



MARTY HART, MASKMAKER

The maker of masks, like the builder of bridges, connects two worlds. Only the two worlds of the maskmaker are the inner self and the outer self. The maskmaker draws from the inner self something fantastical, some spiritual idea or human characteristic and places it in the mask so that it is physical, and touchable. We wear the mask, and are transformed.

Pacific Northwest artist Marty Hart is a maskmaker whose work is in collections in Australia, New Zealand, Japan and England. She has exhibited most recently in Oregon: in Portland this month at the Real Mother Goose gallery.

"In dealing with human beings and their potential and their possibilities there is only a tiny bit we can ever know at a time," she said recently during an interview in her home in Astoria. "It is so complex. There is something about a mask that seems to focus on a particular aspect of what it is to be human."

Hart's ceremonial masks, rattles and fans are both human and animal faces. They are painted in geometrical designs or whimsical patterns, and elaborately decorated. Hanging from her studio walls are duck wings, and bags of parrot feathers and porcupine quills. Her boxes and drawers are filled with stones and shells, and beads of clay, colored wood and Czechoslovakian glass.

The inner self appears in Hart's work through symbolism — sometimes as part of the decoration and design, and often in the use of animals, particularly of birds. "Now, looking back over a body of work that I've done," she said, "I see bird images emerging over and over, creatures with wings even that are not birds — this idea of being able to fly, that somehow there is a potential for a spiritual kind of transformation, or message. Give something wings, give a human a wing, or a pair of wings, and suddenly it is an angel. That is a wonderful kind of transformation."

One eagle mask is split down the center and opens to reveal a human face. Another human face is mounted on billowing wings. Each kind of evokes a different human and spiritual quality, she said. "I have used a lot of birds of prey, strong birds,

birds that fly very well, that have a great deal of altitude and distance to them. I think they have emerged in me at a time when I really needed some height and soaring range. It was not accidental that these were the birds, that they are not little song birds or that kind of thing. These are very strong, powerful creatures.

"I find owls appearing a lot in my work. They are special birds. They are birds of prey which have a very masculine quality, and yet they are birds of the night, which is a very feminine quality. They seem to have struck that balance somehow. There is a lot of mystery about them, and they seem to be in that twilight area for me between the conscious and the unconscious, the inner and outer world."

Most of Hart's papier mache masks have more than one piece. Joining together the pieces of her two-faced rattle, she said, she was surprised by what emerged. "This rattle has two face, so there is a face on each side. One of them looks quite feminine and contemplative and inner-oriented, and the other looks more masculine, definitely more outer-directed. So I was aware of putting this duality together, the masculine-the feminine, the inner-the outer, all the kinds of opposites in us that we cannot put together."

Glueing the two faces together with the handle and the insides intact is a wobbly and messy process, she said. But when it is fastened with a dowel, and bound with leather and raffia, the place where the two halves are joined becomes the strongest part of the whole.

"In the process," Hart said, "it just became clear that all of these sides of me and all these aspects are completely bound up in each other. There is no isolating one little bit and considering it separate, because there is nothing of you that is separate from the rest of you. It is all bound up together. As long as it is together, then there is all this life and movement on the inside. It functions as a rattle."

There is no solid boundary between the inner and outer worlds in Hart's masks. They reflect her own sense that those boundaries are permeable, and that one's life ebbs and flows between them.



RAVEN WOMAN