsider has necessarily to be loosely drawn"**. (Kinley, 1987: foreward).

Outsider art is not part of the 'system'. The work of these men and women does not belong to any recognisable artistic tendency. There is no typical style. It is produced by people who work entirely on their own, for themselves, often in conditions of indigence. Outsiders are in no sense professional artists. Outsider art is inventive, spontaneous

¹ As a result of Dubuffet's research, and its influence on his work, it is a look which has become both fashionable and marketable.

and original¹, because of the fact that it is not associated with any school. This originality is reflected in a remarkable independence of aesthetic and cultural reference points (Lipman, 1972: p.8).

There are, however, characteristics peculiar to Outsider artists. By this it is not meant that we can rigidly apply a set of characteristics to all Outsiders, nor do those characteristics serve to define Outsider art. An example of this is that when creating three-dimensional structures and sculptures a fundamental characteristic is that, in his/her compulsion to create images, "**materials of fortune**" are frequently used (Dubuffet, 1973: p.22). Such materials are often apparently useless or inappropriate items of everyday usage. These are simply items which happen to be available. For example, the Outsider will use any medium at hand such as bread, string, scraps of paper, etc. In structures erected by three major Outsider environmental constructionists - Ferdinand Cheval, Simon Rodia and Clarence Schmidt², commonplace materials such as rough stones, cement, surplus timber, scrap metal, industrial junk etc. have been used.

In two-dimensional art, especially painting and drawing, illusionistic devices such as the perspective systems used in figurative art, are unknown to Outsider artists. Their works often contain repetitive

¹ While not implying that Mainstream art is without originality, this is often difficult to determine because of the complexity of influences that are usually present in such art.

² C.F. chapter 3 page 63-64.

patterning and an intense, but naive attention to detail. Here too, there is little regard for the use of conventional art materials, such as those utilised in the Fine arts.

Outsiders possess no official qualifications as artists. They have no training, are not subsidised, and because they do not strive for recognition their work is not created for a market. They work on their own, often secretly, for themselves. They create works in a spirit of indifference towards, and ignorance of, the public world of art. They are unaware of being 'artists'. Their lack of training is a crucial criterion, yet it does not mean a lack of self-acquired skill. Outsider artists do not seek approval.

Most Outsiders, therefore, are subject to 'minimum conditioning', but this is, however, no reflection of their intelligence. Furthermore, many are social misfits, but then, alienation, non-alignment and imbalance are some of the conditions favourable for the development of a self-contained world. The remarkable thing about their work is the discrepancy between it, and a mundane, external existence¹. This enrichment of their private worlds can be seen as a compensation for their dissociation from mundane reality. In turning away from public communication, the world of the Outsider is one in which he is solely in charge of meanings.

¹ Outsiders live on the edges of society, often in poverty, surviving in mundane employment such as cemetery sweepers, porters or janitors, etc.

One of the strange aspects of Outsiders is that, in many cases, creation begins suddenly and for no apparent reason. This unprecedented creativity usually occurs at the age of about forty or fifty, and sometimes only after sixty. Many stop just as suddenly, as if their task has been completed. One possible explanation for such latent creativity is that **"the capacity and inclination for abstract thought tends to increase in middle-age; it is said that the middle-aged man withdraws his interests from concrete objects, he has reared his children and has largely achieved his aims in life. Consequently his interest turn to more abstract concepts and imagery"** (Ehrenzweig, 1967: p.280).

Another characteristic tendency amongst Outsiders is **"the intense tilling of one particular patch"** (Maclagen, 1987: p.15). This differs from the often dramatic stylistic changes occurring in the work of professional artists. A criticism levelled at the Outsider is that s/he does not show any progression or development in his/her work¹.

Amongst all these characteristics is a common principle: an independence from the real appearance of objects. Outsiders create neither visual copies nor abstract interpretations of nature as is done in Mainstream

¹ This is not so in the case of Van der Mescht.

art. They construct their own visual equivalents of what they see¹, **but** they do so instinctively and unknowingly like children or primitives. Their representations are not of the things themselves nor of their appearance. Instead, they **denote** them, in total defiance of visual logic, accentuating what seems to them most important to their themes, and neglecting everything of lesser significance in the context of their desired representation. Therefore, the logic of the Outsider appears to have its own code and frame of reference. This is a personal way of seeing, and a private mode of expression. According to Vladimar Malekovic it is "**not the reflection of reality, but rather the reflection of the idea of reality.**" (Cardinal, 1978: p.4). In other words an Outsider's reality consists not of the thing itself, but its imprint on his consciousness.

A general attitude is that these works are made with little or no indication of intent. Unlike professional artists, the Outsider does not consciously create a work of art. Apart from a closed-circuit dialogue with him/herself, the Outsider does not create in order to communicate. As a general rule such works are made without any concern for their effect on other people. Communication, therefore, is not consciously intended. The relation of Outsiders to their work is often devious and

¹ It could of course be argued that professional artists create visual equivalents of what they see. Their ideas, however, arise intellectually, and are created in conjunction with academic and artistic knowledge. Conversely, Outsiders' work arises from instinct and desire. They create forms from what they think and believe, rather than from what they actually see.

infused with ambiguity. Some claim the source of their motivation arises from dreams. Others profess to be guided by spirits. Yet most, when confronted with questions of how and why they create, are reluctant, if not unable, to explain this themselves. Some proclaim their achievement. Others make things and then forget about them. But all believe that their creations are authentic.

Nevertheless, in spite of what has been said, sometimes Outsiders are taken up by dealers and galleries, finding themselves in fashionable demand. An instinctive reaction towards such Outsiders who become part of the 'fame game'¹ is that they have compromised their personal vision for the gains of recognition, even if their work retains its authenticity. Oto Bihalji-Merin says that should "[Outsider art] **take notice of the temptations of the market, it risks the true climate of its existence**" (Ayres, 1980: p.14). The work should not be separated from the circumstances of its creation. If it is, it ceases to remain Outsider art and verges dangerously on becoming 'naif'. Klaus Jergen-Fischer believes that "**It [Outsider art] has lost its innocence and is**

¹ Scottie Wilson was an Outsider painter who found his works had public appeal. Paradoxically this occurred through Dubuffet's exposure of Art Brut by means of exhibitions. Wilson now exhibits, sells and caters for public demand. He has assumed the role of 'artist'. His work has consequently been affected by this.

in danger of developing into an academy of amateurism"¹ (Ayres, 1980: p.15).

Judging from the above characteristics one would assume that Naive, Primitive and child art could also be considered Outsider art. This is not so. The definition by Dubuffet holds that: "the artist shall be innocent of pictorial influences and perfectly untutored, he shall be socially non-conformist, even to the point of diverging violently from the psychological norm; and he shall not cater for the public" (Cardinal, 1978: p.2).

The Naifs (or autodidacts/Sunday painters/neo-primitives) diverge from the above criteria in that they are well integrated into their own culture, whereas the typical Outsider has retreated into his/her private world. Naifs are in a false position because they strive for recognition², yet lack training in academic skills. Theirs is an attempt to become colleagues of professionals. Their efforts are to create works that will rival, or at least belong, in the same category as those who receive acclaim or demand high fees. The Naifs are creating to order. They are playing a part that is not consistent. Borderline cases

¹ This writer's feeling is that while Outsider art should be appreciated for what it is, should the Outsider start producing for communication, money, fame, or selling 'art works', s/he is neither Outsider nor Sunday painter but amateur. Outsiders are innocent regarding knowledge of the above. The source of creation should not be compromised.

² This does not necessarily apply to all Naifs - some treat their work as a recreational activity. Hence the term 'Sunday painters'.

however, are not uncommon. Some Naifs are unwilling to participate in official cultural events, while others are indifferent to success.

To uninformed Western eyes, Primitive or Tribal art can appear to have the same characteristics as Outsider art, but it is not the same. Tribal art is bound by strict traditions, and professional skills handed down from father to son. A departure from style or tradition is unthinkable. Individual inventiveness is encouraged only by very few tribes. Although quite different from Westernised cultures, theirs is an art which represents a highly developed expression of its own culture. The Outsider art under discussion here is, therefore, a phenomenon of Western culture as it deviates from **our** cultural norms and set figurations.

In the same way as with tribal art, Folk art cannot be regarded as a form of Outsider art. Folk art belongs to peasant tradition. It is based on inherited motifs and styles. Therefore it is the art of a community, and not that of any individual. In this case 'art' is similar to 'craft' because it is anonymous and subject to conventional patterns. Folk art and Primitive art lean towards function and decoration, whereas Outsider art is non-utilitarian.

Child art also seems somewhat like Outsider art. For instance, it is non-utilitarian and shows a lack of training and an innocent vision of things. According to Dubuffet the child's psyche is not very rich and is therefore unequal to that of the adult. Children cannot generate as

much psychic energy as adults. This viewpoint is not totally convincing because the adult psyche is more likely to be subject to 'culture conditioning'. Closer to the point is that children lack the concentration of the adult mind. Their works are generally a matter of passing interest, which the child sometimes seems incapable of carrying through to any satisfactory degree of completion. Additionally, once children realise the interest shown in their work by parents and teachers, they no longer create spontaneously. Instead, they begin to seek approval. **"Beyond a certain age they create with an audience in view, and with a self-exhibiting tendency that equates with an attempt to become integrated into society"** - an attempt diametrically opposed to that of the Outsider. (Cardinal, 1972: p.37).

How, then, do we explain the existence of Outsider art? It is not a new phenomenon, it has always existed. What is new is that in the present climate of art, it has been welcomed as an anti-cultural, rather fashionable phenomenon. The French artist, Jean Dubuffet, has been largely responsible for disseminating an awareness of Art Brut. Its attraction lies in the 'original creative urge' which is at its core. Even though there is very little evidence of Outsider art before 1900, the conditions in which it arises have always existed. Thus it can be assumed that it has always been there. It is only recent 'discovery' and publicity that has made it seem a 'new' thing.

It was during the years following World War II, that Dubuffet began

collecting works of those he considered to be "**immune to the polarisations of culture and the copycat spirit of art**" (Cardinal, 1979: p.21). He was considerably influenced by Dr Hans Prinzhorn's Artistry of the Mentally Ill¹. Prinzhorn was one of the first to draw comparisons between primitive, mad and child art.

Realising that those with psychological and social deviances would be in a position to produce works 'untainted' by culture, Dubuffet's researches led him to psychiatric institutions. There he discovered that non-aligned creativity could be found along, or beyond, the borders of social conformity. From this he concluded that creativity was incompatible with social approval.

In Art Brut, Dubuffet discovered what he perceived as lacking in Western art. The work in his collection showed spontaneity and inventiveness. As the creators were obscure individuals, unaware of the world of professional artists, their work shows little or no derivation from cultural models or customary art. Dubuffet believed these works to be "**propositions of themselves, unpredictable and wholly inventive both in**

¹ Prinzhorn's book was published in 1922. It was from early in 1945 onwards that Dubuffet began collecting Outsider art.

medium and in their inspiration" (Dubuffet, 1973: p.20). He and Breton¹ saw in Art Brut a vitalism, and an identification with natural forces which they found missing in Western art. Art Brut escaped the canons of culture².

Dubuffet was a bit extreme in his ideas about immunity from the iniquities - as he saw them - of Culture. In fact no-one, except the extremely psychotic, is completely immune to culture. Michael Thévoz³ puts forward the idea that any work of art that manages to achieve total independence from a context, will be beyond all hope of recognition, and therefore become invisible to us (Cardinal, 1979: p.23). Nevertheless, two of the characteristics Dubuffet liked about Art Brut were its lack of communication with the public and its independence from external motivation.

Both Dubuffet and Prinzhorn were pioneers in creating an awareness and

¹ André Breton (1896-1966) evolved a theory of art and literature based on psychoanalysis. He had great influence through the Surrealist Manifestos of 1924, 1930 and 1942. Breton defined Surrealism as pure psychic automatism, intended to express the true process of thought, free from the exercise of reason, and any aesthetic and moral preoccupation. The aim was to free artists from the normal association of pictorial ideas and all accepted means of expression. (Murray, 1976: p.68).

² In Dubuffet's pamphlet of 1968, he reacts against the knowledge of culture in a State which has an official Ministry of Culture controlling the taste of the populace through its *Maisons de Culture*, by way of an educational system backed by a "heritage of foolproof masterpieces" (Cardinal, 1973: p.8).

³ Michael Thévoz is the present curator of the *Collection de l' Art Brut*.

understanding of Outsider art. Dubuffet's beliefs had as their foundation an idea expressed by Prinzhorn; namely that "a primal creative urge belongs to all human beings, but has been submerged by the development of civilisation" (Cardinal, 1979: p.24). As an art historian and a psychiatrist, Prinzhorn believed that "Psychosis can act in certain cases as a facilitating agency, enabling the creator to bypass culture at a stroke and tune in directly to his latent creative resources." (Cardinal, 1979: p.24). His interests and research, dealing primarily with psychotic art, led to a clearer understanding of the psychological foundations of pictorial configuration¹. This, in turn, has provided us with some insight into Outsider art, especially that of psychotics.

The first studies on psychotic art had as their aim "working out a fixed correlation between certain stylistic features and the different forms of dementia identified by psychiatrists" (Thévoz, 1976: p.12). The

¹ CONFIGURATION:-English term occasionally used in Gestalt theory. It describes the external form, figure or shape of a thing as resulting from the disposition and shape of its parts; the external aspect or appearance, contour or outline. ie.: to configurate; to frame by construction, to fashion, shape, to give configuration to.

GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY:-A psychological approach that focuses on the dynamic organisation of experience into patterns or configurations. (German *Gestalt*, 'shape, figure, configuration, totality'). Gestalt Psychology holds, instead, that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In Gestalt theory, seeing is essentially a phenomenological process in so far as what is 'seen', is what appears to the seer rather than what may actually be there. (The Longman Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry, 1984. New York and London: Longman Publications).

psychosis, Schizophrenia, was at the centre of these researchers, because schizophrenics were the most prolific producers. Prinzhorn's statistics maintain that: **"seventy-five percent of the drawings made in asylums were the work of schizophrenics."**¹ (Thévoz, 1976: p.12).

Prinzhorn believed that in normal artistic work all expressive gestures are subordinated to one purpose, which is to actualise the psyche². This consequently builds a bridge from the self to others (Prinzhorn, 1972: p.13). Navratil³ says, **"Primarily, artistic creativity is precisely not under the control of the ego⁴, but serves the purpose of finding the ego (*Ichfindung*) - and through the ego, of establishing a relation to the real world - even if this aim is not always attained"** (Cardinal, 1972: p.44). With the psychotic, however, this does not occur. The psychotic's expressions are not connected to outside purposes, except those directed solely and self-sufficiently towards their own realisations (Prinzhorn, 1972: p.13). This concept is clarified by Lawrence Alloway's description of psychotic art as an art which creates **"an alien realm by means of a complex self-referring system. It is an**

¹ Unless otherwise specified, the use of the term 'psychotic' will be maintained, as it encompasses not only schizophrenia, but also other forms of psychosis including manic-depressives.

² The word 'psyche' implies one's entire psychological make-up.

³ Dr Leo Navratil of Vienna, responsible for his book on schizophrenia and art: Schizophrenic und Kunst (1965).

⁴ The 'ego' is that aspect (of the personality) which relates to the world in a realistic way by limiting its primitive, instinctual needs. (Tyson, 1987: p.373).

order which is closed to us: one with hidden co-ordinates." (Prinzhorn, 1972: p.279). It is, in short a closed-circuit process.

Within this self-sufficient domain, there are characteristics peculiar to psychotic art. There is a propensity toward symmetry, or at least rhythmical form together with repetitive patterning. Navratil offers four main tendencies as guidelines: **"formalisation; deformation; the use of symbols; and physiognomicization¹".** (Cardinal, 1972: p.21). The specific symptoms of Psychotic art include: **"stereotypy, in which the same motif is repeated several times, or contamination or blending, as when an animal body is given a human head or visa versa."** (Prinzhorn, 1972: p.3). Psychological studies also reveal that there are characteristics pertaining to different types of psychosis. For example there are: **"mechanical, realistic copies made by idiots and epileptics; the disorderly, restless unclean smears of maniacs; and the clumsy distortions with a tendency toward the obscene, in the works of paralytics and others."** (Prinzhorn, 1972: p.3). Other Psychotic art, such as that made by schizophrenics also has its own pronounced features, some examples being: iterations², fantasy, absurdity, incoherence and stylisation. Aside from being flat and unreal, schizophrenic art is also characterised by fragmentation and disintegration. Rennert³ describes

¹ **PHYSIOGNOMICIZATION:-**the tendency to impose facial interpretation on shapes. (Cardinal, 1972: p.21).

² **ITERATIONS:-** repetition of formal elements such as hatching, circles, zigzags, dots etc. (Cardinal, 1972: p.42).

³ Rennert, responsible for Die Merkmale schizophrener Malerei (1962).

its stylistic traits as the **"intensification of contours, mixed profiles, condensation of pictorial elements [and the] transparency effect"** (Cardinal, 1972: p.21).

Some examples of Psychotic sculptures are: bread sculptures, wood carvings, and rag and string effigies. More so than other Outsider sculptors, and especially because of confinement, the psychotic sculptor is fundamentally dependent on 'materials of fortune'¹. Although not all psychotics create, confinement is seen as a contributing factor in the creations of this group. As Thévoz says: **"Detention is particularly propitious to imaginative creation"** (Thévoz, 1976: p.112). This is known as the **"secondary gain from internment"**² (Thévoz, 1976: p.125).

Of all Outsiders, psychotics are some of the most prolific producers of creative work, because they have direct access to the configurative instinct. This is partly due to the fact that psychotics, by their very nature, turn away from normal reality. Prinzhorn explains that: **"the configurative process, instinctive and free of purpose, breaks through in these people without any demonstrable external stimulus and direction, they know not what they do"** (Prinzhorn, 1972: p.269). As a result of this direct access to the configurative instinct, the work of the psychotic, more so than with other Outsiders, displays an independence of aesthetic and cultural reference points. His/her work is therefore

¹ C.F. chapter 1 page 10.

² C.F. chapter 3 page 79.

an invention and projection of a surrogate world which becomes his/her reality. Such psychotic Outsiders invent their own language as they go along. As this involves a closed-circuit process, communication is not the aim. The psychotic creates for him/herself alone.

In both Psychotic and other Outsider art, Prinzhorn found that works untouched by the norms of culture were characterised by recurrent motifs - the so-called archetypes. Jung expanded on this idea. These are explained as being the innate shapes imprinted on the collective psyche of all men. This could explain, for example, why carvings from the Congo show a similarity to the work of Outsider sculptor, Karl Brendel¹. This could also be why medieval woodcuts show distortions of the human body similar to those used by some schizophrenics². Lowy explains that this archetypal connection is a result of what he calls "**the primitive memory image**"³ (Lipman, 1972: p.4). As with archetypal connections, the theory behind 'the primitive memory image' states that there are mental images common to all men, which can influence their configurations. This could explain why there is, at times, an unconscious relation between the works of some professional and Outsider artists.

¹ C.F. chapter 3 page 85-86.

² The archetypes are most apparent in Psychotic art.

³ This results from the phenomenon that the memory does not retain all images equally. It selects the aspects which represent the object in the greatest clearness and completeness (Lipman, 1972: p.5).

