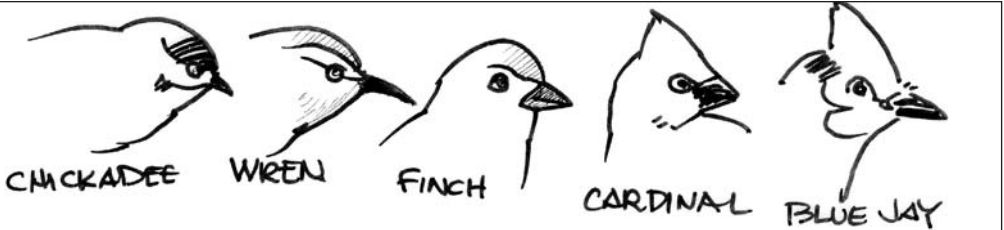


On Judging and Other Things

Bob Block and I are the Judging Chairpersons for the summer show next year. Last month Bob suggested to me that we start a column in the newsletter about judging – things to look for, both good and bad. By having a critical eye you can improve your own carving by seeing what is or isn't right and where improvement lies.

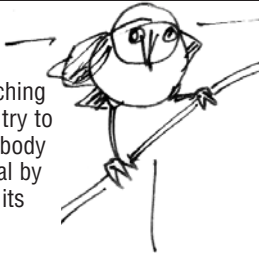
– Rusty Johnson

Realistic Bird Carving. There are a lot of people who don't consider themselves knowledgeable enough about birds to honestly judge the realistic bird categories. Here are a few items to be aware of when viewing or judging (rules generally also apply for stylized and caricature carving):

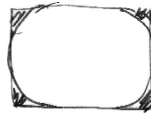


1. Look at the beak, if it doesn't look right, it probably isn't. Refer to one of the bird ID books the club has available for the judges. Most carvers leave the beak too fat as opposed to too thin. Same for the feet. If they look out of proportion or too fat, they probably are. Go to the book.

2. A perching bird will try to keep its body horizontal by bending its knees.



3. Look at the general shape of the body of the bird. Is it shaped like a loaf of bread or is it a rounded aerodynamic shape?



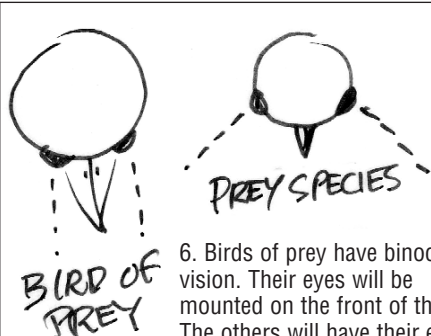
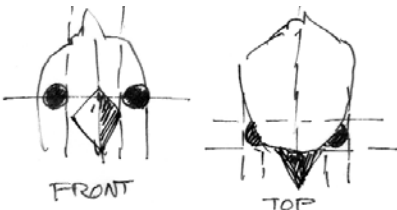
LOAF OF BREAD
CROSS-SECTION



BIRD
CROSS-SECTION

4. Always look closely at where the wings are joined. If you are going to see glue marks, you will see them here first.

5. Check out the eyes very carefully. Looking straight on, they should be even. Look at them from above. Again, they should line up. Look to see if they are both recessed into the head the same, one shouldn't bulge out more than the other.



6. Birds of prey have binocular vision. Their eyes will be mounted on the front of the head. The others will have their eyes more on the sides of their heads.

On Judging– Carving Skill

Carving Skill – 25 points

This one of the three judging categories makes up 50% of the total score, and must be considered carefully. Here are some tips to help make our judging more accurate.

The originality, “O”: To qualify as an “O”riginal piece, the carving must be an original idea and design. Many carvings are inspired by a picture, a painting, another statue, etc. That does not negate the “O.” Carvings from roughouts, bandsawn blanks taken from a published pattern, class projects (where several people end up with a similar carving partially carved by an instructor), or similar pieces cannot be original.

The design: Although design and presentation are part of another category (Artistry) consider the design as it relates to the challenges for carving the piece. Simply ask, “How difficult was this to carve?” Some hints to help answer that question are:

Did this start as a bandsawn piece, or was the carving started from a plain piece of wood or a log; did it require considerable advanced planning and careful wood removal just to get to the design?

