

## Joe Land - Santas by "Josef"

"It's my creative spirit more than anything else . . . the ability to see, the need to express . . . that must come out," says artist Joe Land of himself.

Creativity fills my head in the morning. Coffee and a sketch book start the day and, from there, the ideas flow. My methods are "Old School" for sure. From a sketch I model the figure in clay. The gesture is important to me. I can't abide a static pose. I need flow and movement in the figure and in that movement I see lines that lead me to a composition. From the sketch I use a mannequin to visualize form as I sculpt clay over a wire armature and translate my ideas into 3-D. The composition, only vague beforehand, happens real time as I work. It's Intuitive. For all the books written and classes taught on rules of composition, the golden ratios and rule of thirds, I'm just a slave to my eye. I have to mess with it until it looks right. I'm the person who turns his plate around at dinner until the peas are in the right place. Nothing I can explain.

From the clay model, I sculpt into the wood block with mallet and chisel. I'm crazy for tools and my collection of carving tools is pretty diverse. They say there's a chisel for every cut, and you can coax two or three profiles out of every chisel. I love my traditional European carving chisels from the Swiss, English, German, and Austrian (and soon the French) toolmakers - and hand forged knives from the blacksmiths of Tennessee. Seeing the figure inside the block is one thing . . . causing it to emerge is another. Quite another. I borrow from the centuries old methods of stone sculptors by taking dozens of measurements off the clay "Maquette" and using a pointer to guide depth into the block. I frequently line things up with a laser for a modern take on an old idea.

"Never forget to be an artist" is written across the top of my bench to stop me from being a human camera. I admit a tendency to get lost in realism and detail. So I remind myself as the thing is going down to do some "Jammin." This is the part of the carving process where I walk off the page a bit to add character, stylize, and let the design "swing" a little. Give it some "Joe stuff."

Painting waits at the end of the process, and it's no chore . . . it's dessert. I dream in color and I love to paint. I prefer oils for their rich colors, range of contrast, and workability. Whether faint glazes or bright color, oils allow me to work in layers thin enough to let the hand carved personality of the wood show through. I use only professional quality oil paints on my carvings for their higher pigment load and richer color saturation. I also decorate my carvings with a graphic technique inspired by the Italian "Sgraffito" and Spanish "Estofado" artists of the renaissance, where designs are scratched through paint layers of egg tempera applied over a gilded surface. When the painting is done, I'm partial to the satin sheen and soft hand of the wax finish. Wood and wax just go together in my book.

Each whimsical idea I have for Santa travels through all the major art disciplines to become a reality. Drawing, sculpting, and painting . . . it takes over two weeks to complete one of my 14" Santas. After the carving is done I carefully stabilize the wood in a process that takes about five days. Once Santa is sealed, painted, and waxed, a viewer's "Ah!" is the final touch . . . Santa is real and the child in us lives.