Outsider art, in conclusion, appears to arise from instinct and the original sources of emotion, and not from the confines of culture. In accordance with what has been established thus far, Van der Mescht can be considered an Outsider. He is neither a 'medium' nor a psychotic and can only be described as an 'innocent'. If one is to accept Dubuffet's ideas, Van der Mescht fits in with the opinion that Outsider art is an alternative art, resistant to labels. Van der Mescht's work is alien to that of established culture, in that it deviates from our cultural norms and set figurations. His too, is an art without precedent or tradition. Dependant on 'materials of fortune', his sculpture reflects an independence of the real appearance of objects. As will be seen with other Outsiders, his concern has been not with the product, but with the process. Outsider artists have always existed and they continue to operate. This will be shown in the following chapter which relates more specifically to Van der Mescht.

CHAPTER TWO

Outsider Sculpture: D.C. van der Mescht (1921-)

Dirk Charley van der Mescht was born in Graaff Reinett, in the Sneeu Berg, on the fourth of October 1921. He was the eldest of twelve children, two of whom had not survived. This was quite common in those days, but perhaps of significance is that one of these had been Dirk Charley's twin brother, who had accidentally been killed by a six year old boy when barely four months old. Though he can hardly have been aware of the tragedy, the age of his twin - three months and twenty-nine days - at the time of the tragedy is very clear in Van der Mescht's mind. Even though he will not admit it, the loss seems to have affected him strongly. This is seen in his refusal to discuss the subject; and his withdrawal at any mention of it by Sarie, his wife. According to psychologists¹, a remaining twin feels a persistent sense of loss. This, together with having so many brothers and sisters², could have reinforced the tendency on his part to be a recluse and somewhat misanthropic. These characteristics are not atypical in the nature of Outsiders.

¹ Francis Galton, originator of "**twin-study method**", dealt with this in his study on the mutual dependence and various forms of maladjustment (Goldenson, 1984: p.768).

² Van der Mescht was left with seven brothers and three sisters. He says he had to find ways to escape them, when feeling claustrophobic with so many children around him.

In fact the general patterning of D.C. van der Mescht's life history is, in many respects, similar to that of most Outsiders. Firstly, he has led a marginal life and has therefore been subject to 'minimum conditioning'. That is, he has had very little education and no formal training in the arts. Secondly, due to location and an antisocial attitude, alienation has played a major part in his life.

His education was simple. He attended a farm school in Willowmore. Being left-handed, he was forced to work with his right hand, a common practice in those days. As a child, he had always made things with his hands, such as woodcarvings, 'draadkarretjies' and 'bokwaentjies'. He neither drew nor painted. As he says: **"Ons het nie daardie soort dinge op skool gedoen het nie"**. He just made things such as 'klei ossies' on the Karoo brakpanne. This 'working with his hands', is something which has persisted throughout his life. For example, he used to make picture frames, 'riempie stoele' and shoes.

It appears that Van der Mescht attended school until approximately standard three. He himself seems to have little regard for **"learning"** and is vague on the subject¹. His education, at all events, was minimal. Until the age of nineteen, he worked on his father's farm as a 'plaasboer'. After this he, his brother and his father took part, as 'troopies', in what he refers to as **"Jannie Smuts se oorlog"**. Following

¹ Uncertain as to what age or standard he left school, he says that in those days you could leave school whenever you wished. He appears to be somewhat embarrassed by his lack of education.

this, post-war depression made employment difficult to find. Most of the time the only available jobs were those offered on the farms. By the end of the war Van der Mescht was, furthermore, a married man¹. When he was released from the army in October that year, he and Sarie stayed with her family in Pietermaritzburg for a time. In 1945 they moved to Aberdeen, where he worked as a 'voorman' farming sheep. They were very poor, as he earned only one pound and ten shillings a month. Van der Mescht says: **"Dit is swaar vir die armes, wat die ryk man dink hy besit, wat hom in elk geval ryk maak"**. By 1948 the couple already had four children, and another was on the way. It was during this year that Van der Mescht and his family moved to Port Elizabeth. Here he worked as a 'plaasboer' for his father who owned a few plots in Greenbushes. For a while, during this period, he even had a job spot-welding at the General Motors factory. In 1952 he began working on the railways as a 'spotganger'. At this time, his only creative activities consisted of the making of cots and toys for his children. About city life he says, **"Dit is te deurmekaar in die stad om dinge te maak"**. He and his family remained in Port Elizabeth until 1958 by which time there were nine children.

In 1958 Van der Mescht was sent to an out-of-the-way railway siding called Zuney-du-Mond, but still in the Eastern Cape. Originally, he was sent there for three months to relieve someone who was ill, but this became permanent when he was offered a post as porter. Zuney is situated

¹ At the age of twenty-one, while he was stationed at Pallsmoor, he met his future wife, Sarie. This took place in Cape town. They were married in Bellville, on the eleventh of January 1943.

eighteen kilometres west of Alexandria, and ten kilometres from Perdevlei on the coast. It is just off the coastal road linking East London and Port Elizabeth. As a human settlement it consists of the railway siding which doubles as a post office, and a railway house occupied by the Van der Mescht family, across the line. Otherwise, there is a small farm school and a trading store, but these are out of sight from the siding. The siding serves as a collection/departure point for the surrounding Eastern Cape farmlands. It also links these with Port Elizabeth which is three hours away. The surrounding landscape is often dry, windy and desolate. In the distance, circling the plains, there are hills which break the monotony, yet at the same time heighten the sense of isolation of the place. It was here that the Van der Mescht family finally settled, and the last of their ten children was born. And it was here, from 1962, that Van der Mescht created the colourful sculptures which today link the two buildings on either side of the railway line.

Van der Mescht says he prefers the isolation of a place like Zuney, to living in the city, because **"he walks his own path"**. He also said **"Ek is eintlik gelukkig op 'n stil plek"**. Van der Mescht is conscious of a special relationship with nature and says one can never tire of looking at it, because it is constantly changing, and there is always something new to see. He expresses a strong need for **"die veld en see"** and says, **"ek moet dit vir myself hê"**. He likes to allow his imagination to play on the forms in nature; to see things appearing in the shapes of others. For example, he once found a large rock in the hills which reminded him

of a rabbit. So he took it home and created a sculpture of one. Van der Mescht considers himself an individual and a free spirit, who would feel caged anywhere but in Zuney. Asked how he would view the offer of two tickets to London, he replied with his usual candour: "**Nee wat! Wat sal ek dan nou daar in 'n vreemde plek gaan doen?**".

When the family went to Zuney there was nothing there, aside from the railway cottage and siding, isolated by endless landscape. They built up the garden, started a vegetable patch and planted peach trees. In addition Van der Mescht worked on his sculptures between railway shifts. On questioning him as to why he created his works, he answered that there was nothing there [in Zuney], and that he wanted to make something of his environment¹. With many of these Outsiders, environment is important as it is an enrichment of their private worlds.

This environment now consists of the garden which is terraced and divided into landscaped niches which provided a flourishing organic environment, heightening, and at the same time, contrasting with Van der Mescht's strange and colourful sculptures of figures and animals. Cameo scenes are created by ponds and rockeries which incorporate some of his smaller sculptures. Low walls built by Van der Mescht along the garden path and perimeter, and as part of the terracing, also have sculptures built into

¹ Helen Martins of the Owl House said a similar thing about her location in Nieu Bethesda: that there was nothing there and that she wanted to make something beautiful. She consequently created a world of sculptures and shrines around her. C.F. chapter 3 page 53.

them. There are also altered, adapted and re-painted garden gnomes and cupids. Created with found objects, helicopters, bi-planes and other aircrafts, together with windmills, spin and rotate in the wind which always seems to be blowing there. These aviation crafts on poles, as well as an arched gate-post with a bell in its centre, add structure to the milieu. This results in a strange amalgamation of man-made objects and natural environment. This milieu, together with Van der Mescht's brightly coloured sculptures, forms a bizarre oasis on the windswept plains of Zuneij. The backyard is now inhabited by geese, the odd turkey and a couple of dogs. Near the 'kleinhuisie', and occupied by chickens, a derelict car wreck or two lies abandoned to rust.

The house was built in 1901. Roofed in corrugated iron, it consists of a 'stoep', a 'voorkamer' flanked by two bedrooms, and an old-fashioned kitchen at the back of the house. The kitchen, the hub of the house, is basic and utilitarian. Reminiscent of a scaled-down farm kitchen, it is dominated by a shiny black, cast-iron wood-burning stove. Since the Van der Meschts have been there, the inside of the house, like his sculptures, has also been brightly painted. For example, one of the rooms has been painted in yellow and sky-blue, in some places cutting diagonally across a wall or ceiling. When asked why he had painted the house in such a manner, he replied: "**Ek het net besluit om dit te doen**". This décor recalls the painted interiors of houses in the fifties. Reminiscent of the post-war period, and peculiar to a particular socio-economic background and standing, the house is simply furnished with the

main emphasis on the 'voorkamer'. Here, one finds highly lacquered and veneered furniture, a couple of display cabinets and some of Van der Mescht's carved occasional tables. Fashionable in the forties, there is a picture rail from which paintings and photographs hang at a forty-five degree angle from the wall. Most of these are surrounded by Van der Mescht's carved frames which, like his tables, have zigzags cut around the edges. Aside from a framed wall-hanging, the pictures themselves are either landscape prints, old-fashioned holograph images and family photographs. Some examples are: a hand-tinted photograph of Van der Mescht and his wife taken during the war, and a photograph of him in uniform surrounded by medals. Other memorabilia comprises of numerous snap-shots of the now very large and extended Van der Mescht family, china ornaments and vases on doilies and some Zimbabwean birdcarvings. The interior of the house reflects the past, indicative of a certain era and social background. That is, all except for the large colour television in one of the bedrooms. Van der Mescht's concern for his environment is seen, not only, in the above, but also in the maintenance of his home and sculptures.

Although he was pensioned in 1977, Van der Mescht and his wife remained in the railway cottage¹. They have both worked there for the past thirty-five years. He still does a bit of '**poskantoor werk**', and Sarie runs the general store. Their youngest son, Bernie and his girlfriend

¹ This was a special concession by the railways, considering the long period of employment and the services still rendered.

continue to stay with them.

By living in Zuneij, Van der Mescht has dwelt in relative isolation from middle age onwards, refusing even to go to Grahamstown. Such voluntary isolation is peculiar to Outsider artists. Yet there is a difference here. Unlike most Outsiders, Van der Mescht does not live entirely on his own. Most are recluses and lead solitary lives, whereas for him, his wife and children are very important. As he says, "**tuis bly is belangrik**". Within the family he displays some old-fashioned patriarchal tendencies, for example, he believes that women should have children; that God made them that way. His wife is the stabilising factor in their home. She is the practical, well-organised one in the family. He further maintains that children hold a family together, and that one continues to live through them. This attitude shows that, for him, continuation lies with his children and not in his work. His work came about for no such purpose; it is an unprecedented creativity.

One of the characteristics of Outsiders is that they often retain some of the religious beliefs which were part of their upbringing. This occurred with Van der Mescht. He says that one just has to look around to realise that there must be a God, and that there must be a reason for it all. "[Hy] **weet daar is 'n God**", because He has helped them a lot - in their poverty, with his giving up alcohol, and in his doing something creative. His is a private kind of belief. Van der Mescht says that

"[Hy] aap nie al die stappe [formele]¹ na nie". This is not easy, because ordinary people do not understand the Book properly. His attitude is best explained in De Bona's words: **"In time the interpretation takes over as the essence of the religion"** (De Bona, 1977: p.17). He does not go to Church - he believes it to be too corrupt. **"Min mense wat kerk toe gaan luister na die Predikant"**. People view it as a social occasion, where they can observe what everyone is wearing and saying and doing. He says that he benefits more from watching Church on television. Something else Van der Mescht emphasises strongly is that **"Jy moet liefde hê om God te ken"**. He says that things have changed today. The way it used to be is that one was always taught to believe, and religion was an integral part of family life. Today religion is just a Church-going formality. The following encapsulates his views on the subject: **"A religious meta-system runs the risk that if belief wilts then only ritual, habit and social pressure can keep the meta-system operating"** (De Bona, 1977: p.34). His wife says that television has replaced **"Huisgodsdienst"**. The family no longer communes for the evening prayers. Thus television has replaced this particular form of family communication, and religion no longer plays the role of guiding and holding a family together.

Van der Mescht believes that man, whether religious or not, is a restless being, until he finds his peace in death and, one assumes, salvation. It is also his belief that this restlessness needs channeling. It is

¹ ie. formulae.

possible that his own restlessness found an outlet in alcohol. Alcohol then became a problem which he had to face¹. One day he saw a picture of an elephant in a magazine and had the urge to make one. This helped to alleviate his craving for alcohol. He made the sculpture and that was how it all began. It became something which was a pleasure, and he was caught up in the creative process. It seems evident that to him the creative urge and man's restlessness have a direct connection.

Van der Mescht, when questioned about art², professed ignorance and dismissed the subject with a shrug: **"Dit het niks met my te doen nie"**. This lack of knowledge is characteristic of Outsiders, as they create in ignorance. When asked if he considered his work to be 'art' he replied: **"Destyds het die mense vir my gesê dat dit kuns is. As ek dit vroeër geweet het, miskien sou ek eerder begin het - dit is die jammerte van die hele saak"**. Yet he does have a rudimentary idea about talent. He believes that everyone is born with a talent. If they tell you they have none, it is a lie. Van der Mescht believes his talent lies in his ability to use his hands. Yet, in the contradictory manner³ peculiar to

¹ Alcoholism, in the case of Van der Mescht served as the 'trigger mechanism' which sometimes precedes a period of creativity in Outsider artists.

² The use of the word 'art' here describes both Mainstream art, and art (for example Tretchikoff) with which the less educated public are more familiar.

³ It is characteristic of Outsiders that they often contradict themselves when questioned about their work and their relationship to it. Their explanations are often ambiguous. It is as if in their case, the truth is continually shifting and changing.

Outsiders he says, "Maar hoe moet jy nou weet wat 'n talent is?". He says that the problem with life is that one is not always aware of having a particular talent, or how to utilise it, or if one is doing so to the best of one's ability.

Like most Outsiders he cannot explain his work. He maintains that some things just come naturally. They are simply in your thoughts, and you cannot rationalise about them. Working with his hands (as he terms it) is something that he enjoys. About this he says: "**Ek kan nie daaroor stories vertel nie**". It just comes out of its own accord. God, he states, has made the world and that is how it is. He makes his sculptures and that is the way it is¹. Other than this he has no clearly developed philosophy, or psychological reasons for creating his works. Research on 'known' Outsider art in general indicates a similar instinctive, rather than intellectual, approach to creativity.

Frequently an untoward event, such as an illness or loss, acts as a 'trigger mechanism' inspiring a period of creativity in Outsider artists. Alcoholism was probably the 'trigger mechanism' in the case of Van der Mescht. He had for some time realised that he had a problem with alcohol. One day, in conversation with Sannie, his favourite daughter, he promised he would stop drinking. He said that there were six bottles

¹ His whole approach to religion and art tie in with the deep-seated Calvinistic faith in 'n Hoer Hand', that is, God guiding everything. Very simple people often see things the way he does, for example, his ideas about God's intentions relating to women.

left, and that these would be the last. Sannie 'phoned everyday, and came back after three weeks to check that there had been no more drinking. She had not believed him, but he kept his word and has not touched alcohol since. Today he has no desire for it whatsoever. The sight of someone inebriated irritates him extremely. He even finds the smell of alcohol annoying. The day that he started his sculpture, he stopped drinking. Creativity in his case was not a conscious cure for his alcoholism, therefore it cannot be viewed as art therapy as such. The extent to which it became a conscious therapy, from this time on, was that if he felt the craving for liquor, he would start working and become involved in his own world.

Van der Mescht becomes very emphatic when discussing things about which he feels deeply and sincerely, as reflected in his views on religion and family life and his ideas about city life versus isolation. Beyond these, he views life with a naive almost child-like amusement and spontaneity. For instance, his attitude to the writing of this thesis reflects this amusement. He can, however, be quite taciturn if he does not feel like the company of other people.

Van der Mescht's characteristics of naivety and amusement are evident in his work. His subject matter consists mainly of animals and people. As he says, "**Ek is lief vir diere**". His animals are often game animals which he says he has seen in the Addo Elephant Park. His portrayal of people reveals an amusement almost to the point of caricature. These

people are often shown in conjunction with animals, for example riding a horse or fishing.

Van der Mescht estimates that he began his works somewhere around 1961/3. It is characteristic of Outsiders that their creativity starts sometime during mid-life. Van der Mescht was in his forties at the time. According to psychologists the capacity for abstract thought increases during middle-age¹. He began with his first elephant (he made one more), and finished with his "Adam and Eve" in about 1985. He estimates that it took him approximately twenty-five years to do it all². Like most Outsiders he began working unexpectedly, seemingly without reason, and stopped just as unexpectedly.

His attitude towards his work is one of diffidence and secrecy. It was suggested to him by a news reporter that he study art. Van der Mescht, however, holds little faith in University education. As he said, "**Dit sou alles verander het**". At this he refused further discussion.

Toward the end of his 'twenty-five year spate', his increasing asthma was his ostensible reason for slowing down. It is possible that it was simply age and arthritis which brought his creativity to a halt. He calls asthma his enemy - "**'n bitterde ding**". It was in Zuney that it

¹ C.F. chapter 1 page 12.

² Van der Mescht is especially vague about specific dates and times. He says he does not really keep track of such things.

began to affect him. He complains that in the Karoo he was strong, that about twelve years ago he could climb any mountain¹. Yet, God must take him should he ever lose his eyesight. To him, it is inconceivable to live in a world that cannot be seen.

Besides being unaffected by publicity, others' opinions about his work do not worry him. "As hulle dit beter kan doen, moet hulle dit self doen". At times he is amused at peoples' reactions. He chuckles when he tells how Africans are afraid to come near the house at night, for fear the sculptures will come alive. He also maintains that people must form their own opinions about his work. Outsider artists do not appear to have the same insecurities and doubts about their work which mainstream artists have. They have none of the self-conscious motives of mainstream artists. Interaction, to them, is completely unimportant.

When talking to Outsiders about their work, they express themselves ambiguously. Their stories shift all the time. Besides this, one cannot ascertain whether the ideas for their work come to them consciously, or subconsciously. However, **what** they create is an **instinctive** idea of the thing, rather than an educated one. For example, Van der Mescht's elephant is created through instinct rather than knowledge. Outsiders are unconscious of method in terms of style, fashion or technique.

¹ It is necessary to make it clear that in this instance, it is age that is speaking. Van der Mescht has not been in the Karoo since he was a child. Of course he was strong then. And naturally he could do more twelve years ago. He was younger then.

Without questioning anything, they just do it. Mainstream artists, on the other hand, have at their disposal analytical methods, but sometimes lose the essence of their ideas. They are more conscious of being involved in the creative act. Outsiders, as previously mentioned, have little idea about 'art' as such. As stated already, they are untouched by 'cultural conditioning' or the dictates of fashion. They know nothing to measure themselves against, except themselves. Because Van der Mescht works instinctively, his works are expressive in character. There is more emphasis on pose and gesture than accuracy of form, texture, or anatomy.

Yet, with the exception of psychotics, the underlying creative process in both Outsider and Mainstream art is similar. It involves the same struggle and problem-solving process. Van der Mescht says that he keeps on at it until it feels right¹. He becomes involved with a sculpture, and it does not leave him alone until he has reached a conclusion. Like mainstream artists, on completion of a work, he feels a pressure to move on to the next one. When asked if he ever gets frustrated with his work - angry at it - he acknowledged this, but added with humour, "**Hoe kan ek nou kwaad word; ek het dit dan self gedoen!**".

