

# ROBYN HORN

*Artist, Turners' friend honored by AAW*

**R**OBYN HORN, SCULPTOR, ART COLLECTOR and friend to many of the world's top turners, has been named this year's Honorary Lifetime member by the AAW Board of Directors.

A quiet, private person who friends say is happiest when she is working in her own shop, Robyn is probably best known to AAW members through the sculptures she has been creating for many years.

She and her husband John share a studio near their Arkansas home. He collects antique printing equipment and produces limited edition books and posters. Plus, his experience moving heavy equipment has helped her learn how to manipulate the heavy blocks of wood she uses.

An interest in glass started their adventure as collectors. She started working in wood after her brother-in-law, Sam Horn, took a class from David Ellsworth at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Tennessee, and showed her what he had learned.

"I had worked some in clay and done some painting, but the wood seemed to be the medium that worked for me, the means of expression for which I had been searching. The collecting of crafts and the working in wood began simultaneously," she writes in "Living with Form: The Horn Collection of Contemporary Crafts," an exquisite tour of their home and some of the 800 pieces in their collection. The book, published by the Arkansas Art Center, also features a foreword by Director Townsend Wolfe, an article on Living with Form by Michael Monroe former curator of the Renwick Gallery, as well as comments from Robyn and John on their love for art and artists.

This love led Robyn to become a major factor in the formation of the



Robyn and John Horn, at home in Arkansas. Photo by Matt Bradley

Collectors of Wood Art (CWA) in 1997, a group she says is already having a major impact in bringing wood art — turnings, sculpture and furniture — to the levels "the glass and clay fields have already reached."

"For me, one of the most important aspects of collecting is the opportunity to meet and get to know the artists. Being an artist myself, I think I have an accurate view from the artists perspective. It is not an easy career to choose," Robyn wrote.

## **Friend, patron, colleague**

Sculptor Stoney Lamar calls her "the most important person in helping me to continue my career. Without her, I wouldn't be where I am. Her belief is that the way to support

an artist is to buy his or her work. Robyn has been doing that with my work and with me for 16 years."

Lamar described their relationship on three levels: Friend; Patron; Colleague.

"A patron is one thing; a friend is quite another; and the fact that she is a colleague is truly unusual. Often people, knowing of Robyn's reticence and reluctance to talk about herself, ask me if ours is a difficult friendship to maintain. The answer is no. Ours is an easy comfortable relationship, one that is open and straightforward. And that really is the essence of Robyn's personality. While she is not "open" in the sense of wearing her heart on her sleeve, she is direct, straightforward, and ready for healthy give-

# The Art of Robyn Horn

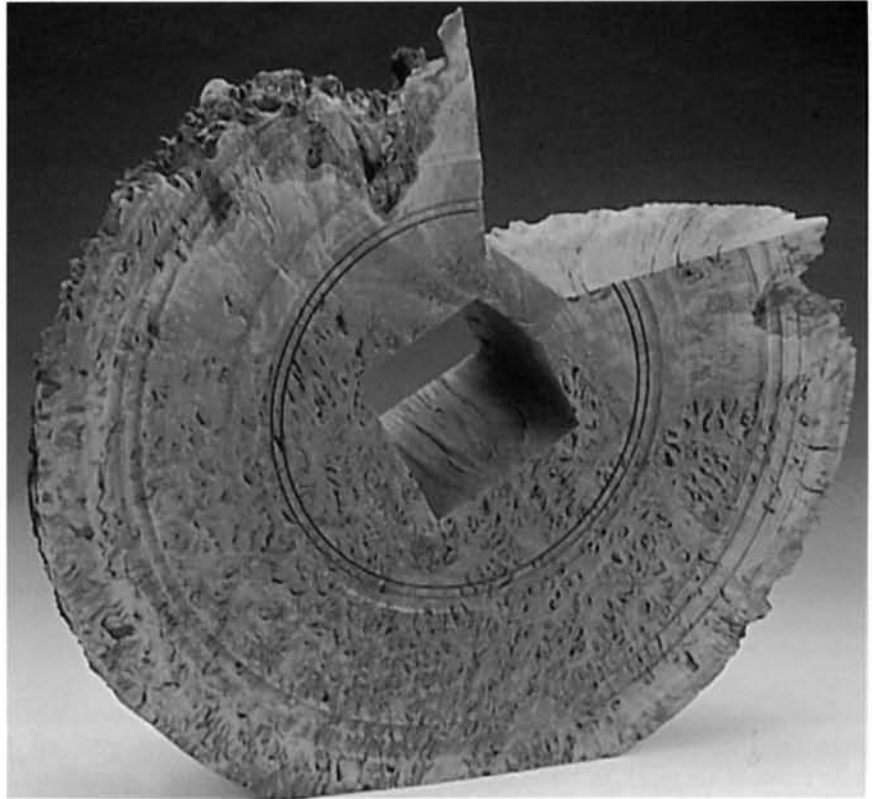
and-take whether it be positive or negative.

"We became friends that first summer at Arrowmont 16 years ago, she and John and I and we have been friends ever since. As a patron, as a collector, Robyn knows exactly what she wants and she goes after it.

