

## **“Conversations with Wood” - transcript July 21, 2011 walk-through**

**Curator Jennifer Komar Olivarez and collectors Ruth & Dave Waterbury (with additions from Ruth & Dave’s earlier presentation and from Jennifer and the Waterburys later walk-through with MIA staff – noted with brackets.**

Q. - Why did you start your collection?

Ruth: It’s a disease! ... There a whole underground of people that you get to know. Buying pieces is fun. Getting to know the makers is fun. Getting to know dealers is fun. Getting to know other collectors is fun.

Jennifer: Ruth and I were recently speaking to a group that included some of our friends who are collectors of antiques. Ruth said, “It’s great to collect those things but you will never meet the people who made them!” [They’re all dead.] That’s been one of the great joys of doing this [collecting contemporary wood artists].

Ruth: There’s another great joy too. When you collect things that are old, the universe of things is pretty much known, established. You might pick up the challenge of filling in the gaps. This doesn’t happen in things that are made today – yet. Nobody knows [where the field will go]. It’s a completely unknown thing.

We do not have a collecting philosophy. We see something. We like it. We buy it. End of story. It has to be a fabulous object that can stand on its own. After we buy it, I’m happy to learn all kinds of things about it. But in the decision to buy it, I do not care how much it costs, who the artist is. I do not care how long it took him.

If you’re true to your passion, true to yourself, you probably can look back and say, ‘This is the stuff I like.’ I would challenge a person – a priori - to say ‘This is what I like.’ You hear all this stuff calling to you.

I hope you’ll see that the conversations happen in many directions.

[[From Jennifer’s first tour and Ruth’s morning tour: Wall sculpture **Christian Burchard [Crossroads #2, cat. 51]**

[[Ruth: What do you see: Line, form and texture. The way the lines intersect. The way they emphasize the burl.

As for the conversation, the burl is playing a part in it. The burl has something to say. In a successful piece, the artist will hear what the wood has to say and will show it off. If the artist tries to get more important than the wood, it’s hard for the piece to be successful. If he tries to depend TOTALLY on the wood, well, then

you've got a nice piece of wood. If you want a good piece of wood art, you have to have this conversation between the wood and the artist. I think Christian's piece is fabulous for that. Very refined and clearly a burl.]]

[[Jennifer: This can be interpreted as an aerial landscape of a forest punctuated by roads, intersecting a large burl. Catalog says that Burchard had a request from Oregon Arts Commission to do wall sculpture for the forestry headquarters of the Umpqua National Forest.]

Jennifer: having said all that, I would say – Being familiar with a number of collections of this material (wood), the way that Ruth and Dave have collected – They have collected in depth with some artists - **Ron Kent** for example, he was the first artist they collected that they saw at the first gallery. But their collection was broad enough that it really did show the range of development of wood art – what was formerly known as 'turned wood.' But that field encompasses so many other techniques now that it's really discussed as the category of 'wood art.' But it made it broad enough to show the breadth of the field.

The Waterburys started collecting in 1987. In the 1970s, this was a craft-based medium. The field was exploding. [It's still a craft-based medium (wood); the techniques have expanded, though, and include more sculpture within that medium.]

[[This show is international. It has artists from America, Australia, France, England, Denmark, Japan, Wales, Ireland. One of the questions about the shift from craft to art: When does an object become "museum-worthy?" Essays in the book, "Conversations with Wood" address that. Fiber artists were experimenting at the same time.

Of the 500-some objects in the book, to narrow it down was difficult. I had in my mind 80 objects. Speaking to Roxy Ballard, our exhibition designer, when we were planning this show - we were talking about 80 objects. She was thinking about that space. She said, 'Let's see if we can spill out into this hallway – G240. If we can't do that, we're going to have to start cutting objects.'

I said, 'WHAT? I could fit 80 objects into the US Bank gallery.' I wanted to incorporate as many approaches as possible with top objects by top artists, as well as looking as less-well-known artists – who produce unique objects because of their approach. But Roxy's approach was to give all the objects a lot of breathing room.

About the research –something behind the Conversations: The idea behind the book was for the Waterburys to document their collection as they planned to give parts of it to museums. So they hire Bob Fogt, who was a staff photographer here for many years - to document the collection.

That was an amazingly prescient thing to do. Those photographs allowed the museum to work with them. But also they decided to send them with a letter to the living artists to get remembrances of that object – looking back into their artistic development or anything else they might remember about that object. And they all responded. This resulted in remarkable artist statements. These were revelations that were interesting to the Waterburys. It's amazing how many responded. We're talking about people who are just very engaged.

Many of them the Waterburys knew. Some they didn't. Some had a lot to say. Some didn't so much. Those conversations – in looking at the objects and thinking and talking about it – are featured on the label copy. What's in Italics are the quotations that came from the artists and were edited down – but also featured on the labels. So we also talked about that whole process of documenting the collection.

It's invaluable when you get an artist to reminisce about a particular work in your collection. That's information that the curators can use FOREVER. As these pieces find homes in museums – some have found in our museums already – that information stays with them. [Compare with what we do not know about ancient and other objects where artists are long dead. Ex. Metsu – Famous artist, yet don't even know who the woman is] It helped us all learn so much more about these pieces.

Ruth: It was fun – just like Christmas: '*Guess* who we heard from today....finally heard from?' Only ONE doesn't have email!

Jennifer: First of all – the videos. Because there are so many techniques involved in this field now, it was one of my objectives to illustrate that. We looked at videotapes from the era that the Waterburys collected and from their own video collection. But I wanted to show different processes. So they're excerpts:

This is Ray Allen working a segmented piece where he planned something on paper very meticulously. He's an engineer - very mathematical and precise. One of his pieces is in the exhibition. Then you have artists who have more of a coming from a trained artists or creative perspective where they let the wood speak as they start to work with it and it leads them in a particular direction they weren't necessarily planning.

