

Abstract

Celebration and Ceremony

by Molly Strader

April, 2010

Director: Linda Darty

DEPARTMENT OF METAL DESIGN

This written report supports a creative thesis investigation about objects used for celebrations and ceremonies. My work in precious metals and textiles symbolically represents significant transitions in a human life. Individually, each object represents a meditation on the different aspects of life's transitions, depicting contemporary culture and the rites, rituals, and markers of time that bring people together through a lifetime. It is my personal interpretation of the natural world and religious ideologies that have inspired me to create works that express my connection to those events.

CELEBRATION AND CEREMONY THROUGH LIFE

A Report of a Creative Thesis

Presented To

The Faculty of the Department of Art and Design

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts in Metal Design

By

Molly Strader

April, 2010

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MOLLY STRADER

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By
Molly Strader

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF THESIS: _____
LINDA DARTY

COMMITTEE MEMBER: _____
CHRISTINE ZOLLER

COMMITTEE MEMBER: _____
TIM LAZURE

COMMITTEE MEMBER: _____
BOB EBENDORF

DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN:

Michael H. Drought

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL:

Paul J. Gemperline, PhD

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INTRODUCTION

As Robert Pipenburg, a ceramicist and educator, once told me: “Just as creativity requires an open attitude, a willingness to see in new ways, your personal work... is best served by bridging these two worlds [of technique and spirituality].” I find this personally true as the work explained here bridges the world of my creative and spiritual development with my personal experiences.

People are not static and therefore, their traditions are not static; they flow and change with time. Through the study and witness of other cultures, my own traditions have evolved. Thanks to my family, I have been able to travel, experience, and study other cultures. During these experiences I have learned a great deal about traditional ceremonies and cultural celebrations regarding expressions of rites of passage. In viewing the ceremonies in Bali through cultural immersion, I experienced the importance in keeping the balance in life. I was able to enter the inner temples to observe the ceremonial cleansings of the sacred masks, and witnessed the importance of holy waters for healing and blessing. These celebrations and yearly rituals have become markers which I am drawn to when recalling the past, or considering the future.

I have participated in family baptisms, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, and funerals. At all these occasions I utilized or observed the use of ceremonial objects. For example wedding bands are used to show the bonds between a matrimonial couple. Other items like baby shoes reflect the remembrance of a newborn child as it embarks on steps of growth and development. Reflecting on the variety of ceremonial objects, the symbolic references, imagery, visual components, etc, were powerful enough to inspire my creating artwork celebrating those specific events.

As I have developed my artistry and skills in metal design, I have built a personal perspective of the phases and ceremonies of life. Considering the length of human life, the

significance of ceremonies and the traditions shared by different cultures, a theme began to emerge. The imagery, colors, and symbolism I have chosen for each piece, are a blend of what I have learned from a variety of cultures. The underlying focus of each creation is drawn from a belief in the inherent spirituality in life. This belief has guided my choice of imagery, the selection of my materials and became the very foundation of my work.

Time Line (Plate 1)

When I started thinking about life and the moments we choose to memorialize, I realized there are millions of moments that are forgotten and pass us by. While establishing the key transitions for this thesis: birth, youth, marriage, aging, and the final transition, I felt life's transitional phases are best summarized by a timeline. *Time Line* is a hand woven silk tapestry that symbolizes the entire span of a life. As human life has a beginning and end point in the physical plain of existence on this earth, the weaving has a starting point where the warp threads are first positioned, and an end point where threads no longer continue.

