

**Wood Turning Center**  
Museum of Contemporary Wood Art  
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***Exotic Woods, Metal Cutters and Dale Chase:  
Ornamental Turnings from the Walter Balliet Collection***  
March 4 – July 23, 2011

(Wood Turning Center, Philadelphia, PA) The Wood Turning Center is pleased to announce the March 4, 2011, opening of its exhibition: ***Exotic Woods, Metal Cutters and Dale Chase: Ornamental Turnings from the Walter Balliet Collection***, which will run at the Center through July 23, 2011.

This exquisite selection from the Center's museum collection includes wood objects finely decorated via metal cutters fastened to historic ornamental lathes. The objects, recently donated to the Center by retired tool and die maker and ornamental turner Walter Balliet, of New Jersey, reflect decades of meticulous experimentation and collaboration by Balliet and friends. These masterpieces include over eighty precious hand-size boxes by the late Dale Chase of California, the largest comprehensive museum collection to date. Other historic pieces, by Balliet and the late Frank Knox, are complemented by contemporary ornamental turning (OT) by Fred Armbruster, Paul Cler, and Gorst duPlessis. The exotic woods include over 25 varieties, including African Blackwood, Pink Ivory, and Bubinga. Experimental materials include precious metals, jade, and acrylic.

Ornamental turning is a historic and complex art form. Artists must configure and master their precise machines, their elaborate cutters and rosettes, and the materials which they select for ornamentation. Beautiful, elaborate historic machines such as Holtzapffel and Rose Engine lathes, belonged to European kings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for use by craftsmen to create treasures for their personal collections. Metal parts from these lathes were salvaged during World War II, and modern makers often had to rebuild their machines before use. Walter Balliet and other OT artists



have built or refined their own OT machines over years of experimentation. A few contemporary ornamental turners also have created computer-assisted ornamental lathes. This exhibit demonstrates that when all materials, machines and cutters are perfectly aligned to slowly cut away delicate, designed patterns over hours of time, the most exquisite detailed items result.

Walter Balliet first discovered ornamental turning in the Fall of 1976, in John Kelsey's article on ornamental turning in the 4<sup>th</sup> issue of *Fine Woodworking Magazine*, which included work by Frank Knox. Subsequently, Balliet utilized his tool and die making skills, along with drawings from the original Holtzapffel books, to build an ornamental lathe and later Rose Engine attachment in his basement. When he eventually met Frank Knox and saw his Holz machine, Balliet discovered he had built his lathe at 2 times the scale (since the Holz book provided no measurements or scales). Balliet next observed OT directly at the Wood Turning Center's 1987 *International Turned Objects Show* (ITOS) in Philadelphia, PA. He was particularly intrigued by the work of Dale Chase of California. Balliet met Chase at the exhibition and this led to collaboration and friendship which spanned two decades. This interaction resulted in the eighty Dale Chase pieces donated to the collection, all of which typify Chase's work over his lifetime. Balliet's professional friendships with Chase and others inspired him to design and make over eighty pieces, many of which are included in the exhibition. Now in his mid-90's, Balliet lives independently in New Jersey.

This exhibition reflects the long-distance collaboration between Walter Balliet (NJ) and Dale Chase (CA), regarding OT tools, metal cutters and techniques. From 1988 through 2006, Balliet and Chase utilized telephones and postage to share their ideas, designs, tools, cutters and products. Every time Balliet made Chase a new cutter or tool, Chase sent Balliet a box showing the magnificent results of their collaboration. Only Chase's untimely death in 2007 halted this profound collaboration.

The exhibit reflects how proficiently artist Dale Chase transferred his technical skills as a vascular surgeon to OT. At first, Chase ornamented only the exteriors of objects utilizing three ornamental lathes, including a 150 year-old Holtzapffel. Eventually he secreted the designs only on the inside, creating surprises and wonder with rosette designs, colorful nested layers of wood, and elaborate tactile surfaces. Chase's hand-sized, lidded, wood boxes include shapes he called – pocket; clam; cricket; cream puff; Prune; rims and nuggets. His finger-sized metal boxes vary from round to oval and hexagonal, utilizing silver and gunmetal, accented with bluing. The lids have Guilloche designs on them, executed with a 100 year-old Leonhard Engine, and highlighted with applied gold. Chase's treasure boxes delight and amaze collectors and onlookers, and reflect his design and technical skills as well as his years of collaboration with and assistance from his machinist friend, Walter Balliet.

