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# **Rochester Institute of Technology**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the College of  
Fine and Applied Arts in Candidacy for the Degree  
of  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

**Aggression and Symbols of Power**

**by**

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# Aggression and Symbols of Power

## **Abstract:**

Weapons are one of the oldest and most significant forms of artifacts, occurring in virtually all human cultures. Weapons and their technology often determine power structures, not only by brute force of arms, but by long standing respect to ritual aggression. In many cultures, weapons have become abstracted and formalized to become symbols of power and authority, as in a ruler's scepter, which is a glorified war club. Jewelry functions in much the same manner, proclaiming the social status of the wearer, although in the western world, we have lost most of the symbolic meaning of our jewelry; for example, we no longer wear talismans to protect us from perceived evil. Meaning has also been lost in our weapons--they have become matter-of-fact objects, like a hammer--a very dangerous trend in our war-economy society. But they still function dually, to threaten as well as act. It is this very duality which fascinates me; the grey area between perceived threat and commitment to action.

## Introduction:

Toolmaking is one of the hallmarks of *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*; although we are definitely not the only species which shows the capacity, we are certainly completely reliant on the talent. The oldest tools that can be reliably dated are those of our ancestors, *Australopithicus Africanus*, which consisted of a few rude chipped and battered pebbles. This is known as the Olduwan tool industry, named after Olduvai Gorge, dated 2.5 million years. (Weaver, 1985) Raymond Dart, discoverer of *A. Africanus*, put forth the theory of Osteo-donto-keratic toolmaking, whereas the first tools/weapons that early man used were of the bones, teeth and horns of their prey. This outlook on our ancestors, as primarily carnivorous, has given way to a view of them as mostly omnivorous, relying on gathered vegetable matter as the bulk of their diet and eating meat only opportunistically, or as scavengers. However, this does not rule out the possibility that jawbones, horns, and other bones were used by *A. Africanus* as tools, in addition to sticks, etcetera, which, of course, would not be represented in the fossil record. It is very likely to suppose that some of these rude implements were utilized as weapons within the social unit as well as upon prey and rival groups of *Australopithicene*. (Johanson/Edey)

Tool industry did not achieve any sophistication until the evolution of our immediate ancestor, *Homo Erectus*. Said ancestor was the species that broke the bounds of Africa, and wandered world-wide. *H. Erectus* was similar to us morphologically, seemingly lacking only in cranial capacity to

be truly human. For our cultures had their birth out of theirs; *H. Erectus* used complex knapped tools of flint and chert and tamed fire. Apparently, they lived in small extended family bands of hunter-gatherers wandering endlessly in search of food.(Shapiro, 1974) It was a simple life, requiring little in the way of social stratification.

What caused *H. Erectus* to evolve into *Homo Sapiens Neanderthal* is unknown, although there is a marked increase in the cranial capacity and dexterity of their tools. The tools worked better and they were much more specialized and finely crafted. Weapons became obviously weapons. But they were conservative. Dr. A. Jelinek of the University of Arizona, who has excavated at La Quena, France, has found that the *Neanderthal* were culturally different from us. He reports that their tools were incredibly monotonous, unchanged for 100,000 years. He felt that this indicated a fundamental difference in innovation, perhaps from cultural differences, perhaps from physical.(Putman, 1988) But certainly not from a lack of brains. An interesting fact is that *Neanderthal* actually had a larger cranial capacity than we now possess, averaging 1400 to 1500 c.c., whereas we average 1350 c.c., but the shape of the *Neanderthal* cranial vault is quite different from ours, which indicates perhaps a different neurological setup. (Pfieffer, 1982) The *Neanderthal* shape is flatter, with more emphasis placed on the back of the brain than on the forebrain, as it is with us. Some theories put forth the idea that higher reasoning occurs in this area of the forebrain; others discount the morphological differences entirely, and argue

that with the increased capacity, our brain structure could exist quite comfortably inside a *Neanderthal* skull. (Pfeiffer 1982) Without actual specimens to examine, all of this is supposition of course; and the past theories that *Neanderthal* was a hulking brute with only the most rudimentary skills has now been discounted. It is known that *Neanderthal* did enjoy a culture that had some concept of religion, testified by ritual burials (Pfeiffer 1982). They also supported injured and infirmed members, discovered through finds of remains of individuals with healed severe wounds and congenital deformities (Weaver,1985). But still much less complex than the culture developed by *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*, in the form of *Cro-Magnon*.

