

# Artifacts of the mind

Edward Swift presents sacred objects from an explorer who doesn't exist

BY STEPHEN DOMINIC  
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Edward Swift can add the term archeologist to two others that describe him: novelist and artist. Swift recently discovered a collection of artifacts in a warehouse in

## ARTS GALLERY

New Orleans. The items — walking sticks, some with faces (made most certainly from human bone, Swift asserts) oddly bedecked in bonnets, others with wide eyes and mouths agape, ceremonial sprinklers, and mummies of sacred insects — were collected by Lord Andrew Spellbinder during the early part of the twentieth century from the Amelita Archipelago. The bonnets and eyes were added to the artifacts by Spellbinder's wife, the opera singer Amelita de la Luna, to make them more pleasing to European audiences. These artifacts disappeared from Paris and were lost for 75 years until Swift happened upon them.

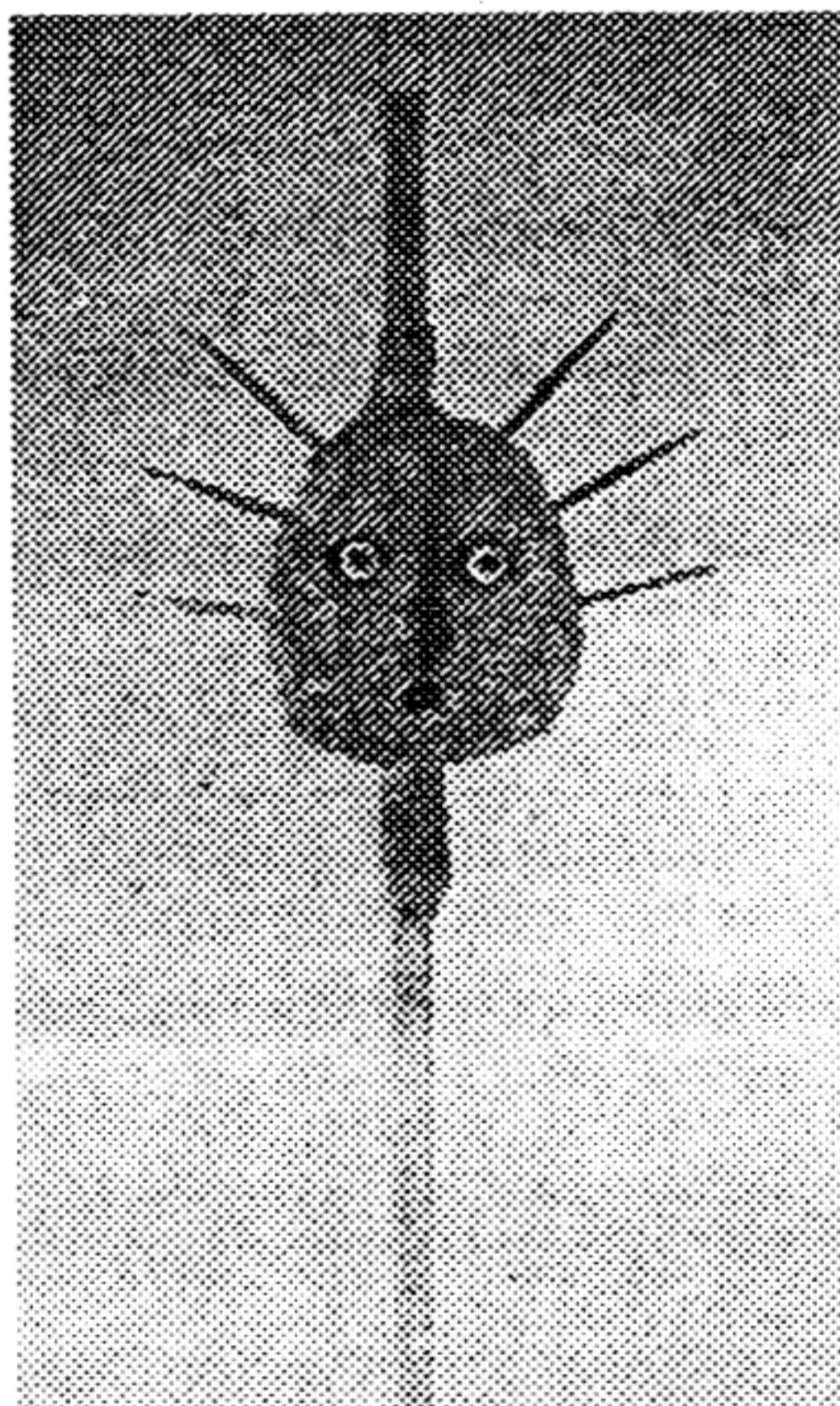
Now don't rush to your encyclopedia or scratch your head if you've never heard of Lord Spellbinder. Few people have.

Spellbinder is a character from "Miss Spellbinder's Point of View," Swift's "biography of the imagination" to be released later this month. The artifacts, on display at the 2/20 Gallery, made most certainly of papier-mâché and other common materials, are byproducts of that novel and of Swift's fertile imagination.

You're more likely to have heard of Edward Swift. With "Spellbinder," Swift has written six novels and a memoir of his family. You might have seen him walking around Chelsea talking to himself, or rather to the characters in "Spellbinder," a novel he has lived in his head since 1988. Or perhaps you might have seen Swift at the American Ballet Theatre, wearing a tuxedo and delivering flowers to the ballerina after the performance. "I try to be as grand as they are," Swift says. "It's a fabulous job. I just love it."

However, even if you don't know the openly gay author or anything about his new book, you can appreciate his art and the process he went through to create it. The truth is, Swift created this art not to tie into the novel, but rather to escape it.

"It takes every brain cell to write that kind of novel," says Swift, who immerses himself totally in his characters and their world. After spending time in quiet solitude writing about Lord Spellbinder and his daughter, Swift found relaxation and peace by turning on the television, listening to opera, and going through things he really has found — buttons, fabrics, and other items — and turning them into something more. The material for staffs, sticks, and insects came from "flea markets and the fabric store on 23rd Street, which from time to time has a fantastic button collection," Swift says. He has also conducted digs in five and dime stores as far afield as Sag Harbor and Houston, as well as collecting old computer wire and things that might seem useless to others.



Though the idea of insects, staffs, and walking sticks with bonneted heads might seem bizarre, the work is, simply and unexpectedly, pleasing to look at. "Every one of them has personality," Swift says. The artist admits that if he had not been writing or had been writing something else, he would not have created such objects. He would, however, have created

something. "I have been making art forever," he says, "but only in the past 12 or 15 years did I turn back to it." This return, specifically to sculpture, occurred after he became intrigued with *nichos*, boxes made by Spanish colonists to house statues of saints, while studying at the Wurlitzer Foundation in Taos, N. M. Swift began to fashion boxes of his own, and other sculpture pieces. The walls of his apartment are covered with his art that, he admits, he will miss when it is gone.

But whether the staff, sticks, and insects return to his home or find new ones, the work has provided Swift with much pleasure. The process of creation "amuses me no end," he says.

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## information

### LORD SPELLBINDER'S DISCOVERIES

Work by Edward Swift  
On display May 7-21  
2/20 Gallery  
220 W. 17th St.  
212-807-8384