¹ It is a debatable point with regard to how many mainstream artists 'feel' something is right as opposed to 'knowing' something is right. Mainstream artists have, besides their innate feeling, resource to quite a range of analytical methods to assist them, should their feeling remain unsatisfied. Also, they interact with other people and are therefore accessible to criticism, comment and response.

Like mainstream artists, Van der Mescht also thinks visually. He says he pictures everything in his head. As far as could be gathered in the interviews with him, his ideas arise from instinct and desire. He is independent of external motivation. Here, he differs from mainstream artists. However, he maintains that his ideas arise from his own thoughts. Yet there are exceptions, because his first elephant was inspired by seeing a picture of one in a magazine. And his "Hansel and Gretel" sculpture was derived from the relevant fairytale. Furthermore, the idea for his last work, "Adam and Eve" originated from thoughts about the Biblical Adam and Eve and the creation of the world. Humorously, he linked the married couple - his wife and himself - to the very first couple on earth as part of a continuous theme connecting the Creation with marriage.

Some of Van der Mescht's ideas were also influenced by watching television, such as his "Bounty Rider". In many respects his ideas were his own, as they arose from his own perceptions and way of seeing. He was not, however, influenced by literature or different philosophies, as reading is something which has held very little interest for him. His interests were primarily visual.

A criticism often levelled at Outsider artists is that, unlike mainstream artists, there is no development in their work. Van der Mescht diverges

from other Outsiders in that there is a development in his work¹.

Van der Mescht's technique consisted of making a wire armature from 'ogiesdraad'. The armature was worked into a cement base which made the sculpture moveable, and was then stuffed with straw. Everything depended on getting the armature correct, as this was shaped in the form he was going to sculpt. Once he was happy with the armature, he built up the form with cement². Asked how he arrived at this technique, he explained that "[Hy] het in vroeër jare met sement gewerk". With his first idea for a sculpture, he realised that the armature method used in cement work could be adapted for sculpture. Once the sculpture was completed, he painted it with brightly coloured enamel paints.

Helen Martins used the same armature and cement technique. Instead of using paint, however, she incorporated glass into her sculptures to give them colour. It is typical of Outsiders to use any medium at hand, and

¹ C.F. chapter 4 page 95-96. Regarding the development of Van der Mescht's work. It is also necessary to bear in mind that 'development' is a term reserved for Mainstream art only. It has however been noted that there is a change in his work. His work does become more advanced, and with practice there is inevitably a natural progression in skill.

² Due to discussion on other Outsider sculpture, it is necessary to distinguish cement from concrete. Cement is smoother than concrete, and easier to manipulate, consisting of one part cement to four parts water. This is the suggested ratio, as it is considerably weakened if excess water is used. Concrete consists of two parts cement to two parts gravel to six parts water. Due to the inclusion of gravel, concrete would not be suitable for the sculptures that Van der Mescht makes. As it is, cement already dictates to style, making for less precision and more roughness of form.

to incorporate found objects into their work. Van der Mescht, for example, used kudu horns on his cow sculpture. He also used 'seevark' ribs for the tusks of his elephant. They are sculptures in the round, as he says that they are to be viewed from all angles. There are exceptions. His "Adam and Eve" are built into a low wall. From the hips down they become relief sculptures as they face each other across a pathway. "Hansel and Gretel"¹ is a relief sculpture as the strangely androgynous Hansel/Gretel figure emerges partly from the front wall of the small house. The head, however, rises above the wall and is sculpted in the round.

Although Outsider art is considered non-utilitarian, some of Van der Mescht's sculptures form a semi-functional purpose. He has built a man, leaning across the road, holding a road sign with reflectors on it. This is the narrow gravel road which passes the front of his property². The sculpture serves to slow down the drivers of cars, so that they will not run over the dogs, geese and chickens. His helicopters and aeroplanes, built out of wood, cans and plastic bottles, are placed on top of tall posts on which they revolve. The propellers also spin around and these sculptures indicate wind direction.

Van der Mescht has not done any more sculptures since the completion of

¹ The "Hansel and Gretel" sculpture consists of one figure in front of a small house. The figure is androgynous in that it is both Hansel and Gretel, having both male and female attributes.

² See map, page 131.

his "Adam and Eve". He has nevertheless taken care of the maintenance of his works when finances permit. In 1988 and 1989 he began by repainting some of the sculptures. This year (1990) he has begun repair on his first elephant and the pink and black man. When asked if he was going to make any more sculptures, he just shrugged. Research on other Outsider sculptors indicates that it is unlikely that Van der Mescht will begin sculpting again.

Typically Outsider, Van der Mescht himself is unable to explain the reasons for his creativity. Neither can he explain much as to how his works come about. "Wie weet wat gaan in 'n persoon se kop aan?" is all he has to say. These are things which do not occur to Outsiders. As he says, "Ek doen dit net".

CHAPTER THREE

'Known' Outsider Sculptors and their Work

This chapter will provide a closer investigation of 'known' Outsider sculptors in, and also outside, South Africa. This will be by means of case studies allowing further elucidation of the nature of Outsider sculpture, and its makers.

It should be kept in mind that, in general, three main types of Outsider artists may be distinguished from the mass of art produced outside the so-called mainstream. These are:

- 1) the 'mad' or psychotic artist;
- 2) the 'innocent', or 'primitive' as s/he is sometimes called¹;
- 3) the 'psychic' or medium who professes to be spiritually guided.

Strangely enough, there is no record of 'psychics' or mediums, who are Outsider sculptors. The closest thing to a psychic in the realm of sculpture, are those who profess to be inspired by dreams². This leaves us with the 'Psychotics' and the 'Innocents' as the main producers of Outsider sculpture.

¹ Van der Mescht is an 'innocent'.

² Bogosav Zivkovic is an example of an 'innocent' who is inspired by dreams. C.F chapter 3 page 73.

A review of their works exposes the following categories of sculpture:

- a) Environmental Sculpture, which consists of a number of sculptures which, as a whole, create an environment.
- b) Environmental Constructionist Sculpture, which encompasses architecture and assemblage.
- c) Constructions of assemblages in the form of 'Inventions' and 'Machines'.
- d) Sculptors, in whose work 'matter takes the initiative', claiming that they 'see' things in the stone or wood medium.
- e) Mixed Media Sculpture which entails the use of anything at hand, often consisting of stuffed objects. This is especially evident in the work of psychotics, who usually make use of found objects.
- f) Sculptors who work from a set 'idea', making the medium work for them.

These categories cannot be applied rigidly. Many Outsiders belong in more than one category. Van der Mescht is the 'innocent' type of Outsider and his work is both (a) Environmental as well as (e) Mixed Media, at times and (f) he works from a set idea. For him, it is the idea which is the starting point.

Thus, these definitions of types and categories overlap and interrelate all the time. These are just guidelines from which Outsider sculpture can be approached. Thévoz made this very clear when he stated: **"True philosophy is not one that lays down certainties and classifies phenomena; on the contrary, it is one that discerns the reason for these**

categories and makes it clear how arbitrary they are." (Thévoz, 1976: p.31). This is something which applies to the whole field of Outsider art, as well as the parts which make up the whole.

Obviously, in Outsider sculpture, the techniques, subject matter and systems of figuration have little to do with those handed down by tradition. Neither are they influenced by present trends in art. There is a tendency amongst these people to stay with a chosen medium. In this they differ from professional artists who feel it necessary to gain experience in other media. This does not, of course apply to those who use mixed media¹. In their case, the nearest accessible article could be incorporated into their work.

A reason for the innovation in the use of media amongst Outsiders, is a high degree of technical freedom resulting from being self taught. Sometimes, if a set method or procedure is unknown, a fresh approach can unwittingly be discovered by finding a new way of dealing with both subject and medium. In some cases, the choice of medium is the result of the individual's previous experience of it. Van der Mescht, for example, previously had worked with cement in a utilitarian manner. It was therefore a natural progression for him to utilise this knowledge in order to express his ideas in sculpture. To some, such as European

¹ As previously mentioned, some Outsiders use anything they can find, in order to create their sculptures.

peasants, wood-carving was a traditional skill. Bogosav Zivkovic¹ was born of peasant stock in Yugoslavia, and is an example of an Outsider making use of a medium which he knew. Others had been stone-masons², ironmongers³, mechanics⁴ and tailors⁵. In their art they used that with which they were familiar. But this does not apply to all Outsiders. Ferdinand Cheval, the postman, knew nothing about the media he chose for the building of "Palais Ideal"⁶. Helen Martins⁷ also had no previous knowledge of the medium of cement with which her sculptures are made. She, however, differs from the above mentioned examples. She only had the ideas. Coloured workers, who knew about cement, executed these under her instruction⁸. It is necessary to stress that the prior knowledge some Outsiders possess of a medium, is only a utilitarian knowledge. They know nothing of creating sculptures. This they learn as they get

¹ C.F. chapter 3 page 74.

² Clarence Schmit, once a stone-mason, is known for his "House of Mirrors". C.F. chapter 3 page 64.

³ Guy Buigues, previously a metal-worker, produced improvised assemblages of scraps of waste metal, soldered together.

⁴ Müller, once a mechanic, made large machines with no purpose other than to be geared up and down.

⁵ Michel Nedjar, previously a tailor, made stuffed doll-like objects.

⁶ C.F. chapter 3 page 67.

⁷ C.F. chapter 3 page 57.

⁸ Helen Martins and Abbé Fouré were exceptions with regard to this use of assistance. Abbé Fouré, it is said, made use of the assistance of an old man. It is usual for Outsiders to execute their work on their own.

involved in the process. This often unwittingly results in technical innovations. As is said of Outsider sculptors, they are, "**propositions of themselves, unpredictable and wholly inventive both in medium and in their inspiration.**" (Dubuffet, 1973: p.20).

The 'Psychotics' of course use anything that comes to hand. Even more so than the 'Innocent', the question of method is not one which becomes an issue to them. Psychotic outsider sculptors are also known, however, to use previous utilitarian knowledge of a medium. Henrich Müller¹ is an example. He was of a mechanical frame of mind, and invented an ingenious vine-trimming device in 1903. On his confinement to an asylum, he produced large machine-like sculptures. These did not serve any purpose, other than to be geared up and down. The work of the 'Psychotics', like that of the 'Innocents', reflects innovation in the use of media². In psychotic sculpture, however, the main innovations occur in the inventive use of media. The 'Psychotic' can create a sculpture from the most unlikely materials as he³ is, through internment, dependent on found objects. The use of found objects is something which permeates the whole of Outsider sculpture. It is, nevertheless, more

¹ C.F. chapter 3 page 48 footnote 4.

² In two-dimensional psychotic art, however, innovations do not occur to the same extent as in the work of innocents, as a lot of this psychotic art is fairly similar in appearance. C.F. chapter 1 page 10-11.

³ It has been found that usually men, and not women, are the producers of Psychotic Outsider sculptures.

characteristic of Mixed Media sculpture, 'Inventions' and 'Machines', Environmental Constructionist sculpture and Environmental sculpture.

Before discussing the various categories, or genres, of Outsider sculpture in greater detail, it is necessary to clarify the distinction between Environmental Constructionist sculpture and Environmental sculpture, in order to facilitate further discussion. Environmental Constructionist sculpture consists mainly of architecture and assemblage. Admittedly, at times, there are sculptures, forming part of the architecture, to be found in the midst of all this. But these are just parts which contribute to the whole, and are not created specifically for individual focus. The creators of these environmental constructions could be viewed as Outsider 'builders' or 'architects'. The best known examples are the houses built by Clarence Schmidt¹, the "Watts Towers" by Simon Rodia², the "Palais Ideal" created by Ferdinand Cheval³ and the tower dwelling "Incuriosity" by Stephen Sykes⁴.

¹ C.F. chapter 3 page 64.

² C.F. chapter 3 page 65.

³ C.F. chapter 3 page 67.

⁴ Stephen Sykes (1894-1964) built, and rebuilt three times in ten years a 65 ft. tower dwelling called "Incuriosity". It was precariously constructed, randomly painted in bright colours and embellished with odd pieces of junk. A 'telephone' invented by Sykes (a funnel on the end of a rubber hose) ran from the second to the ground floor. There was also an 'air conditioner' which was made from a periscope pipe, venting air from the roof down into his bedroom.

Environmental Outsider sculpture, on the other hand, is that in which a whole world of sculptures is created, cement being the most common medium. In other words, they cover their entire property with numerous works and/or cameos thereof. Being created by the same person, these works are often linked not only by style, but also by subject matter. Such links enable them to be viewed as an environmental whole, together with other features of the property which is thus transformed¹. As already mentioned, Van der Mescht is of this type. There are also those, like Helen Martins, who not only create a whole world of sculptures, but also recreate an environment to contain their works. She has produced a milieu of shrines, turrets, arches and towers for her sculptures. Her property has been divided into the "Camel Yard" and the "Owl House". The emphasis, however, is still on the individual sculptures themselves, rather than their environment.

In South Africa, the most famous example of Environmental Outsider sculpture which is comparable to Van der Mescht's work, is, of course, that of Helen Martins who created her "Owl House" and "Camel Yard" at Nieu Bethesda.

Nieu Bethesda is a small Karoo village approximately thirty kilometres north of Graaff-Reinett. The house has a fenced-in verandah, on which twelve concrete owls with eyes of inset glass have been placed. "The Owl

¹ These outsiders make use of the grounds of their properties.



House" is inscribed over the front door. The words, "The Camel Yard" are written in beaten wire in the fencing which encloses the back yard. More than two hundred sculptures fill this area, including a naked woman with outstretched arms, standing on a strange beast with the body of a camel and the head and wings of an owl. Otherwise, there are buddhas, dancing women, a snake holding an apple, shrines, spires and arches, reliefs, painted suns, pyramids and beckoning maidens. Amongst all these, processions of camels and robed figures raise their eyes to the East. Examples of other sculptures are peacocks with spreading tails bejewelled with glass, and owls with large, blank eyes made from the headlamps of an old car. Like Van der Mescht, the method Helen Martins used was cement over a wire armature. Unlike him, she incorporated glass into her sculptures for colour.

Helen Martins was born in Nieu Bethesda in 1899. Unlike other Outsiders, however, she did not suffer from a lack of education. She trained as a teacher at the Training College in Graaff-Reinett. She left Nieu Bethesda when she married a man who later died or deserted her. At one stage she also worked as a waitress in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth (MacLennan, 1988: p.24), but returned to Nieu Bethesda to nurse her sick father whom she hated. He died about forty years ago and Helen Martins settled into the family home where she stayed until her death. Her education sets her apart from other Outsiders. Yet, once she had returned to Nieu Bethesda, and after her father had died, she led the typical marginal existence of Outsiders for the twenty-five years in

which she created the "Camel Yard" and "Owl House". Her education, and her interests in Eastern religions and mythology, are reflected in her sculptures with their strange mixture of Christian, Muslim and heathen allusions.

Typically outsider, Helen Martins had no training in the arts, nor was there any apparent reason for her creations. It appears she was dissatisfied with the world around her, and wished to make it richer. She had an obsession with light. For example, the inside of the house has been covered with different colours of ground glass and illuminated with many candles and lamps. She created simple patterns on walls and even ceilings by applying glue to the walls, then, with her bare hands, throwing the crushed glass onto the area she wished to cover. An example is the living room which has geometric designs on the walls and ceilings in bright colours, encrusted with ground glass. Even some of the chair seats, like the shutters, have on them a fine patina of glass. Elsewhere, for example the dressing table in the bedroom, she covered with loose chips of glass arranged in patterns. To further emphasise the play of light, some of the window panes have been replaced by coloured glass. Coloured glass goblets have been hung upside down from the ceilings to catch, and reflect the light. She also ordered mirrors, one in the shape of a sickle moon, to further add light and reflections. These, together with other materials depleted most of her meagre pension to the extent that she neglected to eat. In the kitchen too, for example

the stove recess¹, decoration dominated at the expense of function. The kitchen was used mainly for crushing glass in a huge coffee-grinder. On the ceilings and walls, she has also painted huge murals of suns, moons and stars which further illustrate her concern with light.

Helen Martins preferred to live the life of a recluse. As she worked, she isolated herself more and more. Like Van der Mescht, she did not believe that what she created was necessarily art. As she herself asked; **"How can I be credited with the title of artist when I am a dud, an ignorant soul?"** (MacLennan, 1988: p.28). More to the point is that her house and yard became a manifestation of the workings of her imaginative mind.

In her attitude to her work, Helen Martins differed from the Environmental Constructionist sculptors who are usually proud, confident and boastful about their work. This is reflected in Clarence Schmidt's comments: **"There's more art here than in all the museums in the entire country!"** (Cardinal, 1972: p.67); and: **"Look! Look! Look! God Almighty, has anyone living or dead done anything like this? Would you believe I done all this ?"** (Cardinal, 1979:p.2). Like the majority of Outsiders, Helen Martins was extremely introverted and had very little communication with anyone. **"I am shy of all people I like. I am frightened of mankind and I am afraid of children."** (MacLennan, 1988:

¹ Little spirit stoves are the only cooking equipment to be found there.

p.28). Van der Mescht on the other hand, although not boastful, can be co-erced into discussing his work and, depending on his mood, takes a shy pride in any interest shown.

The only books to be found in Helen Martin's house were the Bible and The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyham. Some of the words of Omar Khayyham are to be found twisted into the fencing: **"For in and out, above, about, below, 'Tis nothing but a magic shadow show, Played in a box whose candle is the sun, Round which we phantom figures come and go."** (MacLennan, 1988: p.28). This is an apt description of much of the environment she was creating. These two books were the basis of the strange and complex mythological and religious themes evident in her work. She was preoccupied with the East, and most of her sculptures face in that direction. Her other obsession, as already mentioned, was with light. This is evident in the use of glass in her sculptures, and the many candles and lamps to reflect on the crushed glass inside the "Owl House". In the "Camel Yard", space and structure are integral parts of her works which interact with the play of light. She was **"making Mecca out of light"** (Amato, 1988: p.27). This can be seen in the way glass-embellished turrets, towers and spires create different levels of light-reflecting structures, together with elevated, arched figures and birds with outstretched wings, which are all silhouetted against **"that Inverted Bowl we call The Sky"** (Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyham, see: LII) as they rise above the dense procession of figures. The arches form vistas through which one views the complex arrangement of interacting shapes and

structures. Even crowds have their own kind of structure *en masse*. This is created by arms reaching up towards the East, and upward-turned faces with eyes of glass to catch the light. The bejewelled tail of a peacock, a shrine created from bottles, and the glass embedded in other sculptures further make play with light. The rising sun must see these figures reaching towards it, catching the light on their glass eyes. This recalls Omar Khayyham's **"Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight: And Lo! The Hunter of the East has caught The Sultan's Turret in a Noose of Light"** (*Ibid.*: I). Reflections, shadows and scintillating glass must continually interact with the changing light of day. Tall cacti and prickly-pear plants add organic structure amongst the simple shapes as they cast shadows which fall across the clutter of sculptures in the yard. The setting sun must create yet another scene with figures and creatures, emerging and glinting, reaching out from the sky behind them. Dusk too, must make the figures mourn the passing light. These sculptures are indeed **"phantom figures [which] come and go/in and out/above/below"** around the sun. the "Camel Yard", too, interacts with the "Owl House". From the house, different scenes can be seen silhouetted through coloured panes of glass as they interact with shifting shadows, and light on glass, with the changing light of day. Therefore, seen from the "Owl House", new vistas of structure and light are created.

