

Miss America and Her Sisters:

PERSONIFICATIONS OF THE FOUR PARTS OF THE WORLD

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The reasons for collecting are various: one is interested in an artist, or an object, or a medium, or a subject. It is this last form of addiction that occasions the present article. The collection of the late James Hazen Hyde was entirely due to Mr. Hyde's interest in the personifications of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. He sought and found the Four Continents in prints, metalwork, paintings, glass, textiles, drawings, and ceramics. Mr. Hyde's executors, in accordance with the terms of his will, have presented to the Metropolitan Museum some one hundred fifty items from his extensive collection; we hope to suggest their variety this month in the Recent Accessions Room, and in these pages.

It is quite possible that the Renaissance acquired its first visual ideas about the Four Continents through a love of parades. Throughout the sixteenth century, cities from Rome to Antwerp echoed with the sound of trumpets heralding the entry within their gates of royal personages. The king or duke or princess rode into the city at the end of a cortege of hundreds of musicians, city officials, and actors and towns-

people—some on foot, others drawn in chariots or on floats—costumed as allegories. The city itself was decorated with flags, fountains, and, especially in Flanders and France, street theaters and triumphal arches. These last were sometimes simply painted with allegorical figures and coats of arms, but more often were fitted with a stage, set in above the opening of the arch, for *tableaux vivants* in which "living" allegories were unveiled at each turn of the royal route. The subjects of these allegories were chosen primarily to enhance the prestige of the royal visitor: Religion and the Virtues accompanied him in the procession, while allegories of classical heroes—in whose deeds were symbolized his own—were presented as *tableaux vivants*. Political allusions were especially popular, and it was not long before the Four Continents regularly acknowledged the supremacy of the visiting prince.

When Prince Philip, heir to the Spanish throne, rode into Antwerp in 1549 "the three principal parts of the world"—Asia, Africa, and Europe—knelt, in a *tableau vivant*, to pay him homage. In Rouen, a year later, a house representing the Isle of Brazil was built to honor Henry II and Catherine de Médicis. By the end

FRONTISPIECE: *America. German (Fulda), about 1780-1788. Hard-paste porcelain, height 9 1/4 inches*

Unless otherwise noted the objects illustrated in this article are gifts of the Estate of James Hazen Hyde, 1959

ON THE COVER: *Detail of Europe, by Dirk Barentsz, as engraved by Johannes Sadeler. Flemish, 1581. Statuette of Europe. German (Fulda), about 1780-1788. Hard-paste porcelain, height 9 1/4 inches*

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of the century the Four Continents were familiar attendants of royal entries, and nowhere were they more popular than in Antwerp. For there—the largest and most active port city in Europe—foreign merchants swelled the city's coffers with their trade; there some of the earliest travel books were illustrated and printed. Antwerp was the city that could best afford to hire the hundreds of painters and carpenters and actors needed for the entertainment of the sovereigns who made their entries into the city—among them Charles V, Philip, and the Archduke Ernest of Austria. It is thus not surprising that personifications of the Four Parts of the World in the sixteenth century should occur predominantly in Flemish art.

We can trace their iconography in the graphic arts of that country. For most of the century the personifications followed no set pattern. America was usually envisioned as a rather fierce savage—only slightly removed in type from the medieval tradition of the wild man—while Asia and Africa appeared in a variety of Oriental costumes. Europe herself was simply an elegantly dressed woman of the nobility who could as well have symbolized Minerva or Spring.

