

Mark Lindquist

Pioneer of the Unexpected

Terry Martin



Mark Lindquist at the age of 10, upstate New York Adirondacks, circa 1959.



Early turned bowl with purposeful imperfections, 1969–71, Spalted maple burl, 5¼" × 11¼" (13cm × 29cm)

AAW's 2010
Honorary
Lifetime
Member

The choice of Mark Lindquist as the 2010 recipient of the AAW Lifetime Membership award may surprise some members because Mark's history with the AAW is not as well known as it should be and his place in the wider history of woodturning has become blurred over time. Relatively few turners today have met Mark and even fewer know much about what he has been doing for the last thirty years. The occasion of this

award is an appropriate time to remind people of the profound influence this intensely private man has had on the field of woodturning.

Mark is often seen as an enigma because he disappeared from the view of most turners during the 1980s. He briefly reappeared in 2001 at the Minneapolis launch of the exhibition "Woodturning in North America Since 1930" and gave a remarkable speech about the

development of the woodturning field, then disappeared from the radar again. In 2008, he resurfaced again as the creative force behind the landmark "Icons" exhibition at SOFA, Chicago, sharing the limelight with other turning legends David Ellsworth, Giles Gilson, Gary Stevens, and Stoney Lamar. This 2010 award will, at the age of sixty-one, bring Mark back into the fold of the AAW for the first time in twenty-five years.

Beginnings

The foundation of Mark's lifetime of working in wood was his relationship with his father Mel, so this year's award is further acknowledgment of Mel Lindquist's impact on the field. Mel was the fifth person to be given a Lifetime Membership award (1994).

From his earliest years, Mark absorbed his father's know-how in metal technology, machining, and woodcraft. In later years, the powerful combination of these skills would be his mainstay. More important, he soaked up his father's sense of curiosity and willingness to try new ideas. Mel once said, "When Mark was two he was already quite interested in woodturning, so I'd sit him downstairs in my wood shop and he'd watch me." Mel also made a child-sized workbench where Mark could use real tools and work with scrap pieces of wood.

Mel was a fervent outdoorsman and shared his love of nature with his son. Mark remembers, "When I was young Mel taught me everything I could imagine about being in the woods, about forestry and wood lore, and about working with wood." His childhood was filled with woodsman adventures of a kind that no longer seem possible. With his father, Mark explored the woods, built log cabins, hefted enormous chainsaws, and learned the value of a hard day's work. Together they harvested wood for turning, and Mark was with Mel when he recognized the potential of spalted wood for turning.

Mark began turning around 1959 when he was only ten years old, the same year he started using chainsaws. Unlike the "old days," it is very rare these days to meet anyone who has been turning for fifty years. Mark's childhood was like an early and protracted apprenticeship and

Melvin Lindquist (left) and Mark Lindquist at American Craft Council (ACC) craft fair, circa 1979.



it forged his personality in a unique way. Mark recently revealed a deeply personal insight into the impact of his experiences with his father, "In many ways, I'm still following Mel from when I was a kid." This relationship was to have a deep and enduring influence on the development of the woodturning field in general, and on the AAW in particular.

Early days

In 1971, when Mark graduated from his studies of art and sculpture at New England College in New Hampshire and finished training with a studio ►

Lapping Wavelet Bowl, 1977, Elm burl, 6" × 8" (15cm × 20cm), turned and carved

Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC



Brancusi Cup, 1976, Spalted elm burl, cherry burl, soapstone, 8½" × 4" (22cm × 10cm)

Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC





David Ellsworth (left) and Mark Lindquist (right) during Mark's demonstration at the "Woodturning Vision and Concept" conference, Arrowmont School, 1986.

commonplace, so it is hard to appreciate that when they first showed bowls and vases with natural edges, cracks, or other irregularities, many were shocked at their use of "flawed" materials. In 1972, visitors and exhibitors at the prestigious craft show in Rhinebeck, New York, were astounded by the Lindquists' offerings. Their nonfunctional vessels made from wood with arrested decay, holes, and bark inclusions created controversy. Some even asked if they were seconds. However, in the newly liberated atmosphere of the time when the object was seen as more important than the rules of craftsmanship, others were drawn to this idea. When Mark began promoting their work nationally as a serious art form, they helped trigger a new turning movement.