"To understand Robyn as a patron or as a collector one must understand her esthetic. Her esthetic is unique. It is not just about wood or just about craft or just about art. It is about sculpture... three-dimensional. But we're talking top-of-the-line fine art sculpture: Isamu Noguchi; Barbara Hepworth; David Nash; George Nakashima; Dale Chihuly, to name some. To see my work next to work done by these artists is wonderful for me and for any of the woodturners whose work she has collected. Because to see our work in this kind of fine art environment and to see that it fits in, looks right at home, looks like it belongs there is absolutely wonderful. For her to place our work in this context is not accidental, not just a quirk or a collector's whim. It is deliberate. It is part of her esthetic, and a very important part. This is Robyn Horn's esthetic making a statement. As I said, Robyn is confident and knowledgeable. She knows what she wants and selects it without hesitation. This is the patron aspect.

"But Robyn is much more than a patron. As a colleague she is also a 'maker'. Someone who does good work; an artist who is striving to get to where she's going. But it is more than that. She lives the hopes and fears and frustrations that all of us who are trying to make art go through. We are kindred spirits, drawn together, possibly, by our mutual struggles and failures and ultimately, by our successes.

"You can look at Robyn's work and see what she is reluctant to tell you about herself. It is independent, strong, tactile. It originates within her.



*...It seems that I have to make sculpture. The work is inside, and it has to come out. The same is true for me in collecting. The work that I collect has a profound visceral effect on me. Collecting is also part of the continuous circle that completes the process: the artist creating the work, the collectors collecting the work, enabling the artists to continue, knowing their art is being preserved and appreciated.*

— Robyn Horn, *Living with Form*



Photos: Fractured Millstone, top, Jarrah burl; Pierced Monostone, right, Fiddleback maple, steel; Photos: Sean Moorman; "Lyrical" spiral series, above, Cypress and steel; Photo: Matt Bradley.

She makes exactly what she wants to make and uses the inspiration that she feels to guide her designs. There is a tough-mindedness about Robyn, a sense of determination. Look at her work, you'll see what I mean.

"We've both been searching ourselves and our ability to express ourselves through art for the entire 16 years that I've known her. To me she has been a true friend and I, of course, do my best to reciprocate in-kind."

### **Always giving 100%**

Steve Loar, a turner, writer and professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology, describes Robyn as "a warm & wonderful, genuine & generous person. What is also notable, is the degree to which she is all of these things (and more); which is 100%. While most of us work to hone these qualities, knowing that some balance will have to suffice between our large/good self and our less admirable self, Robyn seems to consistently project a whole set of fine qualities. I have been particularly struck by her ability to listen, especially on the telephone. When you speak to her there is only silence; no obligatory "uh-huh" & shy; just silence. She is totally focused on what you're saying. A fact that becomes obvious months later when she asks about, or comments on, something you have said to her. Robyn Horn is a great friend."

### **A passion for all good work**

John Jordan, a turner and teacher in Antioch, TN, said "One of the things that I like most about Robyn is her passion and excitement for good work of many kinds. This passion and excitement shows in her own work as well. Most people don't realize what a productive and enthusiastic maker she is, and I know that on most any day she would rather be in her studio making work than anything else.

*Robyn and John "know how important art is in life. They know the power of art to transform lives, heal brokenness, and affect the chain of global events."  
— Clay Foster*

"Robyn's support of crafts in general and wood in particular has been invaluable, and her encouragement and support of individual artists has helped many of us to be more productive/successful in our work. She and John have been my friends for most of my turning career, and for that I am blessed and very grateful."

### **They know art is important**

Turner and former AAW Board member Clay Foster echoed Jordan's feelings. "I could tell you all the things I know of the contributions that Robyn has made to the world of art both as a collector and an artist. I could tell you all the things I know of the contributions Robyn and John have made to the world of woodturning, things that have benefited you as a turner that you weren't even aware of. I could tell you how generous Robyn and John have been to me, how they have made my life better.

"I could tell you all these things, and you would be rightfully impressed, and Robyn would be quite embarrassed. So instead of telling you what I know, I will tell you what Robyn and John know.

"The reason Robyn would be embarrassed is because she and John have done all these things not to get attention, but because they know how important art is in life. They know the power of art to transform lives, heal brokenness, and affect the chain of global events.

"Robyn and John know that giving enriches their lives as well as those who benefit from their generosity. They know that we are what we do, not what we own.

"The world is a better place be-

cause of what Robyn and John know."

### **Always the artist and advocate**

Washington State turner Michael Peterson met Robyn in the mid-80s. "We both shared an affinity for the natural world and this commonality led to a continuing friendship.

"I enjoy Robyn's unique form of fellowship, shaped by her roles as fellow artist, collector and true patron. She's great at all of these and I, like several others, have been on the receiving end, big time."

He recalls one particular highlight in their relationship: a trip to the Noguchi Sculpture Gardens "where Robyn shared her excitement and passion for natural materials, form and the artists.

"Quick to share a great piece of wood or book, always supporting and caring, always the artist advocate, all this while developing her own work.

"Robyn's contributions are well documented throughout the wood field. And in respecting her private nature I won't go on and on, so let's just say here's to stones, Red Setters and Robyn."

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*Robyn will receive her award at the Saturday night banquet during the 14th AAW Symposium in Charlotte, NC, June 30 to July 2.*

*This report was compiled by Dick Burrows, Editor of American Woodturner. Special thanks to all who contributed, including Stoney Lamar, Steve Loar, John Jordan, Clay Foster, Michael Peterson, and Ken Keoughan.*

*For more information on the Collectors of Wood Art: mail your request to: CWA, David and Ruth Waterbury, 4541 E. Lake Harriet Pkwy, Minneapolis, MN 55409.*

*The book Living with Form can be ordered from The Arkansas Arts Center, PO Box 2137, Little Rock, AR 72203-2137 (501-396-0358)*

*email: adubois@artcenter.org.*