So the series of videos shows different techniques – everything from chain-saw carving by Robyn Horn, which means something to some people. But we're not talking about carved bears here we're talking about a very high level of abstract sculpture. We're talking about using burls and multi-axle turnings. Different processes.

A lot of artists use blown-down trees. They don't want to contribute to deforestation. With **Dan Kvitka [Hollow Vessel, cat. 256]** he uses amboynas burls from Indonesia, some of the rarest and most costly in the world. Another artist in the show – uses the cast-offs for his **Norm Sartorius [Spoon, cat. 418]** Because these works span 25-30 year time span a chronological exhibition didn't make a whole lot of sense. What we did was group objects with Roxy's assistance. To see what kind of formal or aesthetic characteristics worked together.

Just to give you a sense of where everything started:

[From Jennifer's first walk-through: In this first case, these are all objects made in the last 25 years. We placed objects based on aesthetic similarities. This piece, **J. Paul Fennell [Basket-Weave Closed Vessel, cat. 110]** is a *trompe l'oeil* (fool the eye) piece. This is the start of something new in wood-working for that artist—the piece marked a new direction for him.]

[[Ruth's walk-through: This one was a challenge – where do you put the camera? With portraits, that's pretty easy. The farther away from portraiture, the harder the photography gets.

[[Ruth: This case, the centerpiece is **Hayley Smith – [Platter #4, cat. 462]** There's grain and figure.

[[Dave: The dominant visual here is line. That [the horizontal marks are] not the grain of the wood. That's figure that is superimposed upon the grain. When you start to look closely at it, the grain is actually running vertically. Smith really gets worked up with how you display the work.

[[The first time we had it in a show, she looked at that platter and said, "You've got it displayed incorrectly." How do you display a ROUND object INCORRECTLY? In that case, all you could see was the grain. You couldn't see the carved figures. Hayley feels that when the grain is shown prominently, the piece is dead. When it's vertical – the way the tree is standing - you're alive. She has seen the way Roxy displayed this and she's OK with it!]]

This case shows where the field of professional wood turning in the modern era started: It's about "perfection of form and show-casing the beauty of a specimen of wood." And **Bob Stocksdale** was one of the first professional wood turners. There's an object by him inside gallery. But that was the approach:

In this case, you're looking at **smooth edges and regular form**. This was about perfection of form. Stocksdale was the first professional wood turner to become known in this field. Then the aesthetic really changed with the focus on sculpture especially in the 1970s. But two pieces are kind of fun and whimsical with

the **Michael Hosaluk**, which is the **"Family' [cat. 178]**. And this one by David Sengel, which is also a **"Family Portrait" [cat. 435]**.

This one [**Hosaluk**] **can** be rearranged depending on what your family dynamics are! You can separate them. Or move them around. He's a Canadian turner. He's down a lot for the field in innovation, getting people to follow their creative spirit. A lot of his pieces are zoomorphic. This one has been interpreted a number of different ways (seals, leeches, slugs). But the prevailing one is seals. Or leeches. They are actually boxes. They do open up.

The same is true of the David Sengel piece. It's a collection of thorns, which is one of the materials he works with to create this prickly, yet still-united family. The family sticks together but can be prickly. The pieces – the top elements that you see he's turned are in fact boxes. The lids come off. We have the egret in our collection: David Sengel, "Egret," 1996, #2002.84.43a,b, G275

Don't forget that we have related material in our permanent galleries too.

These are two very beautiful vessel forms. This one by **William Hunter** [**"Garden Songs, Cat. 205**], who's one of the top artists in the field today, working with cocobolo – or rosewood, which is a very hard wood to work with. It's sculpted. And his forms started to open up from a vessel that was first carved, then pierced. So it's really like grasses in its inspiration. This was a single piece of wood. It was turned, then carved. Nature is his inspiration. He's living at the fork of two rivers for 25 years. He references grass blowing in the wind. He wanted you to look through the sculpture. As his work becomes more abstracted, the piece is not a particular plant – but more the feelings he has as he watches the plant undulate. His work becomes more and more deconstructed.

[[Ruth's friend who is a long-time collector, much of whose collection is at the Renwick in Washington, D.C., docent at Smithsonian and Renwick: It clearly references nature. And the fact that he lives high in the Palisades and looks down on the water and sees the movement. He wants you to look into the sculpture. But also look at the shadows it casts.

[[Ruth: He's big on shadows. In fact, the shadows in this piece are not as dramatic as some of his pieces. This is referencing grass but also movement. Hunter is one of the tops in terms of collecting and market.

[[Her friend: He's also good at deconstructing a vessel. This is the beginning of Hunter's deconstructed works, where they are "coming apart."]]

**Derek Bencomo**, who's a Hawaiian artist who works a lot with koa, which is a native wood. A lot of artists work with woods that are native to their particular areas. This one [**"Shadow Dancer, Fourth View, cat. 18- wrong image in the book – only glaring mistake the Waterburys found – it's properly displayed in the gallery**]. He says in his letter to the Waterburys that it came from a *koa*

root that was the size of a Volkswagen! So he got a lot more pieces out of it – I’m guessing. This specimen, you can see the grain patterns are very beautiful in this piece. This is a single piece of wood.

Inside U.S. Bank gallery:

Jennifer: I’m going to have Ruth talk about this piece - **Ron Kent** is a person who really helped start things for them. He’s the first person they collected.

Ruth: [**Ron Kent, “Post-Nuclear Series,” cat. 244**]. Ron Kent lives in Honolulu – he’s not turning any more. For many years, he turned Norfolk Island Pine green, meaning wet. This wood is native to Hawaii. He worked it, turning it to see what could be revealed in the wood. He turned it fairly thin and soaked it in oil – watco (a Danish oil) or some kind of penetrating oil. Eventually it becomes translucent, which he discovered quite by mistake.

