

**James Haizlett
Artist Statement
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I have been intimately involved with wood for over twenty years. Most of that time was spent in utilitarian pursuits, like cutting down trees with a chainsaw, splitting the blocks with an axe, and burning the wood in the woodstove to keep warm during the winter. Another good portion of that time was spent nailing boards together for a living, making things like bathrooms, kitchens, additions, and my own home. More recently, I have come to view wood in a different way. While walking along Buffalo Creek on our family farm near Bethany, West Virginia, I came upon a 100-foot tall sycamore tree that came down during the Katrina flood. The spread of the roots from the tree stood over 12 feet high. I sat on the trunk of the tree for a while, studying the interesting tangles that made up the root ball. I began to see shapes in the roots... 'creatures' that seemed to be waiting for someone to let them out. I walked back to the house, and turned right back around with a small handsaw, a hatchet, and a pry bar. For the next few days I dug dirt out of the root ball and sawed out chunks of the exposed roots, not knowing for sure what I would do with them. I carted them back up to the barn, and began carving and sanding.

From that beginning, I caught the bug to keep trying new techniques, types of wood, and concepts. I graduated from roots to downed trees that I found on the farm. I am fortunate to have a nice supply of great hardwoods such as black cherry, black walnut, shagbark hickory, sugar maple, elm, and sycamore. I built a carving shed on the back of the barn, and have filled it with tools and chunks of potential creations.

If I had to sum up what I do in a few words, it would be "chasing the grain." I am selective in the pieces of wood that I work with. The more twisted and tension-filled the raw material is, the better. I don't begin with a pre-conceived idea of what I will be making out of the material. I first observe the block of wood from many different angles and look for patterns, textures, and the flow of the grain. Hardwoods contain so much natural beauty and distinctiveness that I see it as my job to simply reveal the inner beauty that the Creator placed there in the first place. As such, most of my sculpture does not take on the form of humans, or animals, or plants, unless the raw material seems to be inclined to become those things. I'm chasing the grain... and most of the time I'm pleasantly surprised by what I find inside.