



BUDLATVEN

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A Brief Biography 2003

Metamorphosis by Kevin Wallace

An extract of a biography on Bud Latven published in Woodturning magazine by the Guild of Master Craftsmen Publications LTD, East Sussex, England, 2003.

Bud Latven has influenced countless artists and craftspeople with his approach to wood turning, while following the path of a highly individual artist. He is an innovator, and the complexity of his constructed forms might lead one to think of him foremost as a talented technician. Yet it is the ideas behind the pieces and the constant experimentation leading to their creation that truly sets him apart.

Latven's life with wood began when he moved to New Mexico in 1972 and took a job at a woodshop in Albuquerque making cabinets and furniture. Soon after, he began making his own furniture and within two years he had a fully equipped studio. For the next ten years he sold his furniture at galleries and craft shows across the Southwest.

All of this changed in 1982, however, when he was contracted to create production goblets at his studio. It wasn't long before he made the transition from furniture-maker to lathe artist. He was attracted by what he saw as an "unexplored medium that was open to interpretation and experimentation". By working in a field that was not rigidly defined, he saw greater potential for artistic freedom.

Bud Latven first started turning Mediterranean and Southwest stylized vessel forms taking his early inspirations from Native American ceramics. In 1985, *Fine Woodworking* magazine put a picture of one of Latven's forms on the cover of the magazine, an event that lifted his career onto a national level.

Through the 1980s he participated in numerous national art and craft exhibitions and his traditional Southwest vessels gave way to more contemporary forms. "It was during this time that I started looking deeper into issues concerning materiality, surface and form," Latven says. He developed a series of works that had silver rods piercing the walls and rims of the forms. He painted vessels and sculptural forms with juxtaposed raw and airbrushed surfaces and he sprayed melted metals onto tall anthropomorphic forms.

During these years, Bud Latven's work had changed, but so too had the marketplace. As his work became more sophisticated and sculptural, he needed to focus on a marketplace that welcomed this kind of work and find collectors with budgets to support work that required increasing amounts of time to create. He found this in high-end affairs such as the Smithsonian Craft Show and the Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show. As the field of contemporary woodturning took off, a number of galleries appeared on the scene and he was sought after to exhibit with the best of them.

By the early 1990s, Latven was thinking about developing a more definitive language of identifiable forms whose parameters were open-ended enough to allow for expanded creativity. For years he questioned the relevance and pervasive adherence to the concept of the vessel form in the woodturning field. It was then that he started to open out the bottom of his forms, many of which had become based on rotated curves and conic sections such as parabolas and ellipses. He made these forms out of segmented bodies with randomly placed contrasting elements and sections. "Over time, these contrasting sections became more and more pervasive in the forms until I realized that the darker contrasting sections were really an attempt to create visual

voids,” Latven recalls, “it was at this time that I started carving out sections creating contrasting voids or negative spaces in my forms.”

As he manipulated these large carved sections he began to fracture and fragment sections of the forms. This was a new conceptualization, producing coherent fragments of forms, and in 1997 he made the first fragmented piece in what was to become the *Fragments* series. “The *Fragments* series became more and more concerned with how the individual extensions and voids around the edge of the form relate to each other and to the form as a whole,” Latven explains. “This eventually spawned the *Torsion* series whose forms are based on carved paraboloids”. The carved sections in this series bisect the walls in a spiraling movement or torsion. The central arch has thicker walls than the rim areas providing strength and integrity to this narrow area of the work. Since the piece rests on the curving rims, there is a balance of mass that must be equal on both sides. As a result, Latven explains, “The formal design in this series has evolved as a function of mass equilibrium.”

In 1999 Latven created his first bronze casting of one of the *Torsion* forms to see how it translated into another medium. To accomplish this, he spent a year visiting the Shidoni foundry in Tesuque, New Mexico, learning the process and overcoming the technical difficulties. “This experience taught me to look at my forms in a different light, not just as pedestal pieces but as maquettes for larger sculptures,” he says. “It taught me to view these objects as an active participant within and through the forms.”

The concepts Bud Latven explores feed each other, as ideas work back and forth between individual works. His current series of carved works explores concepts of disintegration, fragmentation and re-emergence. Works in his *Tower* series appear to be architectural, decaying and degenerate, while works in his *Impact* and *Torsion* series appear to be more fluid and dynamic.

In addition to being a highly regarded wood artist, Latven has a number of other noteworthy accomplishments. He designed and built his own home and studio in Tajiique, New Mexico and spent several years designing and testing a new innovative wood lathe for Woodworker's Supply, Inc. of Albuquerque. During this project he traveled to Taiwan to work with engineers and manufacturers. Latven and his wife, Caroline Orcutt, also have a sideline business called The Bowl Kit Company that markets segmented bowl kits and plans to amateur woodturners and Latven offers several weeklong workshops during the year for those who want to learn how to design, build and turn segmented constructions.

Latven's extensive resume shows that his turned works have been the object of numerous articles and exhibitions. In 1996 his work was featured on the cover of Patrick Spielman's book *The Art of the Lathe* and the broader context of his work can be understood in the new book *Wood Turning in North America Since 1930* by the Wood Turning Center and Yale University Art Gallery. Latven's work is represented in many private and public collections, some of which include the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Renwick Collection of the National Museum of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution. ♦