Hence, it is said of Helen Martins that she **"defies definitional analysis, or demands that each definitional attempt include its own**

opposite" (Amato, 1988: p.26). In other words, Helen Martins was a solitary figure, isolating herself from the villagers around her, and yet at the same time she formed a focus for attention and concern. Also she needed the position of an Outsider and lengthy periods of isolation in order to work, yet in her solitude there was her assistant. These contradictory aspects characterise most Outsiders.

In one respect Helen Martins' procedure differs from that of most Outsiders. She employed assistants to help her with the manual labour involved. This type of work was too heavy for a small woman who was not physically strong. She therefore needed help. Besides, this phenomenon is not unusual in the South African context. As a result of the socio-political situation, black labour is cheap. It is also custom to employ such labour for manual work. The fact that Helen Martins made use of assistance has given rise to the question of authorship. She did not, however, have more than one assistant at a time. Most of the work was created together with the first coloured 'gardener' until he died or left her. Then she employed another assistant. The fall-off in skill and sensitivity in her later work has been attributed to the inferior ability of the second helper. Therefore, it can be viewed as a joint achievement to quite an extent.

For the most part, though, it is unusual for Outsiders to have assistants. American Simon Rodio (known for the Watts Towers) says he might have employed help had he been able to afford it, but, as he said,

"I was a poor man. Had to do a little at a time. Nobody helped me. I think if I hire a man he don't know what to do. A million times I don't know what to do myself." (Cardinal, 1979: p.170). Abbé Fouré, known for his rock sculptures at Rothéneuf¹, is the only known case of an Outsider, apart from Helen Martins, who possibly made use of an assistant. It seems he had the help of a simple old man, but this has not been verified beyond doubt. Van der Mescht, like most Outsiders, had no assistance, even though, like Martins, he could have employed cheap help.

The halt in creativity in the case of Helen Martins was unlike the sudden, inexplicable, cessation of such activity usual with Outsiders. She committed suicide as a result of being unable to complete her "Mecca". It was because of her failing health, insubstantial funds and space for her sculptures that she committed suicide in 1977 by drinking caustic soda².

Outsiders usually loose interest in their work once they have reached their goal. Only occasionally do they start again, as did Clarence Schmidt³ who rebuilt his house after the first one was destroyed by fire.

¹ C.F. chapter 3 page 75.

² There are two mechanisms which give rise to suicide. One is a sort of temporary madness or rage of fury at life itself - and especially oneself. The other, which applies to Helen Martins, is a sort of blankness or emptiness of will to live. There seems to be nothing to look forward to, and no point in life.

³ C.F. chapter 3 page 65.

He, being an Environmental Constructionist, displays greater confidence in his work than the majority of Environmental Outsiders such as Helen Martins.

Fred Smith, on the other hand, is one of those Environmental Outsiders who actually reflects a confidence more typical of the Environmental Constructionists: **"I'm 166 years old and I'll be better when I'm 175. It has to be in the man,"** he said. **"You have to be almost gifted to do what I've done."** (Blasdell, 1968: p.31). Like Helen Martins, he also worked in concrete and glass. His subject matter resembles that of Van der Mescht, consisting of figures and animals which surround his home.

Fred Smith, of Philips, Wisconsin was born in 1886. His background was sociologically typical of an Outsider. He was a retired lumberjack. During his retirement, he worked for over fifteen years building two hundred and fifty sculptures. His technique was to cast his figures in basic moulds, supported by pipe and wire armatures. These were then modelled with a mason's trowel, and embedded with pieces of broken coloured glass. In some, the glass was used as shingles to repel water. Others like the "Sun Yet-sen" and the "Bucking horse" have mosaic surfaces.

Unlike Smith, S. P. Dinsmoor placed wooden structures amongst his concrete figures and trees. His work resembles that of Helen Martins in that he recreated an environment to contain his works. Dinsmoor was born

in 1843 in Lucas, Kansas. He was a Civil War veteran who, for over thirty years, was financed by a bookkeeping mistake. Every month he received two government pension cheques instead of one. He is known for his "Garden of Eden", about which he said, "**If the Garden of Eden is not right, Moses is to blame. He wrote it up and I built it.**" (Blasdel, 1968: p.30).

Further additions to enhancing the environment for the "Garden of Eden" includes a 'log-cabin' mausoleum. This is constructed of quarried limestone simulating notched logs. This is where he and his first wife are buried. Both Environmental Constructionists and Environmental Outsider sculptors have a penchant for building their own tombs¹.

The concrete² figures in Dinsmoor's garden have social commentaries and Biblical references incorporated into the titles of the art works, for example: "**The Crucifixion of Labour by the Banker, Lawyers, Preacher and Doctor.**" There are also animal shelters and a miniature replica of the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon" which further add to the environment. This milieu, which he has created for his works, also consists of twenty-nine concrete trees. These trees are wired through pipe armatures for electric lights. There are snakes within the trees whose gaping mouths glow as a result of the electric lighting. Dinsmoor died in 1932.

¹ Ferdinand Cheval has done this. C.F. chapter 3 page 68.

² The one hundred and thirteen tons of cement he used for his sculptures were mixed according to his secret formula at night.

The work of James Tellen is similar to Dinsmoor's in that the environment is necessary to enhance the sculptures. He was born in 1880 and spent most of his life as a furniture stripper in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. For the last twenty years before his death he built over thirty animals, figures and miniature buildings. These buildings, together with a fence fifty feet long made out of cement to simulate a fallen tree, with meticulously defined bark, serve to make up the environment for his figures. This attempt at realism, in the fallen tree, as well as preoccupation with minute detail, is usually found in 'mad' art, Outsider painting and the work of those who profess to be mediums. It is also a characteristic of 'naif' painting, but is most unusual in Outsider sculpture. An Indian chief, squaw and child make up a cameo scene around Tellen's fallen tree fence, further adding to the environment he created. Tellen died in 1957.

As an Outsider sculptor Erich Boedeker differs from the above-mentioned Environmental Outsider in that cement was not his main medium. This he only used in winter, wood being his preferred medium for summer. A German, born in 1906 in Recklinghausen, Erich Boedeker worked as a miner for thirty-five years. He also worked as a farmer and a butcher at the same time. It was only during his retirement that he began his artistic activity. His initial inspiration was a birthday gift of a garden gnome. He disliked it so intensely that he decided he could do far better. After 1959, he created more than a thousand figures.

Boedeker's themes come from the Bible, fairy tales and everyday life. His sculptures look like crude posts with round heads, and arms with hands that tend to look like mittens. The finished sculptures are painted in bright enamel colours much like Van der Mescht's. In the manner of most Outsiders, Boedeker also used found objects in his sculptures. For example, he used the base of a miner's stove as a seat, or a flower-pot for a hat. Boedeker's emphasis on a figure-orientated environment is somewhat different from other Outsiders. When he made his figures, he had in mind that they were to be placed in theatrical relationships to each other. Together they form a free composition of life-sized figures, arranged as if on a stage. These figures were made on moveable bases, standing or seated, singly or in groups. An example can be seen in a group of figures on a coach. The cameo has been made as a unit, yet comprises of three figures. The different figures, or groups, are arranged in specific relationships to one another and as a whole, form an environment similar to a stage scene. Oto Bihalji-Merin describes it in the following way: **"Boedeker looks at the world with his own eyes, as though it were standing on a podium and posing for him. The result is strange, unique, and not a little grotesque."** (Bihalji-Merin, 1971: p.172)

Boedeker's composition, which he calls "Modern Society Considering the Fruits of the Quarrel Between Adam and Eve", consists of twenty-one figures arranged in a 'stage-like' scene. Adam and Eve perform the apple scene in the centre. They are surrounded by the people of today: blacks

and whites, a garish queen, a housewife with a real shopping bag, a sheriff, a family, a farmer with a pipe, the Apollo space pilots and a pink pig flanked by two grotesque poodles. There is also a cook with outstretched arms, posed as if inviting the viewers to come and see the scene for themselves. **"These heavy cement figures are brutally direct and convincing - concrete memories in the medium of our time."** (Bihalji-Merin, 1971: p.172). Boedeker died in 1971.

Although Boedeker knew nothing of George Segal's plaster casts of people¹, or Edward Kienholz's environments², his work bears an uncanny resemblance to theirs. This kind of resemblance is not unusual, yet is one of the baffling things about these Outsiders who work in ignorance and isolation.

Unlike the work of these Environmental sculptors, the Environmental Outsider Constructionist's emphasis is not so much on sculptures, as on creating an alternative environment of assemblages and constructions. This usually occurs in the form of a house, building, or tower and it's

¹ George Segal (b.1924) was one of the sculptors associated with Pop Art. He created 'sculptured tableaux' ie. sculpture as a total environment. He cast his forms in plaster from the human figure. The figures are then set in an actual environment, for example: an elevator or the interior of a bus. Props were purchased from junkyards. Although the figures were modelled from life, they were left rough and unfinished -ghostly wraiths of human beings existing in a tangible world.

² Edward Keinholz creates environments of accurately furnished interiors with an atmosphere of decay. His figures are dressed in underwear, shoes and everyday clothes.

surroundings. Shrines and grottoes are popular amongst these Outsiders. The emphasis is not on specific sculptures, but rather on overall totality.

A good example of this is the work of Clarence Schmidt. Born in New York in 1897, he worked as a plasterer and mason, thus having previous knowledge of his medium. He built his "House of Mirrors" on a wooded property in the Catskill Mountains. It was after his retirement that he spent twelve hours a day, for a period of over thirty years, building a rambling environment of constructions. Once a single cabin, his house eventually had seven stories, with thirty-five rooms, made of wood and stone. The rooms were connected by a labyrinth of passageways, encrusted with tinsel-covered shrines and assemblages. **"They're going to make my place a national monument,"** he said, **"the eighth wonder of the world."** (Blasdel, 1968: p.28).

Schmidt's creation had no architectural framework, but the house was situated against a natural hill, and constructed over the rough ground on which it stood. Living trees embedded in the building served as structural supports. The rest of the house was made up of roughly squared timber and make-shift materials.

The surrounding gardens consisted of natural vegetation, cleverly mixed with tree-shaped pieces of scrap metal. These were coated with tar. Other materials and shapes were plastic flowers and dead trees wrapped

in tin foil, with pieces of mirror inserted everywhere. The final result was a complete integration of man-made materials and natural vegetation, allowing the different seasons to affect the work in different ways.

The house burned down in 1968. The fire was considered accidental, until his second attempt was destroyed by fire in 1971. He had to leave the ruined site, and moved to a New York nursing home as an invalid¹. Rumour has it that neighbours were worried about his 'construction' bringing down the value of their properties. Clarence Schmidt's houses are now known only by photographs.

Another Environmental Constructionist is the tower-builder, Simon Rodia. He is also known as Sam Rodilla and was born in Italy in 1879. He emigrated to the U.S.A. as a child. His adult occupations ranged from tile-setter to telephone repair man. Beginning in 1921, he spent thirty-three years transforming his suburban plot into an exotic garden. The garden consists of coloured mosaic walls and floors, and the towering structures: "The Watts Tower". About these he said: **"I had it in mind to do something big and I did."** (Cardinal, 1972: p.2).

Of the three tallest spires, the highest rises to approximately one hundred feet. The spires are skeletal structures of interlinked rings which create a dense tracery. Several smaller spires accompany the

¹ There is, as yet, no recorded date of his death. It is possible that Schmidt is still alive.

tallest. All are encrusted with a coloured mosaic of broken china, glass and shells. The towers are connected by overhead arches and spokes. Red, brown and green cement slabs make up the garden floor. Out of these rise fountains, stalagmites, bird-baths, loggias and benches.

Rodia built the "Watts Towers" without machinery or scaffolding. His method was to erect steel rods, enmesh them with wire, and then add waterproof cement. This formed a strong armature. He would begin by constructing a twenty-five foot tower of inter-connected loops. Then, beginning again at the bottom, he would build another structure around the first. This would carry the tower up another twenty feet. In this manner he would raise the structure to the height he desired. The loops themselves served the additional purpose of a ladder.

Apart from cement, Rodia bought no materials. He used what he picked up in the neighbourhood. In 1954, before his work had reached completion, he stopped, signed away his property and vanished. It is said that he was intimidated by the attention the "Watts Towers" was bringing him, losing interest in his fantasy when he became the object of the curious. As with most Outsiders, he was indifferent to the reactions of others and even to the survival of his work. As Thévoz says: **"In this they stand fundamentally opposed to professional artists."** (Thévoz, 1976: p.29). Apparently, on the way to a television discussion on them, he jumped out of the taxi at a red light and disappeared.

For years afterwards the property was left uncared for, and was subject to vandalism. In 1955 the house itself was burnt down, and the garden became a dumping area. By 1959, a number of people became concerned about the towers and wanted to preserve them. The city, on the other hand, wished to demolish what they saw as dangerous and illegal structures. Engineering tests, however, proved them safe after subjecting them to a 70 m.p.h. wind. Ironically the area has since been cleaned and declared a 'Cultural Heritage Monument'.

The fact that Outsider art exists beyond the realm of culture and tradition, does not mean that Outsiders are unaware that their way of thinking and attitudes differ from those of other people. While they know they are not quite the same as others and sense that they do not belong in the broader community, they do not attribute this to their actual work. To them, this is just something they do. An example of this attitude is reflected in Ferdinand Cheval's statement, that it was not because he was crazy that he built his "Palais Ideal"; but that it was because he built it that he was considered crazy. (Thévoz, 1976: p.27).

Cheval was born in 1836, at Charmes in the Drôme region of France. He was a postman with a lengthy cross-country round. It took this Environmental Constructionist thirty-three years to build his "Palais Ideal" of limestone and cement. As is often said by some Outsiders, Cheval claimed that the plan of his architecture was given to him in

dreams.

The 'palais' is eighty-five feet long, forty-five feet wide and thirty-three feet high. The west facade, which resembles that of a mosque, is also the main entrance. There is also an Indian temple, a Swiss cottage, the White House, the Algerian House of Dice, and a medieval castle. There is also a burial vault where Cheval wanted to be buried "**in the manner of the Pharaohs**" (Cardinal, 1972: p.148).

The "Palais Ideal" is an illogical mixture of anachronistic and eclectic styles. Both the exterior and interior are decorated with reliefs, sculptures, shell mosaics, encrusted stones, shrines and grottoes. On the inside, the length consists of a gallery, which, at each end, winds into a kind of labyrinth, forming what Cheval calls the "**hetacombs**". These have vaulted ceilings with chandeliers made from stone and ringed with shells and fossil snails. On top of the gallery, there is a terrace, reached by staircases at three corners of the Palace. This terrace gives access to two large squat towers at either end of the building.

Cheval has the technical freedom of a self-taught builder who re-invents things anew, in the sense that, being ignorant of traditional procedures, such a builder may come up with something quite innovative. As an Outsider, without the usual inhibitions about style or procedure, the "Palais Ideal" is a creative digression from conventional architectural

rules. Thévoz describes it as a "**hallucinatory migration through times and places**" which arises from "**the same mechanisms of association and condensation as dreams do**", (Thévoz, 1976: p.25). Ulrich Conrad and Hans Sperlich (in Fantastic Architecture) have said about it that it is "**half pagoda, half robber-baron's castle, half nymphaeum, half tomb: not Baroque, not Hellenistic, not Buddhist, not Indian, and yet all of them at once.**" (Cardinal, 1972: p.146).

To use Paul Klee's¹ term, the 'palais' belongs to "**a between world**" (Thévoz, 1976: p.26), on the borderline of the real and the imaginary. The architectural process has been re-invented. Normally a building designed as a dwelling is designed primarily with its function in mind. Imaginative extensions or embellishments are added to this. Cheval, on the other hand, began with the dream of an imaginary palace, which, by the end, he had turned into a dwelling place. In Thévoz's words, "**The real is devalued in relation to the imaginary**" (Thévoz, 1976: p.27).

Cheval says the 'palais' began when, on his rounds between the villages of the Drôme in 1879, he tripped on a stone and bent to pick it up. The stone was weathered, forming a natural kind of sculpture of such a bizarre and suggestive shape, that he kept it. He began collecting these

¹ Paul Klee (1879-1940), a Swiss painter and etcher whose art of free fantasy is defined by his own words as "**taking a line for a walk**". Trained in Munich, his early work was influenced by Blake, Beardsley, Goya and later Ensor. From 1911 he was associated with the Blaue Reiter artists. (Murray, 1976: p.27).

stones: **"Since nature wants to be the sculptor, I shall be the mason and architect."** (Cardinal, 1972: p.147). Hauterives was the area in which he found most of his materials. This was once an ocean bed, rich in calcareous tufa and spongy limestone which forms strange shapes, sometimes containing actual fossils. This, as a material, is probably responsible for the structurally organic allusions and textures in Cheval's 'palais' which remind one of Gaudi's work in Barcelona¹. These interesting stones inspired Cheval to give shape to his dreams of building an ideal palace, one that would **"outstrip the imagination"** (Dubuffet, 1976: p.25). By the incorporation of these stones, there was a transition between finding things and transforming them. Aside from the stones, Cheval also used cement, lime and metal wire, as well as inventing a type of re-enforced concrete².

Cheval spent the first twenty years on the East and North facades. The South and West facades were built over a period of twelve years. These are somewhat spoilt by his attempts to plagiarise architectural styles he had seen in popular magazines. The "Palais Ideal" can, however, be

¹ Antoni Gaudi (1852-1926) was a Catalonian architect. He worked mainly in Barcelona, where his ideas were influenced by the nationalist culture of the region, with its emphasis on folk crafts and its attachment to indigenous themes. At the same time he sought to establish a Gothic style in modern Mediterranean idioms. His work is inventive constructivism with mouldings and details drawn from natural forms. (Thomas, 1981: p.73).

² By re-enforced concrete is meant that limestone and the calcareous tufa were added to the concrete. For a definition of concrete: C.F. chapter 2 page 42 footnote 2.

seen as a naive summary of the wonders of the world. Cheval's eclecticism, nevertheless, is a digression from Outsider art. Yet, considering that he was not subject to 'cultural conditioning' due to his position, ignorance, and isolation, his creation can, even so, be considered as a valid Outsider work.

Aside from Environmental Outsiders and Environmental Constructionists, there are also those sculptors who are concerned with 'Inventions' and 'Machines'. Some create small, intricate mechanisms¹, and other large-scale outdoor constructions².

Emile Ratier is an example of an Outsider sculptor who constructed large assemblages of rough timber and nails. He was born in 1894. His contrivances always included a moving part, set in motion by one or two cranks, and involving an intricate and noisy mechanism. Ratier was a farmer until his eyesight failed in 1960. He was thus blind by the time he came to produce his work. Ratier's infirmity acted as a 'trigger mechanism', spurring his inventiveness. Like Van der Mescht, Ratier was

¹ Guy Buigues (b.1949) of Tazo, Morocco was a metalworker. He produces Outsider sculptures of improvised assemblages of scraps of waste metal soldered together.

² Henrich Müller is an example. Born in 1865, he was a vine-grower. He invented an ingenious vine-trimming device. The idea was stolen. This acted as a catalyst, triggering off a mental disorder. Subsequently confined to a psychiatric hospital, he spent time on drawings and inventions. The aim was to achieve perpetual movement. The large-scale outdoor constructions seemed to be geared up and down, and to expend energy uselessly. C.F. chapter 3 page 48 footnote 4.

clever with his hands, and had a quick grasp of mechanical principles.

It is said that he made his inventions not only to occupy himself, but also to entertain others. Although, as in the case of Cheval, this constitutes a digression from the usual Outsider indifference to the opinions and reactions of others, Ratier, too, remains an Outsider. In spite of his desire to entertain, though, his interest lay more in the materials and the devices that went into creating an effect, rather than the effect itself.