Marking the transition between the allegorical *tableau vivant* and the more abstract idea of personification is a drawing (Figure 1) of about 1575 by the Italo-Flemish artist Johannes Stradanus (Jan van der Straet, 1523-1605). In this drawing Stradanus commemorates the much-disputed discovery of America in 1497 by Vespucci who is seen rousing her from a "hamaca." In the center her name appears in reverse: this was the final drawing used by Theodore Galle of Antwerp who engraved it as the opening illustration of *Nova Reperta* (*New Discoveries*), a

collection of engravings published in the early 1580s that included, as well, the "discoveries" of windmills, spectacles, and oil colors. Surrounding America are some of her fauna and flora: an anteater burrows in the foreground; a sloth clings to the tree, at the base of which is a pineapple plant; a tapir hovers in the background. Stradanus was well informed. One of the earliest collections of voyages, most of them to America, had been compiled by Fracanzano da Montalbado in 1507: the *Paesi novamente ritrovati* has been described by the historian Boies Penrose as the "book par excellence by which the news of the great discoveries—east and west—was disseminated throughout Renaissance Europe." It was followed, every few years throughout the century, by new voyages and descriptions. In 1526 Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdes published *La natural historia de la Indias* which made detailed information about the Indians and American fauna and flora generally available for the first time. It was such printed sources, and presumably manuscripts and first-hand sketches that have not yet come to light, that documented Stradanus's vision of the New World.

Although Vespucci's claim to discovery of the American mainland in 1497 is now discredited, the fact that Central and South America were the first parts of the hemisphere to be explored in the sixteenth century determined from the outset the personification of the New World as a tropical country. Scantly clad in a feather skirt and headdress, with jeweled anklets and long hair, America was always to be represented as Stradanus drew her. Later the club leaning against the tree would be replaced by a bow and arrow, and one of the "venimous beasts, as crocodiles" would become the standard symbol of American fauna. But Stradanus has omitted something. The one aspect of the American Indian that astonished voyagers was his painted skin. In personifying the continent as a woman, Stradanus—and artists after him—must have discarded this picturesque feature as being inappropriate to the fair sex; only in the documentary drawings of such artist-travelers as Jacques le Moyne de Morgues and John White do we find Indians painted "with curious knots, or antike worke."

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Fig. 1. *The Discovery of America*, by Jan van der Straet (Stradanus). Flemish, about 1575. Pen and bistre heightened with white, $7\frac{1}{8} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$ inches

Contemporary with Stradanus were artists whose independent symbolism wove different threads into the fabric of personifications. In the designs of Dirk Barentsz (1534-1592) two attributes were introduced that, thanks to the popularity of the engravings by Johannes Sadeler (Figures 3, 5), were retained long afterward: the parrot in the tree behind America, and the hat (later changed to a parasol) worn by Africa to protect her from the heat of the day. The influence of his designs extended well beyond Barentsz's own generation. Sadeler's engravings were copied with a few variations by Cornelis van Daten in the seventeenth century; these in turn were copied still later onto a set of Frankfort earthenware plates (Figures 2, 4).

The personifications of Martin de Vos (1532-1603; Figures 7, 8), who sketched similar figures of the Continents for the entry of the Archduke Ernest of Austria into Antwerp in 1549, popularized a type that recurs throughout Flemish

and German art until the nineteenth century: the female figure astride her characteristic animal and carrying her attributes.

The subject of the Continents, made popular by the graphic arts, was adapted to the decorative arts almost immediately. Of great interest for their rarity and their early date are four lead plaques (Figures 6, 9), all part of Mr. Hyde's collection, which the Museum has been fortunate in acquiring at this time. Executed by an unknown German artist, they were intended to serve as a goldsmith's model, possibly for the shallow bowl of a cup or *tazza*. The animals that surround each Continent reflect the influence of De Vos—active chiefly in the 1580s—while Europe's costume is also worn by other ladies in the same decade. The feather bustle in which "Miss America" strides across her continent can be traced to about 1505, in a woodcut based on Vespucci's narrative of his voyages; its appeal is evident from the fact that



Figs. 2, and 4 (opposite). Africa, and America. Earthenware plates, with painted decoration copied from engravings by Cornelis van Daten the Younger (1638-1664) of designs by Dirk Barentsz. German (Frankfort on the Main), late XVII or XVIII century. Diameters 8¾ inches



