

Artist Statement: John L. Jensen / Jensen Knives

Art, at its heart straddles between two schools of thought: On one side, art is the ultimate form of anti-establishment, meant to be intimidating, confounding, and a bold rejection of all things “normal”. On the other side, it is meant to uplift the human spirit, and enhance life around us with its beauty and grandeur. With my artwork I’m looking to be a part of both realms...

Fundamentally, the purity and act of creation, combined with the abilities of my mind and hands is a staggering, life-altering experience. The inception and creation of one-of-a-kind Art Knives is where I solely concentrate my main artistic intention and expression. I love radical design, as well as subversive undertones, and unorthodox expression. To me, there is no point in making anything that doesn’t challenge and/or awaken the senses.

The knife is an art form unlike any other, and offers me a focal point for many of my varied interests. It is defined by both its form and function, while also simultaneously evoking a wide range of associations. My work is about the exercise of pushing the boundaries within, and beyond these inherent parameters into realms of design and beauty not often associated to knives. Personally, “Knives as Art”, are the ultimate manifestation of the ideals behind the meaning, intention, and creation of art.

After extensive exploration of numerous and varied design and artistic mediums, no other object has held my attention as knives have. I’ve found that metal, especially harder metals, like steel and titanium in particular, suit my temperament. As a designer, jeweler, sculptor and machinist, the knife-making process gives me a diverse palette to work through in the utilization of *many* different combinations of exotic materials, color, pattern, texture and composition. To me, the exploration of the knife is simply another form of paint and canvas, and one in which I am able to ultimately express and embody my great love of the sublime.

My interest in expanding the parameters of this little known, and often times misunderstood form, continues to challenge and intrigue me on many levels, but mainly because knives offer two distinct and opposing viewpoints. They have long been both feared on a primal level, yet also revered as sacred, even magical objects. This poses an interesting challenge on how to create art out of an object that is so steeped in specific physical and emotional definitions. Knives are mans oldest and most widely used practical tools, and thus are tied to life, survival and death. Yet, they are also ceremonial symbols, used to denote power, status, nobility, etc. Simply put, they are loaded with multiple meanings and associations.

As an artistic platform, the knife also allows me to explore my fascination with a hand-held object that serves as an extension of the body. The knife's functionality is specifically controlled by the body, which in turn creates the end purpose to be ultimately dependent upon the person handling it. This begins to touch upon the idea and controversy of the knife as purely a weapon and means of violence. In reality, the knife is an object that can cause no physical harms on its own accord; its power lies in the hands of the person wielding it. In turn, one's psychological reactions to it, depends solely upon that individual's viewpoint.

Very few objects hold such a plethora of associations, and that is what makes knives so fascinating. They are loaded with history and symbology. Through my work, my intention is to bridge and explore the different contradictory themes and ideas that can be placed upon, and epitomized through an inanimate object. The knife is where I exercise and express my thoughts on art, culture, archeology, anthropology, and sociology. As an art form, it is a very direct and powerful metaphor for all that we experience.

From an esoteric perspective, I see my art-knives as a physical representation of the ideology of dualism. I create objects that seamlessly hold beauty and violence concurrently; two opposing concepts that are being explored and equally represented in one place. I am intrigued by the psychological and spiritual implications of being attracted, yet repelled by the same object.

Duality is something that affects us all. Personally, I believe that the spiritual goal of humanity is to contemplate and ultimately make peace with the dual nature of our existence. One way to achieve this balance is to take opposing ideas and bring them into a place of union. The knife is a form in which I can physically express this philosophy, and explore the polarity of ideas that it represents.

Overall, the vast and provocative thoughts, feelings and energy that the knife form evokes, offers me a continuous and rich body of material to work with. I believe that with skill and finesse, knives can transcend form, function and stereotypes to become sculptural works of art. I hope that my particular interpretation of this artistic form opens viewer perceptions into unfamiliar territory. I look forward to continuing my quest to explore the "Dark Side of Beauty", and to ultimately reveal that dichotomy can be experienced through an art object.

The tradition of creating ornamental edged weaponry is strong and long standing, and no matter how technologically advanced we become as a society, the knife as an object, is one of those rare things that has not become obsolete. It is one of the very few things that still tie us to our ancestors on a daily basis. I am honored to be part of this tradition, while simultaneously breaking from tradition, so that future generations continue to be intrigued and inspired by the knife form seen anew.