Is this a simple figure, or a complicated pose showing action?

Is the anatomy and/or proportion accurate? Or, is the anatomy and/or proportion successfully exaggerated or changed to create impact, as in a character or artistic/stylized piece?

Think about the carving process: type of wood (is it easy or difficult to work?), detail when appropriate, motion when appropriate, etc.

Stand back! We commonly see our judges on their knees, looking at a carving up close and personal. That’s good – but remember to take a second look from afar: does this piece look right and convey a thought or idea?

What if you don’t carve this type of carving? Study! Talk to someone during meetings or even prior to judging who does carve in the category to

which you’ve been assigned. Remember, judging is part of the joy of learning more about woodcarving, either to improve your own skills or to improve your knowledge and appreciation of the art form.

Use the points: You have 25 points to award if the piece is perfectly carved. If you find flaws (areas of the carving that could have been carved better), subtract from the 25 starting point. After you have arrived at a score, stop and reconsider, and add back points if the carving’s over-all appeal is favorable.

Do not confuse carving skill with artistry. You will have another 15 points to consider in the artistry category.

In some judging categories, you can also consider use of the wood (driftwood or bark carvings); or use of grain (does it add or subtract from appeal – was the grain considered in planning the carving); and other factors. Bottom line – for carving skill, look at difficulty (compared to other pieces in the judging category) and outcome.

– Bob Block



With a lot of undercutting and delicate wood removal, this piece should get a good score on carving skill. It is an original design and shows the grain of the butternut nicely. It would score more points had it been carved from walnut.

On Judging Artistry

Artistry (15 points) is a measure of how well a piece appeals by its overall charm, delicacy and uniqueness – a fresh approach – not a copy of someone else's creativity.

You walk into a gallery of paintings, four walls filled, but one piece jumps out at you and you gravitate towards it. What is it about that painting that compels you to study it more than the others? Is it color? Is it composition? Is it subject? Is it style? Is it uniqueness? All of those elements can combine to make a strong impression.

This is true for all art, including woodcarving. How many times have you seen the caricature cowboy, standing with his hands at his sides, looking straight ahead? It may be well-carved and nicely finished, but does that make it good art? Not until the carver makes it his/her own by imbuing movement, expression, character or uniqueness does it separate itself from the rest. This is the artistry of the piece. I also like to think of it as “attitude.” The carving makes you want to turn it around, study the pose, the gesture, the facial expression. It makes you want to say “I wish I had done that.”

Don't be swayed by the size of the piece. **Size doesn't matter**, it's character that matters. In my opinion it is more difficult to get the expression right on a small piece than a large one. A slight slip in eye position on a small scale can be disaster, but a small slip on eye position on a large piece may not even be noticed.

Reward bravery that works. Often in judging it is easy to give points for the unusual subject, the radical pose, the novel idea. But the carving still has to work, **it has to feel right**, not just different. It might be a radical idea to carve a beautiful, smooth face into a gnarled cypress knee but does that make it good? Why would a pretty face be in a chunk of old driftwood? It would have to work within the composition of the wood, blended in with swirling grain, hair flowing into and out of

knots and roots. Unless it works within the context of the total carving it fails the bravery test.

You have to **know the rules** before you can break the rules. Stylized and caricature carvings need to adhere to certain laws of physiology to work. You can make an ear big and floppy but it still needs to look like it belongs, it needs to **fit within the anatomy**. Long graceful sweeps of arms and legs usually don't work if laws of proportion are violated, i.e. the forearm is twice as long as the upper arm. If you look at a stylized carving and have the feeling that something is not right, it usually has to do with proportion. When something is wrong and you can't say exactly what it is, look at proportions. Even when the size of hands are exaggerated in a caricature carving the proportions of the fingers from joint to joint are still maintained.

The **human form** is a very **difficult** subject to carve and an easy one to judge because it is so familiar. If it is carved with one element wrong it is easy to spot. The average judge doesn't know how many toes a squirrel has but they sure do know how many toes a human has and which one is the biggest.

