

**Michael P. Smith.** *Spirit World: Pattern in the Expressive Culture of Afro-American New Orleans.* New Orleans: New Orleans Urban Folklife Society, 1984. 120 pp., ill. (n.p.) Available by mail only from Friends of the Cabildo Bookstore, Presbytere, Louisiana State Museum, 751 Charles St., New Orleans, LA 70016.

**Reviewed by Charles Keil**  
State University of New York at Buffalo

I like everything about *Spirit World*. The photographs portray Spiritual Churches and Black Indian clubs in their New Orleans context with great clarity and affection. The reporting is in big print, straightforward, condensed, wise. The book is a joy to look at, a joy to read, and thinking about the pictures and words together lifts the spirit still further. It has made important differences in the way I will lead my life from now on.

My spouse put it nicely the other day: "Ritual is the only process that can fuse the physical and the spiritual, the material and the ideal." This book is all about such magical moments, social intensities creating soul out of flesh. As Nicolas R. Spitzer notes in the Introduction, it is also about the irony "that in many of the places where physical decay is a fact of life, cultural traditions—the lifeblood of New Orleans—are the strongest" (p. 3) and about the importance of diversity: "Just as the meeting point between fresh and salt water in Louisiana is the richest breeding ground for seafood and shorebirds—unparalleled in North America—so our Creolized south Louisiana society with its blurred social boundaries and multiple cultural codes has produced musics, foods, dances, . . . and architecture that have set the world on its ear, mouth and eye" (p. 4).

Before reading this book I was unaware of the many and deep connections between Afro-American and American Indian cultures that Smith's sections on "The Honoring of a Brother Culture" and "Indian Practice: Another Kind of Church" so clearly reveal. These connections further reverberate into the Spiritual Churches. As Bishop Lydia Gilford puts it, "The Spiritual Churches have all the same saints as the Catholic churches, . . . but have added a few more, like Black Hawk, and Sitting Bull—who were praying Indians—and others. We go to Black Hawk for peace and justice" (p. 53).

Judging from the text and photos, the founder and most of the bishops of these Spiritual Churches have been women. And the "children are raised to be seen and heard" (p. 50) as well. "I saw small children, no more than five or six years of age, get up and speak spontaneously, and with conviction, to large groups of adults. Sometimes even smaller children were held up to the microphone and allowed to speak, or view the proceedings from that vantage point, even if they couldn't speak yet" (p. 50).

A more competitive egalitarianism stylizes the interaction at the predominantly male Black Indian social clubs. They meet Sunday afternoons and evenings at the local taverns. Practices center on call/response singing, rapping duels, and dance turns over a large and diverse rhythm section.

Few are tempted to prove themselves physically where verbal resourcefulness and dance are much more highly regarded than brute strength.

As the practice progresses members of friendly tribes drop by to join in. Whole tribes sometimes pass through the practice in an elaborate ritual challenge where members of the home tribe confront or fend off challenges by members of the visiting tribe. These confrontations are in the same style as tribal challenges in the streets during Mardi Gras. (p. 91)

The major difference between practices and parades is, of course, the emphasis on elaborate feathered and beaded regalia that have been constructed during the preceding year to cap all previous razzle-dazzle displays of plumes. Les Blank's film *Always for Pleasure* lets you see these hand-sewn masterpieces in motion, but they are extraordinarily pleasing to the eye in still photographs as well, in black-and-white or color.

An Afterword by Michael Smith points to two oppressive policies in the city of New Orleans that threaten our "hope for seeing a future of traditions all around us" (p. 4):

The city, for example, should provide police services free of charge to the traditional parading groups all year around—not just during Mardi Gras, which is simply the traditional parade season for the White community, which has been supported by the city over the years and developed into a commercial resource. The equally spectacular parades of the Afro-American community, which traditionally occur in the fall and in the spring, are required by the city to retain police services on their own. That expense alone, some \$600 to \$800 per parade, is extremely oppressive to these marginal groups, and many clubs no longer parade as a result. This is a shame. (p. 118)

The city might also well reconsider its position in relation to its repressive taxing of live cultural arts—especially live music, which has contributed so greatly to the city's reputation and economy. Live music clubs are required to pay a total of 13% in taxes (5% city amusement, 5% city sales, and 3% state sales). On the other hand, live boxing events pay only 1% city amusement tax, and movie theatres pay only 2%. . . . This does not make sense; boxing and electronic entertainment should not be favored over live cultural arts which provide much needed, steady jobs. In recent years many live music clubs have gone out of business, putting many musicians out of work, some only to reopen as disco establishments which pay no amusement tax. (p. 119)

Write to the mayor of New Orleans. Urge him to make cultural freedom a top priority. But first we should check our own local laws to see what obstacles stand in the way of street music, club music, dance, and fully protected parades. The struggle for human rites begins at home but is worldwide.

**Roy Strong.** *The English Renaissance Miniature.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1983. 208 pp., 247 ill. (8 color plates).

**Reviewed by Peter Burke**  
Emmanuel College, Cambridge

This study opens with a fanfare of trumpets. The portrait miniature, Sir Roy Strong announces, was "England's greatest contribution to the art of painting during the Renaissance." On the heels of the important exhibition of these miniatures held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1983, he offers us a crisp chronological survey of the genre from 1520 to 1620, with special reference to five artists. The five are Lucas Hornebolte, a Netherlander who arrived in England in 1525; Hans Holbein, a German who learned the art of "limiting" (as painting miniatures was called) from Hornebolte and produced at least fourteen examples of the genre; Levina Teerlinc, a Netherlander who became a "gentlewoman" to Queen Elizabeth I; Nicholas Hilliard, the only Englishman in the group and the creator of some of the most memorable icons of the Virgin Queen; and Isaac Oliver, a Frenchman who is the real hero of the book for his introduction of Renaissance perspective and chiaroscuro (though Queen Elizabeth did not find him flattering enough and continued to prefer Hilliard).

Strong's study is important for two main reasons. In the first place, he has been in a good position to make use of the new technology developed in the laboratories of the Victoria and Albert and other museums, dating panel paintings with the help of tree-ring analysis and establishing attributions in the light of ultraviolet rays. These methods have helped in the reconstruction of the artistic personalities of Hornebolte and Teerlinc, the listing of Holbein's contributions, and the defining of the oeuvre of Hilliard and Oliver. Of course an element of intuition remains, so it is a pity that Sir Roy did not invite other specialist into the laboratory to view the miniatures with him. However, the new information is most welcome.

In the second place, the book is important for its bold attempt to liberate miniature painting from what the author picturesquely calls its "art-historical strait-jacket." Hilliard is traditionally considered a miniature painter and no more, although there is evidence to suggest that he illuminated manuscripts, painted pictures of normal size, designed medals and seals (and, in Strong's opinion, title pages), made jewels, and even colored funeral monuments. His miniatures need to be set in this context, and also in political