Time Line measures sixteen feet long, is made out of both natural silk and a variegated hand dyed silk, and was woven with a textured piqué weave utilizing the variegated dyed warp threads for the floats of the woven pattern. Floats in weaving are a length of yarn that extends over at least two rows or stitches without being interworked. Because the birth of a newborn is often associated with purity; the weave starts with both the warp and weft in the neutral tones of the silk and symbolizes the beginnings of life. Warp is the threads that are tied to the loom at the beginning and end, and weft refers to the threads that are woven side to side. As the weave continues, the floats begin to transition in color, symbolizing the impact of time. The changes people go through in life are represented in the continued transition of the threads from light to dark, until the last portion of the threads change to deeper purple. I chose the deep purple because of its association in the Hindu belief with the seventh "crown" chakra, which is considered an energy center in the body, representing wisdom and spirituality. Life makes challenging demands that when approached with wisdom, can result in magnificent growth and transformation.

This weaving represents hope, fellowship, love, loss, and laughter. The fine silk thread of each pick, or each throw of the weft, represents moments of progressive consciousness in life

when we move forward, guided by synchronistic gifts from a divine source. As the threads of the dyed floats progress darker, the white threads representing spirituality that carries us through life surround the darker threads. It is a connectedness to our support network that brightens our dark times and often, as we look back, the light overwhelms the darker times.

Time Line is hung above all the artwork I have created for this exhibition. As the dyed threads transition from all white to deep purple, they act as a visual connection with the work and the phase in life depicted in the different pieces that are displayed below the weaving.



PLATE 1

TIME LINE (Installed)

Natural and hand dyed silk

16'x 1'

BIRTH

Blessing Bowl (Plate 2)

Water is a necessity for life. Our bodies are about 60% water and 71% of the earth's surface is covered with water. From water births to baptisms, ceremonial cleansing is a part of many cultures, using a natural part of the world around us to bless the body that houses the spirit. In Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, water is a symbol of body, emotional, and spiritual cleansing, as well as the power of renewal.

Being beside, on, or in water has always been a source of great joy for me. I have been a SCUBA diver for the last 18 years of my life and have spent many hours underwater, exploring and absorbing the beauty of the coral reef. Those experiences have always been a source of rejuvenation and renewal. The coral spawns once a year across an entire reef. From such tiny beginnings, a reef is formed over many years, just as life begins and transforms as time passes. I called on those memories for the imagery in the *Blessing Bowl*.

Just as the coral creates the structure for the reef to thrive, the sterling silver base of the *Blessing Bowl* is chased and repoussé to emulate the appearance of a coral head. The chasing process includes the use of specifically shaped punches that when hammered correctly, can create imagery on the surface of the metal. Repoussé (coming from the French verb meaning “to push back”) creates volumetric forms and surfaces by pushing the metal from the front and back. The actual bowl form is created with a natural spiral shell with the outer shell polished away to reveal the mother of pearl layer on both the inside and outer surfaces. Due to the shell's shape, the opening creates a natural wide pouring spout and allows the viewer to see down to the blue boulder opal set in the bottom. The colors in the opal repeat the many colors of the water and underwater environment.



PLATE 2

BLESSING BOWL

Sterling Silver, Spiral Shell, Boulder Opal, and Pink Tourmaline

4"x 4"x 3"

Baby Spoons: *Release* and *Floating* (Plate 3)

One often thinks of the phrase “born with a silver spoon in their mouth” as a statement of a person’s financial standing. The family heirlooms of silver baby spoons, rattles, and cups have another background based on the health and well being of a child. It was believed in the Middle Ages that a baby mouthing silver, either via a spoon, rattle, or cup, would help deter bacterial infections. Silver is also associated with symbols of purity because of its white color. Gifts of silver spoons to newborns represent the preservation of the health and wealth of the family.

As a child, I did have a special spoon that had Minnie Mouse on the handle. It was not silver, but I used it for quite a few years when I was young. As I considered this phase of my life and the earlier baby years, I sought to embody the idea that spoons symbolize new beginnings and the importance of healthy nourishment in life. Thinking about beginnings, I wanted to incorporate the coral spawning imagery from the base of the *Blessing Bowl* into the spoons.

