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Letters

Beyond the beholder's eye

Certainly, there are objectively measurable elements to beauty ("Facial beauty may lie more than skin deep," SN: 3/19/94, p.182), but I have two observations that qualify Perret and May's studies.

First, as far as popular culture and estimates of beauty are concerned, England and contemporary Japan are hardly poles apart. The fact that many Japanese undergo eye surgery to make their eyes wider is just one example of how Western movies, commercials, and other products have influenced Japanese popular culture.

Second, I think most stars, such as Madonna, who are popular for their beauty would agree that it's not what you've got, but what you do with it.

Chris Cosner
Champaign, Ill.

In a number of studies, people of different races

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and cultures — including relatively isolated hunter-gatherers — rank the same racially diverse faces as most attractive. The point of these studies is that evolved preferences provide the foundation for judgments of facial beauty, on which cultural factors build. In other words, what you do with what you've got — and the decision to do something in the first place — depends on certain universal preferences that go far beyond fads.

— B. Bower

A fossil in hand

The moral imperative to return museums' inappropriately obtained collections of modern, identifiable Native American remains (and artifacts) for proper interment is undeniable ("Fossils on File," SN: 3/19/94, p.186). But insisting that any and all American (U.S.) indigenous human remains be repatriated is irrationality on stilts.

In Colorado, 5,000-year-old remains were recently "repatriated" to an undisclosed site by the Southern Utes. (The new law demands repatriation to the nearest indigenous commu-

nity.) But there's nothing in the anthropological record indicating that anything even remotely Ute was in existence 5,000 years ago. By this logic, the Alpine iceman should be "repatriated" to the nearest Italian village for burial by the largest local religion.

Important information will be lost through ludicrous application of the new law. Only recent advances in technology and technique have made possible the current explosion in our knowledge of dinosaurs. Who's to say such advances can't take place in anthropology as well?

A fossil in hand is worth a thousand bytes.

J. M. Schell
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All letters subject to editing.

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