

Roger Bennett: The distinctive thin-walled bowls of Ireland's Roger Bennett utilize a form resembling an inverted cone, flaring out gracefully from a narrow base. They are inlaid with silver or gold and colored with water-based wood stains. The delicacy and preciousness of Roger's work are well-suited to smaller forms.

del Mano's big show

Small Treasures

By Kevin Wallace

The *Small Treasures* exhibition, del Mano Gallery's presentation of turned and sculptured works under 6" in height, was recently presented for the 15th consecutive year. From its first presentation in 1993, the exhibition proved enormously popular and successful. The reason for the success of the show? That question takes us back to the exhibition's inception.

Because *Small Treasures* is a gallery exhibition, it should not be surprising that marketing was a consideration in the creation of the show. del Mano Gallery had organized the annual *Turned Wood* exhibition for more than a decade when the idea for an exhibition of small-scale works presented itself. This came about from a realization

that the small works in the annual exhibition sold more quickly than the larger works.

One theory held that it was because the smaller works were less expensive, thereby opening the market up to those individuals who might not consider acquiring a more expensive turned wood object. At the same time, seasoned collectors also enjoy bargains and obviously snatched up the works as well.

A second theory was that small woodturnings took up less space, again expanding the market by tempting those living in smaller homes and apartments. This was also a draw for collectors with large homes that are conducive to art collections, as even they run out of space.



Dixie Biggs: Dixie Biggs' education in agriculture and work as a biologist give her a unique perspective in creating finely carved vessel forms that reveal a love of nature.



Ron Layport: Ron Layport's small forms honor nature in a manner suggestive of the ritualistic. His "Vessel of Khepri" is a small lidded form featuring a scarab, bringing to mind the sort of treasure that might be uncovered in an archaeological dig.

Although it was quite obvious that both of these theories held some truth, there was a third, less definable attraction. It was in the way people reacted to small wood objects. They asked to hold them in their hands. And once they did so, they sometimes held them up to their faces to examine them more closely, creating an intimacy that large works couldn't offer.

Kirsten Muenster, director of exhibitions for del Mano Gallery, sums the attraction up well, stating, "The *Small Treasures* exhibition is the most anticipated show of the year. Collectors with budget or space considerations are able to get works by artists they might not otherwise acquire.

"The exhibition allows many artists to express themselves in



Eli Avisera:

Eli Avisera's untitled lace bowl combines symmetry and randomness in a manner that reflects the patterns found in nature. The small scale is ideal for this work.



Nikolai Ossipov: Born in Siberia, the artist combines old-world carving techniques with contemporary imagery, resulting in stunning turned wood vessels.

a scale they don't normally work in," Muenster continues. "This makes some works even more desirable regardless of cost, as collectors know they might never have the opportunity to acquire such works again."

While the annual *Turned Wood* exhibitions featured sales to a select number of leading collectors, the list of names collecting works from the *Small Treasures* exhibitions has grown at least four times since its inception. This has been



Guy Michaels: The artist turns alabaster on his lathe using carbide-tipped tools. The use of segmented exotic woods adds warmth and depth, and the patterns are inspired by Native American basketry and beadwork.



Neil Scobie: Neil Scobie's exquisite turned vessels (the piece above in collaboration with his wife, Liz) represent only a small part of his output, as he keeps busy designing and creating furniture for private clients and galleries in Australia.



Craig Leeds: A renowned conservator and restoration expert, Craig Leeds worked for many years as conservator to the Lipton Collection as well as with artists, museums, and collectors from around the world. The years of working so closely with work from the world's finest turners led him to create finely crafted bowl forms that simply balance form and the natural beauty of wood. His highly polished finishes offer tremendous clarity, enhancing the wood's colors and grain. While some woodturners develop quickly, moving through different series and experimental approaches, Leeds is satisfied with a slow and quiet evolution represented by subtle changes. His recent works feature raised stands that allow the work to seemingly float serenely while also serving to present the work as something to be treasured.

important, as the number of artists working in the field of turned wood has expanded at a much higher rate than that of those who identify themselves as collectors of wood art. Those who acquire a single turned wood piece don't think in such terms, but the seduction that *Small Treasures* offers can easily lead to a shelf of turned wood artworks. And where there is a collection, there is a collector.