The Wood Turning Center's museum collection was first established in 1986. It now contains over 900 historic and contemporary objects. Each reflects the evolution of wood and lathe turning for function and art, into wood as the medium for contemporary sculpture. Function meets sculpture in this international collection. Materials include wood, metal, jade, alabaster, acrylic and other materials that artists select and manipulate. The collection can be viewed at the Center by appointment and in the gallery section on our website.

**Opening Reception and Gallery Talk with Walter Balliet**, Friday March 4 from 5 – 6:30pm.

**Gallery Talk with Walter Balliet and Albert LeCoff** on Saturday April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2 – 4pm and Saturday May 7<sup>th</sup> from 1 – 3pm.

#### **THE WOOD TURNING CENTER:**

At its Old City, Philadelphia location, the Center features international contemporary art made from wood in changing exhibits, a museum collection showing the breadth of the wood field, a research library, and an eclectic mix of handmade merchandise in the Museum Store. The Center is open Tuesday – Friday, 10am – 5pm, and Saturday 12pm – 5pm. Admission is free. Donations support the Center's educational programs. For more information, visit [www.woodturningcenter.org](http://www.woodturningcenter.org), email [info@woodturningcenter.org](mailto:info@woodturningcenter.org) or call 215.923.8000.

**Programming at the Center** is supported in part by generous donations by all Members and Friends of the Wood Turning Center. Included is the **Cambium Circle**: Walter Balliet; Lee Bender & Carol Schilling; Fleur Bresler; Theodore Bunin & Miriam Karash; Harvey & Fiona Fein; Richard & Rita Goldberg; Bruce & Eleanor Heister; Robyn & John Horn; Bruce A. Kaiser; Elizabeth Kalogris; Jerome & Deena Kaplan; Stephen Keeble & Karen Depew; Alan Keiser; Leonard & Norma Klorfine; Tim & Sheryl Kochman; Herbert & Mae Kurtz; Dale Larson; Alan LeCoff; Albert & Tina LeCoff; H.F.(Gerry) & Marquerite Lenfest; Mark & Kathy Lindquist; Judson Randall; Greg & Regina Rhoa; Robin Rice; Norton Rockler; Doyle Scott; Joseph Seltzer; William A. Sticker; Robert & Mary Lou Sutter; Bradford Whitman; and Ronald & Anita Wornick. **Public and Private Foundations**: Samuel Fels Fund; Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance; Pennsylvania Council for the Arts; Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; Philadelphia Cultural Fund, William Penn Foundation and anonymous foundations. **Corporate Sponsors**: Penn State Industries; Rockler Woodworking & Hardware.

*The Wood Turning Center participates in First Friday Openings in conjunction with the Old City Arts Association.* The Wood Turning Center is a nonprofit art and educational organization whose mission is to further the growth of artists, exhibit contemporary art in wood, and promote public appreciation of the art.

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#### **Images (top to bottom)**

Frank Knox, *Greek Urn*, 1977, Lignum Vitae, 12 ¼" x 4 ½"

Dale Chase, *Lidded Container, w Two Bowl Forms*, African Blackwood, boxwood, 2" x 3 ¼"

Dale Chase, *Lidded Container, w Two Bowl Forms*, (Open) African blackwood, boxwood, 2" x 3 ¼"

Walter Balliet, *Potpourri Bowl*, 1988, Ivory, Brazilian tulip, Australian silky oak, American black walnut, 4 ½" x 4"

Dale Chase, *Blued Gunmetal Box*, Blued gunmetal, gold layers, 1" x 1 ¾"

Walter Balliet, *Bisselon Bowl*, 1995, Bisselon, spalted maple, 2 ¼" x 6"