



Offering

**Miriam Carpenter — Fall 2021 Michener Museum Exhibition
and Recent Works**

We at the Raymond Farm Center are so pleased (and very proud) to have been recently informed that the work of Miriam Carpenter, the first artist in residence at the RFC (2015-18), will be exhibiting at the Michener Museum in the fall of 2021. This solo show will be running parallel to a special exhibit

dedicated to perhaps the most influential woodworker/artist of the 20th Century, Wharton Esherick. The Michener's Sculpture with a Purpose: Women, Patronage, and Wharton Esherick, 1930-1945 will explore the profound significance of the support of three women— Helene Fischer (1879-1970), Hanna Weil (1900-1985), and Marjorie Content (1895-1984)— on the work of Esherick (1887-1970). Both exhibits, Sculpture with a Purpose and the works of Miriam Carpenter will be curated by Laura Turner Igoe, Ph.D., Curator of American Art at the Michener Art Museum, and by Mark Sfirri, educator, esteemed woodworker in his own right, and noted Wharton Esherick scholar. These parallel exhibits put Miriam in the rarest of company (and forgive us if we are partial) —one that we believe is much deserved.

Carpenter has been very busy since her residency at the Raymond Farm Center— exhibiting, teaching, presenting at symposia, and even renovating a barn home/studio she shares with her partner Michael Veith, a master craftsman with the Nakashima Woodworkers. In 2018, Miriam was awarded the Windgate Artist in Residence at SUNY Purchase, where she worked, taught, and presented her work in a solo exhibition— A Subtle Curve. Since then, her work has been featured at Art Basel/Design Miami (FL) Salon Art + Design Salon (NYC), and at the Philadelphia Antiques and Art Show (PA), all under the auspices of Robert Aibel's Moderne Gallery of Philadelphia. That same year, Miriam demonstrated her distinctive technique of multi-axis split turning at the Florida Woodturning Symposium in Orlando, FL. She was invited to return to Florida to instruct a Mid-Century Modern inspired table design and fabrication studio/workshop at the Florida School of Woodwork in Tampa. In 2019, Carpenter began the year teaching a semester course on furniture design and construction at Messiah University in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, and soon thereafter stepped in as a long-term substitute teacher of woodworking for the elementary and middle school students of Buckingham Friends School in Lahaska, Pennsylvania. In the fall she traveled to Gatlinburg,

Tennessee to teach a carving course at Arrowmont School of Arts and Craft for adults with varying degrees of expertise. Carpenter was even called in to use her skills in helping the RFC prepare for the Shofuso and Modernism Exhibition photoshoot, filming, and our related Farmhouse tours by fabricating new New Hope Experiment Noémi Design beds.

Most importantly, since her departure, Ms. Carpenter has been making her own remarkable new work. For Carpenter, every piece, every work of art, is an exploration— she is looking, observing and responding to what she is finding —not simply executing a plan. She often has to modify or even invent new tools to achieve what she finds herself pursuing. Whether it is sculpture, furniture, woodblock printing, or drawing, every piece is an investigation of the nature of the material, the nature of making, the nature of beauty and being itself. "My process is of making— of staying present in the moment, of focus and flexibility— and is an ongoing lesson in non-attachment. Everything that I create is a reaction to the world around me and is experimental in method..."



SUNY Purchase "the Pod",
Process Photo

While working and teaching during her Windgate Artist in Residence at SUNY Purchase (State University of New York), Carpenter started one of her most ambitious pieces to date— a wall-suspended "armoire." Formidable in both size and technique—this piece is the definition of usable sculpture. With its compound, Bombay-like curves turned topsy-turvy,

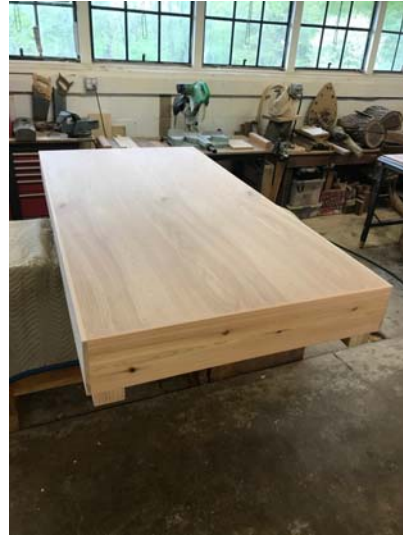
and its gull-wing swinging doors, this piece, when completed, will be some 7 feet in height. Special jigs first needed to be fabricated before the steam bending could begin, and then layers of thin veneers glued and clamped into place to create a shell-like body without any underlying chassis. Like all of Carpenter's pieces, it is both highly planned and completely experimental in design and fabrication.

