



Cabinet of Curiosities

curated by Charles Simonds

with bibliographic information by Linda Lott



The cabinet of curiosities installed outside the Rare Book Room, with a detailed view of the partial contents of one case (right).



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Charles Simonds
Brick Cutting Board, 1969
 Plaster, 6½ x 11¾ x 2 inches
 Collection of the artist

This plaster cast is of a relief that held a test tube of the artist's blood. When Simonds began making dwellings for his imaginary civilization of Little People, he created the board to provide a "sacred" place on which to cut the bricks used to construct his sculptures.

Charles Simonds, *Three Peoples*
 (Genoa: Samanedizioni, 1975).

Three Peoples presents the artist's narrative of the three groups in his imaginary civilization; these groups (the Linear, Circular, and Spiral peoples) are known by the geometric forms assumed by their architecture. The book was opened to the title page; a photograph of the cover was displayed next to the book.





Charles Simonds

Ritual Objects, 1987

Mixed media, 7½ x 9½ x 1 inches

The Lola and Allen Goldring Collection

This collection of ritual objects and artifacts from Simonds's imaginary civilization includes games, cutting implements, autoerotic objects, and building materials.



Charles Simonds
Imaginary Island, 1969
 Manipulated postcards
 Collection of the artist

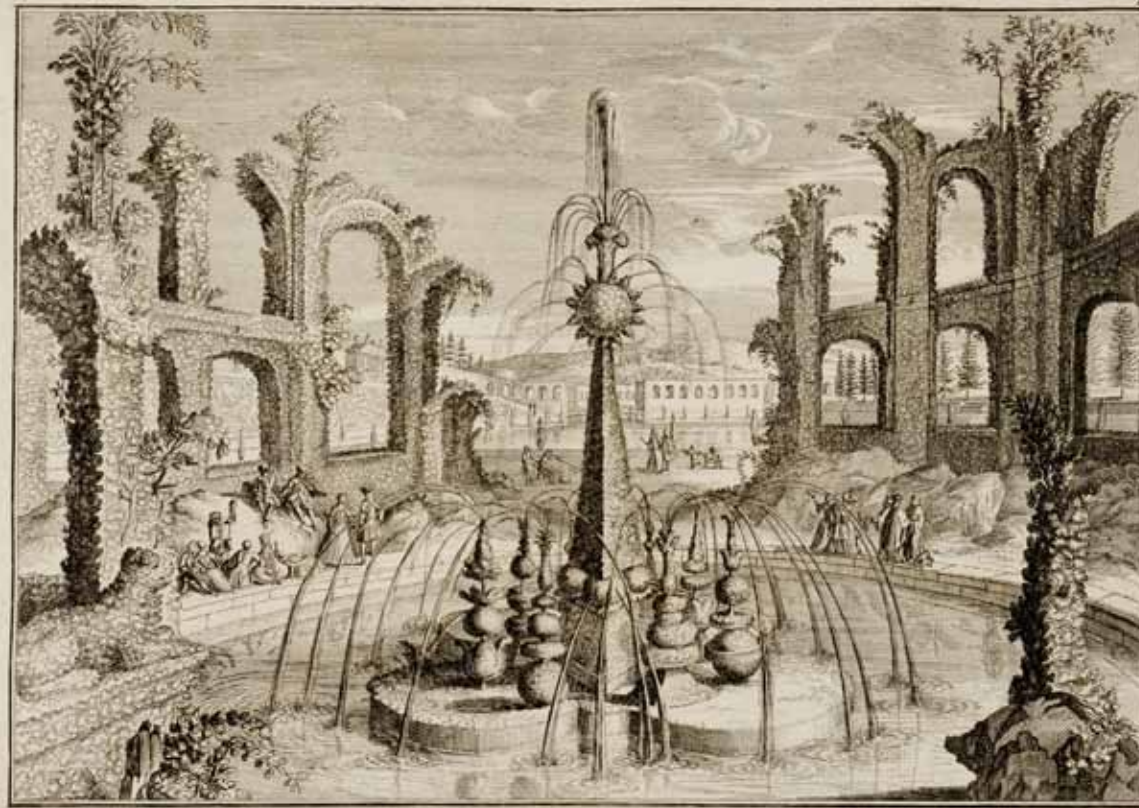


These are framed postcards
 depicting an imaginary landscape.