The imagery used in *Release* depicts a close up look of the tiny pink eggs being released into the water from the surface of a green coral head. The spoon is silver and the handle is champlevé enamel, a technique in which enamel is fused onto the recessed areas of a metal base. Enameling is a process of applying powdered glass that is fused to the silver surface at 1450 to 1500 degrees. Before enameling the surface of the handle, I did a small amount of chasing and repoussé on the metal. Transparent enamel is built up in many layers so the textures and designs on the surface show through. This is a technique in enameling called basse-taille. The finished over all look is of the greenish surface of the coral with the pink egg in the center.

Floating, the second spoon of the series, represents a cloud in the water of both egg and sperm that will create and build on the reef below. The middle section of the handle is a tapered repoussé tube createing the appearance of the eggs floating in the water. The light blue enamel

that is over the surface does not completely cover the bumps and allows the surface of the silver to show through. The very end of the handle has a small section of fossilized pick coral to represent both the product and the color of the eggs.



PLATE 3

BABY SPOON: *RELEASE AND FLOATING*

Sterling Silver, enamel, and fossilized coral

5"x ¾"x ½"

COMING OF AGE

Light of Life (Plate 4)

The Hindu festival of Diwali, meaning row of lights, is celebrated throughout India as a celebration of life. “Diwali is a five-day festival that represents the start of the Hindu New Year. It honors the victory of good over evil, and brightness over darkness” (About.com 3-22-10). My Granddad’s 85th birthday cake was like a festival of lights. I remember when they brought out the cake it warmed the room and those 85 candles nearly melted the cake. What a sight it was to see so many candles flickering. It is an image burned into my mind. More recently we use wax candles formed in the shape of a number. On my birthday this last year, I was given a cake with four-inch tall candles in the numbers three and zero. As I blew out the candles it reminded me of my childhood cakes. My mother had small porcelain candle stands of clowns that were posed in the shape of the numbers for my cakes. When I turned ten she pulled out the clown standing to make up the “one” and then the one with two clowns tumbling together that made the “zero”. Though there were only two candles to blow out instead of ten, it was much more fun because of their uniqueness to the occasion. I always looked forward to the next year to see how we would use all the clowns. We light the candles, make a wish and as the air from our mouth carries our wish across the flame, it is blown out to the universal energies that can answer it.

Light of Life consists of ten candleholders, each representing a number from zero to nine. The patterning on the tops of each holder is designed with cell division and the symmetry of flowers in mind. The chased tops reveal lobes representing a number. “One” has a single rounded lobe with the remainder of the surface radiating lines, “two” has two rounded lobes, etc. The “zero” has no lobes, just radiating lines from the center. The mahogany base has an inset spot to hold each of the candleholders. The candleholders one through nine create an arc on the

mahogany base, with the zero residing in the front centered between one and nine. Once the candles have been blown out, the holders can be lifted off the cake and replaced on the mahogany base for display or set out on their own.



PLATE 4

LIGHT OF LIFE

Sterling Silver and Mahogany

1'x 6"x 2 ½"

Growth of Form (Plate 5)

My love for the sciences, sequences, and a desire for all things balanced and symmetrical, inspired the creation of this necklace. Through researching sacred geometry and mathematical sequences I was inspired to use representations of Fibonacci Spiral Phylotaxis, which is derived from the Fibonacci sequence to achieve divine proportions. This sequence of numbers is achieved when each successive number is the sum of the previous two: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, etc. This has been used to describe the natural spiral of the nautilus shell and to calculate the best arc for an amphitheater. This scientific and mathematical description, for me, also relates to life's events. When detours arise, even as they appear accidental, there seems to be a higher purpose that allows events to unfold as needed, to point you in the right direction.

