

Ceremonial Robes

Developing a conceptual series using encaustic

by Rodney Thompson

"These are the Ceremonial Robes for the Priesthood of Shamans, Magicians, and Wizards of our time..."

While most of my 2-D art is minimalist and relates to a sense of quietude, depicting vast spaciousness and unrestrained possibilities, when I indulge in sculpture it is often for social or political commentary.

This series of wall-hung sculptures is entitled "Ceremonial Robes". Its origin, like many of my sculptures, began when an object "called to me". This is a phrase that comes to mind when I see some thing or material that evokes a deep emotional response within me. I frequently do not understand the exact nature of my response initially but I recognize it as touching something important in my psyche. I will save the object in my studio and live with it, sometimes for years, allowing it to speak to me, and eventually it may find a new home in my art.

In this case it was a small package of electronic resistors hanging in a display at Radio Shack. The neat rows of brightly color-banded beads on straight wires immediately caught my eye. Their precious beauty intrigued me as they are usually hidden away inside boxes, unappreciated for their aesthetics.

I find fascinating how large numbers of small objects placed together transcend their individual nature and become a new material rich in texture. The visual qualities of these resistors suggested beaded garments to me. While taking objects out of context from their normal use and presenting them in new



CEREMONIAL ROBE #3
ENCAUSTIC, ELECTRONIC PARTS, TEABAG PAPER, CHOP STICKS, HAKE BRUSHES, PAPER. 49 1/4" X 50"



CEREMONIAL ROBE #5
ENCAUSTIC, ELECTRONIC PARTS, TEABAG PAPER, COFFEE FILTERS, PAPER. 48" X 50 1/4"



CEREMONIAL ROBE #7
ENCAUSTIC, ELECTRONIC PARTS, CHOP STICKS, PAPER. 54" X 50 1/4"

forms for visual impact appeals to me, so is using them in a way that has meaning relating to their original intent. Thus, the idea of an abstract representation of ceremonial costumes arose, but specifically they would be the robes for the priesthood of the electronic industry.

I researched images of traditional costumes and ceremonial garments to develop my own personal amalgamation and synthesis of sartorial elements suggesting ethnicity without them being specific to any one culture or style. My concept was a museum like presentation of a number of life size robes and smaller vestments, collar pieces and breastplates, that would represent our culture's obsessive fascination with technology and disposable electronic products.

The tiny packages of resistors at Radio Shack would have been too expensive to provide the amount of materials I sought. Ultimately I found industry surplus resistors and capacitors for sale on Ebay at an acceptable price and I acquired reels and boxes of 1,000-5,000 units, amassing a delightful palette of colors, sizes and shapes. My biggest hurdle was convincing the seller to display color images of the items, not just their electronic specifications.

I am interested in the contemporary social structures emerging around us. While many profess devotion to traditional religion, I see true worship, both in time and money, directed toward the obsessive acquisition and dependence on the burgeoning availability of electronic devices. The way people spend their days increasingly revolves around access to these devices. The industry continues to infiltrate our lives with new products, and then upgrade the technologies, further strengthening our bondage to them. It is this phenomenon that fascinates me in its overwhelming social pressure for us to be involved



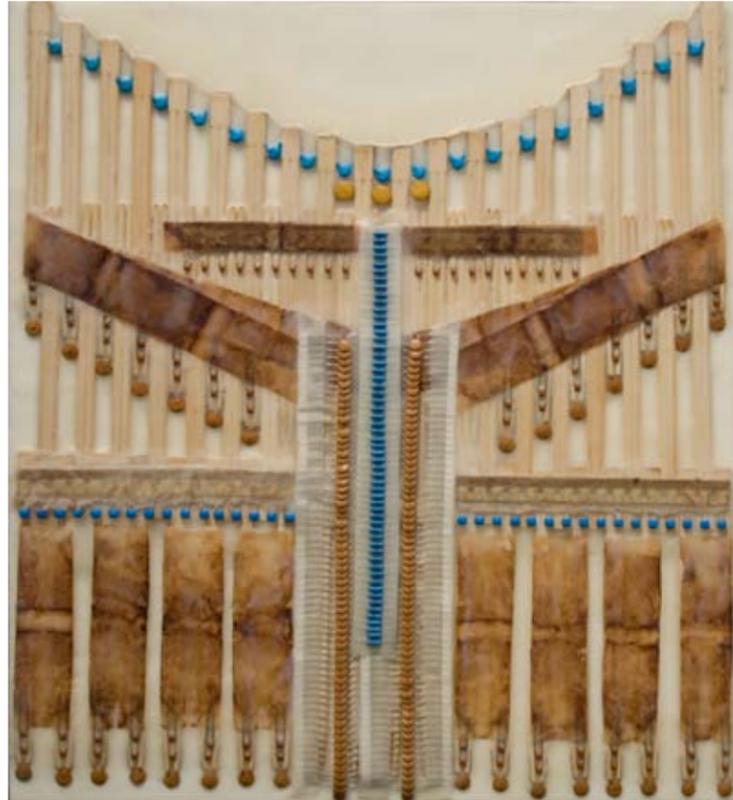
CEREMONIAL ROBE #8
ENCAUSTIC, ELECTRONIC PARTS, PAPER. 53" X 48"



