

Artist Statement

Although I earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in oil painting long ago, I have specialized over the last dozen years in a magnificent medium that remains unusual in the United States despite its potential, namely urushi lacquer (after its Japanese name). Urushi is a viscous organic sap that is tapped from several species of Asian trees. It is not to be confused with the industrial synthetic coatings that are used to impart a high gloss to surfaces. Urushi is a highly resilient and durable medium with strong adhesive properties; its biochemical properties allow it to polymerize when curing; and when it has hardened and been polished, it manifests striking effects of textures, depths, layers, colors, transparency and luminosity. As the years go by and the pieces age, their colors keep getting richer and more intense.

Urushi is an art that reflects the esthetic sensibility of the Asian soul. Its mysterious beauty and universal appeal has always fascinated me, and thus urushi has become my primary medium of artistic expression. I have learned it from several Vietnamese and Japanese masters in different places, but it has mostly been the endless experiments conducted in my studio that led me to discover how a non-traditional use of urushi could accommodate the contemporary language of art. I have produced a large number of two- and three-dimensional abstract paintings, usually on wood, but also on extruded polystyrene and fiberglass.

My most ambitious artwork to-date is a large (6' x 32') mural the Indianapolis Airport Authority commissioned me to create for the new terminal. Titled *On the Tip of Our Wings*, it is made of twenty-seven panels and two fibreglassed sculptures. I spent three years working exclusively on it, from 2005 to 2008. At the community opening of the Col. H. Weir Cook Terminal in October 2008, I was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm manifested by a large crowd of visitors, most of whom had never seen urushi work before.

Part of my innovations with urushi includes creating multi-layered color effects that vary according to the viewer's angle of vision. I have also been applying new techniques for texturing the surface in order to create ripples and other kinds of relief. Polishing the artwork gives it a luster that increases its intensity markedly.

My aesthetic philosophy strives to understand and capture the intriguing nature of human emotions. My paintings are not dependent on what happens in the external world. Each of them is its own inner world, each an experiment in feeling, a feeling that is itself being created in the very moment of lacquering it. My art is presentational rather than representational: it offers the object itself, a self-contained world of sensations and harmonies whose direct experience is all that is required.

Contemporary lacquer painting is not well known or widely practiced in the United States. The work I produce introduces viewers to an art form that has gone only recently through considerable transformation. I wish to contribute to the revival of urushi painting and share the deep satisfaction it provides. The Indianapolis artistic and cultural community has been very welcoming and has shown great excitement since I began exhibiting in the city. A few national museums have begun to take notice as well. I wish this trend to continue so that urushi art achieves greater prominence in our country.