Honoring the sacred space within

Karen Marie Pelc

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

HONORING THE SACRED SPACE WITHIN

By

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As humans, we often create masks or facades that serve as shields. They are our outer armament for the outside world, in order to protect our inner space, as well as keep us from being revealed to the outside world. In life, our accumulative experiences make us who we are and what we will become. In order to function and survive, we must protect our personally sacred and secretive inner space. Like many people, I have used the creation of shields and masks throughout my life to protect my inner space. In addition acceptable facades have protected me from life trials and tribulations, such as trauma or loss. These life experiences may affect me physically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. My shields or masks allow me to reveal only the parts of my inner self that I choose to reveal to the world and to choose who sees what layers of myself I want to expose. When people have made premature attempts to know me (to invade my space too soon) or my inner self is threatened, I create a metaphoric illusion for those who would come in contact with me. This form of defensive armor protects my inner fragility from external harm. I can deploy this guard as quickly as a breath. These internal shields and masks are used as a deflection to protect my personally sacred inner space.

Therefore, my thesis involves the investigation of metaphoric shields and masks, exploring the technique of lost-wax bronze casting and associated processes. Mixed media is researched and incorporated into this investigation as well. Totemic\(^1\) symbols of

\(^1\) Carved, painted representation of animals or animal-human ancestors. To American Indians in the Northwest, who believe that all of the nature has spiritual life, the animals in the totem poles represent the spiritual powers of the animal protectors or ancestors. Microsoft Encarta online encyclopedia 2000
my spirituality\textsuperscript{2} and individuality are manifested within this installation: \textit{Honoring the Sacred Space Within}. These totemic symbols represent fragments of my inner self incorporated within this sculptural form. This artistic installation also functions as a vehicle to disguise my true nature. Through my art, individuals will see only what appears to be obvious. In reality the installation’s meanings are much deeper than what can be observed. For the individual, in the installation they will see what the familiar and personal is and what connects to their own experience. Also, it may allow viewers to identify with masks they may have created as a child or worn as an adult. This may remind them of how they may have felt concealed behind a mask or how they may have felt hiding their own emotions or identity. For me the work is highly personal and I enjoy its dual meaning, the fact that it is a work within a work.

\textsuperscript{2} The quality or state of being spiritual; heavenly-mindfulness. Microsoft Encarta online encyclopedia 2000
The Beginning Plans (2)

For the purpose of this thesis investigation, the use of masks employed in rites of passage and offense/defense will be explored in depth. While the primary purpose for protective masks has been to protect one from physical injury, many masks have been worn to conceal and protect one’s identity. In this sense, the masks were either an actual covering over the face or simply an emotion or disguised identity that was adopted to misrepresent the true self. It has been this concealing form of a protective mask that has influenced the creative and artistic search of my thesis work. This is such a fundamental premise in my life that a thesis on the subject is a natural outgrowth of my artistic expression. “Humans have used metaphors and symbols to represent biological and social rites of passage. In many cultures for example the phases of the moon are seen to symbolize the phases of the female life cycle. The new, full, and fading phases of the moon are similar to maiden, mother, and elder. The stability of the mask during ceremonial rites of passage provides a far-reaching sense of permanence during this unstable time of transition or rites of passage” (Nunley, 66). You can see this example clearly throughout tribes in Africa where many use masks in dance to transform and represent individual experiences in their lifecycles.

Throughout history, cultures and communities have used masks in a variety of ways. “Masks were made and used in the great civilizations of the Old and New Worlds. Death masks accompanied the Egyptian mummy to the tomb and allowed the soul of the deceased to recognize its body after it returned to the tomb in the evening. The Aztecs
and the Maya of Middle America, and the Inca and other civilizations of the Andes used masks. The Chinese, Indians, and the Japanese used masks from ancient times in a variety of different ways including theater, as did the Greeks and Romans. Finally, many tribal and folk societies continue to use masks today” (Ulrich, 1). Ultimately these create an illusion for the world to see and in turn often shield the inner self. “Masks are the most ancient means of changing identity and assuming a new persona.” This was stated in John Nunley’s book, Masks: Faces of Culture “the urge, perhaps even universal need, to transform ourselves has coexisted with the development of human society. Masks have appeared in virtually every region of the world and have been created to satisfy the desires and challenges within these cultures. In addition, masks symbolize our ability to change, to transform, to go to the other world and to appease the spirits. There are five fundamental reasons why humans have made and used masks: rites of passage, festivals of renewal, men as women in the theater, and offense/defense” … “the reason men play women in masquerades in ritual or on stage also relates to female biological transitions and social expectations” (Nunley, 15 Masks: Faces of Culture). Masks say a great deal about the people who make them and the cultures that use them.

Everyday conflicts arise that force us to protect ourselves in ways that will keep us safe. This has been particularly true for the artist and is what has served as the criteria for creating this project. “Artists often believe that metaphorically we arm ourselves to protect our soul, our spirit and our essence, through the creation of shields and masks.”³ Through the creation of shields and masks these metaphors will capture life spirits in the thesis and speak to the world cultures.