Woodturning microcosm

Small Treasures represents the field of woodturning in a microcosm. From simple bowl forms to sculptural works, the wide range of languages employed by the artists is evident. It is particularly gratifying to see that the simple bowls and vessels that were the hallmarks of woodturners such as James Prestini and Bob Stocksdale are still being created, most notably in this exhibition by J. Kelly Dunn, Craig Leeds, Bert Marsh, Matt and Philip Moulthrop, and Robin Piscitelli.



Emmet Kane: "My key interest is materials—Irish hardwoods like elm, oak, ash, beech, and bog oak," says Emmet, who uses techniques including chainsawing, sandblasting, metal leafing, and hand-carving in his work. "Understanding these materials and combining form, function, and balance are my primary concerns. Most of my current work is an exploration of form and texture."

Such forms, devoid of complex carving, painting, and a desire for innovation, have a quiet eloquence that is pleasing to the eye.

At the same time, it was great to see ancient ideas explored by artists such as Glenn Krueg and Ron Layport; painterly expression in the works of Binh Pho, Betty Scarpino, and Steve Sinner; and sculptural approaches by Louise Hibbert, Mike Lee, and others.

The exhibition also made clear that the field of artistic woodturning is truly an international phenomenon, with works by Eli Avisera of Israel, Roger Bennett of Ireland, Alain Mailland of France, Graeme Priddle of New Zealand, Butch Smuts of South Africa, Siegfried Schreiber of Germany, and Norio Yoshimura of Japan.

It is also a great way to discover new artists. Among the most



J. Kelly Dunn: J. Kelly Dunn's vessel, with a seductive curved foot and mouth, proves that simplicity and attention to form can result in dramatic and original works.

Louise Hibbert: "My inspiration evolved from my fascination with the natural world, particularly marine life, microscopic creatures, plants, and fossils, which together offer a fantastic repertoire of imagery," Louise says. "Through this exploration I discovered the work of 19th-century artist and illustrator Ernst Haeckel, whose sumptuous illustrations are constantly echoed in my work."

In recent years, Louise has found inspiration in the jeweler Sarah Parker-Eaton. Their collaboration, which began in 2001, has pushed Hibbert's work to new levels.



Jack de Vos: "I have an acute awareness that the wood and the trees it comes from, as well as the talent one has to craft fine pieces, are God-given," Jack says. "In my artistic pieces, I aim to reflect my appreciation for the majestic beauty of God's creation. As a result, most of my artistic pieces are inspired by nature."



Keith Tompkins: A recent inspiration for Keith's work came from a trip to the mall with his wife that left him bored and frustrated. While he was waiting, the artist noticed a mannequin that was directly in front of him, fitted with a provocative ruffled dress. "In an instant," Keith says, "my mood changed from boredom to elation. The titles to my latest pieces reflect this unexpected inspiration."

promising were Stephen Hatcher, Emmet Kane, and Keith Tompkins.

Challenge and inspiration

Exhibiting in *Small Treasures* presents a great challenge, both in creating pieces that work well in a smaller scale and in making works that exhibit well alongside masters in the field.

"I can't imagine any turner who hasn't dreamed about being

invited to participate in such a prestigious event," Keith Tompkins says of the exhibition. "The initial elation of being invited soon changes to paralyzing fear, as one begins to realize their work will be compared to pieces created by some of the best turners in the world ... certainly a nerve-racking, but rewarding experience."

"Collectors sometimes buy woodturnings based on size,



Bert Marsh: Bert Marsh is possibly the greatest living master of subtle use of form to take advantage of wood's inherent beauty. Despite simplicity of form, Marsh's work is recognizable from a distance, making it clear that establishing an artistic identity need not lead one far astray from simple forms that showcase the wood.

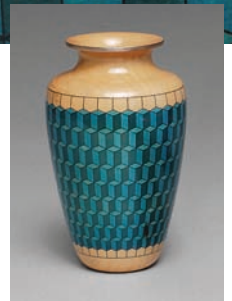
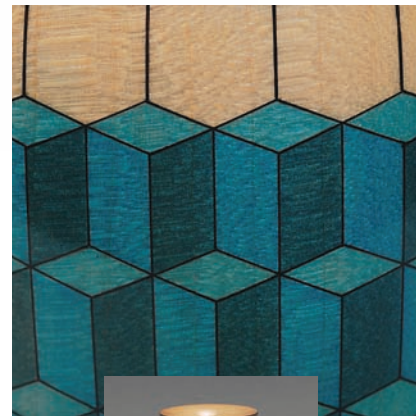
assuming that smaller work is of less value," notes Kip Christensen, who exhibited two outstanding lidded forms in the exhibition. "The *Small Treasures* exhibition speaks clearly to the value and significance of exceptional work done on a small scale."