Approximately 30,000 years ago began a renaissance in human culture. Whereas before, tools were made in a strictly functional manner, now they were beautifully made, with figurative forms and patterns adorning them. Painting made its first lasting appearance in the secretive depths of caves and high remote cliffsides. Access was attained to them only with great hardship. The placement of these paintings and carvings suggests that this art was of a ritual nature, part of intense ordeals for mythical reasons. Although the most famous paintings, such as Lasceaux and the Australian Aboriginal rock paintings at Ayres rock are very accessible to modern viewers and their sense of aesthetics, that type of painting is much less common than the prevailing more abstract style, that often lacks apparent meaning or subject matter. It is my belief that this type is more

important for explaining the reasons behind Art itself and also, perhaps, the gradual extinction of the *Neanderthal*. Art began as a tool for the transmission of information ungarbled through the generations, a Lamarkian rather than Darwinian transmission of information, crucial for survival as the conditions for living became more and more complex. A trend started in the period of *H. Erectus*: the extinction of large mammals and, seemingly continued by *H. Neanderthal*, these extinctions accelerated greatly with the advent of *H. Sapiens* and the new hunting strategies utilized by them. It is theorized that the reason behind these new strategies is that new social structures were evolving, utilizing larger and larger community structures, which in turn needed more organization and firmer delineations of social status and spatial territory.

How to transmit this new information became paramount, since new societies were evolving to maximize the new big-game hunting strategies. Social interactions between strangers became the norm rather than the exception, as more and more small family groups began pooling manpower, territory and resources to more efficiently survive. Here is how perhaps the deep cave art and the associated ritual came into play. It is widely believed that this art is directly connected to the food quest, and the growing reliance on aforementioned hunting strategies. In this period of global cooling, the late Pleistocene era, referred to as the Mousteranian era, the people did everything in their power to assure themselves of hunting success, including killing their prey ritually on cave walls with weapons created for that



purpose alone. Essentially a form of sympathetic magic, other indications exist to point to other types of rituals, aimed at overkill, such as drawing and carving pregnant animals and sex organs. There also seems to be evidence of a “hunt master”, an exalted being who provides the game, makes the rules for the chase, and punishes those who break the rules. The “sorcerer” figure, by far the most famous cave painting, in the Trois Freres sanctuary, is believed to represent such a figure (Pfieffer, 1982). This “hunt master” can be considered the prototype for all subsequent gods, with similar motivations. For where does one turn when the world changes?

The Late Paleolithic was a time of great stress and climactic change. What all this new stress and increased interconnection between peoples points to is the sheer volume of information. An information explosion occurred along with the explosion of Art and ceremony. It seems that the Cro-Magnon rate of information acquisition must have been several orders of magnitude greater than that of the Neanderthal, and it seemed to be accelerating. This amounted to crisis, for the collective knowledge of the band society was on the rise, demanding a far more expansive means of preserving said information without writing. New developments were needed in mnemonics to impress this new knowledge indelibly onto the young minds that so needed it. One way of preparing people for imprinting has been long known by peoples everywhere; the Australian Aborigines use it to this day: bring them to unfamiliar, alien and unpleasant places. Shaking an individual up, removing or at least undermining the everyday world as

much as possible, apparently serves as an efficient preliminary to making a lasting impression.(Tonkinson,1978) Confused and unsure as to what is happening, an individual becomes submissive and mentally plastic as to what he will accept and believe. Caves serve this function especially well, for even before entering, one must confront the mouth of the cave; sometimes huge and yawning, other times so small that one must squeeze to enter. Once inside, the world contracts to velvety darkness and silence, which must have been especially hard to those who have lived outside and traveling all of their lives. The majority of cave paintings are located deep within the cave, accessible only through an arduous journey slogging through mud and water, squeezing through cracks, always being haunted by the unknown ahead. The undercurrent of fear must have made the experience especially vivid for these people, for indeed, these were their gods.

