

# The Malohkoh Line

## Love poems in wood



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Intertwined as the curving lines are traditionally carved, past, present and future join together in the Malohkoh Line, woodcarving based on the Saramacan tradition.

Artisan Dona (born 1971), from this Afro Surinamese indigenous tribe explains that the Saramacan name for woodcarving is *paw a paw den doe*, which literally means line on line with content. All carvings have positive meanings since woodcarving is only made out of love and respect.

The most well-known woodcarving symbol is the never ending knot, symbol of harmonious living, also well-known in Africa and in Suriname most used in silver and gold as the so called "mattenklopper-ring". (Carpet beater-ring) The Malohkoh line has fine and exclusive carving based on the Saramacan tradition in modern as well as traditional furniture and utilities.

Dona named this line of sustainable forest products, after his foremother **Ma Lohkoh** who was captured from West Ghana, enslaved in Suriname on a plantation which she fled with her two sisters, thus preserving the African Heritage. Many more enslaved Africans fled and after 40 years of guerilla signed a peace treaty as free tribes with the Europeans who thought they could own them. African visual culture was thus preserved and developed.

# Love poems in wood

Woodcarving originally is the way a man expresses his love for his woman. The women express their love through the same lovely symbols in embroidery of clothes, carving inside gourds and drawing in cassava pancakes for her beloved man. The love poems carved in wood decorate everything and surround everybody in a traditional Saramacan village, woodcarving is on the huts, the ends of the wooden boats, the furniture (mainly traditional benches), the handles of spoons and forks, the peanut grinding many of boards, the rice winnowing trays. In Readytex many of these items are for sale in actual or miniature size.

In the fifties the indigenous tradition of love poems in woodcraft, which produced beautiful and functional objects, were also given to much respected visitors and on a small scale sold to tourists. Local people also began to develop a taste for this art and the demand was growing but the interior war of 1986 - 1992 forced many good artisans to move to French Guyana. So this country became exporter of Suriname wood carved products and Suriname's locals and tourists were left with little choice. One of the initiatives that changed this was Dona's. One day when Dona, then 23, was tired of unskilled and underpaid jobs he decided to try something on his own. With his own creativity, feelings, art and culture and his last 4000 Suriname guilders (1 Us dollar and 50 \$ cents) Dona

bought a knife, a mirror and a piece of wood. He created a hand mirror in wood which he decorated with carvings and called it *Hati den doe, from the bottom of my heart*. When he sold the mirror to Readytex, in 1994 he shared his dream with them and the Malohkoh Line was born. Anno 2004, the Malohkoh line has more than a dozen finely carved quality products, a workshop with enough equipment and Dona, his artisan cousin and their two young families are living of it. In the names of the commercial products Dona expresses his feelings and passes on his proud history.

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