Robin Piscitelli agrees that, despite its small scale, the challenge involved in making such a work is quite large. "Form that is pleasing to the eye is indeed more difficult to capture when creating a smaller vessel," Robin says. "I think it's largely due to the fact that there is less margin for error than when creating a larger vessel."

Robin goes on to point out that small variations in line and curve are far less noticeable on a larger vessel, as the eye focuses on a broader area. "Although you see the form in its entirety, you tend to shift your eyes from one area of the vessel to the next much more than you would with



Glenn Krueg: Glenn Krueg's *Temple Series* works suggest a reverence for form and material, with the miniature turnings gathered in the manner of holy relics in a reliquary. "The most challenging part of the process is making all the parts look in scale, including the miniature turnings," Glenn says. "The most rewarding part is making the vessels in harmony with each other, having good color and shapes that all come together in the finished piece."



a smaller vessel," he notes. "In that respect, a larger vessel can be more forgiving, as many small variations in the form are just not seen. Hitting that pleasing-to-eye line or curve on a vessel 6" or smaller can be tricky indeed. The vessel requires more study while turning."

"From the artist's standpoint, smaller is not always easier," concurs del Mano co-owner Ray Leier. "In fact, in some cases, it is actually more difficult to create. What I have seen is that because of the scale, the

artist has more time to introduce more detail into the piece."

"Even the photography, which for small work is typically very tight and then often enlarged for publication, can magnify minute, almost nonexistent flaws in sanding, finish, or assembly," Kip notes. "As a result, particular care must be taken in producing the caliber of work appropriate for del Mano's *Small Treasures* exhibition."

"What started as an answer to, 'Where am I going to put it, I'm running out of room,' the *Small*



Robin Piscitelli: Robin Piscitelli has an affinity for natural-edged vessels, most of which are turned green, finding beauty in imperfections such as voids, spalting, bark inclusions, and worm and beetle holes.

“The beauty of form, whether it be in the human body, art, or forms in nature, is determined by the subtle continuation and flow of the curve of the object,” Robin says. “That subtle flow can make the difference between what is a masterpiece and what is mundane in the world of art.”

Steve Sinner: Steve’s vessels utilize geometric patterning reminiscent of the op-art movement in painting. His “Untitled Vessel” makes clear one of the strengths of smaller works, as close inspection reveals how the grain creates a sense of movement in the blue cubes that seemingly float around the vessel.

Treasures exhibition has grown to the most active of our exhibitions,” Ray says. “I think the reasons are multiple. First, the scale provides an emotional connection that is not easily attained in larger work. And with the smaller scale often comes a more manageable price. *Small Treasures* allows the collector an opportunity to own a piece without having to sell the farm.”

Ray sums up the allure of the *Small Treasures* exhibition with three words: “Intimate. Accommodating. Affordable.”



Siegfried Schreiber: Siegfried’s works in the *Small Treasures* exhibition have a purity of form that makes them pleasing to the hand and eye.

Kevin Wallace is a contributing editor to *American Woodturner*. While manager of del Mano Gallery in 1993, he came up with the idea of the *Small Treasures* exhibition, which was his first foray into curating. He has since curated a number of exhibitions featuring woodturning for leading museums.



Norio Yoshimura: “In my art works, excessive decoration is eliminated and I make brevity a principle,” Norio says. “I am aiming for the direction that decoration should be functional at the same time. The reason I use urushi (Japanese lacquer) is that urushi is decoration in itself, and I believe it will bring out the beauty of the wood most effectively.”

Norio is exhibiting works that reflect Japanese culture. “Although those who have been to a Japanese restaurant may know it, Japanese cuisine isn’t comprised of only the food by itself but is completed in collaboration with the plates on which it is placed,” explains Norio, who created works inspired by the sake cup. “In other words, one of the important elements of Japanese art crafts is that it is closely related to our everyday matters such as meals.

“I, myself, engaged in creative work, am always very much conscious about such style of the Japanese culture.”