

Casting out Dogma, Chasing Myths, Raising a Ruckus

by

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Approved:


Major Professor


Date

When the director of a museum walked through the MFA exhibit his first question to me when looking at my metalwork was "Do you often hear people refer to work like this as decorative art?"

What is decorative art? Decorative in the dictionary is defined as 'purely ornamental'. Do people automatically react to metal objects thinking they have no meaning, no content? Some people may have walked by my pieces and said beautiful. Did they see a bowl, candle holder or goblet as just a functional or decorative object? Other people may have walked a little slower and looked at the titles or took notice and interest in the images. I wonder if they get the content of my work. There are allegories, myths, research, sarcasm, and visual puns in the pieces. There are Discordian, Subgenii, Monty Python or HHGTG references. Few will see what is hidden in the pieces or know of the research that goes with their process and content.

Many years of studying metal working techniques, history, artists, and artifacts has shown me the variety, beauty, durability, functionality, etc., of metalwork. During these years I have often heard metalwork called decorative. Objects can be decorative and contain meaningful personal statements. In Italy I saw many liturgical, ceremonial, and reliquary objects in the museums and cathedrals. Many of these pieces were metal that had been chased and repoussèd. The low relief work of Donatello and Ghiberti show the refinement, depth, perspective and illusion of space that can be achieved using these methods. The very best chasing and repousse work is three dimensional and this low relief is what I consider to be the most sophisticated form of sculpture.

At the science Museum in Florence, Italy I also saw many early science and research items used by people like Galileo Galilei and Leonardo DaVinci. The technical virtuosity and aesthetics of their tools moved them from functional and decorative objects to what I see as art. Galileo's middle finger reliquary reminded me of his heresy trial. He was accused and tried by the church for teaching the Earth is not the center of the universe.

My choice of materials and technique is based on what I think will work best for the piece. In some I was using found objects and soft wax impressions from places that inspired the content, so lost wax casting was used. For other pieces Copper or Silver raised into a form that is then chased and repoussèd to depict pertinent images, places, philosophies or beliefs. I used some patinas that take a long time to form, ones that cannot be touched,

ones that show the light and the dark.

Many years of studying religion, myths and philosophy has shown me that the texts have been translated, retold, changed, or have double meanings. Many are inconsistent in style and content. To me they appear to be attempts to explain the unexplainable to people that did not yet have the tools of science. Some religious writings are clear, some vague, some are history, and some parables. There has been much room for error in translation. Comparing myths, anthropology, archeology of various cultures shows how many ideas stories were borrowed and contrived.

Religion, its followers and believers have done a lot of good. Religion is a tool and like any tool can be used for good and not so good uses. A shovel can be used to dig a hole to plant seeds to grow food or it can crush a skull. An axe can cut wood for shelter and heat or it can remove vital body parts from someone that does not believe in the same invisible friend you do. A religious group can start and support a hospital or it can use its belief system to oppress. People will do good or bad with or without religion.

I have used my research, humor, to bring potentially controversial content to my work

The September 11, 2002 World Trade Center terrorist attack started the theme for the content I decided to depict in my MFA thesis work. Religion has been used as an excuse for some of the conflict between many cultures. It seems to me religion should be bringing people together. Instead it is used by those in power to unite followers' thoughts against others for various reasons.

"This is Not a Holy War?" was started after the World Trade Center bombing. It has a box cutter with wings flying toward the towers, one already in flames. My research into why terrorists would do something like this, stories I had read, things I heard led to the rest of the images used. The American government helped set up the Taliban after the Russians were defeated in Afghanistan. A pentagon shaped bottom of vessel form with cave entrance arches coming up from base.

There had been an agreement to allow a planned oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea oil fields through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian Ocean. Negotiations fell apart and the Taliban told the oil companies no pipeline when

the US government increased the requirements. For this I used the oil pipeline crossing Afghanistan image. Getting rid of the Taliban had been discussed before September of 2002. Christian missionaries were in Afghanistan. There has been a battle going on between Christian and Islam believers for over a thousand years. More conflict using religion and cultural differences as justification or excuse for destruction. For this I used the Cross and Crescent Moon/ Star image.

