

The consultation in art

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So far this series has dealt exclusively with medical consultation as practised in Western art. But, of course, there are many societies which employ other approaches, and this is well-exemplified in the case of divination by 'throwing bones', as practised by traditional healers in rural Africa. The coloured etching of a healer in her traditional red costume shows how she is attempting to assess the patient's likely outcome or prognosis from the arrangement of the bones she throws on the ground. Such healers often share the same culture, beliefs and values as their clients. At one time they were considered merely 'witch doctors' or shamans. But this ignores the close association and knowledge they have of the community. For this reason they can become valuable partners in the delivery of health care in many rural communities.

Meg Campbell is a professional etcher and printmaker who has spent a great deal of her time with traditional healers. She was trained at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa and at the West Surrey College of Art and Design. She has a particular interest in women's lives centred on the theme of mother and child, and was an artist-in-residence at the Princess Anne Maternity Hospital in Southampton where she now lives. It was whilst holding a Churchill Travelling Fellowship in 1992 that she met Merci Mansi, a traditional healer who practised in a squatter settlement outside Johannesburg and was part of a group practice which used both traditional African and Western therapeutic methods. The present picture was made for the cover of the recent *Lancet Supplement 2000* 'One World, Many Voices'.



An African healer throwing bones (2000) Meg Campbell
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