Figs. 3 (opposite), and 5 (below). Africa, and America, by Dirk Barentsz, as engraved by Johannes Sadeler. Flemish, 1581. 7 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{16}$ inches



Figs. 6, and 9 (opposite, below). America, and Europe. German, about 1580-1590. Lead plaques, diameters 6 7/8 inches

Rogers Fund, 1960



*Illā quidem nob̄ eris dudum non cognita terris,
Facta brevi auriferis late celeberrima vnis,*

*Visceribus scelerata suis humana recondens
Viscera feralem pretendit AMERICA clavam.*



*Figs. 7 (opposite, below), and 8 (above).
 America, and Europe, by Martin de Vos, as
 engraved by Adrien Collaert II (active about
 1560-1618). Flemish, about 1595. $8\frac{3}{8} \times 10\frac{1}{16}$
 and $8\frac{1}{8} \times 10\frac{1}{8}$ inches*

Figs. 10-13. The Four Continents. Woodcuts from the first illustrated edition of Iconologia by Cesare Ripa. Italian (Padua), 1603. Approximate dimensions 4 3/4 x 4 1/4 inches

it reappeared in costume books of the middle of the century.

Like the graphic arts of the period, the personifications on our plaques are a curious mixture of genuine documentation, details copied from classical sources, and a fertile imagination. The Renaissance inherited a tradition of mythical geography that was rooted in the fanciful narratives of Ctesias in the fourth century B.C., and that was embellished in turn by Pliny, Gaius Solinus, and a fourteenth century Fleming, Jean d'Outremeuse (who wrote under the unlikely name of Sir John Mandeville). Among themselves, they created a world of men with enormous ears (their only clothing, we are told), of sheep who were "weak in the head, and [who] consequently must be made to graze with their backs to the sun," of dog-headed people who were "reasonable and of good understanding."



As the Renaissance outgrew these stories their place was taken by others with direct social implications. Christianity was threatened by the evil Gog and Magog, and glorified by the elusive Prester John; gold from the hoards of El Dorado was to enrich Europe as never before. Such fables were as compelling reasons for voyages as were the more rational searches for good trade routes. While the dream of El Dorado persisted, America was sometimes personified, as she is on our plaque, with vessels of gold and jewelry heaped at her feet. But it was Asia with her pearls and silks and spices that was the real symbol of wealth to the Europeans, and in personifications she is usually dressed as sumptuously as Europe. The luxury of Persian court life, the fruitfulness of Persian gardens, the elephants and horses and camels with their gold trappings never failed to impress the Western merchants and ambassadors. "They are a very pompous nation," wrote the Venetian traveler, Ambrogio Contarini, about 1475, "and their camels are so well caparisoned that it is a pleasure to look at them. Few are so poor as not to

possess at least seven camels.” Symbol of commerce and transportation as well as luxury, the camel—by which the Romans had signified the East on their coins—was naturally adopted as Asia’s animal in personifications. Chief among her other attributes was an incense burner that recalled her spices and incense-laden rituals. On her head a garland of flowers and fruits symbolized her temperate climate which produced “delightful Things necessary for human Life,” although a more popular headdress came to be a turban signifying Islam.

Though Europe was sometimes acknowledged to be Asia’s younger sister, she was presented in greater glory. As ruler of all the Continents she appears with the traditional attributes of power: a crown symbolizes her role as queen, a scepter her temporal power. In her hand she sometimes carries a small temple to signify the domain of the “true and perfect religion,” but the orb—symbolizing the rule of Christianity over the entire globe—is found much more frequently. Surrounding Europe are books and musical instruments to denote her accomplishments,



weapons to emphasize her military strength. In a gesture to an older tradition our plaque represents her with a bull, but the horse figures as a more appropriate animal because it connoted her warlike nature. The horse may perhaps also be taken as a symbol of Europe’s agricultural development.