Beatrix Farrand (1872–1959), *Lovers' Lane Pool*,
 after 1931, photograph. Rare Book Collection,
 Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

Lovers' Lane Pool is located on the east side of
 the Dumbarton Oaks Gardens, on the boundary
 with Montrose Park. The design for the area was
 inspired by a Roman garden laid out in 1725 by
 Antonio Canerari and situated on the Janiculum
 Hill.¹ Farrand wrote a detailed account of
 Canerari's design in her *Plant Book* (1980).²





1. Fontaine et Colise de Verdure. 1. Die große Fontaine und Amphitheatrum. M. Engelbrecht del. 1720

Martin Engelbrecht (1684–1756), *Fonteyn en colise van groente* / *Fontaine et colise de verdure* [Fountain and Framing Structure of Greenery], from *Diverses rares prospects de belle Jardin d' Anguien* (Nuremberg: G. W. Gunther, [ca. 1720]).

William Gilpin, in *A Dialogue Upon the Gardens at Stowe* (1749), wrote that "Water is of as much use in a Landscape, as Blood in a Body; without these two essentials it is impossible that there can be Life in either one or the other."³



Charles Simonds
Untitled, 1969
 Manipulated postcards
 Collection of the artist

These framed postcards of Van Gogh images were arranged and reformatted by Simonds, who sees them as a narrative of birth, death, and resurrection.



Charles Simonds
Twisted Earth, 1969
 Manipulated postcards
 Collection of the artist

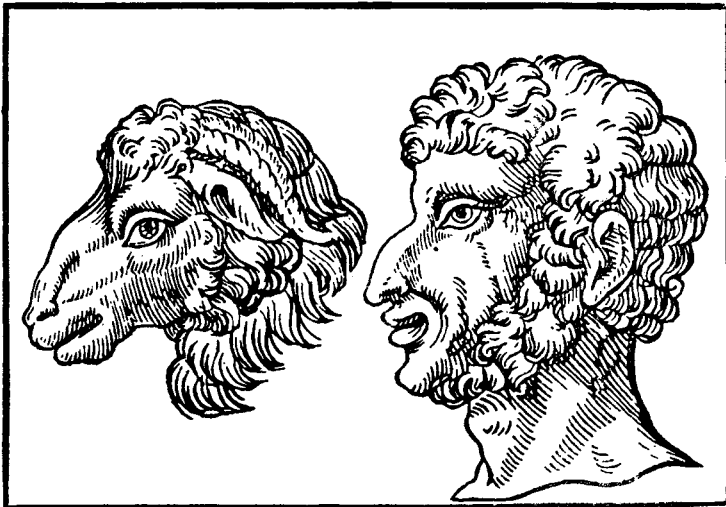


FIG. 74
Giovanni Battista Porta. (*The Man and the Ram*)

Giambattista della Porta, *The Man and the Ram*, 1588, reproduced in Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952), figure 74.

Giambattista della Porta (1535?-1615) was an Italian scholar, playwright, and polymath who lived in Naples at the time of the scientific revolution. Kris presumably took this illustration, which compares human and animal morphology, from his publication on human physiognomy (page 91).



Charles Simonds
Head, 1991
Plaster and clay, 8 x 15 x 11 inches
Collection of the artist

Head, which was inspired in part by speculation about the relationships between human and animal physiognomy, was on view in Pre-Columbian Gallery One in the Dumbarton Oaks Museum.

