

DELICATE **ARTISTRY**



**Nairi Safaryan uses an
indescribable technique to
create utterly unique art**

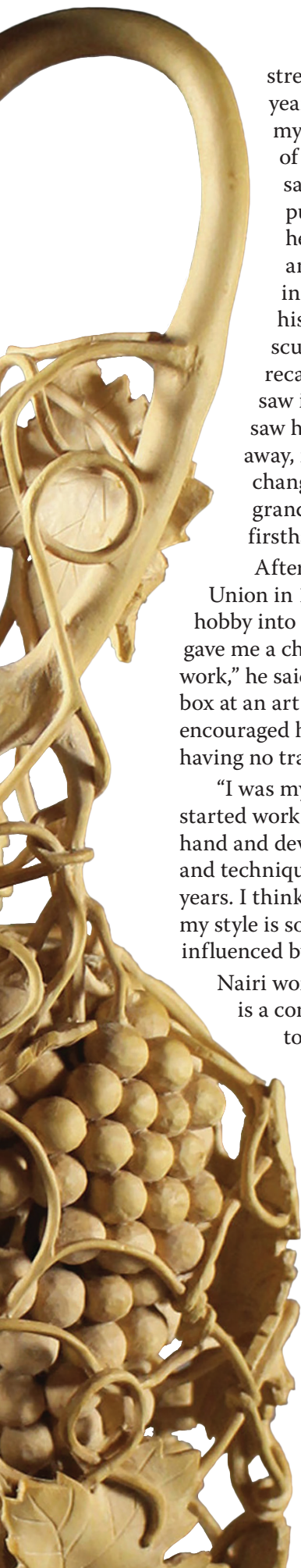
By Kathleen Ryan

I believe that a unique idea combined with true mastery of the work is what elevates a woodcarving to the level of art,” said Nairi Safaryan, an Armenian woodcarver and sculptor whose works are exhibited in many museums and private collections around the world. “Any positive emotion can inspire a new work, but it may take weeks or even months for an idea to develop to the point where I decide to bring it to reality.”

Despite his long developmental process, Nairi never gets frustrated or abandons a project. “By the time I start working on something, I already have a full picture of how to make it and what it’s going look like when it’s finished,” he explained. “Sometimes an artist might create under the influence of emotion, only to find out days or months later that when the emotion is gone they are not pleased with the outcome. A project is first finished in my head, and then in reality, so there are no surprises.”

Growing up in Artsakh Karabakh, a mountainous region of Armenia, Nairi made wooden toys, chalk sculptures, and detailed drawings. He also used a knife to carve through his parent’s table





stretcher when he was just four years old. “My parents recognized my artistic talents and were proud of me; however, they wanted a safer future for their son, so they pushed me towards academics,” he said. Nairi studied engineering and took a job at a research institute. He also produced his first serious work of art—a sculpture of an elderly man. Nairi recalled, “When my grandmother saw it she started crying because she saw her husband, who had passed away, in the sculpture. Something changed in me when I saw my grandmother’s tears. I witnessed firsthand the power of art.”

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Nairi decided to turn his hobby into a way of earning a living. “It gave me a chance to turn my passion into work,” he said. He presented a carved jewelry box at an art show with great success, which encouraged him to keep carving despite having no training in the arts.

“I was my own teacher,” he said. “I started working on wood with one tool in my hand and developed my own special process and techniques for carving throughout the years. I think that’s one of the reasons why my style is so unique—because I was never influenced by the techniques of others.”

Nairi works in a home studio. “All I need is a comfortable armchair and a few tools. Lighting is very important too, so I have several lamps, which I adjust depending on which part of the sculpture I’m working on.” Nairi occasionally uses power tools, but he does most of the work with hand tools, many of which he makes to suit the needs of his projects.