The personification of Africa, alone of the Four Continents, was copied from Roman sources: her appearance on Hadrianic coins (dating about A.D. 138) was well known in the Renaissance and surely accounts to some degree for the popularity of the Continents as an iconological subject. On the coins, she is commonly shown with a sheaf or basket of cornstalks, the North African lands being an important source of that staple of the Roman diet. In the Renaissance, the cornstalks are usually replaced by a cornucopia, which had been the general symbol of plenty ever since Zeus, in the Greek myth, had placed the horn of Amalthea among the stars. Indeed, as can be seen from the accompanying illustrations, the image makers, not to slight the pretensions of any continent, endowed

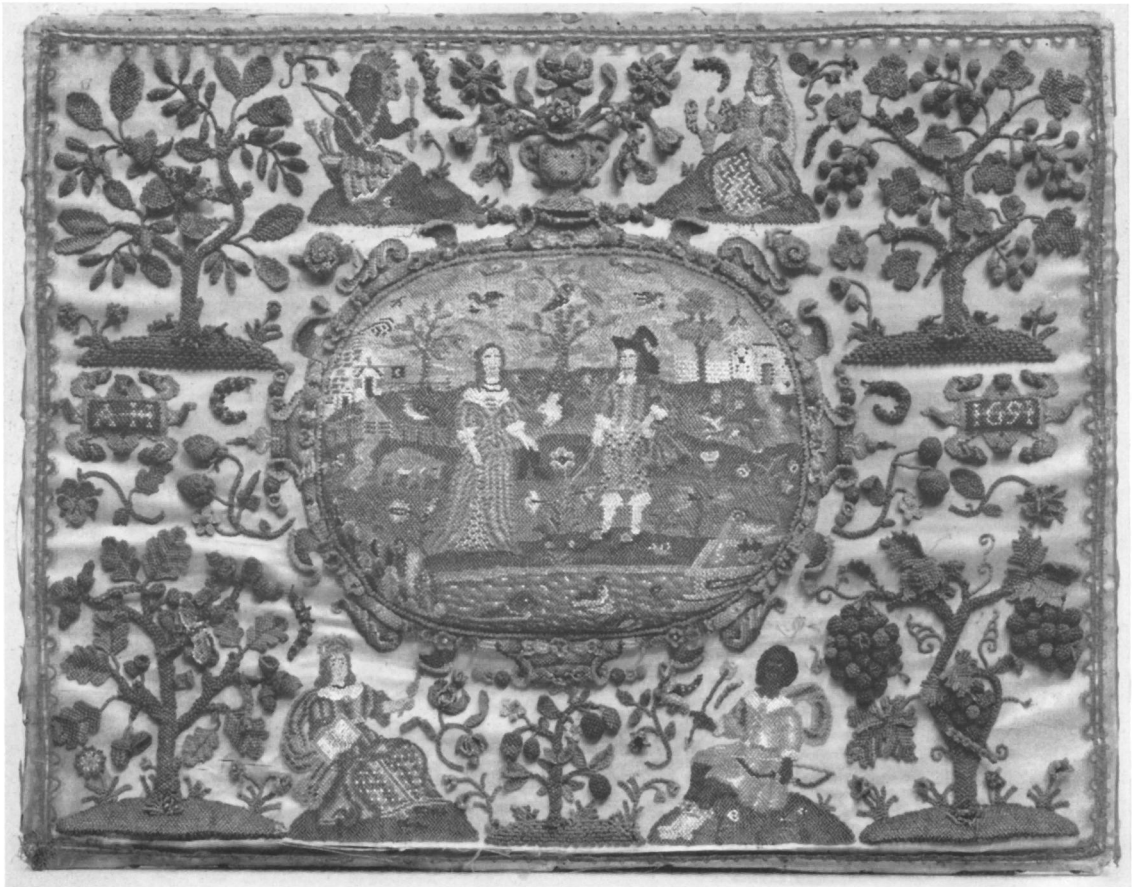
each with exceptional fertility: the cornucopia is found as an attribute of them all.

