

## the diptych vs. the triptych

© Lorraine O'Grady 1998

excerpt from a conversation between Lorraine O'Grady and a studio visitor, 9.12.98.

\*\*\*\*

**Visitor:** You've said your work is an argument against Western dualism. But if that's the case, why do you use two panels? Doesn't that just reinforce the basic idea? Why not the triptych instead?

**Lorraine:** You mean like the three-panel altarpiece? The old beginning, middle, and end?

**V:** Yes.

**L:** Well I know it seems funny, but this is one case where reality doesn't support common sense. You'd think that dualism would be reproduced in two panels, but it's not. No matter how it might appear at first, two does not equal two here. It took me a while to figure this out, but in Western dualism, there's a kicker and it's *hierarchy*.

**V:** Which means?

**L:** There's no equation: good doesn't equal evil, black doesn't equal white, male doesn't equal female, culture doesn't equal nature.... Something is always *better than*. In spite of its name, the binary always contains a hidden third term. It's the thing that has been passed through, the thing that has been experienced or received, that makes it superior, like the blessing of Abel over

Cain, or of Jacob over Esau. The Western binary isn't really a two, it's a three; it's a narrative that goes from fallen to saved.

**V:** It's not a diptych, it's a triptych....

**L:** Right.... With the diptych, there's no being saved, no before and after, no either/or; it's both/and, at the same time. With no resolution, you just have to stand there and deal.