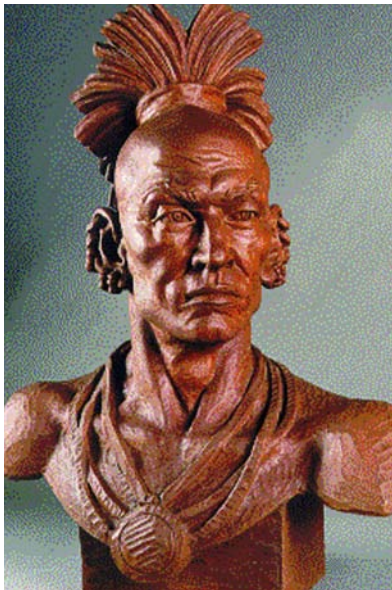
What about detail? Does detail add to the value of the carving? Does it become a distraction? Do you say “wow, look at the detail” and forget to look at the composition? Does it add to or take away from the attitude? Would the carving still work without the dedication to detail or is it still as compelling with just the suggestion of it?

Look at carvings with a critical eye and find the ones that **speak to you**. Then ask yourself “why?” Is it attitude, composition, pose, subject, quality of the carving, difficulty of the carving, uniqueness of carving? Reward the carver for attitude, bravery, feelings. Reward beauty where it is supposed to be and ugly when ugly counts. Reward proportion, but reward disproportion that works. Reward the carving that feels right. Reward the carving that you wish you had done.

Rusty Johnson



Both of these carved portraits show character, style and attitude. The composition of the cowboy and horse tell you of their relationship with one glance. The Indian at the right tells you immediately that you had better be serious with him. Both carvings are best of show winners from the International Woodcarver Congress; left, 2002 by Fred Cogelow and right, 1998 by David Seagraves



Judging the Realistic Full-Figure Human

Throughout history, the human form has been one of the most prevalent themes in art: in paintings and drawings, and certainly in sculpture, as it is represented in motifs from all cultures. In wood carving, the figure is represented singly or in groups; and in true form, or abstract, or caricature. The EOWA category of full-figure human, in realistic form, is the topic of this discussion.

One of the most difficult carving tasks is modeling the human in full figure. If proportions are not correct, or if the anatomy is misrepresented, the errors are immediately obvious to most observers. Common mistakes are: making the head larger than it should be (in most adults, the head is between 1/6 to 1/8 of the total figure height), making the arms and/or legs too long or too short, or missing the proportion of the torso to the rest of the body. If you're looking for a place to add or subtract a point or two, look at the proportion of the hands and feet relative to the head. When judging, look first from a distance to see if the general anatomy and proportion "works." The next thing to judge is the pose. Look for action, and determine whether or not a living human could actually maintain balance in the pose presented. If proportion, anatomy, and pose are pleasing, most of the judging for carving skill is completed. Who cares if the fingernails are represented? It is OK to count fingers and toes, but remember the emphasis of the sculpture overall is more important than detail. If detail is well presented in hair, wrinkles, clothing folds, yes – even finger and toenails, extra points can be added in carving skill, but don't let that over-influence your next category of artistry. Consider giving a few extra points if the hands are modeled rather than stuffed in pockets, and look at the feet, either nude or in shoes – in which case the modeling of the footwear counts

(check out the "Cavalier's" boots). In a full figure human, there will obviously be a face, or the category would be changed to artistic and stylized (abstract). However, facial details will probably be less obvious than they would be in a bust, as the area of the face will be small, unless the entire carving is large.

When you look at "Cavalier," by Peter Paces, you see excellent hair and facial detail in a 15" carving. Notice the clothing detail. Other nice parts of this work are the tilt of the head and hat, the clothing detail, and the position of the feet. The work, "Irresistible," by Ronald Bassinger is, to me, amazing. The proportions are perfect, perhaps the right arm is a bit long, but should be, to emphasize the drama of the carving. The hand we can see is magnificent. If the finish on this piece is as good as it appears in the photo, this could be a 50-point award. It is more difficult to see and appreciate the Flamenco Dancer by Fred Zavadil because of shadow in the photo. The clothing is finely crafted, the pose is perfect, and once again the expressive hands demand attention. All three carvings are about 7 heads tall, with accurate anatomy, adding to their allure. They also demonstrate the point that facial detail can be an important part of the full figure. All photographs are from "Chip Chats."

