



Crazy Al's Tiki Corner 7:

Photos Courtesy Crazy Al Evans



To Tiki or not to Tiki? When is a Tiki not a Tiki or not Tiki enough?

To "Tiki" or not to "Tiki?" What could be considered 'not to 'Tiki,' or not enough "Tiki" rather? These questions have prompted another look at my 'Tiki Budda' design that I've discussed in Vol.3 No.3 and Vol.4 No.1 of Tiki Magazine. As stated previously, when I drew the design in 1996, I thought it to be an original concept. The mixture of Tiki motif with other cultural icons, or as I have called it, 'cross-Polynesation,' seemed at the time original to myself, at least at the extreme of placing a Tiki head on a seated Budda. So, is it a Tiki or not? Is it original or not?



Tiki #55 or "Hang Yang," 2003, displays concepts of mixing Tiki motifs with other cultural icons, or 'cross-Polynesation.'

My Tiki #55, "Hang Yang," 2003, is another one of my seated Budda type designs. It has the unique characteristics of what would become the repetitive theme in my work. Its originality was completely inspired by the puffy/hairy topknot of the pre-cut, natural palm log. Looking like some 'Grand Pu-Bah' of a royal order of something, it was perfectly proportioned and perfectly suited yet another pontifical design! Tiki #55 also crosses the boundaries of culture and design. "Hang Yang" would be the Tiki that covets and protects the 'Yin and Yang' of Neo-Confucian Philosophy. On Tiki #55, my evolving design of



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To hang loose correctly or not to hang loose correctly?

the splayed feet, originally found on my 'Tiki Budda' light-switch, would allude to the iconic 'Hang Ten' logo of the mid-20th century surf culture. On Tiki #44, I used the natural hairiness of the palm bark to create hairy pads on its 'Budda' feet. This technique forced a graphic, flat, more cartoon-like foot just like the historic 'Hang Ten' logo. I had to use it on my next 'Budda' sculpture. So Tiki #55 became "Hang Yang." Now, is this a Tiki or not a Tiki? Maybe it's a Taoist, Buddhist, and Polynesian something-or-other.

Carved in April of 2003, "Hang Yang" came from the same stock of logs from which Tiki #13, "Keeper of the Charm," 1998 came. This special palm log, with the perfect Pu-Bah crown, sat for five years waiting for the right idea to come along. Not only was it well unfitted, but it also was very dense wood and worthy of a very detailed endeavor. Most all my extravagant sculpture is commissioned or created for a particular art show. I had just struck up a deal with an accountant friend for an hour-for-hour barter. Perfect! (I could only hope to make as much as an accountant per hour.) I also had a lot of accounting to do. So, forty-six hours later I had another 'Tiki Budda', this time sporting a 'Hang Ten,' a magnificent headdress, and lots of detailed carving. I carved the five-digit hands in opposing 'Hang Loose' signs. The concept here was that I had heard that in Hawaii there was two ways to sign 'Hang Loose'. I was told that there was the local way to show the sign, and there was the Haole way to show the sign. To hang loose correctly or not to hang loose correctly is that a question? Either way, it was a bit



difficult to carve the hand with the palm facing out. It took on an awkward look in its Budda position. When master carver, Danny "Tiki Diablo" Gallardo, saw this hand he thought it was giving the sign for telling someone to shove off. This idea was well suited for 'Yin And Yang' with one hand signing 'Hang Loose' and the other...well...not. The predecessor Tiki to "Hang Yang" was Tiki #34, "Hang Tiki." This Tiki was a surf-based Tiki that also signed 'Hang Loose.' Tiki #34 was also very detailed with more intricate tapa design carving than my other Tikis. I was able to expand further on the tapa design of Tiki #55 by using color. The smooth flat 'Hang Ten' logo design of its feet gave me an excellent canvas to create opposite tapa graphics with the right foot being a negative image to the left. Another bit of detail this log afforded was that the welcoming pineapple was able to take the form of a Hindu 'Bindi.' The reverent forehead dot of "Hang Yang" took the form of the 'Taijitu' or Chinese diagram for yin and yang. My accountant friend reneged on our barter deal. However, to round out the dualities in the creation of Tiki #55, the once money-less transaction became very monetary. A collector of mine saw a picture in passing of the new "Hang Yang" and had to have it. To expand on the countering connections of this Tiki's universe, the picture my client saw made Tiki #55's head appear round. When I delivered the Tiki, its very flat head brought into question whether I had tried a 'flim flam' on the "Hang Yang."

So here was a Taoist/Buddhist Tiki with a Hindu Bindi. Or does it have a Chinese Bindi? Is this Tiki #55 a Tiki or not? Or is it an original Tiki? Or is it just "Tiki?" By giving Tiki a capital letter, I refer to "Tiki" as a cultural movement of the mid-20th century that is now known as Polynesian Pop. Traditionally, "Tiki" commonly mixed Caribbean into its themes because of its North American beginnings in the Mid-West and East Coast. Much closer then the targeted South Pacific, tropical Florida and the Caribbean were both easy vacation destinations, and relationships or substitutions were made. For the same reason, on the California and Texas borders, Mexican influence creped into Tiki motifs. However, Caribbean mixes African and Spanish cultures, and what does Mexico have to do with Polynesia? In my body of work I try to create a tiki that is related to the origins of its religious or cultural iconography. I barrow from religious and cultural neighbors as I create. So is my adaptation of Asian concepts an original "Tiki" idea or not? Is it to "Tiki" for a tiki? Is it my original design? Is it a Crazy Al or not? To Crazy Al or not to Crazy Al? Is this just another tiki-in-a-corner with a Chinese Bindi? Tune in next time for conclusion and comparisons.



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