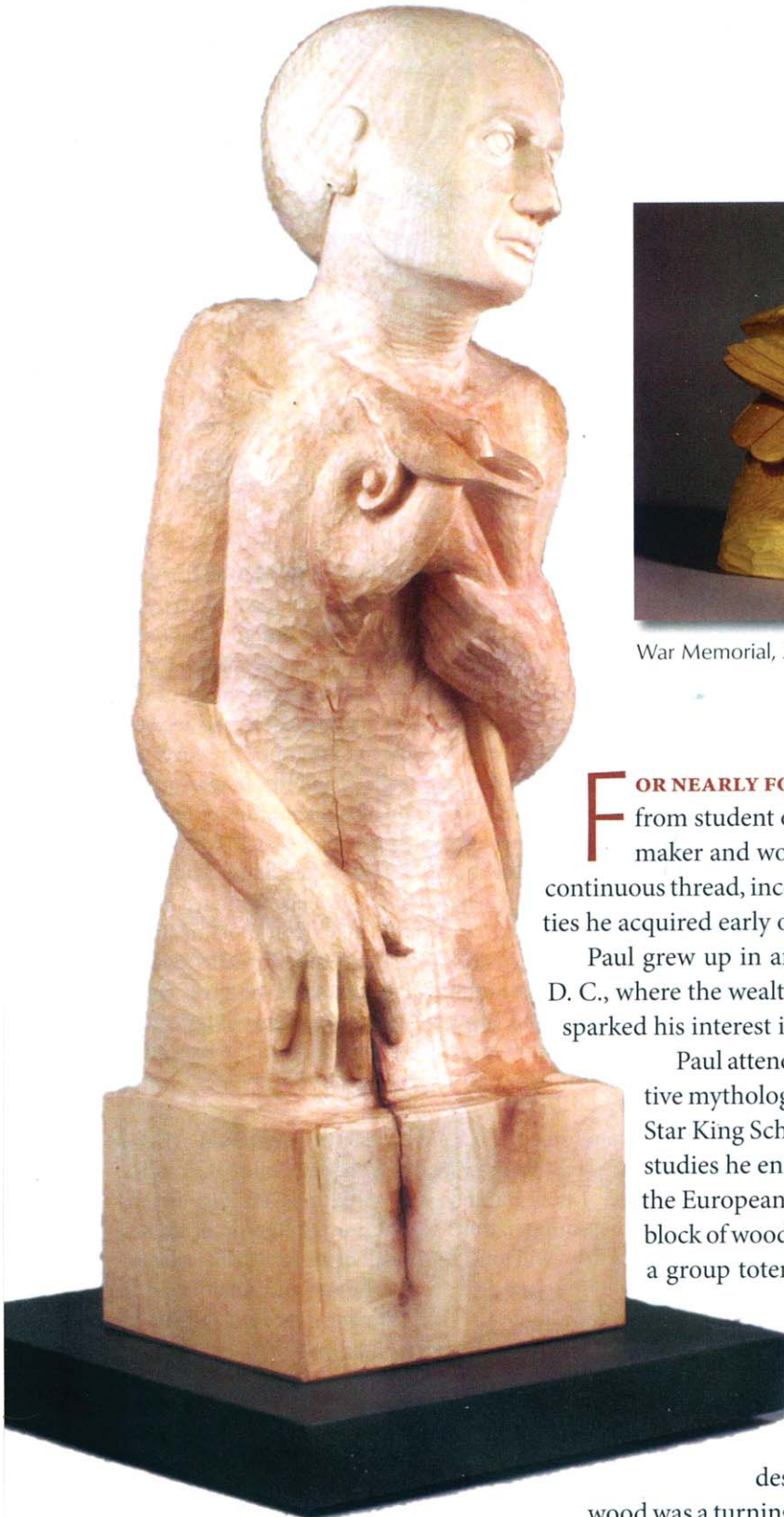


PAUL REIBER: MYTHMAKER IN WOOD



Man with Calla, 25" x 6" x 6",
California bay laurel. Photos: Paul Reiber



War Memorial, 23" x 12" x 8", California nutmeg.

By Peggy Templer

FOR NEARLY FORTY YEARS Paul Reiber has been on a journey, evolving from student of Greek and mythology to wood carver, fine furniture maker and wood sculptor. All along the way his work has revealed a continuous thread, incorporating and refining the ideas, designs and sensibilities he acquired early on.

Paul grew up in an "artistic/intellectual milieu" outside of Washington, D. C., where the wealth of museums and galleries, as well as trips to Europe, sparked his interest in art, particularly sculpture.

Paul attended Boston University and studied Greek and comparative mythology. In the early 1970s, he came to the Bay Area to attend Star King School for Religious Leadership. As part of his theological studies he enrolled in a class in Totems taught by a Jesuit trained in the European tradition of woodcarving. The teacher brought a large block of wood into the classroom and worked with the class to identify a group totem and realize it in wood. The challenge of translating his intellectual understanding of a theological concept into a physical form captivated Paul. By this time Paul had realized that religious leadership was "not his thing," but the wood carving aspect of the Totems class definitely was. It played right into his lifelong desire to be working with his hands. This introduction to wood was a turning point in his development as an artist. Although he had

been drawing and painting since childhood, until then he had not really understood the great power that lies in "Making."

When the College of the Redwoods School of Fine Woodworking announced that it would open in 1980, Paul was living in Anchor Bay. Thinking the program would help with his carving, Paul applied and was accepted for the year-long program. The program's impact on him was profound. "James Krenov taught us about the importance and meaning of hand work, and about the attitude of the artist toward his work. The program gave me a more hands and eyes approach to my own intellectually based aesthetic."

