



Portfolio #3

## **Ceremonial Art & Liturgical Furnishings by David Orth**

*David Orth  
Orth Sculpture  
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## Testimonials & Reviews

*“David listened carefully and worked diligently with us to understand our desires, our needs, and our vision while taking us beyond. The process was at times challenging since we were working with a committee as well as a budget. However, time and again I was touched by David’s patience and willingness to go to the deep places. Responding to our reflections he emerged with something far more beautiful and powerful than we imagined. It was our privilege and joy to work with David. The three pieces are a lasting reminder and a taste of the holy!”*

*Elizabeth Jameson, COO  
Seabury Western Theological Seminary*

*“... an articulate, loving sense of craftsmanship drawn from the past ... sustained conceptually by...humor and personal vision ... highly sensual ... finely tuned ... consistent ... truly ‘art furniture.’”*

*The New Art Examiner*

*“I come to Orth’s website just to be amazed - overwhelming contrasts of the primal versus the ethereal. Rock and roll...the blues...arias.”*

*James A. Mangum  
author of the Dos Cruces Trilogy*

*“Professionalism is the operative word in working with David Orth. His follow through and timeliness are admirable. As an interior designer, I appreciate the artistic integrity with which David adapts his designs to specific sites.”*

*Marilynn Davis, ASID - IIDA  
Highland Park, IL*

*“... really occupies that space between ‘what is furniture?’ and ‘what is art?’ Really very, very beautiful work.”*

*Victoria Lautman  
reporting for Chicago Public Radio*

*“Holy Cow.”*

*Kerry Aufderheide  
Blue Table Studio*

## The Artist

*Perhaps David’s favorite thing is contemplative, sacred spaces for churches, synagogues, & retreat centers. His modern-primitive designs make the not-so-obvious connection between daily modern life and ancient wisdom. The fresh, multicultural work is true to modern design standards, to traditions of iconography, and to meaningful expression for a given community. While David’s native language is “Episcopalian”, he is a fluent student of several wisdom traditions: Christian, Buddhist, Jewish & Sufi - allowing all these depths to influence his work and his own personal journey.*

*David has taught sculpture and design at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, has a graduate degree in philosophy from Northwestern University, and has published several essays on the spiritual and social dimensions of art. A longtime Chicago artist, David Orth now works in his rural woodworking and metalworking studio in Northwest Arkansas.*



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**Ceremonial Art & Liturgical Furnishings**

by

**DAVID ORTH**

## The Sacred Tree

An Interfaith Sculpture

*Weathered, Distressed Steel, Gold Leaf, Handmade Paper.*

*Originally designed for a hospital chapel to be produced at a generous scale of 8 feet from tip to tip. A weathered, golden tree is rooted into a heavy steel arc. A universal call to prayer is hand drawn on an antiqued panel of papyrus. The symbolic experience of floating is achieved by supporting the sculpture and the panel of text from behind a curtain, but it could also be attached directly to a wall. It was never built.*

*Sacred trees are universal to religion - known by many names: World Tree, Sacred Arbor, Tree of Life, Yggdrasil, Sidrat al-Muntahā, Tree of the Sefirot, Bodhi Tree, Tree of Calvary, and the Axis Mundi.*

*The meanings of this rich symbol range far and wide: Illumination, Enlightenment, The True Self, Redemption, Protection, Spiritual Life, Connection between Heaven and Earth, Origin, Strength, Bounty, Flourishing, Wisdom, Unity and Diversity, Time and Eternity, and Transformation.*



AND INTO THE PLACE OF OUR INFIRMITY  
INTO THE OPENNESS OF OUR PRAYER  
THE SACRED TREE OF LIFE GROWS



### Chapel Furnishings for Bexley Seabury Theological Seminary

*Materials: hand wrought bronze, slumped glass, & mixed details*

*Episcopal seminary, Bexley Seabury, needed a fresh visual approach for a new space & chapel. The task was considerable - to create something both modern & ancient, substantial & flexible, contemplative & lively. During an early brainstorming session Tree of Life forms were suggested to carry all these polarities in deep balance: simple, organic, & slightly asymmetrical. Installed Easter 2012.*



## Tree of Life Torah Holder

Oak Park Temple - Oak Park, IL

Materials shown: butternut & weathered, blued steel.