An example of his work is a six foot "Eiffel Tower" which has an elevator running up and down inside it. It is also topped by a merry-go-round which can be made to spin. The emphasis is not so much on the subject, as on the machinery that sets things moving. As in making the item, the significance is on a process, rather than a product. Ratier took a sly pleasure in accentuating the inertia factor and the heaviness of his constructions. He did not use metal wheel-work, nor did he oil the mechanisms. He appeared to do everything possible to increase the weight, friction and rattling that hinders transmission and wastes power. The existence of a blind sculptor - especially an Outsider - is an interesting one. Presumably, in a blind person, the tactile and - in this case - the auditory senses become sharper. Ratier would have had to think visually through touch.

Amongst the Outsiders who devise inventions, the common denominator is

that their creations serve no purpose other than to expend energy to no avail.

Unlike Environmental Outsiders, Environmental Constructionist sculptors, and those who devise 'Inventions' and 'Machines', there are, however, those who do not make the medium work for them. These Outsider sculptors allow 'matter to take the initiative'. Just as some professional sculptors, who claim to see things in a piece of wood or stone, and consequently set about releasing them. This also occurs with Outsiders such as Bogosav Zivkovic. Zivkovic unwittingly describes this approach: **"They are hidden inside the tree-trunk. They live there. I set them free, I release them from the material which keeps them hidden."** (Thévoz, 1976: p.58).

Zivkovic was born of peasant stock in the Yugoslav village of Leskovac in 1920. He worked as a farmhand and as a furrier. During the war he was tortured by collaborators. This resulted in spinal injuries which still trouble him. It was also the 'trigger mechanism' which activated his creative process. His spinal problems caused insomnia, and when he did sleep, he had terrible nightmares because of his war experiences. One night in 1957, he dreamt he was pursued by a snake that wrapped itself around him, in order to stifle him. Without being totally awake, he leapt out of bed and struck at a log with his axe. This gave shape to his first work - a man with a snake.

Zivkovic prefers hard woods such as cherry, oak and walnut. He first steams the gnarled trunks or roots to get rid of insects, and to harden and dry the wood. Then, he carves it with an axe and knife, finally creating a polished surface by rubbing it with another piece of hard wood. The forms which he 'releases' are faces, plants and hybrid beasts growing in and out of one another. These are suggested by the knots, shapes and textures of wood. The figures are never completely set free of the material. In this, they are reminiscent of Michelangelo's "Captives", which appear to be emerging or escaping from the marble. Thus, an essential quality of this sculpture is that the integrity of the medium has been retained.

Zivkovic's figures are often set one above the other as in totem poles. However, other than the folk art of his region, which has obviously had some influence on his work to a very limited extent, he has no knowledge of primitive art, such as Oceanic or African sculpture. He also has no knowledge of the styles of the Sepik, or the totem poles of North America. Yet his works bear a likeness to them. Intuitively, he **"has been in possession of a unique archetypal canon of form"** (Bihalji-Merin, 1971: p.168) since his first sculpture.

The relative sizes of his components lack the harmonious proportions and naturalistic differences of scale found in Mainstream sculpture. This is because, as an Outsider, he is not striving towards any recognised ideal as is often the case with professional artists. Instead, his

figures result from a naive, child-like sensibility. One subject flows into another; they metamorphose from man to animal, and animal to plant. His is a type of 'stream of consciousness' imagery. If there are reasons behind this, they remain unknown to us. Thus, as with most Outsiders, Zivkovic's work cannot really be interpreted. He has no conscious philosophy. He is not aware of the boundaries between dreams and reality. In reference to his first work he says: "As long as this one lives here I won't worry. I have tried to make it feel at home." (Bihalji-Merin, 1971: p.167).

Another sculptor who allowed 'matter to take the initiative' was the Outsider Environmentalist, Abbé Fouré. Also known as a hermit, Fouré lived from 1842 to 1910. All that is known of him is that he was illegitimate, and that the locals refer to him as the one-time rector. He began his works at the age of forty-three, and worked for twenty-five years with the sole assistance of a simple old man¹. Following the suggestive shapes in the stone, he constructed whole pictures, faces and bodies on the cliff faces. He did this during the late nineteenth century. The granite blocks provided suggestive material for a series of figures based on the exploits of the Rothéneuf family. For several generations this was a notorious family of pirates and smugglers on the Brittany coast. Rothéneuf is east of Saint-malo on this coast. Over the centuries, the accounts of the Rothéneuf family developed into legend,

¹ Even this is not an ascertained fact.

consequently giving their names to the rocks and reefs along the coast.

Abbé Fouré unwittingly turned the site of their exploits into a monument to these pirates. The strangeness of his work is enhanced by the ambiguity between the natural erosion and Fouré's handwork, between the carved figures and those imagined in the chaotic mass of rock.

Other types of Outsider sculpture are 'Stuffed Objects', and objects made from mixed media. Mixed Media sculpture is more common amongst psychotics. An example of this type of sculpture can be found in the work of Frenchman, Auguste Forester, who was born in 1887. He was interned in a asylum at the age of twenty-seven **"for liking trains too much"** (Thévoz, 1976: p.53). This stemmed from his habit of running away from home, and getting arrested for travelling on the railroad without a ticket. Finally, he derailed a train by piling up stones on the track so that he could see the wheels crush the rock. It was obvious that, as the 'mad' do, he lived by his own rules, in his own reality, totally oblivious to the functioning of normal society. The following applies to the majority of Outsiders, and especially the 'mad', who are isolated by their insanity: **"When people are alone a lot, they either begin to feed on themselves, cancerously, or they lose definitions between themselves and their world. They have difficulty in knowing where the one begins and the other ends."** (Greig, 1988: p.122).

During his internment, Forester did woodcarving using a shoemaker's

paring knife. He improvised as he proceeded, adding odds and ends which he had collected. The final products were: "**assemblages of pre-constituted elements rather than sculptures**" (Thévoz, 1976: p.54). A sense of oddness prevails, which is possibly created by fitting utilitarian objects into work where they have no place. An example can be seen in Forester's "Model Ship", which consists of roughly squared pieces of wood, a knitting needle for one of the masts, cotton-reels, pieces of chain, scraps of leather, cloth, metal, string and wire.

Francis Marshall's sculptures come in the form of Stuffed Objects. He was born in 1946 in La Frette, France. The materials which he uses are rags, ticking, stockings and scraps of material. These, he collects along the banks of the Seine, downstream from Paris. His 'bourrages' are arranged in tableaux form which remind one of Erich Boedeker's 'stage scenes'. The following quote by Marshall unknowingly describes the appearance of his sculptures: "**Rules, restrictions, work, torture people, kill them, quarter them, undermine them, deform them, crush them, rot them, mutilate them, bind them.**" (Cardinal, 1979: p.3). An example of Marshall's tableaux is "The Waiting Room" which consists of a row of old, wooden, fold-up chairs placed against the wall. Four figures are tied to the chairs with bits of string and wool. The second-last chair, which is empty, has "**Reservé aux 1'Invalides**" painted onto its folded-up underside. Above this chair, on the wall, hangs a roughly-made clock, at five-past-five. The figures themselves are like crudely-made, oversized, and overstuffed rag-dolls. Scrap material are sown together,

then stuffed to form lumpy tubes. The figures have faces drawn and painted onto them. They are tied up at the wrists, across the arms and shoulders, around the thighs, as well as, at times, criss-crossing the head and neck. This tying up of the figures has the effect of further 'mutilating' them which in turn creates a 'quartering' effect.

Distinct from Marshall, Outsiders like Forester and others who are asylum or prison inmates, confinement contributes greatly to their emergence of creativity. Psychotic Outsiders, in particular, show important differences from others, including Environmental Outsiders like Van der Mescht. For example, psychotics refuse to, or cannot, speak about their works. They are unaware of what they have done. Besides being sociologically unaffected by culture, they are mentally beyond its reach.

There are, however, characteristics of the work of 'Innocents' that are common to psychotic art. Examples are: the obsessive repetition of particular images, the distortion of figures, the naive interpretation of perspective, and the use of found objects¹. Aside from these commonalities, the personal reality of the 'Psychotic' does not co-exist with the real world. It is, as A. Noyes refers to it, a "**self-meaningful communication**" (Cardinal, 1972: p.94). As Francis Reitman says: "**he has no message about the real world, directed to its inhabitants; he is trying to express an altered world**" (Cardinal, 1972: p.94).

¹ C.F. chapter 1 page 23.

Psychotic Outsider sculptors are prone to using mixed media, creating inventions, drawing, carving and making bread and clay sculptures. There is, however, no record of a psychotic Environmental Constructionist or Environmental Outsider who uses the cement medium with the incorporation of found objects. This is possibly because of their location in asylums. It is also possible that internment contributes to the fact that psychotics will use any material at hand.

As stated, in the case of some psychotic Outsiders, creativity often begins after confinement. Sometimes seen as the 'secondary gain from internment', Thévoz believes that the reason why inmates suddenly begin drawing, is that they are returning to a childhood activity. It is typical of Western society that many children cease drawing at about the age of twelve. According to Thévoz possible explanations for this reactivation include complex theories about libidinal discharge, repression and other issues which are not primary concerns of this research and are, what is more, based on speculation. What is known for certain about these psychotic Outsider sculptors is that they are all men¹; that they start creative activity during mid-life, and that the latter factor seems certainly linked to the sexual repression they experience in confinement.

Concerning confinement, Thévoz has found that **"detention is particularly**

¹ Psychotic Outsiders who are not sculptors, are both male and female.

propitious to imaginative creation' (Thévoz, 1976: p.125). It involves a social estrangement which brings about a decline of the **"reality principle"** (Thevoz, 1976: p.26). Therefore inmates create their own world with its own order, replacing the normal system of ends and means. Such an inmate is placed in a position of contemplative passivity.

A pertinent question here concerns the greater creative output in asylums compared with that in prisons. In prison, the inmate knows that his exclusion from society is a temporary measure. Prisons aim at impressing responsibility upon the inmate. Asylums, on the other hand, do everything to exempt the psychotic from responsibility. Also, the 'Psychotic' no longer has to rely on language as an instrument, as his ability in this regard had been challenged. Thévoz explains this: **"The mental patient, as soon as he is designated as such, ceases to be listened to - except with a view to diagnosis or in a climate of therapeutic solicitude that rules out any reciprocity. Since he is now deprived of any interlocuter, his utterance, his power of expression, no longer has to be regulated in terms of a desired result: it becomes an end in itself. Disinterested, having no direct object, it can play freely with itself. Usually it will regress towards stereotypy. But it may also develop and open out, without regard to any standard of communication."** (Thévoz, 1976: p.126). In other words, he is no longer part of the communication circuit, and so he creates his own. **"Their only resources lay precisely in 're-sourcing' signs which for them had no further use, in detaching them from their usual meaning and for**

imposing a new one upon them." (Thévoz, 1976: p.126). This also applies on a more physical level in the use of any materials at hand: "re-sourcing" 'known' objects.

Considering the 'secondary gain from internment', one wonders whether or not there would be a halt in creativity, should an asylum inmate be released. More examples would be necessary to ascertain this. The only known case study is that of the Frenchman, Clément.

Clément, born in 1901, was illiterate and of peasant stock. A belligerent character, he was often fighting and quarrelling. In 1925, he set fire to a house with a bundle of notes representing family savings. Consequently, he was interned in an asylum. Being accustomed to open-air life and freedom, he found detention unendurable and reacted violently. After twelve escape attempts, he was placed in solitary confinement, in a narrow cell, for two years.

After six months of solitude, Clément began carving into the panelled wall of the cell. He made his own tools from a spoon and the broken handle of a chamber-pot. These, he whetted on a stone in order to sharpen them. Eventually, he covered the whole wall with relief carvings.

Clément divided the wall into one hundred and eighty-nine panels. The figures are represented in a more or less stereotyped manner. They are

treated frontally and hieratically with no concern for illusionism. The forms are flattened against the plane, and notched with crude, straight strokes - simplified almost to the point of abstraction. These forms, which make panels, are characterised by repeated designs, and ask to be read row by row, from left to right, like a written text. Different viewpoints are freely combined, and proportions are varied, emphasising one part of the body, and cancelling another out. There is little concern for, or knowledge of, anatomical conventions. The forms are schematised and generalised. He appears to have deliberately avoided anything like individualisation, much in the same way as African Negro carvers who refrain from individual reference.

Clément works in terms of negative volumes. That is, the relief is not obtained by projections, but by sunk carving. The use of registers gives his work a superficial resemblance to Byzantine reliefs and Byzantine decorations, a device quite common in art where illusionistic space is not a consideration. In fact, the underlying source of his long processions lies in what Freud terms the "**repetition compulsion**". This occurs when the emotional pressure of a traumatic situation drives an individual to repeat a gesture or figure (image) obsessively. This helps him dominate the situation little by little.

On his release in 1931, Clément found a job as a farmhand. When he was questioned about his work, he declared that he had done no further carving since his release. He said that such work held no further

interest for him. Thus it appears that, in his case, confinement was one of the main incentives for creativity.

As previously mentioned, even in prisons, confinement can arouse latent creativity. A good example is the Italian, Joseph G. Interestingly his creativity, like that of Clément, also ceased upon release.

Born in 1877, Joseph G's background was like that of most Outsiders - being illiterate and of peasant stock. He worked as a farmhand, labourer and bricklayer. During the course of his life, he finally reached the position of building contractor. He was sentenced to six years of imprisonment, after killing his mistress.

In prison, he used his enforced leisure to make groups of statuettes from bread. These were painted, and varnished when they had hardened. Typically, he could never give any explanation for his sculptures. These works appeared to represent an allegory, or parody of life's social rules, in the form of a type of carnival.

One of these groups portrays a collective punishment with a band playing in the background. In another, a circle of figures dance together with acrobats and musicians. On the outside, there is an observer watching everything through a spyglass. One of the works even depicts the gory head of a decapitated man. There is also a strange figure posing on a rostrum, surrounded by figures turning their backs on him. As already

mentioned, Joseph G. stopped making his sculptures after his release from prison. Therefore, internment was one of the main incentives for creativity.

One strange phenomenon occurring amongst all types of Outsiders has been of considerable interest to those observing them. Many of their works bear an uncanny resemblance to some works from other cultures or artists¹. What makes this phenomenon so uncanny is that, as we know, these Outsiders know nothing of other forms of art - or culture - or even art history. This has been of particular interest to Jungian theorists who have seen it as confirmation of their research into the universal subconscious and the primeval image.

Prior to the formulation of Jung's most important theories in the 1950's, Prinzhorn, in 1922, believed in the existence of an original configurative instinct as one characteristic of all people. He was convinced that this had been buried by the development of civilisation. When this emerges spontaneously after years of hospitalisation, or other confinement, it could be explained as **"an ability common to all men which usually remains latent. For some reason it is suddenly activated and brought to the surface. Some of the causes could be the inner development/change of an individual; his (forced) renunciation of the outside world, and the autistic concentration on his own person - as well**

¹ C.F. chapter 1 page 24.

as the change of his environment. But, it is most notably his isolation from the outside world, with its innumerable small stimuli and his inactivity." (Prinzhorn, 1972: p.270).

One aspect of the buried configuration instinct which emerges in Outsiders, especially confined ones, is the 'repetition compulsion'. It is therefore possible that the 'repetition compulsion' is a manifestation of the unconscious relation between the work of Outsiders on the one hand, and Outsiders and other - professional or primitive - artists on the other. To Jungians, this proves the archetypal theory because the type of repetition is often similar between these otherwise unconnected artists. Therefore, Prinzhorn's premise is one which Jung expanded upon, namely, that the primary process occurring in artistic work, which has as far as possible escaped cultural conditioning, tends to produce recurrent motifs¹. These are the so-called archetypes². They are explained as being the innate shapes "**printed on the collective psyche of all men, and equated to a shared physiological characteristic such as the habit of standing upright.**" (Cardinal, 1972: p.19).

A prime example of a possible archetype appears in the work of the psychotic, Karl Brendel. His sculptures have bent legs, and a stylistic

¹ Nevertheless, in Art History there are many differences which weaken this Jungian theory. For example, in Prehistoric art there are very often single, repeated motifs.

² C.F. chapter 1 page 24.

development of the genitals into a rhombic shield. It is this which most likens his work to that of the "Head-Foot Figurines"¹ from the Congo. Brendel's works are also reminiscent of the Benin Bronze and Wood Sculptures from Soruba². In many other cases, the deformations of the human body adopted by some schizophrenics, can be likened to those found in medieval woodcuts. Examples like these are held to show that in man there exists an elementary artistic process that emerges in the works of those, who, for one or other reason, are remote from the dominant culture.

In the case of Psychotic art, configuration often strikingly relates to that of other artists or cultures. It is reasonably certain that this relation is, furthermore, unconscious. For this reason, observers like Prinzhorn have found Psychotic art particularly pertinent to their theories. Such a relation is also typical of Environmental Outsider sculptors. It is not such a common occurrence in Environmental Constructionist sculptors.

Nevertheless, it is tempting to compare Outsider art with modern movements such as Art Provera etc., but closer analysis leads to the conclusion that only the superficial appearance of the end products bears any resemblance to one another. In intention, Outsider art is

¹ Göttenburg Museum.

² Hamburg, Volker Museum.

diametrically opposed to these movements as well as to ritualistic Primitive art.

In this chapter the case studies of various Outsiders have borne out the existence of different genres of work. It has been shown that, though many Outsiders may be placed in categories, there is a great deal of overlapping. Although there are differences between Outsiders, there are also similarities. Besides their fundamental difference with Mainstream art and culture, they share common ground when it comes to social status and background; for example, their isolation. In their ignorance, and through their use of found objects, technical innovations and inventiveness in the use of media are most obvious. Although Outsiders do not strive towards a recognised ideal as do professional artists, the way that they isolate themselves in their obsession with their work is as much a mystery as their reasons for creating. Although seen as an enrichment of their private worlds, Outsider art cannot be interpreted.

CHAPTER 4

The Work of Dirk Charely van der Mescht

In Outsider art, apart from a common dependency on 'materials of fortune', there is no typical style as such¹. The work is produced to satisfy the individual concerned, for no apparent reason, and is created instinctively and unknowingly. It is untrained and innocent of normal pictorial or sculptural influences². The sculpture of D. C. van der Mescht, for the most part, shares these characteristics. Certainly, it deviates from our cultural norms and set figurations³. In common with Outsider art, his work shows an independence of the real appearance of objects⁴. True to the nature of Outsider art, Van der Mescht's sculptures are **"propositions of themselves, unpredictable and wholly inventive, both in their medium and in their inspiration"**⁵ (Dubuffet, 1973: p.20).

One's first impression of Van der Mescht's sculpture, is that it is comical and extremely naive. A closer look reveals that his works are expressive in character. Additionally, the bright enamels in which his

¹ C.F. chapter 1 page 8.

² C.F. chapter 1 page 8 and 9-10.

³ C.F. chapter 1 page 9-10.

⁴ C.F. chapter 1 page 12-13.

⁵ C.F. chapter 1 page 18-19.

sculptures are painted, gives them a peculiar sense of heightened reality, in spite of their often primitive appearance. Nevertheless, the fundamental characteristic of Van der Mescht's work is that the image is subordinated to pose and gesture.