The fun story about this particular piece – He had a gallery opening in Santa Fe. The gallery owners were a little nervous because they had pedestals that weren’t quite as big as they should have been. We were all standing around with a glass of wine and Ron decided he wanted to talk. Ron’s a fairly (uses exaggerated arm gestures to demonstrate) like this.

And this piece ended up on the floor in four pieces – much to the horror of the gallery owner. He had already done some pieces in which he called his “Post-Nuclear” series, which is the stitching. So we said, Ron you have to take that home and stitch it up, which is what he did. Most of us – Ron included - think it’s a better piece now than it was before.

[[These oiled bowls remind of the “feast bowls” in the Thaw exhibit.]]

We were talking about the conversation and Jennifer was talking about the artists’ words. The FIRST conversation is between the artist and the material – They need to understand. In almost every case of people we collected, they very much loved the wood. They listen to the wood. The wood tells them what they can do and what they can’t do. As you read through the stories, there will be cases where somebody thought they’d do this and because of the wood, ended up doing that. So this is the first conversation in the creation of wood art. You find – I suspect – a similar thing in marble. If you’ve read about Michelangelo and you look at that marvelous [Chinese jade] vase that has the orange on the front. I don’t think that was dyed. I think that artist understood where that vein of color was and was able to place it.

Wood isn’t the only material that you have to have a conversation with.

Jennifer: That’s a really interesting point: When you get into the gallery. Some of these are extremely thin. I’ve had many people ask me as we do the tours – “How

do they know how far they can go with this?" Well, especially when you're working with burl, which is an irregular growth from a tree that doesn't have a regular grain structure, it's unpredictable – especially with the large pieces. They could break and fly off. So there's really an element of unpredictability. Like the **David Ellsworth** piece that's part of our collection [**"Lunar Sphere," cat. 105**] that's been used as promotional object for the show, it's just millimeters thick. Just to be able to work with it – have the experience to work with the material at that level and know how far you can go – again that comes from a lot of work and experimentation. Many of these artists have decades of experience working with wood. So this is the top level. These are not amateurs. These are people who not only understand the wood and use it to their advantage but know how far they can push it to innovate at the same time.

In this case – they're constructed or re-constructed. The one in the middle – **Mike Shuler, cat 444**] who does segmented work – that's what he's really well known for. But this one is an organic material – it's a pine cone that he chose to work. It's a found material – which many of these specimens of wood are. It was a way for him to explore a different material and see how it would react.

Ruth: You first have to impregnate the pine cone with an epoxy – like a clear resin. He encased it in a block of plastic. Then he turned that plastic. You're not going to turn a pinecone without the resin. He's an engineer. You see a lot of engineer creativity. He uses all kinds of things – bugs and found materials.

We were talking about the translucence of Ron (Kent), he emerges it in oil. **Gianfranco Angelino [Bowl, 2000 cat. #7]** over there is an Italian, who also turns pine, which is also translucent. But that's translucent because of its natural oil – not because of oil he's added. So it's fun that they both have translucent pine – but translucence because of oil in a different way. And they both discovered it serendipitously.

[[He sometimes has translucent pieces – which also are pine. But there's a kind of pine that grows in Italy that is so saturated with oil naturally that it's translucent. So it's fun. They both have pieces that are translucent because of the oil but for totally different reasons.

[[Ruth: Each artist is conversing with the wood in the sense of when they're making it. But this case is a nice example of the wood objects getting on well with each other. Somehow the shapes and the color, you can see conversation going back and forth. It's possible to put two pieces together that really insult each other.

And there's an example right behind you: This is a fabulous piece by Connie Mississippi, the biggest wood piece in the museum is made by a woman. The insulting part was that when Dave bought it – WITHOUT consultation! – he put it

our living room. It totally destroyed the whole living room. Everything was completely out of scale. So you have to pay attention to scale. When you look back to the **Dennis Elliott** on the wall [**Wall Piece, cat. #84**], it's a pretty good size piece. But when you see this piece in front of it, it just diminishes it. You have to put it somewhere. [I would argue that the vessel by Ed Moulthrop in the museum's collection is about the same size – 2003.2.3]

[[Connie is having fun with scale. Having turned the whole thing, just by turning down, angling a little bit, you can see the pattern in the plywood. Here's what happens when you take it down very gradually. There are a couple examples in the show of playing with the wood and showing what you can do. It's very special plywood – not what you're going to buy at the hardware.

Q – How did you resolve your dilemma?

[[Ruth: Gave it to the museum!! We paid a ton of money to move it into the house. Then we paid another ton of money to move it out of the house. Now it's here and it's not traveling with the show. We like it a lot – particular HERE.]]

Jennifer: In this gallery – This is the elephant in the room **Connie Mississippi. [Sea Chamber, Cat. 309]**– This is an interesting situation. Instead of a found material, it is an engineered material – or man-made material from wood. It's plywood. So Rudy Osolnik was one of the first to turn plywood and we have an example of that later in the exhibition. But here, first of all it's a woman turner. There are a number of top female turners.

She did turn this piece on a lathe. It's extraordinary in size, which is one the reasons it's here – it's a museum scale piece. In terms of her work, he talks about how in her earlier pieces, she cut holes in the boards before she laminated them. So she wouldn't have to hollow it out. This one she did hollow out while it was on the lathe. So even more skill was required to control that. But then, she kept cutting away at it. Really to emulate a natural form – something you might find in nature – a sea shell in this case.

So she's using a material that comes from nature – wood - engineered by humans. And then turned to create a form that references a natural material. So to me that's really interesting.

Q: How do you create the depth???