Searching the Internet I found about the Bin Ladens, their family history and connections to President George Bush's family. The oil businesses that they are involved in and that went on between them. Also about the honey trading business that Osama Bin Laden is involved in. Poppies are a big crop in Afghanistan and Opium is smuggled in large vats of honey. In part because it is really messy to try to dig through and detect if there is something other than honey in there. Honey Bee carrying a poppy, and coincidental (mystical synchronous metaphysical supernatural) occurrence of the beeswax forming a hole to peek into what may be hidden inside the piece. And also a great way to solve that 'how do you deal with the inside of a chased and repoussèd form?' question.

It was difficult to put humor in that piece. For "*Not in Deference to any Particular Religion*" it was much easier. This is a chalice inspired (instigated) by the Georgia Museum of Art staff sending an email asking for input from Graduate Students that would be exhibiting in the MFA exit show. When originally scheduling the MFA exhibition, it was not noticed that the opening reception was scheduled on Good Friday, March 29 2002, a holiday for some people. The email asked what thoughts were about changing the opening reception to April 6th. I replied, "What does a myth have to do with scheduling a reception for MFA exhibition?" The reply from museum was, "This change is not in deference to any particular religion." If not a particular religion, then what is it in deference to? If it had been any religion besides the one that is culturally dominant in this country would there even be a first thought to changing the date? The title comes from this email and some of the staff at the Georgia Museum of Art thought the piece rather funny.

After receiving the email, I thought, it has to be a holiday somewhere in the world on April 6th. I was going to write an email back saying I would be celebrating whatever holiday came up on my search and would not be able to attend the opening. The more obscure the holiday the better. Even thought

that the dogma I would soon believe in would require my work to be covered on April 6th. Playing with beliefs can be entertaining.

The search for holidays turned up a few choices: Uprising day in Sudan; Thailand, Chakri Day; Drop of Water is a Grain of Gold Day, Turkmenistan; National Tartan Day, USA ...tartan? Click link, (<http://www.tartanday.com/>) Scottish American Day...Uh-oh, one of those 'this is gonna be fun' moments.

The idea for the chalice came quickly. Scotch Highland Games have a competition called the Caber Toss. The stem of the chalice is a visual pun of Caber/crucifix and the evolved fish with legs is tossing the whole Resurrection and Last Supper ceremony. Since Christianity is the culturally dominant religion of this country I think most people know about the Crucifix. The Caber may be less well known, so:

The Caber

[Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games - Fergus Ontario] This is the premier Scottish event. The competitor must "pick" a caber (a heavy wooden pole (such as the trunk of a young fir) tossed as a test of strength), run and toss it so it lands straight out from him/her at a 12 o'clock position. The Caber is tossed for accuracy not distance. The judge must "call it" just as the stick hits the ground. A side judge will sometimes be used to determine if the caber rotated thru 90 degrees, if not it's a "Fifer" and not counted. The Caber can be any size, it's the style not the size, but a 23-26' stick is not uncommon today.

(http://www.fergusscottishfestival.com/heavy_events.html)

Test your Caber throwing skill at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/games/Caber.html>

Darwinist's fish with a Kilt, Caber/crucifix toss, chalice. Evolve, toss out the old superstitions and dogma. Have some fun doing it instead of condemning and killing people that do not share your beliefs. This is a new era and it is time to toss old beliefs that do not have evidence to support their existence. Time to put away superstition. Science is finding more evidence and reasons to toss dogma.

And . . . IF IT AIN'T SCOTTISH, IT'S CRAP!

Believe what I do or I will whack you with a Caber, or a fluffy pillow . . .

(A torture device used in a Monty Python sketch about the Spanish Inquisition.)