³ Fire & Shadow: Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art; Nevill Drury and Anna Voight
These shields and masks protect us from the onslaught of hostile environments and elements that try to penetrate us physically, spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically. I feel that we hide behind the masks, creating whatever truth will protect our inner self. For children, their parents or guardians often serve as the masks and the children later develop their own masks for confronting positive and negative life experiences. As young people encounter life situations, the variety, depth and number of masks needed depends upon the actual experiences. I find from my research experience that these processes become natural, just as if we were breathing life into a mask in order to protect the inner self.

My inner self is rooted in my spiritual experiences. The definition that closely relates to my inner self I have quoted. “Spirituality is that which comes from within, beyond the survival instinct of the mind. Each of us has a spiritual center, which is our connection to this source of inner knowing. A spiritual center is our inner self – beyond our programmed beliefs and values – that is the source of wisdom. It is the source that influences us to behave, with passion, understanding, empathy, humility, compassion, and love.”

In addition to the use of masks as a means for protecting the inner self, I also investigated protective masks and how they connect to ancestral roots and indigenous identities. There are two main identities that I explored in this artistic process: my spiritual, ancestral roots and the influence of indigenous cultures that have shaped my life. Significantly, pieces of these elements exist in us all, and we protect them both consciously and unconsciously. We may need to protect ourselves when we are most

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4 www.workplacesspirituality.info
vulnerable with others outside our culture due to our differences or beliefs. We learn through our experiences that masks or illusions we create can protect and preserve our ancestral heritage.

When I researched masks and various mediums from world cultures both traditional and contemporary, I decided the medium must fulfill a dual purpose. First a versatile material that must be hard enough to protect like a warriors shield, second a material which through its own creation must be able to be manipulated and transformed through the various stages, just as my thesis evolved and transformed into an artistic statement. The process that fulfilled these criteria was traditional bronze casting. I began by exploring the process of bronze casting and incorporating the lost-wax technique, (See photograph of wax mold below, picture 1).

The lost wax technique can be cast either hollow or solid. I used my own face as the form. Before preparing my face, I precut gauze strips in various sizes and soaked them in water until moist. Next, in preparation for the actual mold making, I covered my face with Vaseline and then I prepared a plaster of paris mixture. The precut gauze strips were dipped in the plaster solution and layered onto my face. The plaster mold needed to be strong. This required an adequate layering so that when dried and removed from my face, the mask mold would not crack or crumble. Once the mold was removed from my face, additional plaster was applied to the outside of the mold, reinforcing the outer layer. Wax was then heated to a liquid state, and then poured into the mold. The entire mold was rotated so that the inside would be covered with wax. I also hand brushed wax inside the mask. This process was repeated until I built up the
appropriate thickness of wax. After the wax mold cooled, it was submerged in cold water to loosen the wax from the plaster mold. The wax was pulled out and repaired with additional hot wax applied to the inside. This assured that the outside details were not altered (See photograph of wax molds, pictures 2A and 2B). This step reinforced any weakened areas that were visible from the inside. The wax mold was held up to a light source to identify any minute holes that needed additional wax layering. The wax model was then attached to a pour-cup, which was funnel-shaped. This element channeled the metal into the mold from the outside, using "gates or sprues"\(^5\) (398) made from rods of wax. A venting system was made the same way, releasing air and other gases out of the mold when it was filled with hot metal (See photograph of wax sprues, picture 3). Once the model was set up with its gates and vents, it was surrounded with a material that covered it smoothly when wet and was capable of withstanding high temperatures when baked. I used both the "ceramic shell" and "investment" method for the casting process. The wax mold was set up in much the same way as the ceramic shell, except that more venting is necessary due to the decreased porosity of the mold material. The wax mold was incased using plaster of paris as a binder for the sand and silica powder. The dry ingredients (plaster of

\(^5\) Sprue system: the complete assembly of sprues, runners, gates, and individual casting cavities in the mold
Paris and silica) were mixed with water and poured into a container. The material used is metal mesh which is the surrounded by tar paper (See photograph of wire mesh gate, picture 4). Then I poured in the mixture. Once the plaster mixture had setup and became hard, the plaster silica encasement was placed in a kiln and slowly heated to 1000 - 1250 degrees Fahrenheit and held at this temperature until all the wax residue disappeared. For this reason the process is referred to as the *lost wax* process. The metal was then melted and the molds were filled with the liquid bronze. The container was allowed to cool, and then the plaster silica mold was chiseled away. Finally, metal gating and vents were cut off and filed down.