The Fibonacci Spiral Phylotaxis, which is the design utilized for this piece, explains the growth patterns in plants, predicting where the next leaf will grow or where the next seed in the head of a sunflower will arise. Though things in nature seem sporadic and of their own accord, there is a plan that is in place. Upon reflections as I mature, I have seen the patterns that seem to flow naturally from one event to the next. With growth of plants in mind the champlevé components of the necklace are layered with transparent blues and greens in the circles to represent the new growth in spring, with a light, to darker grey transition in the background. Utilizing the basse-taille technique, I texturized the metal below the enamel to add to the visual depth of the colors. Half of the pieces of the necklace have one domed and hammered disk in one of the two largest places of the spiral. These domes, for me, represent the seeds of beginning and, like an egg, hold the energy for life.



PLATE 5

GROWTH OF FORM

Sterling Silver and Enamel

10"x 10"x ½"

Sparkling Grape Juice (Plate 6)

It was during my youth that I recall breaks from school and the effervescence in life so full of swirling energy. I felt a desire to be a grown up, and to experience activities that adults enjoy. As I wasn't of drinking age, and there would be times of celebration where the family would toast, I would be given sparkling grape juice so I could participate in the toast. For this reason *Sparkling Grape Juice* is a toast to youth and our desire to fit in. When celebrations occurred and the champagne or wine started flowing at my grandparents' house, I was given my own special small, cut, crystal cordial glass for the non-alcoholic sparkling grape juice. I made a special cordial glass to act as a toast to youth, ambition, and growth. The stem of the glass reflects my personal aesthetic as influenced by viewing the cathedrals in France, especially Sacre Coure in Paris (Plate 7). This cathedral contained a beauty of clean pure lines, unlike the more opulent cathedrals I viewed in Italy. The base of the cordial is inspired from the cathedrals I viewed in Siena and Rome. Compared to the stem of the cordial glass, the base stands out with the flash of the blue zircon, white topaz, and 18K gold accents. Similar to when I was a young girl playing dress up, believing that the costume or outfit I put on made me into a different person; this cup represents the innocence and purity of drinking grape juice with being able to join in and participate with the family toast because of my special cordial cup.



PLATE 6

SPARKLING GRAPE JUICE

Sterling Silver, 18K Gold, Blue and White Topaz

5"x 2"x 2"



PLATE 7

SACRE COURE, PARIS FRANCE

BETROTHAL / Wedding Rituals

The Tie That Binds Two Hearts As One (Plate 8)

“I honor the place in you in which the entire Universe dwells, I honor the place in you which is of Love, of Integrity, of Wisdom and of Peace. When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me, we are One. Namaste.” Hindu Greeting of unknown ancient origin.

According to Webster’s online dictionary, handfasting is defined as “a contract or covenant especially of betrothal or marriage” (Webster 3/20/10). From handfasting’s Celtic origins we have also come by the phrase “Tying the Knot”. It was a way for couples to pledge their betrothal by joining hands, his right to her right, his left to her left, so from above they looked like an infinity symbol and a cord or scarf was then tied around the hands, holding fast together for the remainder of the ceremony.

Though hand fasting scarves have no historical parameters for their color or length. *The Tie that Binds Two Hearts as One* is pure white in color, extends ten feet in length, and ten inches in width. The design structure of the piqué weave for me, represents harmony, balance, sincerity, love, and truth. I chose natural silk for it’s inherent luster because it is the strongest of natural fibers. Similar to *Time Line*, the white of this hand fasting scarf represents the enlightenment of the spiritual and mental balance. White is seen in several cultures as a representation of divinity and the spark of life. This scarf represents new beginnings, purity, and protection for the joining of the masculine and feminine. No longer individual energies but combined, two hearts, two lives together; embarking on a life as one strong team. This acts as a reminder for the new couple, as they join their two lives together as one, to administer compassion and consciously choose forgiveness in a situation.