My reading about the Spanish Inquisition, Crusades, witch trials and several

quotes and inspired the candle spike titled *"When Religion Ruled the World they Called it the Dark Ages"*

"It is not disbelief that is dangerous to our society; it is belief."

George Bernard Shaw

"Christianity is the most ridiculous, the most absurd and bloody religion that has ever infected the world."

Voltaire

The candle spike references a torture device used during the Dark Ages. The spike was a torture (death) device used as an attempt to get heretics to confess and redeem themselves, beg for forgiveness. Upon the point of a sharpened pole or rod the accused person was forced to sit. The person's weight would cause the stake to work its way slowly through the body. If you did not get the point of religion they would give you a point to ponder upon. There were probably no survivors of this torture.

I used bones to represent the victims of the Inquisitors, an executioner's axe for those who were martyred for beliefs that did not conform to the people in power. The skull with a bone stuck in the eye socket depicts "Matthew 7:3: And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 7:4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?"

Star of David is a symbol of Judaism. It is placed on a cross symbolizing Christianity that came from it. A crescent moon and star for Islam. These three religions fighting during the Crusades over slight differences in belief systems derived from a common source. Italian symbols of good luck/superstition are in the center of the stem. The Dark Ages were a time of superstition and ignorance. When religion ruled the world by intimidation, taxes, abuse of power, fear, and sold the cure for the fear the church inflicted on people.

Fear, destruction and eternal damnation are basic to religions that have their roots in the Middle Eastern regions. Reading the stories from the various cultures reveals similarities and connections in these myths. Studying archeology, anthropology, astronomy and other sciences shows the timeline for when various stories were written. Also what may have occurred to

inspire the myths in cultures that had no way to reveal what science and modern research methods do now.

Satellite imaging has revealed much about the history of the earth's surface. Discoveries of ancient meteor craters led to the piece "*Noah-Gilgamesh mesh*." This piece is about the origin of the Epic of Gilgamesh and Noah's Ark stories. A meteor crater was found in Iraq, Spring 2001. The meteor hit about 4,000 years ago. The formation of such a young meteor impact structure may have had a catastrophic effect on the people living in the Middle East region. There is a possible quasi-historical reference to such an event in the account of the Deluge from the Epic of Gilgamesh, dating from ~2000 BCE: "...and the seven judges of hell, the Annunaki, raised their torches, lighting the land with their livid flame. A stupor of despair went up to heaven when the god of the storm turned daylight into darkness, when he smashed the land like a cup. One whole day the tempest raged, gathering fury as it went, it poured over the people like the tides of battle." Could this be a reference to a meteor impact that triggered massive thunderstorms and a tsunami?

This disappearance Middle Eastern culture from the archeological record and meteor impact occurred just before the Babylonian and Syrian story 'The Epic of Gilgamesh' was written. This story tells of people building a ship, as their lord directed them, and taking aboard all the seeds and animals to save them from fire and brimstone, falling stars, messengers from Hell and a great flood that destroyed the earth . . . (Rest of the story translation available at most libraries or go to website:

<http://www-relg-studies.scu.edu/netcours/rs011/restrict/gilflood.htm>)

The bowl depicts the meteor crater, with the cube ship as a base, and seven lighting bolts coming up from the cube to hold the bowl. The two stars that fell from the sky in the story are depicted as snakes. This is connection to the way the serpent is used in Biblical and other myths. Such as the serpent being blamed for temptation and starting sin (another unoriginal story) and were most likely two meteors that brought fire and brimstone upon the Middle East.

The writings of the bible, which came after this and other myths, has been shown to contain borrowed stories. Stories that came from the Syrians, Greeks, Egyptians, and other cultures of the Middle East. Myths that came before the writers of the Torah, Talmud, and Old Testament. This piece

depicts what may have been the source of what is considered a myth. The Bible may have been written by people that borrowed stories in an attempt to explain how the Universe is. A prescience explanation of who we are and a method to put fear into people as a means to control them. These stories were written in a time before science started to remove the cloak of ignorance and superstition.