Mark guided his father through the process of becoming more professional in his woodcraft and presenting their work as art. In 1973, a time when craft shows were dominated by an atmosphere of rustic simplicity, the Lindquists shocked everyone with track lighting and gallery-standard displays. Then in 1974, they further surprised everyone by distributing catalogs, posters, and brochures, sometimes drawing criticism for being too commercial and self-promoting. The Lindquists' most significant move—one that has entered the folklore of the wood art community—was pricing their work as art, perhaps long before the market was ready for it. Today, when such professionalism is seen as a *minimum* standard of presentation for artists and craftspeople alike, and everything they introduced has been vindicated, it is hard to appreciate just how new these ideas seemed and the impact they had.

As the woodturning movement took off, the Lindquists became unexpected celebrities, taking part in exhibitions,



Unsung Bowl Ascending #3, 1982,
Spalted maple burl,
17" x 16½" (43cm x 42cm)

Collection of the Currier Museum
of Art, Manchester, NH

Nehushtan, 1982, Cherry burl,
14" x 14" (36cm x 36cm)

Collection of Robert A. Roth, Chicago

Photo: Paul Avis





Evolutionary Bowl (Proto-Captive), 1982, Spalted maple, 18" x 18" (46cm x 46cm)

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Winneg, NH

Photo: Paul Avis

museum shows, and symposiums. In 1978, the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired two pieces each from Mel and Mark. In the same year, the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution presented its first exhibition of woodturning, showing the work of Ed Moulthrop, Bob Stocksdale, and the two Lindquists. This was unprecedented acknowledgment, not only of woodturning but of the influence of Mark and his father on the field. At only twenty-nine years old, Mark was the driving force behind the acceptance of their work at such a venue.

Mark and the AAW

In the section of the AAW website dealing with the organization's history and its links with the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, there is the following: "In 1985, the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, in Gatlinburg, TN., was one of the few places in the country where it was possible to teach or study



Ichiboku Series Sculptures, Polychromed hardwoods, 49"–70" (124cm–178cm)

Private collections

woodturning." This is true and the reason is that in 1980 Sandy Blain, director of Arrowmont, asked Mark Lindquist to establish a woodturning program at the school. Mark had been Head of Woodworking at the Craft Center in Worcester, Massachusetts (1978–1979), and his woodturning program at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts was only a year old. Mark explains further, "Sandy agreed that Melvin and I would teach

the course together. Interest was growing in woodturning, but it certainly hadn't 'arrived' yet." Typically, Mark didn't want to do things the way others always had, "I was intent upon creating a Studio Woodturning program similar to those offered in clay and glass, where the courses were focusing on contemporary approaches to craft, and not along traditional lines that had already been done, or that were a part of local heritage. ►



Mark Lindquist with his patternmaker's lathe and his robot *ASTRO* (assigned specific task robotic operative [extreme right], designed and built by Mark Lindquist).

Dogmatism often prevented experimentation. Really, the idea of the course was to begin by introducing my and Mel's philosophy of woodturning and sculpture without dwelling in the past." A 1981 flyer for the program touts the Lindquists as "Self-employed woodworkers specializing in spalted woodturning." The *self-employed* is a hint to how people viewed such activity at the time. The idea that you could actually make money at such work was very attractive.

As the program evolved, Sandy and Mark agreed that they should find new instructors for the course and she asked for Mark's recommendations. "My first recommendations were David Ellsworth, Dale Nish, and Rude Osolnik, and I believe they all did teach there eventually. My last teaching session was in the spring of 1983 and it went very well. At that time, I suggested that Sandy consider holding a national woodturning conference and she thought it would be a great thing to do."

A life-changing experience

Soon afterward a major incident occurred that changed Mark's life and caused him to drop out of the woodturning scene for many years. In 1985, he was involved in a serious automobile accident that left him with major head injuries and multiple fractures. "I was scrambled for a long time after that," he says, "and I purposely backed away from many things. I did what I could under the circumstances, but even today I'm whacked from that accident."

