

# What's in a Name?

## *ReTurnings* at the Wood Turning Center

BY D WOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN CARLANO





**L to R:**

Stephen Hogbin  
*Bowl*, 1978  
 3 3/4 x 7 3/4" (9.5 x 19.7 cm)  
 Mahogany  
 Wood Turning Center

Stephen Hogbin  
*Walking Bowl: Reaching*, 2000  
 10 x 5 1/2 x 5" (25.4 x 14 x 12.7 cm)  
 Birch, paint

**L to R:**

Leo Doyle  
*Spindle Bowl*, c.1985  
 8 x 13" (20.3 x 33 cm)  
 Walnut

Leo Doyle  
*Matched Candlesticks with  
 Matched Drawers*, 1987  
 14 x 4" (35.6 x 10.1 cm)  
 Bird's eye maple  
 Wood Turning Center



Every exhibition needs a name. As an embryo, it has a working title, but when it comes time to consider publicity and invitations a concerted effort must be made to give it a new identity. The Center's first exhibit of 2002 was "January show", or "Old/New", "Past/Present", until an early morning shower suggested "ReTurnings." I discovered that my thought was not original—Stephen Hogbin had used *Re:Turning* for his 1990 retrospective—but he agreed that we could adopt the name. It is appropriate that Stephen is present in this namesake.

The premise of *ReTurnings* is that artists who are represented in the Wood Turning Center's Collection were asked to provide work made subsequently to what is owned by

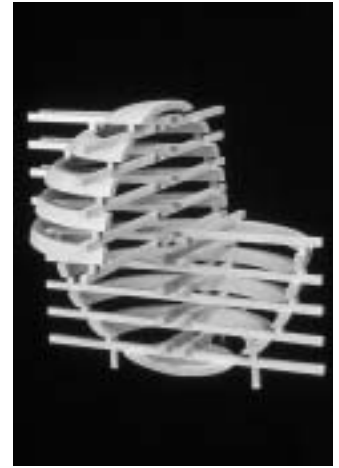
the Center. Some artists responded with recent pieces, others chose to send a favorite object that is part of their own collection. We then partnered each new arrival with an example from the Center's treasures. In Stephen's case the older work is *Bowl* from 1978, a mahogany example from Stephen's "rocking bowl" series. *Bowl* was created by cutting a bowl form in half and gluing the halves together at the original rim line. The bowl, therefore, has no "bottom" and can tip back and forth until it finds its natural resting point. The transformed vessel is an essay in line, concavity and convexity, repose and movement. Created over 20 years later, Stephen's complementary piece is *Walking Bowl: Reaching*. Stephen writes: "*Walking*

*Bowl: Reaching* is made from a spindle turning. The early walking bowls were made on a face plate. While there is a difference in each basic technique, the idea of the form remains similar and the sense of movement continues to be explored. Most turned objects are centered on the turning axis, which gives the form a classical repose. The walking bowls are romantic, playful, unexpected and extravagant gestures; reaching and dancing towards life." It is evident from the juxtaposition of these two works that Stephen returns to the theme of movement. One movement is smooth and graceful, while the other has forward energy and torque. It should also be noted that the later work has a painted inner surface, which draws emphasis away from grain toward



**L to R:**  
 David Ellsworth  
*Bowl*, 1980  
 2 1/2 x 7 1/4" (6.4 x 18.4 cm)  
 Quilted maple  
 Wood Turning Center  
 David Ellsworth  
*Mataak: Geometric Solstice Series*, 1991  
 29 x 23 x 16" (73.8 x 58.5 x 40.6 cm)  
 Ash, painted and burned

**L to R:**  
 Dewey Garrett  
*LIM #3*, 1992  
 4 x 12" (10.1 x 30.5 cm)  
 Bleached maple  
 Wood Turning Center  
 Dewey Garrett  
*Sphere Construction*, 2001  
 11 x 11" (27.9 x 27.9 cm)  
 Bleached oak



shape. Stephen aptly epitomizes the theme of *ReTurnings*, allowing the audience to observe the developments in his explorations.

