

## PROTECTING ONE OF THE NATURAL WONDERS OF OUR WORLD

The tusks of elephants have been an obsession of mankind since antiquity. These symbols of status and luxury were made and traded by the Ancient Chinese, Greek, and Roman peoples, throughout Africa and the Indian subcontinent. The Romans were so enamored with ivory that they had completely wiped out North Africa's elephant population by A.D. 77.<sup>1</sup> More recently, the industrialization of Europe and the United States during the Nineteenth century saw another major rise in demand for ivory tusks. Unfortunately, this coveted resource does not come without a price. Elephants have been hunted to the point of extinction, with current populations totaling just less than half a million, down from three to five million in the last century.<sup>2</sup>

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) amended its Appendix II in 1977 to include the African elephant or *Loxodonta africana*.<sup>3</sup> Countries adhere voluntarily to this agreement, which regulates the international trade of endangered species to ensure their survival. In 1989, CITES banned all international trade in ivory from African elephants, leading to a brief reprieve in hunting; elephant populations in several regions began to recover.<sup>4</sup> At present, ivory is once again in high demand, with illegal poaching playing a huge part in the endangerment of the species.

Similar to the blood diamonds of Sierra Leone, ivory is considered a conflict resource tied to poverty, terrorism, and civil war. Organized crime is at the forefront of the poaching of elephants and rhinoceros. Profits from the illegal ivory trade help finance terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda's Al Shabab wing, Sudan's Janjaweed, and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda.<sup>5</sup> Military and police officials supply weapons and equipment to poachers, who are often poor and living at the edges of wildlife parks. Drawn by the promise of immediate cash, these poachers slaughter elephants, bury the ivory, and later sell it at reduced cost back to those that supplied the weapons. Highly organized smuggling syndicates move the ivory into Asia, relatively unhindered by weak governance and insufficiently supervised markets.

However, without demand from consumers willing to pay for carvings, chopsticks, bracelets, and other objects fashioned from elephant and rhinoceros tusks, there would



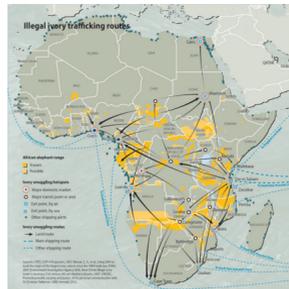
be little economic incentive to supply ivory through poaching. China's ivory market has risen exponentially in response to a growing economy and increased consumer spending in the past few decades. Though China and Thailand are the largest consumers of illegal ivory, Western markets play their own role. In the United States and Great Britain, thriving antiques markets mask illegal trade of post-ban ivory.

In Central Africa, 62 percent of all forest elephants were poached for their ivory tusks in the past 12 years.<sup>6</sup> Roughly 6,500 elephants currently inhabit the entire savanna region of West Africa; most populations are scattered and isolated, with many herds consisting of as few as 200 elephants.<sup>7</sup> As of 2013, the total remaining population of elephants on the entire continent of Africa was estimated at 401,650.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the dire situation, efforts are being made in the international community to protect the African elephant from further harm. Developed by CITES, in partnership with 38 African elephant range States who hold jurisdiction over the ranges inhabited by African elephants, the African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP) was adopted in 2010.<sup>9</sup> Solutions for the conservation of elephants and the disruption of the illegal ivory trade include combating corruption in local political and military bodies and imposing severe punishments for poaching. Other efforts include the destruction of seized ivory to prevent theft and recirculation, anti-consumer campaigns, and coordinating international cooperation, especially among range States.

The current population numbers are staggeringly low. If we do not move swiftly and purposefully, these majestic creatures are destined to become a myth, found only in science books and museums alongside the dinosaur.

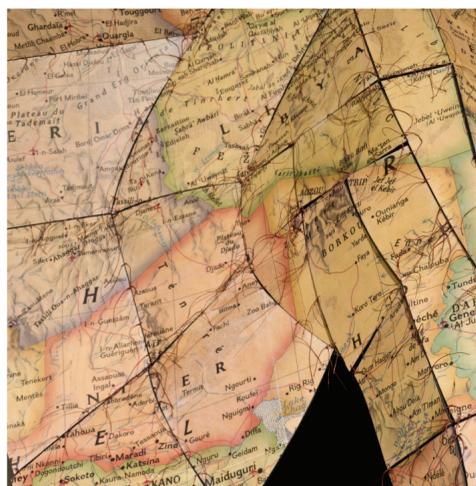
Elizabeth Kozlowski, Curator, 2015



Top image: Elephant mouth. Amboseli National Park, Kenya. Photo by Peter Prokosh. Infographic: Illegal ivory trafficking routes. 28 Nov 2013 - by Riccardo Pravettoni, GRID-Arendal. [http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/illegal-ivory-trafficking-routes\\_486e](http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/illegal-ivory-trafficking-routes_486e).