Mark explains how this affected his involvement in the conference that resulted in the formation of the AAW: "I asked Sandy if she would contact David to work on the conference, and he graciously agreed to take over as co-organizer with Sandy. I stayed involved, but David was the one who pulled everything together. I focused on establishing an award to recognize

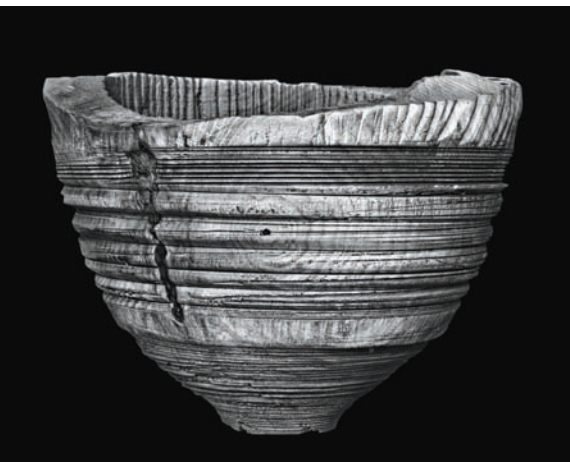


Photo: Rick Sniffen

Melvin and Mark Lindquist installation, "The Art of The Turned Bowl," Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1978.



Elements Gallery exhibition invitation—Mark Lindquist/Bob Stocksdales.



*Ascending Bowl #3, 1981, Walnut,
8 1/4" x 11 3/8" (21cm x 29cm)*

Smithsonian American Art Museum

with heavy duty professional lathes, the current wood program includes six turning classes a year. Be assured that your name is mentioned in regard to our strong lathe program." In an early and timely recognition of Mark's wider accomplishments, she continued, "Your commitment to the arts and most significantly through your accomplishments in moving the wood-turned object from a craft to an art form are internationally significant. And, most recently, I do appreciate your assistance with the October 1985 national wood conference and exhibition. Knowing your willingness to serve as a consultant has made my position of facilitator much easier."

Disappearing from the radar

So why do we hear so little these days about Mark's early influence on the field? Perhaps it is because he did not consider himself to be part of a woodturning movement, but simply an individual looking for new ways to express his vision and philosophy. By the early 1980s, when turned bowls that celebrated the natural beauty of burl and spalted wood had become mainstream, Mark was moving away from the work that had brought him early prominence. He began deliberately tearing into the grain of his turned bowls, producing texture and patterns that celebrated the internal nature of wood, rather than its surface beauty. People ►

the pioneers of the movement, and participated with David and Michael Monroe in selecting the work for the 'Woodturning, Vision and Concept' exhibit. I also brought my patternmaker's lathe to Arrowmont and, for the first time, demonstrated my chainsaw lathe-turning techniques."

The conference, attended by 200 turners, became a model for the AAW. It consisted of a three-day symposium, the juried exhibit, and recognition of the pioneers. The flood of goodwill and enthusiasm that accompanied the event were catalysts for the establishment of the AAW. In April 1986, Mark remembers the excitement of that time, "When we all sat down to establish the initial board, I was on that first steering committee. I was still feeling the effects of my accident, so I didn't become a board member, but I continued to support the organization."

In 1984, Sandy Blain wrote to Mark, confirming his pervading influence at every stage of the early development of the field, "The woodturning program at Arrowmont was given impetus through your leadership. From a small ill-equipped studio to the new structural addition [which Mark designed]



*Chieftain's Bowl #3,
1987, Maple burl,
walnut, 38" x 25 1/2"
(97cm x 65cm)*

Collection of Arthur
and Jane Mason

Photo: Paul Avis

Unmet Friend #5, Totemic Series Sculpture, 2008, Pecan, spalted pecan, English walnut, 78½" x 21½" x 19½" (200cm x 55cm x 50cm)

Photo: John McFadden/Mark Lindquist/Lindquist Studios



Windsoar Cloud Chair (Cumulous), 1978, Cherry burl, spalted maple, birdseye maple, ebony, padauk, 38" x 27" (97cm x 69cm)

Photo: Paul Avis

found it hard to work on the scale he wanted to, so he adapted robotics to the turning process and constantly refined his skills to create his own tool systems. He never felt the need to share these ideas with other turners, not only because he didn't want his techniques hijacked, but also because he was never interested in technique for its own sake. Mark

who had been shocked by his early work were now shocked by his towering cliff-like *Ascending* and *Unsung Bowls* that had surprising interior vortexes formed by chainsaw cuts.

Beginning in 1982, Mark created a series of *Captives*, in which the bowl is not released from the turning blank. The exterior of the tree, and the bowl's orientation within it, are retained. In 1983, he began creating monumental sculptures, stacking forms created using his rough-turning techniques. Later phases of his work include chainsaw-carved painted reliefs, nonturned Ichiboku sculptures, and a new Totemic series incorporating metal elements.

