

THE PROCESS: HOW MY WALL-HANGING SCULPTURES ARE MADE

My wall-hanging sculptures are made by cutting, chiseling and sanding pieces of wood. The shape and complexity of the sculpture will determine what type of wood I use. Once the parts for the sculpture are carved and shaped, a wood sealer is applied and then all the parts are sanded again until they are perfectly smooth. At this point I will make a mold of the sculpture for casting. The castings are exact replicas of the original wood sculptures. I cast with plastic resin. There are various hardnesses and weights to the plastic resins I use. The size and end use of the sculpture will determine the material I cast with, however, the different resins all look the same once they're painted. Very rarely does a casting come out of the mold perfect and ready to paint. I spend some time going over the casting to make sure all the details are right. I usually end up sanding and patching some areas. I also have to sand the back of the sculpture so it sits perfectly flat up against the background. A lot of times I'll dry fit and assemble the parts so all the mounting holes are drilled before I apply paint. It's the same process as working on a car body before painting. The key to a good paint finish isn't just the application of paint, it's the hours of prep work leading up to the painting which makes or breaks the finish. Once my casting has been sanded, patched and resanded, it has to be thoroughly washed before applying primer. I apply 3 heavy coats of primer to the sculpture. I wet sand the primer to remove any spray marks or to remove spray dust. The sculpture will once again need to be washed, air dusted and wiped down with a tack rag before applying the first coat of paint. The design and the paint scheme will dictate which colors get sprayed first and which areas are masked off. Large color areas are sprayed with an automotive spray gun, most of the detail work is sprayed with a fine art air-brush. Pin striping and touch ups are done by hand, with a fine line paint brush.

I do all the prep work and painting on my sculptures myself. I use acrylic enamel automotive paints. They're expensive, messy and chemically aggressive, but their durability and quality of finish are amazing. The methods I use are the same as a custom painter would use to paint a Harley Davidson Motorcycle or a Corvette. The process and chemicals are exactly the same, except on a smaller scale.

In between coats of paint I will wet sand the colors to remove any bumps or spray marks. Wet sanding also removes the ridge lines where the masking tape was applied. After wet sanding, the sculpture will again need to be thoroughly cleaned before applying the next color. If the sculpture I'm working on is a race car with sponsor logos, decals of the logos will be applied after all the colors have been sprayed. I can mask off and spray paint some sponsor logos but a lot of times I will use the same computer cut vinyl decal technology used on real race cars. I recreate the sponsor logos in my computer drawing program, then I send my files to a supplier who prints and cuts them with a computerized cutting machine. Decal creation is one of the only times I use a computer in the process of creating my sculptures, everything else is done by hand.

Once the sculpture has been sprayed and wet sanded and all the decals have been put on, a high gloss clear coat can be applied. I like to put on 4 to 6 coats of clear. After the clear coat has had time to dry I will wet sand areas to remove any dust specs that happen to fall in the clear before it dried. Wet sanding will dull the finish so it will need to be buffed and polished back to a high gloss shine. I use various sized buffing wheels and rubbing compounds to get the gloss back and to remove swirl marks. Afterwards I apply a coat of car wax and the finish of the sculpture looks as good as any show car.

The backgrounds of my sculptures are usually made of wood and they are cut out and shaped using traditional wood working methods. I paint my backgrounds with paint brushes and acrylic paints. After the paint is dry I will apply a light coat of matte varnish to protect the colors. At this point the sculpture can be assembled. Most of the hardware holding the sculpture to the background is applied from the back. Once the sculpture is secured to the background, it's ready to be hung on the wall. All the customer has to do is mount the specially designed bracket securely to a wall and then hang the sculpture on the bracket.

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