In order to achieve my goal, I first created a plaster cast of my face, which was then used to create multiple molds of my face through the use of the lost wax technique. This process allowed me to create the masked illusions that I create in my own life when I establish protective shield from the external world. This cast process mirrors my life experience and my ability to create my masks both literally and figuratively. The process of learning the lost wax technique paralleled the creation and understanding of my own use of masks throughout my life. For example, the first masks that I created in wax had some weak areas and were very thin. As I mastered the process, the masks improved. When I made them the appropriate thickness, they were no longer vulnerable nor had inconsistently fragile areas. After creating many masks the process became second nature very much like brushing my teeth. This is similar to my own life experiences. When I was younger I had to learn what masks to use in various situations. It was through both positive and negative experiences that I became so proficient at using my mask that I no longer had to consciously think about it.
Once the wax masks were created, some were altered, pierced, separated and reattached before they were cast in bronze. (See photographs of bronze masks end of document, Appendix) The alterations were symbolic of my various life experiences: birth, loss, pain, self-exploration, creative expression, and spiritual enlightenment. The life experiences that the masks represented were symbolic of the rites of passage that I have encountered throughout my life.

When I decided a totem structure would be used to suspend the bronze masks, four types of wood were chosen. These particular species were chosen for their strength and color, contrasting from dark to light: blood wood, granadilla, mahogany, and canary. A total of twenty-four poles were carved. Four of the tallest carved poles remained within the circle of tripod totem structures. (See picture 5 carved wood totems). The totem structures were the supportive and protective architecture for the installation. A conscious decision to carve the wood to resemble bone was made. By laminating two pieces wood with glue, I was able to create the desired thickness for the pole structures.
Some of the poles were solid, representing the pure aspects of life while others were laminated and symbolized different facets in my life. The wood process incorporated additive and subtractive carving techniques. After the tripods were created, I wrapped various sections of the tripods with leather, metal wire, fiber, and animal fur. This process served as a means of connecting to the natural earth elements. The process of subtraction incorporated an angle grinder to form the desired wood forms. These processes seemed symbolic of my own life in which things are given and things are taken away; a process of making me who I am, and who I will become.
When I researched Symbolic Circles, I found many indigenous traditions and current day religions frequently utilize the circle. From sun worship\(^6\) to Tibetan mandalas\(^7\), or even the circular concepts of early astronomers\(^8\), the symbol of a circle focuses on the most important aspect of life, its ultimate wholeness.

In many Indigenous traditions the circle represents a way of life. For example, Native Americans believe that the medicine wheel is representative of their spirituality. This circle of life symbolizes the individual journey we all must take in order to find our own path. The medicine wheel is sacred because the native people believed that the Great Spirit caused the sun, sky, earth, and moon to be a circle.

Dr. M. -L. Von Franz a contemporary Jungian analysis explained the circle as a symbol of the self. “It expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and the whole of nature.” Carl Jung Man and His Symbols (240):

The circle represents life, rebirth and the honoring of each step along the way.

According to Dave Chief Oglala Lakota

\(^6\) Deification and adoration of the sun occurred primarily in agrarian societies. When man became a farmer and thus dependent upon daily and seasonal changes of weather he often turned to worship the great force that regulated these changes. The worship of the sun, although not peculiar to any time or place, received its greatest prominence in ancient Egypt. The influence of the sun in religious belief also appears in Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, Roman religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, and among the Druids of England, the Aztecs of Mexico, the Incas of Peru, and many Native Americans. Columbia Encyclopedia, sixth edition, copyright © 2005

\(^7\) Mandela is the sanskrit word for circle. In religious art, the mandala is used to symbolize wholeness. Princetonol.com

\(^8\) Astronomers of the ancient past appears to have used a method of lunar accounting to effectively measure and meter out the completion of the annual circle. www.creation-answers.com
"The circle has healing power. In the circle we are equal. When in the circle, no one is in front of you. No one is behind you. No one is above you. No one is below you. The sacred circle is designed to create unity. The hoop of life is also a circle. On this hoop there is a place for every species, every race, every tree, and every plant. It is this completeness of Life that must be respected in order to bring about health on this planet. To understand each other, as the ripples when a stone is tossed into the waters, the Circle starts small and grows... until it fills the whole lake." 9

In addition to the use of the lost wax technique and bronze casting, I also explored woodcarving as a creative process for developing my installation. Wood was used to create the tripods, which supported and protected the various bronze masks and ultimately my inner spirit (See photograph of tripods, picture 6).

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9 Quote: Dave Chief, Oglala Lakota
War Defenses as Inspiration (4)

Life is like battle. In the book *Art of War* (Szu Tao, Chapter 9) "Those skilled in the defense conceal themselves in the lowest depths of the earth, those skilled in attack move in the highest reaches of the Heavens. Therefore, they are able to protect themselves and achieve complete victory."

A simple definition of the word mask is "a covering used to conceal all or part of the face as a disguise or for protection."\(^{10}\), so it is no surprise that masks have been used as a form of protection. Nunley states, "Masks created for protection are worn when dealing with space, primarily with spatial boundaries". (Nunley, 275) For example, human conflict is rooted in aggression, causing people to act both offensively and defensively at the same time. The coexistence of these two actions results in the formation of many types of masks. Often, the mask becomes one part of the protective covering. This extension would not only cover the face but the total body as its armor.

