

Out on a Limb Contemporary Wood Jewelry

This exhibition features the work of emerging and established artists that use wood as the primary medium for jewelry and adornment. Long utilized in wearable objects, wood immediately connects the body to the natural landscape. This versatile material offers compelling color, pattern, and texture as well as a pliable surface. Those whose works are featured in this exhibition are drawn to wood for both conceptual and aesthetic reasons. Whether carving, painting, appropriating, or otherwise manipulating, they stretch the boundaries of how we understand a familiar material.



Gustav Reyes
Organic Coil (Limited Edition), 2010, Walnut
3 1/2 x 3 1/4 x 1 inches
Collection of the Artist
Photo: Erin Beckman

Wood's historical uses, its flexibility as a surface, and its connection to so many elements of our environment and experience (e.g. trees, furniture, homes, and more), make it a rich substance for a variety of material and metaphorical investigations. Several artists, such as **Sharon Church**, **Gustav Reyes**, **Edgar Mosa**, **Christine Brandt**, **Sukyo Jang**, and **Tina Rath** respond to the immediate connection wood makes to the larger natural world.

Using boxwoods and ebony in combination with diamonds, dye, and other media, **Sharon Church** creates exquisitely carved flowers, pods, seeds, animals, and leaves that metaphorically address ideas of abundance and life cycles. In Church's words, they "embody a symbolic language of growth and decay, death and renewal." Similarly connecting nature to concepts of transience and revitalization,

Gustav Reyes uses spare amounts of wood as calligraphic line. Understanding wood as an "intrinsic part of our history as humans," Reyes creates brooches, neckpieces, bracelets, and rings in the form of circles, squares, and spirals that decorate or surround parts of the body.

Edgar Mosa responds to wood as an embodiment of time. He describes it as a measuring unit and one of the substances that, in his words, "encapsulate a rite of passage in their constitution." His neckpieces—shaped hunks of tree bark sometimes juxtaposed with delicate pearl or shell—are bold gestures finessed through design choices yet still revealing an intuitive connection. The achingly powerful rings of **Christine Brandt** also resonate with a raw natural quality. Needing to be "surrounded by nature and the beautiful objects found within it," Brandt combines carved exotic woods with dense clusters of semi-precious gemstones and minerals, such as hematite and azurite. Not only does the juxtaposition of smooth wood and rough mineral create visual drama, but these particular combinations somehow exude luxury and decadence. **Sukyo Jang** achieves a cadence between materials as well, opting for a palette that incorporates a light/dark contrast as silver or gold-plating shimmers next to Macassar ebony. Inspired by times of the day and night, weather conditions, and environmental factors, Jang's neckpieces are moments in time connecting the body to the land.

Interested in the tactile and visceral quality of materials, **Tina Rath** explores the significance of adornment as well as the power, order, and abundance of the natural landscape. She uses wood, metals, furs, suede, silk, ivory, minerals, and pearls to create brooches that are incorporated here into an installation where they read as mosses, lichens, and other natural elements.



Edgar Mosa
The Hours, 2010, Wood
12 x 12 x 3 inches
Courtesy Gallerie Louise Smit,
Amsterdam, Netherlands
Photo: Edgar Mosa

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Julia Harrison
Choros, 2008-2009
 Holly, sterling silver, magnets, epoxy, and wax
 18 3/4 x 1 x 3/4 inches
 Collection of the Artist
 Photo: Julia Harrison

Wood is warm. Or, perhaps more appropriately stated, it can feel warm to the touch. The pattern of wood grain can be as varied as skin. These qualities conceptually connect wood to the human body. **Daniel DiCaprio**, **Julia Harrison**, and **Bruce Metcalf** play with this idea both directly and indirectly. **Daniel DiCaprio** creates brooches, rings, and small sculptures that hint at bodily forms. In his own words, one aspect of his work is “vaguely biological, referencing plant or animal anatomy and invoking a connection with the primitive.” **Julia Harrison** carves human bodies or parts of bodies. Her work—brooches of lips or the small of a back, a necklace of beads constructed as classical statues—is humorous, engaging, and a metaphorical doubling of the body that is wearing the actual piece of adornment. **Bruce Metcalf** obliquely references the human body. His address of sensuality comes through over-sized plant forms, stimulating color, and provocative surfaces. Metcalf connects wood to ancient traditions of adornment and jewelry’s long-standing connection to the body and concepts of seduction.

Significantly, many of these artists are also creating jewelry and adornment that addresses how such objects function in a social, cultural, and even linguistic context. For example, wood can subvert the idea of being precious while still playing with the idea of preciousness. **Michael Dale Bernard**, using over 75% post-consumer recycled material—creates what he describes as “Wood Be Diamonds.” Brightly-colored wooden “gems” allude to abundance and pleasure—they are über-gemstones that pay homage to high-value jewelry while simultaneously slyly questioning how and why we value what we do.

Julia Turner is interested in exploring shape, idea, and material—seeing jewelry on a parallel with language. Her pendants, rings, and brooches, of colored, geometric, and abstracted form utilize wood’s ability to simultaneously suggest the material they are and read as something else—i.e. Turner’s clusters of wooden blocks become beads or draping gemstones, while still being recognizable as chunks of colored wood.

Liv Blavarp, **Gillion Carrara**, **Flora Vagi**, and **Julia Walter** investigate wood and jewelry via process and design—their explorations extend through the process of making to the interaction between jewelry and the body. Inspired by native Norwegian traditions and African art, **Liv Blavarp** creates sinuous, biomorphic neckpieces that are both familiar and unfamiliar. While noticeable visual statements, Blavarp’s carved and dyed wood neckpieces are smooth and pleasing on the form of the body. Influenced by both architecture and nature, **Gillion Carrara** creates wood rings and bracelet cuffs characterized by a streamlined sense of design. Carrara often combines natural and industrial associations, favoring materials that “evoke specific responses based on cultural and psychological associations.”

Flora Vagi uses ebony and oak in an exploratory way—shaping the materials so that they once again recall natural forms, such as leaves or flowers. Vagi uses acrylic paint or a cold enamel process to saturate her evocative neckpieces, brooches, rings, and bracelets with intense color. **Julia Walter’s** approach to working with wood also emphasizes an intuitive, visceral connection. She cuts large pieces quickly, soaks them in dye, and attempts to allow the process of creation to continue uninterrupted. Her brooches read as small yet important markers of time and place.



Flora Vagi
Blooming Series:
Papavero II Brooch, 2009
 Oak, enamel, and steel
 2 3/4 inches diameter
 Collection of the Artist
 Photo: Flora Vagi