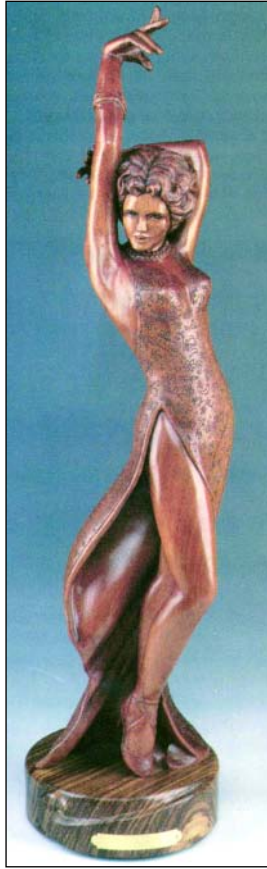
Before judging full figures, check yourself out in a mirror, and pay close attention to the shapes and sizes of your friends. Find a good sculpture book, and become familiar with how the human form has been presented in art over time. And remember, before looking closely at a carving to check out detail and finish, stand back first, looking for overall impact.

– Bob Block

Cavalier by Peter Paces



Irresistible by Ronald Bassinger



Flamenco Dancer by Fred Zavadil



Judging Stylized

Stylize: to represent or design according to a stylized pattern rather than according to nature.

So how do you judge something that is different from what you see and know in nature? First thing you do is look at it from a distance and see if you recognize patterns. Do different shapes within the piece suggest something familiar? If it is painted, do the colors reveal anything about what it is? If it has detail, does the detail suggest reality? If any of these characteristics tell you what it might be then the carver has succeeded in representing something in nature differently from how we see it.

After looking at the piece from a distance, step up close and look at what the artist has done in representing reality. Are forms and colors simplified? Are shapes exaggerated in either color or wood? Does detail or lack of detail help or hinder the carving? Does your mind fill in the blanks where detail is left off? And lastly, does it all work together? Do the lines flow where they should flow, stop where they need to stop?

Observe the pintail duck carving below, a winner at the Woodcarvers Congress. At first glance you see the pintail duck and you might think it is a realistic piece. Closer look shows that the bird is similar to a real duck except that they don't hold their tails like that. The carver has emphasized one distinctive characteristic and stylized it into a beautiful sweeping form very different from nature. The painting of the duck plumage is also very striking. The color shapes represent what we see in nature without being an exact copy. Same with the head and neck. Beautiful representations of reality without being real. Stylization.

Lady of Spring
by Willard Stone



Some might say that this is realistic because it has eyes carved in it. I contend that once the carver has *stylized any part*, it can no longer be realistic. This has long been a bone of contention in the carving world – what is called a “tweener” – between categories. If the carving attempts to retain the proportions and colors of nature it is realistic. Anytime natural proportions are intentionally changed, no matter how much detail is carved in, then it is stylized. An example is the work of Willard Stone. Probably ninety percent of his carvings are stylized and would not fit in the realistic category,

although we tend to think of him as a realist. In his *Lady of Spring*, pictured here from the White House collection, Stone incorporates realism and abstraction into the flowing sensuous lines of the female form rising from the organic floral forms representing spring. First reaction – realistic. Further examination – all very stylized.

Note the bear carving below by Vernon Lunasee. What a charming and appealing bear fetish, a stylized representation of the natural world. Closer observation (although not very visible in this photo) shows that the carver has carved in nostrils, claws, eyes and a tail. Details from nature on a stylized form. Definitely not realistic, Definitely stylized.

What gives this piece its charm? I think the exaggerated roundness of the forms of the legs and back, the appealing look on the face of the animal and the inquisitive pose all work together to invite you to spend time looking at it, turning it around, and wondering what the bear is up to. It is a piece that you want to pick up and touch. A success in anyone's judgement.

– Rusty Johnson

Pintail Duck by John Mueller



Bear Fetish by Vernon Lunasee



Judging miniature carvings

To fit in the EOWA category of “miniature,” any kind of woodcarving will be accepted if it fits inside a 2-inch cube. The carving could be realistic, a caricature, human, animal, abstract, or anything else that the woodcarver has attempted to render in miniature form. This category can be a challenge for the judge, because of the variety of categories that might be represented, all now in one category based on their miniature size.

