

# CRAZY AL'S TIKI CORNER



## Crazy AL's Tiki Corner 6:

Photos by Tikimania.com

My last two tiki discussions were based on a seminal sculpture in my work, Tiki #13 "Keeper of the Charm". Another equally important and influential piece in my body of work is the partner of Tiki #13, Crazy AL Tiki #12 "Hula Lover". To be more accurate, these two were part of a trifecta of leading pieces in my early work which included Tiki #11 "Tiki Lantern", who's story is told in Tiki Magazine Vol.3 No.1. These three tikis all appeared in the Copro/Nason 'Tiki Art' show in September of 1998. Each tiki represents my first attempts at defining my individual style and technique in the re-blossoming Tiki Culture of ten years ago. "Hula Lover" has remained one of my most unique artistic tikis in over a decade of work.

In Tiki Magazine Vol.3 No.3, I stated that Tiki #13 was the first tiki sculpture of mine to adorn a natural headdress or crown; it was a new look, or discovery, in the nature of palm logs. In the same manner, Tiki #12 was also a first. Just as the slow stripping of the palm boots revealed a royal cap, a 180 degree flip to the log exposed a perfect grass skirt! This unforeseen and very appropriate costume was another of Mother Nature's suggestions as to the direction of a sculpture. The hairy matting between the palm boots caught my attention as it was quite extensive and appeared to mimic fine woven cloth. Polynesian traditions have beaten the bark of the paper mulberry tree into large blankets of cloth for the use of clothing. The rustic brown dyes with which the tapa cloth is colored resemble the naturally beautiful burnt sienna hues of the freshly uncovered palm matting. The shape of the cascading inverted palm boots and the cloth-like natural matting that remained on the half-stripped log of Tiki #12 beckoned to be left on as a

Tapa-grass skirt. Certainly, this would be a unique tiki sculpture I could use in the upcoming Copro/Nason show. Of the 145 tikis I have completed, only three others are sculpted with the skirt technique: Tiki #9, "Dominic Tiki", Tiki #51, "Hula Heart" commissioned by Tikis Grill and Bar in Waikiki, and Tiki #52, "Hula Baby", a rare traveling, four-gig tiki carved with APE. \*\*

The natural skirt gave me direction for Tiki #12. This concept of a hula-skirt-wearing tiki developed into "Hula Lover." I continued to explore the stripping down of layers of the palm bark. My self-taught tiki carving technique had me infatuated with the first quarter inch of the log before I ever cut into its interior. My limited experience with palm wood suggested that the interior of the log would be too soft to do much interesting carving anyway. During the carving of Tiki #11, I had cultivated a design concept that used semi-traditional Tapa patterns to decorate a graphic outline around an open mouth. I liked this direction very much and decided to elaborate on it even more once I discovered a "palm skin" under the palm bark. This interesting layer looked to be a hardwood veneer over the top of the soft blond interior wood. This hard "skin" nicely took clean carved lines made with a sharp pen knife. I was very pleased with the result and exploited the new-found material with a crazy undertaking of intricate designs that I would later enhance with a darker stain. All the successful work in the "palm skin" gave rise to another idea. This tiki could have real tattoos! I had done tattooing-type etching, or pen knife work, as early as Tiki #2. However, this tiki could merge the original Polynesian tradition of tattooing with the modern traditions of Western pop-culture tattoos. I knew then that I wanted to portray the infatuation of Western sailors with the exotic and erotic Hula Maidens. From Captain Cook's first Pacific sailors to WWII U.S. Navy men in bellbottoms, the topless island girl in a grass skirt was irresistible. Tiki #12, "Hula Lover," became a masculine tiki in a skirt! The deity-rannical\* characteristics of my tikis lend themselves to being whatever they want to be. So I went for it. On

Tiki No. 12, "Hula Tiki" continued the exploration of leaving natural textural occurrences of the log in tact, in this case revealing mother nature's grass skirt.



