

WHEN ART IMITATES LIVESTOCK

An Illinois sculptor re-creates his farm's animals in wool.

Organic farmer Kiyoshi Mino, a Chicago native of Chinese-Japanese descent, raises chickens, ducks, sheep, and cows on 14 acres in Central Illinois. In

addition to tending livestock, the 36-year-old sculpts remarkably lifelike models. Mino, who learned about needle felting during a 2011 “sheep-to-sweater” course at the

Farm School in Athol, Massachusetts, initially tried working with fiber from his own flock, but cleaning and dyeing the wool proved incredibly labor-intensive. “It would be like if I were a painter and manufactured all my own paints and brushes,” notes the artist.

Mino begins each sculpture by building a wire armature, then uses a barbed needle to poke wool into the skeletal structure, gradually firming it into felt and adding more colors to create the contours of the animal's body and face. At first, he sold the

charming creatures—felted pigs, donkeys, and barn owls—for \$250 to \$500 a pop on Etsy, but he's since been overwhelmed by commissions from clients. Last year, the sculptor poured 400 hours into his biggest beast yet, a nearly three-foot-tall wool chimpanzee; the primate is now on display at Chamber, an art gallery in New York City, priced at \$12,000. Mino is currently working on three naturalistic birds for Princess Hisako Takamado, a member of the Japanese imperial family. Once the project is complete, he plans to post new work, priced from \$500, on his blog, kiyoshimino.blogspot.com.

Despite Mino's growing fame, he remains incredibly humble: “One thing I'm trying to convey is that animals aren't that different from us. We're just one species of many.” —Lynn Freehill-Maye



/ SAVE THE DATE / APRIL 2-3 MAPLE OPEN- HOUSE WEEKEND Throughout Vermont

Travel the scenic back roads of Vermont—America's no. 1 maple-syrup producer—as roughly 80 of the state's sugar shacks invite visitors to tap trees and help collect sap, then watch as the clear liquid is boiled down into syrup. Of course, there'll be food, from pancake breakfasts to sap-boiled hot dogs. (vermontmaple.org)

/ BY THE NUMBERS /

Keep calm and farm on: During the 2014-15 school year, the number of U.K. students enrolling in postgraduate-degree programs in agriculture and related subjects rose 29 percent.

SOURCE: HIGHER EDUCATION STATISTICS AGENCY, UNITED KINGDOM