



Smithsonian
National Museum of the American Indian

PRELIMINARY ABSTRACTS

for

PRESENTATIONS AND POSTERS

for the

International Mountmaking Forum

at the

Smithsonian

May 5-6, 2010

Gordon Lambert, Seattle Art Museum (May 5th)

A Beginner's Mannequin: Museum Action Figure or Crash Test Dummy?

Task: Present Lightning Serpent Mask (Nuu-Chah-Nulth, Tseshaht Band, ca. 1910) as worn in 1950's photograph showing women dancers in Port Alberni, BC, Canada.

Background: Recent staff layoffs have created opportunities including in-house fabrication of mannequins. This seemed like a natural extension of mountmaking skills. A period of research was in order, so I took a look first at activity at our local ballet company costume shop and the University of Washington's Ethnology/Natural History Museum. Each had a unique usage of the human form.

I started construction welding small section steel square tube as a skeletal structure that would be quite stable. Ethafoam filled out the larger body volumes.

Issues and Problems – Face, hands and Feet: As my mannequin presented a full face, three possibilities emerged: 1) A heavy abstraction of facial features; 2) A realistic and detailed approach; or 3) Something in between – show enough anatomical detail but still be generalized and “Neutral”.

The mask now mounted to the head has its own presence and these issues seem resolved. At this writing, hands and feet still present problems but are relatively minor.

Future Work: An overriding problem with projects like this at the Seattle Museum has been the acceptance or rejection by the “near audience” (curators, designers, conservators). The myriad decisions that are made and the final aesthetic are very subjective.

The next project in the pipeline is to present one of contemporary artist Nick Cave's sound suits. This will be somewhat easier as it's an entire ensemble covering virtually all figure features.

My next area of research will be appropriate materials and techniques. My repertory of foams, felts and fabric is limited – sewing skills would be a terrific addition.

A limited number of images would accompany this presentation.