This was not Art for Art's sake, nothing so casual. It was sheer survival. The development of these rituals must have been of paramount importance, for the failure of communication, misunderstandings, or forgetting of animal or human migrations, would surely result in extinction. Everything had to be remembered by rote and forever, indoctrinated so deeply that the people would know without thinking the patterns of their lives.

This type of initiation ritual survives today in traditional cultures that still manage to exist, such as some in sub-Saharan Africa, Micronesia, the far

North, and Australia. This type of initiation takes place at puberty to mark the transition into the responsibilities of adulthood, indicating that the child now possesses all the knowledge need to function in society. It can take many years to complete. Robert Tonkenson, an anthropologist, lived among a group of Aborigines relatively untouched by exposure to the West, and found that rock painting, body painting, singing of epic tales, ritual objects and weaponry were all incorporated in complex rituals that enabled the initiates to remember vital information, such as where and when the water is, a matter of survival. Aborigines are hunter-gatherers, some of the last living, and they have honed their knowledge over the generations. We, as outsiders, can know only a fraction of what they can articulate, which in turn, represents only the tip of the proverbial iceberg of the knowledge contained in the totality of ritual. The Aborigines must keep on the move, for their resources are so scarce. The Art of desert survival, like that of paleolithic Europeans, depends on timing. Being there at the right place at the right time, staying until the water dries up or the animals migrate away, and knowing in which direction to go next. Aborigines have a mental image of their desert, and it differs considerably from ours. Both images include the same physical features, but they see not just miles of empty desert, but a vast stage, inhabited by mythical beings who, among other things, can be coerced with the proper tools and mystical weapons into helping them move confidently and safely from watercatche to watercatche. The use of these tools must be earned through the completion of the proper ritual, or the

tools themselves will have power over the user and destroy him. The performance of the proper ritual always involves incredible hardship, but the gains, both in the spiritual world and in human society, are worth the risk. The right to wear certain paint patterns and/or carry certain weapons, wear certain clothing and jewelry, signifies that individual's position in his society. For the unadorned body is a mute, inarticulate thing; devoid of status and identity. It is only when the body/individual acquires the requisite adornment that it begins to communicate and becomes an active member of the surrounding community. This serves a crucial function in avoiding intergroup aggression.

The ritualization of combat, as opposed to the more laissez-faire approach of predatory behavior, has always been a major theme in weaponry, whether in human or animal society. Many animals participate in ritual combat to determine social status and/or reproductive rights. Interestingly enough, the weapons they use, such as the horns of the impala, are actually of a shape and placement to avoid inflicting serious damage to an opponent. All animals have complex dominance/submission behaviors that communicate unambiguously their social status to other members of their species, whether it be colors and patterns, like that of many fish, or the body movements and vocalizations that characterize the interactions that occur in a wolf pack or baboon troop.(Huntington/Turner, 1987) Supporting this theory in humans is much more subjective, for although human behavior exists within certain, rather narrow, genetic parameters, the permutations of

these parameters are legion. There are however, many similarities pan-culturally. Humans are a male-bonding species, with most sexual competition occurring between males. This is reflected in weapon/combat/religion rituals. They are highly differentiated by sex. While historical and mythical exceptions exist, such as Artemis, the goddess of hunt, Jean D'Arc, and the Amazons, these competitions and rituals have almost always been the closely guarded province of the male. Moreover, men build weapons not only to kill with, but to threaten. Whether it takes the form of a larger club, a horrific monster on a helmet or the excruciating logic of nuclear deterrence, the urge to intimidate occurs over and over.(O'Connell, 1989) Weapons in this case have become a function of display. Just as birds of paradise compete for females with beautiful feathers and complex mating dances, the flaunting of these symbolic objects/ornamentations, earned through exhaustive ritual, function to defuse more violent intergroup aggression. Rather it fosters the inclination to fight by predetermined rules, using similar weapons and in a prescribed fashion.

