

RIPPLES BECOME A TSUNAMI

The 2021 Virtual WIT eXchange

The AAW's Women in Turning (WIT) committee created the WIT eXchange in 2018 as a woodturning collaborative challenge for women. Like many innovative ideas, it started small, with just thirty-three in-person participants. That eXchange was held at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, and by the end of the

three-day event, the participants were infused with creative energy and armed with new supportive friendships they had developed.

The ripples commenced from that beginning, and soon after, the first local eXchange was held. Now, just four years later, WIT eXchanges based on our original model are happening worldwide, including makers

of all genders using various media. The ripples have developed into a tsunami of creativity—crossing borders and breaking barriers of language and gender.

What's it all about?

So what's the big deal about participating in the WIT eXchange? What makes the eXchange an asset to the AAW?

FOR FURTHER READING

EXPLORE!

Log on at woodturner.org and use the Explore! tool to find these *American Woodturner* articles about past WIT eXchanges and WIT's approach to creativity.

- "Uproarious Reciprocation: The 2018 Women in Turning eXchange," by Lynne Yamaguchi and Kathleen Duncan, February 2019 (vol 34, no 1, page 42).
- "Abundant Imagination: A Case Study in Fostering Creativity" by Lynne Yamaguchi, August 2019 (vol 34, no 4, page 37).
- "Breaking Boundaries and Removing Limitations" by Linda Ferber and Marie Anderson, April 2021 (vol 36, no 2, page 42)



Team Absolute Zeros (Nicole MacDonald, Debra Higley-Feldman, Jan Brown)

Inspiring Curiosity, Maple burl, oak, pine, fused and dichroic glass, crystals, stones, beads, fossils, preserved and imitation moss and lichen, 12" x 9" (30cm x 23cm)



Team Busy Bees (Suzette Edwards, Jana Patka, Louise Butler)

Bountiful Generosity, Hickory, plywood, cloth, acrylic paint, glass, metal, 15" x 11¾" x 11½" (28cm x 30cm x 29cm)

Why do we host these eXchanges? Why is this specifically the *Women in Turning* eXchange?

In general, people join the AAW to learn, socialize, share, and expand woodturning so it will continue on for future generations. Most people don't know that women make up less than eight percent of the AAW membership. The WIT committee was formed to encourage more women to join. We know that women learn and socialize differently than men, and the WIT programs are designed to fulfill the needs of women. The eXchange offers a supportive environment where women can ask questions, get answers, and feel empowered to take risks and learn from the inevitable "design opportunities."

Many of the women who have participated in WIT eXchanges have had previous experiences where the learning atmosphere was unsupportive and challenging. During the eXchanges, these same women gained confidence in their skills, supported by the other participants. This has fostered a community that is thriving and growing worldwide. Although many of these women have joined the AAW, there is still much work to be done.

To be sure, there are chapters that have done a great job of encouraging and welcoming women into their groups. There are also numerous chapters that would benefit from adding women (or more women) members. Unfortunately, there are still women who are intimidated when they walk into a room full of men. The reasons cover a broad range and may not be limited to women. While the AAW membership has grown over the years, the proportion of women to men has remained fairly constant. It's not that women are not interested in turning, or in ►



Team Ambitious Anxious Worriers

(AAW) (Brenda Miotke, Debra McLeod, Amanda DeNoyer)

Pointed Abundance, 2021, Ash, basswood, acrylic paint, maple, acrylic dowel, steel rods, paper clips, lacquer, 6" x 10½" x 6" (15cm x 27cm x 15cm)



Team Creative Confluence

(Martha Bird, Tina O'Brien, Sally Ault)

Harmonious Pathway: Embracing the Unexpected, Kooboo rattan, Dorset sheep wool, merino sheep wool, flax plant fibers spun into linen, magnolia wood, 5" x 13" x 10" (13cm x 33cm x 25cm)



Team Confetti

(Louise Wilde, Lynn Walker, Crystal Earley)

Neglected Fragment, Wood, glass, 18" x 14" (46cm x 36cm)



Team Irregular Flatliners (Andi Wolfe, Dianne Looker)

Horizontal Rhythm, Various woods, onyx beads, nylon thread,
19" × 22" × 13" (48cm × 56cm × 33cm)



Team KAM-a-lot (Anne Ogg, Mary Getchall, Kimberly Winkle)

Energized Independence, Wood, horse and mule hair, paint, 12" × 20" × 5"
(30cm × 51cm × 13cm)

the AAW—it's that some women just don't see themselves in the organization. The WIT eXchange has begun to change that by offering a safe learning environment—a place where women learn from other women and receive an introduction to the AAW that reinforces that

woodturners (men and women) are open and sharing people.

Some eXchange participants have shared that the event was their first exposure to the AAW. In this way, the WIT eXchanges put into action AAW's diversity statement, which reads in part: "The AAW strives to

cultivate an organization built on mentorship, encouragement, tolerance, and mutual respect, thereby engendering a welcoming environment for all." To read AAW's full Diversity Statement, visit tiny.cc/AAWDiversity.

An international event

The 2021 Virtual WIT eXchange brought together eighty-eight women from seven countries (including eight different time zones), speaking eight languages. With twenty-seven collaboration teams, these women were challenged to safely push their creative limits to achieve new levels of potential.