As an 'Innocent', Van der Mescht created in the only way he could, that is, in ignorance. The result is that his work reflects a simple instinctiveness. Thus, where a sculpture may not necessarily depict the anatomical nature of an action or gesture, it nevertheless creates the feeling of that action or gesture through its expressiveness, however simply depicted. The forms are crudely made and subject to distortion, whilst features are roughly modelled, yet at the same time exaggerated. For example "The Gunman"¹ leans over in a balancing act on the horse. One gets the feeling, in spite of the completely unanatomical back, shoulders and pelvis, that his whole being is concentrated on aiming the gun.

As an Environmental Outsider sculptor, Van der Mescht created an environment featuring animals and figures which, as mentioned earlier², began around the railway siding, and led across the tracks into the garden and the house. The last two sculptures stand facing each other on either side of the garden path³, just before one enters the 'stoep'.

¹ For photographs of Van der Mescht's work, see page 132.

² C.F. chapter 2 page 29.

³ C.F. chapter 2 page 38.

The works are also placed in close relationship to other features of the environment. For example, the "Stasiemeester" stands beneath the Zuney siding sign, looking out for oncoming trains. Another example is the "Bounty Rider" trying to urge his horse forward towards the "Man with the Hazard Sign", who is slowing down any oncoming traffic. Within the macrocosm of sculptures *en masse*, microcosms of smaller environments are also created. An example is the "Fisherman" and pond scene which depicts a fish being brought to shore. The fisherman stands on a small island surrounded by a moat. On the borders of the moat, a small cairn, a dwarf's head emerging from the rocks, and a man with a leopard's head can be found. Near this pond scene there is yet another cameo scene of the goose and chicks which, through subject matter and location, interacts with the pond scene. These add to the larger environment as a whole. Van der Mescht's creation of this environment of sculptures can be seen as an enrichment of his private world.

When Van der Mescht first began making his cement sculptures, he used to alternate this with woodcarving¹. The initial idea and urge to create came upon him suddenly², as is the case with *Outsiders*. His first cement sculpture was of an elephant. The idea which gave rise to this was a picture of an elephant in a magazine. On completion of this, he asked a 'kwedini' to clean up around the sculpture, but it was accidentally burnt

¹ After a while chronic arthritis became too painful for him to continue with the carving.

² C.F. chapter 2 page 38.

down. Consequently he began again, and sculpture followed sculpture. The idea of the elephant obviously led to ideas for creating the other game animals which followed the elephant. Van der Mescht is, therefore, the type of Outsider who works from a set idea, making the medium work for him¹. The "Fisherman" came about in a semi-autobiographical manner because Van der Mescht himself is an avid fisherman. Other ideas arose from watching television, for example the "Gunman" and the "Bounty Rider". The "Man with the Hazard Sign" came about to serve a functional purpose. The sculpture of "Hansel and Gretel"² was stimulated by the story itself, just as the Bible story of "Adam and Eve" inspired Van der Mescht to sculpt them³.

When it comes to the style in which Van der Mescht executed his ideas, his chosen medium of cement does dictate to quite an extent. Cement lends itself to primitive form, even though it is only relatively malleable, with a drying time of about twenty-four hours. Cement is not conducive to fine detail or modelling. This is because it cannot be packed in areas where there is no support. Detail is especially difficult because cement is runny and has to be built up layer by layer. By making the basic shape, or number of shapes, with 'ogiesdraad', Van der Mescht somehow managed to convey a sense of intrinsic structure

¹ C.F. chapter 3 page 46.

² Note, Hansel and Gretel is in fact one figure, but Van der Mescht refers to it as "Hansel and Gretel". In specific discussion, here, the term Hansel/Gretel is used.

³ C.F. chapter 2 page 41.

underlying forms and shapes. Thus he has captured the essence of his subjects. His previous, utilitarian knowledge of his medium, as well as his dependency on materials of fortune, likens him to the majority of Outsiders.

Van der Mescht's use of 'materials of fortune' displays an inventiveness, both in inspiration and in their use, which is typical of Outsider art. These found objects vary - from the use of 'seevark' ribs for the tusks of his first elephant to a plastic dwarf's head for the 'dwergie' in his pond scene. Another example is the incorporation of buoys, and of coir matting for the hair and/or scarf of the "Groot Dwergie". The coir matting is wrapped around the head and tied under the chin, giving it the appearance of both scarf and hair. The buoys themselves seem to suggest a balancing of scales, as the one hangs from the right hand which is touching the hip, and the other gives the impression of being held up by the left hand. It is, in fact, hanging in front of the hand, from a tree on the left of the sculpture. It is also possible that the right-hand buoy serves to balance the weight of the sculpture because it tilts somewhat to its left with a heavy, outstretched arm. There is a pole too, which is visible next to the left leg and serves to correct this imbalance. These found objects are incorporated into the sculptures in an extremely rudimentary way. After all, expression is all, and style is of minor importance. The aircrafts and helicopters which Van der Mescht made near the end of his twenty-five year spate of creativity, are more akin to mixed media sculptures. They are made from tin cans, toy

wheels, pieces of plank and plastic bottles. These have been created for a functional purpose as they indicate wind direction. Aside from this, they add to the environment of sculptures surrounding the Van der Mescht's property. The "Man with the Hazard Sign" also had its origins in a functional need. The red triangular sign with its reflectors serves as a warning to motorists.

Van der Mescht's use of colour, on the other hand, serves a descriptive purpose, and also has aesthetic value. He used colour to indicate transitions which could not easily be defined by modelling. This occurs most frequently in clothed human figures like the "Fisherman" in which the top half of the body is yellow, the lower half white, describing the relevant garments. The colours are usually bright and primary. Most sculptures only have three to four colours describing them, and not much use is made of tonal ranges. In general, Van der Mescht stuck to more or less naturalistic colours for animals. An exception is the horse which forms part of his "Jockey". This was painted blue with a red head, mane and hindlegs. On the whole, differentiated colour zones are characteristic of Van der Mescht's sculptures. The clothing of figures is superimposed over the basic modelling with paint. In other words the clothing and body were treated as one, forming one surface. In most cases there is little or no indication of underlying form beneath the clothing.

With regard to Van der Mescht's conception of form, he did not really

take anatomical structure and proportioning into consideration. He distorted forms and exaggerated features to serve his purpose of expressiveness. There are, however, exceptions. In his second kudu and his cow there is evidence of some knowledge of underlying anatomical structure. The faces of some of his figures reflect this as well, for example, as seen in the face of the "Fisherman", which was treated naturalistically, and that of "Hansel and Gretel", which suggests underlying bone structure and surface planes. Faces are, in most cases, the main vehicles of expression in Van der Mescht's sculptures. In his later works this is especially evident, as facial features such as ears, eyes, nose and mouth become overly emphasised and exaggerated in size. While the faces carry most of the expression, the bodies of Van der Mescht's sculptures are distorted in support of this. Their stance is significant in this regard.

The above supports the hypothesis that Outsiders concentrate on what seems, to them, the most important aspect of their themes and disregard the rest. An example of this can be seen in Van der Mescht's treatment of the "Fisherman's" ears. The "Fisherman" wears a 'lappie' hat which tilts down towards the right ear. This ear is hardly suggested at all, while the left ear is clearly indicated. A possible explanation is that, when viewing the figure frontally, the suggestion of the right ear serves as adequate description, a three-dimensional ear not being necessary as the fisherman looks over his left shoulder. From the back of the sculpture, the tilted hat only necessitates description of the left ear.

On viewing the actual face head on, one does not notice the discrepancy immediately, because the shadow and tilt of the hat adds to the suggestion of the right ear and gives one the impression of it being there. The left side is exposed and therefore required more definition. There are other examples where Van der Mescht deemed it necessary to show specific details because these explained the essential meaning of such pieces. Two of these are his "Adam" and "Eve" in which can be seen, with clarity, male and female attributes.

Rob Amato's description of Helen Martins can be applied to Van der Mescht. He too **"defies definitional analyses, or demands that each definitional attempt include its own opposite"** (Amato, 1988: p.26). By this it is meant that there is no consistency in the case of Outsiders with regard to certain stylistic factors. Thus, in Van der Mescht's work, there are many contradictions. Animals such as the elephant and horses show no understanding of anatomical structure, yet others, like his cow and second kudu, do indicate a knowledge of anatomical structure. The faces of the "Fisherman" and "Hansel and Gretel" are naturalistically portrayed, while those of the "Gunman" and the "Bounty Rider" are treated like caricatures. Figures like the "Groot Dwergie" and "Adam" and "Eve" reflect some understanding, or at least limited knowledge, of body structure, but others, such as the "Stasiemeester", are completely naive.

In spite of these contradictions, Van der Mescht's work, unlike that of most Outsiders, shows some signs of change, even development. Here we

must keep in mind that Outsiders are often criticised because there is no development in their work. However, the study of configuration of Outsiders was based on Gestalt psychology¹, which depends on aesthetics and **ignores syncretistic (analytical) individuality**. Thus our knowledge of development in the work of Outsiders is based on limited research. In at least one area, common sense tells us that after a number of years spent creating, a natural progression in skill can be expected. And this can certainly be seen in Van der Mescht's case. Towards the end of his twenty-five year spate, his works reflect more confidence in his medium and have a more 'finished' and polished look.

But, in order to discuss a more fundamental development in Van der Mescht's work, the researcher is faced with a typical problem with regard to Outsiders - that of establishing the chronological order of their works. Here, the devious, ambiguous relationship of Outsiders to their work makes the task difficult². In Van der Mescht's case it was established that the tusked elephant was first, and "Adam and Eve" last. Several interviews produced different versions as to the order of the rest of the work. In the end, from six different lists and a study of the works themselves, these works could be roughly grouped into early,

¹ C.F. chapter 1 page 20 footnote 1.

² This ambiguity emerged in a recent interview with Van der Mescht. The interview endeavoured, once more, to come closer to the mystery surrounding the reasons of Outsider creation. Van der Mescht had said that he created his works in order to better his environment. Yet on this occasion, he said to another visitor, who had come to view the sculptures, that he made them for his grandchildren.

middle and late periods, which are as follows¹:

EARLY:

Tusked Elephant	Giraffe	First Kudu
First Lion	Seagull	Stasiemeester
Goose and Chicks	Fisherman and Pond scene	

MIDDLE:

Pink and Black Man	Rabbit	Dwergies I and II
Geometric Man	Pond scene	Second Lion
White and Blue Man	Bokkie	Jockey
Hansel and Gretel	Second Kudu Cow	
Masked Figure	Windmills I and II	
Aircraft Gunner Seat		

LATE:

Gunman	Bounty Rider	Groot Dwergie
Second Elephant	Man with Hazard Sign	
Planes and Helicopters	Adam and Eve	

The majority of the sculptures surrounding the railway siding are Van der

¹ Considering the nature of Outsider art, Outsiders do not always give titles to their works. Where Van der Mescht has used a term to describe a work, this name has been used. In other cases, a descriptive term has been coined in order to aid discussion on the various sculptures.

Mescht's early sculptures. At this stage in his creativity he was also working on the trains, and on his sculptures between shifts. Therefore the sculptures surround the siding. These works are mainly of wild animals, or of man in relation to nature and his environment. Van der Mescht's special relationship with nature and love for animals seems to be reflected in these early works.

The first sculptures, namely the tusked elephant, giraffe and first kudu are extremely naive in execution. The tusked elephant, for example, has an overly long, cylindrical body with a small head. The elephant's ears extend from the shoulders to the head. Additionally, the stilt-like legs and feet are not in the least bit like those of an elephant. Therefore, in spite of the fact that a picture of an elephant stimulated the idea for this sculpture, it is evident that Van der Mescht was not pictorially influenced by this. And, as previously mentioned, found objects in the form of 'seevark' ribs serve as the tusks. Like the elephant, the giraffe and kudu also show little regard for anatomical structure. They too, have barrel-shaped bodies with stilt-like legs. The giraffe's body is too long, whilst its legs are too short. In fact Van der Mescht's giraffe is, in shape, the opposite of the normal visual perception of this animal. Observation of the knees, spine and the way the different parts of the body fit together, has not been of importance to Van der Mescht. His idea of a giraffe, with its long neck, giraffe 'horns' and bright yellow paint with large and small black dots, was his main concern. The colour of grey for the elephant, and brown for the kudu,

are fairly naturalistic. As in the elephant, when making his first kudu, Van der Mescht used found objects: in this instance, real kudu horns. Like the giraffe, it is the head area which is given the most emphasis in these early sculptures. It is as if this serves to explain and identify the rest of the sculpture. In other words, the elephant is identified as an elephant by the 'tusks', trunk, ears and grey colour. Likewise the kudu is seen to be such by the shape of its head, its horns and its colour. The identity of the giraffe is explained by its long neck, small head, giraffe's ears and colour.

The same emphasis on the head area occurs in Van der Mescht's first lion. The head is large and amorphous in shape, suggesting the mane of the lion. The mouth is exaggerated. It is these two features which are the most expressive aspects of a lion. The bright red mouth of the lion enhances this, contrasting as it does with the grey body¹. In this sculpture the body is treated as a whole, the parts of the body flowing easily into one another. Here a sense of intrinsic structure, underlying the forms and shapes, is evident. Van der Mescht has, in other words, captured the essence of a lion. The stance of the lion supports the expressive description of the head area. Standing its ground, the lion's legs are stretched out at a slight angle from the body, as if geared for action. Here, the body is no longer barrel-shaped, but more suggestive of the shape of a lion, even though still primitive in form.

¹ The paint on the first lion has now worn off, but the colours can still be detected.

In the seagull, as with the first lion, expression is all, and style is of minor importance. This sculpture too, is expressive in its pose and gesture, with threatening outstretched wings. It appears to have just landed, or to be about to take off. The forms are crudely made and subject to distortion. The wings and tail are awkward, heavy and primitive in form, while the body of the bird rises straight from the base block without any legs. Once again most attention has been given to the head which is smoothly modelled in contrast to the rest of the body. Although the head is like a seagull's in shape, the heavy curved beak is more like an elephant's trunk. The bird's head is also cocked to one side in a position often seen in birds. Added to this naturalistic touch is the naturalistic colouring of white wings, tail and beak, brown body and grey head.

In the vicinity of the seagull, and beneath the Zuney siding sign stands the "Stasiemeester". He has a compactness, characteristic of the majority of figures in Van der Mescht's early and middle works. The arms are barely separated from the body and the treatment of the 'hands' is ambiguous. The sleeves do not seem to lead into the trouser pockets. It is possible that Van der Mescht simply left the hands out. The "Stasiemeester" is related to his environment in that the pose and gesture indicate that he is watching out for the approaching train. He rests on his right leg with the other slightly forward. The shoulders tilt in such a way that a primitive weight shift is suggested. This pose of the body is endorsed by the facial expression. The head is tilted

slightly backwards with exaggerated facial features. Especially noticeable is the pig-like nose with large nostrils. These are over-emphasised in order to explain that the figure is looking slightly upwards into the distance for the train. This upward looking motion is also indicated by the way the chin flows into the neck area. Large hollows serve to describe the eyes, while there is an attempt at explaining the lips and cheeks. Van der Mescht has also given the figure character by indicating the fat stomach and the double chin. The compactness of the figure is emphasised by the fact that upright bricks were used to build the legs of the figure, giving them a square appearance. In the case of this figure, found objects consist of three tyres, one large and two small, in the centre of which the figure stands. The hollow formed by the tyres has been filled in with soil so that the whole forms a highly original plinth or pedestal. The colours of this pedestal - blue and yellow - are echoed in the figure's yellow boots, blue trousers, a white top with a blue collar and yellow hair.

Another early sculpture with expressive pose and gesture is the goose and chicks. The goose stands in a pose typical of a hissing goose, leaning slightly forward on legs spread apart, angled wings, an outstretched neck with a cocked head, and an open beak. The planes of the sides of its head, and those on either side of the breast bone, are well-indicated. A well-described stance adds life to the sculpture, especially in the angle of the wings and the position of the neck and head. Comparing the goose and chicks with the giraffe and first elephant, the better observed

details would seem to bear out the argument that Van der Mescht's work shows development. In this case it is, in fact, possible that Van der Mescht was simply more familiar with this type of animal¹. In spite of an element of naturalistic observation, the legs of the goose are, however, rather thick and cylindrical, and it stands on two-pronged feet. These thick legs were probably necessary for balance, and to prevent breakage. As in earlier sculptures, the goose is painted with broad areas of flat, naturalistic colours, in this case a grey body and head, black feet, beak and tipped wings, with a brown neck and legs. On either side of the goose, there are two chicks which are similar in pose and treatment. All three stand on an area of bright blue cement, simulating water. They create a cameo scene on their own, and this, in turn, adds to the larger environment of sculptures around them.

Situated close to this is the "Fisherman" who, together with a small island and moat, forms another cameo scene². Again there is little concern for anatomy, except for the attempted naturalism of the face. The catch seems to meet with disappointment, disdain or disapproval. The body of the fisherman is simply treated as a rounded rectangle with

¹ In the case of Outsiders development is difficult to pinpoint. A valid argument for such development should be confined to sculptures of similar subjects done at different periods. Even here, there are found to be contradictions.

² C.F. chapter 4 page 90 for further description.

cylindrical legs and arms¹. Here, the arms are not compacted against the body, but instead are stiffly outstretched, with 'mitts' curving in the manner of hands holding a fishing rod². White pants and a yellow top are indicated by the change in paint colour. The fisherman is also wearing a bright blue 'lappie' hat which has been separately modelled, and not just indicated by paint. The fish itself is almost as large as the fisherman. It has a smiling open mouth in which Van der Mescht has, humorously, modelled a large tongue. The fish appears to find the fisherman's disappointment amusing. In appearance, the fish resembles a cross between a coelacanth and a shark. It is treated more naturalistically than the fisherman. There is an indication of gills, side fins and dorsal fin. Van der Mescht has also simulated scales by creating texture on the cement. Painted grey, it reflects more knowledge of the creature's anatomy than was the case with the giraffe or elephant. It is obvious that Van der Mescht is more familiar with a fish's anatomy as he is a keen fisherman. Van der Mescht frequently fishes at Perdevlei. On the other hand, a fish has a simple basic shape, easier to imitate than the shapes of more complex animals.

These early works consist predominantly of wild animals, and a form of self-portraiture. This is most evident in the "Stasiemeester" and the "Fisherman". Although Van der Mescht, himself, has not called this self-

¹ This naive description of the fisherman recalls the work of Erich Boedeker, especially that of his cook, indicating to the viewers to see the scene for themselves. C.F. chapter 3 page 63.

² The fishing rod has been either lost or stolen.

portraiture, he has portrayed these figures engaged in favourite activities of his own. Additionally, the character of the fisherman bears a likeness to him. Together with these figures there are the wild animals which he loves, with which he has almost created a mini game park. It is, therefore, evident that he was giving concrete shape to his private world. In summary, then, the sculptures of this period are fairly large and naturalistically coloured. Expression predominates, mainly in the "Stasiemeester", seagull, goose and chicks and the first lion, whereas the "Fisherman" reflects Van der Mescht's humour.

The sculptures of the middle period are smaller than those of the first. Exceptions, however, are the cow, second kudu and the "Masked Figure" which are almost life size. It appears that most of these sculptures were done in the interests of the environment surrounding the house and garden. Also, greater use has been made of found objects, and colours have become brighter and more primary. In this, the middle period, there is an increased emphasis on people and domestic animals.