Next to Stephen's pieces are two works by Leo Doyle that contrast with the movement of their neighbors. *Matched Candlesticks with Matched Drawers* and *Spindle Bowl* are definitively static forms. Leo's purpose was to pursue his intuition and imagination while addressing practical considerations. There is no hidden agenda—what you see is mastery of technique in expertly realized fine elements. *Matched Candlesticks* has long, elegant, tapering stems to support the candle receptacles; the drawers at the base of each candlestick contain a match box, revealing the humor of the title. *Spindle Bowl* embodies the

same elegance. Fourteen identical spindles define a conical space and, while practicality has been addressed, it is unlikely that Leo's work will ever be seen as other than sculpture.

The contrast between motion and stasis leads to another contrast in this exhibition: scale. David Ellsworth requested a largish pedestal before delivery of his work *Mataak*. With a footprint of almost 3 square feet and a height of 29 inches, it dwarfs most of the work in the show, as well as his piece from the Center's Collection. *Mataak* is part of the Solstice series begun in 1990 as a departure from David's emphasis on the wood itself. With *Mataak*: "...the surface becomes a canvas for expression through the integration of color, fire and the metamorphosed textures

of the material itself." Next to this rounded-over, splayed tube form, David's 1980 *Bowl* sits modestly and unassumingly. Yet it represents resounding expertise with its ultra-thin walls and an enviable ability to create line through the placement of edge and reliance on void. A number of visitors to the Center have been turned on to turning through David's classes; for these amateurs to progress they would be well advised to examine, carefully, his mastery of design.

Dewey Garrett's pieces warrant consideration of the variety of issues that they address. Beginning with *LIM #3*, which comes from our Collection, the work has what Gordon Ward (an ITE resident in 2002) calls the "cor blimey" factor, that is, how did the



**L to R:**  
 Giles Gilson  
*Holiday in Spring*, 1993  
 13 x 5 1/4" (33 x 13 cm)  
 Wood, lacquer  
 Wood Turning Center  
 Giles Gilson  
*Cammy-Oh II*, 2001  
 18 x 5" (45.7 x 12.7 cm)  
 Lacquered basswood, brass, walnut, Corian

**L to R:**  
 Dave Hardy  
*Ornament*, 1987  
 5 3/4 x 3" (14.6 x 7.6 cm)  
 Maple, rosewood  
 Wood Turning Center  
 Dave Hardy  
*Castle*,  
 11 1/2 x 11 1/2 x 7"  
 (29.2 x 29.2 x 17.8 cm)  
 Maple burl, box elder, cherry



artist accomplish this feat? Portions of the bleached maple bowl, once achieved, were sliced away so that the negative space was as strong as the positive. The more recent *Sphere Construction* again plays with the idea of positive/negative, yin/yang. To quote Dewey: "This piece examines the simple form of a sphere by constructing it in a tentative, skeletal form built from simple turned segments and scaffold-like supports. Unlike earlier works turned in entirety, this piece uses turned segments as the basis for a composition on form". The viewer is forced to look at form because the bleached oak provides no distraction. In *Green and Blue Life Form*, however, Dewey faces the challenge of surface design and color and achieves a work

that seems to connote longevity and heritage. The shield-like presence has a more aggressive personality than its cousins and it is the mark of an artist that such a vastly different body of work can emanate from the same hands.

Whereas Dewey Garrett is concerned with form in these pieces, Giles Gilson is inspired by his biography, as he interprets it artistically. From the Center's Collection, his 1993 *Holiday in Spring* has aspects of a positive vacation memory—sunny color, playful patterning—yet the stem and base remind the viewer of the need for groundedness about such a transitory experience. *Cammy-Oh II* is about a different subject: an allusion to femininity dressed in a particular garment.

The lip of the vessel curls back on itself much like fabric; the stem is elegant and sensuous to complement its opening. Giles' skill with application of tone and lacquer on both vessels is essential to the signature of his work.