In human societies, one of the most vivid examples of this restraint occurred in Pre-Columbian Central and South America. In Central America, there was a historical succession of cultures, the Toltec, the Mayans, and the Aztecs, whose main focus of aggression was not the mere killing of foes or the conquest of territory, but the gaining of status and captives, who were subsequently sacrificed to nourish the gods. In order to prevent the Sun

from starving and dying, which would result in the destruction of the world, He, and a pantheon of other gods, required constant feedings of blood and human hearts. The Aztecs, the final inheritors of Pre-Columbian Central America, are the culture we know most about, for it was through their culture that the Spanish imperialist conquistadores slaughtered and raped their way to the final conquest of Mexico. Until the arrival of the Spanish, the Aztecs participated in Xochiyaoyotl, or “flowery wars”, named for the combatant’s regalia. Many colored shields, feather headdresses, ear and nose plugs of precious jade and gold, labrets, were all booty yielded from the fallen to the victor in the waging of ritual battles with obsidian-bladed clubs. Gambling their lives, warriors either won honor and position by taking captives or, if defeated, gave their hearts and blood to the famished gods. These prearranged displays between the ruling city-state, Tenochtitlan, and the outlying subject cities of the Aztec empire, created perpetual war. These warriors seemed to have been the preferred offerings to the gods; the Spanish, who were appalled by the practice, make no mention of ordinary citizens falling to the knife. It is hard for us to conceive of or in any way approve of these practices, but the Aztecs, as their predecessors the Mayans and Toltecs, believed that those sacrificed entered the highest of heavens, the Paradise of the Sun. To them, sacrifice and the subsequent entry into heaven, was an honor to be earned. One showed he was worthy to enter heaven by entering into the arena of the Xochiyaoyoti. (McDowell,1980)

It is ironic to realize that the Spanish, who were so shocked and

offended by this ritual warfare, in their conquest caused the deaths of so many more. After Cortez had destroyed the ruling hierarchy, the succeeding waves of colonists and missionaries enslaved, infected and burned as heretics an estimated three million people. Eyewitness accounts from missionaries reported that many of the Aztecs committed suicide from the shock of the overthrow of their society, and to avoid becoming slaves. Spanish apologists retorted that their presence in Mexico had saved some six hundred thousand Indian lives from the sacrificial alter in the first thirty years of conquest, before they had consolidated their rule and crushed the Aztec empire and culture.(Tomkins,1976) The Spanish, from their long history of unrestrained warfare in Europe, which did not recognize non-combatants, also failed to recognize the Aztec way of restrained battle, nor did they respect the lives of ordinary citizens. The Aztec, so long restrained, could not adapt in time to save themselves.

Much less is known about another warlike people, The Moche, ancestors of the Inca, from the coast of Peru. They are known primarily from the magnificent painted ceramics depicting warriors in fantastic dress striving against one another, and of a recently discovered tomb of a warrior/priest in Sipan, Peru, whose riches rival that of Tutankhamen. From what can be reconstructed from these artifacts, the Mochica people had a similar pantheon of gods that demanded that sacrificial victims must be taken in battle to feed them. It is virtually the only motif in their artwork, so important was religion to them. Indeed, there seems to be no separation

of religious and secular life, or the real world and the domain of the gods. The Sipan grave held what appears to be a warrior/priest, and a bevy of women, guards and even his dog to accompany him to the next world. With him was buried, dated about A.D. 290, all of the finery and trappings accorded to him by rank. Enormous golden crests, worn on the head, and golden backflaps, attached to the belt and worn into battle for both spiritual and practical purposes, are both in the form of sacrificial knives. Also found was a golden inverted pyramid shaped rattle, on a long copper staff, seemingly a direct derivation of the war-clubs depicted dispatching enemies in the ceramic art. The role of the warrior and combat in Moche society seems to have been the same as in the Aztec; crucial to the survival of the gods and henceforth the world. It is no surprise that the weapons that made this ritual combat possible had been abstracted and formalized into the power symbols of the Moche. Their art provides numerous depictions of military equipment, warriors, and war activity. It shows that the primary purpose of warfare was the acquisition of enemy warriors, rather than territory, and the religious ceremonies that culminated in the dispatching of these captives and the nourishment of the gods.(Alva,1988)