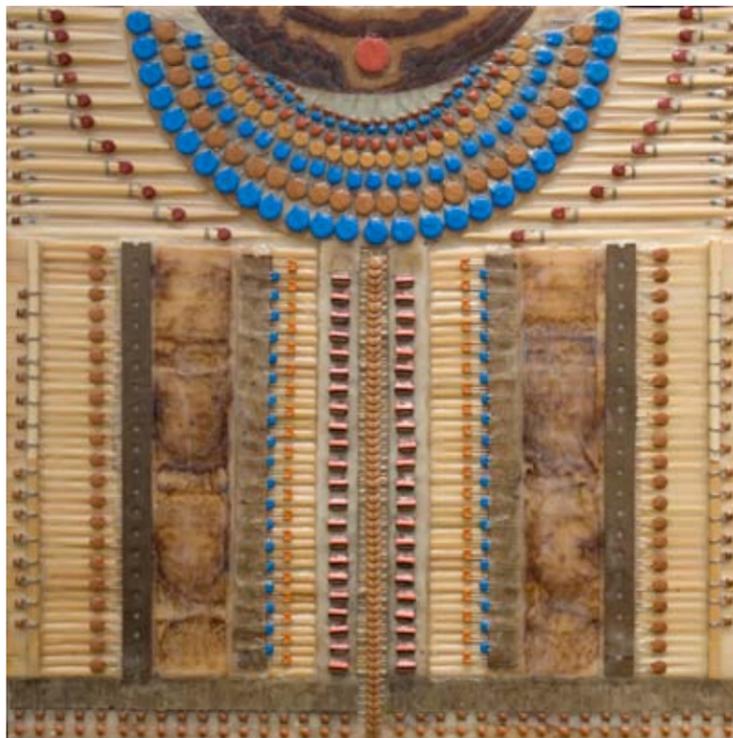
CEREMONIAL ROBE #9
ENCAUSTIC, ELECTRONIC PARTS, TEABAG PAPER, COFFEE FILTERS, CHOP STICKS, COTTON SWABS. 56" X 62"

in ways that parallel primitive societies where the priesthood dazzles and provides in ways that the common people do not understand yet remain enthralled and faithful.

It is the creators of our electronic wonders, the magical boxes that entertain and pacify the populace, insure domestic tranquility, and influence our thoughts and lives that we pay homage to through the money we earn with our labors. Computers, cell phones, music players, video games, digital televisions with hundreds of channels, and other devices of electronic wizardry have come to dominate our quest for status and happiness. As with ancient shamans and mystics, only they truly understand the magic in these devices while in our awe and ignorance we spend precious hours on the phone waiting for the tech support acolytes to confer upon us their benevolent wisdom. We revere and honor this Priesthood with our sacrifices and fealty. What do we sacrifice? We give up the hours we work to afford the products they create and the time we spend, our minds locked into the Wizard's programs, instead of being mindfully aware of the beauty and wonder all around us in the natural world that is even more amazing and free.



BREASTPLATE #1
ENCAUSTIC, ELECTRONIC PARTS, TEABAG PAPER,
CHOPSTICKS, PAPER, TWINE. 23" X 21"



BREASTPLATE #4
ENCAUSTIC, ELECTRONIC PARTS, CHOPSTICKS, TEABAG
PAPER, COTTON SWABS, COFFEE FILTERS, PAPER.
18" X 18"

These sculptural works are constructed of modular wood panels using encaustic to apply color and to incorporate the electronic parts, paper, and other materials common to everyday life. These objects, such as teabags, coffee filters and chop sticks are considered disposable, like our cherished electronics that are soon discarded to be replaced by the next version, insuring our continued allegiance to the industry and a consumptive lifestyle. The parts of the robes are bound together by wax, like the wings of Icarus, also bound by wax, impermanent and vulnerable to dissolution when the next generation of wizards and shamans appear to usurp the present regime with newer mind controlling wonders yet unimagined.

I do not intend to condemn technology or the electronic industry per se, but rather I attempt to raise awareness of how we as a culture are responding to this new age. I don't deny being an active participant but it seems important for me to be cognizant of my role and my choices. It is up to each of us to find the balance of mindful attention to life with the mind absorbing scripted input from electronic devices. It seems fitting to this balance that such an ancient and natural material such as beeswax be used to offer this view of such a contemporary and technological phenomenon.



COLLAR PIECE #2
ENCAUSTIC, ELECTRONIC PARTS, TEABAG PAPER, COFFEE
FILTERS, PAPER. 12 1/2" X 12 1/4"

For additional information on
Rodney Thompson check out:
<http://www.rodneythompson.com>

