

Menu

[Home](#)
[AFR Magazine](#)

AFR MAGAZINE
 Feb 19 2018 at 12:15 AM
 Updated Feb 19 2018 at 12:15 AM

[Save article](#) [My Saved Articles](#) [Print](#) [License article](#)

How PNG tribal art inspires sculptor Dion Horstmans



Horstmans with some of the tribal art works that influence his own works (at far right). [Louie Douvis](#)

by [Matthew Drummond](#)

Sculptor [Dion Horstmans](#) describes his passion for items he found in the Papua New Guinea Highlands. Plus his love of a more urban object: his 1964 Pontiac Parisienne.

You're an artist who collects ethnographic art. How many pieces do you have?

About 100, from crocodile skull pendants to bone daggers to tapa cloths. One of my favourite pieces is from a village called Waskuk in Papua New Guinea; it has a nose that looks like a phallus. I bought that on an earlier trip in 1995, when I was on a buying expedition with a guy called Jim Elmslie. We collected items from villages up the Sepik River and along the way we stopped in Waskuk. The villagers brought out their pieces from under their huts and there was this piece that I bought for a kina [40¢].

What was the first piece you bought?

A shield from the PNG Highlands. I was working for Elmslie, who had a business importing primitive art from New Guinea. He had a bunch of high-end stuff. Since then

Latest Stories



Markets Live: ASX rally rolls on
 ● LIVE



Subtly the key to criticism in Xi's world

5 mins ago



How to woo clients without boozy lunches

15 mins ago

[More](#)

SPONSORED CONTENT

Top 100 Graduate Employers Guide

The new graduate job seeker's guide to the top 100 employers

the primitive art market has kind of gone belly-up and I've gotten rid of a lot of pieces. But I've kept the pieces that resonated with me.

Such as your shield and spear?

The spear is from Tambanum, which is a village on the Sepik River. You fly into [Port] Moresby, and then fly to a town called Wewak, on the north side of New Guinea over the Highlands. Then you truck from Wewak to a village called Angoram. Then you take a canoe to Tambanum. It's a real spear, used daily to hunt crocodiles or pig or cassowary. Any bush tucker that moves, that you can eat, they use the spear for.

The shield is also from Tambanum. The swirling pattern, that shape is used on their buildings, on poles, it's carved into stools. It's a recurring shape.

What drew you to this art form?



Growing up in the Cook Islands and New Zealand. The tribal graphics in NZ are really bold; the diamonds and triangles are very linear. Everything is drawn from nature, whether it's a fern frond or a shell or a palm frond. Those primal shapes and colours, I really relate to them.

Tell us about your Polynesian heritage.

My father is from Niue, which is a little island in the middle of the Pacific. Captain Cook called it Savage Island. It's a rocky outcrop in the middle of nowhere. It's pretty isolated and harsh. I went out there once looking for my father, in my early 20s.

You're known for your geometric and jagged sculptures made of powder-coated steel. Do these ethnographic artworks influence your own art?





Horstmans with one of his favourite pieces. Louie Douvis

Yes, those bold patterns and shapes, that you see on tapa cloths from Samoa or Tonga, they're very much diamonds and triangles. The patterns are repeated over and over. Where I started from, I extrapolated a shape out of the repetition of triangles. And then I strung them together in a random way. From there, my practice has evolved. I passed light through it and ended up with a shadow. I really liked the shadow so I rebuilt the shape of the shadow, and then I've cast light and rebuilt that. It's an ongoing process.

Your crocodile-shaped coffee table must be a talking point when guests come around?

In New Guinea it's referred to as a puk puk. The first time I went there, I stayed in Yangoru on the way to Tambanum. There was a guy called Geoffrey who's the same age as me; we bonded straight away. I was 27, pretty young, and I saw this table and thought it was amazing.

Geoffrey's old man had made it. It's a beautiful piece and I wanted to buy it. But I didn't want to just give money. So I went back the following year in 1996 with a big Sony boom box that I'd bought duty-free and a bunch of batteries and some discs, and traded him all that for the puk puk table. I still have the table and can guarantee you that Geoffrey doesn't still have the boom box.



Horstmans with his beloved Pontiac Parisienne. Louie Douvis

Is your girlfriend as much into ethnographic art?

Not at all. She looks at it and goes 'yeah, that's your thing'. I think Grace would have much less stuff in the house. She would have dust-free, object-free surfaces.

You've also got a 1964 Pontiac Parisienne? What do you love about that?

What's not to love? It's got a fat wide arse. It's low. It's like sitting in a lounge. It's the best of what the Americans created; in the Space Race in the '60s, they were trying to get a man on the moon. There were missiles and rockets; it was smack bang in the middle of the Cold War. From the back it looks like a flying saucer.

How do you find parallel parking?

It's easier to park my Parisienne than a Toyota Yaris.

The Arts issue of [AFR Magazine](#) is out on Friday, February 23 inside [The Australian Financial Review](#).

Follow [AFR Mag](#) on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)

Related articles

A not so Pacific ride for this new Musketeer

Why this Rich Lister opened an art museum

Five top Australian homes for sale this week

Survival tips for when your ship sails off without you

Sydney lockout laws relaxed for Mardi Gras

[How MONA plans to keep its edge and stop its losses](#)

[How to sell to 'The Pivotal' generation](#)

[I make ugly things look beautiful, says this designer](#)

[How Mossgreen spent other people's money before collapse](#)

[Mossgreen exposes flaw in art auctions](#)

[How to get driven executives to slow down](#)

[Where a cruise expert cruises](#)

[What to do when accusations go viral](#)

[Why being an introvert is an asset in the C-suite](#)

[Put a leash on the Earth Dogs for a prosperous Chinese year](#)

[Five top Australian homes for sale this week](#)

[Survival tips for when your ship sails off without you](#)

[Step back in time at Aman's newest resort](#)

[Dream bedrooms: designs for sound sleep](#)

[Wacky food combos that make for fine dining](#)

Special Reports

[Data and technology to transform the medical system](#)

[Local cryptocurrency exchange gets certified](#)

[Europe's alarm at China's Belt and Road initiative](#)

[Sector growing in importance as technology takes hold](#)

[Talking to a doctor a two-way conversation](#)

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

Subscription Terms

[Digital Subscription Terms](#)

[Newspaper Subscription Terms](#)

[Corporate Subscriptions](#)

Contact & Feedback

[About us](#)

[Our Events](#)
[FAQ](#)
[Contact us](#)
[Letters to the Editor](#)
[Give feedback](#)
[Advertise](#)
[Site Map](#)
[Accessibility](#)

Markets Data

[Markets Overview](#)
[World Equities](#)
[Commodities](#)
[Currencies](#)
[Derivatives](#)
[Interest Rates](#)
[Share Tables](#)

Brands

[The Australian Financial Review Magazine](#)
[BOSS](#)
[AFR Lists](#)
[Chanticleer](#)
[Luxury](#)
[Rear Window](#)
[The Sophisticated Traveller](#)

Fairfax Network

[The Sydney Morning Herald](#)
[The Age](#)
[Adzuna](#)
[Domain](#)
[Drive](#)
[RSVP](#)
[Essential Baby](#)
[Home Price Guide](#)
[Weatherzone](#)
[Oneflare](#)
[The Store](#)