Dave Hardy gained recognition as a turner primarily because of his Christmas tree ornaments. The early work was geometric, but as demand for the ornaments increased Dave incorporated realistic elements, such as castles. The turned and carved *Castle* which appears in *ReTurnings* is described as an ornament that just grew.

On the shelf beside Dave Hardy's pieces is the work of Christophe Nancey. Christophe was an ITE resident in 1997 and he continues to employ a technique he demonstrated in



**L to R:**  
 Christophe Nancey  
*Changing of Universe*, 1997  
 18 x 5 3/4 x 4" (45.7 x 40 x 10.1 cm)  
 Yew, manzanita, box tree, wire, red maple burl  
 Wood Turning Center

Christophe Nancey  
*Space Flower*, 2001  
 14 x 10 x 6" (35.6 x 25.4 x 15.24 cm)  
 Heather root, pewter, burned elm, maple burl

**L to R:**  
 Boris Bally  
*Rep Forms*, 1996  
 22 x 9 x 9" (55.9 x 22.9 x 22.9)  
 Recycled traffic signs, aluminum  
 Wood Turning Center  
 Boris Bally  
*Defiance of Direction Triptych*, 2000  
 25 x 5" (63 x 12.7 cm)  
 Recycled traffic signs



Philadelphia whereby he uses pewter filler with the wood. His submission for this show, called *Space Flower*, is a delicately balanced burl blossom, voluptuous in its breadth and exposure of smoothly turned surface. Pewter is evident on the outer side of the hibiscus-like trumpet. *Changing of Universe*, 1997, composed of a variety of woods and burls, incorporates metal wire to join separate elements prior to turning. Evidence of the tool glancing the metal can be clearly seen. In selecting this piece to put on display, we discovered that its two elements—a sphere and a collar—could no longer be housed as a unit. The collar had shrunk and the sphere is placed beside it rather than integral with it. The process of movement in a natural

material over time couldn't have been more appropriately named: changing of universe.

For those who have visited the Center in Philadelphia, you will recall it as a long narrow space with large windows along its eastern flank. It was important, when designing the show, to draw pedestrians from the front door of the gallery into the space and to entice traffic to stop. This was achieved by the placement of Boris Bally's *Defiance of Direction Triptych* on the rear wall, visible from outside. Boris recycles traffic signs and the triptych centers three bent or curved arrows on separate platters. The arrows can be swiveled, depending on whether you wish to direct traffic up, down or sideways. A triptych is usually associated with religious art and its

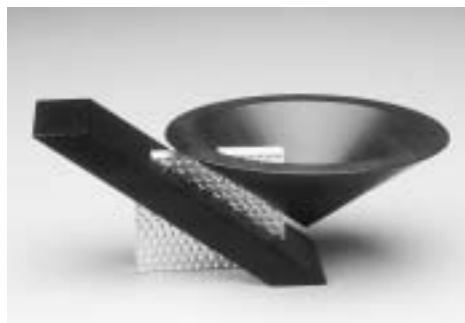
adoption here is an ironic comment on our material culture and apparent lack of spiritual direction. Additionally, because turn arrows and caution warnings draw our attention on the road, awareness of those messages ensures our attention to *Defiance of Direction Triptych* and its multi-layered content. On a pedestal beneath the platters is Boris' *Rep Forms*, a set of 35-pound dumbbells which play with the ideas of repeating exercises in a gym, repeating layers of material to compose an object and repeating use of a discarded product from an industrialized society. The Center welcomes the inclusion of such provocative avant-garde work in its exhibitions.

Michael Chinn's *Near the Edge* is avant-garde in a very different way. Michael's work is

**L to R:**

Michael Chinn  
*Tri* – 10,000, 1988  
3 1/2 x 9 x 6 1/8"  
Purpleheart, indian ebony, aluminum  
Wood Turning Center

Michael Chinn  
*Near the Edge*, 2000  
8 x 8 x 4" (20.3 x 20.3 x 10.1 cm)  
Mahogany, purpleheart, aluminum



**L to R:**

Christian Burchard  
*Old Earth Series: Black Walnut in Black Fields*, 1995  
5 1/2 x 5 1/2" (14 x 14 cm)  
Black walnut, ink  
Wood Turning Center