This is THE category to judge “up close and personal.” However, the same parameters for a good larger carving apply to the miniatures. Anatomy, proportion, pose, movement, emotion, and artistry are similar in this category to what would be required of larger carvings. Certainly the judging areas of artistry and finish deserve attention as they would in any other categories. Carving skill points should be reflected in two major areas: general skill and ability to portray complex features in miniature. The general skills are similar to other categories. In the carving of the cowboy with the beer can (carving by Gary Falin, 2003 winner of miniature category in the CCA annual competition) note that the hands are shown and there is action. The hat actually fits on the head. Facial features are good, including ears – although the carver did cheat by hiding the mouth under the mustache! The little doctor, on the other hand, has a good face (if I do say so myself), but lacks action and detail in the clothing. Portrayal in miniature should be the main point of judging this category. The cowboy caricature with his hands looped (2004 blue ribbon winner by Gary Falin) in his belt demonstrates terrific detail in the facial expression, the clothing, the belt, and the positioning and modeling of the boots. The cougar on a tree checking out a very tiny rabbit has pluses and minuses. First, note that the entire carving, except for the added rabbit is from one piece. Next, note the potential carving problems that had to be handled: the thin tail, the open space between the cougar

and the tree, and the facial details on the miniature cat. If there was additional action, perhaps with the cat’s head and neck turned more toward the rabbit, the piece would be better, but the head is turned some away from straight-on, and that should be worth points. There was an attempt to burn in hair, which is good, but the burning lines are generally straight, which is not good. The painting is average. Having a base on a miniature carving is a bit unusual, because it takes up valuable space, making the remaining carving even smaller in order to fit into that pesky, small box!

To emphasize a point, think about the problems a carving in any category presented to the artist as he or she was creating it. Doing a work in miniature presents special problems that require unique solutions so the finished piece is competitive. Facial expression on this scale is very difficult, a small miss-cut and the expression can quickly change from a smile to a scowl. Prior to judging a miniature carving, you might try to create a piece of your own, to experience first-hand the unique skills required. Safety is important here. Wearing a glove, using sharp tools, and working patiently and never when you are tired are VERY important rules. Finally, when judging, ask yourself – does this carving “work,” – can I tell what it is, is it well carved, is it exciting to see this work rendered in such a small space, and am I giving or taking away points based on complexity or simplicity? Thanks to Gary Falin for the cowboys, and the doctor and cougar are my attempts at this fun category.

Bob Block

Miniatures by Bob Block, right and bottom right; CCA winners by Gary Falin, below and below middle. Note the three bottom pieces are almost actual size.



Judging Caricature Carvings

Caricature carvings are like cartoons – a humorous passage focusing on a brief moment in time. And like cartoons, not considered by some critics as “art.” I disagree. Caricature carving requires all the skills of carving a serious subject or “artistic” piece. The carver must be able to convey a story or an idea in the carving by exaggerating or distorting a condition or event. A good caricature carving should amaze and amuse the viewer – amaze with carving skill and amuse with depiction of the situation. The viewer should observe the piece and have a reaction to the scene, situation or character. And, as with all categories, carving skill, originality, novelty, and creativity are to be rewarded.

Action, exaggerated pose and situation are important and – although proportions and expressions may be distorted and exaggerated – human and animal physiology still has to feel right. Bones and joints still have to line up and if a pose has the head in an impossible situation it still has to look like it could happen. And that is the challenge to the carver. Making the viewer believe the event took place.

The theme or subject can be silly, ludicrous, comic, amusing, even a little naughty, but never profane, disgusting, insulting or demeaning. The carvings that succeed best are ones that treat the subject with respect and humor, not ill-will and condescension. The carving of the cowboy who has just been struck by lightning (right, by Lynn Doughty) is a fine example. The carver makes you laugh at the situation while still feeling compassion for the victim. The expression is wonderful.

The carving skills to be admired are: detail when needed, capturing an expression, capturing a pose, translating an unbelievable situation into a believable one, and distorting the face or body to evoke an emotion (see Wait-a-Minute Man below).

Carving the character from one block of wood also should be rewarded as opposed to the carver who does the same subject but assembles the character from many pieces. This verges on model building as opposed to wood carving. In the event of a tie between two pieces, reward the carver over the constructor. This is sometimes hard to determine as a successful carver should be able to hide joints and sections. Any glued or joined section that shows cracks, joints or glue marks should have points deducted.

