

AAW Symposium 2013

by Robin Goodman

The American Association of Woodturners (AAW) holds its International Symposium in a different State every year and this June the event was held in the vast Tampa Convention Centre in Florida – **photo 1**. With easy access via a direct flight from



London and the opportunity for a short holiday, I decided to attend this year. It is the largest gathering of woodturners in the world; in the past numbers have almost reached 3000 attendees, but this year the figure was nearer 1200. Spread over 3 days, there were over 150 demonstrations and panel discussions to choose from as well as an instant gallery of over 1000 turned items and several special exhibitions.

Choosing which 11 demos to attend from so many good turners and interesting subjects was difficult. UK demonstrators Nick Agar, Phil Irons and Margaret Garrard from the UK and Glen Lucas from Ireland were in action and John Jordan is due at Loughborough in August, so I gave them a miss, but that still left nearly 130 to choose from!



I have always admired Michael Mode's striking laminated bowls such as

that in **photo 2**. Whilst the principle of making bowls from concentric rings cut from a plank is simple, I had struggled to figure out how he made some of his beautiful patterns. His 2 demos on Bowls from Planks a) the 'Easy Way' and b) the 'Hard Way', whilst not giving away all his trade secrets, provided plenty of hints. Accuracy is of prime importance and easier to achieve if one has exactly the right woodworking equipment. Prediction of final appearance is very difficult, so experimentation is part of the process.

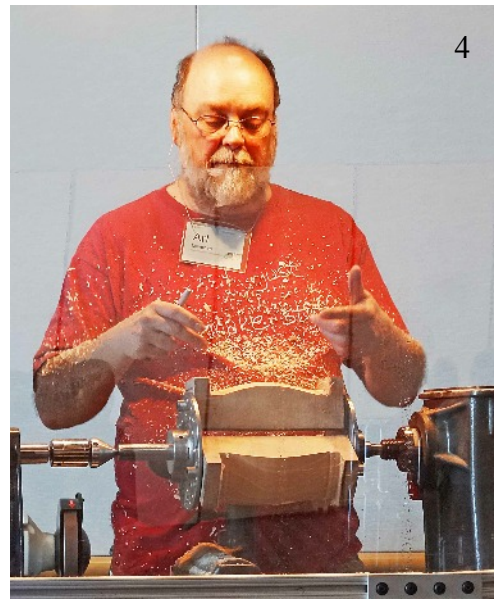
Gilding with metal leaf can be very effective and David Marks is an expert in this, having started experimenting with leaf over 20 years ago. Although his demonstration was 1½ hrs in length, his chat and preparation of the surface, including rapid drying size, left very little time at the end for actually applying the leaf. However there was plenty of interest here and I now know that in 2001 he produced a DVD called 'Gilding & Chemical

Patinations.' An example of his painting with metal leaf is shown in **photo 3**.

'Therming' is the term applied to multi or off-axis turning, where the axis of rotation lies completely outside of the piece being turned. This means that a carrier or jig is needed to mount the work.



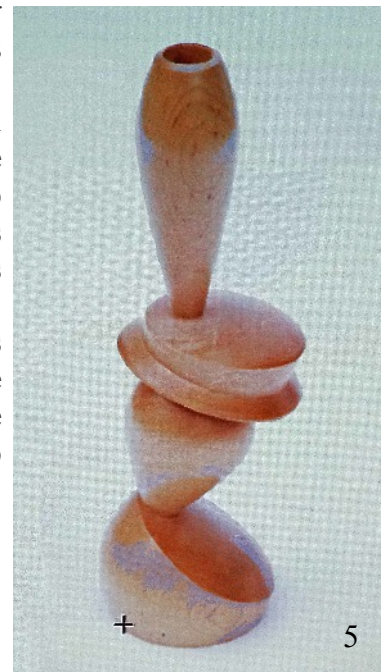
Mike Darlow has several pages about the method



in one of his books and the Canadian Art Liestman has a good article about it in a 2010 edition of the *American Woodturner* magazine. Art's demo on Therming, also known as 'barrel turning', provided some further information on

the method. Plywood end carriers are OK for occasional use, but great care is required to make sure they cannot rotate relative to each other. Art has had special metal end carriers fabricated that are held relative to each other by a metal shaft, the pre-drilled holes in the carriers make it easy to turn various combinations of spindles, usually 3 or 4 at a time – **photo 4**.(above) After turning and shaping one side of all the spindles, the spindles are then rotated by 90 or 180 degrees, before shaping the other sides. It is broadly similar to involuted turning, but has more scope.

Mark Sfirri is an American woodworker and furniture maker, but he also specialises in multi-axis turning, so his 'Multi-axis spindle turning basics' demo had appeal. This was good revision on the basics and a simple example is shown in **photo 5**.



'Surface Embellishments' demo was given by Mark Gardner, who specialises in intricate geometric patterns, such as the detail given in **photo 6**. Many of his pieces are very dark, having been coloured with black leather dye, although he is also keen on milk paints. The main tools he uses for his texturing and patterns are a wire brush, a reciprocating carver and a pneumatic engraving pen. This latter pen is air operated, has very little vibration and is far easier to use than the basic electric Dremel engraver that I own and find difficult to use and control.



In a similar vein, Donald Derry gave a demo on 'Rotary texturing and colouring.' He likes to use the NSK rotary, Mastercarver or Foredom electric tools and has produced some beautiful pieces such as that shown in **photo 7**.



