

CRAZY AL'S TIKI CORNER



Crazy AL's Tiki Corner 8:

Photos Courtesy Crazy Al Evans

So? A tiki is a tiki is a Tiki. Or is it? My last Corner article brought forth the question of the originality of my 'Tiki Budda' design. ('Budda' is being misspelled in reverence to the religious figure Buddha.) Could the image of my Tiki #55 'Hang Yang,' with its Taoist/Buddhist leanings and Hindu pineapple Bindi, be a tiki? And does the question of 'cross-Polynesian' being an original idea have any merit for debate? This second half of my discussion will look at these ruminations.

The 'Tiki' movement or movements, past and present, have seen much adaptation and borrowing in their metamorphoses. It might be said that creative spawn are births of ideas having been conceived by something interesting to the artist's mind. The world-changing art of Picasso is believed by many to have been inspired by imported primitive masks from African tribal cultures and nothing all that 'new.'

More recently, the prolific artistic productions of Wayne Coombs created what is now known as the 'Florida Tiki Style.' Throughout the 70's, 80's and 90's of the last century, the many wayward assistants from Wayne's 'Mai Tiki' studio went off to populate the East coast with 'Mai Tiki' clones. Wayne's shop had also sent his tikis far and wide. As a kid in Phoenix AZ, I 'grew up' with the Florida style, and it was tiki to me, although 'Florida Style' really isn't a Polynesian-looking creation of 'Tiki' at all. I, myself, had to research Hawaiian tikis before recognizing this fact. The year 2000 would find Mai Tiki clones coming from Mexico in Southern, CA Home Depots. Tikis from Mexico? ...tikis that started in Florida... that don't really look like a tiki from Hawaii or even the South Pacific.... are they too 'Tiki' for a tiki?"

I'll ask then, "Will a new generation of kids grow up thinking tikis are supposed to look like a Buddha coming from Mexico, or in my case the Philippines or Indonesia?"

Five of my 'Tiki' sculptures have adopted this 'Budda' theme of mine. In the early renaissance of the current Tiki revival, my four foot Tiki #45, "Good



Budda x3



Original Indo Tiki #45

and Plenty," was commissioned by New York City's 'Waikiki Wally's.' I carved this next 'Budda' in December 1999 to relegate good fortune and prosperity to this 'new' tiki bar. Tiki 'Good and Plenty' was designed to sit atop the back bar and hold the daily limes for the Mai Tai-making bartenders. It was to be surrounded by the other fruit needed in tropical drink-making endeavors. But, of course, this Cornucopia of 'Tiki' found its way to the floor, where its flat head held daily 'event fliers' and no fruit. Nonetheless it did make the pages of an 'Atomic Magazine' girly spread that was shot at Wally's. #45 was also depicted by artist Richie Fahey in Wally's Menu art. When I visited the establishment some time later, ol' #45 was up on the bar with a small tiki coffee cup in his pragmatical grip. This forty-fifth palm sculpture had a similar papal crown as its forebearer Tiki #13, "Keeper of the Charm," described in TM Vol. 3, No. 3. Not only having been a fellow 'Tiki-Budda' design, Tiki #45 also had an edition of imported carved wooden replicas like Tiki #13. This time the carving was being done in Indonesia and the 2-foot tall figures have hands poised to hold an endearing object such as a lucky coin or wallet size photo. Will these replicas find their way into tiki-changing history?

Tiki #55 has also had replica editions carved for me in Indonesia. These were smaller items about 10 -12 inches high. The first figures I received did not have the reversed 'Hang Loose' hands described in my last article. This detail went unnoticed by the carvers and they made two clenched fists instead. Now this is



