

“Wear your mask”

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The current pandemic has made the wearing of masks a “necessary, if not life-saving, evil”. However, masks have been admired and worn throughout the world for centuries and play an integral part of many activities including customary rituals, cultural events, battles, entertainment, and for protection. They may hide identities, reveal certain personality traits, suggest moods, or act as a barrier between the wearer and the outside world. Masks and mask making has a striking number of similarities to dentistry, and so it seemed fitting to dedicate this year’s cover pages to various types of masks.

Both masks and dental restorations may vary in form ranging from very simple to highly complex. Both can be made from a variety of materials including (historically) wood, bone, ivory, plant fibres, metals, ceramics, and synthetic compounds. They can be produced using a number of different tools and techniques, to provide surface finishes that are rugged, simplistic, smooth or intricately carved and detailed. Some may even be adorned with added “cosmetic bling” according to the tastes and customs of the wearer.

Their morphological elements are usually derived from natural forms and may be near identical replicas of the innate features, or can be reconstructed to alter the wearer’s image quite dramatically. The latter can deviate to the extent of providing some with a whole new identity.



Masks (and dental restorations) are made by professional artisans or sculptors (clinicians), are manufactured within certain bounds, following prescribed well-established steps (evidence based dentistry), and using tried and tested procedures and techniques. If not followed, the artist could bring upon themselves severe censure from their allied social group. However, there is always a permitted degree of freedom for artistic expression, and the artist is encouraged to add certain “vital or aesthetically pleasing” features to their work. Those who are able to do this became highly sought after and well respected in their field.

Traditionally it was believed that the spiritual powers of the mask manufacturer were conferred to the mask, and lived within it. In order for these spirits to provide benefits and protection to the wearer there needs to be a close and harmonious relationship between the maker, the work, and the recipient. How wonderful it would be for us as a profession if our treatment, restorations, and work ethic could mimic the artistry and spirituality of the masks and their creators.

We too could provide our patients with a number of benefits including more pleasing smiles, confidence, and perhaps even brighter personalities. This year lets all strive to bring the beneficent spirits within us to life in all of our daily lives, work, and activities.

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