Michael Kehs's demo was also called 'Surface Embellishments' and he concentrated on pyrography and the different tips and patterns that can be produced, such as those on his sample board in **photo 8**.(left)



I saw the Canadian Marilyn Campbell demonstrating her bandsaw epoxy resin inlay method for platters – see example in **photo 9** - at Loughborough in 2011 and have tried the method several times. I took the opportunity to see the demo again, since one can always pick up extra information a second time around.



Husband and wife Michael & Cynthia Gibson combine to produce some beautifully decorated items such as the teapot in **photo 17**.



Cynthia seems a master of pyrography and showed how she uses the different tips to such good effect and the simple colour markers to colour items, see **photo 11**. (left) There were so many other demos I could have opted for, including those by Mike Mahoney, Trent Bosch or

Stephen Hogbin. The German Hans Weissflog, who is best known for his intricate latticework on turnings, such as in **photo 12**, gave 3 different demos and I was fortunate to be able to see all



three demos during a whole day demo that took place a couple of days later for two woodturning clubs at Port Charlotte, well south of Tampa. His lattice lidded box has been copied by many, the making of his drunken box with a

sphericon shape – **photo 13**(above) - was quite difficult to follow and his Saturn box intriguing, but all required great precision, as suited to his nationality.

Alongside the demos, there were a dozen panel discussions. I attended one titled 'Making Work Distinctive – Ideas & Techniques'. The panel included David Ellsworth, Eli Avisera and Joey Richardson – **photo 14** (above). Personally I found it disappointing,



although Joey did make some interesting points about putting your heart and story into a piece. I caught the tail end of the interesting ‘Instant Gallery Critique’, where 3 people, including a gallery owner, commented on a few chosen items.

A highlight of the symposium is the Instant Gallery, the largest assembly of woodturning one can ever see. Even with reduced numbers this year, there were still over 1000 pieces on display, all made by delegates. There was a vast range of types, shapes and sizes and there seemed to be a higher proportion of ‘artistic’ turnings than one would find in the UK, as I expected. See Photos 15, 16, 18.



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There were also several specific exhibitions such as one by the Center for Art in Wood that included



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items by known turners such as Binh Pho photo 19,



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UK’s Joey Richardson photo 20

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and Alain Mailland photo 21 and photo 22.

The trade show is the largest for woodturners in the world and had plenty of items to tempt one to part

with a lot of dollars.



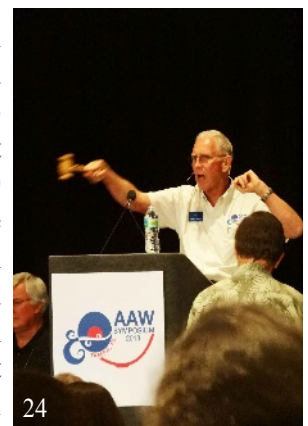
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The products varied from the very large, photo 23, to the very small and of course many are not available in the UK. Youth training is

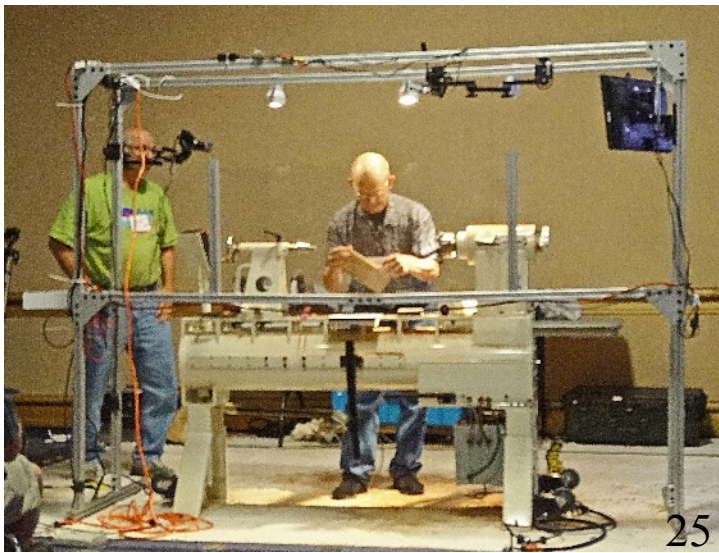


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included at the Symposium with special demos and workshops and non-turning spouses were able to attend craft workshops throughout the event. The sight of over 1200 people sitting down for the Symposium dinner in one room was impressive. Our glasses had all been pre-filled with a brown drink and I had to ask to find out that it was iced tea. After the meal there was an auction of turned items – photo 24 – but unlike the AWGB’s Loughborough event, on-line bidding was not possible. Prices this year were thought to be exceptionally low for pieces by many of the world’s top turners.



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Overall the 15,000 member AAW did a very good job with the organisation for such a large event, relying largely on an army of volunteers.

In all the demo rooms, an effective standard metal frame was erected in front of the lathe to support lights, video cameras, a protective screen and a monitor for the demonstrator, **photo 25**. The enormous venue was ideal with lots of space and thankfully well air-conditioned; on going outside into the heat and humidity, my specs often steamed up !

This was my first visit to the States for 47 years, when the roads seemed full of excessively long Cadillacs and my Greyhound bus ticket cost only \$99 for 99 days. Much of course has changed, but not the very wide highways and the sensible numeric street numbering. The trouble is that with traffic signals at every road junction in the cities, progress for both vehicles and pedestrians is often ridiculously slow.

The whole Symposium was a very stimulating and worthwhile event with much food for thought. It was a long way to go and obviously not cheap, but it was easier to justify when combined with a summer holiday.

Robin.