

Red Lily (a Teaser) by Janel Jacobson

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5.25 inches or 13.5 cm in length. Boxwood (perhaps English)

It is amazing how slowly the detail work goes! Over eight hours yesterday, completing the veining-whatever of the lily petals and just the 18 toes of the frog at the bud opening end. One must tip toe around the wood at this stage or a toe could be sliced off!

It is also very tricky to keep the flow of the form true to the line when it passes beneath the frogs and comes out the other side, to make the petal look like the frog was placed on the bud rather than carved from the same block.

Another tricky thing is lighting the petals and comparing them. Optical struggles with one light source making light/shadow on the petal edge on the right OR the left of the deeper petal's vein. Only one side

shows at a time. Trying to keep all six halves looking like they are related and not carbon copies of one another, while trying to even see them pushed my endurance as the night carving hours progressed.

I've also reached the point where I am wishing I had a few more tools to do the undercutting, around behind underneath in between... I think I would enjoy some study with a tool maker, to learn about what the different metals you metal guys have written about and what each has to offer to a tool, and to learn how to make tools from it.

Now to the bench and for the remainder of toes on the other frog, sanding and contemplating - testing and doing ukibori. That is a lot to hope for one day.

Off to make more dust piles...

I intend to gild the lily this time. I, too, like the fresh look to the piece as it is, but this piece is for a client who expects color.

I've got a shot of the piece that some day I will share with y'all, which, if one or another interpretation clicks, I must insist that it was unintentional though might fit the circumstances! There is also a Japanese interpretation for frogs which harmonizes with the intended arrangement.

That's all for now. The men are away for an overnight and the next 20 hours are all mine! Back to making more dust for the pile. Good fun and humor for your summer weekend, wishes to you all



Ukibori day!

Once the coloration commences, there will be more textures added to the bumps. Two frogs ukibori filled the nearly 11 hour day with sanding and detail care. Phew. Next step, eyes.

Question: (by Doug Sanders) Janel, two questions: When you do ukibori work, how do you stabilize the carving while depressing the wood. The few times I've tried it, I end up holding the punch and carving with one hand and my tack hammer with the other...or do you have enough super human strength to not use a hammer? Secondly with the earlier set of 3 or 4 photos you shared- was the carving at a state of only knife and scraper work, or was there some sanding already done, especially on the lily bud?

Answer: (by Janel) Lily bud fluting must have been cut and scraped, then the lines straightened with a needle file (slight across grain direction), then likely 220 or/and 320 and maybe a little 400 sanding, but likely not much that high yet. Scraping with a good sharp set of tools eliminates using 220 or 320 when done carefully.

Answers to some other questions: (I have more, of course, but will save for after the show. Twenty days and counting down.)



Elmers brand (Tack and Stick?) white putty, kneads and sticks to wood. Quite handy for holding



Deep first compressions, sanded or scraped to half depth, then another round of compressions added.



This goes with the earlier ukibori image posted. This is it, pre-sanding.

As I said, there are more images of this in progress, kind of fun to see, but I'd rather be working on the eyes now. See ya'll later.



Ey-yi-yiy! I'm getting a little looney with the limited movement, hard on the fingers work! A couple of days of this is way enough! At one point in time, around 11 p.m., I saw this little thingy looking back at me, making me laugh, so I gathered the accomplishments together and took a family portrait. If the family and the wood are lucky they might get married tomorrow. Sheesh. Time to snooze and get straightened out. Some nights I got lost between the frogs while working on their feet and toes. It has been an odyssey of navigation throughout the many steps that are done in a necessary order. Rather fun, but must remember to be patient with everything! This is no time to rush or goof this far along!

Question: (by ford hallam) Janel! I've just noticed that you appear to be using an inverted twist drill bit as a punch and are striking the hardened point of the bit with a hammer, ugh! shudder. You bad girl. That's akin to nails scraping down a blackboard for me. Now I'll probably have to teach you how to communicate with metal...., this exactly the kind of thing that keeping women out of workshops avoids. Laughing!