Perhaps the turning world isn't as aware of Mark's influence as it should be because he dropped out of the demonstrating and teaching scene in the mid-1980s. The focus of his own work had shifted to chainsaw-turning techniques, which he felt were too experimental, too dangerous, and too reliant on specialized equipment to share. Also, after his accident, Mark

was always focused on the end result.

However, Mark's absence from the educational and social events of the turning field did not mean that he had no influence. He continued to exhibit in museums and craft and art galleries. He stopped going to craft fairs because of the physical work it entailed, although he did participate in the New York ACE fair, and later in both SOFA New York and SOFA Chicago. His work is in all the great collections of woodturning, and he continues to be consulted by collectors, historians, and gallery owners interested in understanding the foundations of the woodturning movement.

Mark's achievements

Both during the early days of the turning revival, when Mark's contributions to the development of the movement were obvious, and since, Mark has achieved at a level that now, looking back, we can only marvel at. It isn't possible to discuss all of his achievements, but some highlights will give a sense of what he has done.

From as early as 1973, when he was only 24 years old, Mark was exhibiting in venues that would still be beyond the dreams of most wood artists. In 1978, the Renwick Gallery held the first woodturning exhibition and included the work of Ed Moulthrop, Bob Stocksdale, Mark, and his father. That same year, the Metropolitan Museum acquired Mark's *Brancusi Cup* and *Lapping Wavelet Bowl*.

In 1979, he exhibited with Bob Stocksdale at the Elements Gallery on Madison Avenue in New York City. That's thirty years ago! For a woodworker to be accepted in such a venue so long ago was a remarkable coup. Even more amazing, *The New York Times* reviewed the show and mentioned that Mark's work was priced up to \$3,000. When we think of what that amount was worth then, and the prevailing attitude toward woodturning as a production process for making utilitarian objects, it is clear that Mark always aimed high and it seems he often achieved it.

By 1980, an article in *American Craft* mentioned that Mark's work was selling for up to \$10,000. He had not long before refused an offer of \$10,000 for his *Windsoar Cloud Chair* and had withdrawn the chair from public view. In 1981, even while he was establishing the turning program at Arrowmont, Mark continued to make inroads into the fine art world when the National Museum of American Art purchased his *Ascending Bowl #3*.

Mark's list of venues is a *Who's Who* of the gallery world: 1982, HumanArts Gallery, Dallas, TX; 1986, Les Ateliers d'Art de France, Paris, France; 1988, Mendelson Gallery, Washington Depot, CT; 1990, Franklin Parrasch Gallery, New York City, NY; 1992, Snyderman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA; 1993, Dorothy Weiss Gallery, San Francisco, CA; 1996, Maurine Littleton Gallery, Washington, DC, and many more. In a typical reaching-out to the

wider art field, Mark exhibited with legendary glassmaker Dale Chihuly at the first SOFA event in Chicago in 1994. Most remarkably, a retrospective of his work was held at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, in 1996.

I saw a wonderful example of Mark's eccentric relationship with the wider turning field in 2000 when the Collectors of Wood Art held their annual conference in Charlotte, NC. The woodturning world seemed to descend on that city for the launch of the Mason Collection at the Mint Museum of Craft + Design. In the book that was published to celebrate this event, the very first photograph was of Mark's *Chieftain's Bowl*. It typifies much of what he was doing in this period and was only one of seven pieces by Mark in the collection, dating from 1981 to 1996. *Chieftain's Bowl* is a massive piece that retains the natural burl around its circumference, but it has been tooled by Mark's captive chainsaw to create recurring patterns around the base and interior. These are techniques that Mark pioneered and still uses today.

That Mark's work was collected so deeply by Arthur and Jane Mason is an acknowledgment of his early leadership as a fine-art turner.

However, on the same occasion, Mark's role outside of the woodturning movement was highlighted by something I stumbled across when I was strolling around the downtown area of Charlotte. I went into the impressive Bank of America headquarters and was stunned by what I saw. Standing outlined against the glass wall of the lofty lobby were three enormous pieces by Mark Lindquist. I spent a happy half hour walking around them, admiring the juxtaposition of the glassy space and the warm rounded wooden shapes.

At first I assumed the work was part of the events unfolding that weekend, but I soon learned that *Totemic Triad* had been commissioned by the bank in 1993. It was typical of Mark. His work was not only significantly represented in one of the most important turning exhibitions ever held, but he had already been the top turner on the block in Charlotte for many years. It seems that Mark was always there first. ►



Photo: Paul Avis

Fluted Vessel, Ascending, with Rhythmic Motion, 1992, Cherry burl, 9" x 15" (23cm x 38cm)

White House Collection of American Crafts



Photo: Mark Lindquist

Group of sculptures, 1984 – 2008.