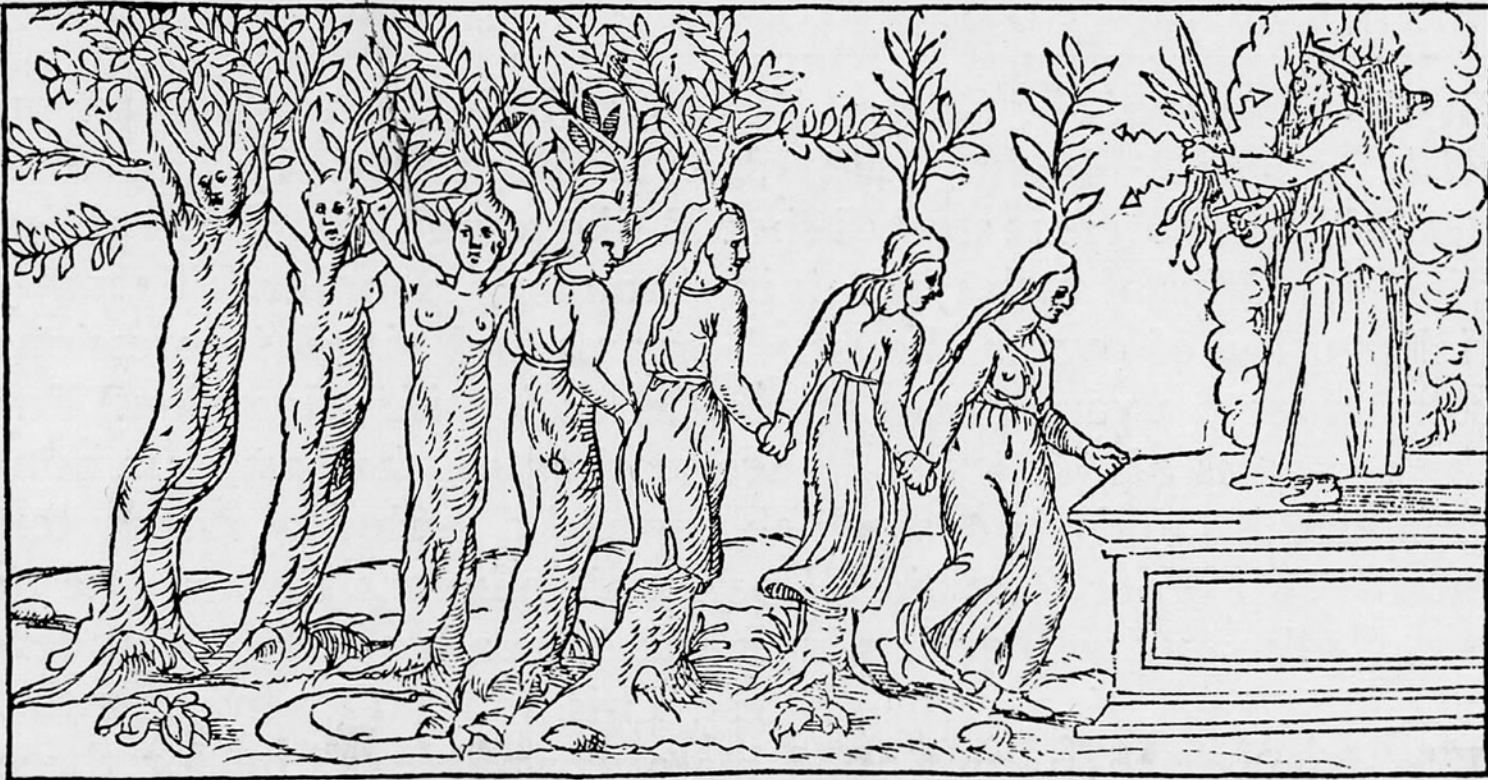


Copy of *Apollo and Daphne*, folio 134 of Christine de Pisan, *L'épître d'Othéa*, ca. 1401. The British Museum, London.

Christine de Pisan (1363–ca. 1434) was an Italian-born writer active in the French court; she wrote entirely in Middle French. In her version of the Apollo and Daphne myth, Daphne is pursued by Apollo, who is smitten with love of her; she calls on Diana to preserve her virginity. Daphne, transformed into a laurel tree, provides Apollo with the means by which to make a chaplet of laurel leaves in the sign of victory. Daphne is shown nude with her head, arms, and shoulders in the process of transforming into branches of the laurel tree, while Apollo is dressed in courtier's robe and hat, plucking laurel branches in order to make himself a crown.



Jacopo Ripanda Bolognese, *Apollo and Daphne*, ca. 1500.
Copied by the artist from Ernst and Johanna Lehner, *Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants, and Trees* (New York: Tudor, 1960), 66.



