

Tom Hirata

I grew up in New Jersey. As a teen my parents took me to the studio of George Nakashima. I marveled at the slabs of wood and his furniture. We still have a Nakashima table in our family.

I began my art career as an illustrator in New York City after two years of study at the Art Center College of Design in California and 3 years of life drawing and painting at the Art Students League of New York. I transitioned to fine art as a photorealist oil painter of landscapes and animals. My paintings have been selected for 16 state Duck stamps, including the first of State NJ and the first of State CT. The sale of my originals and prints has raised over 3 million dollars for conservation. My work has been shown in the Smithsonian as part of the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Bird Art world tour and has been exhibited five times at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Museum Show of the top 100 bird art pieces in the world. Other showings of my work include: the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences, the Denver Museum of Natural History, the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Southern Alleghenies Art Museum. My original works of art have been purchased by art collectors in 17 countries. These paintings are in private and corporate collections.

After 30 years making a living as a painter, I wanted to explore working in different media. My etchings (zinc plate on hand made papers) and sculptures were mixed media: wood, oil, acrylic and epoxy. That work was influenced by Native American and Asian sculptures and designs. The most recent body of work is mostly wood. Other materials include: epoxy, metal, stone, leather, raffia and found objects.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Decades of composing paintings and creating sculptures is the foundation of my wood work. I am influenced by the work of George Nakashima. I love the strong simplicity of Eastern and Western architecture: particularly Frank Lloyd Wright designs.

Working with wood creates new and exciting challenges, technically and artistically. There is a freedom in creating a piece when the function is secondary. There is a challenge in creating something that is functional, structurally sound and artistic. I use several species of wood from North, Central and South America and Africa. These species are my palette. How to combine them is an exciting challenge. I am drawn to the wood grain irregularities that only Nature can create. Wormholes, bark texture, spalting, knots and/or color variations are integral in determining the final creation. Much of the wood I use is reclaimed or repurposed from pallets, scraps from other craftsmen, neighbors' trees and found objects. I also use gold and copper foil, turquoise, epoxy and faux finishes.

This body of work is intended to be touched. My boxes should be opened. The wood should be appreciated for its characteristics. The work should be viewed from different angles. I hope you enjoy it as much as I enjoyed creating it.