PLATE 8

THE TIE THAT BINDS TWO HEARTS AS ONE

Silk

10'x 10"x .2"

Golden Wheat Rings (Plate 9)

Contemporary wedding bands are thought to have originated in Ancient Egypt, where it is said that plant sections were made into circles to signify never-ending and immortal love. It was thought that ring fingers enclosed the vein that led directly to the heart. I think of wheat as the product of growth from the warm sun's energy and the culmination of the days of work reaching fruition. Wheat is a symbol of bounty, health, and a natural celebratory symbol of harvesting. It has been used in artwork like the sculpture *Madonna del Coazzone* by Pietro Antonio Solari I saw in Milan at the Castello Sforzesco (Plate 10) to represent her fertility. Sheaves of wheat have also been used as a symbol of growth, prosperity, and renewal. *Golden Wheat Rings* are two 18K gold wedding bands that utilize the imagery of two wheat spikes wrapping around creating the band. At the top, where they come together, there I set a 2mm diamond. This joining of the two spikes is representational of a couple joined together and where they meet in the middle is symbolized by the brilliant sparkle of the clear diamonds.



PLATE 9

GOLDEN WHEAT RINGS

18K Gold, Diamonds

1"x 1"x .25"



PLATE 10

Madonna del Coazzone by Pietro Antonio Solari , Castello Sforzesco

A Toast to Love (Plate 11)

“From cane reeds, sugar.

From a worm’s cocoon, silk.

Be patient if you can, and from sour

grapes will come something sweet.” --- Rumi, from *Say I Am You*

After wedding ceremonies when friends and family join together to rejoice and celebrate a newlywed couple, they raise their glasses in salutation and toast their new life. These toasting cordials mimic the give and take of a relationship and how each seem to have a personality bending and curving to match the other’s movement. Each has a hand raised silver cup liner inside the raw white porcelain outer cup. The tall cordial represents the dreams and high ideals that the new couple has. The stem and base are hand formed silver with 18K gold accents near the elegantly curving stem. The shorter cordial also has a silver stem and base that has a ceramic component with earthy greens and browns of the glaze setting the stem and base apart. This cup lies closer to the ground and represents a wish for the couple to be well grounded, stable, and strong throughout their marriage.



PLATE 11

A TOAST TO LOVE

Sterling Silver, Porcelain, 18K Gold,

1"x 1"x .25"

PERSONAL CEREMONY

Contemplation Tea Infuser (Plate 12)

As cooler temperatures arrive, people find time to visit with loved ones, make tea with family, or hot cocoa for children. All the facets of autumn are golden, in my mind, and are summarized by the idea of “tea time”, a time to spend finding and celebrating tranquility in life, ceremony of friendships, time to slow down, closeness, and meaningful moments. Taking tea with my mother, as well as my friends, has created special memories. It is about catching up, quieting our minds, and enjoying the views. There are times, while sipping tea with a friend when no conversation abounds, and we just sit quietly contemplating, drinking in the moment. This tea infuser brings all those memories to mind.

“In [most] every culture the circle symbolizes wholeness and the experience of unity” (31 Arrien). Circles are commonly found in cultural designs and religious artwork of Native Americans, Tibetans, Buddhists, Christianity, Taoism and many others. They are often used for halos around the divine or holy beings or to encompass a labyrinth or a mandala in a rose window of a cathedral.

For me a mandala is encompassing, fulfilling, and a visual source to meditate and draw from the energy inside of me. “[A mandala] has the regenerative and curative power to activate the latent powers of the mind. The meditative process helps to focus and open the heart to the healing power of unconditional love” (2 Cornell). Each side of this tea infuser has a mandala and is designed to be used. Once the tea steeps, it provides a visual stimulus for meditation and contemplation. The two inch wide infuser has the lines of the mandala design chased into the surface, with a hook and chain connected to the end of a magnetic clasp. At the very center of each side is a 3mm hessonite garnet with an eight-pointed star surrounding it. Each tip of the star is a double pointed oval radiating from the center. The next ring of the design has eight golden

citrines set, and 32 triangles pierced through the surface. The outer most ring of the mandala has over 400 holes drilled through each side imitating the chased lines of the design. This design of the mandala and the use of the orange and yellow stones are representational of the earthly world and a reminder to remain in the moment and not drift to the past or dream too long of the future, but to drink in moments of each day.