The regalia depicted in their art unmistakably identifies the status of individual members and gods, and their positions in Moche society, a trait found in many other societies as well. The unambiguous display of insignia can be likened to the wearing of jewelry in the form of metals earned in battle, or the sheer ostentatious flaunting of wealth. Both are a function of



status. It is interesting that in Western society, jewelry is strictly ornamentation, although it is still perceived as a flaunting of wealth. With the abolition of the European class structure in the American Revolution, and the subsequent revolutions in Europe, the delineations of status in the West and the accompanying regalia associated with it have fallen into disuse. But outside of the West, it is still very alive.

In sub-Saharan Africa, in the few remaining cultures that still hold fast to their own culture, rather than the alien sphere of religion and culture forced upon them by the European Imperialists, the religion and lives of the people are one. All Africans, unlike their European conquerors, are totally dependent upon the soil and their herds for their existence. They are at the whim of nature and, understandably, these forces of nature are central to their life and religion. The success of crops and herds are seen as an expression of divine approval, and they try to maintain this approval by sacrifice and ritual. They believe themselves to be weak and without divine influence because they are merely human. This is why masks are such an essential element of the ritual ceremony. They believe that the mask will enable the wearer to transcend the bonds of humanity, to lay aside the human personality, and to adopt a new identity, that of an animal or spirit. The belief is that this new personality, adopted through the mask, will give the power to influence the course of nature and that the ritual will give the opportunity to do so.(Chesi,1977)

The Dogon people of Mali are probably the best known of the mask-

making peoples, and have a sculptural and religious tradition little affected by outside influences, owed to the isolation of their lands. They live south of the Niger river, in a harsh wilderness of barren sands and rocks and stunted thorn scrub that separates the Sahara from the coastal rain forests. It is crossed by no trade routes and has no wealth in any form to tempt others to lay claim to it. Life here is harsh indeed, and communication with the gods/ancestors crucial to survival. Marcel Griaule, a French anthropologist, is responsible for our knowledge of the Dogon. He lived among them, starting in 1931. In his studies, he lists hundreds of mask varieties; antelope, hare, crocodiles, monkeys, spirits, warriors, and women of other tribes, for the entire world has to be portrayed in their masks. A man may not wear any mask he chooses, he must apply to the master of masks, one of the most senior members of the *Awa*, the men's secret society, who will then determine the mask that he has the right to use.

This right arises from his position in the life-long ritual called the *Sigi*, which provides the shape to a man's religious life and takes sixty years to complete. A boy is initiated into it at puberty, when he is circumcised and entered into the *Awa*, which is ruled by the elders. It has its own secret language incomprehensible to women and uninitiated children. The *Awa* elders control all the ceremonies and its member's position in them. As the boy grows older and more important, he takes an increasingly prominent role in the ceremonies, reflecting the changes of status in village life.

(Attenborough, 1976) Here again, is a direct correlation to regalia and

status, determining who has access to what. A man cannot marry unless he has achieved a certain level of status, which is usually not attained until he is in his mid-thirties. If he fails to complete some part of the initiation, he never will be recognized as a man and will fail to reproduce. He will be treated as a child all his life, or worse, a slave or outcaste. Women, however, are usually married in their early teens. They do not have to prove their abilities to head households, or win status in society. They take status from their fathers first, and then from their husbands. Only late in life do women win the respect accorded to them, when their wisdom is prized by younger women. This enables men of higher status to have many wives and a higher reproductive success, for the display of his high status is the display of the ability to communicate/manipulate the spirit/ancestors and have success in the procurement of food. Such a man would be an excellent husband, and is much sought out by the families with marriable daughters.