Under the serenity of this agrarian image lurked one of a darker Africa, a mysterious land inhabited by savage monsters. Already on Roman coins, as on our lead plaque, lions and reptiles were her fauna. Sometimes she held a scorpion in her hand in a picturesque gesture not picked up again until the eighteenth century when the quest for the authentic source became earnest. Another feature of ancient derivation was her headdress, composed of the hide of an elephant's head and trunk. Although first encountered by the Romans in Asia, the elephant came to be considered characteristically African; the coiffure possessed an exotic quality that, again, appealed mostly to eighteenth century artists. Going back only to the Renaissance is the tradition of the basket or branch of coral which

frequently accompanied Africa. Deposited all along her Mediterranean coast, its magical attributes made it much sought after for jewelry.

In 1593 the first modern book on the science of images was published. The work of a Perugian compiler named Cesare Ripa, the *Iconologia* (the English language gained a word from its title) was chiefly concerned with the "things which are in man himself and inseparable from him; like ideas, thoughts and customs which occasion particular actions." But Ripa nevertheless perpetuated the existence of such classical divinities as Flora, Oceanus, Aether, and Zephyrus in a section devoted to the seasons, elements, winds, rivers—and the Parts of the World. In contrast to the personifications of the Continents we have seen, which were the result of personal interpretations, those of Ripa were drawn, whenever possible, from classical symbolism as

Fig. 14. The Four Continents. English, 1651. Panel with beadwork decoration on satin, 18¼ x 22 7⁄8 inches



known from ancient books, coins, and sculpture, for, he warned, “one works in vain without these originals.” The *Iconologia*, as first illustrated in 1603 (Figures 10-13), became a standard source for later artists; in culling from all the “right” sources, Ripa established a type of personification of the Continents that was to influence artists for nearly two centuries.

But though Ripa was the chief source for artists he was not the only one; the theatrical presentation of the Continents flourished in the seventeenth century, tempering Ripa’s somewhat dry analysis. In the Netherlands, the triumphal arches adorned with figures of the Parts of the World survived as the title pages of atlases and geographical histories. In France, Louis XIII starred as Asia in a comic ballet of the Continents in 1626, while in London, in 1672, the investiture of the Lord Mayor was celebrated by America, “a proper masculine woman, with a tawny face.” The courtly figures in their chariots which grace a set of playing cards are clearly an allusion to royal progresses. Four of a pack of fifty-two geographical cards—the others personify individual countries—they were designed in 1644 by Stefano della Bella at the behest of Cardinal Mazarin as an instructive amusement for the young Louis XIV. Mazarin was probably inspired by the *Iconologia* which appeared in a second Paris edition that year, following upon one of half a dozen years before.

Uninfluenced by Ripa, whose work was not published in London until 1709, the English enjoyed a certain iconographical independence. The seated figures of the Continents on an embroidered and beadwork panel (Figure 14) dated 1651 are familiar in type, but the neat Puritan costume of Africa is wonderfully insular. And, as was quite common, the attributes of Africa and America have been confused. Both countries were tropical, both savage. For some time they shared the lizard and the palm tree; the lion and crocodile were interchanged; and Africa—who like Asia had not been endowed by iconologists with weapons of her own—occasionally borrowed America’s bow and arrows.

The vigor of sixteenth century personifications of the Continents gradually became subdued.



Fig. 15. Africa. German (Fulda), about 1780-1788. Hard-paste porcelain, height 9 ¼ inches

By the eighteenth century the active excitement of discovery had been transfigured into the passive dream of Arcadia; the Amazons of our lead plaques have become four young girls of winsome grace delicately modeled in white por-