*This was one of my very first liturgical commissions - both an abstract Tree of Life sculpture and a Torah holder with several complexities to support the Torah, the crown, and breastplate. Note the small horizontal fissures in the steel - abstractions representing ancient writings & the passage of time.*

*A personal note: the wisdom of writers such as Abraham Heschel, Viktor Frankl, & Elie Wiesel were crucial discoveries to me - demanding from my art (& my life) curiosity, honesty, & delight.*



## Northpark Cross

*Materials: heavy mulberry wood with recessed detail in enamel & gold leaf. Japanese 'shou sugi ban' wood finish - a time-honored, scorched & abraded surface treatment for architectural wood.*

*Chicago, July 2014: The seven-foot cross was installed in North Park University's new Johnson Center prayer room along with a sculptural bench made of the same material. The wood for this cross came from an ancient mulberry tree that grew on the building site. There was active student protest about removing this tree, but a conversation ensued and it was agreed that the wood would be saved for community memory & use.*





## St. Paul's Cross

*Materials shown: bronze, wood, & archival graphics.*

*Size shown: 21'H x 7.5'W x 5"D*

*In 2011 St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Louisville, KY held a nationwide competition to design and build something for the soaring 3-story, blank wall at the head of their sanctuary. This 21-foot, cruciform was chosen from a field of 34 entries. It was assembled from 15 separate pieces that fit together to make the whole. I installed it myself in one long day - on a narrow extension ladder. Next time I will call the scaffolding guys.*

*I would love to do this again in completely new configurations or scales. Thanks to C. Robin Janning for the green graphic excerpted from her painting "When You Left Where Did You Go?" & to Vlad Gerasimov for bottom right graphic adapted from "Infinity Blue". Both used with permission.*