Such daughters are a valuable commodity and they also have a very specific ornamentation to display their value. Many cultures have the concept of brideprice, whereas the husband is paying the family of the girl what he thinks her value to his household will be. Unmarried girls advertise their availability, such as the Fulani, a tribe neighboring the Dogon; unmarried girls wear small gold earrings and small amber beads in their hair. Women who wear the giant forged gold earrings, valued at twenty head of cattle, about \$3,000US, as well as a hairstyle with large chunks of amber, is signifying that she is married. In the High Atlas mountains of Morocco,

festivals occur where eligible men seek wives. The wearing of a rounded hood warns that a girl is available only for betrothal. In contrast, a peaked hood identifies a widow or divorcee, open to an immediate marriage without the formalities of a long engagement and parental negotiation.(Fisher, 1984)

We have very little in our culture like these things. It is not to say that we, as the Western-Judeo-Christian-Military-Industrial peoples, have no identifying raiment, testified to by the ubiquitous grey, three-piece suit. Our culture is a hodgepodge of almost every culture on earth, some of course more dominant than others. European fashions have dominated, concentrating on the display of status through the amplification/emphasis on anatomical features, with the use of makeup, wigs, corsets, high heels, and such, rather than the invention of abstract symbols. Unlike many other cultures, fashion and *haught couture* have no restrictions, other than financially, on who may indulge in such display. One may argue that, especially in America, status in our society is exclusively determined financially. The paradox in this is that the *nouveaux-riche* are universally despised; inherited money seems to be of the highest status. Since American culture puts it's highest kudos onto the acquiring of money, and rags to riches stories are what attracts so many to start afresh in America, it seems natural that many of the cultural heroes of America are such individuals, who in later generations become more respectable the older the money becomes.

On the other end of the social yardstick is the Punk, and their spiritual

children, the Rappers. Here is where the European aesthetic falls to the wayside. Punk accoutrements are a deliberate outrage against the unity, symmetry, and hygiene of the body. The Punk and Rapper flaunts the new totems/emblems of the techno-neo-fascism they perceive Western society as being. They paint their faces and dye their hair in the toxic hues of chemical pollution, anticipating the biological and social degradation we see coming so clearly, unless we make drastic changes in our lifestyles. Today's savagery is not to be found in New Guinea, or among the Pygmies of the Congo. It slashes out in the cynical goings-on all around us. The violent, dehumanizing lyrics of the Punks and Rappers describe the destruction of nature, the tragedy and waste of drug culture, the attempt by the fundamentalist Christian right-wing to restrict civil liberties, and the variety of government abuses, which also scream from the mass-media daily. The West is a culture living in the uneasy shadow of the bomb; held hostage to the questionable concept of nuclear deterrence.

The West's entire political structure is based upon the threat of random and final violence, held in check only by the questionable restraint and judgment of its leaders. It is peace based not on strength, but strength negated. In reality, because of the enormous lethality of nuclear arms, these weapons are perceived (hopefully!) as virtually useless for actual fighting; they have become the ritual object and weapons used in aforementioned ceremonies to manipulate the gods. However, since the West has no connection to such rituals, it is not surprising that the influence of the bomb,

even its mere existence, is so corrosive to World society. Despite assurances from politicians, there is a darkly cynical side to this culture. It seems that the most fundamental change in the nuclear age is the widespread withdrawal of loyalty and respect from public authority(O'Connell,1989), from whence the Punks and Rappers and other disaffected have sprung. Yet there is also an awareness that the politicians are not to blame; that the weapons themselves in the mere act of existing have shaped reality beyond anyone's control. Nuclear arms for us have become the same as the masks of the Dogon or the totems and mystical weapons of the Aborigines; powerfully controlling our lives, hidden from our sight as well as from that of our enemies, as if just gazing upon them will strike one down. The parallels are amazing; only a few older people (elders) have actually seen/experienced their use. Yet we all have the same conviction of their power as the Aborigine, who knows the mystic weapons held in check by ritual can be just as devastating. That we "know" the bomb is "real" is immaterial, its role in avoiding intragroup aggression is the same. It also acts, like the ritual weapons, to bond us together in the responsibility to prevent it's use ever again. For we know that their use will cost us terrible retribution from the only gods that exist in the West, those of science.