One example of a human figure of this period is the pink and black man. Although similar in execution to the "Stasiemeester", this sculpture, although still compact, is more elongated than Van der Mescht's earlier figures. It, too, has upright bricks for legs. There is also a brick placed across the two, in order to create the lower body area. Here too, the arms are not separated from the body and the hands appear to be pocketed. The figure is wearing a cement hat similar to the woollen hats

bought at African trading stores, which one pulls over the head and rolls up at the edges. Black trousers, a pink top, a black collar and tie make up the colours of the sculpture. The face, like that of the "Fisherman", is fairly naturalistically treated, except for a very thick neck flowing into the shoulders. The expression of the face is observant and passive, except for the white eyes, ringed in black and joined over the nose. This treatment of the eyes gives the face an inscrutable look. Sometimes Van der Mescht repaints his earlier works. It is possible that this happened here, as this reflects the more intense expressiveness of his later works. Nevertheless, in this figure, the face is once again the focal point, with the body pose endorsing the facial expression, echoing as it does the tired waiting expression of the face. The right shoulder is raised and the hips are slightly counter-balanced to this. This pose, with its primitive weight shift and pocketed hands, suggests that the pink and black man is waiting for a train. Facing the tracks, the figure is placed between the gravel road, which runs in front of the Van der Mescht's property, and the railway tracks.

About three metres from this figure, a very strange rabbit can be seen. Created from a found object¹, Van der Mescht has added cement to emphasise further the compact, rabbit-like shape. Cement and paint marks indicate the direction of the rabbit's fur. There is no indication of limbs, and the head runs straight into the body. There is, however, an indication of black ears streamlined against the body. The position of

¹ C.F. chapter 2 page 29-30.

the ears complements the expression in the rabbit's eyes. For the rest, the rabbit is painted white with widely spaced black brushstrokes, indicating spots. In spite of the lack of definition, expression is concentrated in the face. There is a red incised line for the mouth, and two red holes for nostrils which are quite widely spaced. The eyes are treated differently from one another, giving the rabbit two separate appearances, depending on the view from which it is seen. The eyes are made from inserted bottle-tops with the hollow side facing outwards. The right eye is painted red, but with a white crescent towards the rabbit's nose, so that this eye seems to be glancing backwards, perhaps with fear or timidity. A black ring surrounds the whole eye. The left eye, on the other hand, stares straight out sideways. Once again a black ring surrounds it. But it is given a manic, crazed expression by the blood-shot white iris, blue pupil and a red ring between the iris and the outer black ring. As in Van der Mescht's figures, the ears, eyes, nose and mouth function as the most expressive areas of the sculpture.

Van der Mescht's geometric man, white and blue man and 'dwegies' are similar in treatment, compactness and pose to the pink and black man. In these sculptures, paint also serves to demarcate the different body or garment areas and adds to the expressive qualities of the works. Their faces are also the main areas of expression. They are to be found incorporated into the wall, bordering the Van der Mescht property. In the same manner as the "Aircraft Gunner seat", windmills and aeroplanes, they have been created to add to the environment.

Van der Mescht created his pond scene for the same purpose. Positioned in the Van der Mescht garden, it can be found to the left of the garden path. Small, round pebbles cover both the top of the surrounding wall and the inside of the rectangular shape. The wall, thus covered, is painted blue with patches of red. In the centre of the pond which is, at times, filled with water, there is a 'dwegie'. Different from the typical garden pond gnome, this 'dwegie' consists of a white amorphous shape, which suggests the upper torso. Set into this, is a plastic toy dwarf's head, of a common, commercially made type. Adapted for Van der Mescht's purpose, the head has tufts of hair, a smear of cement across its forehead and eyebrows, and lips repainted bright red. To the left of the 'dwegie', a black bird, more than three times its size, looms ominously over it. Suggestive of a crow, the bird is completely black in colour. There is no suggestive detail other than slightly outstretched wings and tail. Sitting on the wall behind the 'dwegie' is a most extraordinary and eccentric figure. This depicts a woman in a white 'Voortrekker' dress and bonnet, with the black face and wide red mouth of a monkey! This creates a sharp contrast in colour, and emphasises this figure as a most odd conception. In antithesis to the large, black crow, this delicately modelled figure leans forward protectively over the 'dwegie', with its arms curved outwards and resting on its knees. As in most previous works, the hands are not visible but, instead, disappear into the knees. Yet, unlike previous sculptures, there is an indication of underlying form because the waist, breasts and legs are clearly discernable beneath the clothing. The arms,

however, are not anatomically formed as they are tubular in shape. In contrast to this carefully made figure, a large, primitively formed, black bird stands on the back right-hand corner of the pond. Twice the size of the crow, this bird is also painted black and is shaped to suggest a crane. Anatomical description has not been important to Van der Mescht in this case, as thick, red tube-like legs emerge from a mound of cement. Like these, the beak and feet are also painted red. We see an example of Van der Mescht using colour for a descriptive purpose, as the feet are only indicated by three red prongs painted onto the cement mound. Expression is further added to this sculpture by large white circles, indicating the eyes. On the wall in front of the 'dwerגיע' is a lump of bright green cement. This, together with large, white circles for eyes, suggests a frog. As a cameo scene, the pond, with its figures, forms a microcosm within the macrocosm of the environment of sculptures at Zuney.

Further up the garden path, to the right, Van der Mescht has placed his second lion. It emerges from the top of a low, blue wall alongside the garden path. Not much of the body is indicated as the focus is mainly on the head which rises above the wall. The brown head has an open, red mouth and brown mane which contrasts with a grey body. Unlike the first lion, this head has more definition to its parts. Although the head is cylindrically shaped, there is a suggestion of ears, a separate mane and a neck area. There are also circular hollows for the eyes. In this instance the separate aspects of the head are given more attention. In

the first lion, the head was treated as a whole. The mane of this second lion is simulated by dribbled cement which gives it a fairly stylised appearance. Like the "Bokkie"¹, which emerges in a similar way from the boundary wall, it was in all probability made for no purpose other than to decorate the garden wall.

The "Jockey" can be found to the right of the garden path, on the low wall bordering the Van der Mescht's property. Unlike the second lion it is freestanding, superimposed onto the wall and is approximately one metre high. The horse's back legs are straight and stick-like, while the body arches forward, with the front legs curved underneath, in what seems to be a jumping motion. Whereas Van der Mescht's sculpture usually captures a frozen moment in time, this sculpture is particularly interesting in that he has attempted to capture movement. This is also seen in the way the horse's neck and head arch forward, bending down towards the feet. As was previously stated, the horse, unlike Van der Mescht's other animals, is not naturalistically painted. The horse, with its hind legs, head and mane painted red, the rest of the body blue, is thus not naturalistically coloured. Clearly, it is that expression of movement, rather than naturalistic colour and treatment of form which is emphasised in this sculpture. The arbitrary colours contribute to this portrayal. The movements of the jockey and horse compliment one another,

¹ The "Bokkie" is actually more like a panda bear in appearance than a buck. It does not emerge from the wall in the same manner as the second lion, but has been built up from the wall. Painted red, black and white, it is primitive in form. It is placed on the low wall in front of the property, far to the right of the garden path.

as he leans forward over the horse's neck. The jockey's dark blue lower body is almost part of the horse, with the exception of stick-like legs protruding at an angle from the horse's sides. Black paint, describing the gloves of the jockey, is the only thing which prevents his hands from merging totally into the horse's shoulders. Green paint demarcates the top part of the jockey's body, which is tubular as are the arms. A strip of black paint indicates a collar around the neck which, in form, is indistinguishable from the tube-shaped body. Together, the jockey and horse form a single entity. This does not happen in the "Bounty Rider" or the "Gunman". Also, unlike the smooth surfaces of these two sculptures, the surface of the "Jockey" is almost impressionistic in its treatment. Furthermore, unlike many of Van der Mescht's other sculptures, the face has not been singled out for special emphasis. Apart from the jockey's eyes - large white orbs with heavy black lids - his face does not draw all the attention. Altogether, this piece is expressive, both in the use of colour and Van der Mescht's achievement of a sense of movement and unity. In later sculptures, parts become more defined, sometimes at the expense of unity.

Like his pond scene, Van der Mescht's "Hansel and Gretel", which is a single figure, with the attributes of both fairytale characters, forms a small environment on its own. It is placed to the right of the property, on the far right of the driveway. The figure backs defensively against a cairn-like house suggestive of a celtic cross. The sculpture is almost the same size as the house, showing that, like children and

primitives, Van der Mescht seldom considered naturalistic scale and proportion. Unlike previous sculptures, this figure is not freestanding, except for the head which is large and in the round. From the neck down, the simplified body is created in a manner similar to bas-relief. This figure is not compacted like the majority of Van der Mescht's earlier works. Instead, the arms are stretched out sideways against the wall. In this instance, it may have been easier for Van der Mescht to execute the figure in such a manner, as it is not freestanding and breakage is therefore not such a risk. With the exception of the "Fisherman", this was one of the first times where Van der Mescht created ungloved hands with each finger well-indicated. Unlike previous self-contained figures, Hansel/Gretel is vulnerable and exposed. It nevertheless does convey the feeling that Hansel is trying to protect Gretel from the witch. The pose of the body is in harmony with the defiantly defensive expression of the face. The face is not as naively executed as previous faces. Although simplified, more attention has been paid to detail such as the jaw, which is well defined, as are the planes of the cheeks, the lines down the side of the mouth, the indentations behind the nostrils, the ridges for eyebrows and the suggestion of eyelids above the hollow eyes. The whole conception of the eye-sockets compares favourably with, say, the same feature in the "Fisherman", "Stasimeester" or "Jockey". While this could be interpreted as a sign of development in Van der Mescht's work, it should be noted that some sculptures done later appear retrogressive in these same respects. With Outsiders, development in terms of anatomical accuracy seems quite baffling and certainly sporadic and inconsistent.

Contrary to the rest of Hansel/Gretel's face, the nose is almost a caricature, being large, beaked and pinched. A slightly open mouth with thin, tense lips reveals a red interior with white incised teeth. Above large ears, a stylish mop of black hair can be seen. These details show that Van der Mescht has focused on this area rather than the rest of the figure and, therefore, it is that which attracts the most attention. Although the head, obviously that of a boy, depicts Hansel, the body is ambivalent, indicating both Hansel and Gretel. The relief of the figure is painted with black pants and a red top. Strangest of all, the upper torso has breasts. On the wall from which the figure emerges, a blue silhouette of a dress is indicated by paint. The figure therefore combines both characters. This is so strange a conception that one wonders what went on inside Van der Mescht's head, but his verbal incapacity leaves one guessing. It would be interesting to know, for instance, how he would have understood the fairytale. As for the witch in the story, the only indication of her can be seen in Hansel/Gretel's reaction and a number of small, black, amorphous shapes that surround "Hansel and Gretel". Van der Mescht says that these are the owls and that they belong to the witch.

Van der Mescht's second kudu, in contrast to the first kudu, shows a more naturalistic treatment of underlying muscles and body structure. Thigh muscles, the shape of the forelegs, the heavy neck area, and curve of the rib-cage into the belly are clearly indicated. The head is like that of a kudu, especially with the inclusion of real kudu horns. It is,

however, not that expressive in its pose. Somehow, in spite of the extreme naivety in the first kudu, it seems to have more expression, especially as the head area serves to define the sculpture. There is a possibility that at certain - perhaps unpredictable - moments Van der Mescht wanted to express gesture and character, and at others concentrated on something closer to the real appearance of his subject. When this happened there was less expression. This can be seen in "Hansel and Gretel" where, although defiant in expression, the whole conception is more rigid than that of other Van der Mescht sculptures, for example, "Fisherman", "Stasimeester", "Man with the Hazard Sign" and the "Jockey", all of which show relatively little concern with more than the very basic detail. This could be because the wall in "Hansel and Gretel" acted as a limiting factor. It could also be because Van der Mescht was attempting a more realistic rendering of the head at the expense of expression.

Van der Mescht's cow is also life-size and is painted black. This is in sharp contrast to the stark, white udder. Here too, he included kudu horns, but these are broken and angled to look like those of the cows kept by Africans. The cow is leaning slightly backwards on its legs, with an open mouth and large nostrils, as if lowing in refusal to move. Aside from stilt-like legs, the thigh, shoulder and neck areas, as well as the head, are like those of a real cow. It is similar to the Kudu in that it shows anatomical observation and is naturalistically modelled. There is a dichotomy between these two sculptures, and the rest of Van

der Mescht's work, or, in other words, between naturalistic, anatomical observation and expressive depiction. This kind of contradiction is, nevertheless, typical of Outsiders. Outsiders have no interest in how things work in practical reality. Once again, the researcher has had difficulty deciding whether such attempts at anatomical accuracy really represent a development, as they are not consistently followed up in subsequent sculptures.

Unlike previous sculptures, the "Masked Figure" has a found object, in the form of a cement mask, incorporated into its head. To this, Van der Mescht has added very stylised hair. Together, these create a head which is fairly realistic, yet which contrasts sharply with the squat and naive body. Heavy shoulders and arms curve around in unnaturalistic, semi-circular shapes which bury the hands into the hips. The upper torso is painted bright yellow. The black, lower body is small and compact in comparison to the heavy upper torso. This sculpture does not have the same expressive quality as the majority of Van der Mescht's works. It is possible that, because of the inclusion of the mask, he could not use the face as the main area of expression which is usually the case. As it was seen in Hansel/Gretel, a realistic rendering of the head area occurs at the expense of expression.

It appears that, in this middle period, Van der Mescht was primarily concerned with adding to the environment surrounding his home. Things that have characterised this period are the greater inclusion of found

objects, more adventurous conceptions in the form of small ensembles, some very strange iconography, for example "Hansel and Gretel" and the 'Voortrekker' lady with the monkey face, and tentative experimentation with naturalistic anatomical detail. It seems that this period was more experimental than his early and late periods, and it is also possible that the inclusion of found objects helped towards ideas for sculptures. There are also many contradictions in the manner in which he executed these sculptures. All in all, a baffling variety of oddities was added to this environment.

Although fundamental development has not been conclusively proved to have taken place in Van der Mescht's early and middle periods, it can, with certainty, be said of his late period that there is evidence of a natural progression in skill. There is more clarity and definition present in these sculptures. The different parts have become clearly defined and closer attention has been given to detail. Colours are so much brighter that they even appear garish at times. These sculptures are also larger, with bigger heads. Forms are plumper and altogether more rounded. Greater emphasis has been given to the faces, and pose and gesture are even more expressive than before. In this period there was a greater emphasis on man. The only animals depicted are domestic animals, and they are shown in conjunction with man.

The more intense emphasis on expressive pose and gesture can be seen in the "Gunman". Van der Mescht's humour is once again in evidence here.

This sculpture stands near the railway siding and the figure seems to be aiming his gun at the oncoming trains. Although naive in execution, the sculpture is expressive to the point of caricature. The gunman is leaning back into the saddle with his feet thrust forward in concentration. He is holding a large-barrelled, sub-machine gun and his whole body is subordinated to aiming this weapon. This can be seen in the way the body is twisted and contorted with the movement, to such an extent that from behind, the shoulder and head become one. These two areas are only separated by the blue paint of the shirt and the yellow of the hair. Adding to the whole expression is the tilt of the head, the open mouth and the holes for eyes. Where there was previously an attempt at naturalism, here the whole conception is subordinated to expression. The head is almost as large as the torso and is distorted in the interests of expression. It has a big, beaked nose and a large, yellow beard which is treated as if it were a physical extension of the face. Primitive in execution, with coarse features, the face, beard and body are treated as one form. The different parts of the body are only distinguishable by the bright blue paint of the lower torso, the light blue of the upper torso, the pink of the face and feet, and the yellow of the hair and beard. Added to this, and contrasting with the other colours, is the black of the gun and gloves of the gunman. The brightly painted figure contrasts sharply against the white horse with its yellow saddle and eyes. Here, a comparison with the "Jockey" could be made. Whereas in the latter, horse and rider form one expressive entity, the horse in the "Gunman" is singularly naive and serves as little more than

a passive support for the figure. The gunman and horse are rather at odds with one another. In a waiting pose, the horse has its feet firmly placed on the ground, with the forelegs angled slightly forward. Without any anatomical concern, the body of the horse is barrel-shaped with tubular legs and tail. The neck and head are also tubular, and only the ears give it the character of a horse. In the "Gunman", the emphasis on pose and gesture convey an expressiveness almost to the point of caricature.

The "Bounty Rider" is even more like a caricature than the "Gunman". The rider is large and fat, with an enormous head, almost like Humpty Dumpty. Stumpy little arms curve outwards in a clumsy - yet amusing - effort to balance himself, as he tries to urge the horse forward by pushing down into the saddle with his short, little legs which are pressed firmly into the horse's side. In answer, the horse's head is twisted stubbornly to one side, with its stilt-like legs standing firmly on the ground. The front left leg is just beginning to lift off the ground, but not willingly. Here, the knee of the horse is suggested. Attention has also been given to the muscle of the shoulder, above the knee. Forms are conceived as consisting of angular planes, thus suggesting the sides and front of the horse's head. All in all, the forms are plump and rounded. The horse is painted brown with red hooves, with a red and white bridle, a white saddle, and a white mark in the centre of its forehead. There is black on the inside of its ears, too, as well as on the mane. The left hindquarter is painted dark brown. Bright colours, describing the

rider, stand out against these muted colours. He has black pants and gloves, a brown hat with a red rim and a red v-necked shirt. His open mouth is also red. Incised, eye-shaped eyes have blue irises and holes to indicate pupils. Although there is barely a suggestion of ears, the nose is as large, if not larger than those often seen in caricatures. Once again, pose and gesture are subordinated to purposes of expression, as forms are distorted and features exaggerated. However naively executed, expression dominates and distorts form here. Here a further comparison would be appropriate, this time with both "Jockey" and "Gunman". "Bounty Rider", as an entity, is similar to "Jockey" in that horse and rider are all-of-a-piece as far as unified expression is concerned. But "Bounty Rider" far surpasses "Jockey" in execution and finish. This is a clear example of the progression of skill mentioned earlier. Compared with "Gunman", Van der Mescht has in "Bounty Rider", returned to his earlier unified expression but has managed to achieve a more closely observed, imaginative piece.

Unlike the "Bounty Rider", the "Man with the Hazard Sign", as previously mentioned, serves a functional purpose. He is placed on the right-hand corner of the Van der Mescht property, leaning over to the right towards the gravel road, in order to face the oncoming traffic. His body leans over in an anxious, yet cautionary manner. The facial expression complements this anxious pose by means of a large head with over emphasised features. Heavy, black eyebrows, painted sideburns, moustache and beard on the dropped jaw, which reveals an open, red mouth suggest

that he is about to call out "Slow down!". Standing on thick black legs, the man leans from the waist towards his left, with his tubular arm bent at the elbow to hold erect the red, triangular hazard sign. The right arm balances this pose, with its hand resting on the hip. Although the wrist is joined to the body, the hand is painted brown and does not disappear into the hip as in some previous sculptures. This could be because it seems as if the hand is resting on what appears to be a gunholster. There is a black rectangular shape beneath the hand which has been added onto the left thigh. If so, this is another touch of Van der Mescht's humour, in which he is saying, "Slow down or else!". What is more, the figure is painted in a uniform to further emphasise his functional role. He is wearing black trousers with a painted red belt and a black buckle. His white shirt has a red pocket and collar, with a black armband, similar to those used in scholar patrols. The black hat further defines his road-side occupation. In this sculpture, as in "Adam" and "Eve", more attention has been given to painted details like belts and buckles, than in previous sculptures. In the "Man with the Hazard Sign", as in other sculptures, Van der Mescht instinctively, like a child combined colours very effectively. As in "Stasiemeester", where blue, yellow and white are beautifully balanced, so too, in "Man with the Hazard Sign" red, white and black have been effectively used. Although there is little regard for anatomy here, this sculpture serves its function through its total expression.