Describing his method, Nairi said, “First I visualize the work, then draw on paper, and then on wood, after which I start carving. However, sometimes

I work straight on the wood.” He cuts each work from a single block of wood chosen for its strength, color, and texture. Using very hard wood allows him to make the carving as thin as he wants; favorite hardwoods include boxwood, ebony, cocobolo, bloodwood, holly, and walnut. Nairi protects the wood with beeswax or oil but never uses any finishes, stains, or paints.

Beyond that, Nairi said, “It is impossible to describe the process I use to create them, which differs from the work process of other artists and enables me to carve such thin vines and delicate petals.” He does, however, share his methods with others. “I have taught master classes where my students had an opportunity to closely observe me while I carved to learn how I accomplish this work.”

After putting so much time and effort into a single piece of art, Nairi admitted that it is sometimes difficult to part with it. “On the other hand, after the last stage of a project has been completed, when I see the results of many long hours of work, that is most rewarding for me. It also makes me very happy to know that people value my art.”

See more of Nairi Safaryan’s work at www.woodsymphony.com.



Nairi cut this vase from a single block of boxwood.

“I witnessed firsthand
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Goblet was carved from a single branch with all of the pieces completely attached. It is 3½" by 6¾" (89mm by 17.1cm).



Dancer was carved from a single piece of ebony. It measures 3¼" by 4" by 12½" (83mm by 102mm by 31.8cm) and is enhanced with a light coat of beeswax.



Unity is a 17-inch sculpture was cut from a block of extremely dense bloodwood.



Like Father, Like Daughter

**Larisa Safaryan is an
"egg"straordinary carver, too**

By Kathleen Ryan

For Larisa Safaryan, Nairi Safaryan's daughter, carving can be a crushing art form. That's because Larisa carves eggshells, and even the tiniest slip of a finger can spell disaster. "This is definitely not for the faint of heart," she said with a laugh.

Larisa began carving wood at age seven. "The wood was just too hard for my thin fingers to manipulate," she recalled. After a few minor nicks and cuts, her father suggested she try something softer, like eggshells. For Larisa, it was a match made in heaven. "In the beginning I worked with chicken eggs. They were in the refrigerator whenever I wanted to carve something new, so I collaborated with my mother. She would bake cakes and I would make a sculpture from the eggs she used. Everyone was happy." Later, Larisa decided to challenge herself with more exotic eggs. "When people heard what I was doing, they would call me and ask if I could use a goose egg, a pheasant egg, etc. Once a guy even gave me an eagle egg!"

Although she holds two masters degrees, Larisa has never attended an art class. Instead, her passion and talent came naturally. By simply giving freedom to her thoughts, she creates intricate nature scenes, delicate flowers, and elaborate filigree lace on eggshells that range in size from a tiny parrot egg to an ostrich egg. "Art makes me forget about the mundane things and lets my soul see what my eyes cannot," she said. "I often change my mind in the middle of a project and make something completely different from my original design."

Larisa has experienced many heartaches working with such a fragile medium, but the greatest mishaps have occurred during exhibitions. "Some people are curious and want to test the strength of an eggshell. They don't seem to realize that once the sculpture is broken, it is impossible to fix," she said ruefully. "Now all of my works are exhibited under glass."

In addition to creating her own carvings, Larisa assists her father with the business aspects of his art profession, freeing more time for him to carve. "My father creates masterpieces that are becoming a part of art history. Every minute of his time is valuable," she said. Nairi and Larisa also share tools. It is a symbiotic system filled with mutual love and respect that works well for them both. Larisa is so into eggshell carving that she has no plans to carve anything else. "Maybe in the future I will try another medium, but for now there are still many ideas that I want to bring to life."

See more of Larisa's work at woodsymphony.com/oc/ovo_collection.html.

Larisa carved **Spring Crown** from goose eggshells. It is 2½" by 7¼" by 8" (64mm by 18.4cm by 20.3cm).



Larisa combined goose eggshell and African ebony in **Elegant Teapot**, 2¼" by 3½" by 7¾" (57mm by 89mm by 19.7cm).

