



GREENWOOD

Have Chainsaw–Will Travel

Tree Sculpture in the Peruvian Amazon

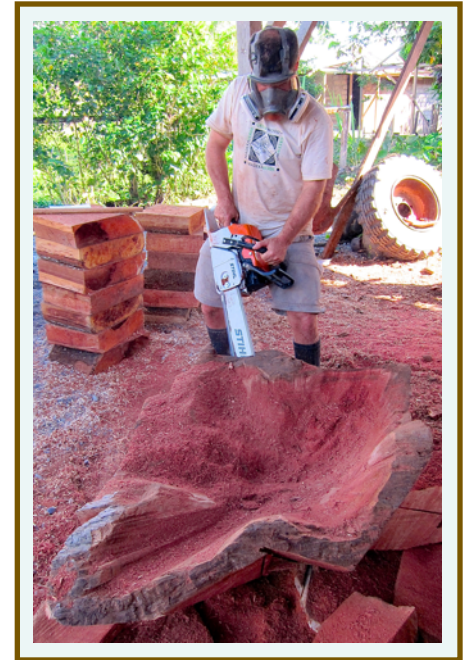
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Brad Sells creates exquisite wood sculpture out of roots, stumps and branches—the parts of a tree that the rest of the world calls firewood or compost. He has traveled widely in search of unique expressions of “tree spirit” waiting to be released with his chainsaw: mulberry crotch wood from a tree in Georgia O’Keefe’s yard, salvaged Hawaiian koa and exotic pink ivory, royal wood of the Zulu tribe in South Africa. In early June, GreenWood brought Brad and his chainsaw to the Palcázu Valley of Peru where we have been training indigenous Yanesha carvers for the last three years. The six Amazonian villages where we work are nestled



Brad Sells “Tunnel Form” sculpture.

between three protected areas, near the site of a renowned USAID experiment that broke new ground in the 1980s with its “strip-shelterbelt” harvest and transformation of a wide variety of tropical tree species. (This project led to one of the first exports of tropical timber from a sustainably managed source and eventually to the founding of GreenWood. But that’s another story...)



GreenWood is dedicated to appropriate technology, so skeptical readers might wonder about the “appropriate” introduction of chainsaws in the Amazon, where they are more often linked to vast environmental depredation than to art. In fact, GreenWood’s local artisans are expert adze men and women, who struggle daily—along with our local nonprofit counterpart organization PaTS—to meet the price points required to sell their hand-crafted carvings in a competitive world market. One of the key conclusions of the GreenWood instructors who led our January workshop in the Valley was the urgent need to expand and refine the use of the chainsaw to remove bulk stock in preparation for carving.

Brad’s one-week workshop in the Valley did that, and much more. In a series of hands-on demos in three separate sites, he showed a dozen Yanesha artisans how bowl blanks could be prepped efficiently and safely with the chainsaw to greatly speed their completion with the adze. Yanesha artisans can still achieve their characteristic hand-tooled surface treatment, but in a fraction of the time it would have taken without the



saw. More importantly, by taking his saw directly to abandoned harvest sites in the forest, he showed how a stump or a crotch or a half-rotted log can be “opened” up with a chainsaw to reveal a uniquely sculpted form that gives three-dimensional shape to that amorphous territory between craft and art. In so doing, he also opened the eyes and imagination of our artisans to a world of creative potential they had not previously considered. New sculptural designs are sure to emerge from this dynamic collaboration.



The story of Brad’s hunt for Hawaiian koa and African pink ivory was documented in two PBS “Tree Safari” programs. GreenWood is working with Brad to develop an Amazonian Tree Safari and, perhaps, a Mosquito Coast Tree Safari that would feature our mahogany guitar-part production in Honduras. See more of Brad’s work at: www.bradsells.com.



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