Masks have also been used as physical protection, particularly in times of war or conflict. In the South Pacific, islanders uniquely created body armor that included protective headgear which covered the face (281). Similarly, the Greeks believed that a battle mask could transform a citizen into a fighting warrior, giving him strength and courage for combat (282). Perhaps the most well known protective masks were created in Japan during the sixteenth century. Samurai was Japan’s military elite (See photograph of Samurai mask

\(^{10}\) Standard Dictionary: Funk & Wagnalls pg 486
on previous page, picture 7). These masks were unique statements of personal identity and taste as well as protection during times of war (283).

After all it seems metaphorically, life can be equated to war. Everyday conflicts arise which force us to strategize and arm ourselves to protect and keep us safe. Masks have also been used in terms of offense/defense throughout time (See journal drawings pages 19, 22, 23, and 24). The masks involved in my research were associated with ritual or masquerade. In many societies, warding off evil is the responsibility of the shamans\textsuperscript{11} and diviners\textsuperscript{12}; it is the shaman who wears the ritual mask. The responsibility of the shaman or diviner is not only to protect the clan from evil and danger but also to give advice and guidance in both physical and spiritual healing realm. When comparing these responsibilities to western medicine doctors, priests and counselors who perform the same roles with different titles. The shaman and diviner are the clan's intermediary between forces of nature and the spiritual world. The shaman uses symbolic attire to negotiate with the spiritual world for his or her clan.

Many cultures use masks for spiritual and physical protection against their adversaries. Diviners, warriors and shamans will equip themselves with the appropriate material used for the degree of protection needed in battle to protect themselves while negotiating the evil forces of the spiritual world (Nunley, 276). In African cultures protective attire is often worn in times of crisis to combat spiritual aggression (277). In addition, shamanic

\textsuperscript{11} Different forms of shamanism are found around the world; they are also known as medicine men and witch doctors. Shamanism is based on the belief that the visible world is pervaded by invisible forces or spirits that affect the lives of the living. www.questia.com/library/religion/other-practices/shamanism

\textsuperscript{12} Someone who claims to discover hidden knowledge with the aid of supernatural powers. www.wordreference.com
masks are used for healing and communicating with the spiritual world. Other societies have developed protective masks to ward off illness.

During my research I found a striking metaphor which seemed to represent my own symbolic and continuous transformation. The Kwakwaka’wakw people in the northwest coast use a transformation mask (Nunley 101). This mask depicts different manifestations of the same being. During a ceremonial appearance, the dancer will turn away from the group and will pull strings attached to the front layer of the mask. Once this is pulled open, another mask is behind the first. The dancer then turns to face the people to reveal the anthropomorphic shaman’s face within. This double mask feature influenced my decision to place a variety of pouches behind my masks. Enclosed in the pouches were symbolic objects inferring dual meanings. The legend of the transformation mask representing a spiritual being presenting itself in various forms. This seemed a logical means for visually defining my personal: identity, as well as my culturally rich European and indigenous heritage and ancestry, (See drawing of transformation mask, picture 8). The protective masks represented in my installation as well as in life, have been used to shield my identity as a gay female from those I encounter on a daily basis. As a member of an oppressed group in our society, I learned to become more aware of my surroundings in order to remain safe and to survive. The discovery of my masks became the vehicle through which I was able to live and explore the life that society prescribed. Our

13 drawing of Transformation mask,
contemporary culture enabled me to portray an illusion that “I am like everyone else” wearing the mask of a straight female, but that illusion implies a sense of not belonging to a heterosexual society because I am gay. The masks separate me from possible persecution and harm. They also separate me from my true self in the gay community at large. It is only when I feel safe that I can take part of the protective mask off and make known my identity to others.
Symbols as Historic Reference (5)

Masks have been used to indicate rites of passage in societies where agriculture, hunting, fertility and oral traditions have played a large role in daily life. In these societies, the recognition of birth, onset of adolescence and death are discernible by the use of different types of masks. Rites of passage provide a way to deal with the challenges associated with these specific life stages. The rites assist individuals to place life-cycle phases in a cultural context. This also serves as a guide for the continuation of traditions for future generations.

My historical research combined with my own life experiences served as the foundation for the creation of Honoring the Sacred Space Within. Throughout history man has used symbols to communicate metaphoric meanings. Looking back in time, the history of symbols demonstrate that everything can assume some form of symbolic meaning: objects in nature like plants, animals, stones, wind, fire, and water, or man made objects like homes, furniture, or cars or even abstract forms like letters, numbers, or circles and squares can be identified as a visual symbol. "Man, with his symbol-making propensity, unconsciously transforms objects or forms into symbols (thereby endowing them with great psychological importance) and expresses them in both his religion and his visual art.” (Carl Jung 232) Aniela Jaffe's Chapter 4 Symbolism in the Visual Arts: Man and His Symbols.