Science has revealed much about the origins of life and the universe. Many of these findings go against the teachings and explanations the church has had for thousands of years. People like Copernicus and Galileo were put on trial for heresy for teaching things that did not agree with the church's doctrine. "Life Starts Where, When, How, Why . . .? Oh, just evolve already!" is about Darwinism and Evolution. And the problem many fundamentalist religion proponents have with it. Creationism is a theological theory. It has no evidence to support it. Evolution is a science theory. A theory that has made predictions of what will be found in the fossil record. A theory proven by many different branches of science, such as anthropology, paleontology, geology, and genetics. Much of what was predicted has been found. More evidence is being found. All the evidence is well documented and any errors are corrected.

This is different from creationism where the proponents say 'God did it'. They don't know how or why or when, they just believe because there is a story in their book that says he did it. There are actually two different stories in the Christian Bible, but they say we are not supposed to question the divine revelation there. Creationists have no evidence to support their claim so they spend their time attacking scientists who have many more and better things to do than deal with these people.

Intelligent Design is a relatively new kid in the realm of how we got here. To me it looks like Creationism dressed up in a lot of pseudo-science. A fabrication that looks impressive until it is examined with the same methods that Evolution Science is examined with. It then falls apart. ID is an attempt to get Creationism taught in public school science classes. Most of what ID has is twisted reasoning, unproven, poor logic, fabricated evidence, etc. ID proponents have been debated by reputable scientists and their theories and evidence falls apart under scrutiny. The people that promote ID have letters after their names. An examination of their degrees is scary. Since when does a law degree give a person the knowledge of genetics and paleontology? One ID person even made up his own University and gave

himself a degree.

And some people want this stuff taught in public schools. Maybe Creationism should be taught and exposed for the ignorance that it is. To be fair to all religions all the creation stories will need to be taught. There are at least a couple hundred from the Native Americans in just this country. Public school will be an all day story time. Fun. To be even more fair science should be taught in churches. All the sciences. Are you beginning to see how ridiculous this controversy is?

Religion has been in the way of progress in science and attacked science ever since discoveries were made that showed what the church taught was wrong. Research started when the church hired alchemists to find ways to turn lead into gold and find elixirs for immortality. The church has often fought the discoveries of science. Things like the Earth is not the center of the galaxy or the universe, the Earth is not flat, and the moon and planets are not stars that shine with their own light. A few more are stars do not fall from the sky, the sky is not a canopy held up by pillars, there was no flood that covered the earth, lightning rods will not attract demons from the air.

That is why the fish are off balance. They are reeling from the attacks by people that are afraid. People fearful of that what they have been teaching others to believe will be exposed for the fraud and ignorance that it is. The creation stories from all cultures were told and written by people that did not have science as an attempt to explain the universe. Time spent fighting ignorance is time that could be spent discovering cures for disease of the body and mind.

It is time to put outdated unprovable explanations on the fiction shelf and just EVOLVE ALREADY!

And go "*Fishn' fer crishuns*". While fishing you learn the secret of walking on water is knowing where the shallow places or stepping stones are. Most likely it was a walk on wet sand that looked like water from a distance with the sun at the correct angle. Skeptics can find rational reasonable explanations to supernatural claims.

