

# TURNED TORSOS

*Uncovering creativity*

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**M**ANY TURNERS LIKE TO MOUNT a piece of wood on the lathe and see what develops as they turn. This approach often produces something pleasing. However, I've found that the process to create something really special that has emotion and really speaks to the viewer will take an investment of your time and energy away from the lathe.

Inspiration and insights were plentiful at both the AAW Symposium in San Antonio and the World Turning Conference in Philadelphia last year. Many demonstrations and lectures were dedicated to the creative process. Both Steve Loar and Clay Foster shared their great insights into the creative process. Both promoted sketching and scrapbooks to collect ideas. By exploring different media you will discover what really pleases you. Hugh McKay said, "Pump information into your brain." (For presentations on creativity by Steve Loar and Hugh McKay, see the

video "Techniques of the 1997 AAW Symposium," 612/484-9094.)

I think hard work and dedication can lead to creativity. It was not many years ago I was asking the question "Where do you get all your ideas?" Now I am being asked the very same question. If you keep your eyes open and explore other media, art and craft items, they will give you ideas. You need to see pottery and glass, visit galleries and museums, and explore illustrated books and journals. There are rounded shapes in two-dimensional art. All of a sudden you will see something that will lead you to say "I could do that in wood. That shape would look spectacular in wood. I could tweak it here and change it there and come up with something really exciting."

We get pleasure from the forms we create. To make the most of the turning experience takes some research. Something that impressed you years ago (and you took the time

and effort to record in your sketch book or clip for your scrapbook) will come back to help create an idea for what you can turn today.

Turning begins as a relationship between wood and form. The grain lends itself and reacts to the rounded surfaces of the human shape. In all my work I try to reveal the beauty, color, and design of the wood. Wood has always been a sensual medium for me, and to bring the human figure into the mix has been stimulating and satisfying. The creative process has been fun. As you develop your own tastes for form and beauty, it will show in your turning. A little effort will produce lots of ideas to expand your turning pleasures

I was on my way back from the AAW Symposium at Greensboro two summers ago, when I stopped at a museum in Cleveland, Ohio. I was struck by an old stone sculptural form, an artifact created thousands of years ago. Doing a turning to re-



1. "Late Summer Tan," left, of English elm, 8" high.
2. "Dancer I," above, Siberian elm, 8" high.
3. "Dancer III," right, Siberian elm, 11" high.



4. "On the Move," left, spalted white birch, 11 " high.

5, "Princess," right, wild black cherry, 21" high.



semble the stone sculpture gave me a technical challenge. I asked myself "How do I hollow it? How do I chuck it? How do I balance it?"

My first attempt started with a squared up block of straight grained elm. On two sides of the block I sketched the front and side views of the form I wanted to turn. I left an inch or more waste wood around the entire drawing. From the drawing I could establish where the three axes would need to be, and I chucked it up between centers on one of the "leg" axes lines on the drawing.

At this point it was necessary to add counter balancing weights, since the block was mounted well out of balance and would vibrate without added weights. I turned a flat depression for the faceplate. Using the drawing for a template or guide, I measured the size and depth of the hole and turned the inside of the first leg. After turning the inside of both legs I had to fabricate someplace to mount a faceplate to hollow the opposite end of the piece. I used a plywood box screwed into the waste wood of the still intact wooden block.

You can understand why the inside turning needs to be completed before the outside so that the waste block remains for mounting the faceplates, weights, and a steady rest. The outside of the form could be

turned only part way into the area between the legs; I removed the remainder of the wood by hand. I used sanding disks and rotary cutters to shape the outside. Any deep hollow turning requires precise control. To provide this degree of control I developed a two-tool-rest system (see *AW*, March 1997).

My first piece, "Late Summer Tan" in the *Body Beautiful* series was rather primitive (Photo 1). Using the same turning process, I started to breath life and emotion into future pieces, such as "Dancer I," by changing the proportion of the three axes, and then by changing the display presentation (Photo 2). As this series evolved I tried to make the shapes more and more realistic. With "Dancer III" I had to hollow the inside to the contour of the human form instead of turning straight-sided holes (Photo 3).

Just as with bowls, the key to preventing cracking is to have uniform wall thickness. The inside of the torso walls needed to follow the contour of the outside desired shape. For each successive piece in this series I added more shape and more form, which generated more life, more action and more feeling.

The next step in the transformation was to break out of the same plane and hollow all three axes from different planes. Up until now, all three holes opened into the center. Now, the inside turning of the sides and bottoms of the holes became more difficult because the second and third hollowings intersect the previously turned holes at odd angles. The openings created intermittent cuts along the side walls.

"On The Move" (Photo 4) is the first of the multi-plane turnings, and you can see much greater movement and action in this piece. Photo 5 shows "Princess" the most anatomically correct piece in the series.

Where do I go from here? Does

the human figure have to have legs? Some of John Jordan's hollow forms have great sensual appeal. What about the male counterpart to the female series? Should I use a fig leaf? I look forward to seeing where the creative process will take me.

Many would not have the equipment or desire to do sculptural forms or anything this technically challenging. However, it is interesting to see the creative transition of this series and the value of developing ideas and exploring all aspects of creativity.

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