### FOOTNOTES:

1. Tim Jackson, "Ivory Apocalypse," *Africa Geographic*, April 2013, 34.
2. The World Wildlife Fund. "Threats." Accessed November 16, 2015. <http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/african-elephant>.
3. Christian Nellemann, ed., *Elephants in the Dust: The African Elephant Crisis: A Rapid Response Assessment*, (Norway: United Nations Environment Programme, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, International Union for Conservation of Nature, and Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce, 2013), 12.
4. Ibid, 23.
5. Jeffrey Gettleman, "Elephants Dying in Epic Frenzy as Ivory Fuels Wars and Profits," *New York Times*, 3 September 2012, accessed November 9, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/04/world/africa/african-elephants-are-being-slaughtered-in-poaching-frenzy.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/04/world/africa/african-elephants-are-being-slaughtered-in-poaching-frenzy.html?_r=0).
6. Jackson, 39.
7. Ibid, 41.
8. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and African Elephant Specialist Group (AESG). "Continental Totals: Provisional African Elephant Population Estimates: Up To 31 Dec. 2013." Accessed November 16, 2015. [http://www.elephantdatabase.org/preview\\_report/2013\\_africa\\_final/Loxodonta\\_africana/2013/Africa](http://www.elephantdatabase.org/preview_report/2013_africa_final/Loxodonta_africana/2013/Africa).
9. Nellemann, 52.



Top image: Exhibition view of Wendy Maruyama: *The wildLIFE Project*. On view at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, Texas, September 18, 2015 - January 3, 2016. Photo by Scott Cartwright. Bottom left: Wendy Maruyama, *Orkanyawoi* (detail), 2014. Wood, string, ink. Photo by Scott Cartwright. Bottom right: African Elephants, Amboseli National Park, Kenya. Photo by Dave Block.

## WENDY MARUYAMA The wildLIFE Project

Organized by Houston Center for Contemporary Craft  
Curated by Elizabeth Kozlowski  
On view in the Main Gallery at HCCC, September 18, 2015 - January 3, 2016.  
This exhibition is made possible by generous support from the Windgate Charitable Foundation

### LEARN MORE

To learn more about the exhibition, please visit [www.crafthouston.org/exhibition/the-wildlife-project/](http://www.crafthouston.org/exhibition/the-wildlife-project/). Follow the exhibition on Tumblr at [www.wildlifeproject.tumblr.com](http://www.wildlifeproject.tumblr.com).

### ADVOCACY GROUPS

Please consider donating to one of these conservation efforts:

- Amboseli Trust for Elephants | [www.elephanttrust.org](http://www.elephanttrust.org)
- Big Life Foundation | [www.biglife.org](http://www.biglife.org)
- David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust | [www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org](http://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org)
- ElephantVoices | [www.elephantvoices.org](http://www.elephantvoices.org)
- Save the Elephants | [www.savetheelephants.org](http://www.savetheelephants.org)

### ABOUT HCCC

Houston Center for Contemporary Craft (HCCC) is a nonprofit visual arts center dedicated to advancing education about the process, product and history of craft. HCCC provides exhibition, retail and studio spaces to support the work of local and national artists and serves as a resource for artists, educators and the community at large.

Admission is free. Free parking is available directly behind the facility, off Rosedale and Travis Street. HCCC is three blocks south of Wheeler Ave. MetroRail station on Main Street.

HCCC is funded in part by grants from The Brown Foundation; Houston Endowment, Inc.; Texas Commission on the Arts; the National Endowment for the Arts; the Kinder Foundation; the Morgan Foundation; Windgate Charitable Foundation; and the Wortham Foundation. HCCC is a member of the Houston Museum District.

Houston Center for Contemporary Craft is funded by grants from the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance and is a participant of the Capacity Building Initiative.

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Cover image: Wendy Maruyama, *Satao* (detail), 2015. Wood, burlap, paint, string. Photo by Scott Cartwright.

## WENDY MARUYAMA The wildLIFE Project

## CURATORIAL STATEMENT

With a career spanning four decades, artist and educator Wendy Maruyama designs furniture pieces and imbues them with artistic references and themes related to her Japanese heritage. Born in La Junta, Colorado, to second-generation Japanese American parents, she has made several pilgrimages to Japan. Alternately reverent of Japan's craft history and dismayed by what she views to be Japan's self-indulgent and patriarchal society, Maruyama vacillates between creating works that mirror or parody Japanese culture.