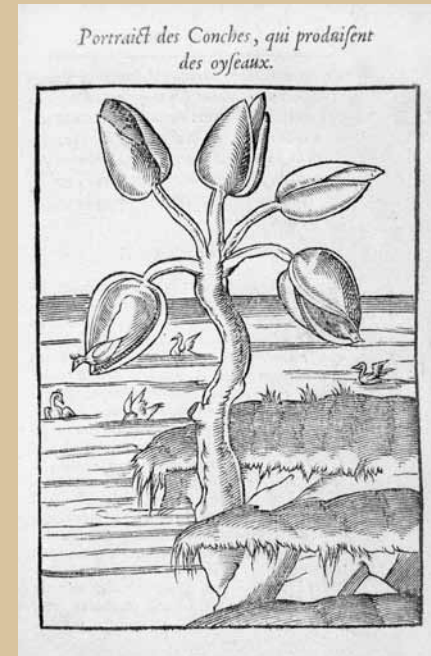
Francesco Colonna (d. 1527), *La Hypnerotomachia di Poliphilo: Cioè pvgna d'amore in sogno, dou'egli mostra, che tutte le cose humane non sono altro che sogno, & doue narra molt'altre cose degne di cognitione* (Venetia: Casa de'Figliuoli di Aldo, 1545).

The *Hypnerotomachia* is probably best known for its woodcuts of the architectural structures and garden settings that serve as a backdrop for Poliphilus's dream. After Poliphilus was rejected by his love, Polia, he wandered into a Dantean wood. He fell asleep and, in his dream, he traveled to the island of Cytherea with Polia. His dreams were comprised of mystical, mythological characters, extraordinary, lush architectural works, and antique garden ornaments. Woven into the story is a blend of erotic allegory, Christian and Middle Eastern symbols, and classical references. The cabinet featured a woodcut, copied from a 1994 reprint of a 1546 French edition of the *Hypnerotomachia*, of a relief on a vase of Ethiopian hyacinth, described by Poliphilus.⁴



Claude Duret (d. 1611), *Histoire admirable des plantes et herbes esmerueillables & miraculeuses en nature: Mesmes d'aucunes qui sont vrays zoophytes, ou plant-animales, plantes & animaux tout ensemble, pour auoir vie vegetatiue sensitiue & animale; Avec leurs portraits au anturel, selon les histoires, descriptions, voyages, & navagations des anciens & modernes* (Paris: Chez Nicholas Bvon, 1605).

The cabinet of curiosities featured copies of illustrations from a first edition of the *Histoire admirable des plantes et herbes esmerueillables & miraculeuses en nature*, which compiled accounts of remarkable plants and depicted them with woodcuts. Duret was particularly interested in zoophytes, or plants that have animal properties and transgress the Scholastic distinction between the animal and vegetal. Two examples of zoophytes were exhibited: the Credulity Tree (top right), whose leaves turn into fish or birds depending on whether they fall in water or on the ground; and the Barnacle Goose (bottom right), which was believed to hatch from shells on trees and was said to occur in the northern parts of Scotland and the "Orchades." The book itself was opened to a page showing the "Phalle Hollandique," whole and in three parts (above).



borant, melancholiz, & perturbationi mentis resistunt, & morbum sacrum curant; ex R. Moie in aphorismis. Maluæ folia Magi lien capræ vocant, ab ea, quæ cum liene similitudinem habet: Sextus torminosis capræ lien bibendum præbet: Plinius maluam videri torminibus illini, præterea ad venena, & venenatas puncturas, ad foeminarum purgationes, voluprates, conceptus, comitiales, calculolos præstare, ut etiam capra, & alia promissæ habere.

PLANTÆ ANIMALIUM TESTES REPRÆSENTANTES.

Cap. XVIII.



Verum sunt plantarum bulbi, qui animalium testes mentiuntur, præsertim luxuriosorum, & ita anabæ eos mentiuntur, ut nemo sit, qui videat, qui se eos cognoscere non fateatur. Natura hominum generationi satagens, hac testiculorum imagine ad vires venereas, ad conceptum, & ad prolem eos valere significavit. Testes pecori, armætoque ad erura decidui, subus adnexi, de phino prælongi vltima conduntur aluo, elephantio occulti: oua parientium lumbis intus adherent, qualia ocyssima in Venere, buteonibus terni.

