



“NOTHING LIKE SCRAPING ON OLD BONES TO CONNECT WITH YOUR CAVEMAN DEEP INSIDE”

DAN STOCKWELL, MODERN DAY SCRIMSHANDER

by David Charles



originally referred to sailors making tools from readily available materials. On whaling ships, this was whale by-products. Keep this aspect in mind as you read how Dan Stockwell got into making his beautiful scrimshaw pieces—how the art entered into what was a highly practical and mechanical activity. It’s interesting that with Dan the art has taken over from the mechanical. Is this how art first found its place in ancient societies?

Dan:

I have always had a lifetime interest in primitive art forms and outdoor living skills. Primitive fire making with flint and steel and bow/hand drill led me to the fire piston, which is an ancient technique of fire making from islands in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, etc. The technique uses intense air pressure to ignite the tinder that is put on the end of a piston rod that is whacked quickly into a perfectly fitted cylinder to create the

The art of scrimshaw is an old tradition amongst seafaring men, mostly whalers. It refers to the art and craft of engraving on whalebones, the teeth of sperm whales and other by-products of whaling. From this it has expanded to similar engraving on other materials. Interestingly enough, scrimshaw

needed compression. The same principle of fuel firing in a diesel engine. No spark plug necessary.

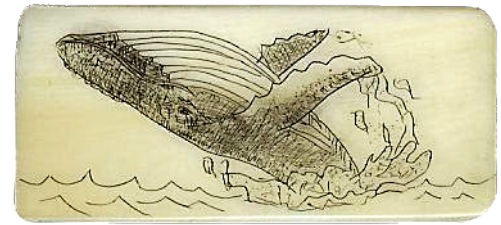
I was using old piano keys as a cheap source for black ebony for the pistons. This left me with a bunch of old elephant ivory pieces, which I used as inlay on some of the pistons and then I started doing the scrimshaw etchings—which has become my real focus—that I do on a broad range of materials.

Born in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1967, Dan says that Yankee ingenuity as well as aviation run deep in the Stockwell genes. After gaining a BA in Anthropology he headed for the great outdoors, leading expeditions around the Cape Cod area including 4 days and nights in heavy weather conditions in an open whaleboat with only a tarp for protection. He now lives in Dublin, New Hampshire, with his wife Heather (also an artist who owns a tiling business specializing in glass mosaics) and 5 year old son, Woody (Daniel III)—“who is constantly immersing himself in his own creative artful endeavors.”

FIRE PISTONS TO SCRIMSHAW

Art was always flowing in Dan's veins. He recalls selling his first masterpieces in second grade at school—well, barter is probably more accurate. He drew sea monsters (note the early maritime connection) for a friend who paid him for them with magnets

and pocket change. Unfortunately these early works were not registered with the Fine Art Registry so we can't see them in Dan's gallery.



When Dan began making the fire pistons he drifted over into decorating them and then the resulting

scrimshaw became more of a focus than the fire pistons themselves.

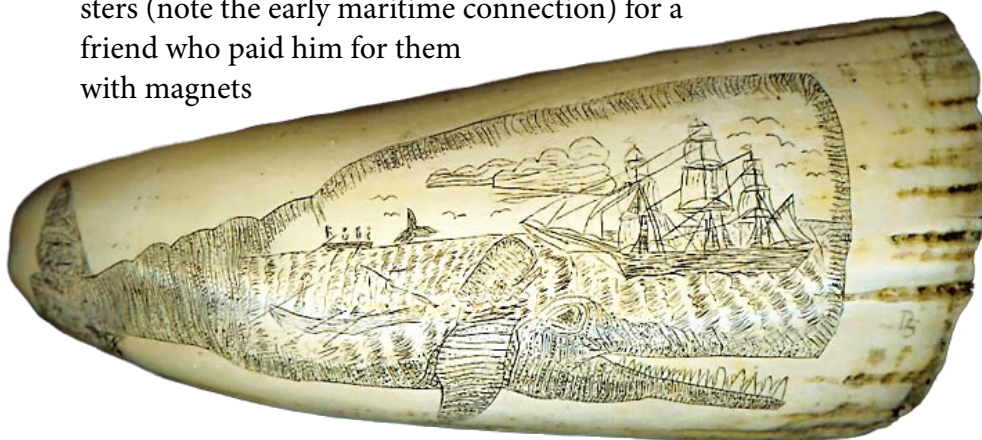
The scrimshaw expanded into a wide range of pieces, on a variety of materials, some commissioned and many, many sold all over the USA and some abroad.

