

PHILLIP SHORE

"We are in nature and nature is in us," says Phillip Shore. "I want to present nature and human beings as a whole." Shore carves and constructs wooden sculptures that look like elongated human arms, fuses polyurethane castings of his hand to the tops, and covers the surface with a liquid metal material, which he then patinates. Halfway up each sculpture is a door that opens to reveal a cavity, which contains a small natural object such as a bee, a beetle, or a cicada exoskeleton.

Other sculptures by Shore have slim vertical profiles, but are less anthropomorphic and look like scepters or ritual artifacts. Shore uses earth colors when he decorates his work. "The idea for this series of sculptures came to me twelve years ago," he states. "It took that long to process what I wanted to do."

The artist wants his sculptures to look very old and to recall the ancient religious objects that he saw in Greece. "I went to an archaeological dig in Corinth," he says, "where the leader was reconstructing a temple from the 7th century BC. I saw the marks of the hand on artifacts that we examined—chips, carving, brush strokes, and the like. In the museums, the patinas on the sculptures and bronze helmets fascinated me. All this went into my work."

Anaphylactic is a 28-inch-high wooden sculpture, patinated, and topped with the artist's cast hand. Halfway up is a small, gilded bowl-like depression with a bee encased in resin. "If you have an allergic reaction to a bee sting, you go into anaphylactic shock as I did," Shore explains. "By appropriating the concept of the reliquary, I present the encased objects with the same importance as the bones of a saint. I collect the insects I use in my work. Friends give me some and now I have boxes full of them. I never hunt anything and if an insect comes to me alive, I let it go."

O.N.E. is a wall-mounted sculpture composed of three knife-shaped objects that recall New Guinea artifacts. All have pointed green triangles at the bottom that the artist has carved and painted. Elaborately framed doors halfway up each sculpture open to reveal gilded bowl-shaped interiors with the progressive phases of the cicada life cycle encased in resin. Topping *O.N.E.* are castings of the artist's forearms and hands, which spell out the letters O, N, E in sign language.

Shore experiments freely with his sculptural language. An untitled piece is shaped like a canopic jar, but instead of putting human organs in it, he mounted a type of bee that kills cicadas by attacking their nervous systems with its venom. Topping this work is a casting made from the head of an antique doll. "The head is blindfolded," says Shore, "and is



Sculpture Invasion, Koehnline Museum of Art, Oakton Community College
Essay by Victor M. Cassidy, July, 2007

thus unaware of its surroundings. The piece opens and shuts. It looks very intriguing when closed and it's just human nature to want to open it."

Beckoning is three forearm-like wooden sculptures, with cast hands ranging up to 28 inches high on top. One has a door that opens wide to reveal a bagworm nest. "The bagworm is a pest species here in Texas where I live," says Shore. "It attacks cypress trees." The center piece has a door that opens downward to become a tiny steep staircase such as one might see on a Mayan pyramid. Three sprouting acorns are mounted vertically in its reliquary cavity. The piece at right has a door that's hardly open. "I want to force viewers to engage with this piece to see the cicada exoskeleton inside," Shore explains.



"My work harkens to a time when we lived on the land and were closer to it than today," the artist states. "My sculptures are very serious, almost solemn, something you might find in a shrine or place of worship."



From top: *Anaphylactic* (detail);
O.N.E., 2006. Wood, resin, cicadas, steel, 24 x 20 x 7 in.