Finishes can vary from natural wood to fully painted. But a fully painted piece should still convey the fact that it is a wood carving, not a porcelain figurine. Most caricature carvers show knife cuts and facets in the wood, especially true in the Scandinavian style, but sanding to a smooth finish is also

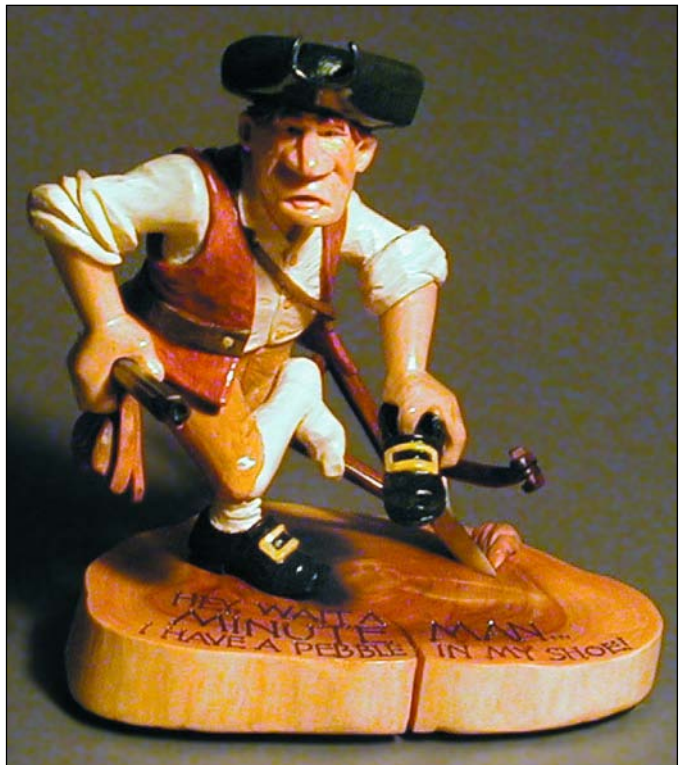
EOWA Human Caricature winner in 2002 by Rusty Johnson exhibits motion, balance, expression, composition – and the figure is carved from one piece of wood.

appropriate. As with all woodcarving categories, whatever finish is used, runs in the paint and poor painting are still bad for the piece. A great carving can be ruined by an average paint job.

Points to remember: motion, expression, situation, composition, originality, carving skill, and finish – not much different from all other categories is it?

Rusty Johnson

EOWA Human Caricature winner in 2004 by Lynn Doughty has great expression, detail, and finish.



Judging Chip Carving and Canes

CHIP CARVING

Chip carving has embraced a multitude of motifs, interpretations and adaptations through the centuries. The reason chip carving is developing so fast presently is it is easy and the simplest form of carving, using patterns as a guide to maintain proportion of design and balance.

There are three categories of chip carving cuts and shapes.

Generic: The generic designs are shapes such as diamonds, squares, circles and rectangles. These design types are used and incised into the wood that produces a pleasing and artistic appeal.

Free Form: The free form design takes on subjects like flowers, bird, animals, shoes, etc. This design type is a simple two cut chip that outlines the pattern to develop the shape of the subject with some details to bring out the figure.

Positives Imaging: Is the art of removing wood around the a subject effecting a relief of wood by using a chip carving and relief carving technique to make the design clear. This technique also applies to floral, foliage, vines, fruit, etc. The use of chip and imaging clearly defines the subject and brings out the artistic and pleasing effect to the carving.

One of the most difficult tasks when chip carving is to use the chip cutting design in a combined arrangement to prevent the carving from looking dull and flat. This is overcome by varying the pattern and by changing the chip size, shape, or depth. The difficult part is, as the various sizes, shapes and depths change, it is easier to overcut, lose sharp edges and over-cutting the bottom grooves of the chip.

When judging the carving in its final form, one should look for uniformity of depth, clean cuts, sharp edges and no over-cutting the bottom of the chip groove. There should not be any hanging chads in the bottom of the grooves and no fingernail marks on the flat surface of the carving.