Jennifer: When you build up the form before it's turned? You just keep layering it, layers of plywood. You can see the layering – the grain.

Ruth: This is another example of conversation – In this case, not a very friendly conversation. Pieces also have to be in harmony with the pieces they sit next to.



When this came into our living room, it wasn't very nice to the other pieces. It threw them all out of scale. So the conversations aren't always friendly. They might be dominated by one person. The bull in the china shop. It's a wonderful piece – it just needs to be in the right place. You could say that about every one of these pieces – they all need to be in the right place.

Jennifer: I want to point out the baseball bats. We do have Rejects from the Bat Factory in our permanent collection. [**"Rejects From the Bat Factory," Mark Sfirri, 1993, 2002.63a-f – G275 – similar to below:**



But I like these black ones because they have a very abstract silhouette. So very different form the ones we have. They are by the same artists, but we have some collaborators here [**Mark Sfirri and David Sengel, cat. 440**] **Mark Sfirri** is the one who really developed the idea of the baseball bat as a form that could be manipulated for a nonfunctional, sculptural sense. What he is doing here is working on multi-axis turning technique. It's mounting the wood on the lathe and turning it. Taking it off and remounting it at a different point on the wood.

[[Earlier walk-through: Sfirri tells how he started. He and his son were watching a baseball game. The son said, "Dad, you have a lathe, you have wood, make me a bat!" These are spindle- turned, multi-axis technique – where you turn the piece, then reposition the object to turn a different portion of the work. In these pieces, the (conceit is that) the ball was hit so hard, it knocked the bat out of alignment. You can see where the ball hit.]

[[Ruth: These bats we collected individually. And had Mark make the rack. It's a little bit of stress-producing if you were actually to use that bat. These bats presumably you've already used. But this one (with sharp-edged grip) waits for the person who has the nerve.]]

So you're able to turn the shaft of the bat and then reposition it and turn the ball – which is puncturing the bat in this case for these sculptural works and then

Michael Brolly [**Baseball Bat, cat. 32 and Sinker Ball, cat. 34**] has done these two pieces that are on the bat rack. The baseball bat and the sinker ball. And this one is a collaboration of **Mark Sfirri and David Sengel** who did the thorn piece in the hallway. None of these would be very good for playing baseball. They show the sense of humor that a lot of these artists have toward their work – they don't take themselves too seriously.

[[Ruth: **Dennis Elliot**. He's hugely respectful of the burl, letting you see the burl unfinished. One piece of wood. He had to get a new lathe to make this one. You understand how things spin. You need space to accommodate the largest space from the middle to the edge. So sometimes that's just one little point sticking out. But nevertheless, it's going to hit the floor and break off. He probably turned this with what we would call out-board. Normally you'd have the lathe and your piece is in the middle between two prongs. Now the other side of the heart of the lathe, where the belts are- on some lathes, you could attach a piece out there. It could be a good deal bigger and that's what he would have done.

Not sure what the black center is made from.

[[Ruth: [**Michelle Holzapfel [Blossfeldt Vase, cat. 161]** – May have been collected as long as any of the women turners. Calling her a turner is pushing it in the old sense. There's a metal lathe. She only gets the rough shape. Then, most of that is carved. She's hugely imaginative. She works with carved with hand tool. Ebonize with pyrographic tools. She's one of the first female wood artists to get recognized. She was inspired by the fern. Based on the form of Canadian burnet from Karl Blossfeldt's "Art Forms in Nature."

[[Ruth: Aren't all the women in this show great?! **Andi Wolfe** is a professor of botany at Ohio State. She studies funny little plants. She goes to South Africa and prowls around. And so her inspiration for this is the cell structure of some of the plants she studies, which turns out to be not all that different from the products that other people come up with. **Andi Wolfe [Imagine the Hidden World, cat 514]** inspired by the cell structure. She looked at pollen grains through the microscope.

[[Ruth: remember Hayley's piece out there? I could argue that the aesthetics of the two are not very different. But the inspirations are different.

[[Ruth: Talk about falling in love with a piece! This is **Rolly Munro [Paptua Form, cat. 365]**. I just love his work. It's refined. It's strong. He's from New Zealand.

[[**Betty J. Scarpino [Revealing Relationships, cat. 422]** makes references to life events, in this case about her true emotions shortly before her divorce. In the catalog Scarpino says this sculpture revealed feelings buried for many years. She

finds it magical when something so profound surfaces in her work – a quiet expression in three-dimensional form. It was done during her separation from her husband. She turns the wood, cuts it and then paints.

[[**Neil Scobie [Erosion, cat. 426]** Suggests the Australian plain, where water has eroded the land. The piece was turned, carved. He takes advantage of the grain. The form is turned, carved and then cut. He appreciated the natural edge of the wood.]]

Jennifer: Let's go into the first area here. This piece is pretty interesting – it's **Arthur Jones [Night Star VII, cat. 209]** I like to point out this piece because most of the pieces that we were looking at – they would suggest certain thing. Ultimately Roxy and I would decide what worked best for this exhibition. But this was a piece that is different in its approach: Most of these pieces come from the technique of turning. It's a reductive technique. In a sense you don't know what you're going to get, but it's about removing material.

This particular fan-shaped piece of the **Arthur Jones** – this is a constructive piece. So you have these slats that radiate out from the piece and that you can see through. The title of the piece is **Night Star**, so you get that sense of lunar or nocturnal reference. This is not a case of starting with a massive piece of wood and carving or turning it. It's about assembly: constructive, not reductive.

I wanted Ruth to speak about the difference in aesthetics between different curators.