Christian Burchard  
*Black basket set (5)*, circa 2001  
2 1/4-9 x 2 1/2-9" (5.7-22.9 X 6.4-22.9 cm)  
Scorched madrone burl



dominated by the sensibilities of state-of-the-art industrial design and engineering; he is known for his juxtaposition of geometric turned shapes with high-tech materials. The piece owned by the Center, *Tri-10,000*, presently on tour with *Wood Turning in North America Since 1930*, incorporates perforated metal similar to that used in vegetable graters. The "product" which results, for it definitely looks more manufactured than hand-crafted, gives the appearance of fulfilling some functional purpose. Michael writes: "I choose to work with geometric elements in my compositions because they provide the means to address thematic issues via the universal visual language of form and space in a simple and direct manner. The conical form is

symbolic of a dominant culture, which by itself cannot stand with grace on its vertex. However, with the assistance of secondary and sometimes tertiary elements the cone can be supported in a variety of ways." An unusual piece, standing on its own pedestal, it demands special attention to see its connection to the surrounding exhibition. It is often the work outside the mainstream that pushes the boundaries of the medium as a whole.

Christian Burchard is the antithesis of Michael. Christian relinquishes control of his art by using green wood and letting the drying process determine his vessels' shapes. The burls are turned very thin with successively smaller vessels joining their bigger brothers as part of the same set. The *Basket* series

represented here is scorched madrone. An earlier, more formal work sits beside the grouping of five baskets—*Old Earth Series: Black Walnut in Black Fields*, dated 1995. Seeing Christian's booth at the American Craft Council 2002 show in Baltimore proved that the controlled and the laissez-faire exist side-by-side in Christian's work. We cannot assume that the separation of *Old Earth Series* from *Black Basket Set* by six years is an indication that the latter is the artist's "development." It is a reminder, yet again, of the returnings that artists make to re-view unresolved issues and familiar forms from the past.

Robert Sondag's *Myrtle #4*, which was part of the Center's 1999 traveling exhibition



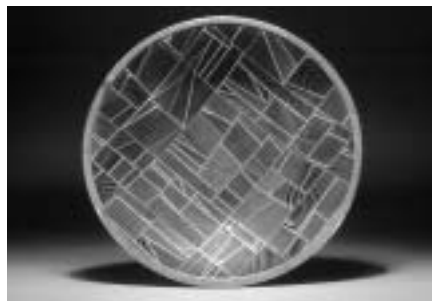
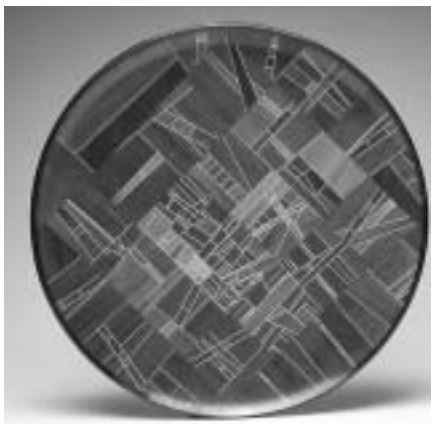
**L to R:**  
 Robert Sunday and various artists  
*Canes*, 1989  
 Assorted woods

Robert Sunday  
*Myrtle #4*, 1994  
 9 x 7" (22.9 x 17.8 cm)  
 Western myrtle



**Top to bottom:**  
 Max Krimmel  
*Alabaster Vessel #196*, 1987  
 4 1/2 x 17" (11.5 x 43.2 cm)  
 Alabaster, ebony, bloodwood  
 Wood Turning Center

Max Krimmel  
*Vessel #527*, 2001  
 3 1/2 x 8 1/2" (8.9 x 21.5 cm)  
 Alabaster, ebony



**L to R:**  
 Max Krimmel  
*Magahomaplenny, Bowl #46*, c. 1987  
 2 1/2 x 24" (6.4 x 61 cm)  
 Mahogany, maple, imbuya  
 Wood Turning Center

Max Krimmel  
*Vessel #106*, 1988  
 2 1/2 x 13" (6.4 x 33 cm)  
 Redwood, maple

*Curators' Focus: Turning in Context*, is an exquisite example of Robert's process: "Completing beaded surfaces which are as close to flawless as humanly possible, then taxing the surface with hand-incised texture, is a technically wonderful act....If all phases come together, then an object which delights the visual and tactile senses is realized. That's what drives me in my work." Robert's Collection piece is a cane from the grouping made for Albert LeCoff by over 35 artists.

