

# Contemporary Segmented Woodturning

## Reflections on the 2nd Segmenting Symposium

Sharon Bierman

In the turning world, *segmenting* generally evokes visions of vessels influenced by Southwest Native American vessel forms. Such proved not to be the case, however, in Gatlinburg, TN, this past November. Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts served as the site of the 2nd Segmenting Symposium, bringing together a vast array of worldwide talent and inspiration. It soon became apparent that segmenting had crossed a threshold into contemporary craft and art.

The Pi Beta Phi  
Sorority estab-  
lished

(Above)  
**Dennis Keeling**,  
*Polychromatic Bowl*, 2010,  
Plexiglas, birch plywood,  
4" x 8" (10 cm x 20 cm),  
18 pieces

**Jerry Tackes**, *Angles*, 2010,  
Mahogany, maple, dyed veneers,  
5½" x 8" (14 cm x 20 cm), 184 pieces

(Above)  
**James Lynn**,  
*Pac Man*, 2010,  
Zebrawood,  
mixed woods,  
15" x 12" x 3"  
(38 cm x 30 cm x  
8 cm), 75 pieces

Arrowmont School in 1912 (The Pi Beta Phi Settlement School, as it was originally named) to educate children of the mountain region. Today, Arrowmont attracts approximately 2,500 students annually, with shared goals

of perfecting skills in clay, fiber, textiles, glass, metals, enamels, drawing, painting, printmaking, photography, wood, and more. Arrowmont, with its spacious classrooms and rich history, was an ideal setting for hosting the

**Harvey Crouch**, *Longhorns*,  
2010, Mesquite, wenge, bloodwood,  
4" x 39" (9 cm x 100 cm), 818 pieces,  
tubular construction

**Ray Robertson**, Assorted Duck Calls, 2005–2007, African blackwood, cherry, walnut, redheart, 6" × 1½" (15 cm × 3.8 cm), 70 to 1,117 pieces

segmenting conference. As is true for the school, much has happened in the evolution of segmented woodturning.

- In the 17th and 18th centuries, early examples of what could loosely be termed *segmenting* included wooden drinking bowls, usually made from staves of contrasting woods held together by metal hoops or bound with willow.
- Articles about laminated turnings were published in England throughout the 20th century.
- In the early 1930s, Jacob Brubaker specialized in multicolored laminations termed *artwood*,



using richly figured local woods and incorporating nonwood materials such as pewter and plastic in his turnings to provide color and pattern.

- Working in the 1940s, Thomas Nicosia constructed vessels from many pieces of contrasting woods ▶

(Below) **Bill Abendroth**, *Stairway to Heaven*, 2010, Poplar, spalted oak, paint, ebony, 11½" × 5" (29 cm × 13 cm), 109 pieces



**Thomas Nicosia**, *Standing Cup*, circa 1960, Purpleheart, rosewood, tulipwood, cocobolo, satinwood, ebony, mahogany, bubinga, poplar, limba, felt, 11½" × 7¾" (28 cm × 19 cm)

Collection of Samuel M. Freeman II

Courtesy of Wood Turning Center Research Library



(Below) **Bud Latven**, Untitled, 1985, Maple burl, walnut, bubinga, ash, sapele, holly, purpleheart, 5" × 8" (13 cm × 18 cm)



**Yosh Sugiyama**, untitled, circa 1993, Satinwood, peroba rosa, padauk, 5" × 4½" (13 cm × 11 cm)



**Jacob E. Brubaker**, *Moon Container*, 1969, Walnut, Osage orange, pewter, Bakelite, 5" × 6½" (13 cm × 17 cm)

Collection of Lynn Sommer

Courtesy of Wood Turning Center Research Library



(Left to right) Robin Costelle, Al Miotke, and Ray Robertson were awarded the Excellence in Segmenting award, presented at the 2nd Segmenting Symposium, November 2010, held at Arrowmont School for Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN.