Ruth: We bought this piece for one particular place. There are only two pieces that we both for specific places. We were in Chicago and we had already bought the piece. There were other similar pieces there and we asked an art historian friend to come and comment on the work. He commented – he didn't like the work – OK, fine. Years go by. Jennifer was working on the show. Eike (Schmidt) comes in. The first thing he says is, "THAT piece has GOT to be in the show." We all have our own opinions. The art historian had his reasons. I think he thought it was architectural and that wasn't part of the body of work he was thinking about. Nevertheless you have your own opinion. Not everybody shares the same opinion. It's all relative. If you like a piece and you want to buy it – buy it. Don't worry about what the experts say. And these were BOTH experts.

Jennifer: Just in putting together the exhibition if they plucked the curator out and put in another curator, it would be a different show. There may have been some overlap. But you're going to choose work that resonates with you for a particular reason – or with our collection. Another museum might think completely differently. So there is inherent subjectivity.

Here we have a case – as it turns out – no pun intended – these pieces are all boxes of a sort. The **Michael Mode [The King's City, 2003, Cat. 321]** is a piece with a lid. The top part. So it's constructed. It has turned elements. His inspiration for pieces like this is Mughal architecture. So you can see the shapes being echoed here. But the bottom part, if you can imagine – having been turned, then carved away to create these triangular, flowing parts on both sides. Then the top with a laminate, bowl-turning technique. Then other pieces constructed with it. But it IS a container form. Michael Mode is another artist that the Waterburys have collected in depth and really supported as an artist over the years and become friends with.

Q – Is the hat the lid?

Jennifer – See the band? That's the bottom of the container. So the conical element is the lid. In fact he's done a number of these that include little chess sets inside.

The other pieces in this case are boxes. Even the top – the **Bonnie Klein top [Spin-Top Box with Small Top, Cat. 249]**, The handle of the top screws off – it's threaded. And then you have the little top inside.

And the Dale Chase box and **Hans Weissflog [Ball Box, cat. 504]**, both of which employ an amazing level of skill to be able to work boxes - Boxes are very tricky things – not only to get them to fit right, but with the Weissflog – you have two layers of wood that he's essentially carving away like half of the inside and the outside of that box! So many of them break on him – so it's a very delicate technique.

I did want to point out that some of these have been turned with an ornamental lathe. This **Cecil Jordan box [Lidded Box, Cat. 211]** is one of them and that is the lathe that was used historically for ivory turning. It's almost used as a carving tool. So you're able to turn it and then cut away in a very regular fashion and get these patterns. If you look at the top of it, it has striations carved in the top. But this was made on a lathe that was used to make a gift for the queen mother (Queen Elizabeth). The lathe dates back in the artist's family for several generations. He's an English artist – so the lathe itself has a particular story.

**William Moore [Pitcher, cat. 352]** I like that handle because it has a very art nouveau plant tendril. ON the video – William Moore if you watch him do the metal spinning, it's a very similar process to wood turning.

This is the case I wanted to point out because you see **Bob Stocksdale [Marriage in Form Set, cat. 482]** working in the vessel tradition. Bob Stocksdale would always write the type of wood on the bottom. I think he also dated his work. But he wrote the specimen of wood. This set is called the Marriage in Form set. So Bob Stocksdale turned the bowl and his wife, **Kay Sekimachi**, who is a well-known

fiber artist, used it as a form to create a bowl out of fiber out of wasp-nest paper. I think it's a wonderful kind of relationship. The marriage of form is really about that kind of relationship of working in very different media.

Then **Bert Marsh [Vase, cat. 298]** passed away and this is another one of those very beautiful vessels that he made. You see the little bit of sap wood on the edge of cocobola. So again an exotic wood. As I said, A number of artists work with exotic wood. Some work with native works or woods that are available in their own geographic areas. But they make a point of not contributing to deforestation.

Right here are where the laminate pieces are. You saw **Ray Allen** – as I was talking – with his strips of laminate [**Closed Vessel, cat. #1**]. Then they get combined into a form that he then turned. He was one of the masters of that. He is now passed away.

[[Earlier walk-through: Ray Allen was a retired aerospace engineer. He is part of that older generation of turners who worked in very precise ways. He designed everything on paper first.]]

But **Rude Osolnik [Check this – Bowl, cat. 387]**, who's not with us any longer but really developing that tradition of turning plywood – kind of inspired in a large sense of what **Tapio Wirkkala (Viricola)** was doing in Finland in the 1950s, if you're familiar with him. He produced all kinds of things – dishes, tables – that included turned and sculpted plywood to beautiful effect. This is a gorgeous piece that illustrates that.

The two other **Connie Mississippi pieces [Spheres, cat.#308]**, I don't know if you bought those as a pair?

Ruth: We saw them together and bought them as a pair from her. She was happy but she wasn't necessarily selling them as a pair.

Jennifer: Think about what Ruth was saying about impregnating the pinecone. But this is a little bit different. **Philip Moulthrop [Bundled Mosaic, cat. 364]**. This is a little bit different. He starts with branches and sticks, which he probably in this case gathered into a bucket. He then fills the bucket with resin, lets it dry. Then he turned it to create what he calls his mosaic bowl effect for a unique process that he developed. The three Moulthrops soak their vessels in a (actually polyethylene glycol) to permeate and preserve the wood and make the piece shiny.]

**Philip Mouthrop is the son of Ed Moulthrop** – maker of that large bowl there [**Open Vessel, cap. 357**]. Ed Mouthrop is one of this older generation that started to innovate. For him – it was from the vessel, but to do it on a gargantuan scale. He uses long-handled tools to work on this mammoth scale.

What did you say – that some of his tools were like 100 pounds?

Ruth: He was a big, tall guy.

Jennifer: He must have been extremely powerful. I never got to meet him. But he started out as an architect. Worked in Atlanta, designed the Atlanta International Airport in the 1950s. Then became increasingly interested in his hobby, which was wood turning. And so become one of the most recognized artists in the field. He made some pieces- We have a piece about this tall (waist high) that you could get a child inside. They're very large scale. Just think about the amount of strength and control that you would need to turn a piece that big from a single piece of wood. So there's a familial relationship.