PLATE 12

CONTEMPLATION TEA INFUSER

Sterling Silver, Hessonite Garnet, Golden Citrine, Earth Magnets

2.5" x 2.5" x 2"

Making Eyes at Me (Plate 13)

As we age, we begin to see the world around us differently. Our focus in the early years of life is often on the material matters and measures of success, and we push our bodies to keep up with our goals and often wear them down. Spectacles have become an important part of my life as I have needed them in the last two years to bring into focus the fine joints and components of my metal work. *Making Eyes at Me* are 'readers' (magnification of 2.75+) to help bring the small things in life into focus for up close views.

These spectacles are meant to sit lower on the nose. The wires that hold the lens in place were formed into the shape of an eye. These wires help suspend the lens that I shaped to mimic the iris. The temples are made of 18K white gold, with hinges and accents of 18K yellow gold. To represent colors of fall and changes in the body, I set reddish orange hessonite garnets on the tops and bottoms of the hinges. These spectacles are a celebration of embracing and accepting who we are as we change.



PLATE 13

MAKING EYES AT ME

18K White and Yellow Gold, Hessonite Garnet

5"x 5"x 1"

TRANSITIONS / REMEMBRANCE

Life Blessings (Plate 14)

We all come to understand reality and the passage of life in different ways. Beliefs and religions are all different, and similar at the same time. Holy water, or libations are used in different religions and cultures to bless the body and soul of someone who is dying, to purify or cleanse a body after death, or to toast to their life. Even the most sorrowful mourner at an Irish Wake is inspired to raise a glass and remember the happiest of times in the life of the deceased. In the Hindu religion “Before a [person] dies, water is taken, if possible, from the Ganges [is put] into the dying person’s mouth... It assures the family that the dying person will receive a blessing from the Ganges which will bring peace” (38 Kramer). The Catholic Church has a ceremony/sacrament that is known as the “last rites” referred to today as “anointing of the sick”, if the person is able, this sacrament can be accompanied by confession and the Holy Eucharist.

Life Blessings is a hand-raised chalice set on top of a porcelain base. The technique of raising, used to make the chalice can be described briefly as the manipulation of a sheet of metal, through hammering over a form, into a volumetric shape or container. The linear texture on the outside of the cup and on the base, for me, expresses the spirit leaving the body. On the smooth porcelain base there is a satin black glaze, contrasting the lightness of the silver. The light and dark represents the beginning and the end. Just as winter will bring spring again, so will the spirit be transformed.



PLATE 14

LIFE BLESSINGS

Sterling Silver, Porcelain

6"x 3.5"x 3.5"

***Fragile Existence* (Plate 15)**

“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

I trust in change, and even death, because there is a continuum; there are no final endings. In my own personal belief death is not the end it is a threshold and a time of transformation for the spirit. In some cases after death the body is cremated and placed in an urn.

Fragile Existence is an urn, a vessel that acts as a representation of, and container for a cremated body. The egg references body because of its origins symbolizing the rebirth and fertility of the earth in Pagan celebrations of spring. The dark, deckled, emu egg brings with it the ideas of birth, and symbolizes a container for energy and a location for transformation. The chased and repoussé base and top display the expansion of energy with radiating pattern of liner dashes.



PLATE 15

FRAGILE EXISTENCE

Sterling Silver, Emu Egg

6"x 3.5"x 3.5"

CONCLUSION

"Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny." — [Mahatma Gandhi](#)

The moments we choose to memorialize, the way we celebrate them with special ceremonies or objects, create the symbolism and ideals we internalize and pass on to future generations. Those generations will take stories from their lives and through their own experiences, transform and use what entices them most. However, change is inevitable. My experiences with celebrations and ceremony during my life, have inspired me to create these special objects. I hope that these explorations will enrich the meanings of my work as I continue to expand my knowledge and incorporate symbolism into future pieces.

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