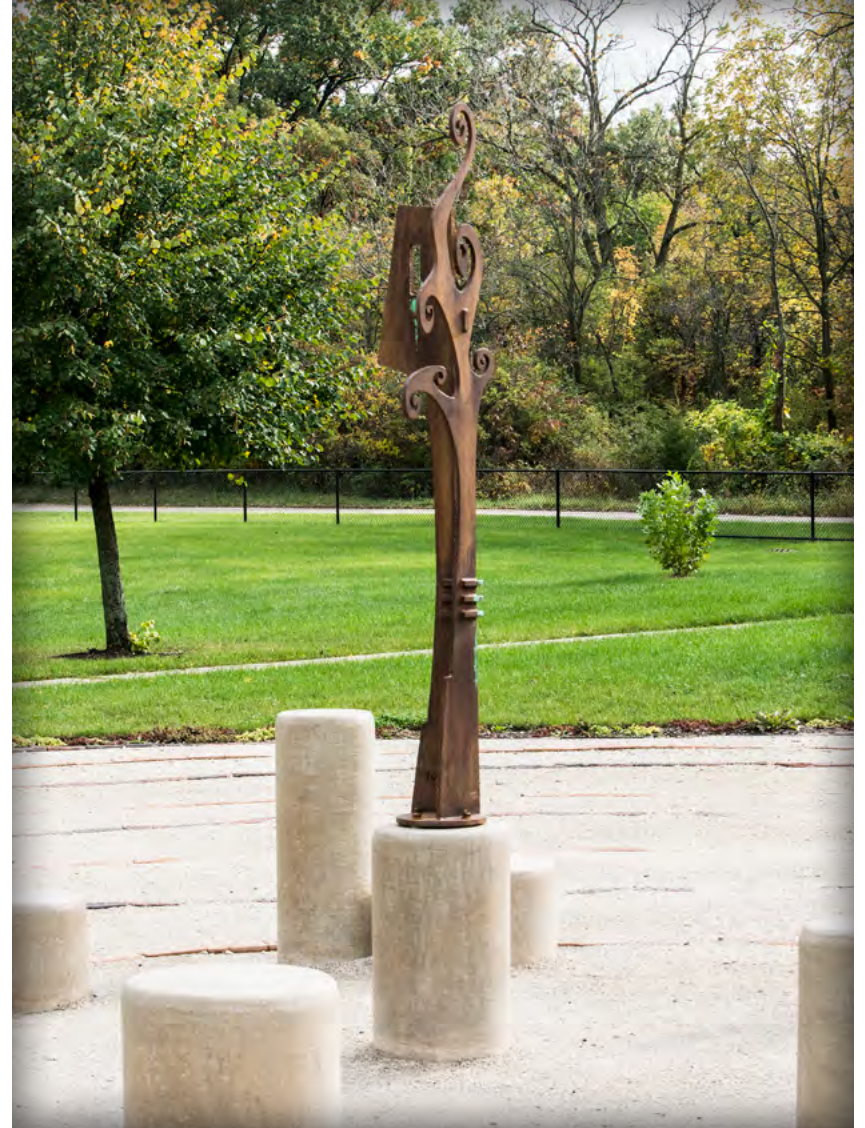


## Labyrinth Sculpture & Seating

*Title: "Meeting". Materials: Steel & concrete*

*Sculpture & seating commissioned by the City of Woodstock, Illinois as a contemplative, public environment at the center circle of a 60-foot diameter labyrinth.*

*Labyrinths occasionally harbor sculpture or seating at the center. This labyrinth was created in crushed limestone and brick by the Bull Valley Garden Club. Installed in Woodstock's Peace Park & dedicated by Mayor Brian Sager June 2016.*



*photos by Ron Seymour*





## Furnishings for Episcopal Church of St. Benedict's *Bolingbrook, IL*

*Altar & Candle Stand: steel with natural oxide*  
*Wall cross: cherry with steel detail*





**Altar of St. Francis**

*Material shown: Bronze  
Also available in steel or wood  
Sized to order*



Bronze & concrete-base version

## Bird Altars

Size shown: 81W x 37H x 9W

*In the cherry & steel-base version note the laminated construction with random carved 'cracks' and metal shards. This was the original, built for the Chicago Community Mennonite Church. St. Ann's Episcopal of Woodstock, IL uses an oxidized steel version as an altar in a small meditation area.*



Cherry & steel-base version





**Sylvan Altar #5903**

*Materials: Rough Sawn Oak,  
Weathered Zinc, & Oxidized Steel  
Size shown: 72W x 36H x 13H*

*Rustic, weathered materials.  
Primitive construction with subtle assymetries.  
Polished surfaces for a worn and pleasant touch.*

### Star of David #9002

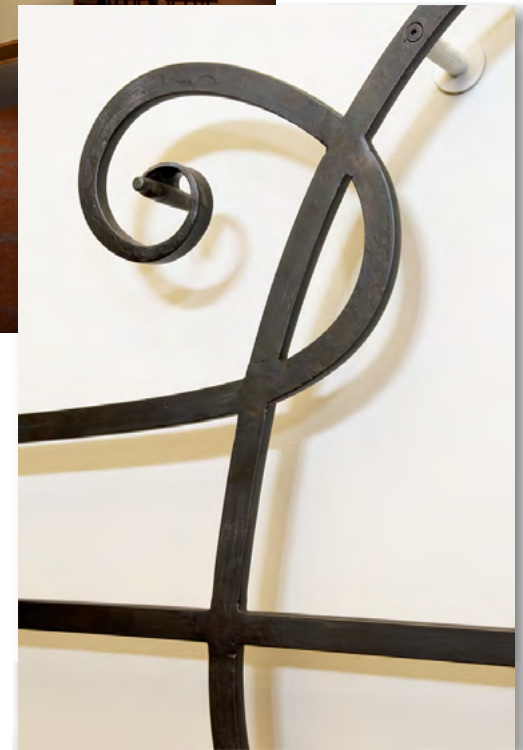
Material shown: Cherry

Size: to order

*When I am asked to work with symbols, I begin with a study of all the layers: especially origin stories & lost meanings. Identifying symbols are frequently diagrams alluding to universal spiritual insights.*

