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FOOD & WINE/ART/BOOKS/TRAVEL/GARDENING ... AND OTHER WEEKEND TREATS

THIS WEEK

A wine bar with all the time in the world; Learn it on the grapevine; Endurance art erases the stakes



ANIMAL MAGIC

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Chi-Ling Tabart has a sawdust-covered shelf on her Howrah garage work bench for all the creations from the past seven years that didn't quite work.

It's lined with intricate wood carving animals and characters that aren't good enough for Tabart, who likes her detailed and fine creations to be as perfect as the pictures in her mind.

She keeps these misfits where she can see them, to remind her of her mistakes so she doesn't make the same one twice.

"My creations are very small so they can easily break," she says. "Sometimes the wood piece I'm working with is only a millimetre thick."

Among the castaway collection are 3cm crabs with missing pincers and broken legs, and ants and bees with snapped off legs and broken wings.

It turns out, carving life-like animals and characters out of recycled, off-cut timber is a particularly tricky and time-consuming business.

"Carving is like solving a puzzle," the sculptor says. "You start with a block of wood and you have to imagine what you will end up with. You take the wood out of the block but you can't take too much, so it's quite challenging."

The self-taught wood carver and real life Geppetto creates incredible pieces that sometimes take her up to two months to complete. Sanding and oiling alone can take weeks.

"It's a terrible investment," she laughs. "But once you fall in love with carving you can never really stop."

Tabart can be hunched over her work for hours at a time. She gets so lost in concentrating on her carving that she ends up in a kind of meditation.

All her creations, mostly chiselled out of old Huon pine fence posts gifted to her by her father-in-law, are symbolic of an issue important to her.

They make you think about love and relationships, parenting, the environment and social inequities. Similar to the reject shelf in her garage, her carved creatures often highlight where we've gone wrong.

The 40-year-old whittles away for six hours a day at least, up to six days a week, using a pencil-like Dremel power tool. Sometimes her pieces are so tiny she needs to fold down sandpaper to half centimetre squares.

"I want to see my imagination come to life."

Chi-Ling Wood Art will exhibit small sculptural wood works ranging from \$390 to \$3800 at Sidespace Gallery in the Salamanca Arts Centre from October 14-27. The exhibition will be opened at 6pm on Friday, October 18