One example in which the symbols and metaphoric meanings are expressed in the installation was demonstrated in the mold-making with the wax for bronze casting. By
intentionally varying the thickness of the wax in the molds I have symbolically represented the thickness of my skin. Making the wax mold symbolized the protective layering. This was intentional in each mold and its varying degree of thickness upon casting represented situations needing varying metaphoric strength of protection. Each mask in the installation represents situations where these metaphorical masks were utilized to protect my inner self. This was, in a way, consciously done and was cathexis.\(^{15}\)

Thinking of situations in my past, if I needed a thicker mask given the situation, then the specific mold would include additional waxed layers. The materials and elements I used in these processes connected me to several natural elements of the earth. Fire was the element that was first used in the forming of the wax molds, and fire was consistently used until the last stages of casting the bronze masks. The element of fire was used to both create and destroy the wax molds. In the circle of life, fire symbolically represents the beginning and the end.

This investigation of indigenous beliefs and symbols has led me to research totemic images and spiritual metaphors. During my initial conceptual drawings, many of my images (see sketches) resembled totemic objects. The definition of totemism mirrored the symbolic concept. "Totemism, a complex system of ideas, symbols, and practices based on an assumed relationship between an individual or a social group and a natural object known as a totem."\(^{16}\) The totem may connect to a particular animal, plant, rock or a natural phenomenon, or a specific part of the area landscape. Through this totem, the

\(^{15}\) Concentration of psychic energy upon a given object. Investment of the psychic energy of a drive in a conscious or unconscious mental representation such as a concept, idea, image, phantasy, or symbol. Psychiatric Dictionary: Robert J. Campbell

\(^{16}\) Microsoft Encarta online encyclopedia 2000
specific group or tribe may believe they are connected in some way. The word totem is derived from the North American Ojibwa nation.

This totemic belief is widespread and has been observed in Africa, Guinea and as far as Malaysia. The area in the world it appears the strongest is especially Native Americans and the Australian Aborigines. "The totem in these societies very often considers the totems as a companion and helper with supernatural powers and as such respected and occasionally venerated." Members in a totemic tribe see themselves identifying with all or part of the totem, and the totem may be referred to by sacred names and symbols. For example a totem maybe traced back to an original totemic ancestor, which has become a protective symbol for the tribe. The totemic structure within the installation, Honoring the Sacred Space Within, serves the same protective purpose.

17 Microsoft Encarta online encyclopedia 2000
Evolution of the Installation (6)

The strongest impact of the thesis installation was the construction and layout. During my research I was able to build upon experiences and creative concepts. When developing the concept for my thesis, I struggled with arranging the various components of my life into a cohesive composition. Many articles about composition contain a dictionary definition. For this purpose it is worth retrieving the meaning. The web site, www.dictionary.die.net offers four definitions. The definition I reference to is the following: 1(b). Composition 1. The act or art of composing, forming a whole, or integral by placing together uniting different things, parts, or ingredients. In specific uses: (b) (fine art) “the art or practice of so combining the different parts of a work of art as to produce a harmonious whole.” The art components were laid out in such a way that the installation could be viewed as individual art forms or as a gestalt structure. My previous studies in creative art therapy reminded me of the gestalt theories and psychological healing impact that art has on an individual. In German gestalt means “whole” or “form.” Dr. Frederick S. Perls the father of gestalt therapy, “theorized... if a person brings together all their fragmented parts they will become a complete whole of the form they were meant to be; more then the sum of their parts.”18 Just as in gestalt therapy, which allows an individual to become centered in the present, I knew it would be critical to stay focused in the present. This would allow the viewer the ability to see the installation as a whole unified piece initially and then discern the individual components.

18 www.souloflife.com/gestalt.html
When the installation is viewed as a whole structural installation, it can be viewed as a gestalt experience.

Janie Rhyne, another famous gestalt therapist, invented and utilized art by applying the gestalt therapy so that it would become the fundamental part of the gestalt art experience. Rhyne explains the gestalt art experience,” gestalt, as I use it here, means the ability to perceive whole configurations—to perceive your personality as a totality of many parts that together make up the reality of you.”19 This circular formation and all the component pieces represent a cohesive composition.

During the evolution of the thesis a psychological impact in the form of a catharsis through the art process happened. My personal interpretation of the catharsis can be expressed through a paper written by Vygotsky20 in 1925. We can say that the basic aesthetic response consists of affect caused by art, affect experienced by us as if it were real, but which finds its release in the activity of imagination provoked by a work of art. This central release delays and inhibits the external motor aspect of affect, and we think we are experiencing only illusory feelings. Art is based upon the union of feeling and imagination. Another peculiarity of art is that, while it generates in us opposing affects, it delays the motor expression of emotions and, by making opposite impulses collide, it destroys the affect of content and form, and initiates an explosive discharge of nervous energy.

Catharsis of the aesthetic response is the transformation of affects, the explosive response which culminates in the discharge of emotions.” This evolutionary process of

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19 Art, Design and Gestalt Theory; Roy Behrens  www.mitpress2.mitedu/e-journals
20 www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/work/1925/ch09.htm
the installation became the healthy release of emotion both of pain and artistic creativity through this catharsis.

Upon completion of the design and construction of the thesis, the location of the installation *Honoring the Sacred Space Within*, and complete layout within the gallery was a major consideration. With the assistance of the gallery curator and my peers the location was discussed. This decision resulted from factors including the number of thesis candidates, the available gallery space, the size of the installation and the maximum visual impact on the viewer.