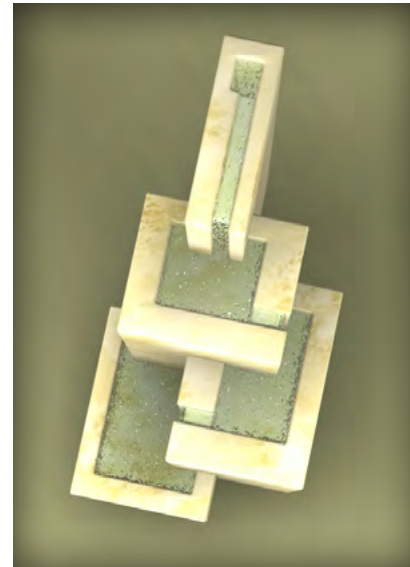
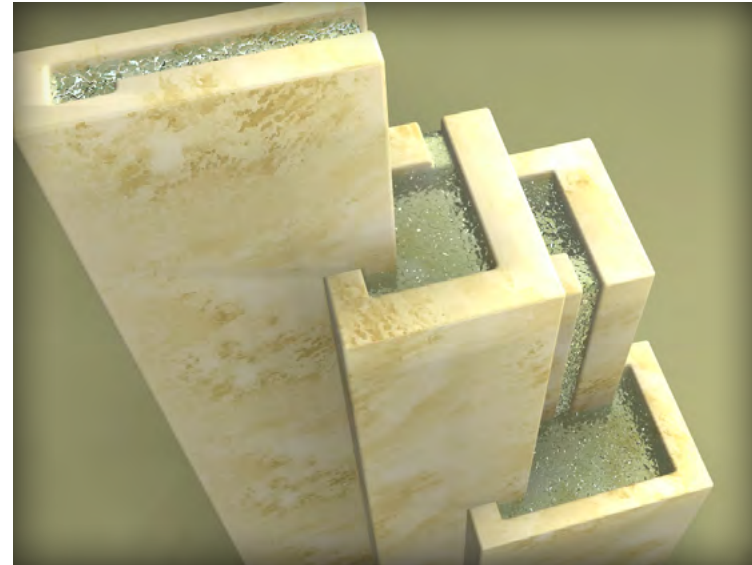
*They have an intrinsic sense about them. For instance, I have been surprised to find both 'Jewish' and 'Christian' symbols used in Tibetan Buddhist art - clearly for their direct, mystical insight, not for signaling identity. In this Magen David, for instance, two triangles - interwoven, and pointing both up and down - seem to illustrate a creative interaction between body & soul - Divinity & humanity.*





**“Water From the Rock”**  
a Tallitot & Kippot Sculpture  
Material: blued steel & sculpted concrete  
Size: 18.5 feet W x 8.5 feet H

*Congregation Beth Am of Buffalo Grove, IL had need of a functional sculpture to adorn the long entryway into their sanctuary and to hold tallitot & kippot for visitors. A theme of God’s care in the wilderness is abstracted into the fissured concrete base representing a rock from which flows the miracle of water. The rock supports an elongated steel bowl. The separate linear abstraction of generously spouting, flowing water hangs slightly out from the wall. These elements symbolize Divine generosity while at the same time holding kippot in the bowl, and tallitot on the wall structure.*



## Font: Recuerdos de la Alhambra

*Material: sculpted concrete  
Size: various*

*This font, inspired by a visit to the Alhambra in Andalusia, Spain, evokes **outpouring life and generosity** through its multiple cascades and pools. The astonishing Alhambra is a great witness to the classic tradition of Islam - delight, love, & intelligence expressed visually in architecture, fountains, and gardens.*



### **Processional Cross #9001**

Walnut, Goldleaf, Enamel

Standard Size: 14W x 24H (plus post)

*Sacrifice, intelligence, descent, & victory. Rough and fine surface treatment on the walnut. Gold leaf head descends into abstracted corpus, and ends in a dappled transition into the black post. Or is it the other way around? Five red metal shards and random fissures in the walnut represent the wounded healer. This multicultural crucifix supports symbolism of both death and resurrection. Also works as a wall cross.*





## Processional & Wall Crosses

*Materials shown: Cherry & Ebony*

*Smaller pectoral cross shown in Bronze*

*Size: as needed*

*Segmented cherry form joined by ebony structure. Crack/wound detail. These cross variations were created for the Chicago Community Mennonite Church and St. Giles Catholic Parrish of Oak Park, IL. Available as processional cross, wall cross, or pectoral cross in wood or bronze.*