The furniture movement of the 1980s, which marked the beginning of Maruyama's career, was influenced by Post-Modernism and Abstract Expressionism. Artists like Maruyama began to challenge traditions, turning towards the conceptual, and away from purity of form and materials. Furniture was transformed into hybrid objects that combined both natural woods and traditional joinery techniques with manufactured materials and hardware. Artists reflected on the past, constructing visual critiques through pastiche forms. Colors were bolder and richer, and designs masked their utilitarian intentions. Maruyama developed her signature forms through this exploration of history and concept. She created more abstract shapes and painted her surfaces with daring and lavish colors, highlighting the textures created by her tool marks.

Incredibly innovative and often rebellious, Maruyama's early work combined ideologies of feminism and historical furniture forms. Her practice continues to move beyond the boundaries of traditional studio craft and into the realm of social practice. *The wildLIFE Project* deftly illustrates the plight of African elephants and other endangered wildlife, a cause that is very personal to the artist. After travelling to Kenya to investigate the issues of continued poaching of both elephants and rhinoceros, Maruyama created an exhibition of object-based works, combined with a societal message about the dangers of poaching and the need to preserve animals in the wild. She views this work not only as an art project, but also as an advocacy tool—one that brings communities together for a common purpose.

My deepest gratitude goes out to the Windgate Charitable Foundation for their unwavering support of the craft community and this exhibition. I would also like to thank Houston Center for Contemporary Craft for debuting the show. Most of all, I want to thank Wendy for allowing me to accompany her on this incredible journey.

Elizabeth Kozlowski, Curator, 2015



## INTERVIEW WITH WENDY MARUYAMA

*As a curator, it is always my hope to achieve genuine collaboration with an artist and I believe The wildLIFE Project truly represents that. I had an opportunity to sit down with Wendy and find out what inspires her to create.*

**Elizabeth Kozlowski: Why did you choose furniture as the medium through which to speak?**

**Wendy Maruyama:** I was drawn to woodworking and furniture making in college. I dabbled in drawing, then tried ceramics, textiles and metalwork before settling on woodworking. Woodworking itself never really appealed to me. Furniture as a creative form motivated me, so I trained as a furniture-maker, using wood as the primary material. I find it natural to use furniture as a springboard for dialogue, especially with casework, which is my favorite furniture form. In some instances, the furniture form itself becomes a reference to a certain time period or culture, adding a new layer to the story.

**EK: As one of the first two women to graduate with an MFA in woodworking, do you feel any responsibility for the development of the field in terms of gender? Have you given any thought to the barriers you have broken?**

**WM:** Indirectly, perhaps I do. In my experience, gender barriers are imposed by social and familial influence. When I was growing up, girls took home economics while boys took woodshop and learned car maintenance. My mother encouraged me to take typing lessons in school so I could work as a secretary. It was a revelation when I discovered in college that woodworking is not just for boys. I felt cheated. I could have had a head start!

It was never easy. Even while in college it was a challenge to find employment in a woodshop. I once applied for a job in a cabinet shop and was told that they could not hire me because I "would just be a distraction for the men." I am very aware of the challenges that still exist, and am thrilled when I teach a class with more than fifty percent women. I want them to have the experience of learning these techniques without fear. I feel fortunate to work within an academic and artistic environment that is generally very liberal; sometimes a trip to Home Depot or a strange lumberyard will remind me that that sexism is alive and well. I am not sure if it will ever go away, but if I played a part in encouraging more women to go into this field, then I feel I will have done my job right.

**EK: You just celebrated your retirement after more than 35 years of teaching. Having influenced decades of women and men in the field, what do you hope to have inspired in your students? What do you think is the most important lesson as an artist?**

**WM:** I believe that the most important thing in any field of art is to be prolific. In order to make that one GREAT piece, you have to have made nine others before reaching that "masterpiece." Some artists, especially woodworkers, proceed so cautiously for fear of making a mistake. They end up taking forever to finish something. However, "mistakes" made in the process are often the best learning tools, and sometimes those mistakes end up leading to a fantastic idea.

**EK: I would like to delve into the symbolism behind *The wildLIFE Project*. Can you tell me about the significance of using the shrine form in *Cenotaph* and *Bell Shrine*?**

**WM:** A cenotaph is an empty tomb specifically designed to commemorate someone whose remains are elsewhere. It is a form usually used for war monuments. My contention is that there is a war on wildlife, and wildlife is suffering huge losses. The *Bell Shrine* is an adaptation of a Buddhist shrine used to honor the dead. It is fabricated from Claro walnut salvaged from a defunct rifle factory. The bell is set to ring every fifteen minutes, in honor of every elephant that is lost to poaching.