These are the things that I think about, the things that influence me, when I work. I tried to imbue meaning from the objects that I saw had meaning to other cultures and translate them into terms that my culture could understand. In the creation of my objects, I found that indeed, some

things have a language of their own that draw upon the roots of all cultures. It is this I would continue to explore, for I feel that my work is just beginning now that I have found a toehold onto the visual language I have been seeking.

My thesis work has its impetus from these cultural precepts; it started from a Indian hand-axe that I had discovered in my explorations on our family Farm. This axe-head, made of polished black slate, showed no signs of use and, out of curiosity, when I looked it up, I found that it was indeed intended for ceremonial use. Its form is a very pleasing one to me, and I found myself echoing it when I began to teach myself to carve stone.

The idea of ceremonial weaponry is one that I have been pursuing in my work for a long period of time, although this thesis work was a time to hone this concept to a much more sophisticated level. My work previous to this concentration had quite a bit of the contained aggression, but the concept of ritual weaponry was only implied: I consider my pieces to be high-tech talismans, celebrating the industrial age that we live in. I found that this machine aesthetic could exist quite comfortably with the primitive and pure forms that I had discovered in various cultures; indeed, a metaphor for the emerging world culture sweeping from the West to all other cultures. To merge the symbols of the colliding cultures into a harmonious balance of elements, speaks of my desire to see those cultures preserved; not to be swept away in the tempest of the West, but to take the best and assimilate it. That is not to say that Western culture is somehow superior, it is just powerfully driven and overwhelming. It is also not to say that the West is not being assimilated to other cultures, it is because new ideas are so welcome here, we often do not notice the assimilation. This is what I sought to concentrate on, the assimilation.



The series, Pagan Shadows, is the result of this concentration. There are six pieces, all of them inspired by the hand-axe. The first two have blades of wood, referring to the first implements our ancestors must have used. The next two, of stone, the next step on the evolutionary trail. One blade is a granite replica of the axe, the other is an actual Indian flint arrowhead, also from the Farm. The next two are distortions, extrapolating the idea and design as far as it could go. The brooch, Pagan Shadows V, leads to the earring, Pagan Shadows VI, as I realized the similarity in form to the earrings of the married Fulani Women and the regalia of the Mochica Warrior-Priest. This realization was very pleasing to me, for although we in the West have no codified raiment as firmly ensconced as the aforementioned, the wearing of such type of jewelry does make a statement. All of these pieces relate to my previous work and to each other through the use of sterling silver tubing in their construction.

The next pieces are a break from that technical consideration. Danger Pins I & II, Danger Rings I & II, and Ritual Knife I & II, all continue the carved blade aesthetic, but leapt away from the harsh architectural constriction of the silver tubing, allowing the cast silver to continue and enhance the carved form. Danger Pin allowed me to explore another utilization of the carved wood forms, freed of the traditional brooch format that up to now I had concentrated on. Danger Rings had this consideration as well, but also enabled me to challenge the concept of ring. In the country of Turkana, all of the men wear rings and bracelets of forged steel, the edges

honed to razor sharpness. The removal of a leather guard, which aids the comfort of the wearer, is all that is required to enter into battle. Such ornamentation/ weaponry would be very handy on the streets of certain cities, or in the bowels of certain subways, and Danger Rings have this in mind. However, they remain ceremonial in that they are only capable of the display of threat; the blades being made of Corian, a modern plastic that imitates granite quite well, are incapable of sustained battle. They are mounted in sterling silver, sculpted to conform to the hand, and not interfere with the use of fingers, quite a challenge for a double ring. But I wanted to be sure, like those of the Turkana, that my portable weapons would be more of an asset than a drawback.