ORCHIDÆAM species duos sub aspectu veniunt, contemplatur in prima facie huiusmodi testes cum semine, canoni, & tandem triarchidam, ex accipitrum genere.



Cyno.

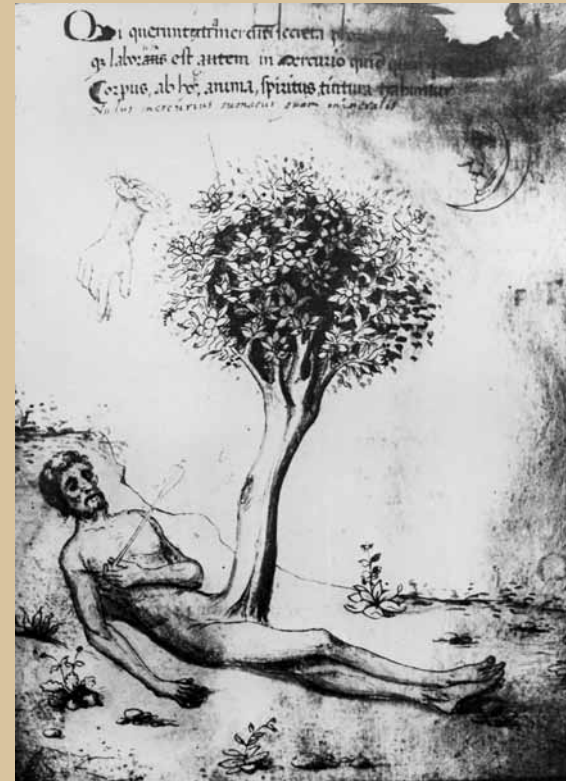
Giambattista della Porta, *Phytognomica: Octo libris contenta; In quibus nova, facillimaque affertur methodus, qua plantarum, animalium, metallorum; rerum denique omnium ex prima eximæ faciei inspectione quibus abditas vires assequatur* . . . (Naples: Apud Horatium Saluianum, 1588).

Phytognomica, by the Neapolitan polymath Giambattista della Porta (1535?–1615), was the first work to classify plants according to their natural habitat; as such, it offers an important pre-Linnaean taxonomy. The book applies the medieval belief in the Doctrine of Signatures, which posited that there was a natural correspondence to plants in both the external form and the internal nature of an object. Relationships were also drawn between the appearance of a plant and its potential medicinal properties. Porta's theses were supported by woodcut illustrations; for example, poisonous roots were made to resemble snakes. The concept of resemblance, which goes back to the ancient Greeks, has left its mark in modern plant nomenclature. The plate that was exhibited in the cabinet of curiosities compares orchids with like objects, such as the testicles of a small animal. The name for the Orchidaceae family derives from *Orchis*, a flower whose roots were believed to resemble testicles, which in Greek is ὄρχις. See also *The Man and the Ram*, page 87.



Photograph of *The Skull as the Mortificatio of Eve*, ink drawing from *Miscellanea d'alchimia*, fourteenth century. Codex Ashburnham 1166. Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence.

Simonds copied this ink drawing from C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), where it was reproduced as figure 135. The illustration depicts the nude figure of Eve reclining in a natural setting. Beside her, on a tomblike structure, is a larger-than-life skull lacking its jaw. Eve conceals her nudity modestly with her right hand and points toward the skull with her left hand. Out of her head grows a young tree in full foliage. She is thus associated both with generation and with temptation and death.



Photograph of *Adam as Prima Materia, Pierced by the Arrow of Mercurius*, ink drawing from *Miscellanea d'alchimia*, fourteenth century. Codex Ashburnham 1166. Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence.