The kickoff for registration for the 2021 Virtual WIT eXchange opened on International Women's Day, March 8, 2021, a day that celebrates the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. ▶



Team Earth, Wood & Fire (Anna Duncan, Kate Chenok, Kim Wolfe)

Fragile Silliness, Wood, clay, 6" × 18" × 6" (15cm × 46cm × 15cm)

In Their Own Words

“I got involved in the AAW’s Women in Turning Virtual eXchange this year, and it was the absolute best experience. It catapulted my turning skills and concept of what is possible on the lathe.”

“Hours alone in my shop can feel isolating. The WIT collaboratives change that in so many ways. Now I’m surrounded by women... eager to grow friendships.”

“I was very reluctant to try [this], and I am truly glad I did! The two ladies I was paired with were extremely wonderful, and we really hit it off.”

“As an artist from outside the woodturning community, I felt so welcome!”

“What a delight! Just when you think you cannot fit another thing into your life, along comes WIT eXchange—smiles, laughter, comradery, support, and challenge—and time is created.”



Team Mystical Makers
(Julia Swyers, Ana Marie Lappegard, Lisa Pritchett)

Luxurious Gesture: A Gift of Gifts, Walnut, maple, shell, acrylic, milk paint, walnut oil, 4½" x 6¼" (11cm x 16cm)



Team The Travelers
(Heather Marusiak, Martha Diefendorf, Dima Tawakkol)

Inspiring Aggregate, Cherry, oil paint, 14" x 14" x 14" (36cm x 36cm x 36cm)



Team Turned HerStory (Robin McIntyre, Stacey Pellom, Tracey Lee, Marie Anderson)

Robust Evolution, Wood, fiber, paint, 12" x 18" x 4" (30cm x 46cm x 10cm)

This day also marks a call to action around the world for accelerating gender parity.

The WIT committee used social media to promote the event, posting photos from earlier eXchanges, which generated some buzz and

created interest in the event. For the first time, event organizers reached out directly to various women artists using different media and were successful in recruiting women whose main focus was pottery, metalsmithing, basketry, glass, fiber, paint,

vinyl, and more. This served to enhance the creativity and push the woodturners in the group to look at their projects from different perspectives.

Collaborative teams

As in the past, participants were put into teams of three or four to work collaboratively. The process (not the finished projects) has always been the main point of the eXchange. Each year, the teams document their processes as they work on their projects. Sharing these processes throughout the event creates a trust that grows as the teams work through their respective challenges. The teams collectively become a supportive community. By the time the Presentation of Projects event is held at the end, teams are filled with anticipation and are eager to share the stories that helped shape their final projects.

Building on the success of the 2020 Virtual WIT eXchange, the 2021 event's Presentation of Projects again used the five-minute speed talk format. Some of the teams focused on current events such as the pandemic and climate change, some addressed women's issues, and some took a



Team Triple Dares (Linda Ferber, Rosanne Gold, Daryl Gray)

Artistic Strength, Birch, maple, walnut, elm, paper, paint, 12½" × 11" (32cm × 28cm)



Team Wood Whisperers (Stinne Lund Vestergaard, Kathleen Duncan, Christine Wenzhöfer, Ellen Starr)

Dimpled Idea, Wood, metal, glass, 13¾" × 9½" (35cm × 24cm)



Team The Time Travelers (Cindy Pei-Si Young, Kandie D. Candelaria, Jean LeGwin)

Moving Scenery, Resin epoxy, LED lights, SpectraPly, clay, felted alpaca and merino fibers, brass wire, poplar, maple, cherry, milk and acrylic paint, rocks, twigs, lichen, glue, O-rings, plywood, beech, padouk, walnut, walnut veneer, cherry veneer, oak veneer, 12" × 11" (30cm × 28cm)



more whimsical slant. The teams included a range from non-turners to professionals, artists to scientists, young to seasoned. There were static art pieces, sculpture, moving artistic machines, and more. Not your typical art presentation, but without question it was educational, inspirational, and entertaining.

The WIT eXchanges, both in-person and virtual, encourage a dialogue, foster community building, and facilitate self-confidence among women makers. They offer an opportunity for makers in any media to expand and explore their creativity. Supportive, empowering, motivating, and encouraging, the eXchange demonstrates that women at all skill levels can work, learn, and ultimately thrive together. Lasting friendships and a broad range of connections have begun through these eXchanges, combating the isolation of women working in craft.

Ripples grow

What began as inspirational ripples, the WIT eXchanges have become like a tsunami, introducing (or in some cases, re-introducing) countless people to woodturning. There is an opportunity to encourage women, children, and

makers in other genres to look at woodturning as an outlet for their creative endeavors. We know that hands-on making stimulates the brain, helps with problem-solving, and is fun. So we encourage you to invite someone new to your local club, host a WIT event (possibly an eXchange), or simply pass on your woodturning knowledge and skills through your local club—virtually

or in person. If you need help or encouragement, please reach out to the AAW or your local chapter. ■

The WIT committee is deeply grateful to Ruth Niles (nilesbottlestoppers.com) for sponsoring the 2021 Virtual WIT eXchange.

—Linda Ferber and Marie Anderson



Team Turnin, Burnin, Stitches (Julie Schmidt, Jeannie Ureno, Penny Clifton)

Brilliant Community, Ash, fabric, ink, burning, buttons, paint, copper, wire, solder, Swarovski crystals, feathers, 21½" × 17¼" × 15½" (55cm × 44cm × 39cm)

2022 WIT eXchange and More

Please watch for details and plan to join us in 2022 for the next iteration of the WIT eXchange.



Visit tiny.cc/WIT to learn more about AAW's Women in Turning program, view video recordings of past WIT Presents artist talks, read WIT newsletters, and see the full array of collaborations from the virtual 2021 WIT eXchange.