The "Groot Dwergie" is not as expressive as the "Man with the Hazard

Sign". It is placed on the left-hand side of the driveway entering the property. One's first impression of it is that it is a man, but closer inspection reveals female attributes. There is a primitive indication of hips, breasts, thighs and even knees. More evidence of an attempt at form is visible in the legs than in the arms, which look like wide, solid tubes. The figure is attired in painted black trousers, a sleeveless red top, a black cowboy hat, one short black glove on the right hand, and an elbow-length black glove on the left hand. Although not expressive in pose or facial expression, the attire is somewhat eccentric¹. S/he has a pig-like nose similar to that of the "Stasiemeester", bright, red lips and white eyes. These eyes are actually shaped like eyes, but are indented with white paint and no other colour. Van der Mescht has treated the eyes of his sculptures in many different ways. Others', such as "Eve's" have lots of black painted around them, which gives a sinister appearance. The "Man with he Hazard Sign" has large hollows for eyes, which were painted over with grey circles and given indented holes to indicate pupils. These holes, indicating the pupils, work quite effectively as can be seen in the "Fisherman", even though his eyes are not painted at all, but instead left pink like the rest of the face. As previously mentioned, hair was added to the "Groot Dwergie" in the form of coir matting which Van der Mescht found at Perdevlei. The right arm, for once, does not disappear into the hip. Instead it appears to be

¹ Unable to gain explanations for the term of "Groot Dwergie", or reasons for the idea prompting the creation of the sculpture, one wonders if this is not Van der Mescht's 'tongue-in-cheek' version of a fantasy woman.

lifting the edge of the red shirt, whilst a buoy dangles from the wrist. The left arm is outstretched, giving the appearance of holding up the other buoy, which in actual fact is hanging from a branch of the peach tree beside which the figure stands. This sculpture is the first explicit version of a female which Van der Mescht created.

Van der Mescht says that he made his second elephant shortly before "Adam" and "Eve". It is positioned on the other side of the railway line from his first elephant. Smaller and thinner than the previous elephant, the head is larger than its body. In the first elephant, the body is heavy and large with a very small head. In the second elephant the stilt-like legs are longer than those of the other elephant, and not too different in form from the shape of the trunk. More attention has been given to the head of this sculpture, and the manner in which the ears join the head. Although the head of this one, together with the longer legs, gives one something of the feeling of an elephant, the first one, in spite of the legs being too short, seems to have even more of an elephantine character, especially when it comes to the body. The heavy elephantine character of the body in this first elephant is re-enforced by the inclusion of tusks. The tusks, heavy body and trunk are the most expressive features of an elephant. This same elephantine sense is not to be found in the thin, second elephant. All that the second elephant has to identify it as an elephant, is its trunk. Once again, when it comes to the question of development, Van der Mescht, like most Outsiders, shows inconsistency. Whether the second elephant is less

successful than the first, because he was trying to repeat himself, or for any other reason, is a matter of guess work, as is his reason for creating the same animal again.

"Adam" and "Eve" are the last of Van der Mescht's sculptures. They stand facing each other, on either side of the garden path, before one reaches the 'stoep'. "Adam" is on the left and "Eve" is on the right¹. They emerge at upper-thigh level, from white walls painted pink on top. On the sides of the white walls Van der Mescht painted flowers and three flying birds. Most of his previous sculptures were freestanding, with the exception of "Hansel and Gretel", the "Bokkie" and the second lion. Here, "Adam" was created first, and, except for a very dominant and obviously male chin, is smaller than "Eve". His arms are raised above his head with his hands disappearing into a blue spherical shape. The light blue tubular arms are only separated from the dark blue sphere by strips of red paint indicating sleeve cuffs. Van der Mescht says that the blue sphere is the earth, and that "Adam" is holding it in order to show that he was the first person created by God on earth. Adam's head is sunk into the large shoulders in a primitive manner. Even so, this gesture does suggest the feeling of what happens when one raises one's arms in such a manner. Here, there is a more particular indication of gender than beforehand. "Adam's" nipples (in spite of the fact that he is wearing a shirt) are indicated through modelling, and there is a suggestion of the genital area. There are also green buttons painted

¹ C.F. chapter 2 page 41.

onto his black trousers. In this sculpture, detail is meticulously explained by a painted red belt with a green buckle, and black buttons on the blue shirt. In contrast to "Eve", "Adam" is almost child-like in appearance and the 'world' he holds aloft seems more like a child's ball. In "Eve", gender is more clearly indicated than ever before. The genital area as well as the large hips, heavy thighs and conical breasts are clearly, even aggressively, modelled¹. Furthermore, the nipples are painted red, in spite of the fact that she is wearing a red collar-neck jersey under a blue shirt which is covered by a green top. This, one can only surmise, is a touch of Van der Mescht's humour. Like "Adam", "Eve" also has black buttons painted onto her top, as well as a black belt with a red buckle. Her arms are also tubular in shape, and the hands disappear into her hips, from which they are separated by red bands of paint indicating her jersey cuffs. "Eve's" face has a disapproving look with large, black-ringed eyes. "Adam's" expression is one of nervous avoidance with blue, cat-shaped eyes and small, black pupils which look sideways. Both faces show more attention to detail than in previous sculptures. "Adam's" heavy forehead hangs anxiously over a sharp, pointed nose. There is an incised line around his mouth, which is slightly open, and somewhat negroid in appearance. Details such as brows, and the lines around the mouth and hollows under his eyes are also shown. "Eve's" face is softer in its features than "Adam's". Her mouth is slightly open with her bottom lip and jaw protruding as if ready to

¹ In pre-historic sculpture, this exaggeration of the female attributes such as breasts, thighs and hips was indicative of fertility and creation.

reprimand. This impression is emphasised by the black circles around the eyes. Her nose is longer than "Adam's" and hawk-like in appearance. Lines around her mouth and the indentation above her upper-lip are also indicated. Like the "Masked Figure" she also has somewhat stylised, shoulder-length, brown hair. The forms of both figures are full and rounded, with brighter colours than in earlier sculptures.

In summary, the works of Van der Mescht's last period reflect greater confidence and ability, both in style and technique. They have a far more polished appearance than do his earlier sculptures. After making the last two figures, Van der Mescht's creativity, in true Outsider manner, came to a sudden halt. One can only surmise that Van der Mescht had achieved what he had set out to do. Nevertheless, this, like many aspects of Outsider art, cannot be explained categorically.

It has become clear, from the research and analysis outlined in this and earlier chapters, that Van der Mescht, in many respects, can be classified as an Outsider. Above all, it has been seen that expression is paramount and style is of minor importance; and that, as has been stressed, this is because Van der Mescht worked instinctively. This can be seen not only in the way expression dominates and distorts form, but also in his instinctive use of colour. It is also through this instinctiveness, typical of Outsiders, that Van der Mescht at times, managed to achieve the essence of his subject matter. It has also been seen that, like that of most Outsiders, Van der Mescht's work is full of

incongruencies and discrepancies.

Although some small measure of development can be discerned in the work of Van der Mescht, this is very inconsistent and somewhat obtuse. As already stated, this makes him something of an exception, but such development as there is in his work is not striking enough to disqualify him as an Outsider. In his work, as a whole, development is not the major factor.

In spite of in depth research and many interviews, such an analysis and investigation has proved the motivation behind Outsider art to be both baffling and closed to our understanding. In this instance it is necessary to restate that interpretations, reasons and motives do not concern Outsider artists. Van der Mescht's work has borne this out, as have his words on the subject; when he said that God made the world and that is how it is, and he makes his sculptures and that is the way it is. All he can tell us is: **"Ek kan nie daaroor stories vertel nie. Ek doen dit net."**

CONCLUSION

It can be said of Western culture today, that it is characterised by an immense overload of information. As far as the arts are concerned, this can result in the dilution of personal vision as well as confusion, and, ultimately, a sense of artistic apathy. The situation of the Outsider isolates him/her from this overload.

In this investigation, it was seen that social isolation has left Outsider sculptors innocent of 'cultural conditioning'. Linked to this is the fact that they have had no formal artistic training and are completely ignorant of the artistic world. One of the mysteries of Outsider creation is that it comes about for no apparent reason. The most that can be said is that, in some cases, there is a 'trigger mechanism' which activates creativity. In Van der Mescht's case it was his abstention from alcohol¹. It was further found that, in general, this creativity most often manifests itself in mid-life, and can cease just as suddenly as it started. Moreover, it was noted that Outsider sculpture is more prevalent amongst men than women. Innocent of Mainstream influence, their work is highly dependent on 'materials of fortune'². Therefore, this instinctive creativity becomes inventive both as far as medium and inspiration are concerned.

¹ C.F. chapter 2 page 36.

² C.F. chapter 1 page 10.

This thesis has investigated why Outsider sculptors create as they do, without prompting; indeed why whole environments of works come about in this inexplicable manner, with neither education nor training. Outsider sculptors seem privy to that creative urge which mainstream commentators on art have so flagrantly tried to describe. The fact that Outsiders have access to this urge without tutelage shows more clearly than in the case of mainstream artists that it is something innate, as much a part of human nature as the urge to breathe. In view of this it is not surprising that Van der Mescht cannot more fully describe his own creative urge.

This primal urge generates a paradox in the study of Outsider art: that this quality was first discovered and could only be evaluated by people who are culturally sophisticated. However, such artistically trained researchers may themselves have become distanced from that original unexplained creative urge, and so their terminology cannot adequately describe it. For example, one should be hesitant to call Outsider creation art, as this word in the established sense has communicative connotations with which the Outsider is unconcerned. In Outsider creations we find something more like an instinctive creative discharge. Outsiders seem precisely to have taken care to guard themselves and others against any risk of communication. As Thévoz has it "[Outsider art] has to be envisioned as a practice or a production in which no question of any message can ever arise" (Thévoz, 1976: p.97).

Any attempt to bring Outsider art within the bounds of Mainstream art will fail, because it becomes altered in the transition, as was seen with the modern primitives and 'naifs'¹. Ehrenzweig claims this is because **"the formalisation of their maxims would destroy their meaning"**. (Ehrenzweig, 1967: p.142). This work should not be separated from the circumstances of its creation.

Outsider art has always existed, and has managed to escape the genuine conflict inherent in Mainstream art between two kinds of sensibility: on the one hand, conscious intellect, and on the other, unconscious intuition and instinct. For this reason, Outsider art has been welcomed as fashionable in the twentieth century in those circles where there has been a deliberate referral back to primitive creativity. The Outsiders themselves never experience this conflict. They retain, in pure form, their intuitive creative sensibility. They draw inspiration directly from this and produce works which are individual, inexplicable, yet ever-intriguing.

When Western culture was confronted with Outsider art the first thing that occurred was a kind of pillage. Later, this manifested itself in an anthropological and aesthetic interest, the aim of which was to save and preserve the objects concerned. Cultural colonisation has now taken to milder methods but the end result is much the same. The method is now

¹ C.F. chapter 1 page 8.

one of ingestion, assimilation and homogenisation. (Thévoz, 1976: p.14). **"Having passed through this digestive process, the object ends up in a museum - into which goes everything that can be described as art"**. (Thévoz, 1976: p.14). Yet it was precisely the cultural dictates of the museums that Dubuffet was against¹. In the long run, however, this did not stop him from exhibiting in galleries or organising exhibitions of Outsider art. Therefore Outsider art runs the same risks as Mainstream art of becoming part of the very museum set-up to which Dubuffet was so vehemently opposed.

Thus, as there is virtually no place for cultural phenomena outside of cultural institutions, it has been by virtue of Outsider art being an anti-cultural phenomenon that Dubuffet himself has been integrated, by default, into cultural history. What then is the position of the Outsider artist today? Are we not including him in our culture? Is it possible that art historians of the future will look back and write Outsider art into our cultural history? But the very existence of culture allows for, and defines 'non-culture'. Therefore, ironically, it may be that Dubuffet's integration into our culture will allow the Outsider artist to remain on the outside.

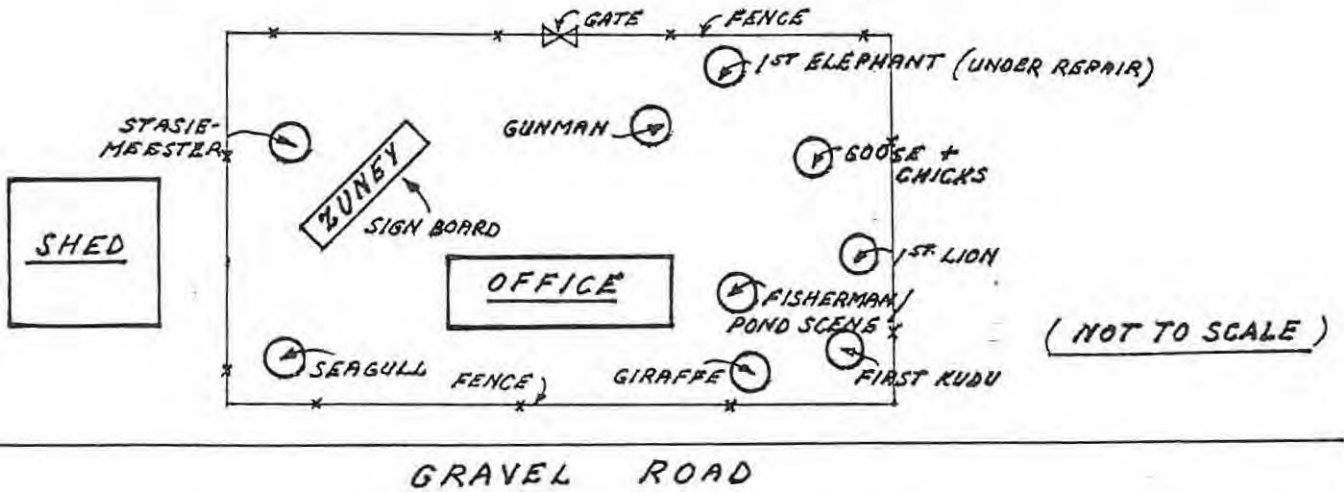
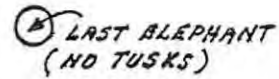
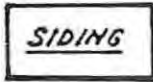
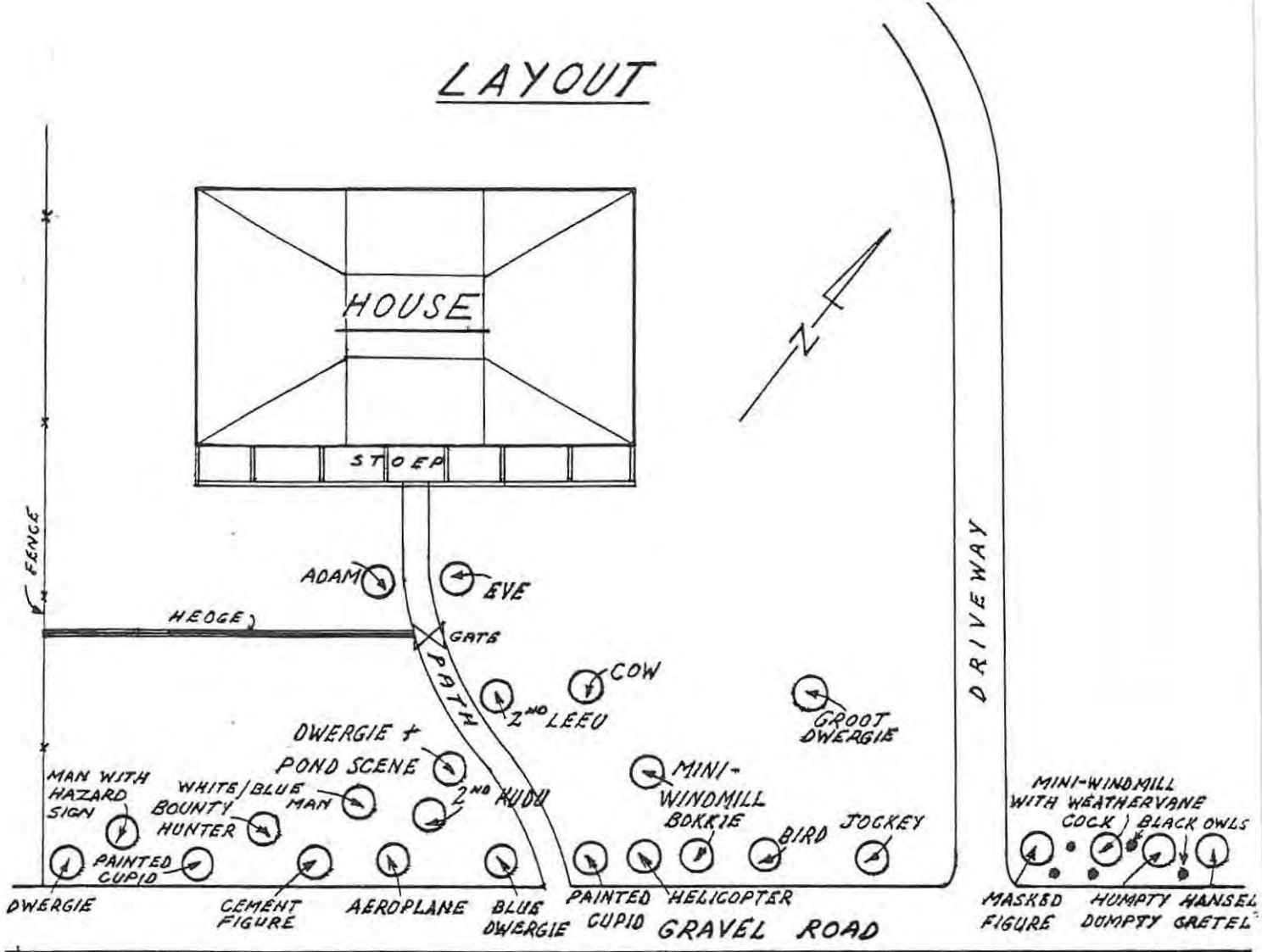
At this stage a warning can be sounded for future research and acquisition of knowledge about Outsider art. It is a delicate

¹ C.F. chapter 1 page 19 footnote 2.

phenomenon, and when tampered with, will lose its essence, which is that creativity which is found when society, and more specifically the art establishment, cannot label, categorise or judge it. Although we do not wish to interfere with Outsider artists, we can learn from them something about our own basic artistic values. Possibly, Outsiders are the oldest in art history - those who created before coming together into a community and calling themselves 'artists'.

Fortunately for most Outsiders, including Van der Mescht, they are extremely resilient against attempts to describe and encapsulate their creative mystery. While unable to describe adequately the essence of Van der Mescht's sculptures, he, himself, was able to put this researcher's attempts into perspective. During an interview, upon repeated questioning, Van der Mescht replied with a self-contained, enigmatic smile "Ag, meer vir die liegboek, heh?".

LAYOUT



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POSTSCRIPT

Two days before the final submission of this thesis, the researcher returned to Zuney in order to retake photographs and to bid Dirk Charley van der Mescht farewell. It was surprising to find that not only had he repainted some of his sculptures, but he had also created four new ones. Based on the existing knowledge of Outsiders it was predicted that he would not begin more works¹. This unexpected renewal of the creative process is uncharacteristic of Outsiders. Nevertheless, for future researchers, it can be used as an example of the difficulties and possible dangers of laying down predictions, in a field of studies so diffused with contradictions and ambiguities.

¹ C.F. chapter 2 page 43-44.

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