Figs. 16, and 17 (below). Africa, and Europe, by Gottfried Bernhard Goetz. German, second quarter of the XVIII century. Black chalk drawings, 9 x 13 ⁵/₈ and 9 ¹/₄ x 13 ¹/₄ inches



celain (Frontispiece, Figure 15). This pastoral vision was chiefly centered in the classical past; but to a century that admired Nature and Simplicity from the warm comforts of its firesides, the savage, like the ancient Greek, was at once noble and picturesque. As early as 1584, Sir Walter Raleigh had found the Virginian Indians “most gentle, loving and faithfull, voide of all guile and treason, and such as live after the

surely this very ignorance of the interior of the continent that accounts for the reliance, in personifications, on Ripa and classical precedent. In a splendid drawing (Figure 16) by Gottfried Bernhard Goetz (1708-1774) Africa is shown with an unusually complete set of attributes, including the coral and parasol. The added details of the landscape, and the attendants with their bizarre headdresses suggest that



Fig. 18. Detail showing Africa, from a hard-paste porcelain dish. German (Meissen), about 1740

manner of the golden age.” Even the most adverse accounts of intervening centuries had not dispelled the vision of America as a country of green plains and clear rivers, of “birds of all colours, some carnation, some crimson, orange tawny, purple, greene,” of docile natives adorned with “fayre plumes of fethers.”

The vogue for faraway places included Africa and Asia as well. Africa was almost wholly ignored by eighteenth century explorers. It is

Goetz sketched this for a painting or even as a setting for a ballet or festival. Two other related sketches by him are known: that of Europe (Figure 17), riding triumphantly through the countryside while her regal attributes are borne aloft by putti, is also in the Hyde Collection; the drawing of America was formerly in the collection of Sir Robert Mond. Whatever the original purpose of these drawings it appears that Goetz, who was a designer for the Meissen

Figs. 19, and 21 (opposite). Asia, and Europe. Details from a damask panel. German, 1787



factory, adapted them to other uses. Africa appears, copied with but few variations, on a large painted Meissen dish (see Figure 18) of about 1740; on the same dish America is copied from the Mond drawing. A large sculptural group of Africa in the part of the Hyde Collection that was given to the Cooper Union Museum for the Arts of Decoration has the same variations from the Goetz drawing as the painted figure; a smaller figure of Europe in the same collection corresponds closely to our other sketch but in reverse. The figure of Asia on our plate can be ascribed to Goetz on the basis of engravings of this whole series by Balthasar Sigmund Setletzky. Only the source for Europe has not been discovered.

In the treatment of the Continents during the eighteenth century, the image of Asia was the one least bound by convention. It reflects centuries of trade, travel, and even closer contact: the Janizary music that Mozart heard at the city gates of Prague is still heard in the *Abduction from the Seraglio*, the theme of which held a particular fascination for monogamous Europeans. After the middle of the century we can expect to see Asia personified as a turbaned potentate. On a German damask panel of 1787 the sultan (Figure 19) is presented in all his



Oriental splendor. In a porcelain figure (Figure 20) probably made at Niderviller about 1775, the emphasis is rather on commercial relations with the Near East: Asia is a merchant, thoughtfully leaning on his bundle.

This figure and its two companions, all painted in rosy pastel colors, offer a complete break with the customary types of personifications. In a surprising sexual metamorphosis, Africa has now become an awkward young man clearly unused to his role as a savage Continent, while Europe (Figure 22) is a timid soldier striking a tentative pose beside his horse. They are far removed from the personifications on our German damask panel. With her globe and parasol, with the blazing sun above her, Africa reigns supreme over her torrid lands. Reflecting a somewhat parochial view of continental grandeur, Europe (Figure 21) appears as a German princess: above her, a double-headed eagle supports the arms of Lorraine and the Medici family; they probably refer to Joseph II, ruler of the Holy Roman Empire from 1765 to 1790. But Europe's domain is larger than that small territory; regally crowned, bearing her scepter and temple, she is—as artists always intended her to be—queen of the Four Parts of the World.



Figs. 20 (opposite), and 22. Asia, and Europe. French (probably Niderviller), about 1775. Soft-paste porcelain, heights 5 7/8 and 6 inches