Max Krimmel joins Boris Bally in his use of a material other than wood. In 1986 Max adopted the use of alabaster and has worked almost exclusively in the medium since. His well-executed classical forms are nearly taken for granted as the depth, color and light of the

alabaster takes precedence. The two bowls shown in *ReTurnings* have ebony rims, a dark line defining the lip of the bowl against the paler pink stone. Our piece dates from the late 1980s, while its companion was made last year. Alongside the alabaster are two of Max's glued wooden pieces, the scraps of wood separated by thin veneer strips. *Magahomaplenny* has been sealed with an impermeable finish making it seem like a manufactured product; *Vessel #106* is more naturally finished and includes sand-blasted redwood, making the desire to touch almost irresistible. Max's work demonstrates the tactile nature of the entire show.

*Timna*, from the Center's Collection, was the first in a series of William Moore's

experiments in combining spun metal and turned wood in a single vessel. The form is crisp and symmetrical; the grain of the madrone burl and the patina of the copper belie the manufactured appearance of the object. *Gatherer Series* has much more evidence of the hand. The uneven top edge, movement in the wood fissure, swirled pattern of the burl and mottled patina of the nodules of copper all contribute to a sense of an individual artist in command of his materials. With this freer use of wood and copper, there is a greater connection with the humanity of William Moore.

Mark Sfirri creates in seemingly disparate ways: he is a furniture maker, a lathe artist producing fair-face wood sculpture, a



**L to R:**  
 William Moore  
*Timna*, 1990  
 10 1/4" x 11 1/4" (26.1 x 28.6 cm)  
 Madrone burl, spun copper  
 Wood Turning Center  
 William Moore  
*Gatherer Series*, 2000  
 11 x 9" (28 x 22.9 cm)  
 Madrone burl, copper

**L to R:**  
 Mark Sfirri  
*Set of boxwood vessels (2)*, 2000  
 9 x 4 1/2 x 4" (22.9 x 11.4 x 10.1 cm) each  
 French boxwood, ink  
 Mark Sfirri  
*Sirup d'érable*, 2001  
 7 x 5 x 4" (17.9 x 12.7 x 10.1 cm)  
 Poplar, paint



contriver of whimsical and humorous *objets d'art*, a collaborator, an educator. He is represented in *ReTurnings* by the Center's *Glancing Figure K—Elvis* and several examples from his distorted bottle series. The most amusing, *Sirup d'érable*, is indicative of Mark's ability to reprise and adjust form, add surface embellishment and texture. The piece originated in response to participation in a Vermont exhibit for which he referenced the state's maple syrup industry. *Glancing Figure* is a statue about stature; it is abstract but the sculpture's title prompts consideration of its realistic reference. Mark will again be represented by the glancing figures series in next year's *Cabinets of Curiosities* exhibition to be held in conjunction with the Furniture

Society's 2003 conference.

What's in a name? Return is defined as "to go or come back, as to a former condition or place." It also means "to reflect or send back," "to reply," "profit made on an exchange of goods" and "round trip ticket." Each of these definitions is embodied in *ReTurnings*. We went back, we reflected upon what that journey unearthed, we responded to the continuity and/or change in the artists' work. We have profited aesthetically from the exchange and are committed to making the journey again in a future Wood Turning Center exhibition schedule. Our thanks to the artists who climbed aboard this time, who helped to give a name an identity.

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*D Wood, a writer specializing in fine craft, coordinated recent exhibitions at the Wood Turning Center and the installation of the exhibits featured in this article.*