Miriam Carpenter teaching Grace Sippl, of the Buckingham Friends School, how to use the lathe.



Miriam Carpenter teaching Grace Sippl, of the Buckingham Friends School, how to use the lathe.

“When I began at BFS, I had only two days separating the completion of my semester with advanced students at the University to teaching children as young as six how to work with wood and how to handle and properly use sharp woodworking equipment. It was challenging for me to recognize and adjust my teaching approach and expectations, but I soon realized that the technical aspects, idiosyncrasies of material potential and technique I was so accustomed to focusing on were not the most important aspects of that class for the kids. It was eye-opening and freeing to scrape away the superfluous and delight with them as they took deep pride and discovered individual agency, purpose, empowerment and meaning in making.”



Noémi Pernessin Raymond (+
Miriam Carpenter) The New Hope
Experiment Platform Beds

This summer, Carpenter was called in to help the Raymond Farm Center prepare for the Shofuso and Modernism exhibition photoshoot and filming as we readied the Farmhouse for our special curated tours. The RFC commissioned Miriam Carpenter to craft “Farmhouse beds” based on Noémi Pernessin Raymond’s original designs of 1939–40. These beds were the original bunks for the 24 or so summer students and employees of the New Hope Experiment— the Raymonds’ summer teaching atelier.

The modest, straight forward design of Noémi’s platform beds was formed by both necessity and frugality. When they needed to make their return from Japan as war broke out in Asia, the Raymonds hastily closed their offices and left all their belongings behind. Although their bank accounts were frozen and the Raymonds could not wire their money back to the USA, they could spend it in Japan. They did this by having the shoji screens and fusuma panels needed for the Farmhouse fabricated and shipped from Tokyo to New Hope. Not one to waste, especially in those times of the Depression, Noémi made these beds from boxes the shojis and fusuma came in. Miriam

fabricated the new beds in red cedar to approximate the Hinoki cypress of the original shipping crates and assembled the beds' substructure with Douglas fir. Miriam contributed to Noémi's original design, bolstering the size of the framing members, and improved their joinery.



Offering. Process Photos

In a written piece about her process for the literary magazine *Cleaver*, Carpenter stated — "As I work, I allow myself to pour out love with such intensity that what I create becomes embodied with a life that is viscerally connected to me. I do not believe that hand-made artifacts are simply objects or things; I believe they are imbued with heart and soul." Nowhere is Carpenter's engaged loving/caring process more apparent than in the latest of her feathers series — *Offering*.

Carpenter started making her distinctively unique carved

feathers in 2011. “I must work slowly and diligently, holding the piece in the palm of my hand so that I can feel the wood move, bend, stretch, release and expand. The feather symbolizes that which is ethereal – the soul, contemplation – is deeply complex within the framework of a simple form, and is a testament to the resilience of nature.” Each of Carpenter’s feathers start with a specific found section of wood. As Michelangelo would discover the figure locked within a unique marble slab and chisel away the superfluous material, Carpenter carves away to reveal the feather within. As enchanting as a feather of an angel’s wing, *Offering* is the most extraordinary of Carpenters feather series yet. With its Brancusi-like integrated base of an ebonized block of ash and its cast and polished sterling silver stanchion, it stands 36 inches tall. *Offering*’s feather alone rises 24 inches. Carved from a burl of white oak block with a steam-bent central rachis, and finished, it took five months of Carpenter’s patient, focused, mindful work. The title, *Offering*, comes from Miriam’s acknowledgment of her need to “let go” of the piece once complete. “After months of holding the piece in my lap or in my arm as I mapped out and carefully carved the form, I fell completely into the work. It is important for me to shift my perspective at some point during the process and think about the piece as a gift, or offering. It’s a reminder that I’m doing this work because I feel that it is the clearest way I can share the best parts of myself with the world, in the most responsible and impactful way I know how.”

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