**Del Sandberg**, *As the World Turns*, 2010, Poplar, walnut, cherry, 14" x 9" (36 cm x 23 cm), 456 pieces

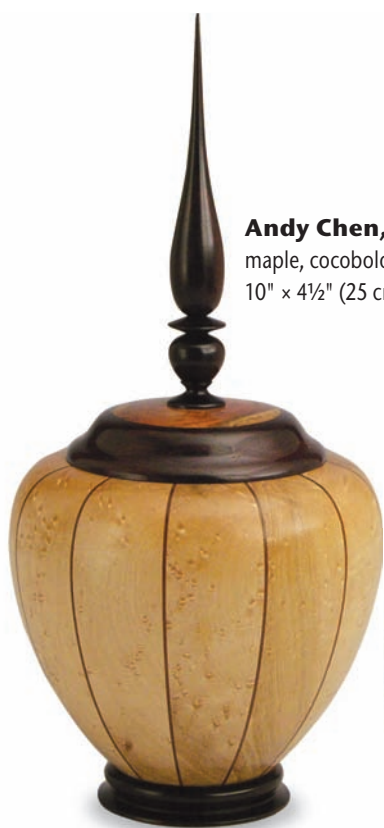
and used a metal lathe to turn small parts that he assembled with tongue-and-groove and rabbet joints. His use of high-gloss lacquer was uncommon at the time.

- Giles Gilson, an Honorary Lifetime Member of the AAW, took segmented turning in a different direction in the mid-1970s by telling stories through images. His technique involved tilting the table on a scroll saw or bandsaw, stacking two contrasting pieces of wood, and sawing them, thus resulting

in one piece fitting into the other (AW, vol 24, no 2).

- For many years, the salad bowl industry made conical-shaped stack-laminated bowls from single flat boards. Turners such as Michael Shuler began to experiment and develop this technique to create artistic pieces.

**Andy Chen**, *Arca Acer*, 2008, Birdseye maple, cocobolo, mesquite, macassar ebony, 10" x 4½" (25 cm x 11 cm), 54 pieces



**Virginia Dotson**, *Dune Series #8*, 1991, Ash, wenge, walnut, 6" x 10¼" (15 cm x 26 cm)



(Below) **Al Miotke**, *Erosion*, 2010, Pau rosa, maple, wenge, 6" x 9" (15 cm x 23 cm), 209 pieces



(Below) **Ray Allen**, *Untitled*, 1995, Poison sumac, 6" x 10" (15 cm x 25 cm)

Wood Turning Center  
Permanent Collection

Donated by Neil and Susan Kaye



From the simple to the spectacular, segmenting supports a wide variety of skill levels and design finesse. Purchase a DVD of the 2nd Segmenting Symposium and watch segmentedwoodturners.org for details of future events. Segmentedwoodturners.org is a virtual online chapter of the American Association of Woodturners, with more than 600 members worldwide.

- The 1980s brought Bud Latven and Addie Draper, who rose to national prominence with their work featured on the cover of *Fine Woodworking* in 1985. They redefined the old technique of segmented woodturning, pushing the field in a new and exciting direction.
- Virginia Dotson added her own aesthetic of laminating wood and plywood to replicate the layered landscapes of the Southwest.
- Yosh Sugiyama is credited as being the first to experiment with open segmented work in the late 1980s.
- Lincoln Seitzman is known for pioneering the basketweave illusion

that he developed for a competition at the Wood Turning Center in Philadelphia and for other innovations. It is fitting that Lincoln was recognized for his contributions to the field at the 1st Segmenting Symposium in November 2008 (*AW*, vol 24, no 2).

### Ray Allen's legacy

There are other makers in the history of segmenting; however, Ray Allen is the person most commonly considered to have the largest influence in bringing segmented turning to the forefront. An incredibly talented and prolific artist, Ray Allen, to some extent, left the early pioneers

forgotten. Ray began his segmented woodturning career in 1986, using the techniques devised by Latven and Draper. Unlike others, however, Ray's work led to the commonly accepted vision of segmenting as Southwestern-inspired vessels. And no wonder—during his twelve-year turning career, Ray produced hundreds of pieces.

Appropriately, the 2nd Segmenting Symposium chose to honor Ray's legacy at the Saturday night banquet, with a special appearance by Ray's surviving family members, including his great grandson who had been photographed as a young child standing next to Ray's largest piece, which measured approximately 36" by 48" (91 cm by 122 cm).

