



## Provocative Design

By Tim McCreight

pro•voke, verb. pro·voke, -voked, -vok·ing

1. to anger, enrage, exasperate, or vex.
2. to stir up, arouse, or call forth (feelings, desires, or activity)
3. to incite or stimulate (a person, animal, etc.) to action.
4. to give rise to, induce, or bring about

*Origin: 1400–1450; late Middle English, from Latin, pro and voc-re meaning “to call forth”*

People talk about inspiration as a bolt of lightning from the sky, or the whispering of a Muse into a dreaming ear. Though it sometimes feels as if ideas simply pop into our heads, there is always some point of origin. Sometimes we know it, sometimes we even seek it out, but whether it is deliberate or subconscious, all our ideas are provoked by some stimuli.

I thought it might be interesting to look into the things that provoke jewelry design, and I came up with eight categories. Or four. Or twenty. This is not a science, nor is the exercise intended to reach any kind of conclusion. Think of it as an excuse to look at some interesting photos, and maybe to provoke an idea or two along the way.

Here are the categories I propose:



**Nature**



**Spirituality**



**Geometry**



**Mastery**



**Opulence**



**Function**



**Content**



**Materials**

It will quickly become clear that most pieces span several categories. This pre-Columbian gold disk from the 7th century, for instance, is a wonderful study in geometry, an elegant abstraction that reduces the human form into its minimum pure forms. The small figures might refer to religious ceremonies, cultural events, or political hierarchy, which is to say that this piece does not fit neatly into a single category, and in that regard it is typical.



The fact that the pieces spill over into several provocations might be an organizational frustration, but it points to the reality of our lives. When we're asked where the idea for a particular piece comes from, we rarely have a single answer. Even if the imagery has an identifiable source, why did we use that particular material, or scale, or color? We are usually responding to several things at once. Our work would also defy easy categorization.

Is there a hierarchy to these categories? I don't think so, at least not in any universal sense. One or two might rise instantly to the top of your list, but be less important to someone else. In some cultures or eras, art was in the service of a particular purpose, as for instance in Medieval and Renaissance Europe when religious imagery and function infused everything from architecture to fashion. Some are relatively confined historically, such as the Bauhaus style of Germany between the world wars, which explored geometry and function as primary provocateurs.

But in our daily lives as makers of objects, we respond to a wide range of stimuli. What calls forth your ideas? Perhaps pausing once in a while to ask the question will make us more aware of the depth and breadth of our resources.