Answer: (by Janel) Laughing! Ford, the hammer and chisel I find are second nature when I pick them up. In the summer of 1983 I was second to the carpenter who helped me build a two story timber frame building (mortise and tenon joints)... another life another time and story. Funny I didn't consider larger sculpture being familiar with such tools! I am quite interested in what it might be like to carve metal, but you haven't much to fear, for a while...anyway. I'll stay away from it like I am resisting trying lathe turning. Knowing me, I would like to do those creative things very much, and must hold in the reins and remain focused with the current work.

Ah ha! Earplugs for Ford? I use what I can find. Being untrained in the metal and jewelers' arts, and an hours drive from a metro area that does not have the sort of store I need anyway, what am I supposed to use? By the time I started needing these tools for carving and details with non-clay materials, travel for training was not possible, having gotten into a family way. Now, college looms not far off for the spud, and pennies are pinched. Apart from that, I'd have to ask someone what

to use, and like men with aversions to maps and manuals, I ask only trusted and few friends for steering in the right direction. Led by the nose almost I wish, because I don't know what to ask a catalog (and what catalogs in the first place) for, and then sense by 2D images how the tools might be used. If I see it/hold it, and can use my imagination then the light bulb goes on and I'm off to work. Now... if you are really offering... I might encourage self reliance with the family and ... hope to achieve another portion of the dream...

Doug, this time, shudder, am trying black nail polish. I'll check back here to see if anyone screams STOP before I inlay the eyes.

Jim, that Elmer's Tack and Stick stuff is quite handy, and a source of play when nothing else is obliging a moment of relief from the rigid materials being worked upon. The eyes brightened up the evening when I was checking for balance between the pupils. It kindled the imagination and I wanted to play longer... Now, off to the bench. Thanks for the smiles and laughs! It all helps.



PS More SCREECH factor: *The other ukibori tools*

(by tsterling) Nail Polish? STOP! (Well, you issued the challenge...)

Or, at least, be warned that lacquer thinner is the solvent used in and for epoxy, and if you are going to inlay the eyes using epoxy, it may dissolve the nail polish. How about model airplane paints instead? Some other netsuke carvers have used this in the past. I won't say who. I use sumi ink, and haven't had any problems once it is thoroughly dry. At least, test the glue/nail polish combination. I also wonder about the light fastness of nail polish, since it's meant for short term use. Just thoughts...

PS Great looking eyes! Although I'm not sure I'd want those critters hiding on my workbench.

(by DFogg) Great series Janel. I agree with Ford though, get yourself a punch or large nail set and dump the drill. At the very least you will ding your hammer and worse case it will blow off a shard and hurt you. Drills are very hard and can shatter under impact. Us metal guys learn the hard way.

(by Janel) Yikes! Thanks for the lesson! I've got lots of pin punches on hand, would that do? Some of my favorite tools are made from them. They are not quite the same as nail punches, I think.



Thanks Tom for the caution about the glue and the nail polish. One, I will test the materials. Two, it will just be a matter of time to remove and replace with sumi. I purchased a bottle of liquid sumi ink a little while back. The color for the eye has a clear medium in it, I should test that with the glue as well.

I am eager to get the eyes in, because then I can do the color. I really like the coloring part, having enjoyed oil painting back in my twenties. I like the smells and the richness and variety of color.



One more shot of the ukibori. The bumps are from the same sort of compressions shown in the above illustration with the hammer and the “fingernails on chalkboard” tool.

Thanks for the input. I like to learn!

(by tsterling) Here’s a thought concerning your pupil problem (I know, dangerous for me to be thinking). You could try mixing the fingernail polish lacquer in with some quick set epoxy and fill the remaining pupil space with that, or even just paint a layer over the existing lacquer. If the lacquer mixes well with the epoxy you’ll have a barrier between the pure lacquer and the pure epoxy. If the lacquer is dissolved some by the colored epoxy, it won’t be noticeable, and once that is dried you can glue the eye in with clean, clear epoxy and not have a colored mess for cleaning up the squeeze out.