The elaborate details of Tiki No. 12 would inspire much more elaborate carving in the future.

the right arm I carved the image of a hula maiden and also a heart with "Hula" where "Mom" might go. On the left arm a sailor's militaristic Chinese dragon was left in the skin as well as a primitive Life Spiral linking generations. The art show in which Tiki #12 first appeared gave me some of my first publicity in print. Not only did Juxtapoz Magazine issue #18 mention my art in the show, but interestingly enough, International Tattoo Art Magazine also mentioned the show. My much-better half of many, many years, Lizzy, and myself appeared inside the March 1999 issue. I attribute this acknowledgment to the tats of the "Hula Lover," since neither of us to this day have sported ink on your own skin.

Despite my worry that the inside of the log would be soft and of undesirable carving density, I found that the new stock of palm trunks mentioned in TM Vol.3, No.3 was quite solid. These logs, which came from more mature trees, allowed me to detail and define the arms and hands of "Hula Lover." In turn, the detail of Tiki #12 would inspire the much more elaborate carving of Tiki #13. Another link between these first



The natural layer of "palo skin" underneath the bark of the tree gave rise to the idea that No. 12 could actually have tattoos.

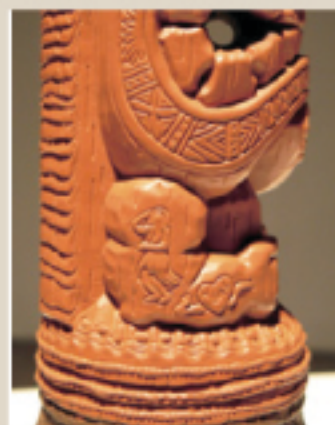


two exploratory creations is that I first used the eyes of my "Tiki Budda" light switch (described in TM Vol.4 No.1) on Tiki #12 and later the Budda body and feet would appear on Tiki #13. These tikis also adorned add-ons such as bone beads and found shells, a direction I stated with Tiki #3, "King Tiki"

The testosterone level of Tiki #12 had been kicked up a notch or two with burly tattoo laden arms. I wanted to give this guy the ability to hold a Samoan Fire Knife in his teeth. It would allude to the traditions of male Polynesian dancers and just look dang Cool! Or, should it be Hot! I never got a torch in his teeth for the 1998 show, and I have never wanted to try and to run natural gas lines through the sculpture to ensure an endless fire show. However, as part of my never-ending, back-burner project of an Exotic Calendar, I photographed this hula-exalting tiki with the help of Sean Murphy. He did a fantastic job portraying a flaming scene of the classic relationship between Waihine and Tiki. I also photographed the fire spewing Tiki #11 with Sean's assistance and hope to use these portraits soon.



October 2008 will see the debut of the limited edition "Hula Lover" mug in the same Bahooka room where the original Tiki made its first appearance 10 years ago.



The "Hula Lover" mug has been sculpted to match the original in every detail, including the tattoos.

The ten-year anniversary of my trifecta, Tikis #11, 12, and 13, approaches this fall. To commemorate these primordial tikis in the Crazy AL Tiki Gallery, a new ceramic creation which will be debuted at the Bahooka Restaurant, Saturday, October 18, 2008. A decanter, or carafe, design of Tiki #12 "Hula Lover" will be sold in a numbered edition in the very room the same tiki was first presented to the public at the Copro/Nason Tiki Art show of September 19, 1998. Sculpted by myself to match the original in every detail, it also is proportional to its partner Tiki #13 mug. I hope to have a ceramic candle-holder miniature of Tiki #11, "Tiki Lantern" as well as Tiki #12, and more Tiki #13 mugs. Maybe the photo shoot images will make an appearance as well in printed editions. Crazy AL's Tiki #12, "Hula Lover," stretched my imagination regarding what a tiki could be. It led the way to more developments in my personal quest for originality and stands alone as a tiki in the corner with a Hula Girl tattoo.

\* deity-rannical: forceful demonstrative action  
\*\* Tiki #51: "http://tikimania.com/docs/bt\_51.html"  
Tiki #52: "http://tikimania.com/docs/bt\_52.html"

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