

NIGHT + DAY

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THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE  
WEEKLY ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE  
**18-24**  
JANUARY



# GOING WITH THE FLOW

Vista artist Dean Ramos embraces uncertainty in his work

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Kate Abbruzzese, Matt Schwader, Helen Carey, Christian Cohn, and Helen Cespedes. Photo by Jim Cox.



**T**here's a certain level of satisfaction that comes with not knowing what's just around the corner. Dean Ramos is OK with that, but he didn't always feel that way.

"I think that people who are creative struggle with control," he says. "But as you get older, it becomes more and more about letting the creative process dictate the outcome instead of being in control."

"There's beauty in that uncertainty, of not knowing what's ahead," the 44-year-old artist says. "I guess I'm now at that phase in my life where I'm able to accept that ... that uncertainty."

At this particular moment, though, control is necessary.

He's putting the finishing touches on his new exhibit at Art Produce in North Park. Titled "Into," the solo show features a mix of old and new pieces, wooden sculptures and abstract work that "explore light and shadow, balance and movement."

"I know I wanted that piece near the window — the show is named after that piece," he says, pointing to a pair of wooden heads that make up his 2015 sculpture titled "Into."

Gesturing to the wooden sculpture "Lumbering," he says: "But that one was in the middle of the room yesterday, and it was bugging me all night because the other pieces in here need air and space around them. And that thing just occupies the whole room, so I ended up pushing it back there."

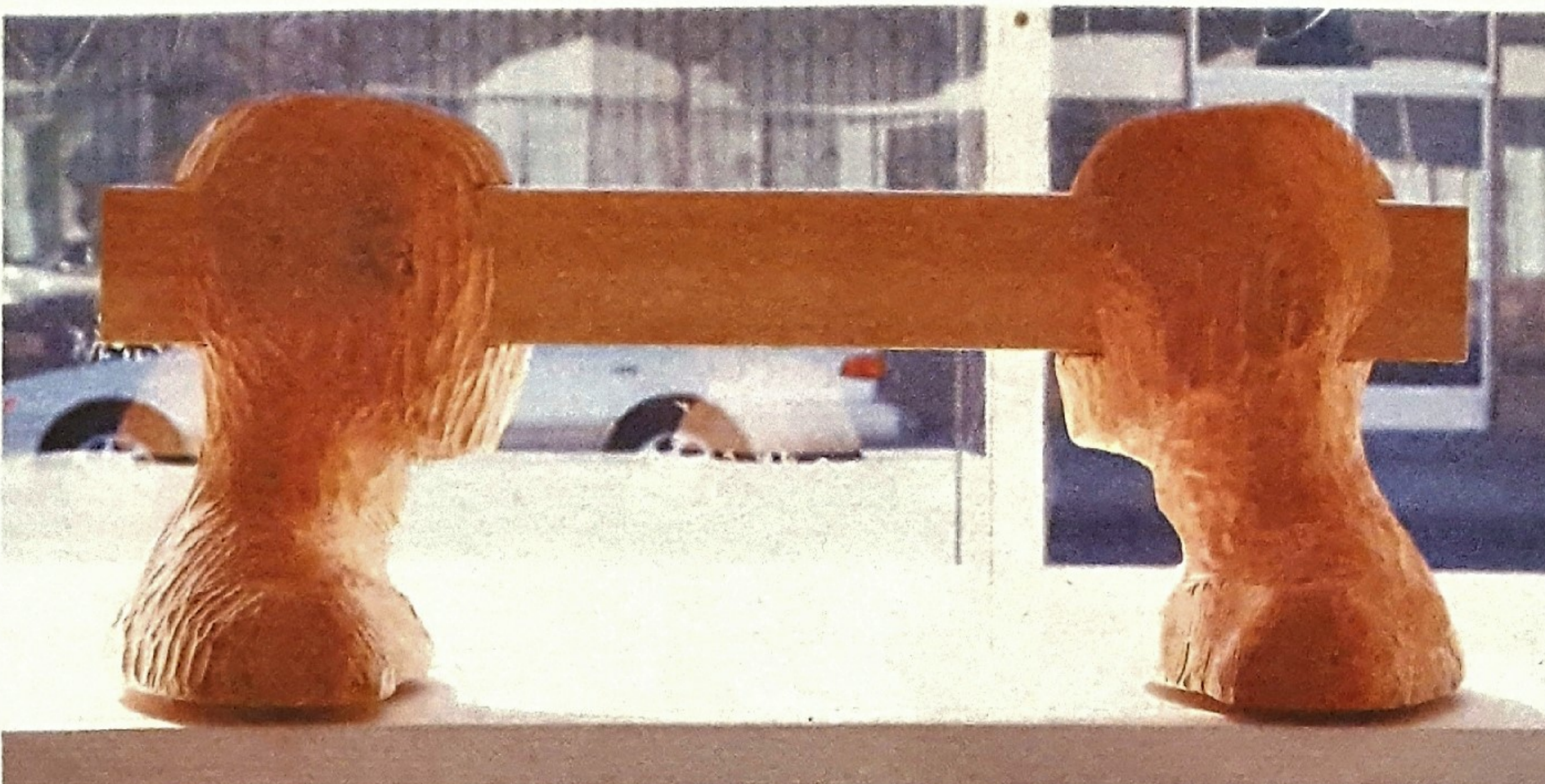
Now, on this particular January afternoon, "Lumbering" is set against the gallery's back wall, and the exhibit — which opened Friday and continues through March 3 — is almost ready. It's Ramos' third time at Art Produce, having participated in shows in 2010 and 2016. The latter — "Looking Back/Forward" — was a retrospective that featured 26 previously exhibited artists.

