

Carved Leaf Tutorial - by Jim Kelso

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18 years ago I met the Japanese artist Kodo Okuda at the Netsuke Society convention in Miami. As well as carving amazing netsuke I became aware of a series of leaf carvings he had done in lacquered Ivory. I was later able to handle one and was just flabbergasted at the technique and artistry. Having done woodcarving myself I naturally went over in my mind what I thought the process would be to produce a piece like that in wood and pondered trying it. I think mostly what kept me from trying it was the thought that people would say, "Oh Kodo did that already", or something like that.

Well, since that time the thought of trying it has stayed with me like a sheep-dog and my love for fallen and decaying leaves has only increased so I decided to give it a go. I also came to realize that a wood piece would be very different than an ivory one and have it's own set of unique qualities, such as color, and whatever unique features I could bring to it as an artist.



I'm going to start by posting photos of one of Kodo's leaves® in lacquered ivory and also the real leaf (L) I used as a model.



Well here's the real leaf I used as a model. I'm going to have to review how to post multiple images.



Here's the leaf model and my pencil drawing of a top and side profile. I stretched the design out somewhat just to make it less compact.



This shows the top and side profile templates positioned on the Ebony piece I chose. I don't know exactly what specie this is. Some think it is Macassar which it may be, but it looks different than most Macassar I've seen. It may be of Philippine origin. It has beautiful caramel marbling and striping. I've had a couple of log sections for nearly 30 years, and it came across country with me.



This shows the initial band-sawing of the profile from top to bottom. I spent a lot of time trying to make the most of the coloring. At some point you just have to jump.



Here I've sawn the side profile. Also shows the off-cuts. My best guesses seem to have worked OK for the color.



Beginning the shaping. After the band-sawing, about 95% of the work was done with burs. I did some filing, scraping and knife work which I'll show later.



A little more shaping with the center vein being defined. Hi Don! Anyone please jump in with questions or comments at any time.



This shows further shaping with the beginnings of veins showing.



Further vein definition. Also note the color distribution which worked out nicely.



As the outside became more defined I began work on the inside. From this point it was real back and forth between the inside and the outside with the outside taking the lead.



At this point I wanted to work out my system for forming the veins and the final texture, to be able to proceed with some confidence in the way things would look at the end. I rough formed the veins with a bur and filed the top edges smooth with a file and sandpaper. I could then carefully work up those polished tops with more bur work. The tops of the veins end up being a thin polished line contrasting with the highly textured surface. This ended up being a good system, allowing for changes if I wanted or in the case of slip-ups.



Well here we are two weeks later. Longer finishing time (no kidding) than expected, making a display stand and the photography have eaten up the time. I've decided to show a few more shots in progress as hopefully it will be helpful in some way. Here is a shot of the deepening/thinning.



This shows a special long-shank 1/4" round burr that I used to get into the deeper recesses. I ran it at very low speed and wore a glove (me and Michael) so I could let the shank run through my fingers. Grabbing was a problem, but as things went along, I noticed where it was likely and took special care in those areas.



As the thinning went along, I made some depth-gauge holes in areas that would be pierced with decay later. I put these in strategic spots that helped me give it a fairly uniform thickness.



This shows the tip rolled in on itself with thinning progressing.



Showing form and vein refinement and thickness gauge holes.



Coming down the home stretch with most of the thinning done, a lot of the final texture done and some of the decay piercing done.



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It measures about 6.9" (175mm) long by an average 2"(50mm) wide by 1.75"(45mm) at the highest point off the table. Here's another shot showing two views.