

Joyce Anderson
Derek Bencomo
Ed Bosley
Michael Brolly
Jake Brubaker
Christian Burchard
Art Espenet Carpenter
M. Dale Chase
Michael Chinn
Fletcher Cox
Frank E. Cummings III
John Diamond-Nigh
Virginia Dotson
Addie Draper
David Ellsworth
Paul Eshelman
Ron Fleming
Giles Gilson
Jerry Glaser
Michael Graham
Stephen Hogbin
Michelle Holzapfel
Robyn Horn
Michael Hosaluk
Todd Hoyer
William Hunter
Carl Huskey
C.R. (Skip) Johnson
John Jordan
Ron Kent
Frank Knox
Max Krimmel
Dan Kvitka
Stoney Lamar
Bud Latven
Mark Lindquist
Melvin Lindquist
Steve Loar
John (Jake) May
Hugh E. McKay
Connie Mississippi
Bruce Mitchell
Ed Moulthrop
Philip C. Moulthrop
Thomas Nicosia
Dale L. Nish
Harry Nohr
Craig Nutt
Rude Osolnik
Stephen Mark Paulsen
Gord Peteran
Michael James Peterson
James Prestini
H. Wayne Raab
Hap Sakwa
Norm Sartorius
Jon Sauer
Merrill Saylan
Betty J. Scarpino
Lincoln Seitzman
David Sengel
Mark Sfirri
Michael Shuler
Alan Stirt
Bob Stocksdale
Jack Straka
Del Stubbs
Robert Trout
Howard Whipple

Wood Turning in North America Since 1930

Tour Schedule

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Minneapolis, Minnesota

October 21 – December 30, 2001

Target Gallery

Symposium I, October 26 – 27, 2001

Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Washington, D.C.

March 15 – July 21, 2002

Yale University Art Gallery

New Haven, Connecticut

September 10 – December 1, 2002

Symposium II, September 20 – 21, 2002

Wood Turning in North America Since 1930

Wood turning is the cutting of wood as it spins on a lathe. Seventy years ago, the craft of wood turning was rarely practiced in this country outside of high school shop classes, factories, and the workshops of hobbyists. Today, turning is a sophisticated art form that has attracted the attention of museums and collectors. This exhibition traces this transformation and explains the emergence of the studio turner. It includes many of the crucial objects that have led turners to breakthrough to new technical and aesthetic directions. It also presents an historical analysis of the field based on chronology and varying approaches. This history shows that some wood turners have seen the use of the lathe not as a limitation, but as a challenge that elicits creativity, experiment, and aesthetic accomplishment.



Mark Lindquist sculpting
on the lathe, 1979
Photo by Kathy Lindquist



James Prestini
Salad Set, 1939
Cuban and Honduran mahogany
Tray: Diam 21 7/8",
Small bowls: Diam 6 15/16";
Large bowl: Diam 11 3/8"
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, Gift of the Artist, 1975,
1975.135.1-8
Photo The Metropolitan Museum
of Art



Bob Stockdale
Fluted Birdmouth Bowl, ca. 1965
Macassar ebony
H 2 3/4" x W 6 3/16" x D 5 11/16"
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill
Photo by John Carlano



Howard Whipple
Intarsia Box #116, 1947
Mahogany and various
inlaid woods
H 1 3/4" x Diam 6"
Oakland Museum of California
Lent by Mrs. Howard Whipple
A77.40.6
Photo by Oakland Museum
of Art

Modernism: Form and Material

The first contemporary studio turner of note in America was James Prestini, a turner, sculptor, and teacher. As a lineal descendent of the idealism of the Bauhaus, Prestini was interested in pure form. Bob Stocksdale, by contrast, was inspired by traditional Asian design. He was the central figure in a group of early turners in California who brought out the color and figure of choice pieces of material, paying careful attention to the compositional opportunities inherent in each piece of wood. A few early turners, like John May and Joyce Anderson, were strongly influenced by Scandinavian modernism, an enthusiasm that swept America's design community in the period immediately before World War II. May's work, like Scandinavian design, offered soft but exacting contours that bridged the gap between modernist purism and commercial appeal.