Also, for gluing in the stone blades for my knives, I often mix sawdust from the adjacent wood in with the epoxy (after painting all the surfaces with clean, clear epoxy). That does a fair job of disguising any gaps. I wonder if in the future a little epoxy mixed with ebony dust would make a good pupil filler? I occasionally have a little problem getting the sumi I’ve been using to wet the surface of the polished pupil indentation, and colored epoxy would solve that, filling the pupil indentation completely. You might also try mixing epoxy with various paints as well. Just a thought

(by Janel) Great ideas to try, Tom! I’ve got the first test setting up right now. I’ll try to peel it off the amber, slice it and have a look. Dad gave me a binocular microscope that is not quite balanced eyepiece to eye piece, but that might offer an interesting viewpoint. I promise I won’t try to carve using it!

The ebony dust does sound good for the pupil, if it is black enough. I tried mixing a black fabric stain in powder form, but that was lumpy and the powder bits were different colors. Behind the lens, it worked OK though. Not my first choice this time.



Its been a long day, but I've reached the nearly end of the work on this piece. 'scuse the grammar, it is 3 a.m. We've got a day in the city tomorrow (uh, today) and I didn't/couldn't/wouldn't put the coloration on hold. When I have daylight the critical eye will inform me if the piece is garish or good. The lighting for the digital photos, plus the easy white background (white watercolor paper taped together, floor, two sides and a back with the light overhead reflecting off of another piece of paper most of the time) is too white and bounces reflected light off of the piece. I'd rather show you the best color photo, rather than a poor one of the whole piece. When I have time and daylight, I will do the tweeking of color and textures, then let the piece dry. Once dry, gentle buffing over a period of days to bring a luster and good feel to the surface. And, yes, I like the monochrome of the boxwood before coloring, but the work is a commission which expects color. It is not all bad though, and could actually be interesting. We'll see in the daylight.

I just remembered, inlaying all of the eyes was rather nerve wracking! The test with nail polish and five minute epoxy was just fine, the nail polish did not seem to be in trouble. Phew. I got all four eyes right side up and in the right sockets! I gotta do something simple next...



Caution, wet paint! Actually it is already setting up, but can be altered at this stage. I did some touch up after we returned, but must handle it gently. The black photo set up worked very well, and the light were shining directly on the carvings (not much gleam or shine since the pieces have not been buffed yet) from the right, and a mirror reflected a field of light from the left to pop a glint the other frogs eyes a little and add fill. Here they are:

Now what do I do? I've touched some of the wood-in-waiting, but didn't commit to any one piece. I bit with a few tool marks to see what they feel like... two weeks! What is possible?

Happy summer, and a "glad I'm not doing outdoor art fairs anymore." It was HOT today at the Uptown/Metris art fair!

My thanks to you all. Without your patient viewings and encouragements, I would still be waiting to witness the response of someone looking at this piece. It feels very good, and I thank you. I just wish that you could each hold it and answer the questions you have that only touching and turning it around might give you. Sigh.

I have begun another piece and am working on the finish for the dragonfly with figured maple base. Cross your fingers for the finish application. I'm very new at it.

I must have described various ways to create/apply color, but if not here on TCP, then I've typed it and assumed...

I use artist's oil paint, having decided long ago to not use fabric dyes that other carvers of netsuke have learned to use. I like the range of colors that oil paints are capable of, and that there is flexibility with the application. To be sure, it is mostly a surface application, very little soaks into boxwood. I enjoyed using oils long ago while learning to paint in college, and still enjoy them. If you want to delve into details, write to me privately and I'll answer questions.

Thank you all again. It means a great deal to me to read your responses. One needs a pat on the back now and then.