The fish symbol adopted by Christians as a symbol of their faith was borrowed from a Pagan fertility symbol. Scientists, evolutionists, pagans, Darwinists, etc. have had fun doing an assortment of parodies. People that

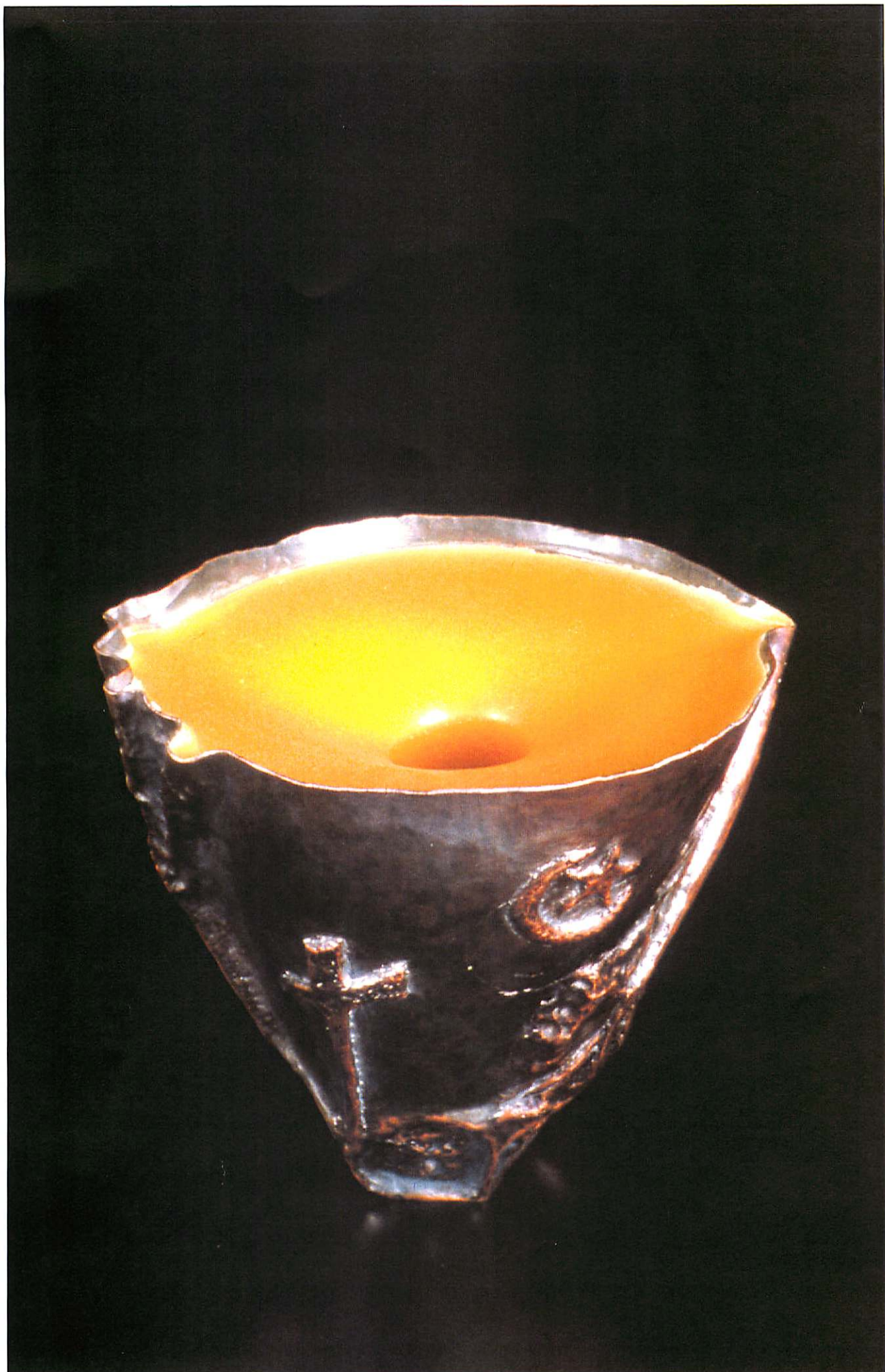
believe in the gods and goddesses of religions will swallow anything, thus the big hook. Believers also hang onto their dogma in spite of growing evidence that their beliefs are nothing more than superstition. That is why the fish hanging from the cross are suspended with their mouths open. They could let go at any moment and experience true freedom but the hook is too deep in them.

