

Body talk

Gina Tabasso explains how the work of American artist
Lyle Jamieson has found a new audience

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DON RUJT



Dance, maple burl

Lyle Jamieson of Traverse City, Michigan, is a wood sculptor and instructor who has created a niche for himself by not only being the only woodworker producing sculptures by using a special process, but also by positioning himself in the cosmetic surgery market.

Art positively affects a surgeon's practice by making a powerful first impression on the patient. It demonstrates to the patient that the

surgeon has a special appreciation of the human form and is interested in creating a warm, inviting environment.

Lyle says that his sculptures "bridge a social stigma of nudity and exposing the human body. They are a tasteful way of opening up the subject without actually talking about it and they can be conversation pieces that break the ice."

They also create a connection between the doctor and patient by showing that the surgeon is cultured and a real person too, he says. Art is an expression of personality. This promotes trust and shows vulnerability.

Lyle's sculptures are said to be a way for the surgeon to remove emphasis from the hospital-like setting and improve the doctor-

patient relationship by creating a more comfortable environment.

The son of a pattern-maker in Detroit, Lyle became involved in woodworking at an early age. Mentored by his father, he learned the intricacies of the material. "The wood has drawn me all my life," he explains.

Multi-axis approach

In 1988, Lyle focussed his attention on turning and has developed a style that is both innovative in design and technically challenging. He began his work with traditional, single-axis, round vessels and bowls, before his creativity and attraction to the human form caused him to turn his attention to the more difficult multi-axis approach required by a

complex, yet delicate subject. "The challenge was how am I going to hang onto this piece of wood and turn it at the same time," he says.

He therefore developed a tool system for hollow form turning that allows him to ergonomically guide the cutter into the vessel. He has developed his skill through a series of symposiums and workshops. With no academic background in art, he learned muscle contour and anatomy, and then began to increase his repertoire with creative and expressive design elements.

Lyle's method of preparing the material involves a three-month process of taking green wood and



Lyle Jamieson with Lady Liberty



Indulgence, spalted maple burl

Tale of Footsteps, curly maple



Treasure, elm



Celebration



drying it, then thinning and hollowing the vessels while stabilising the wood to prevent it from cracking. He believes there is an obvious parallel between sculpting and cosmetic surgery, since both artists and surgeons are sculptors and creative.

He knew of an annual cosmetic surgery conference, and contacted the contracting and promotions company for the trade show's exhibitors.

His proposal was presented to a five-doctor panel and he was duly given room to display his work at The American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons show in Philadelphia in 2004. He describes this as "the start of the snowball rolling down the hill."

His work was well received as the surgeons appreciated art. It also provided them with the opportunity to "take a break from the technical world."

Enhancing appearance

When asked what he does for the doctor through his work, Lyle replies, "I make them look good and increase their image."

By displaying art, a doctor enhances the appearance of the office, and, since artist and physician work on the human figure, the connection is even stronger. "Wood as an art form is a warm, inviting, sensuous, living medium."

A doctor who bought one of his sculptures in Philadelphia kept it in

his inner office where he conducts initial consultations, especially with breast implant patients. He believes the sculpture assists him in calming their fears by creating a relaxed environment.

Stories are a large part of the creation and enjoyment of art, because people relate to stories. "When someone buys one of my pieces, they buy not only the piece of art but the story," Lyle offers.

The lifestyle of the artist and how he crafts the piece are integral. In the same human tradition, a patient is not only buying the services of a physician, but the whole package. The physician's personality, office environment and reputation contribute to patient satisfaction. Lyle also shared a story of a friend who wrote a poem entitled *The Promise* inspired by one of his sculptures.

It spoke of security, love, comfort and the promise of good things, which is what the female form represents.

Lyle says he enjoys what he does every day. Part of that enjoyment is in "establishing a connection with those who view my work so that they may also share in the journey."

He says there is something beautiful to be captured in every tree and in every woman. His work reflects this innate beauty. ■

Diva, maple burl