an interesting 'change.' Interesting in that a very similar image came to my attention this last summer. While browsing the immense and admirable tiki mug collection of Mark Holt, during his Summer Tiki Pool Party, I noticed Tiki #55! Well, I've yet to make Tiki #55 a mug like I've done with Tiki #13. I knew that when I decided to have my designs made overseas there was a strong likelihood that my designs might find their way to unauthorized products. So, I snatched up the 'look-a-like' and to my surprise it had a Tiki Farm Logo on it. This is a Southern CA manufacturer and the very producer of my very own Tiki #13 mugs, the first in my 'CrazyAL Tiki Gallery Collection' of mugs. I was a bit perplexed. The 'look-a-like' mug had the logo for Hula's Island Grill (a local Monterey/Santa Cruz restaurant chain) on the back in nice raised letters. My memory did spark an inquiry by Hula's to commission tikis from me at one time. I offered them the new Indo carvings of #45 and #55, but have no record of a sale. At that time the hands of #55 would have been carved as two fists. "Hummm?" I asked myself. Whatever circumstance created this design, I've since been told that the designer of the mug was Marcus Pizzuti. Upon closer inspection I noticed that this very creative designer beautifully combined the elements of my Tiki #13 and #55 to make this different (?) but well-executed 'Tiki-Budda' Design! Wayne Coombs, eat your heart out; I've got clones of my own.

Well? If the Marcus Pizzuti, Tiki Farm Mug was not a clone, then there are others that have not had their genes scrambled so well. Which came first the CrazyAL or the tiki? This summer also spawned emails sent to me saying, "You've been ripped off!" Indeed, my favorite Tiki #13, that graced my own promotional 'Bone Productions' stickers and inspired my first unique mug launch, has found other admirers. A few stray carvings from the Philippines have been discovered here and there. But more poignant, a new venture that changed near nothing, spare the details, is filling the backyards of tiki seekers with non-CrazyAL issued 'Tiki-Budda' #13 look-a-likes... bright idea, however, really lit up my interests!

Are my Tarzan loincloths all in a bunch for a reason? I know I was very pleased with myself at my first light switch cover design of the 'Tiki-Budda' depicted in issue TM Vol.4, No. 1. I sent it out as a holiday gift to friends and family in Dec. 1997 with a note saying, "Rub his belly when you turn out the lights and you might get lucky." Shortly thereafter, I saw a promo flier for Limbo Lounge depicting a Tiki head on a dancing Shiva figure. I was taken aback with the great image and well executed illustration. Then, in 1999, on my first selling expedition to Hawaii I found a Tiki Budda! Right in the famous Hawaiian Market Place in Waikiki!! It looked to be an old stock of black resin tikis. It was not a Coco Joe's design. This black resin "Hauoli Akua - Happy God" was a Rainbow Craft - "A Hip Original." Being 5 inches tall, it had a smiling Hawaiian style tiki head, hands holding potbelly, and it was in a seated position, but, with the souls of the feet pressed together. This little guy also had a quote attached saying to rub his belly... for happiness. I nearly made poi. It was cool and I had never seen it before and have found few since. One was carved of wood. Recently my friend the Pizz (Mr. Cover Art) showed me a Tiki drawing he had done in 2002 that looked very much like a traditional Buddha. But perhaps the all time 'What the...?' moment was at last year's Tiki Oasis 8. Right in the Tiki Atrium of the old Hanalei Towers, right on the Tiki Totem-Posts I've seen for a few years now, right on the posts of the famous Tiki Hut... was a splayed-foot 'Tiki-Budda' type tiki!

So? I guess I'm not the genius pioneer I thought I was. However, I'll let the discerning public make the comparisons as to which tiki came first

and just what is a tiki. What is to 'Tiki' for a tiki? To tiki or not to 'Tiki?' Who is to judge these perplexing questions of the 'Tiki' universe, like the new Von Franco-Tiki Farm mug, debuted in December '08 at Frankie's Tiki Room in Las Vegas, NV.... just another 'Splayed-Footed-Tiki-Budda' in the corner?

End Note:

Carved Hardwood editions of Tiki #45 and other CrazyAL art available at TIKIMANIA.COM

Correction: Tiki Corner #7 (Winter 08-09 Issue) mentions Tiki #45 as Tiki #44, a 'Crazy' mistake.



IndoTiki #45