

Who is that mask artist?: Robert Tokarz' work adorns people, walls, windows

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Robert Tokarz designed mask called Flame, which is a black, orange and gold beaded face trimmed with black feathers.

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By NOAH JAMES

Opulent hand-made masks made of crystal beads, rhinestones, pearls and exotic feathers are the specialty of Toronto artist Robert Tokarz. They are colorful and rich-looking and sparkle with design and inventiveness. More than merely decorative, they are finely crafted works of art and 17 of them are on display at La Folie Restaurant on Queen Street West.

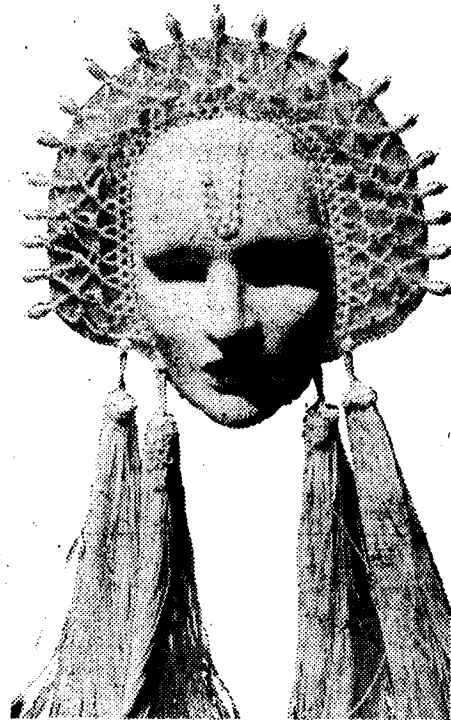
Four of Mr. Tokarz' masks will be featured in a masquerade sequence in a segment of *Love*, a feature film shot on location last fall with singer **Joni Mitchell**. For the movie Mr. Tokarz created Dracula, Spiderman and star masks, as well as a three-quarters face mask used in the film by Miss Mitchell herself. Her mask features an Art Deco motif done in gold and silver bugle beads with gold gardenias framing her forehead.

More recently, Mr. Tokarz was commissioned by Tiffany's, the renowned Manhattan jewelry store, to create eight masks to be displayed in their windows this fall.

Mr. Tokarz, who studied jewelry design and ceramics at the Ontario College of Art, began making masks six years ago. His first masks were made of exotic feathers and although he still incorporates feathers into his pieces, his main concern now is mosaics.

Working with plastic faces, Mr. Tokarz overlays each mask with a mosaic of crystal diamante bugle beads, rhinestones and pearls. Using a hypodermic needle to apply the glue, each bead is set down one at a time to create patterns and gradations. His mask entitled Gloria Swanson, for instance, features a pin-striped forehead and checkerboard eyelids in blue and charcoal bugle beads. Elizabeth Wong; another mask, has a fuchsia beaded mouth and a face done in swirls of seed pearls. It is crowned with a diadem made of woven pearls, rhinestones and tassels. Still another mask, Esmerelda, has 13,000 bugle beads in shades of green, gold and red.

Mr. Tokarz uses only the finest materials — Lady Amherst pheasant tails, for instance, that cost \$36 each, and imported crystal rhinestones and



Elizabeth Wong mask is of seed pearls in swirls topped with matching diadem.

bugle beads that are faceted individually like gemstones to make them more brilliant. It takes him from 125 to 150 hours to complete a mask. Each is lined in silk, lace or beads; some are mounted on canes.