

# AGS Judging: Technique Series



This Judging column is going to cover the judging considerations of one technique – a different one for each of the coming issues – to assist AGS Certified Judges when performing their judging duties and gourd artists who use the given technique and those who enter gourd competitions. Our goal is to help you answer the following questions: What does good look like?

What are the expectation differences for Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels? What do experts in the given technique expect to see that demonstrate quality execution of the skill? Conversely, what are errors that we should be aware of?



*Novice carving, above: Howard Palmer; left: Linda Shafer*

Our goal for sharing the judging criteria will promote a fair and consistent approach to evaluating gourds at Gourd Art Competitions. We know that no two artists (or judges) will agree 100% on a set of guidelines, but they will agree more than they disagree. The other “variable” happens at gourd shows, because they often describe entry categories differently. Some will allow other techniques in addition to the main one, i.e., Carving

with other media and embellishments. When other techniques and media are allowed judges and entrants need to know what the acceptable ratio of the main technique to “other” techniques is ... is it 90:10, 75:25 or 51:49? How is the specified ratio measured? Is the main technique the only one being judged? AGS Guidelines can help, but ultimately it is the decision of the individual Show/Competition committee and what they have announced (in writing). If not specified in the Show Guidelines, then the AGS Guidelines would be the default specifications.

## Question & Answer #1

**Q:** “I think all techniques should be judged. What if a nicely carved gourd has a messy rim? I’d judge that gourd down because the other technique detracted from the whole gourd.”

**A:** If a technique is being judged, that is what should be given the most weight. When we judge, most will consider the other things more as a tie breaker, offering extra points for artistry when the other techniques enhance the focal technique. An awesome carving should win over a mediocre carving that is beautifully finished if carving is the category.

## AGS Guidelines for Main Technique with “Other” Techniques

Main technique should be the dominate technique, 75% or more of the crafted area. Note: this is different from how much of the gourd must be crafted in the technique there is no requirement regarding the percentage of a gourd that must be crafted.

- If carving is less than 75% of the overall techniques, the entry should be moved to the category that corresponds to the actual predominant technique or to a multimedia category
- Main technique should be the ONLY technique evaluated for the quality of Craftsmanship
- Main technique should be the ONLY technique evaluated for Degree of Difficulty

## Judging Carving at Gourd Competitions

Carving is a technique that encompass’ several different techniques—relief carving, filigree, fretwork, cutwork and chip carving. Carving

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## Judging continued



*Intermediate carving, above: Jeannie Ryan;  
below: Wayne Schmad; right: Connie Wegeng*



categories may be separated into individual categories or lumped together. Rules vary from show to show; some competitions allow additional techniques and/or added colors. Carving techniques must be the predominant feature of gourds entered in these classes. Other



techniques, if allowed, should accent but not overpower the carving. Entrants should carefully read the entry guidelines and rules to avoid disqualification and judges should read them too to be consistent and fair.

### CONSIDERATIONS

**Originality:** It is recommended that the use of commercial patterns and class projects should not be allowed above the novice class. If the gourd is created from a pattern or the project was from a class and is entered in divisions above novice, fewer points for Originality will be awarded.

**Dominance:** In Carving categories, carving must predominate. Note: If the different forms of carving are in separate entry classes the stated technique is the one that must predominate. If the class description states 3D Relief Carving with other techniques, be sure the relief carving is the “dominant” technique...and not Filigree or some other technique. In some cases, the entry will be moved to a different category when the stated technique does not dominate.

**The Gourd:** Does the gourd sit well without danger of tipping over? Is the gourd appropriate for carving? Are there thin spots, flaws or mold markings that will detract

### Question & Answer #2

**Q:** “Will the gourd be judged lower if a “product” was added to weight it down?”

**A:** Adding weight inside a gourd for stability is fine, as long as it is done well and looks decent. Gourds tend to be thinner at the bottom and if they are sanded to sit flat, adding resin or something in the bottom is probably smart. Many judges award bonus points when a gourd is stable! If the gourd rocks all over the place, it is bound to break at some point in its lifetime.



from the finished project if not repaired? Is the gourd shell thick enough to be appropriate for the carving? Judges will be looking to see if repairs were made because the gourd was not appropriate for carving.

**Neatness:** All carved areas should be cleanly carved, without obvious errors such as patches or errant tool marks. When carving has been sanded and smoothed there are no unintended rough edges that detract from the carving. It is attention to these details that make one entry score higher than another.

### Question & Answer #3

**Q:** “Why should a judge be concerned if the gourd shell thick enough to be appropriate for the carving?” Sometimes carving on a thin gourd is more of a challenge. I don’t think the thickness of the gourd is really relevant, just the quality of the carving.”

**A:** People that start with really flawed gourds are going to have less than quality results. For example, Filigree should have some structural strength when finished. If you start with a thin shell and then remove a lot of material, someone will eventually poke a finger through the weak area. Relief carving shouldn’t show signs of going through the shell – they need a better gourd to start with OR they should become masters of repair! A good repair should be invisible.

If someone is leaving a gourd natural, it’s better to avoid areas with dark mold marks when carving. If they paint, that’s not a big deal.

**Presentation and Design:** Judges will be looking at all of the carved entries and comparing them. They will be looking to see how and where the carving is placed on the gourd. If it is too high or too low the result can affect the appearance. Does design catch their eye? Are soft and hard edges combined to create the illusion of depth and perspective? The judge should consider all these factors when scoring for overall appearance.

**Craftsmanship:** The skill of the artist will be judged in relation to the entry level (Novice, Intermediate/Open, Advanced, Masters). Judges look at how well the entry has been carved and the level of difficulty. At higher entry levels the degree of difficulty is anticipated to be greater. Using a fresh approach will receive a higher score for originality. As a new artist the use of patterns is acceptable, but as you become more experienced trying something different will be rewarded.

When additional techniques are allowed—pyrography, painting or embellishments—these techniques are not



*Master carving: Madonna Watermon*

factored in when judging craftsmanship. Only the carving will be judged for quality of craftsmanship and the key feature of the artistry. Of course, judges consider color and other techniques that have been added, but only when scoring for overall appearance.

**Artistry:** Artistry is an overall impression judges get when they look at an individual piece and/or the whole category from a distance. The phrase "I know it when I see it" describes judging the Artistry factor. As defined by Wikipedia, the phrase is a colloquial expression by which someone attempts to categorize an observable fact or event, although the category is subjective or lacks clearly defined parameters. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I\\_know\\_it\\_when\\_I\\_see\\_it](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_know_it_when_I_see_it)

### Conclusion

Many of these guidelines will apply to other techniques, such as pyrography, weaving and painting. It may seem redundant but repetition will lead to a better understanding and a consistent application of these judging guidelines. Focus on the originality, quality of craftsmanship and overall impact of design of your entries.

**One last word.** Take the time to enter your gourd art in the proper category and at the appropriate level. Don’t be afraid to enter at the higher level if you are on the cusp of two levels. Challenge yourself. Recognize that you are likely to be more accomplished than you give yourself credit for. 🙌