

# Two Americans in Austria



Lou Fuchs of Essex, Ct., carves the face of an older woman.

By **MARTIN GEISLER-MORODER**

**C**URRENTLY, two American woodcarvers are involved in our professional woodcarving program. For those of you who are not familiar with this program, it is a set of intensive coursework, both practical and theoretical, that prepares the student for the Austria Woodcarving Exam. Passing this exam, which is administered by the Austrian government, entitles you to be recognized as a professional woodcarver.

The professional program normally requires 52 weeks of training, spread out over multiple years. It is important for students to practice the woodcarving techniques while applying the theoretical material, such as human proportions, during the time between courses. We have students who attend classes from a few weeks a year to multiple months a year. Our students come from all over the world including Europe, Japan, and America.

I would like to specifically feature two of our students from America: Bryan Berenson from Milwaukee, Wisc., and Lou Fuchs from Essex, Ct.

By trade, Bryan was a diesel mechanic both in the Army and for a Caterpillar dealership. He also attended college for mechanical engineering just before starting his journey into woodcarving/sculpting. Bryan is changing careers from a diesel mechanic to a professional

woodcarver not just from a love of carving and sculpture, but also due to a medical condition. Being a young man of 38, he has a form of arthritis called Reiter's Syndrome. The arthritis causes him a great deal of pain, joint stiffness, and fatigue. This eventually made it nearly impossible for him to work a regular job. Bryan had carved as a hobby after his parents bought him a book on carving a Santa Claus for Christmas. After reading an article in *Chip Chats* about the Geisler-Moroder Austrian Woodcarving School, he attended a class in 1999.

"After taking the class, I realized that I had a lot to learn about wood sculpting, and that I had a passion for it," Bryan says. "My wife and I decided that becoming a wood sculptor was in my best interest."

In 2000, he started the professional program and anticipates finishing in 2004. He attends classes at the school in Austria a few times a year with each visit normally a few weeks in length. When back in Wisconsin, he carves five days a week on his own schedule and in a controlled environment. The work in his studio ranges from finishing pieces he started in class, pieces of his own design, restoration with paint and gold leaf, and commissions. His latest commission is a woodcarving of a "Rising Christ."

Bryan enjoys all forms of carving (figures, animals, ornamental, relief, etc.) but currently prefers human figures because "I can express human emotions/feelings best through human figures." He plans on carving full time and perhaps teach after he completes the program.

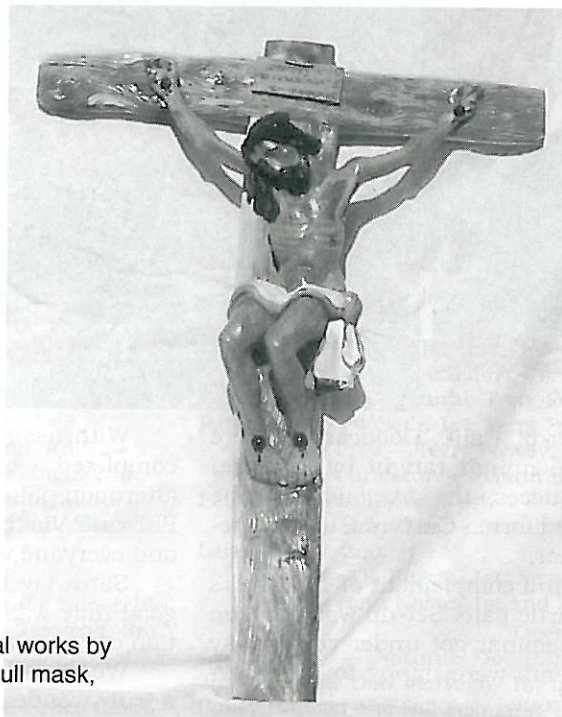
"What I like about the school is the environment in the classes," says Bryan. "The students are of all different talent levels and it seems that I learn something from every one of them! There are multiple teachers, each with his own specialties. That allows me to pick up something different from each one of them. Besides the school environment, the landscape around the school is beautiful and stress-free.