Ritual Knife I & II Pendants are much less direct although they draw upon the same roots as the Danger Rings. Since they are pendants, this ensures that there is much less temptation of them to be used, although they are as incapable as the Danger Rings of combat for the same reasons of construction and material. The impression of their ability for actual use in a conflict, I believe, comes from the weight of the silver castings, as well as the fluidity of the form. They feel useful in your hand, form following implied function. The carved Corian is much lighter and stronger than actual stone, and, because it has no crystalline structure, it has no natural fault or fracture lines that prohibits the use of stone in this pieces.

In my departure, I went very far afield in the pieces, Idol I & II hairpins. Although they have some relation to Danger Pins, with their long

spears of stainless steel, they stand out from the others because they are figurative. They are my expression of the desire to echo the African maskmakers and find a connection to the earth spirits. Idol I is almost completely unaltered from the granite piece I found. Very little had to be done to it to draw out the impression of a human face. The natural arc of the fractured piece of stone reiterates both the blade form and the stone knapping technique used to create spear- and arrowheads. Idol II is the first step on the road back to consistency of my design; the silver tubing and blade form begins to reappear, although they are secondary considerations to the figurative quality of the piece.

Ritual Knife III pendant is the piece in which I returned to my original aesthetic, but continued to draw on what I had discovered in my break away from this aesthetic. I fully restored the use of tubing, although this time the tubing consisted of 14kt gold, and I came around in a full circle in the stone blade form, using again the hand-axe that I had found. Here I utilized the lapis lazuli blades in a different manner. I found myself drawn to the large sweeping forms of Ritual Knife I & II, and I echoed this with a large sheet of 18kt gold in the configuration of the dominant blade, with the two matched lapis blades as mere ornamentation. Although my original intention was not figurative, this piece has a strong suggestion of a human face and I find that it makes the piece even more compelling.

I was almost sad that I did not have another year to work on my thesis, for I found that the more I worked, the more possibilities sprang forth,

crying out “Pay Attention to Me!” However, upon reflection, I realize that a truly successful thesis is one that raises more questions than it answers, one in which the discovery of new ideas and designs never runs dry.

I am also pleased that I was and am able to bring other aspects of my life and interests into my work. Anthropology has always been of great interest to me, not only as an artist studying other art forms, but as a human, exploring all of the possibilities that the myriad cultures of our planet have spawned. In this I follow the advice of Ben Shan, who urges the artist to sample all of the aspects of life on Earth, and all social standings, so that one may better comment on and understand the human condition. I have every confidence that this line of inquiry will keep me busy for years to come.

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## Illustration List

- Pagan Shadows Brooch #1: Sterling Silver, Wenge Wood, 3"x3"
- Pagan Shadows Brooch #2: Sterling Silver, 14kt Gold, Wenge Wood, 3"x 4"
- Pagan Shadows Brooch #3: Sterling Silver, Granite, 3"x 4"
- Pagan Shadows Brooch #5: Sterling Silver, 14kt Gold, Fossil Horn Coral, 6"x 2 1/2"
- Pagan Shadows Earring #6: Sterling Silver, 14kt Gold, Australian Lacewood, 11" x 5"
- Danger Pins #1 & #2: Sterling Silver, Stainless Steel, Wood, 14"X 3"
- Ritual Knife #1: Sterling Silver, Corian, Silk Cord, 5" x5"
- Ritual Knife #2: Sterling Silver, Corian, Rubber Cord, 11"x 4"
- Danger Ring #1: Sterling Silver, Corian, 6" x 3"
- Danger Ring #2: Sterling Silver, Corian, 6" x 3"
- Idol Hairpin #1: Stainless Steel, Granite, Sterling Silver, 15" x 3"
- Ritual Knife #3: 18kt Gold, 14kt Gold, Lapis Lazuli, 6"x 4"



