And the son – **Matt Moulthrop** – who worked with his grandfather, Ed, before Philip left his job as a lawyer to turn full-time. Matt was helping his grandfather in the studio. So he's working in a similar aesthetic that's sort of globular. It's a kind of distortion.

Q – They look like Edvard Munch shapes.

Jennifer: You can almost see faces in it – like The Scream.

In this case, we have several scientific references, which is why Roxy grouped them together. The **Richard Hooper [Time Warp-cat. 163]** – He's an English artist. He's a physicist. What he's exploring with this piece – if you come around you can see the notion of a black holes He's done that through a laminate, too.

**Bud Latven [Tigerstripe Fragment, cat. 271]** – looks better upright than lying down in the picture] who has been again one of the innovators with segmented and turned pieces started reducing them down so you the subtraction – It's about the subtraction as much as it is about form. This piece can be shown upright or lying down (as in the photo). He carved away a hyperbolic form which reminds me of the Death Star under construction in Star Wars.

Ruth: He started out doing segmented work. He talks about it in the book.

Dave: The real point – Bud started with small vessels. They were all segmented and beautifully put together so that the grain would be matching. They kept getting bigger and and bigger. He kept experimenting with taking pieces out. He did it very carefully. I think you're talking about form and line and volume. It's a lot like Mondrian. The first time you see Mondrian you think, 'I could do that.' No way. And the same thing with Bud. You think you could put wood together and cut it apart and put it together. But there's a real aesthetics to which pieces he removes and which pieces he leaves. There's balance to it. Not every piece these artists make is equally successful and they don't like to hear that. The bowl on the far side is a **Bruce Mitchell** piece and we think we own the best piece he's ever made. **[Windscape, cat. 310]** And we keep telling him, 'Bruce, we're not going to buy

another one.' When you have something that's that good, it takes a whole lot to trump it.

(The Latven piece) It's tiger-striped maple.

Jennifer: The fact that he's used one wood as opposed to various woods for color, stripping, contrast – he's used the same wood and he's able to get so much variation from it. Again, it's such thinness.

Dave: A lot of the pieces he makes will be more than one type of wood. In addition to the abstract part of it, he's mixing color. So he's getting color in addition to open space.

Ruth: The importance of the void. That's something you find in sculpture various places.

Q – And that's just sitting like that.

Dave: We have it displayed that way sometimes and lying on its side sometimes (as in the picture). It depends on where it's displayed.

Jennifer: The one in the center and I always enjoy Dave demonstrating this when I come to the house. It's a Gravity Bottle. **Giles Gilson [Gravity Bottle, cat. 139]** So you take off the lid and it has a ball inside. "If it falls out into your hand, then you know you have gravity: Please tell the authorities." As you said, that had more resonance during the last administration. Gilson is one of the first wood artists to incorporate color. He used another exotic wood – purple heart – and a dyed veneer.

What we've tried to do here is show some of the different approaches to the bowl or the vessel form in these very large, nonfunctional example – Everything from this **Anthony Bryant [Flat Bowl, cat. 39]** – they call it the "potato chip bowl." Bryant turned the wood while it was green and allowed to shift. Green means turned when the wood is not dry or cured. This allows for movement of the wood, which contributes to unpredictability.

**Christian Burchard's work [Eighteen Baskets, cat. 40]** – you can see it on the video.

Some of these other pieces like the **David Comerford [Captured Rings vessel Series, cat. 58]**. He's an Irish artist, looking at Irish archeology and visiting Irish museums and thinking about things that might have come from old digs and seeing that inspired in their work and looking like something that could have been extracted from the ground – something that could have been used thousands of years ago. Which was one of the things about this piece that appealed

to me. And the burl grain on the inside, which you can see because we don't have vitrines over these pieces.

This is a piece that **Chris Boerner [Platter, cat. 27]**- reddish piece, hanging on the wall]. He's from Hawaii, isn't he?

Ruth: He's from South Carolina.

Jennifer: He learned to turn from a Hawaiian turner. But he got this piece of redwood as a kind of exchange and this was a piece that I saw in the Waterbury's house, but it's in a hallway stairway. On another visit, I happened to take my flashlight and shine it and see the depth of grain in that redwood piece. And I realized how beautiful that was. Just recently I was telling our lighting person – Carl Shapansky-- put a lot of light on this piece because it really does pop. It's just an extraordinary specimen of wood.

Dave: We've had this piece for 15 years. I've always see it as just a beautiful piece of wood that's incredibly well-executed. We were here last week with a curator from Cedar Rapids. And curators see a lot of things – that's normal. He looked at it and said, "That's a topographical map." This was made from a crotch of a tree. This is the grain in the crotch (on the right-hand side). Coming into it from all over you can see the tributaries. If it's that obvious to somebody, you have to drop to it.

Ruth: If you fly over the mountains on the way to California, you'll see.

Jennifer: It has a very 3-dimensional quality to it.

Ruth: Everybody has a different interpretation.

Jennifer: So this is where you can talk a little more about sculpture.

\*\*\* To give you a little history or background: **Mark Lindquist** is probably the best known for creating that tipping point where this field was seen less from the perspective of the vessel and more from the perspective of sculpture, which isn't to say that it wasn't being recognized before. This is the second generation of wood artists, who begin to do really innovative things: They take an organic approach, often showing the natural edge of the wood. Lindquist takes an abstract point-of-view.

[[There has been a change in nomenclature from "wood turner" to "wood lathe artist." The MIA started collecting in the early 2000s. ]]

What Mark was doing - and his father [Mel Lindquist] was also one of those early generation turners, whose piece is in that case on the end. But you can see the father was already appreciating what we call the natural edge or imperfections inherent to the wood. If you're turning burl, you're seeing a lot of that. But that was



an aesthetic to exploit that. So the tide sort of changed to appreciate that and get away from the perfection of the vessel. But that ALSO continued to be popular.