### Symposium events

There was something for everyone in the lineup of demonstrators. Sessions ►

**Robin Costelle**, *Autumn's Vessel*, 2010, Maple burl, walnut, ceramic leaves, 12" x 14" (30 cm x 36 cm), approximately 125 pieces



**Denny Wetter**, *Holds No Secrets*, 2010, Maple, walnut, 6½" x 14" (17 cm x 36 cm), 241 pieces



(Left) **Richard Sowa**, *Whisky Jug Cookie Jar*, 2010, Maple, walnut, boxelder, 10" x 6" (25 cm x 15 cm), 204 pieces



**Carl Barton**, *Many Trails*, 2010, Ebony, holly, 6" x 9½" (15 cm x 24 cm), 174 pieces

included scribbling and fluidity in wood, segmenting alternative materials, pen and spindle segmenting, designing projects, open segmenting, specialty tools, ribbon construction, designing feature rings, the anatomy of segmented patterns, gluing, using the club's forum, and photography.

Additional highlights of the symposium included Saturday night entertainment by Broadway's "Phantom of the Opera" star Jim Romick, with his segmenting-inspired adaptations of popular Broadway musicals. Known to others as a Broadway star, Jim is appreciated as a fellow turner and segmenter.

The star of the weekend, however, was the Instant Gallery, showcasing nearly 175 segmented pieces, representing skill levels from beginner to advanced. Items included imaginative creations such as freeform sculptures, longhorns, walking sticks, intricate eggs, an African drum, miniature birdhouses, lampshades, duck calls, and alternative materials. If the imagination could conceive of a turning, it could be executed by segmenting.

And it didn't stop there. These artists pushed the envelope and adorned their pieces with gilding, patination, inlay, piercing, dyes, air-brushing, ceramics, and lacquering. Indeed, these works no longer were your grandfather's bowls; segmented turning has evolved to join the contemporary craft movement.

## Heading home

The symposium ended as quietly as it had begun. Cars, once again laden with their repacked segmented treasures, quietly pulled out of Arrowmont, heading home, with many turners eager to try new techniques, inspired by the weekend's events. During four days in Tennessee, approximately

## Jamie Donaldson

I was surprised when Curt Theobald invited me to the 2nd Segmenting Symposium, because I've been a "chunk" turner rather than a "chip" turner for the past 24 years. Nonetheless, he requested that I demonstrate the "Phrugal Photo Studio," a program I developed from my experience as a professional photographer (now retired). The program is aimed at teaching turners how to better record and promote their work. Photographs are the visual language by which we turners often communicate. Here would be a new audience to which I could preach the gospel of taking better images!

I know several of the key figures in the new segmenting movement: Malcolm Tibbetts for his intensely constructed forms, Jerry Bennett for his delightfully imaginative freeform sculptures, and several others that score high on the how'd-he-do-that? scale.

As the Instant Gallery began to fill, it became obvious that an extraordinary event was unfolding. I have watched segmented design gradually evolve away from the Ray Allen era, when the two primary influences seemed to be Southwestern Native American-style pottery or beer steins without the handles.

Here now were examples of beautiful flowing forms, fair curves replacing awkward transitions, and masterfully constructed works of pure sculpture. I quickly realized that my impressions of segmenting were obsolete and that a new aesthetic was at play. This event was an awakening in the perception and production of the segmenting process, and proof was on display.

Sitting with others in the dining room at meal times, I overheard turning terminology foreign to my ears. Yet, as is characteristic of most turners, everyone eagerly shared knowledge, and these participants were the cream of the crop. Nothing beats the live learning experience, the direct person-to-person exchanges.

The weekend's event will be noted as a landmark in the evolution of segmented turning that future such gatherings will strive to measure up to. I came away with a newfound admiration for the process, products, and people who practice this art form.

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*Jamie Donaldson's turnings and his Phrugal Photo studio can be seen at [jamiedonaldsonwoodturner.com](http://jamiedonaldsonwoodturner.com).*

120 segmenters converged to share camaraderie and knowledge; all left altered by the experience.

No one knows for sure what the future of segmenting will bring or from whom the next innovation will emerge. It is clear, however, that the world of segmented turning is evolving, has evolved. We are looking forward to the future with great anticipation.

*The author thanks Albert LeCoff and Curt Theobald for their contributions to this article.*

*Photography by Sharon Bierman and Jamie Donaldson.*

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