This reproduction of an ink drawing from the *Miscellanea d'alchimia* depicts the nude figure of Adam lying in a field. A foliating tree grows from his loins and an arrow pierces his chest. Above the tree are a crescent moon and a hand emerging from a celestial cloud. Adam can be interpreted here as the *prima materia* with the *arbor philosophica* (or tree of life) growing out of him. As the father of humanity, Adam is the root of the Fall in Christian belief; he also provides the means of subsequent redemption by furnishing the tree upon which Christ is crucified. Like Eve, Adam is thus linked to death and resurrection.

Art / Cahier 2

Charles Simonds



SMI - Paris

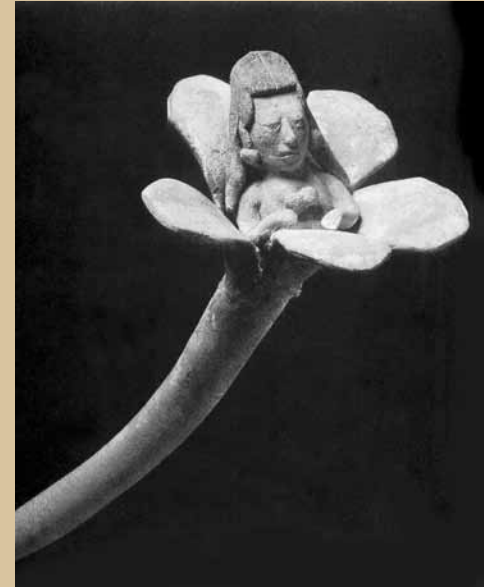
Daniel Abadie, *Charles Simonds*
(Paris: SMI, 1975).

The first book on the artist's
work features a cover
photograph of Simonds
enacting one of his *Landscape/
Body/Dwelling* rituals.



Charles Simonds
It, 1993
 Clay and plaster, 3½ x 17 x 3½ inches
 Collection of the artist

This dildolike object relates to the ritual objects on page 83.



Photographs of Classic Maya Jaina sculptures representing figures emerging from flowers, similar to one on view in Pre-Columbian Gallery Three in the Dumbarton Oaks Museum.



Charles Simonds

Stugg, 1991

Cement, 9 x 177 x 15 inches

Collection of the artist

Stugg, which was on view on the Fountain Terrace in the garden, begins as a seedpod that sprouts an adolescent torso and terminates in a visage that is part goat head, part human face, and part landscape. It evokes both human-plant transformations and Classic Maya Jaina sculptures of figures emerging from flowers.