Recent research has found belief may be a genetic survival mechanism. This may partially explain why people still believe even after evidence shows there was no miracle, paranormal or supernatural event. Most people want something to believe in and there seems to be a lot of people willing to sell them those beliefs. For me belief in the basis and reasons for religion is hard to swallow. The hook on the line is big, easy for many to swallow, but it is not for everyone. There is a lot more to learn about why people believe without evidence, or try to turn unrelated events into evidence, think that everyone has to believe, or fabricate evidence, or . . . Ah, ummm, ya know . . . , I'm fishn' fer a way to conclude this . . .

GONE FISHIN

This is not a Holy War?

Copper, raised, chasing/repoussé, Beeswax



Not in Deference to any Particular Religion

The cup part of chalice is .969 Silver, hot forged and raised from a billet.
The base is lost wax cast Sterling (.925) Silver



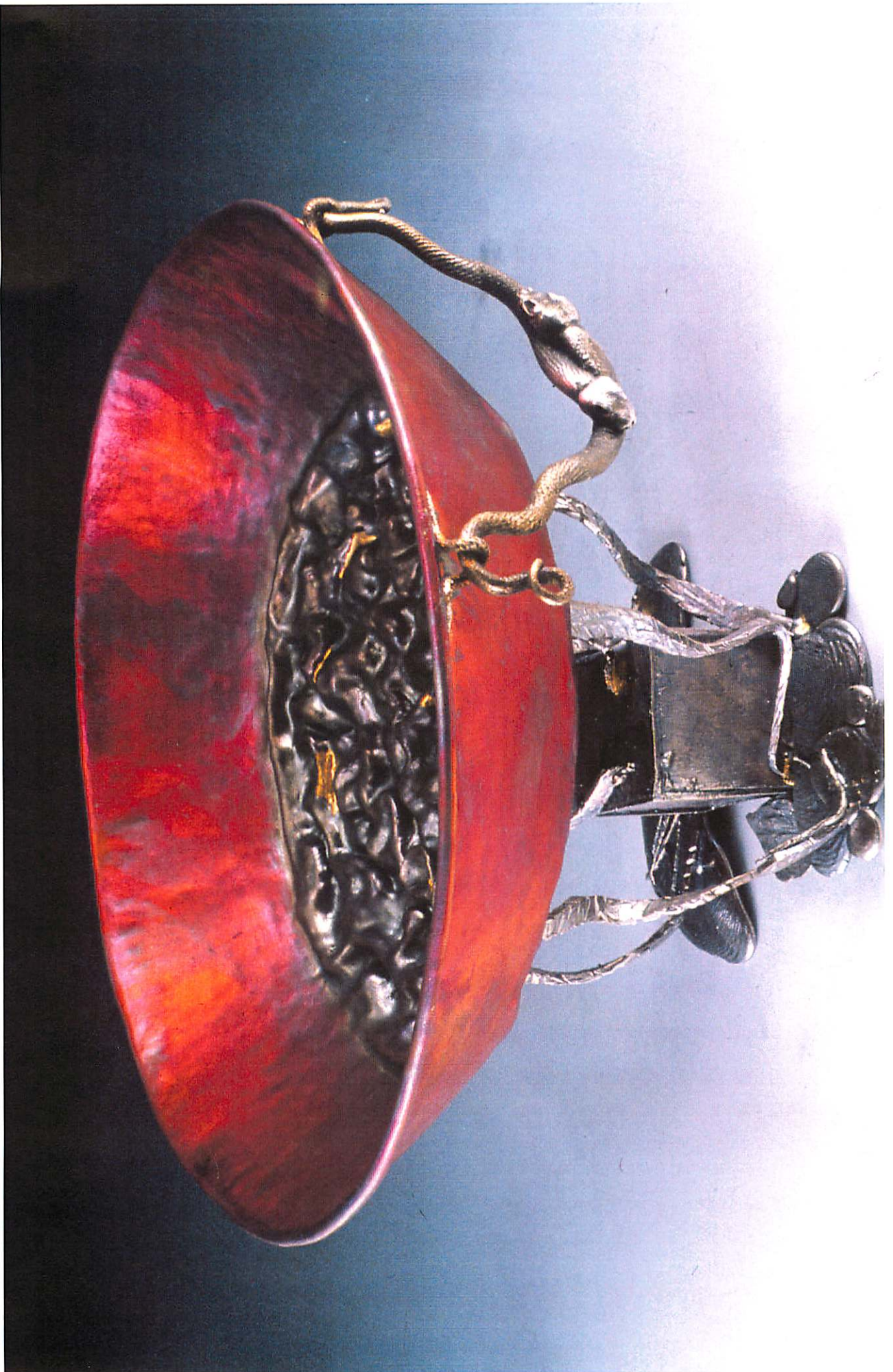
When Religion Ruled the World they Called it the Dark Ages

