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A NATIONAL AWARD-WINNING NEWSPAPER

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Wood artist arrives at Scott White

By **DAWNA BRATTEN**
DOWNTOWN NEWS

The Scott White Contemporary Art Gallery is excited to bring an outstanding wood artist to San Diego. Foon Sham has been creating wonders from natural wood in its environment and found pieces, for more than 20 years. His sculptures are puzzlelike in their construction from different woods in synchronous shapes and forms, suggesting vases, vessels and funerary urns. Some units are reminiscent of primitive and organic forms of housing, such as igloos or tepees. All require deliberate scrutiny from inside and out.

Sham gathers woods from around the world when he travels, favoring Norway and Australia woods. The woods, cherry, pine,

red gum or birch, are cut into small blocks and then assembled. The finished sculpture ultimately portrays a balance between the primitive and the modern – from the raw to the refined. Renewal and cojoining underlie a diverse body of work that is metaphorical as some sculptures reach toward the sky and challenge the imagination.

While exploring the desert in New Mexico, the artist was impressed with the cliff dwellings and the vast landscape. He created pieces not too unlike the dwellings that he was so taken with and recognized the analytical minds of those early people who took from their raw environment and made it livable. Some of Sham's pieces reflect works of these people and include indigenous rocks over metal armatures.

Another series of constructions consider place and interior light source. Some of these constructions came about after thoughts while driving or walking past lighted houses at night, imagining their inhabitants' lives that made the artist responsive to people and their environments – not always exposed to the world. Light sources have to be discovered and shadows and designs reflect an opportunity to stretch the imagination through the pieces using stacked wood scraps exploring the effects of light as its own journey.

The "Spiral Vessel" reminds one of an old-fashioned figure eight courting chair. The spirals are constructed with flat pieces of many-toned wood. Beginning from the floor and working to the

top, the pieces are set together with expanding sides, which gradually become rounded sides, then gradually taper to the top, completing the whole from its roundness. The two pieces are internally connected, which gives the viewer an opportunity to nearly step inside to feel the intimacy of the piece and then to stand back and marvel at the light and shadows created from its placement.

Scott White, gallery owner, said that "the sculptures are shipped in many pieces in large crates and then have to be reassembled at the gallery." There will be indigenous wood pieces from areas of Australia and other countries.

Sham has been working with wood for more than 20 years. He has traveled extensively and has been commissioned to create sculpture on location in many states and countries that are now permanent outdoor environmental sculptures. He teaches fine arts at the University of Maryland, College Park. In 2003, he was selected to be included in the prestigious International Sculpture Center's Juried Exhibition at the Grounds for Sculpture in New Jersey.

The artist will be at the opening reception on April 21, 6-8 p.m. in conjunction with the Kettner Nights events. The gallery will also be open during the San Diego Art-Walk festivities, April 29.

Scott White Contemporary Art Gallery, 2400 Kettner Blvd., Loft 238. Hours – Tuesday through Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., or by appointment. (619) 501-5689. The exhibition closes June 3. ■



COURTESY PHOTO

"Opening" by Foon Sham