**EK: For *Bell Shrine*, you have incorporated Buddhist practices into the work. What drew you to the elephant and to later make the connection to Buddhism?**

**WM:** While I was working on *Executive Order 9066*, I became friends with several people who were members of the Buddhist temple here in San Diego. Although I am agnostic, I have always been drawn to the rituals of Buddhism, and have visited temples in Japan and in the States. The process of honoring or commemorating the dead found its way into my work while I was researching the problems of poaching. It became an internal way for me to deal with the agony of the research, and a way for me to honor the life of every animal that dies at the hands of poachers and trophy hunters.

**EK: You also spent some time at Pilchuck Glass School to create the hand-blown tusks for this body of work. Did you have any difficulties with the medium? Are you interested in continued use of glass in your work?**

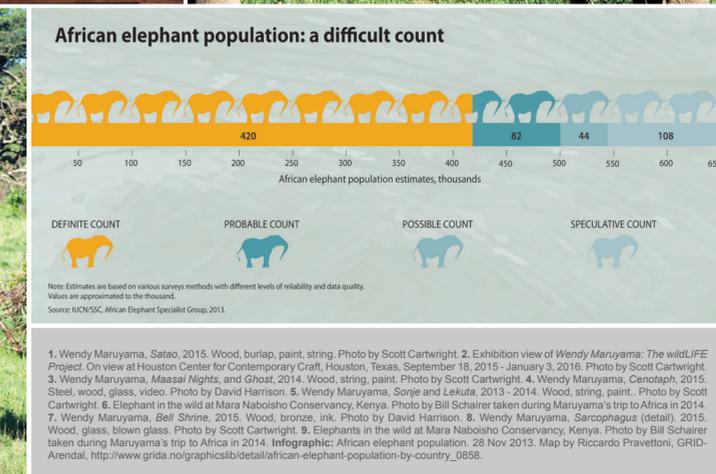
**WM:** As an artist in residence at Pilchuck I was paired with two phenomenal glassblowers, Nancy Callan and Dan Friday, who helped me with my tusk forms for *Sarcophagus*. This project would not have been possible without their help. I also took a tutorial with Joanne Teasdale on how to fuse photos onto glass. I am interested in using archival photos and also transparent materials, which allow me to layer multiple images and incorporate video monitors into my work.

**EK: What does your decision to house the hand-blown tusks in a sarcophagus represent in the context of the illegal ivory trade?**

**WM:** I wanted to encourage viewers to draw comparisons between the living animals, the bloodied tusks, and the use of ivory to create status symbols as trivial as chopsticks and bracelets.

**EK: Video has also been a major component in your work, typically embedded in your cabinet-like forms. How important is the full sensory experience?**

**WM:** Both the videos and photos function as an archive of memory associated with the work, whether they are historical, as seen in *Executive Order 9066*, or images and videos of animals in danger of becoming extinct. In *Cenotaph*, the video is encapsulated in a glass tomb as a desperate method of preserving a recorded remnant of this animal. Both metaphorically, and physically, the whole piece is incredibly fragile, despite being supported by solid steel.



1. Wendy Maruyama, *Satao*, 2015. Wood, burlap, paint, string. Photo by Scott Cartwright. 2. Exhibition view of *Wendy Maruyama: The wildLIFE Project*. On view at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, Texas, September 18, 2015 - January 3, 2016. Photo by Scott Cartwright. 3. Wendy Maruyama, *Maasai Nights*, and *Ghost*, 2014. Wood, string, paint. Photo by Scott Cartwright. 4. Wendy Maruyama, *Cenotaph*, 2015. Steel, wood, glass, video. Photo by David Harrison. 5. Wendy Maruyama, *Sorge* and *Lekota*, 2013 - 2014. Wood, string, paint. Photo by Scott Cartwright. 6. Elephant in the wild at Mara Naboisho Conservancy, Kenya. Photo by Bill Schairer taken during Maruyama's trip to Africa in 2014. 7. Wendy Maruyama, *Bell Shrine*, 2015. Wood, bronze, ink. Photo by David Harrison. 8. Wendy Maruyama, *Sarcophagus* (detail), 2015. Wood, glass, blown glass. Photo by Scott Cartwright. 9. Elephants in the wild at Mara Naboisho Conservancy, Kenya. Photo by Bill Schairer taken during Maruyama's trip to Africa in 2014. Infographic: African elephant population. 28 Nov 2013. Map by Riccardo Praveltoni, GRID-Arendal, [http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/african-elephant-population-by-country\\_0858](http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/african-elephant-population-by-country_0858).