Putting a final finish on the project is the choice of the artist. The following methods are usually found on chip carvings.

The **natural** wood color can be left as a finish, or a clear coat may be applied. Look for over fill in the grooves, or no dry spots or dings on the flat surfaces.

When the carving is **stained**, the stain should be uniform in color over the top surface with the chip grooves darker in color, no excess stain in the bottom of the grooves, with a uniform top coat on the carving.

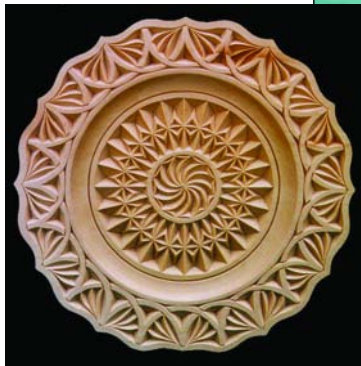
When the carving is **painted**, the color should be uniform with no runs or excess paint in the bottom of the grooves or runs on the flat surface. If the chip carving is incisedly cut, after painting the total surface, there should be no visible chips in the corners of the cuts and no over-cuts in the paint.

Remember the artist is depending on light and shadows to highlight the carving. To get a feel for this move about and look at the changing shadow effect you see in the chip carving.

—Buyrl Franks



A basswood and walnut urn (left) by Mickey Hudspeth. Especially note that carving on a curved surface requires much planning so that the patterns match properly where they meet. Plate by Wayne Barton (below) shows equal skill on a flat surface.



Canes/Walking Sticks

While judging a cane or staff can seem difficult because of the potential for a wide variety of style and or subjects, i.e. floral motif, animal design, human figures, realistic, mystical, abstract, chip or incised, woodburned and or all of the above in any combination; in the end it boils down to the following:

- What is your reaction to the presentation? This first impression has a lot to do with the art value of the presentation.
- How well are the individual objects carved or woodburned?

The presentation should have clean cuts, smooth where it should be, and have a well executed background. Note: a lot of cane carving is some form of the relief style. If objects are executed in high relief or through cut note the cleanness of the underside/inside of the cuts.

A note here about the big difficulty with canes/staffs: they are mostly very narrow, round and lack the proper amount of wood for truly realistic carving so the carver must improvise and adapt the subject to the product. The judge must evaluate the effort of the carver to present the theme on a restricted medium (art again, combined with carving quality).

- A cane or staff should have a dedicated area for holding or grasping. A

handle should fit the cane both in joinery if added, or suitable if natural - the handle should feel right and be balanced.

• After carefully evaluating the quality of the carving look for a theme or idea of the carving. Does it follow through? Does it make a statement, look nice, etc. Give the artistic execution a value.

• Color may be used, and if it is it must fit the carving. Many woods are better left unpainted just as some carving is best left unsanded. Most importantly, in the area of art, is the value of originality, if the presenter didn't create the art unaided, its value is diminished.

• The finish should suit the carving and as in any project should be well done.

— Jack Nitz



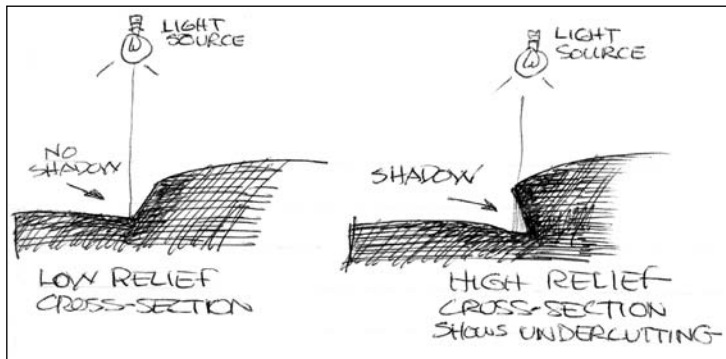
A variety of canes show different styles in handles at left and above, and a northwest native American walking stick shows colorful designs with the elegant curved neck of the stylized bird. While the variety is hard to judge, creativity and skill usually win out. If it is a functional

cane, how does it fit the hand? If it is a walking stick, how does it balance when you hold it? Ceremonial sticks and canes just need to look good!