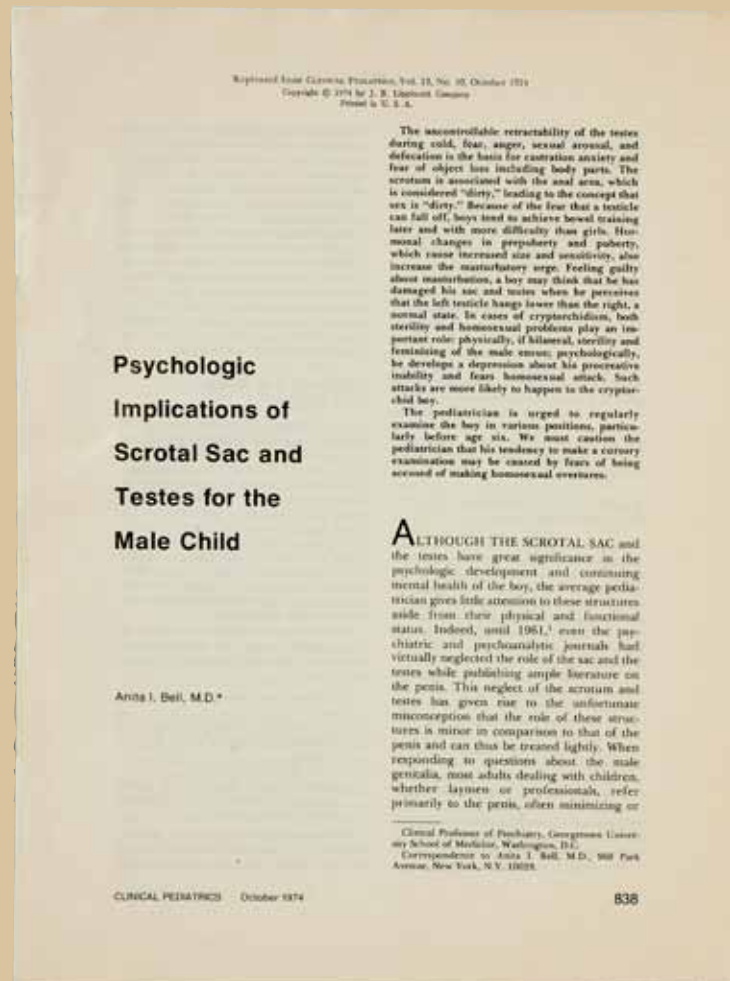
Charles Simonds

Untitled, 1998

Clay and plaster, 6½ x 3¼ x 2 inches

Collection of the artist

Untitled suggests analogies between body parts and plant tubers, much like the woodcut illustration seen on page 91.



Anita I. Bell (1911–1995), "Psychologic Implications of Scrotal Sac and Testes for the Male Child," *Clinical Pediatrics* 13 (October 1974).

Article by the artist's mother, a renegade Freudian psychoanalyst.



Charles Simonds
Uroboros, 1973
 Resin, 12½ x 12½ x 2¾ inches
 Collection of the artist

Simonds made a cast of an iguana for the *Uroboros*. He used the circular emblem for eternity in the formulation of the *Growth House* and in his *Circular People*, one of the three peoples of his imaginary civilization (featured in an installation at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1976). The *Circular People* devour their past and rebuild it into the present.



Copy of *Uroboros*, folio 279 of *Livre su l'art de faire de l'or* . . . , 1478. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

The uroboros or tail-biting serpent, a symbol of eternity or the universe in ancient Egyptian papyri, is used in the earliest extant alchemical manuscripts. Pictured here with two scaly rings (the inner green and the outer red), three red ears, and four green feet, the uroboros is a hermaphroditic monster, a unity that is also a duality capable of begetting itself upon itself.

NOTES

1. The Bosco Parrasio was the meeting place of the eighteenth-century Arcadians, who took their name from Jacopo Sannazaro's poem *Arcadia* and whose stated aims were to free Italian poetry from the "barbarism" of the seventeenth century and to return to the simplicity of nature. They adopted the pipes of Pan, along with the pine branch, as their badge. The Arcadians met in the Bosco Parrasio to read their literary compositions. Georgina Masson, *The Companion Guide to Rome* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 437–38; and David R. Coffin, *Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 239–43.
2. Farrand wrote in her *Plant Book* (1980): "These seats have been adapted from the well-known open-air theatre on the slope of the Janiculum Hill at the Accademia dell'Arcadia Bosco Parrasio. The shape of the theatre at Dumbarton Oaks was copied from the one in Rome, but the slopes surrounding the Dumbarton Oaks theatre are far steeper than those on the Italian hillside and therefore the seats are considerably raised from one level to another. In order to give seclusion to this little theater, it has been surrounded by cast-stone columns, also baroque in design and taken in their essential ideas from Italian gardens of the baroque period." Beatrix Farrand, *Beatrix Farrand's Plant Book for Dumbarton Oaks*, ed. Diane Kostial McGuire (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1980), 107.
3. William Gilpin, *A Dialogue Upon the Gardens of the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham at Stow in Buckinghamshire*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for B. Seeley, 1749), 20.
4. "On the front side of the vase I saw an excellent relief of high-thundering Jupiter, holding in his right hand a sharp golden sword made from a brilliant vein of Ethiopian chrysolite, and in his left a blazing thunderbolt made from a ruby vein. His threatening face was a vein of galactite, crowned with stars sparkling like lightning and standing on a sacred altar of sapphire. His divine and tremendous majesty was being celebrated by a chorus of seven nymphs dressed in white, with indications of solemn singing and reverent applause. They then transformed themselves into green trees of transparent emerald, covered with bright blue flowers, which bowed devoutly to the high god. The last one was entirely turned to a tree, her feet becoming roots; the next all but her feet; the third, all but the part from the waist to the arms; and so on, successively. But the tops of their virginal heads showed that the metamorphosis would happen to each in turn." Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili: The Strife of Love in a Dream*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 174.

