

## EAA March Zoom Demonstration Monday, March 4, 2024 @ 7:00p.m. Danielle Dixon - "Portrait Wood Burning"

Featured artist, **Danielle Dixon** demonstrated "**Portrait Wood Burning**" on Zoom from her home studio in Cleveland, Ohio. Program director, Joan Milligan, introduced Danielle to the group of 13 members who zoomed in to watch a very interesting presentation by this amazing artist. Danielle is not only an artist, but a published author and poet. She has a BA in Visual Art from Kent State University and is an alumna of The Cleveland School of the Arts. In March, 2023, she was featured on [PBS Applause - Ideastream](#), where she explained how the science fiction writings of Octavia Butler inspired her art. Danielle started burning portraits into wood as a novelty in the late 1990's. She was always fascinated by faces and the stories that people's faces tell. For this demonstration, Danielle chose to do a portrait of James Baldwin, a 20th-century American writer and civil rights activist who published novels, essays and plays on race, spirituality and human rights.

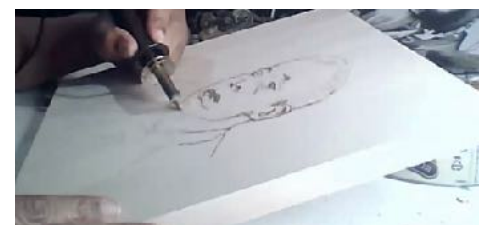


Danielle explained that she starts the process by taking the picture given her and making copies, blowing up the image to fit the size of the wood. She buys prepared wood from Michael's in the size she wants the finished piece. She pays close attention to the wood grain, making sure the wood is smooth and has no noticeable flaws. "The only eraser for wood burning is sandpaper, 150 grit...the higher the number the finer the paper," she said, which she also uses to rub off the build up on the tips of her tools. Danielle showed us her woodturning tools, five soldering irons each with a unique tip. She carefully sets up all the irons so that they are hot and ready to use. "Be mindful that the irons are very hot and can cause a fire if not handled with care."



Danielle uses transfer paper to trace the image on the wood using the tip end of a paint brush or the cap from a ballpoint pen. She does a generalized outline to ensure the proportions are correct. Then starting with the eyes and the dark areas as shapes, she presses hard enough to go through the paper and carbon. She traces just enough 'bread crumbs' so she knows where she's at. "I treat the portrait as a black & white drawing, even though it comes out in sepia," she said. In the 1990's, as she started to perfect the process, she did a portrait on a piece of wood with 'live' edge bark that had caught her eye. Her portraits quickly became popular. Charging only \$30 to \$50 each, she got lots of requests from co-workers, family and friends...a definite 'blue light special'! Obviously she was not charging enough!

Next step...start burning the wood, but first she wipes off any residue built up on the tip. Danielle gets the eyes and darker areas in place first. As a rule of thumb, she always makes the top lip darker. She continues to map out the shadows as shapes and defines the facial structure. "Tried cake decorating once and it was a disaster," she quipped. Changing irons to use a flat tip, she



builds shadows slowly. The flat tip allows for shading. By moving the iron tip slowly, the wood burns more creating a darker line. One face can take a total of 5 hours to complete. The final portrait can be left raw or can be coated with clear shellac. Danielle shared a beautiful portrait of her cousin's family...a total of 4 faces including a dog! She also does pet portraits.



Danielle likes faces with more character and lines, as this tells her more about the person and their life. As an artist who sees possibilities, she also plans to do a pastel portrait of James Baldwin. "I see a lot of purple in his face." As the demo was wrapping up, Danielle still needed to work more on his eyes. The last step will be to erase trace lines with sandpaper and wipe it off with a paper towel. We thanked Danielle for spending the evening with us and sharing her talents in wood burning. She achieved an incredible likeness in her wood burning portrait in just over an hour....an excellent demonstration enjoyed by all.