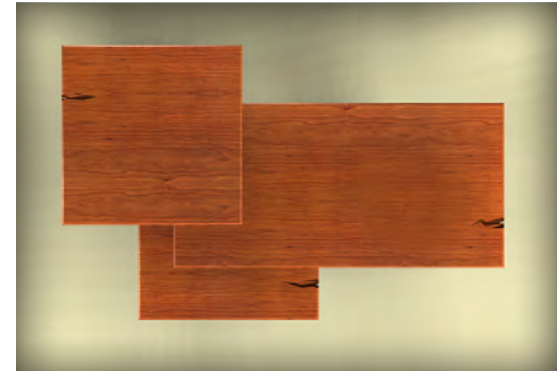


## Retreat Center Portico

*The Gurdjieff Foundation - Alden, IL*

*Materials shown: Cedar, translucent roofing material, & concrete.*

*A cedar, timber frame entry, designed by David Orth and built with assistance of Chicago Gurdjieff Foundation members, transforms an ordinary, metal building. The open, traditional joinery imparts warmth, energy, and transparency - inviting sacred work and meditation. With integrated seating, it is a popular place for visiting and enjoying nature - especially during heavy Midwestern downpours.*



## Trefoil Altar/Reading Stand

Material shown: Cherry

Available in wood, steel, or bronze versions.

Size: as needed

*Shimon Hatzaddik taught: "On three things the world stands: On Torah, on prayer, and on acts of kindness". There are many threes in religion, science, and mathematics. These three intersecting table forms express this alchemy between complexity and simplicity with a gesture of generosity and accessibility. It is adaptable to other sizes or configurations. Here it is shown as an altar, but the elements could be rearranged to form a bimah reading table.*

