

ARLO NAMINGHA, *DIALOGUE THROUGH FORM*

NIMAN FINE ART

125 LINCOLN AVENUE, SUITE 116, SANTA FE

IT'S LIKE SEEING LIFE WITHIN STONE, WOOD, AND BRONZE.

Arlo Namingha's show at Niman Fine Art captures the artist's love and respect for the land and also for the materials he uses to articulate these emotions. Large bronzes have a woodlike quality. Wood becomes landscape. And stone is his canvas to pass along motifs linked to his ancestor Nampeyo's revival and stylization of ancient pottery designs.

The show includes a range of pieces from jewelry to sculpture to monoprints. In *Guardians* Namingha crafted two large curved and notched bronze segments that can either connect or stand separately, depending on the mood of the owner. The deep red of the bronze looks like gorgeous wood grain until you read the accompanying descriptive tag and learn that this is indeed bronze and the rich patina comes from titanium and red ferrics. "I work with wood so I want to warm up the bronze," says Namingha. Each curve represents a face—the identical twin grandsons of spider woman—and features Namingha's signature, katsina-evoking, round, open mouths and open eye slits.

Sandhills is a four-element installation that again offers options. The three long bronze blocks are identical but can be placed on end or lengthwise in any orientation to create the effect of hills or outcroppings. The fourth element is a perfectly round sun, which can also be moved at will. (Fortunately the gallery has small wooden maquettes on hand of *Sandhills*, *Guardians*, and *Chanters* that visitors and clients

can experiment with.)

Maiden combines bronze and wood and demonstrates Namingha's appreciation of what he describes as "the strong simplicity of lines and curves." Her bronze form results from four curves: two extend downward for her shoulders, one creates her head, and the fourth sweeps from temple to temple, forming her strong chin. Half of her garment is made of padauk wood and the grain flows downward as though woven.

A trio of wall hangings (*Horizon #6*, *Landscape #21*, *Horizon #5*) is full of surprises. Here Namingha builds aluminum housings that are then powder-coated in black. Inside he layers different woods and even Texas shell to create mini landscapes. Each choice of wood offers a different texture, and he assembles the finished work so that certain pieces of wood protrude while others recede. Some of the textures are inherent in the wood itself while others are crafted by Namingha into graceful curved edges or dark channels. "It's the idea of using natural colors," he says, "and creating harmony."

With *Mimbres*, *Hope*, and *Imagine*, Namingha takes us into a marine world. *Mimbres* is a Texas limestone sculpture of two fish. Here again they can be displayed in many orientations. Subtle lines in their tails evoke the four directions. *Hope* and *Imagine* are monoprints. The green fish in *Hope*, on the left,

swims toward the blue fish of *Imagine*, on the right. Namingha uses fewer than a dozen graceful, sweeping curves for each fish and captures their character and their fluid movement beautifully. They reflect his optimism about imagining and hoping for pure water in our world.

Many of the show's sculptures are stacked works in marble or Indiana limestone or Texas shell with three, four, or five components. Namingha has stacked them in a way that creates slight overhangs, which result in accidental shadows that enhance the beauty of the stone. They are easily disassembled—by simply lifting or pulling them apart. *Fifth World #2* is made from five pieces of Texas shell. The creamy yellow color of the stone contrasts with the smooth recesses left by dissolved fossils. For this show, the five elements are standing side by side with two slightly hinged in an open position to reveal their interiors, but they could just as easily be stacked, or partly stacked. The creative possibilities for positioning are endless. Namingha's intention here is to involve the viewer in both the creation of the components' placement and the idea of constant change.

When Namingha was in his teens, his mother asked him to help out one weekend in the family's gallery, which exhibited the work of his father, Dan Namingha, but he balked. Yet after just that one weekend watching clients react to his father's work, he resolved to develop his own art. At the time he was carving katsina dolls and he has never lost his love for wood. "I started with wood," he says, "and that's where my heart is."

He uses blood wood, African mahogany, purple heart, bass wood, and the list goes on and on. He understands each one and knows how to reveal their grain and their character. He can even achieve a woodgrain effect in limestone. He surprises us with subtle differences between the front and the back of a sculpture. He has developed an ability to chisel in a way that controls the concaves, and then he listens. "You can hear when it's about to break," he says. His technique enables the components to nest. Namingha invites us to take our impressions of his beautiful surface transformations with us into the world. We can look at natural stone and wood and wonder what Arlo Namingha might do with them.

—SUSAN WIDER

Left: Arlo Namingha, *Balance #6*, marble, 20" x 8" x 7", 2013

Right: Arlo Namingha, *Sandhills*, bronze 36" x 17" x 11", 2008