It was through my research, my artistic and creative development that I was able to consciously identify what I was doing to protect myself as an individual, and especially to protect my inner spirit, and it was my artwork that served as the vehicle to present this side of myself to others. The finished installation became a three-dimensional self-portrait for others to observe, interpret and identify with in relation to their own lives.
Conclusive Message (7)

I intended the installation to demonstrate the many cultures and experiences that throughout my life have influenced and enriched my life. The cultures that have greatly influenced me are African, Native American and other ancient indigenous cultures. These cultures honor and assume relationships between themselves and natural elements of the earth. One of the African tribes that have influenced me in my art and spiritual tradition are the ancient Yoruba culture.

The Yoruba\textsuperscript{21} people and their tradition serve as one of the foundations or cornerstones of my thesis sculpture. The Yoruba people were once a nomadic tribal group who eventually settled in the southwest section of what is now known as Nigeria. The Yoruba’s God is known as Olodumare, the “owner of all destinies, the almighty, and the ground of life.”\textsuperscript{22} According to the Yoruba tradition, the artist learns from other artists only the technical skills, ideas and ways of seeing with imagination. The artist becomes one who articulates and shapes perceptions of reality.”\textsuperscript{23} In comparison, Native American religious worship and Santeria,\textsuperscript{24} where every aspect of nature and the affirmation that we live on sacred Mother Earth is similar to” Santeria’s\textsuperscript{25} belief that all aspects of nature are divine.”\textsuperscript{26}

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\bibitem{footnote2} Santeria, African Spirits in America: Joseph M. Murphy pg.7
\bibitem{footnote3} Santeria’s beginnings are in Africa, in the Yoruba religions native to Nigeria. It was brought to the new world by hundreds of slaves.
\bibitem{footnote4} Quote from, “Altar of My Soul”: Marta Moreno Vega pg.4 paragraph 3
\bibitem{footnote5} Quote from, “Altar of my Soul”: Marta Moreno Vega pg.4 paragraph 3
\bibitem{footnote6} Quote from, “Altar of My Soul”: Marta Moreno Vega pg.4 paragraph 3
\end{thebibliography}
Many cultures venerate and protect nature and natural forces for future generations. I have extracted elements of nature to honor its strength and sacredness. These elements within nature were utilized in this thesis. For example, within the installation the totem structures were constructed of wood. These structures supported and protected each individual mask that hung from them. Wood, symbolically in the thesis has been used for shelter and protection from the elements. The earth that was placed underneath each totemic tripod was symbolically supporting the plant life and water of our Mother earth. Earth, also represents gifts from the Creator. The masks, which were cast from bronze, utilized the element of fire. I believe we are all connected to these living entities that support our fragile existence on this planet we call Mother earth.

Creating the entire installation was a cathartic process for me. I felt that the viewers’ responses during and after the show were positive. Visitors to the gallery were able to connect with me in a new way and come to a better understanding of who I am as an artist. Some of the feedback that I received after the thesis show was that people truly connected with the installation on a spiritual level. Peers stated, “I felt a reverence, a spiritual presence.” Another commented that, “The center totem felt protected, a space to be honored.” These statements were a summation of the comments that were shared with me from peers who viewed the installation. These comments reinforced the artistic goals of my thesis. I believe that I was able to exalt, celebrate and protect my sacred inner self. This installation was a way for me to, not only, connect and honor my gay identity but my indigenous identity and roots as well. Humans in their most basic form are the natural elements and forces of earth, fire, water and air. The creation of this installation
incorporated all the natural elements, which are connected to my most basic self and enable me to portray my indigenous roots through this artwork.

**VIEWING THE INSTALLATION (8)**

The installation, *Honoring the Sacred Space Within* consisted of a total of eight tripods arranged in a fourteen-foot circle. The circle was the first obvious image a viewer encountered when observing the installation. Within the outer circle was the center tower structure (See photograph of tower structure, picture 9), which symbolizes the various stages of my life. The eleven foot center structure includes three sections. First the bottom section has three main pieces. A mound of soil supports a nest that cradles my mask (face) in bronze (that is split and holds a rock that is shaped like an egg.) This bottom section represents my beginning.

The middle displays three welded bronze masks representing roles played by me in my life. The artist, the professional, and the inner self, represent the present life. The last and top section of the structure is the mask facing the heavens, the spiritual self-current and the future, spiritual self.

I explored the tripodal system for arranging my researched elements. The wrapping of the tripod or bones was a means of protecting and supporting the inner spirit, much like the mask did. In addition, wrappings of pouches were suspended behind the masks, forming another illusion to be interpreted by the observer. The masks, tripods and the
wrappings were used to create a sacred space that served to both honor and protect my inner spirit (See drawings 24-28).

Each tripod consisted of three carved wooden bones, a bronze mask and a variety of other items.