Hobbyist Experimentation

In the 1920s, a dramatic increase in home ownership, particularly small-sized suburban homes, and the widening of electrical service to these houses spawned the growth of a do-it-yourself, home craft movement. Turning was one of the favored workshop activities. As electric tools were still relatively expensive in the 1920s and 1930s, only the most dedicated and wealthy do-it-yourselfers purchased lathes. They learned their skills on the lathe by trial-and-error and by reading magazines, such as *Popular Mechanics*, and turning manuals. Occasionally, such non-professionals, for example Howard Whipple, hit upon techniques and styles that were surprisingly sophisticated.



Rude Osolnik
Salad Set, ca. 1950
Rosewood
Large bowl: H 4 3/4" x Diam 12"
Small bowls: H 2 1/3" x Diam 7"
J.B. Speed Art Museum,
Louisville, Kentucky, 1999.4.1-6
Photo by Kenneth Hayden

Other Early Professionals: Rude Osolnik, Mel Lindquist and Ed Moulthrop

Rude Osolnik was the most prolific studio turner of the 1950s, and Mel Lindquist, and Ed Moulthrop began working in the 1960s. All were professionals, in the sense that they sold their turnings. But because of their relative geographic isolation, none had much influence on other turners until they were well into their careers. All three prized stylistic distinctiveness over the purity and simplicity of form. In this respect they offered later turners a more free and open-ended model of turning than the modernist approaches to turning represented by Stocksdale and Prestini.



Rude Osolnik
Candlestick Set, ca. 1952
Walnut, brown felt
H 17 1/4" x Diam 3 1/4";
H 15 1/4" x Diam 3";
H 12 1/4" x Diam 3"
Mobile Museum of Art,
Museum Purchase with Funds
from John B. Waterman by
exchange, P1998.04.01-02-03
Photo by Alex Contreras

Production Wares

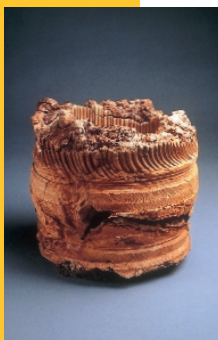
With the advent of widespread professional turning came an interest in serial production wares, which were designed to be made in a rapid repetitive series, and sell just as quickly. Prior to 1980 nearly all professional turners made such "bread and butter items," which provided consistent income to supplement the sale of major pieces. Because such work demanded efficiency, simplicity, and reliability in use, serial production wares were an important way that turners honed their skills and learned about effective design.



David Ellsworth
Vessel, 1979
Desert ironwood
H 6 3/4" x W 6"
Wood Turning Center,
Anonymous Loan,
1995.01.01.051L
Photo by John Carlano

The Hollow Vessel and the Natural Edge

In the late 1970s, David Ellsworth was the most widely influential figure on the east coast. He originated a new way of fashioning turnings, using a cutting tool with a bent shaft that allowed him to turn the interior of his forms to eggshell thinness. Such "hollow vessels" continue to be a fundamental means of expression in the wood turning field. The most important compositional device for hollow vessel turning is the "natural edge," in which the rough profile shape of a log is left intact as a defining part of the turned vessel. Such an edge provides an organic counterpoint to the regular geometry of the turned vessel.



Mark Lindquist
Nehushtan, 1982
Cherry burl
H 14" x Diam 15"
Collection of Robert A. Roth
Photo by Paul Avis
Photography Studio

The Textured Mass

Rather than turning to refined thinness and proportion, some turners created massive, thick-walled vessels and used texturing, rather than edge, figure, or color, to provide visual interest. Mark Lindquist can be credited with popularizing this approach to turning, which he developed alongside his father, Melvin. The substantial walls and roughly textured surfaces of Mark Lindquist's work in the 1970s were diametrically opposed to the thin walls and pristine finishes of Ellsworth's hollow vessels. In a sense the work of these two figures set the poles between which turners over the succeeding decade would experiment.