Mark's influence

Mel once described his son as “a lot like the Tennessee mountain men—won’t lead, won’t follow, and can’t be pushed.” This may well explain Mark’s determination not to be driven by the existing market or accepted

norms. He was first among his peers to name his wooden sculptures and to create a series of themed work, something that has since become commonly accepted. Mark moved so quickly to the forefront that almost before he had started he left his

chosen field behind, consciously moving on to purely sculptural work that was at odds with the newly developing studio woodturning. In this he was profoundly influenced by such sculptors as Brancusi and Noguchi.

Mark has also been strongly influenced by Japanese pottery, and by the aesthetic of avoiding attempted perfection, accepting all that appears in the work, whether intended or not. His work is characterized by robust disregard for the precision of traditional woodcraft. He has often rejected the perfect curve and sensuous line in favor of the apparently rude cut and severe ascetic form.

Mark agrees that his work didn’t proceed as might have been expected, “I had to turn my back on what was traditionally expected of a woodturner.” Despite the controversy that surrounded his stance, it is hard to overstate how influential it became. Ken Trapp, former curator-in-charge of the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, says of Lindquist’s career, “Through exhibiting, writing, and teaching, Lindquist was instrumental in bringing about the acceptance of the craft of woodturning as a serious art form, and inspired and nurtured the followers of this fledgling movement.”

Mark could have taken the easy path, but a combination of strong ambition, genuine conviction, and a modicum of Lindquist cantankerousness drove him to seek the higher ground. Bountiful praise has been heaped upon him from many quarters. Perhaps his finest praise came from Robert Hobbs, who wrote, “With his new works Lindquist joins a small but important group of craftsmen turned sculptors that includes Robert Arneson, Howard Ben Tré, Wendell Castle, and Peter Voulkos. Like these artists, he takes the craftsman’s concern for materials to the level of metaphor, and thus he creates art.”

Photo: Terry Martin



Mark Lindquist, 2009.

Mark continues to create challenging work from the Lindquist Studios in Quincy, FL. It is a rambling 15,000 square-foot facility set in the middle of broad farmland. Mark refers to it as “the compound” and he takes particular delight in showing visitors around. He enjoys their growing amazement as they walk from building to building. There are two galleries and several studios for different disciplines, including woodturning, robotics, machine shop, and photography. He even has his own wheezing, clanking freight elevator that makes his description of the compound as “a New York City loft dropped into a hayfield” particularly apt. Mark stores timber in a vast tobacco barn, and on the top floor of the main building you can look across an array of partly finished Lindquist sculptures, covered in dust, quietly waiting for Mark to decide which one he will complete next.

Like so many successful artists, there is a hidden partner behind much of what Mark achieves. Mark and his wife, Kathy, were high school sweethearts. When they married in 1968, they began a long and devoted journey together. Kathy is a successful professional in her own right, working as an editor and writer, but she has supported Mark in almost every endeavor and is able to give us a unique insider’s view. “It’s always been a family thing,” she says, “and

exciting things happen because he always sees possibilities and never sees obstacles. You never know what’s going to happen next.”

Final thoughts

The woodturning movement owes more than most realize to the prodigious impact of Mark Lindquist’s life work. When he did make the decision to separate himself from the studio craft revival, he missed out on the fame that would have been

due to him in a movement that was looking for early prophets to elevate to stardom. Although it surprised the turning world that he set his sights so high, the long-term outcome has been recognition that he was right all along. Kathy has this to say, “I know he’s thrilled. Being recognized by the AAW feels very good to him.”

Mark offers these final thoughts, “Mel and I were always amazed that the AAW became such an incredible organization, an institution unto itself. We helped plant the seeds by establishing the woodturning program at Arrowmont, then working on the conference. Others have done an amazing job watering the seeds and growing the tree that the AAW has become since

that early humble beginning. We all owe thanks for the hard work of so many people.” ■



Lindquist working at the lathe, 2007, Lindquist Studios, Quincy, FL.

he’s always the creative force. First it was with his father. Mark’s mother and I would get involved preparing for craft shows and then our two sons helped.” When asked what it is like living with Mark, Kathy laughs, “He’s like a terrier. He has a lot of focus and concentration and he never stops thinking. All kinds of

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