

Michael Ferris

Artist's Statement

The sculptures I create are portraits of my friends and family members. Constructed from reclaimed wood and informed by my own Middle-Eastern heritage, my work is surfaced with a reclaimed wood mosaic process inspired by the wood intarsia technique developed in Damascus Syria. My approach to this historical process involves the reclaiming of discarded wood, a method informed by my environmental concerns. My father was Lebanese Maronite. Throughout my life I have been exposed to many aspects of his heritage, the most influential being two inlaid Middle-Eastern backgammon tables that were in my childhood home in Chicago. These tables were a constant source of fascination for me. When I began making wood sculpture over twenty-five years ago, I found I was compelled by the desire to cover my sculpture with an overlay of wood mosaic-like pieces. I now realize that my inclination to inlay is a result of being exposed throughout my life to those Middle Eastern tables. I feel every sculpture I make personally connects me to my father and my heritage. My early work had an Outsider Art aesthetic. As my work developed over the years, I became interested in capturing a more naturalistic quality. When I am working on a piece, a dialog naturally develops between the sculpture's form and its complex patterned surface. I become interested in finding balance between these two realms. As the sculpting process unfolds, I focus on synthesizing the numerous visual complexities of a piece in accordance with a feeling that exists within myself. My intent is to imbue the portrait with a fully realized and personal human presence. With my current work, I am continuing with my interest in creating portraits with a more naturalistic form and presence. Every portrait sculpture I create is meant to honor the friends and family who have been important to me in my life.

I create many drawings in connection with each of my sculptures. I work on these drawings as the sculptural process progresses and develops, until completion. Each drawing has a different purpose and is connected to a specific stage of the sculpture's construction. Initially these drawings take the form of straight portraits. At this stage, issues of likeness, proportion and mood are most important. As the sculpture making process unfolds, the drawings serve to work out ideas connected directly to the 3-dimensional piece such as pattern, form, scale, and concept.