After graduating in the spring of 1981, Paul worked for a year at the Gualala-based studio of David Starry Sheets. He then moved back to Fort Bragg and opened the first of several shops in the Fort Bragg area before building his own studio in Caspar. Doing a mix of speculative work and commissions, he developed his carving skills and incorporated them into his furniture work. In 1991, he had his first solo exhibit at Bill Zimmer's Gallery Fair in Mendocino featuring "The Goddess Series," sculptural chairs based on a variety of Goddess images. During the 1990s his work was shown nationally. He was invited to join the Baulines Craft Guild and he helped found the Mendocino Furniture Makers Association.

After September 11, Paul says, "the financial bottom dropped out of the studio furniture world." Paul used this opportunity and responded by moving away from making functional furniture and exploring non-functional sculptural

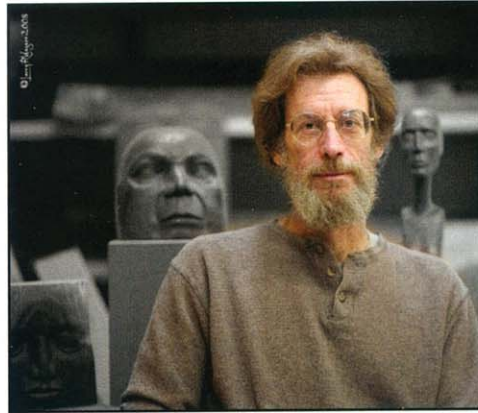


Photo: Larry Wagner

wood, all he has studied and done before, and his relationship with this individual piece of wood. His process – which he refers to as a "spiritual practice" – begins with a sketch and a piece of wood, working with his vision and in dialogue with the wood's characteristics until he has a fairly good likeness of his vision. Then he creates a clay model

of this image. Next he begins to carve the wood, imagining the figure emerging from the inside out, concentrating on what it feels like for the figure to assume a particular posture and orientation, rather than what it looks like. Describing his approach to his medium, Paul uses the analogy of driving down a fog-enshrouded highway, as shapes slowly emerge here and there, and eventually coming into the light. His work is a product of his personal process. "What truly matters to me is the process of making art. It is certainly my hope that my work will resonate with others and trigger little harmonies, but that is not the focal point of my artistic concern."

Throughout his career Paul has created both speculative work for his own pleasure and commissioned pieces. "I particularly enjoy working with a client to identify images that have potency to the client and



Fish Bench, 65" x 48" x 14", walnut, basswood, ash, pigments, gold leaf. Photo: Jay Odee

incorporating them into the piece being made, whether this be a headboard, a church door, a domestic sculpture or an urn for cremated ashes." Paul currently accepts a wide range of commissions for sculptural pieces including functional art such as headboards, mantels, and doors.

Paul's work shows a wide range of influences. "I am drawn to art that addresses issues of the soul. This can equally be the exotic intensity of tribal art or the familiar magnificence of Michelangelo. The work of the German sculptor Ernst Barlach and the American Leonard Baskin have helped me see unpainted wood as a powerful sculptural medium." He is particularly drawn to work with a narrative quality, generally speaking to the internal relationship between people and the natural world. His unique, compelling figures and animals all strive to invoke narrative content.

Paul has shown his work at the Mendocino Art Center, and will do so again in December, where his work will be featured as part of an exhibition of handcrafted wooden toys. His toys are playful and whimsical and embody that distinctive Paul Reiber aesthetic.

Paul teaches woodcarving through the Fine Woodworking Program in Fort Bragg, at Anderson Ranch in Aspen, Colorado, and in private classes. His work can be seen on the Mendocino Coast Furnituremakers Web site at www.mendocinofurniture.com.



Woman and Owl, 25" x 11" x 7", walnut. Photo: Paul Reiber

THE WOODEN TOY SHOW

*Handmade wooden toys by the Mendocino Coast Furniture Makers
Nichols Gallery, Mendocino Art Center, December 1-31, 2011*

Mendocino Coast Furniture Makers will be hosting their third annual wooden toy show this December. The show is inspired by the Christmas bazaars that are held in Northern Europe during this time of year, when families come in from the cold to have something good to eat, warm to drink and to purchase beautiful handmade gifts. Because children have an early sense of what is finely made, these toy makers believe that finely made things should not be limited to adults. Like knowing where their food comes from, children should know who makes their toys.

As this group of furniture makers has now been working on this project for three years, the inventory is expanding. There are puzzles (for the young and old), educational games, rocking horses and pull toys that flap and clack as they are pulled along. The sound of the wooden clack feeds the soul and the feel and smell of smooth wood satisfies the senses. Many of

the toys are made with local woods and inspired by local themes.

Founded in 1997, the Furniture Makers Association is dedicated to the preservation and evolution of the fine art of furniture making and now toy making. In their non-holiday life, they specialize in custom-designed, one-of-a-kind pieces in both traditional and contemporary styles. Using the finest materials and proven hand techniques, they provide customers with furniture designs that enhance their homes' interiors. You can contact individual members to purchase an existing piece or commission a design that will be uniquely yours. Members include Taimi Barty, Michael Burns, Michael Carroll, Les Cizek, Ken Davis, Stefan Furrer, Graham Gilbertson, Kerry Marshall, Paul Reiber, Robert Sanderson, Greg Smith, Dan Stalzer and Judy Tarbell.



Articulated toys by Paul Reiber