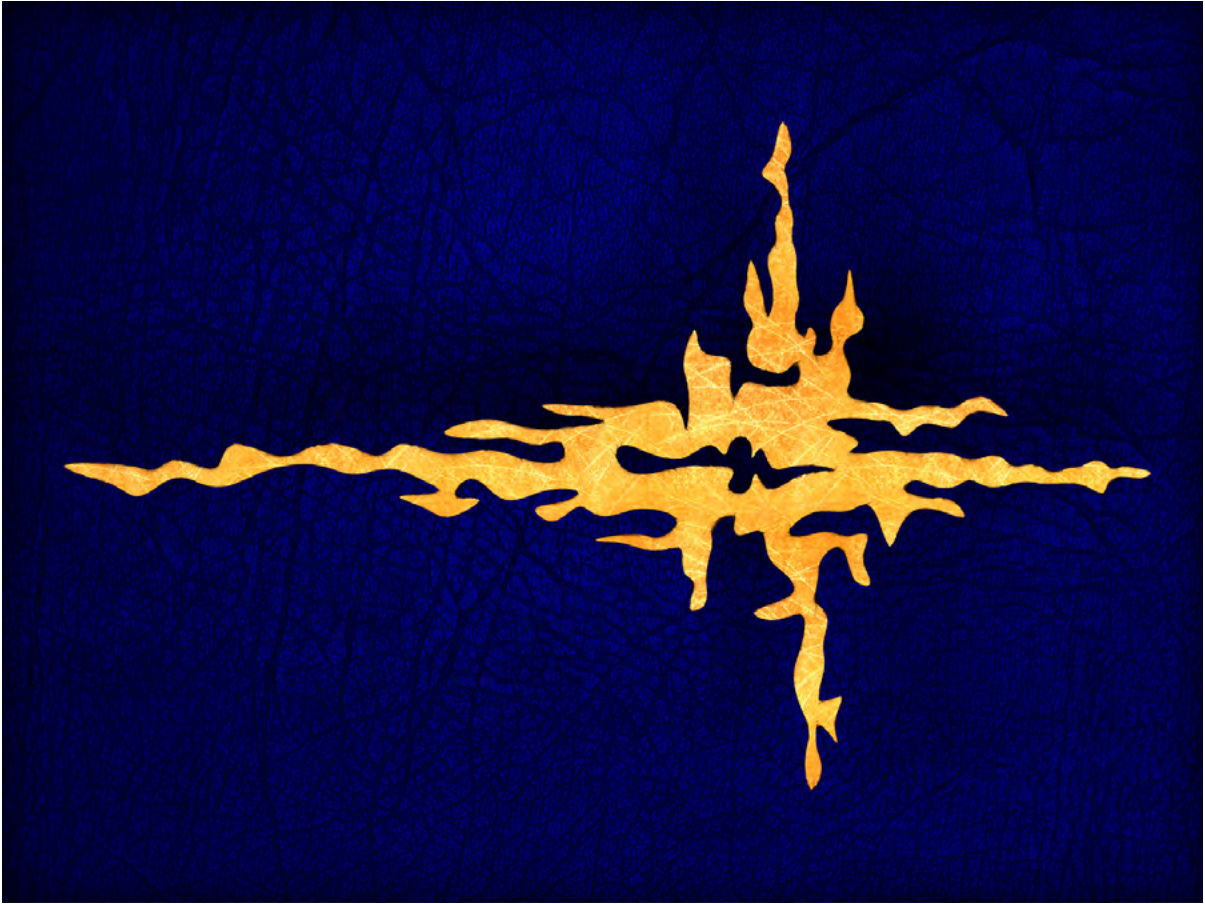


**Meditation Table #5920**

*Materials: Maple, Steel, & Glass*

*Size: 41W x 30H x 22W*

*The top metal bowl has a sculpted crack in the bottom as if it held water a long time ago. It appears as if dripping water has caused erosion beneath the bowl - forming deep cracks in the wood surface. 'Emptying' (sunyata, kenosis) is a common theme of contemplative traditions both East and West.*



**“Starfire in the East”**

*An Advent Sculpture  
Gold leaf over steel.*

*Size to order.*

**Christmas Star**

*designed by David & Sarah Orth  
suitable for tree topping  
weathered bleached wood*



*The three wise Magi from the Orient, some say Zoroastrian astrologers, illustrate a kind of inner-soul-bravery, a curiosity that trespasses barriers, a search for our origin that leads us out into far flung territories, something that follows a star.*

*So who is it that follows a star? I know what follows a pop song, a pretty woman, the warmth of the sun. But who or what follows a Star? What travels in the night sharing the road with thieves and vampires? Who were these stargazers from the East who seemed to know something, who set out from their high towers, who crossed borders at will? We domesticate them in crèches & Christmas plays. But they remind me that not all who seek the Child, who carry word of the Child, are churched, catechized, circumcised, or circumspect.*



**Altar/Reading Stand #7324**

Material shown: Bronze

Standard size: 65.5W x 34H x 15D

*These residential side tables contain ideas that, with changes, could be used for altars or bimah reading tables.*

**Eclipse Altar/Reading Stand**

Materials shown: Bronze & Concrete

Standard size: 80W x 38H x 14D





### Inner Cross - Wall #9007

Materials: Blued steel & bronze

Standard Size: 10.5W x 14H

An inner cross is formed within the opening created by the structure of the outer cross.

### Inner Cross - Pectoral #9008

Material: Hammered Bronze

Standard Size: 2.5"H x 1.75W



## A Different Kind of Urn

*As a young artist, requests for cremation urns caught me by surprise - I didn't see it coming. At first, I accepted the work just to be helpful, but in time I realized that some events demand their own art form. The funeral industry has clearly dropped this ball. And so, over the decades, I find this work, and the people I do it for, to be as interesting as anything I would do for an art gallery or museum.*

Go to [www.DifferentCremationUrn.com](http://www.DifferentCremationUrn.com) for more information.