With Mark, what you're seeing here is a vessel [**Prodigal Vessel (Returning) with Overlapping Spiralettes, cat. 280**]. But he's also done chain saw carving on the interior. He's carved the exterior to create these striations. He was in a car accident that left him without the same motor control. So he created tools, including a robotic arm, that allows him to create linear patterns on the surface with robotic-controlled tools. His sculptures were often constructed with integral bases, similar to what Brancusi did.

**Lindquist** increased the scale of work. And he started presenting his pieces as sculpture on pedestals at craft exhibitions. Created some constructed pieces that have references – such as special bases that echo what Brancusi had done, for example, with his sculpture. A couple of his pieces were purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the late 1970s. That helped bring this field into the museum attention at this time.\*\*\*

[[Earlier: This raised the question: Is it CRAFT? Or is it ART? Lindquist in the mid-1990s had the first one-man show from the turned-wood tradition.

There are a lot of artists who have played off those sculptural tendencies. You're starting to see a number of these in this area of the show. There are several artists working with the same type of wood.

**Michael J. Peterson [Sculpture, cat. 406]** He's doing chain-saw carving. He started out doing vessels. We have a couple of his vessel pieces in G275. They have reference to landscape. But with these pieces that he's making from Madrone burl, native to the Pacific Northwest. He's carving them with a chain saw. He's often bleaching them, sand-blasting them, pigmenting them and then creating these stacked pieces that, to me, look like something you'd find on the beach – like driftwood. Or something you'd encounter on a walk in the forest. Again, it's one of those things that you take a natural material. You manipulate it and put it through different processes and in the end, you get something you can appreciate that has these naturalistic references.

**Christopher Burchard [18 Baskets, cat. 40]** – also working with Madrone burl – you see again on the video], working with the green wood. He developed this basket series in the 1990s and he admits it was a response to what Dale Chihuly was doing with the glass baskets – the nesting baskets. We have some of those, as well. He's working with the green wood and allowing it to expand in different direction.

So you see that it's not quite round. The bottoms are like Weebles – they move and find a place to stay. They can be configured in various ways. It's funny, he was here for the opening. And he said to me, "I really like the way you've configured that for the exhibition." And I said, "We were just following the picture in the book. The Waterburys had set it up." We knew that from the artist – a number of these can be configured in different ways, we understood that there was a preferred side. Or way of setting things up. We had our baskets in the galleries like the Russian boxes. Christian said that's fine too. There are various ways that you can do it. But he liked the relationship we created here.

This is **David Ellsworth [Lunar Sphere, cat 105]**. He's a very important person in this field – not only as a teacher, sharing his techniques, but developing this blind turning – as they call it – where you have a very small entrance point.

He developed a bent-shaft tool to hollow out the interior. Also called "hollow turning." I love this particular piece because it allows for that **spalting** – which is the rotting of the wood, decomposition of the wood (Note: Spalting is a by-product of the rotting process that is carried out by a vast array of stain, mold and decay fungi. So it's a little like carving on a mushroom.) That's how you get those black striations. You see more of those patterns with an almost spherical piece. It's called Lunar Sphere. The piece *reads* like the moon. So again, it's one of those celestial references. But David is someone who has shared his technique very widely.

**Binh Pho [Bamboo Basket, #2, cat. 408]**, who's piece is in the end of that case also uses the bent-shaft tools that others have worked to develop. A lot of wood artists sell tools to other turners so they can use them. So Binh Pho could emphasize the surface of his piece. It has a very small hole and lid on top of it, so you can notice that when you walk back through.

[[Pho's work is Asian-influenced, seen especially in the bamboo. Binh Pho escaped from Vietnam. This work explores his dramatic story.]]

[[Earlier: **Thierry Martenon, [Untilted, cat. 299** – two tall, triangular shapes, black on one side, blonde the other] He works in a national park in France – Parc Naturel Regional de Chartreuse. Every tree he works comes from there. The trees grow very high - 5,000 feet – and are very dense. To avoid deforestation, he does not use exotic wood. He achieves intense texture and shows a yin/yang effect through ebonized and burned wood.

[[**Mike Scott [Bowl, cat 429]**. The wood crumbled as he turned.]]

Q - I remember the first time I came to see this show. I was fascinated by this – **David Ellsworth [Lunar Sphere, cat 105]**. how in the world does he create this perfectly beautiful, round object and have carved it out?

Jennifer: That's the technique that he developed.

Ruth: If you stand over here – you see that it's not completely spherical. He understands the wood. David is the most skilled in understanding the wood and what it's going to do.

Dave: The biggest problem is that the spalted wood is very fragile. All you have to do is stick your tool in the wrong place and you have a **hole**. The walls of that are about **1/8 of an inch thick!** If you look at it from this direction it's spherical. If you look at it from where Ruth is (slightly behind it), it's slightly out of round. That's caused by the wood changing from moisture in the wood.

Ruth: Remember, lathes only do perfect circles. You can move the thing on the lathe. But the lathe itself only turns perfect circles. So when you see this, it's something that happened as the wood dried. A lot of time people anticipate what's going to happen. I think that's what happened here.

Dave: the he turns his perfect circle (by cutting the block), then turns it 90 degrees. Turns it another way and another 90 degrees. There are techniques for getting a perfect sphere – good turners. I can't do that. But a good turner can put a piece of wood on a lathe and come away with a ball that's just about perfect.

It's very light.