Lost Wax Cast Shibuichi 80/20 Candle Spike



Noah-Gilgamesh mesh

The bowl form is copper raised with a plastic hammer on a plastic stake. The bottom was chased and repoussèd using whatever tool and method worked to achieve result. 18K gold solder was used to patch holes and cracks where I overstretched and stressed metal. Lost wax cast 85/15 Shibuichi base, lighting bolts and snake handles.



Life Starts Where, When, How, Why...? Oh, just evolve already!

Lost Wax Cast Shibuichi 80/20, glass beaker



Fishn' fer crishuns

Cast bronze cross and hanging crishun fish, cast Darwin fishin' fish and snake fishin' pole Shibuichi 80/20, rock of ages stepping stone cast in place.

A resin bonded sand mold was used to cast the cross. Investment and lost wax casting method used for the fish.



Glossary

Alloy: A mixture of two or more metals.

Casting: Pouring molten metal into a mold.

Chasing: An ancient process in which steel tools and a hammer are used to refine details or decorate the front surface of a metal article.

Copper: A common reddish metallic element that is ductile and malleable and is one of the best conductors of heat and electricity.

Cross-Pein Hammer: Hammers with long, narrow faces running perpendicular to the handle and used for raising, forming, and planishing. Plastic or steel.

Lost wax process: A casting process in which a wax pattern is used. The wax pattern is invested in a refractory slurry; after the mold is dry the wax is melted out, forming a cavity into which metal is poured.

Patina: Any of hundreds of surface film created on metals to provide a desired color or surface finish.

Planishing: The act of hammering or refining the surface of a metal object with highly polished hammer faces. This process refines the surface after raising and may be used as a decorative element. Great care must be used, for even a speck of dust will make an impression in the metal being hammered.

Raising: The technique of forming a flat sheet of metal over a cast iron T-stake or head, forming and compressing the metal to take a hollow form. This labor-intensive process is the purest form of silversmithing.

Repoussé: A process used to roughly emboss a metal object from the back or inside with larger punches than those used in chasing.

Silver: A white metallic element that is sonorous, ductile, very malleable, capable of a high degree of polish, and chiefly univalent in compounds, and that has the highest thermal and electric conductivity of any substance.

Shibuichi: An ancient Japanese alloy of Copper and Silver. 80/20 is eighty

percent copper and twenty percent silver.

Stake: Any polished cast iron or steel tool placed in a vise and is used for forming and planishing metal over. This tool is generally large enough to be used without a horse.

Sterling Silver: An alloy of fine silver (92.5%) and copper (7.5%) most commonly used when fashioning holloware and flatware because of its strength. Fine silver (99.99% pure) is generally too soft when producing large functional objects. U.S. law states that all objects marked "sterling," "925" or "925/1000" MUST contain no less than 92.5% fine silver.

T-Stake: Any polished, cast iron or steel tool in the form of an elongated "T" and used in a vise for raising, forming or planishing metal.

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