

Feathers



In 2011, Miriam Carpenter began teaching herself to carve. She made a wood block print and then, for her first piece in the round, decided to carve a feather. As she worked, she says, “I fell in love with the simplicity of the form. But also I began thinking about the feather as a symbol—representing the soul and things that are ethereal, and the resilience of nature.” Thirty feathers later, she is still captivated by the process. Using a variety of power and hand tools, she carves the feathers vanishingly thin—about $\frac{1}{32}$ in.—so they practically tremble. The final work, hours and hours of it, is done with tiny curved scrapers while she sits outdoors, feather in one hand, scraper in the other. “I’m not really looking at it,” she says, “I’m just feeling. Because sometimes your eyes play tricks on you; but your hands don’t, ever.” Periodically she holds the feather up to the light to gauge its thickness and evenness, and when she’s finished scraping she uses a scalpel to articulate the edges. Making the feathers, she loses track of time. “Staying that focused and that present shuts everything else out,” she says. “It’s like an active meditation.”

—Jonathan Binzen



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