

Robert Budecki: A Passion for Wood Carving



A long-time fascination with the natural beauty of waterfowl led Robert Budecki of Cedarburg into a passion of carving and painting a variety of life-like wild fowl over the past 35 years. Budecki has honed his artistic talent and technical skills studying with world-acclaimed carving artists Pat Godwin, Keith Mueller, Gary Eigenberger and Shaun Minadier at week-long workshops. Budecki works primarily with tupelo wood and paints with acrylic or oil paints. He is known for his attention to detail and accurate renditions of wildfowl as well as for the creative vision presented in his pieces.

Initially Budecki was in awe of the beauty of ducks and the variety of colors, particularly in the drakes (males). Many of his earliest explorations in wild duck carving burned the detailed textures of the feathers into the wood as in Budecki's Canvasback Drake carving at right. Another technique that Budecki employs with his waterfowl is creating a "smoothie." With this technique, a carved bird has a smooth surface that allows for a greater emphasis on enhancing the painting with fine brush strokes, colors, and shadows, making it appear as if each feather was carved. An example of the smoothie technique in Cedarburg Art Museum's *Beauty in Wood* exhibition is the artist's Goldeneye Drake carving.



Oftentimes, carvers need to hollow out the underside of the duck and add appropriate weights so that it can float in a realistic manner in water, like historic decoys. One of Budecki's most coveted awards was a second-place finish at the international Ward World Carving Championship held annually in Ocean City, Maryland. In this competition Budecki's life-size, floating Canvasback Drake was accurately carved, beautifully painted, and floating realistically.



While Bob Budecki has been honored with prestigious, national awards for his detailed, naturalistic renderings of waterfowl, his recent explorations move beyond wild fowl to reveal similar skills in carving and painting songbirds. The more recent smaller subjects allow for new challenges in Budecki's continually evolving talents and expertise. Budecki's Least Bittern carving, shown at left, is a carving of a small heron that reveals his adept execution with birds in a creative setting. In this example, an orchid plant and a butterfly are also hand carved.

Additionally, Budecki finds challenges with subjects of flowers, freshwater fish, and butterfly subjects. Delicate petals and leaves of flowers and diaphanous wings of butterflies seem unsuitable to wood carving, but this Cedarburg artist can transform a solid wood block into delicately undulating floral blooms or fluttering insects. Carving artist Budecki remains committed to forge ahead with personal goals and interests in wood carving, choosing subjects of great interest to him rather than catering to a retail marketplace.