Judging Relief

First, what makes a piece high or low relief? It should be very simple to tell by examining the edges of the carved areas. If there is ANY undercutting then it is high relief. For example, if a strong light were placed perpendicular to the carving, would the edge of the carved object cast a shadow (see diagram at right)? Any shadow? High relief. This is not to say that a shadow determines the piece. Move the light to an oblique angle to the carving and the cast shadow is what gives the piece depth. No shadow, no depth, but that is a different shadow than that cast by undercutting. A carving can be several inches thick with many levels of cutting, but if there is no undercutting of the edges, it is still a low relief. That's simple enough, right?



When judging relief the same considerations are made as for any other carving, i.e. carving skill, artistry and finish, either it works as a piece of art or it doesn't work. The big difference is that the relief is basically two-dimensional (length and width, very little depth) as opposed to in-the-round carving (length, width and depth). And because it is less dimensional it depends a lot on carving skill to imply dimension. For instance, to show the illusion of depth the various levels must be carefully rendered to different shallow depths. An object in the background must be smaller and proportionate and not protrude to the front of a closer object. Admire the incredible Fred Cogelow high relief piece at the right. Notice how he uses perspective and size to give the illusion of depth. The piece is probably not more than three inches deep but gives the grand illusion that you could reach deeply into it. There is an illusion of an in-the-round piece.

Compare that to the low relief carving by Bruce Futterer of the old woman praying. The low relief gives no illusion of three dimensions, it is more like a drawing, but you still have the impression of depth rendered by the carving skill. Notice the placement of the hands and how they appear to be in front of the rest of the figure, a very difficult achievement in a board only one inch thick.

Relief carvings may be painted and even woodburned but their

charm really demands carving skill. If a carver depends on paint to render depth the piece fails as a carving but may succeed as a nice painting. Both examples shown are natural finishes and need no paint. Look for the usual bug-a-boos with finish – is it an even finish, does it reach into all the little corners and crevices, are there any runs?

Rusty Johnson



Above: Fred Cogelow's "In Hac Petra" won best of show at the 2003 Woodcarver's Congress. The carving is 52 x 58 x 4.5"

Right: Bruce Futterer was a winner with this relief carving in 2002.



Judging Bark, Log, and Driftwood Carving

As with all categories, the general principles of judging apply here. Carving skill and artistry should reflect thoughtful use of the “found” piece of wood, using the material to emphasize the point of the piece. For example, a polished piece of driftwood that suggests the form of a fish, but is embellished with an eagle head, has probably missed the point! The choice of the bark, log, or driftwood should be considered in the overall points, most likely as part of the artistry score. Do not confuse carving skill with the natural gifts given to the carver by the wood. A few cuts to define an image on a piece of wood that by itself forms a shape are not that difficult to do! But laying out a carving to take advantage of the shape of the piece of wood, then creating an intricate, appealing, well-carved piece deserves points. Finish can be very important. Is the chosen finish compatible with the piece of wood? If painted, are there areas left



intentionally uncovered to emphasize the wood? If finished with a clear finish, perhaps with wood-burning, does the chosen finish complement the piece (glossy or muted, as appropriate)?

In photo 1, notice how the carver has utilized the shape of the cypress knee to create a wonderfully artistic impression. Certainly artistry garners many points for this piece. It appears to be naturally, and appropriately finished for high point in that area. But how difficult was it to carve? I would suggest a lower carving skills score for this piece, although I would be proud to display it as a piece of well-crafted art. In photo 2, the bark carving of a mountain man, notice how nicely he fits into the rough, raw wood; and how some of the bark is visible below him. This is a nicely carved piece, with reasonable artistry and what looks to be a fitting finish. Compare this to the tumbling houses in photo 3, also from a piece of bark. But where's the bark? This piece could have come from any number of raw material pieces, and might not even be appropriate for this category as there is no “play” on the natural material.

To summarize, when judging this category, step back and take in the entire piece to get a feel for how the subject matter and the raw material work together; a significant factor in artistry. Then, think about how difficult was the actual carving work. Thinking about how the finish highlights and compliments the work is the last piece. And just for fun, when you're out and about, look for interesting roots, bark, logs, or driftwood that might become wonderful woodcarvings!

– Bob Block

All carvings shown have been featured in Chip Chats magazine of the National Wood Carvers Association.