Under each tripod was a glass bowl consisting of a stone immersed in water and placed on top of a small mound of soil. From the beginning of time stones have been metaphors, with psychological significance when used as a form of visual expression such as in monuments “Stonehenge,”27 tombstones, or stone objects invested with spiritual powers to represent deities as in Lucumi28 tradition. Many stones in religious sanctuaries were the mediator between man and God. The stones in my work were a means for me to integrate honoring and refreshing my ancestors while at the same time connecting nature to my inner spirit. The completion of the circle was a way of honoring that sacred “circular” space within the installation. A metaphoric totem towering eleven feet was created within the inner circle. The inner totem29 was constructed of four canary wood legs carved as bones. There were three sections to the tower. The first section symbolized my birth and the womb. A bronze mask was severed and reattached to look like a womb and held a single stone (photograph of bronze split mask). This was placed on a mound of soil, connecting me to Mother Earth.30 The second section symbolized my inner spirit. Three bronze masks were welded together and protected a piece of rock, which was wrapped and suspended from the third section. The rock was originally from

27 Stonehenge and Avebury, in Wiltshire, are among the most famous groups of megaliths in the world. www.unesco.org
28 Lucumi tradition utilizes stones to represent the embodiment of the deities.
29 Totemism, a complex system of ideas, symbols, and practices based on an assumed relationship between an individual or a social group and a natural object known as a totem. Microsoft Encarta online encyclopedia
30 Native Americans believe that there are all a part of and connected to mother earth
Italy, my ancestral home (See drawing 29). This section symbolizes my own spiritual journey. One bronze mask was placed on the top of the structure facing the heavens and was supported by a small platform. A white chalk barrier around the outside circumference, which was ceremonially used to mark the sacred space, held the installation together. Within the circle the carved wooden poles, metaphorically symbolizes my bones. These poles, ("bones") formed the structure for the tripods and center tower totem. This metaphoric skeletal structure supported not only my masks but protected the inner tower core. These structures visually created an illusion - the ultimate form of protection.
SUMMARY (9)

In many ways the installation *Honoring the Sacred Space Within* is the configuration of myself and the totality of many parts. Finally, perhaps the biggest reward from the thesis search was one of personal triumph. The final installation is my most expressive and personal artistic achievement. It stimulates an element of surprise and mystery for the viewer. This statement enables viewers to connect with me on a more creative and personal level and experience their own unique interpretation as well.

This three-year process was one of personal gains and losses, additions and subtractions. I focused on staying in the here and now during this development of my thesis art so the installation’s impact would resonate between my indigenous identity and my culturally rich heritage to instill reverence and curiosity in the viewer. This architectural totem would be the final culmination and triumph of the installation for my thesis *Honoring the Sacred Space Within*. Spiritually, if a person’s energies are formless, the bronze masks were used metaphorically to symbolize this concept. The masks became the metaphor for the physical protective shield of the “inner spirit”. There is an old Chinese stratagem that suggests that the best place to hide something is right out in the open. The installation became a celebration of life and knowledge obtained through various art techniques utilizing many processes. It was through research and experiencing other cultures that I was able to consciously identify what I was doing to protect myself as an individual, and especially to protect my inner spirit. It was my artwork that served as the vehicle to present this side of myself to others. The finished installation became a three-
dimensional self-portrait for others to observe, interpret and identify with in relation to their own lives.

In the end an intimate artist statement was created. I dedicated the installation as well as the entire process to my father John R. Pelc, who crossed into the Spirit world during my work on the thesis installation. During this experience I learned that life, like art, is not a destination, but a journey in the evolving circle of life.

“Knowing others is intelligence: knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.”

~Lao-Tzu in the Tao Te Ching"
Work Cited


JOURNAL THESIS DRAWINGS
Organzi in between ribs (bones)

Ying + Yang
Black + White

Veil
- organza
- beads
- mesh
- web
- glass
- plexiglass (lexan)
- vapor (dry ice)

Sound - drums

Containment:
- boxes
- crates
- environments
- pod
- Seed
- Cavern

Pod
- poppy
- a seed

Veil
- painted glass - idea

Our lady of Regla
- catholic in african

Connected to yemaya
- inside pod
- begins to grow
- baby connected

3Dimensional
- stretched over light
- and painted on

-inaas linear
A vessel contains the body as a shell. Spiritual growth suspension. Vessel.

Top to bottom:

- **Spinal**: Spinal column with vertebrae labeled. Head and facial features indicated.
- **Giraffe**: Silhouette of a giraffe with details such as ossicles and facial features.
- **Vessel**: Diagram of a vessel with labeled parts and signs such as 'ache' and 'giraffe'.