Stephen Hogbin
Chair, 1974
Cedar
H 32" x W 28 1/2" x D 38 1/2"
Collection of the Artist
Photo by John Carlano

Turning as Engineering

Some contemporary artists approach turning as an engineering challenge. For them, the limits and possibilities of the lathe itself provide an arena for artistic creativity. For some who approach turning in this way, such as Stephen Hogbin, circularity is a factor to be struggled against and transcended through ingenious manipulation. Others have focused on polychrome turning, in which a multi-part glued block is shaped on the lathe. This technique is capable of introducing pattern and color into the turned object, because the block can be made up in any configuration of different woods and composed in an infinite variety of patterns.



Giles Gilson
Sunset, 1987
Lacquered basswood
and aluminum, black flocking
H 12 1/4" x Diam 24"
Smithsonian American
Art Museum, Gift of George
Peter Lamb and Lucy Scardino
in memory of Natalie Rust Lamb,
1995.100.8
Photo by Bruce Miller

The Design Aesthetic

One way that turners have tried to break out of their parochial “craft” status has been to occupy the vocabulary of contemporary industrial design. This phenomenon occurred primarily in the 1980s, perhaps because of the power and high profile of professional designers in that decade. The move to a design aesthetic occurred in all the crafts, but it made an especially dramatic impact in turning, where “wood worship” had been the dominant strain. Design-minded turners flew in the face of this reverence for material, applying paint to the wood surface in order to explore elements of graphic design.



Hyperbolic Objects

Often, turning is only an initial step in the generation of a piece, as the craftsperson concentrates his or her skills on tour de force carving. Michelle Holzapfel, a turner and carver in Vermont, has been the leader in this type of work. She is unusual in her ability to infuse her creations with narrative content as well as virtuosity.

Michelle Holzapfel
Domestic Violence II, 1987
Assorted hardwoods, acrylic
H 29" x W 18" x D 14"
Yale University Art Gallery,
1999.41.1
Photo by Carl Kaufman



Ornamental Turning

This type of turning depends on the use of a complex ornamental lathe. The work piece can be rotated by hand at increments measured by an index on the lathe; at each "stop" the piece is cut by specialized rotating cutting tools. Ornamental turnings, like hyperbolic objects made on regular lathes, derive their interest from the extraordinary investment of time and skill placed in their manufacture.

M. Dale Chase
Best Box '94, 1994
African blackwood, pink ivory
H 1 3/4" x Diam 2 3/4"
Yale University Art Gallery; Gift
of Ruth and David Waterbury, BA
1958, in honor of Patricia E. Kane
2000.93-2a-b
Photo by John Carlano



Framing the Turned Object

Turners continue to look for ways to emulate the characteristics of fine art. One of the most powerful devices in this regard has been the tactic of framing the vessel in a larger sculptural context, such as a shaped pedestal. Early manifestations of such framing were quite direct, simply putting a vessel atop an integral stand. But recently, there has been a more thoughtful incorporation of ideas from the fine art world into the turning field. In the process, turning has taken on some of the self-awareness and metaphorical power of contemporary sculpture, without losing its identity as a craft.

Connie Mississippi
The Black Hole, 1992
Laminated plywood, paint,
rubber, nails
Diam 37 3/8" x D 21"
Collection of the Artist
Photo by John Carlano

Wood Turning in North America Since 1930

Yale University Art Gallery
New Haven, Connecticut
September 10 – December 1, 2002
Symposium II, September 20 - 21, 2002

Family Day
October 19, 2002

John Jordan
Wood Turning lecture/demonstration
October 5, 2002

Mark Sfirri
Multi Axis Turning lecture/demonstration
November 2, 2002

Jon Sauer
Ornamental Turning lecture/demonstration
November 23, 2002

Wood Turning in North America Since 1930
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Wood Turning Center
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www.woodturningcenter.org

The publication accompanying the exhibition features two essays that provide an historical and critical analysis of the wood turning movement, as well as a description of the attributes of wood as an artistic medium. The 192-page book also includes 157 color illustrations with analytic captions of all 134 works in the exhibition, glossary, index, and finally, biographies of the 67 artists in the exhibition, an index of important exhibitions of wood turning, and an extensive bibliography. The publication is available in both softcover (\$35) and hardbound (\$65) editions at the venues or through the Wood Turning Center Museum Store 215.923.8000; turnon@woodturningcenter.org and Yale University Art Gallery Museum Shop 203.432.7421; art.museumshop@yale.edu.

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