

Todd Wohlt

Todd Wohlt (b. 1968) was born and raised in New London, WI. At age 12 he became interested in decoys when he found an old rig of hunting decoys his late grandfather had used on his job as a professional duck hunting guide and fisherman. He began to repair them from years of use, and then started carving on his own, creating miniatures.

In 1984 Todd visited the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum's annual *Birds in Art* exhibition, which showcases important contemporary artists who work with birds as their subject matter. After seeing this he realized that he wanted to become a more serious bird carver.

In 1985 Todd entered his first competition, the Mid-Atlantic Wildfowl Festival in Virginia, and took third place in the novice category. On the recommendation of carver John Scheeler Todd took classes from Marc Schultz to improve his technique. Todd's parents drove him to Marc's Studio most weeks he had lessons, and Todd credits his supportive family with much of his success. Before he was 18 Todd entered two more competitions, including the Ward World Championship, where, at age 17, he took Best of Show in the Novice Decorative Floating Decoy category, and the A. Danner Frazer Memorial Award.

Between 1987 and 1991 Todd attended the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point and received a BA in Fine Arts. This led to a career in graphic design lasting over two decades. Todd credits his training and career with helping him to keep carving designs simple and not overly elaborate. He also credits friends and co-competitors Larry Barth, Keith Mueller, Ernie Muehlmann, Pat Godin, and John Sharp with positively influencing his work.

The sense of design first developed in college helped lead Todd to many notable accomplishments and awards. For example in 1990 he won his first Best in World title at the Ward World Championship, in the Decorative Life-size Wildfowl division. He has won Best in World in that division a total of four times (1990, 1996, 2004, 2008) and Best in World three times in the Decorative Miniature Wildfowl division (1997, 2008 and 2014)! Todd has also won the Gulf South Championship at the Louisiana Wildfowl Festival several times, and on multiple occasions he has been juried into the *Birds in Art* show that stoked his interest in carving as a boy.

Today Todd is known in part for creating colorful species of birds exotic to this Appleton, WI resident. He says he is "not afraid of color," and enjoys doing very different things—different sizes and different species—in his work, and he regularly pushes boundaries. For example, the Blue-breasted Bee-eaters that took Second in World (Decorative Life-size Wildfowl) and the People's Choice award at the 2015 Ward World Competition are meant to give the observer an opportunity to see the art form in different stages. The Bee-eaters are presented as roughed out, carved with detail, painted with rough brush strokes, and finished—all in one carved sculpture. This piece is outside the box for Decorative Life-size Wildfowl, yet it manages to capture the character of a species and essence of the creative process all at the same time.

In addition to carving, Todd has served as a competition judge and a carving teacher as well. He urges young carvers to talk with established carvers, and "don't be afraid to get a critique." He

says that carving takes a lot of patience and carvers must be willing to make – and learn from – mistakes. This advice, which worked well for Todd when he was younger, is solid advice for any carver. Todd also balances carving and work with time with his wife, Julie, and three children.

For his willingness to help the next generation, and especially for his ability to grow and push the boundaries of the world of carving, the Ward Museum is proud to honor Todd Wohlt as a 2016 Living Legend.