I use a lot of materials: antique elephant ivory (old piano keys, antique cue balls, old ivory jewelry, etc.), commissioned work on various ivory, warthog tusk, nautilus shell, shed antlers of deer, caribou, elk, and moose, cow horn, beef bone, swordfish bill, plastic. I make my etching tools using old Victrola and gramophone needles.

Mostly through eBay I have sold pieces all over the world. A lot to California and Florida coastal areas. My fire pistons have made it everywhere. Africa, Germany, Alaska, England, Italy. I have scrimshaw all over the USA now, and have sold several pieces abroad on fossil ivory and antler. I know that I have at least one piece in Italy.

IS SCRIMSHAW FINE ART?

It might seem at first to be a somewhat off the mainstream art form, but Dan sees it differently.





There is really so much I am trying to do with my work. The scrimshaw instinctually to me seems to embody what I would like my artwork to represent. Something very basic, but still a high potential for complexity. Something that can be appreciated on many levels. Much of my scrimshaw has a tactile component, and I think the object needs to be held in the hand to appreciate the smoothness of the polish and so on.



And for Dan, his scrimshaw definitely fits into mainstream art:

I would have to say Andy Warhol was one of my major influences, in terms of staying out of the box and resourcing ideas and materials by recycling them. I

would say that I think scrimshanders were really some of the early "Pop Artists" since whalers and sailors were known to utilize images from popular catalogs and magazines at the time and use them, sometimes copying exactly the pictures from those publications, often times from advertising. In terms of scrimshaw work, Delano's work I find to be very exciting. The back of the Kennedy fifty cent piece is based on Delano's interpretation of the Presidential Seal that he did on the whale's tooth that Jacqueline Kennedy placed with J F Kennedy in his final resting place.

FIRST SCRIMSHAW ARTIST REGISTERED WITH FAR

You can see some of Dan's work in his Fine Art Registry online gallery: www.fineartregistry.com/portfolio/scrimshander



Dan discovered FAR last spring when he was investigating

ways to establish and preserve the authenticity of his pieces. You can see 8 of his pieces registered in his [online gallery](#). He sees many advantages to registering.

It gives me a way of taking control in establishing my signature with my work with the wider population. Very easy to do this way. By having items registered the way I do, it means I don't have to keep the pieces and show them all the time or have them shown.





They are there for people to see a variety of what I can do. It creates much more interest in all my work. The registered work remains there on line to be seen, at least until others start picking up on it and giving it exposure.

It has helped when people want me to do some work for them and would like to see examples, I can give them the address to my FAR portfolio for instance.



vided materials—you know, bigger stuff, on materials that I could never afford, for museums or estate collections.

Dan, a modern day scrimshander of consummate skill, one of a very few who survive in the old tradition, sees the future as bright and busy. The whalers of old would be proud to see their art carried forward in such creative and competent hands.

People are impressed with the FAR portfolio. Other artists I know really like the concept and are very interested. I think it will become very popular.

Dan markets his work mostly through eBay.

I don't really make any money with the better part of the scrimshaw I sell. I've sold quite a bit, but it goes for what I think are low prices, so I look at it as basically free advertising for what I'd like to be more my work, and that would be larger commissioned pieces on pro-

