

Listening to the Wood

BY MARCIA MORSE

When is a table more than a table? What mysteries, beyond tangible things, might a cabinet hold? Art and craft, form and function, have long had a charged but symbiotic relationship. Contemporary artists working with materials traditionally aligned with craftwork—wood, clay, and fiber among them—have discovered and explored their hybrid lives, their capacity to fulfill specific functions as well as invite complex visual inquiry. These artists have expanded the spectrum of possibility, often creating work that may use a purposeful object—a table, for example—as a point of departure, but focuses on the conceptual potential of the material that is informed by but not limited to functional need.

A Woodworker's Journey: Concept to Creation, in the Schaefer International Gallery at the Maui Arts & Cultural Center, now celebrating its 25th anniversary, includes twenty-five invited artists from Hawai'i and the U.S. mainland with established careers in woodworking. Each artist was asked to create new work; the resulting exhibition, curated by Gallery Director Neida Bangerter, is itself a celebration of a marvelous and versatile material, and an opportunity for collectors to acquire an exceptional piece. Viewers living in the islands will see this exhibition in the context of a resource that is integral to our natural environment, and also the source of some of our most prized cultural artifacts—*koa*, *milo*, *kamani*, and *kou* speak the poetry of our forests. The exhibition also voices, through the palette of color and texture selected by artists working in other environments, the rich diversity of wood—oak, maple, walnut; pine, cedar, spruce; mahogany, ebony, rosewood; even



this story in the grain is just as exciting to me as transforming it into an artifact." Working with manzanita, partners Roger Asay and Rebecca Davis integrate the color shifts wrought by the aging of the wood, while Koji Tanaka notes that, "Every piece of wood I work with has its own unique characteristics and grain patterns that dictate how the material will best be displayed." Some may

begin with a quick sketch—or "many, many sketching sessions," as Tai Lake suggests. Others, like Mats Fogelvik or Yuri Kobayashi, move directly from mental concept to what Kobayashi calls "3-D drawing"—the creation of small-scale models in which spatial presence and structural demands can be more readily assessed. The creative process may be further shaped, as Lake suggests, by purpose—"the demands we place on our furnishings. (A table) must be just so high, must always be flat, and need to perform a given function in a certain, familiar

wood that has been salvaged and given new life. As the title of the exhibition suggests, viewers will be taken on a multi-faceted journey. One aspect of that journey is the creative, labor-intensive process itself—how artists receive and act on ideas, select tools and materials, and put them to work in service of their ideas through a complex series of decisions. Some artists listen first for the voice of the wood itself—structure, grain, or color. As Miriam Carpenter says, "Each piece of wood has its own story...Reading



MAUI ARTS & CULTURE



Roger Asay begins the Manzanita Sphere design (left)

way.” Even works that need not answer to the constraints of function may still be bound by structural imperatives—is it constructed in a durable way? Is it in harmony with the laws of gravity?

A Woodworker’s Journey is grounded in the intimate process of negotiation between artist and material. It can also be viewed as a series of conversations—sometimes serious, sometimes playful—in which viewers may participate. Some conversations begin with very personal narratives: Wendy Maruyama invokes the drama and trauma of Executive Order 9066, by which Japanese-American citizens were interned during World War II. Kristin LeVier, with a PhD in molecular biology, draws on a deep knowledge of the organic world in her biomorphic sculptures. On another level, Ted Lott references the



Rebecca Davis doing the finish work to the sphere (above)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

left page top: Paul Schurch doing marquetry inlay

left: PART OF HER DISAPPEARS EVERYDAY by Wendy Maruyama

RAL CENTER

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2020

The Woodworker's Journey: Concept to Creation

SCHAEFER INTERNATIONAL GALLERY
Maui Arts & Cultural Center

JANUARY 7 - FEBRUARY 23

Open 10 am - 5 pm

Tuesday-Sunday FREE admission!

FREE Public Events

WOOD SHOPS & PROJECTS

JANUARY 6, 5 - 6:30 PM

A panel featuring Dean Pulver, Tai Lake, Paul Schurch, and Koji Tanaka will discuss the process, tools and techniques of fine art woodworking

OBSERVE & PLAY FAMILY DAY

FEBRUARY 15, 10:00 AM - NOON

Families are invited to experience the gallery, view the exhibit, and engage in art-making fun.

ARTISTS

- ROGER ASAY (AZ)
- JOEL BRIGHT (HI)
- ANDY BUCK (NY)
- ROBERT BUTTS (HI)
- MIRIAM CARPENTER (PA)
- MARCUS CASTAING (HI)
- MICHAEL CULLEN (CA)
- REBECCA DAVIS (AZ)
- SHAUN FLEMING (HI)
- MATS FOGELVIK (HI)
- HANK GILPIN (RI)
- KATIE HUDNALL (IN)
- YURI KOBAYASHI (ME)
- TAI LAKE (HI)
- KRISTIN LEVIER (ID)
- TED LOTT (MI)
- WENDY MARUYAMA (CA)
- PETER NARAMORE (HI)
- CRAIG NUTT (TN)
- DEAN PULVER (NM)
- PAUL SCHURCH (CA)
- MICHAEL PATRICK SMITH (HI)
- KOJI TANAKA (CA)
- RICARDO VASQUEZ (HI)
- ALAN WILKINSON (HI)

The Woodworker’s Journey: Concept to Creation is presented by Maui Arts & Cultural Center, and sponsored in part by the Hawai’i Tourism Authority through the Community Enrichment Program, and County of Maui - Office of Economic Development.



Katie Hudnall in her shop

Listening to the Wood CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21



PIGEON CABINET by Katie Hudnall

connection between wood and human habitat to emphasize the way in which creating shelter and furnishing our worlds is an enduring quest.

Another interesting conversation involves a key design question: to embellish or not...? Is the wood itself enough, or does it invite the addition of color and ornament? Several island artists, including Joel Bright, Marcus Castaing, Peter Naramore, Ricardo Vasquez, and Alan Wilkinson, often choose to let the wood speak for itself. Other artists, including Andy Buck, Michael Cullen, Craig Nutt, and Dean Pulver use the wood as a substrate for additional color, while Michael Patrick Smith traces intricate wood-burned designs on his turned bowls. Another technique, integral to the woodworker's art, is marquetry—the inlay of segments of wood of various colors to create patterns or images—an art perfected by Shaun Fleming and Paul Schurch, among others. A unique approach, in which pattern is integral to structure, can be found in the work of Robert Butts, which incorporates intricate lattice-work of bamboo rounds between ribs or panels of solid wood.

At a fundamental level, those who work with wood are mindful of the limits of their chosen material. Wood is a natural resource, subject to the stresses of the environment that are becoming ever more evident in contemporary life. Several artists

are engaged in efforts to ensure the cultivation and sustainability of this resource. Hank Gilpin has a parallel career in horticulture, designing gardens and landscapes. Tai Lake manages a koa forest project on the island of Hawai'i, and mills the wood he uses, as does Marcus Castaing, whose elegant work utilizes wood from down or dead trees. Katie Hudnall's work, whether furniture or sculpture, utilizes wood that has been salvaged and repurposed. Her series of cabinets embodies several of the conversational threads in the exhibition—between form and function, structure and surface, between persons and the furnishings of their worlds. As Hudnall notes, "I love the strength and structure of wood as it relates to the timeline and logistics of being human. The material is resilient enough to take a human lifetime of use without breaking while still sharing the history of it." A Woodworker's Journey is the record of that history, that conversation. ■