



Santa Ana Wind # W-3, 2000, split & chopped found wood, maple wood, 39" x 74" x 15".

ESSENCE AND MATERIALS

Works by Minoru Ohira

Curated by George Kinghorn,
Deputy Director and Chief Curator,
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With a few simple words – “with nature always” – Minoru Ohira reveals the essence of his works of art, and above all, insight into a life that embraces a deep reverence and fascination with the natural world. The Japanese-born artist’s elegant sculptures are inspired primarily by subjects observed in nature. The artist transforms raw materials, primarily wood salvaged from construction sites and roadside discards, into a dynamic assortment of meticulously crafted seductive forms. These sculptures are often subtle abstractions of plant life, seeds and the human figure.

The rounded and curvilinear sculptural works, some more than eight feet in length, exhibit a range of highly polished to jagged, rough surfaces. Works such as *Santa Ana Wind #W-3*, with its scale-like textured skin, are constructed by incorporating more

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than a thousand chips of redwood and Douglas fir that are individually glued to a formed wooden armature. Central to understanding these works is the artist's steadfast commitment to traditional woodworking techniques and a deep respect for the inherent nature of materials. In fact, *Santa Ana Wind #W-3*, like many of Minoru's sculptures are created not by the use of power tools, but by his painstaking use of Japanese hand saws and hatchets.

In works such as *Two Eggs # M-1* the artist's juxtaposition of synthetic and natural materials provides a striking contrast of surfaces and coloration. The top section of the work is created in fiberglass resin that is sprayed with successive coats of paint and then carefully sanded and polished to render a variegated pattern of colors and an ultra smooth surface. The bottom element is created with laminated strips of white oak applied to a hollow wooden formed armature. The $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick white oak strips are relatively easy to bend and are held into place by staples until the glue has fully dried. The layering of the wooden strips, whose look is inspired by Japanese bamboo basket making, creates a beautiful tactile surface that is enhanced by the natural tones and subtle imperfections of the wood.

In *Prayer* and *Dancer #2*, Ohira's forms more clearly relate to the figure. The fractured limbs in *Dancer #2* are created by applying hand-cut strips of slate to a wooden form. The weighty stance of the two abstracted legs is clearly grounded in the earth. *Prayer*, a sculpture that hangs on the wall, recalls the curvy bends of an elephant's trunk or an abstraction of a human arm.

The artist received little formal training in woodworking and acquired much of his skills as a teenager assisting his uncle who was a carpenter. Ohira's art school experience was rooted in very traditional and academic approaches to sculpture. The artist recalls the invigorating and pivotal experience of viewing contemporary exhibitions in Tokyo. It was there that he encountered works by Brancusi and other European sculptors. These works were liberating and encouraged the artists to investigate new creative approaches including abstraction and a more expansive view of materials and processes.

Ohira was born in 1950 at Niigata, Japan. After receiving his Master of Fine Arts degree at Tokyo National University of the Arts he relocated for a brief period to Mexico City. In 1982, the artist moved to Los Angeles where he has created his works in the same studio for more than twenty years.

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Above » *Dancer # 2*,
1997, slate on wood, steel base, 49" x 26" x 17"

Below » *Two Eggs # M-1*, 2002,
split found wood, fiber glass resin, pigment on wood form,
30" x 28" x 29"