### Making the choice

Art came naturally for Ramos. His skills began to surface when he was a young child in Chicago, where he was born and raised.

"I was always artistic, always drawing," he says, "but it was probably around the third grade when people started realizing that I have this ability. I was always drawing, but I burned out."

It was in college — at a small liberal arts school in Chicago called North Park University —



COURTESY PHOTOS

"Into" (top) and "Drifting" are both featured in an exhibit at Art Produce.

where he began to fall in love with art again.

"I took a drawing class," he says, "but it wasn't until my junior year at North Park ... it wasn't until that time when I realized I had to make some hard decisions. The arts can be a difficult path. It's something people have to think about."

"Was I up for that life?"

His mentor, a professor and

artist, gave him a nudge.

"He was important in my life as far as giving me some guidance," he says. "It took being around another professional who's made that same decision to help me realize what I needed to do. When you're young and uncertain of what lies ahead, you're afraid to make the hard choices."

He's grateful he did.

Ramos — who went on to earn a

### DEAN RAMOS: "INTO"

**When:** Through March 3. Gallery hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Opening reception: 6 to 8 p.m. Feb. 3.

**Where:** Art Produce, 3139 University Ave., North Park (enter through the restaurant next door, Tostadas).

**Admission:** Free

**Online:** [artproduce.org](http://artproduce.org) and [deanramos.com](http://deanramos.com)

### WHAT'S NEXT

Ramos, who last year exhibited at the Koumi-Machi Kougen Museum of Art in Koumi, Japan, is preparing for a two-person exhibition at the Shiga Kogen Roman Museum in Nagano, Japan, this summer with his MiraCosta College colleague and department chair, Yoshimi Hayashi.

master's in fine art from the University of New Mexico in 2002 — is a full-time professor at MiraCosta College, where he's been teaching painting, drawing and sculpture since 2006.

"I'm grateful that I have a job that gives me the opportunity to do what I want," says Ramos, whose paintings and sculptures are part of collections around the country, including the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque, the Albuquerque Art Museum and the State Street Corporation in Boston. "Not everyone has that luxury. I'm able to create art for art's sake instead of doing it solely to pay my bills."

### Pushing boundaries

His new exhibit at Art Produce is a welcome return. Just ask Lynn Susholtz, the artist and arts advocate who runs and owns Art Produce, a nonprofit cultural center long considered to be the impetus behind North Park's resurgence.

"I don't gallery-sit, and Art Produce wasn't designed to be that kind of space," she says of the almost-always-open art venue on University Avenue. "It was meant to engage the neighborhood — to have art accessible to people walking to the drugstore, going to the bus stop or kids walking to school."

Ramos' art, she says, hits all the right notes.

"It's always exciting for me to see how an artist's work has evolved," she says. "And that's what this space is all about — they have the freedom to do whatever they want to do to the space. Anything to help them push the boundaries, to evolve. Knowing Dean from before, I know his work already. Dean knows how to engage."

For this exhibit, Ramos is showcasing sculptures carved out

of wood from Home Depot and abstract pieces made of plastic, copper wire and thread — two artistic styles at both ends of the spectrum.

"Sometimes my work is very physical and more emotional, more weighty," says Ramos, who creates his art in an 850-square-foot studio in his Vista home. "The wooden pieces are more that way — they're more visceral. And other times, I go to the complete opposite side of the coin. It's more ephemeral, very delicate. Sometimes I go from working with concrete to working with translucent material."

He adds: "But I know I need to work with materials. When I was painting, I'd reach a point where I wanted to physically interact with forms. Materials interest me — working to find the expressive potential of the material."

Just like his artistic process, Ramos revels in the unpredictable.

"Sometimes I'll have a piece done, and I'll see that I actually made what I sketched," he says. "But sometimes, what you end up with isn't exactly what you thought you'd have by the time you're done. And that's OK. It's kind of like breathing — you just have to let it form naturally and not confine it too much."

That's one of the lessons he tries to impart to his students.

"When I teach, I try to be respectful of my students and their creativity," he says. "I want them to have the freedom to be themselves — to not be too confined. There's this creative energy in each person, and you need to respect that. They have something to say, and you need to give them the space to do that."

It's a rule he tries to apply to himself as well.

"I don't think I'm ever quite happy with anything I make," he says. "That's good, though. It's good to question what you're doing. That's part of the reason why I think it's good to try different things. Otherwise, I'd just keep on doing the same thing over and over again. And just making the same thing repetitiously, I don't think that would completely satisfy me. With the visual language, the potential is so vast with what you could do and you can say. There's a lot of potential things I could make, a lot of different things to evolve from me."

And Ramos is always looking to evolve. There's a certain level of uncertainty in that — just the way he likes it.

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# COVER STORY

Dean Ramos in front of  
"Suspension 1" (acrylic,  
monofilament, wood,  
steel and paint), which  
is part of his exhibit  
titled "Into" at Art  
Produce in North Park.

# INTO THE UNKNOWN

Artist Dean Ramos,  
who has a new exhibit  
at Art Produce in North  
Park, lets his work go  
where it wants to go