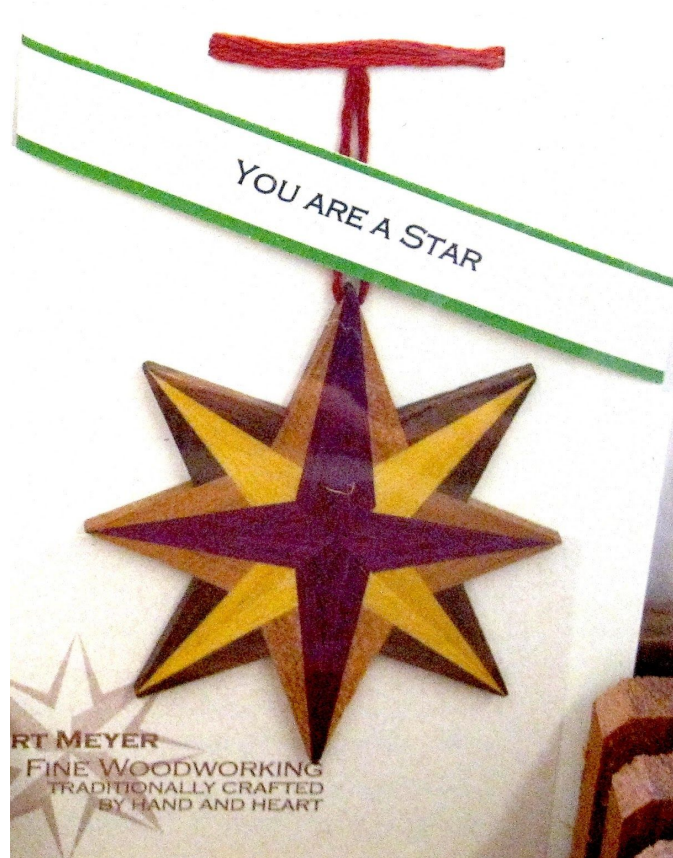


## Kurt Meyer



You've probably looked at Kurt Meyer's star ornaments at the Shelburne Arts Coop and marveled at the close joinery without really grasping how it was possible to create such an intricate design of different woods. You mightn't have guessed that wood could be cut and glued like a cheese log and then sliced off into parquetry stars by the hundreds, rather like making beads from a log of polymer clay.

Kurt Meyer explained this process during my studio visit to his Ashfield woodshop. If you go to his website, you can see the process in a short video as well. Strips of wood are cut and glued and cut again with careful planing of each section before they are glued so that they fit together without a gap. Kurt has been making these ornaments for many years, and still imagines new tricks to boost the efficiency of the process, in which he is self taught. His first star was made in 1990 for his sister as a holiday gift. She was a quilter, and the star was in homage to quilt patterns. It took him four days with an exacto knife to piece it together, but it won first prize in an ornament contest he entered



and he realized it might have sales potential.

Fast forward thirty-seven years, and the process is down to three minutes a star. Kurt is still trying to drive down the waste in this process: sawing each slice loses some material, and he is experimenting with a Japanese method of planing off a very thin amount that can be glued on to a backing, rather than sawing a slice.

Looking at what he has taught himself how to do, and at the timber frame workshop he built himself on the side of an Ashfield hill, I feel pretty confident that he will master this mystery process too. I commented that he must utilize a lot of patience and precision in what he does, but he replied, "Precision for sure, and patience to arrive at the precision, but once you lock things in, you kind of just 'go'... There is not so much patience in the execution."

Kurt studied computers in college, but after he graduated in 1989 he felt he was "done with computers" and learned some cabinetry. After a year, he went back to the computer field, but kept the woodworking on the side. Ten years later he moved from Seattle to Ashfield with his young family and built the timber frame wood shop. He has been self employed since that move, working as both a technical editor in the computer field and a fine woodworker. After the crash in '08, his computer work fell away and he has survived on the woodworking alone.

Remarkably, Kurt finds time to "do it all"— he is a one man band of bookkeeper, marketing professional, and distributor to his network of over 150 wholesale accounts. He invests in doing several trade shows every year.

This year, he took work of a different kind to the Paradise City Art Festival in Northampton. He is premiering what he calls Reflection Spaces at the show, and these represent a new direction away from production work and towards something experimental. "I got really sick last year, for a

weekend, with Lyme disease” explained Kurt. “I started to get sick Friday afternoon before the July 4th weekend. I thought I had some sort of spider bite, three marks on the shoulder, inflamed and painful, but by Monday there were three bulls eyes around them. I was in that state, fevered, in and out of true consciousness, and it hit me that I needed to do this work. It was a flash of insight, the coming together of a lot of different things at once.”

Some of this involved spirituality, and “where I am at in life” and about what kind of satisfaction he wants to get from his work. “The year before that, I realized that I was feeling a lot of anxiety about my work all the time. So I changed my attitude to do more of what interests me at the moment, which was so refreshing, and gave me a lot more energy. So there was a progression, a foundation for what happened on the July 4th weekend.”

He began by making shrine-like containers, places wherein one can place an apple, a scroll, a few words, a blossom, whatever one would like to contemplate.



These little cupboards sometimes had parquetry designs on the doors, and Japanese style roof lines. Recently he was excited to discover that the curve of these roof lines matched exactly with the curve of the slopes of Mt Fuji he found in a magazine photo. These are the initial stages of his reflection spaces project: in the next phase, he has been working on a five foot by eight foot high space designed similar to a pergola. “This is a radical departure for me!” said Kurt. He cut down five pine trees which he has utilized in constructing the structure, and which he also carved into a grouping of rustic figures.

On his website he writes, “One of the initial inspirations for this project was remembering visions of simple shrines by the roadside in Japan, where crude figures represent memories or perhaps spirits to honor. So I always intended in this project to build that sort of outdoor monument and populate it

with a small group of figures, crudely carved and only roughly indicating a human figure.”



Although he plans to show these at Paradise City he says he lets go of commercial expectations regarding work in this series. “Either people like it, or they don’t, but I did what I needed to do making this work,” he commented.

On his website, he reflects quite deeply on the structures he feels drawn towards creating in this new project, asking open-ended questions during these explorations, such as “What is consciousness? Sometimes defined as the ability to take in information and then to disseminate it. Is an ant conscious? Does a stone have consciousness? If a stone sits in the sun all day, and you pick it up, does it transmit information about the warmth it has experienced this day? What does the rock tell you about its experience over eons?”

Check out Kurt’s website to learn more about his work and the Reflection Spaces project.

[www.kurtmeyer.com](http://www.kurtmeyer.com)