

Gustav Reyes A Bent for Wood

BY ANDREA DINOTO

A BRACELET SPIRALS around the wrist like a bit of ribbon; a necklace tumbles in airy, interlocking hoops; a slim wedding band emits an intriguing gleam.

Gustav Reyes achieves these dramatic and subtle effects with the most stalwart of materials: wood. Reyes employs a proprietary process that melds traditional

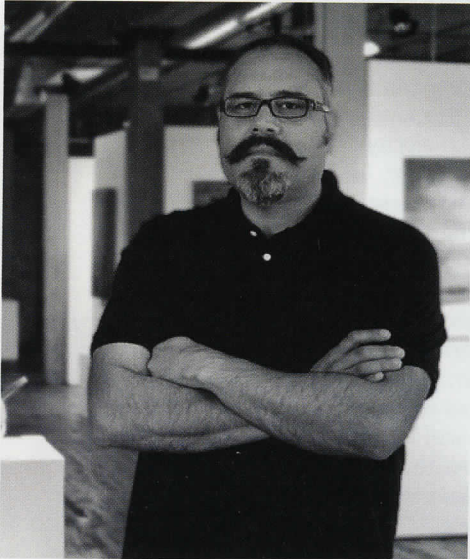
woodworking techniques with the steam bending and laminating technology associated with bentwood furniture manufacture. A cabinet maker by trade, Reyes turned exclusively to jewelry in 2005, the day his wife Juanita—who has metal allergies—asked if he could make her a ring of wood. Reyes understood that if he drilled a hole in a piece of wood it would collapse, but if the wood were thin enough and he could roll it he'd get a solid structure. In half an hour he'd made a ring that would become the prototype for his unique line of laminate

and carved jewelry in woods from common to exotic to found.

Reyes uses salvaged woods from a variety of sources: craftsmen friends, industrial offcuts, even sentimental items such as

recycled musical instruments or a child's old baseball bat. For his popular "Organic Coil" spiral bracelets, he uses FSC wood from controlled forestation, "so there is an ethical approach to its harvesting," he explains. Reyes exhibits regularly at ACC and other shows and through select galleries. Although he makes every piece himself (prices range from \$120 for bracelets and earrings to about \$3,000 for one-of-a-kind pieces), he employs three studio assistants and two people to help with media, bookkeeping, website design and customer relations. While he invests in some paid advertising, his most valuable contacts come, he says, through direct interaction with customers, curators, and gallery people whom he meets largely through shows.

Born of a Puerto Rican father who fought as a Marine in the Korean War, and a Mexican mother who immigrated to the States as a teenager, Reyes was raised in Chicago, where he lives with his wife and two sons and maintains a studio/workshop. His father, a carpenter, who died when Reyes was 11, made precious-metal jewelry as a hobby. "I often accompanied him to workshops he attended to learn the craft of jewelry making," Reyes recalls, which awakened in him "a desire to create." Reyes attended art school at the Art Institute of Chicago, and also the Chicago Bauhaus Academy where he says he developed a strong understanding of and appreciation for architecture and the finer aspects of woodworking. After turning to jewelry,



Artist Gustav Reyes, 2010



Rings, 2009
oak; bog wood with
birch liner



Organic Coil (bracelet), 2010
cherry wood
3 x 3 x 3"



After turning to jewelry, Reyes began to view trees, the source of his material, as “gems of nature.”

Reyes began to view trees, the source of his material, as “gems of nature... part of our evolution, something we accept and that society puts in its place.” Reyes’s modernist sensibility, coupled with his skill with laminate technology (view the process at: <http://vimeo.com/32805862>) enables him to create lightweight but incredibly strong forms—circles, hoops and arcs—destined to become rings, necklaces, brooches, pendants, and in a new twist, lamps. One of his recent bold, sculptural rings features a base of bog oak supporting a sculpted top of red wood and ebony (reclaimed from a bass violin) set with freshwater pearl. For durability, all of Reyes’s pieces are finished with a light coating of beeswax, which, he says, affords a softly glowing patina plus “good protection”; although, he cautions, wood jewelry should never be immersed in water.

Reyes distinguishes between his limited-edition GR Art Jewelry line, that sells best to more mature collectors, and his phenomenally successful production line of wedding bands called Simply

Wood Rings, which has tapped a niche market among young people “comfortable with spending money on the Internet.” (He estimates that he has produced more than 4,000 wedding rings.) In fact, says Reyes, the Internet accounts for 80 percent of his sales, especially among ecologically minded customers looking for jewelry made from sustainably obtained materials, “people very conscious of not using metal bands or diamonds.” A Reyes wedding band often features an inlay of semiprecious stones—turquoise, amethyst, mother of pearl from crushed buttons—to provide color and textural contrast to his earth-toned, satin-finished woods. Reyes’s philosophy about wood and the ephemeral nature of life itself might be summed up in the name he’s given to his bestselling wedding band design: Love is Now. Set with a faceted moissanite, a synthetic diamond, the ring can be made in a variety of woods. “The material will go back into the earth eventually,” Reyes explains, “so if you don’t cherish it now, you won’t have it forever.” But trees have feelings, too. As Reyes’s tag line reads for Simply Wood Rings, “Let the tree hug you!”

Andrea DiNoto is a New-York based writer on arts and design.

Gustav Reyes’ booth at the ACC Baltimore show, February 2012

Furthermore:

www.gustavreyes.com
www.simplywoodrings.com