**Woven Pectoral Cross #9035**

*Standard size; 2.5W x 2.125H*

*Material shown: hammered bronze*

*Also available as wall cross or  
processional cross - wood or metal.*





*“Someday,  
after  
harnessing  
the wind,  
the ether,  
the tides,  
and gravity,  
we will learn  
to harness  
for God the  
energy of  
love. Then  
on that  
day, for the  
second time  
in history,  
man will have  
discovered  
fire.”*

*Pierre  
Teilhard de  
Chardin*

### **Candle Stands #9055**

*Size: to your required scale*

*Material: walnut, oak, cherry, or other*

*Note optional variation in heights. The candle (wax or oil) comes down through the wood to be gripped - with an interesting sense of being held high.*



## Table of the Magi

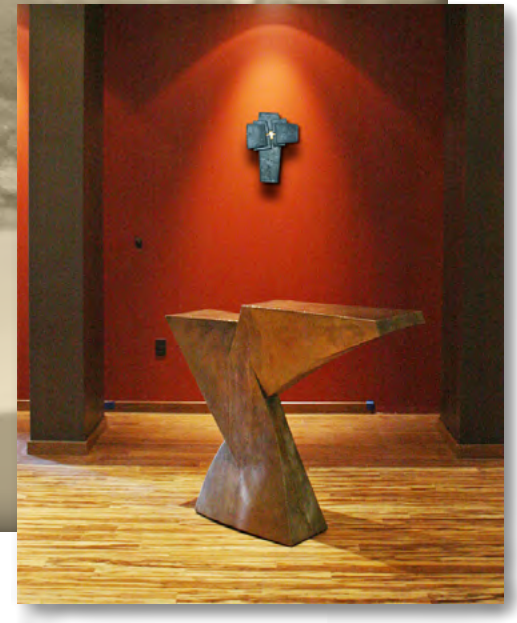
*Rustic Wood & Metal - Size various.*

*This concept altar (think 'concept car' - a study in possibilities, but a little impractical) is inspired by Advent and Epiphany - telling the story of three wise men who followed a star in the East - bringing three gifts. The three closed bowl forms are embedded permanently into the top beam. I have it in my mind that hidden within the bowl forms would be small portions of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

**Bronze Altar #7356**

Materials: Bronze or steel  
Size shown: 45W/39H/15D

*A dynamic, reflexive altar culminating in two level surfaces. The anvil form suggests inner force, fluidity, and resilience. The altar was chosen by the art department of St. Norbert College of De Pere, WI for the chapel in a newly constructed dormitory.*



# The Origin of Objects: Random Thoughts around the Workshop

*Excerpt*

*David Orth*

Objects have many layers to them. Ceremonial objects especially seem to register something from each level in what philosophers sometimes called the Great Chain of Being. I am an archeologist. When I am designing, I get down on my knees and brush back the accumulated debris of time. I sift through the layers of an object's significance, its context, & its forgotten origin. Any object is an archeological site.

This archeologist is very careful not to destroy the fragile discoveries so that significance and origin can be extrapolated from the slightest clues. The first layer we come to is the material. The wood, the metal, the glass, the precious stone - we wonder if these materials were simply at hand, had special structural qualities, or if they were sought out for their symbolism and feeling - nothing is discounted. Beneath this layer we find evidence of how the object was put together. This is the structural level. Rarely are structural decisions simply practical. *Structure* is about the sustenance, alignment, and transmission of energy. It is the cosmos of the object – the cosmos on the level of the object. We see tool marks on the object and speculate about the tools and the maker of this object. We speculate about motive and need and it's place in a community.

There are psychological layers to the object - objects can express *neurosis* (this is the broad theme of Jean Baudrillard's sobering book, [The System of Objects](#)) or *integration* (expressed so profoundly in Martin Heidegger's essay "Building Dwelling Thinking"). Our metaphorical archeologist is getting down to the oldest layers of soil. These layers are always decomposing and are very delicate; the digging

slows and becomes even more careful. The boots come off – this requires a barefoot state of mind. These layers reveal faint signs that an object carries forward a mythology, a vision of how all things interact. Even the Midcentury Modernist (boldly stripping away the excesses of Edwardian and Victorian form) sang a new mysticism of space and number, of clarity and universality. We feel in our own bones something that calls out quietly from the heart of an object. We hear an inner resonance within a simple bowl – we are drawn down into its quality of space. We are detecting a spiritual level in some objects. Somehow, perhaps because this craftsman was herself feeling something profound, something got caught in the fabric or in between the parts of the joint. This *something* is still here years later and is able to remind us – remind us to settle down and open up. Finally (and we cannot see this event, but we can detect the *event horizon*) we sense that the object at its center carries something of the Immensity. Objects congeal around little specks of cosmos. Some objects hide and protect us from this immensity. Some objects may form points of access to this immensity. Many are both – we need them to be both.