Ruth: The spalting is another way of appreciating the imperfections. So Jennifer mentioned the rotting. Spalting also happens by bugs eating their way through. Nowadays we love those lines, but at one time we didn't

Jennifer: That's part of the explanation about this piece – David is one of the most talented artists in the field. He's done SO much turning and developed his technique that he knows how far he can go with it. And so, there are lot of people who work with the blind turning and get to that thinness. It takes a lot of experience. David has shared all his techniques very widely.

Let's just talk about a few pieces in the back area over here. With these three artists – they've learned from each other or their friends.

**Jack R. Slentz [On the Edge, cat. 451 – cube]** is a protégé of **Robyn Horn**. And Royn and Stoney Lamar are good friends. What you're seeing here is getting away from that perfect form, beauty of surface.

Of course Jack Slentz's piece is so far from round (cube) that it's a different geometric form. He does a number of different types of forms. We have some of his disks with a doorway. We have some house sculptures. You might have seen when we put up pieces we got from Dan Greenberg's collection. But he tends to TORTURE the wood in many ways. He likes to say that his pieces have a "from hell and back" quality. He likes to burn the wood. He carves with a chain saw. It's not about beauty of surface. It can be about contrast of surfaces, as you see with this piece, which has a wonderful sense of proportion and balance.

This two pieces, **Robyn Horn's piece [Full Circle, Slipping Stone Series, cat. 173]** has a sense of illusion in that she created the Slipping Stone series and it looks for all the world like a constructed piece. There is a scene of her in the video carving with a chain saw from HUGE redwoods. This piece is carved from one piece of burl. And those of you who are standing near it, you can see that. For me the appeal is that it really does give a sense of movement. It is an allusive to slipping stones. The stones could be moving and falling and that sense of precariousness.

And **Stoney Lamar's piece [Slipping Off the Wire, Cat. 264]** gives movement of a different type. Movement of the wood because Stoney uses that multi-axis technique that Robyn talks about in the video. So he's done that. You can see where he's turned it and created a cheek and an eye. He uses "milk paint" that has milk components [casein] in it. A lot of his pieces have a portrait quality to them. And this is called Slipping Off the Wire. He talks in his statement about a couple different reference points. He talks about Cycladic sculpture, which tends to be very minimalist and abstract and has inspired a lot of contemporary artists. It's like a high wire routine, where you have a sense of balance. He's incorporated metal in his sculpture. You see that with William Moore. There are a couple of artists who use metal in their wood sculptures. Stoney is one of the more successful ones. **Bill Moore** doing it for a different effect. Stoney doing it for a sculptural effect.

I did want to point out these two: This is **Ed Bosley [Sand Castle, cat. 31]**, again turning burl. He didn't turn for very long. The comments he made - He says, "Luckily, I only have one broken finger." But talking again of the unpredictability of a burl this size. It's really a wonderful piece. It's called Sand Castle. So it looks like something that could be constructed. But he's removed selectively, different areas of the burl. It's a beautiful specimen but the way he's made it has great appeal to me.

[[Earlier: Question about dangers in turning. At the conference, people were wearing red ribbons. I learned that it was about a woman who had an accident while turning a very large piece. She subsequently died!]]

And **Norm Sartorius [Spoon, cat. 418]** who makes these non-functional spoons from all different woods. But here he's using Amboyna burl, Which **Dan Kvitka** – you might have seen his piece **[Hollow Vessel, cat. 256]** of the same wood in the case that we first looked at in the hallway with the vessel forms. It is an exotic wood, and he uses the discarded woods from Dan Kvitka, which are smaller in scale. So there is sharing of materials. He says you could call it a “diet spoon” because you wouldn't want to get that jagged edge in your mouth.

They do share common aesthetics in the edges. Very very different aesthetics from what you saw with Stocksdale and with Melvin Lindquist's piece here on this side.

Q – Ever come across new artist that blows you away?

Ruth: There are some new artists that are very exciting and we tempted to buy it? No! You're old you run out of self space. You run out of money. You run out of time. The newest piece we have is **Andi Wolfe**, who did that little piece **[Imagine the Hidden World, cat 514]** inspired by the cell structure. She's a botanist. Occasionally we run into things in other media. We have one wonderful ceramic piece and a basket piece. But there's a limit. You have to give yourself some parameters.

Q – How display in your house?

Ruth: Almost every question you can ask is in the book – on shelves, pedestals.

Jennifer: They talked about how their collecting developed. But with this exhibition we used them as a case study. But everybody's collecting approach is different. But to learn how people do things – there isn't one right or wrong way to do it.

\*\*\* They DID get on the ground floor of this particular craft and have helped develop the field by supporting artists, by buying not the tried-and-true, but what appealed to them. And that's how a lot of these contemporary fields get built: On the faith of collectors, maybe even more than museums -because museums tend to buy more established artists with reputations. So we really look to collectors to inspire us and I have to say I've learned so much from the Waterburys, talking with them and looking at things with them to contemplate for this show. And there WERE some pieces where they said, We'll take a look at this piece. And it didn't fit with the story so much here. But there are also some pieces.

The **George Peterson** is one example **[Grid Disk, cat. 397]**. This one was hanging in their bathroom. They said, “Don't forget – Come and LOOK at this piece!” I looked. He's one of the younger artists in the collection – more in my age group. He's inspired by punk rock music. He listens to music and attacks the wood. And again torturing the wood – similar to Jack Slentz. You see also with the sanding

that he has done – reveals really interesting grain structure in the wood. So how those things played off each other is very appealing. I think it looks great on that baffle.

So there were incidences like that. When I started visiting your collection years ago – it was a LOT to absorb. But the more that I worked with this field, it really allowed me to have a perspective for this exhibit.

Q. – Does it take more technical skill to work laminates or natural pieces of wood?

Jennifer: Don't really know. But I'd guess that laminates are solid and therefore more predictable. The knots in wood make it more unpredictable.