

The Twists, Knots, And Burls Of



Myrtlewood Suit Carver Terry Woodall

by C. S. Homer

It has been said, in an allegory, that those who see the world outside its ordinary confines assume a responsibility to impart their wisdom to the masses still held within life's constructs. Wielding an ever tolerated and proverbial stick of eccentricities and imagination, the artist is perhaps the greatest example of this axiom. Working in the obscure realm of sensual interpretations, the artist communicates perceptions unique to each individual yet also, and with uncanny regularity, he provides a connective and primal understanding. One such artist is Terry Woodall, an Oregon wood-carver shaping myrtlewood to depict the Pacific Northwest's wildlife and sea life.



In the world of artistic endeavors the third dimension poses a threatening hurdle. A hurdle that many avoid completely, some try to create, and others embrace. Where some painters strive to create the illusion of depth by manipulating the color, the shading and the intensity, the sculptor works in all three dimensions, carving a figure or shape subjected to criticism from every side.

Many sculptors choose clay as their medium, a block of malleable material that will bend to their every desire. Like a blank canvas, the clay is lifeless and wanting before the artist applies his craft. Bending the clay to his will, the sculptor simply can add or remove clay as needed, having to conform to no ebb or flow or natural variance within his medium. At completion, the clay piece is cast in bronze and reproduced a set number of times creating a limited edition. Finally, after thirty years of wood carving and demand exceeding what one carver can create, Terry Woodall has decided to cast select pieces in bronze, allowing collectors greater access to his artistry.

It is doubtless that those who choose the field of sculpting require great skill, patience, and creativity, yet they must bend knee for those who choose to sculpt a medium already bent, twisted, and weathered by nature. In the realm of wood carving there is no blank canvas or consistent block of clay to manipulate and mold at a turn or a whim; no, there are knots and burls, twists and layers, and even scars earned from a life of growing, adapting, and

enduring. The myrtlewood shrub transforms minerals from groundwater into colors from black and brown, red-orange to deep yellow, and on occasion pink heartwood may be found.

Woodall chooses to work with this medium that demands not only his expert skill, but also his surrender of creative control. With many handcrafted tools and his years of experience, Woodall frees apparitions of nature trapped within the close grain, color, and curves of myrtlewood. He works within the confines of nature's endless variances carving away that which isn't needed.

Gathering the raw myrtlewood, the aptly named Woodall says he hunts for the wood and yet sometimes the wood is seemingly looking for him. Traveling thirty to forty miles onto logging roads, armed with a chain saw

"I look for the spark, getting in tune with the natural forms."



and winch to collect stumps, logs, and roots that supply his wooden medium, Woodall peers through the layers of illusions to the beauty trapped within the gnarly chunks of wood, debris left by the loggers. Collecting a truck-load at a time and pleased, he says, to be using abandoned materials, Woodall searches for those pieces where he sees the apparition within, and where he knows he can find the balance and grace. His sight sees what others cannot and his earned skill and natural talent work together in a process that begins with searching for the perfect raw material and ends with the intricacies of sculpting and carving it into its destined form.

"I look for the spark, getting in tune with the natural forms," Woodall explains. "I've developed my talent and skills

Opposite page: *Sea Lion Song*

Right: *Breaking the Surface*



On The Wing
(full piece and head detail)

The wood is a static medium; you have to go with what's there. Unlike clay you can't bend it.

On The Wing
bronze



to know when something is balanced – I know when I've got what I set out to achieve. I know when it is there, when it has the grab, the glow. I have no doubt when I have the balance – it has to have a balance. The wood is a static medium; you have to go with what's there. Unlike clay you can't bend it. You have to work around a lot of obstacles, and I have the sense that when I have it, I know it."

Working with what the exotic myrtlewood offers and the forms he sees within, Woodall carves sculptures "reflecting the outdoor spirit of the great Pacific Northwest."

Beginning some thirty years ago overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Terry Woodall chose not only to be an artist but also to do so with natural wood as a medium. From "both interpreting exterior shapes of the tree and 'reading' the grain patterns within," Woodall could see through the shadows cast on the cave wall and sense the forms within the wood. In a platonic analogy, Woodall's carvings are the

light that sets the forms free.

Having carved thousands of figures from Pacific Northwest's coastal sea life to its woodland wildlife, Woodall's name has become a trademark in the wood carving industry. As a third generation Oregonian, Woodall traces his family history back to the days of logging with crosscut saws. "I'm compelled and drawn to this work, and I know the wood well enough to know that I can achieve this or that," and with this ability to see within the myrtlewood, Woodall carves everything from small figures to four-foot-long seascapes.

He designs his own patterns from his extensive experience from watching wildlife and sea life from his native Oregon shores. "With my own work, I always dream up new things," inspired by the raw myrtlewood, his life of experience, and the nature he interacts with everyday. "An elk herd wandered by our kitchen window this morning, and bear come through our property occasionally," Woodall says. "This summer we've been watching a beaver family off our deck and will look for salmon returning to spawn in the same creek this fall. I go down to the bay (three miles) and ocean headlands (twelve miles) to watch orcas (which are rare and seasonal), and pelicans, sea lions, seals, and gray whales. Deer are as common as fleas on the dog, as are heron, egrets, and other waterfowl. And there are a few nesting bald eagles in the area. I carve all these creatures and more." But always, he adds, he is creating a monument to two living things: the wood and the wildlife.

Woodall enjoys attending art shows around the country. "I like to show my work, I like to express all this; I like a configuration where each element complements the whole." Shows demand good artwork, he says, but great shows, like the Waterfowl Festival in Easton, Maryland, in which he will be participating this November, demand that you have "great work."

Terry Woodall's meticulous workmanship shows in his carvings, and, as different as the subjects of his sculptures may be, they are connected with an attention to detail and cultivated skill that implies nothing less than a mastery of his craft and his art.

Mr. Woodall's work shines a light into the cave, casting the shadows aside to reveal the forms hidden within the wood. Taking the raw myrtlewood and carving away all that is unneeded illuminates and frees the form held within... what Woodall achieves is more than art, it is a mastery of balance and grace between free-form carving and the constraints of the wood. Δ

See Terry Woodall's ad on the inside back cover