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Illusion

Project Cancer Care

Mountainsous Trench

My mother the earth

Landscaping the garden

Happy faces in the

Joint of Illusion - journey
Shields = screens = protection
Bamboo shields in front of bronze masks
Mounted on bamboo rod of acrylic

Stretch material over frames of acrylic rods
Bamboo, metal rods

Screen: metal ex. copper, aluminum, steel
(push bronze through, make impression)

Warrior armor
Shields
Weapons

Construct small models
Materials: plastic, vinyl,

Back to back
Vessels
mask collection
amount, design, texture

vessels

mask - section of marionette

back view

use prototype clay

silicone (molds)

plaster

clay

wood frame (tin sheets)
material hanging honoring my ancestors
I am all of them...

metal mask = armor (encasement)
can't penetrate/unpenetrable

mask - vessel - womb (honoring matriarchal family members)

cradle
soil = earth

vessel
leather

glass

mat or soil - to rest
split mask
with egg/rock
Roots of my Ancestors
Family tree (wood)
Grounded bonding of family

bones

carved/wood

essence of bone shapes
mask = shield
Shield = mask

mask we wear to protect our inner core

display pieces of you
- items of ancestors
- soil from motherland
circle of cascarrilla

11' - 16' height of center tower

refinement energy

move 4 structures out further

- interesting elements
- lured into center
- focal point is the center piece (tower)
- give it space
- need age & stress
- need to bring concepts through
- clean decision of purity of idea from the past & also using tradition and its ceremonial elements
- tradition, incorporated whatever is available
wall unit all Orisha's Series each orisha highlighted in 1 area

Presentation of work each orisha, a piece of the whole

change to contemporary items, ex. things common to my world

Circle completing the Circle of life

main searching

candle or (water)

cross

shrine
Design the whole pull into pieces
Screen in front of piece (forced to walk around)
- gauze
- sheer nylon
  (shield, screen)
  Protection

layers of spirituality

each piece has common element to pull it together

most expressive personal direction & expression needs to
  provokes an element of surprise
  which stuns people into their message
  conclusion or visual journey and
  experience

Botanica: purchase icon pictures of saints
"creating an environment"

ancasement
womb
cave
light inside
Grotto
translucent
cave
foam
soft fabric
texture sand added
to canvas structure stretched
glass slab

Sea Urchin
pods
slight opening
bulbs

Shell form - abstract
life from the womb
water embryotic fluid
water pump
center of installation

glass

Shell shapes

Tools of the trade

...
Enclosures

Scarification of mother earth

Enclosure

View from all sides different sizes openings

Lights to give illusions of feelings, through color from clear light
enclosures barriers

upside down aquarium

bell jar one container encased in another

bal bos containers
mold - bronze cast pieces

Shelter for each piece

to explore to seek = spirituality (to be drawn in)
ever the same always changing

"enclosure"

faith: strength support healing wound
mold of face to forge

wax mold of face with added imprints on it

plastic mold

Double walled

rubber - bounces off plastic
plastic - water resistant
laytex - repell

imprint items into shields = traumas
impressions stitches

bronze mask

clear lexon or acrylic

head mask

shields = protection

layers over layers

suspension from ceiling
core object is very powerful. Size, stature, relationship between shields = facade
vessel could = part of shield or core
½ of vessel could be shield
do 12 of each keeping them (vessel, shield) separate at first
face = shield, battle war, use different shields
face - we wear into battle = life
"my Face" = "my Shield"
relationship between double shields for protection
masking/ protection of inner core

personal exploration
ex. being gay
ex. person of two spirits

→ Tlingit mask
of Transformation

protective environment
for self and/or inner core shrine
Process from sketches to placement

Inspiration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagram 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagram 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagram 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagram 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Split to ground
- Ring
- Strand
- Strand
- Web
center sun/mask facing upward to the heavens

4 corners
circle
9 Bronzes
whole to 1/2

Starting or to split
Close again illusion metamorphosis
Open womb mask
Other material wax with implements
Key: 
- quake + grind
- cut out
- not cut

Facing: west
Chin: east

Cradle:

Geometric shapes with labels (A, B, C, D,...)

4 6' 6½ mahogany
5 6' 1½ mahogany, 5" short to add on 25" total need to extend
1 9' mahogany
1 7' 1½ bloodwood
2 canary wood (granadillo wood)

Abstract - Concept

Measurements: 14', 132", 5", 6", 3.5"
Face (surface) that we show to the world inside (literally + physically, spiritually) what's really there to expose. Creatively a portion of inner self: ancestral roots = inner self (part of inner self) piece of what I want to expose.

Sacred objects, inner self
Homage to Ancestors
Honoring the sacred space within by
Sacred environment

Totems.
So many parts of me — so many influences
Cultural

Items: coins Italian Shell Cartridges
back of masks —

webed stretched skin
Holding/hiding objects
inside
the shields back of

my head is full
of knowledge

ideas:
- fiberglass Cloth
- dear skin
- sheer material
- netting
- wine
- screen (copper, brass)

Shells

Technique — how, the process
continue to work on the piece (the core totem)

mask 4 pieces
5 pieces

actual mock of standing pieces
* wood Hang
1 piece use
other objects behind

open split form

1. Cradle birthing

2. trilogy

3. Spiritual self

Secrets
Self
Identity
Experience
Feelings
Ancestors
spiritual self
platform

3 6
my statue
core forms

3 trinity
root forms
PHOTOGRAPHS OF BRONZE MASKS
PHOTOGRAPHS OF INSTALLATION