When each layer is attended to, all the layers become more harmonious – as if they were musical chords and harmonies. In a thorough design process, each layer becomes a little bit transparent as if it were resonating with the others – as if in each layer, all the others could be seen. Subtle layers thus become a little more substantial, and substantial layers become a little more subtle. Layers leak into each other looking for re-connection and re-enchantment. Perhaps within such an object the curtains between human *business as usual* and *the possibility of the unexpected* part a bit - become diaphanous even. Sometimes, a thoughtfully made object can be a threshold - a *thin place*.

*Full text of this unpublished essay is available for the asking from*  
[davidorth@OrthSculpture.com](mailto:davidorth@OrthSculpture.com)

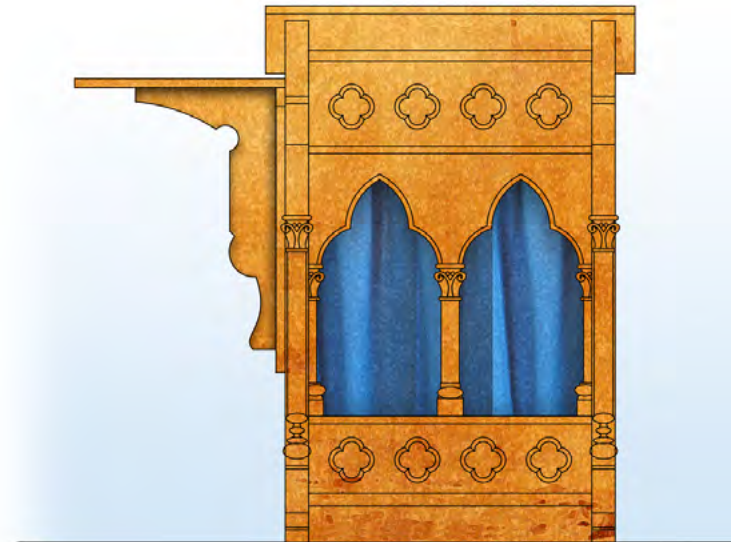


**Cloud & Mountain**  
*Altar or Meditation Table*

*Materials shown: Bronze & Steel*  
*Size: to order*



*Installed before finish matching.*

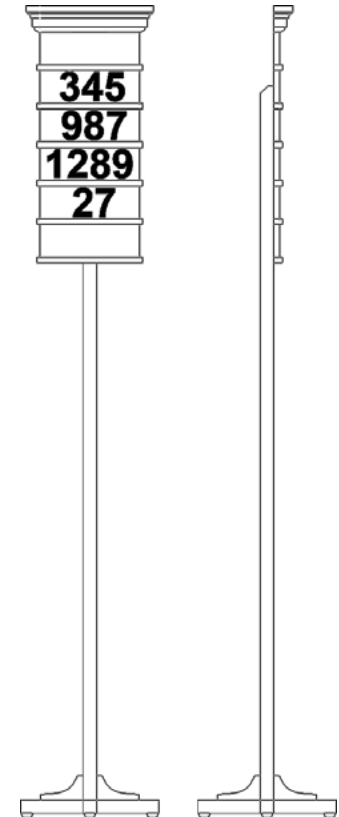


*Proposal illustrated.*

## **Podium Extension**

*LaSalle Street Church, Chicago*

*I enjoy helping out with special architectural problems. This historic, oak podium in downtown Chicago had need of an update to accommodate a laptop or iPad. The Gothic Revival furnishing was studied carefully for a solution that functioned well, reflected the spirit of the original, & had minimal impact on the podium's value & historicity.*



**St. Andrew Parish - Chicago**

*Custom Hymn Board*

*Material shown: Quartered Oak*

*St. Andrew needed an over-sized hymn board legible from the back rows of their deep sanctuary. We matched the quartered oak, style, and color of the existing woodwork. At the same time, we reduced the width of the board for a more elegant, restrained presence.*





More sculpture & furniture  
in woods and metals at  
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