Martin Geisler-Moroder



Bryan Berenson creates a witch mask. Additional works by the Milwaukee, Wisc., carver include Crucifix, skull mask, rose with hands, and horse.



Very different from here in Milwaukee, Wisc."

Lou Fuchs currently resides in Connecticut and spends the school year attending a traditional figurative art school and the summers in Austria taking classes within the professional woodcarving program. Lou, in his early 40s, decided to make a career change from his high-tech computer engineering career to sculpture, with an emphasis in figurative woodcarving/sculpture.

"The opportunity just presented itself," Lou said when asked why he was changing careers. "The high-tech start-up company I was working for in Idaho was shut down by it's parent company and I was offered a nice exit package. By this time in my life I was ready for a change from the fast pace of high-tech industry and being on the road for business travel. I always heard people saying that they wished they had followed their dream instead of a 9 to 5 job. I decided to turn my dream of being an sculptor into a reality by selling most of my belongings, including my house and truck, and enrolled in both an art school and the professional woodcarving program."

Lou was first exposed to carving while attending graduate school in New Mexico. He said a neighbor gave him a few carving knives and some wood and he carved an old-style boot. From that time on, he knew he wanted to learn to be a serious carver. While working in the engineering field, he read an article in *Chip Chats* magazine about the Austrian Woodcarving School and attended one of our "American week" classes.

"I spent two weeks at the woodcarving school in Austria and realized that I had an enormous amount to learn if I wanted to carve/sculpt as a profession," Lou says. "It was amazing to watch the master carver instructors turn a block of wood into a creation, or to watch them fix my mistakes with one or two gouge cuts. Also, I was impressed that the instructors were proficient in all styles of carving, from realistic figures and portraits, animals, reliefs, and ornamental. Usually, no two students are working on the same piece in the classroom."

Once Lou completes his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in two more years, he also plans on finishing the professional woodcarving program. After that, his plans are to start his own studio, produce his own work, teach, and accept commissions, including portraits both in wood and bronze.

"For me, I believe that the art theory is the most important aspect of my education," Lou says. "To produce figurative work, it is vital to understand the human anatomy, which includes body and head proportions, the bone structure, and the muscles. With this knowledge, you are able to create art pieces that can range from realistic, impressionistic, and abstract. For me, some pieces work better in wood and others work better in bronze. Also, studying (and copying) works from old masters is an excellent learning process."

When asked what he likes about Austria, he said, "Besides having some of the best woodcarvers as instructors, I truly enjoy the atmosphere of not just the school but especially of Austria itself. The school is located in a valley surrounded by Alps. The landscape is just breathtaking. I never get tired of looking out the school window and seeing mountains."

For those who may not be able to make the time commitment that Bryan and Lou are doing, we also offer a new Geisler-Moroder Woodcarving Certificate Program that requires only eight weeks of classes. These classes can be completed in one stay or over a period of time. The aim of this certification program is to give carvers a comprehensive insight into the profession of a woodcarver. Each of the eight one-week courses is divided into practical applications and detailed theory lessons. The courses cover human anatomy, ornamental/decorative carving, the human head, animals, the nude figure, drapery/clothing, styling of figures, and relief.

If you are interested in talking to Bryan or Lou, they can be contacted directly via e-mail at <fourspot@execpc.com> for Bryan, and <lffuchs@usa.net> for Lou. Any specific questions regarding our school, such as the professional program, the certificate program, course schedules, housing, pricing, etc., can be directed towards our "America" representative Carl Wiggins in Alabama at <wiggs7@aol.com>, (205) 979-1111; or to our United Kingdom representative Peter Hurrell at 02392-373899, or sent directly to us at the Geisler-Moroder Austrian Woodcarving School in Austria at <geisler-moroder@aon.at>, phone ++43-5634-6215, fax ++43-5634-6128. As always, you are welcome to visit our Web site at <www.geisler-moroder.com>. ■

