

Charles Meur

If the art of the Pacific reaches more than 200 years later, from the time when Captain Cook was making his ocean voyages and giving such splendid accounts of them, it is thanks to the superb drawings produced by his ship's artist, John Webber. Some of these engravings have become universal icons that first enabled us to see the art and inhabitants of that part of the world, before photography existed.

More than thirty years ago, a series of richly illustrated maps of the cultural groups of the Congo appeared in Belgium, in atlases and books in which the drawing took precedence over the photographic image, renewing ties with the first expeditions' traditions. Monographs on the weapons of Central Africa and numerous illustrations in dozens of books, exhibition catalogs, and on posters followed. ... The list is too long to enumerate.

In the beginning was The Word, to be sure. And Charles Meur had it—he was articulate and cultivated, sardonic and ironic, and a masterful writer. He authored many articles, such as the one on Tanzanian masks in the only book devoted to this great country's ritual arts, as well as the superb and concise introduction on the subject of ivory that he wrote—and especially drew—for the first volume of *White Gold, Black Hands*. He was passionate about photography, capturing emotion first and beauty second.

We have him to thank for the greatest ethno-linguistic map of Africa, drawn with undeniable precision and scientific rigor, and for the thousands of draw-



ings in the “brown book” (*Art et Kongos*), which analyzes the sculpture of the various Bakongo groups.

His illness this summer, and his death at the end of October, prevented him from completing the seventh book of the magnificent eight-volume series on Congolese ivories, *White Gold, Black Hands*.

Most museums, foundations, and universities, from Antwerp to Zanzibar by way of the Quay Branly, Harvard, and Tervuren, as well as private collections, own, use, and enrich their knowledge through Charles' books and catalogs, published by Marc Félix and many others. He was a scholar, a painter, a cartographer, a photographer, a movie maker, an author, and a journalist, and most of all had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and life itself. He was a faithful friend—as precious as he was precise—and a “Renaissance man” in the very best sense of the term.

But to those who knew him or went to visit him in his hidden and mysterious headquarters at the research center for the art of the Congo Basin in Wattermael, he was also and especially a sensitive man, discrete and generous, and ever available to his brother and partner, Marc Felix.

The pain eases with the passage of time, but the breadth of Charles' work continues to grow every time a new tribal art aficionado discovers one of his drawings and enriches himself through it. That will never cease. If on one fine summer evening, the Milky Way begins to look like a collection of African masks, you won't need to wonder who the magician is. You will recognize the shock of white hair and see him with his paintbrushes as he rearranges the stardust.

Pierre Loos

Martha Longenecker

Martha Longenecker, who died this past November at the age of ninety-three after a brief illness, was one of those rare individuals whose artistic spirit, will, and relentless drive left a lasting legacy in the art world. As a teacher (professor of art at San Diego State University), artist, and founding director of the Mingei International Museum in San Diego, she saw the power of visual expression and its relationship to spiritual self, as well as to the larger world of mankind.

I first met Martha in 2003 at the memorial for Billy Pearson, my wife Mia Pearson's father. Billy and Martha had been close for more than fifty years, sharing a passion for art through a similar critical eye. In the decade since that first meeting, I came to know Martha and to appreciate her vitality and commitment to art as something for the people in all its many manifestations, not the least of which was tribal art and that of ancient non-Western traditions.

From an early age, art was a driving force in her life. She graduated from the University of California at Los Angeles with an art degree, then, in a defining moment, met and studied with the venerable and multitalented Millard Sheets. Under his influence she earned an MFA from Claremont University and then es-



tablished residence at the Sheets' compound in Claremont, a mecca for artists of all stripes. During the war years, she established her first kiln there and began producing art pottery. From 1944 to 1964 her work was exhibited and sold nationally through Dalzell Hatfield Galleries.

In 1952, as a gift from her mother, she attended a seminar in Los Angeles given by Soetsu Yanagi, Shoji Hamada, and Bernard Leach. The influence of those men would remain with her throughout her life and contribute to defining her own work in a number of ways. It ultimately led to the aesthetic approach realized in the founding in 1974 of the Mingei, where artworks were to be displayed with a minimum of verbal and physical interference, allowing the viewer to see the object's beauty unencumbered. Martha was uncompromising in her selection of art pieces and in the way they were displayed, as I learned firsthand in assisting her on an installation. It was exhausting, yet the result was exceptional.

Her legacy rests with the people she educated and inspired (myself included), the art she created, and, most importantly, in the Mingei International Museum, which is more vital than ever in the capable hands of its current director, Rob Sidner. Martha's name and creative aesthetic influence will be long lived in that museum, her creation.

Cliff Niederer