'Unsung Bowl Ascending #3', 1982, spalted maple burl, 43 x 42 cm

'Evolutionary Bowl (Proto-Captive)', 1982, spalted maple, ht 46 cm

PHOTO: PAUL KIVI

Mark Lindquist
REINVENTING SCULPTURE

The processes employed by Mark Lindquist in creating his sculptural work in wood have more in common with a virtuoso working in a recording studio than a visual artist creating art objects for exhibition. Profile by Kevin V. Wallace.

MARK Lindquist is a legendary figure in the field of contemporary wood art, though he has spent the last two decades quietly working in his Florida studio and avoiding the fanfare of shows and symposia that are central to the woodturning movement. Once the lone sculptor in a field dominated by pretty and perfectly finished vessels, he today watches from afar as others build upon his aesthetic breakthroughs. The honours continue to find him – he was recently made a fellow of the American Craft Council, for demonstrating outstanding artistic achievement and leadership in the craft field, and in 2007 was awarded a POP Fellowship Award by the American Association of Woodturners for the influence he has had on the field of contemporary woodturning.

PHOTO: PAUL KIVI

'Fluted Vessel, Ascending, with Rhythmic Motion', 1992, cherry burl, diam. 38 x 23 cm. The White House Collection of American Crafts

Taking it all in his stride, Lindquist focuses on creating sculptures that are part of a continuum which stretches back into his childhood.

He was born into a life that treasured nature, particularly as manifest in the material of wood, and the world of machinery and tools. His father, Melvin Lindquist, was an engineer by profession and his work as quality control manager for General Electric Corporation meant that his workdays were filled with exacting and stressful work. For this reason, the woodturnings he created in the evenings and on weekends were spontaneous and experimental. During the mid-1950s, Mel began experimenting with the turning of spalted wood from his 100 acres of land in the upstate New York Adirondacks. It was a material which had always been avoided by traditional woodworkers owing to its inherent weaknesses. Spalting is the beginning of rotting and when the process is arrested at the opportune moment, the wood features markings that resemble abstract black pen lines running throughout. It was a challenging but rewarding material to work, requiring the experience of an engineer as well as a craftsman.

Soon after being given a lathe of his own when he was 10 years old, Lindquist started working alongside his father in the evenings, turning vessels from spalted wood.

Lindquist majored in art at New England College in the late 1960s, studying photography, painting and sculpture. The college offered an experimental course of study that allowed him to pursue his work independently. He built a home and studio in Henniker, New Hampshire in 1969 and began making sculptural vessels by carving and hollowing out burls with a hand gouge, followed by a difficult and tedious finishing process. At the same time, he was enjoying the comparably faster method of removing wood to create a vessel form on the lathe. Concurrently, he spent three years as apprentice to a Zen-adherent potter, which expanded his experience with

'Silent Witness #1, Oppenheimer' (Totemic Series), 1983, walnut, pecan and elm, ht 216 x 22 cm. Collection Margaret Pennington

PHOTO PAUL AYRS

'Toreador' (Totemic Series), 1984, spalted oak burl, spalted maple, cherry burl, ht 152 x 76 cm. Ethan Allen Corporate Collection, US

PHOTO PAUL AYRS

'Rockin' Magnum Satztooth Opus #1', 1997-2000, maple burl, ht 38 x 34 x 23 cm

the language of craft. Throughout his education, he maintained a close relationship with his father, sharing what he had learned about form and art history, and providing new ideas and inspiration.

In the early '70s, Lindquist discovered a better way to accomplish the arduous task of carving the interiors of bowls: using the chainsaw. He made a number of sculptural vessels in this manner – his work with the chainsaw paralleling the pioneering work he was doing with the lathe. He held his first show in a local gallery in 1970 and the following year began exhibiting his work in craft fairs.

When his father retired from GE, the two worked the craft show circuit together, with Mel often demonstrating his woodturning techniques. Times were changing and craft fairs were expanding in different directions. Few today remember that the music festival known as "Woodstock" was originally billed as "The Woodstock Music and Art Fair". Others, such as the prestigious craft show in Rhinebeck, New York, were setting the standard for a new form of craft fair. When the Lindquists exhibited bowls and vessels that explored the use of burls, spalting and deformities, such as bark inclusions and natural edges, at the 1972 Rhinebeck fair, they were noticed.

PHOTO PAUL ANIL

'Nehushtan', 1982, cherry, ht 35 x 35 cm. Collection Robert Roth

The Lindquists celebrated the organic beauty of the material which is normally removed before the wood is worked. The creation of these works required difficult and experimental processes, as the tools and technology that make turning irregular materials easy now were still to be developed. Today these early bowls might appear simple and unadorned, but in the early '70s the standard turned bowl was smooth, uniform and symmetrical, created from straight-grained wood. As if this departure from the norm was not cause enough for notice, they began producing bowls with holes penetrating the wall, thereby removing the possibility of any utilitarian use. The bowls had the quiet beauty of a Japanese ceramic, but the imperfections spoke very loudly when first shown.

'Perhaps the one consistent thread that has run through my work during the past 38 years is "the shock of the new",' Mark Lindquist says, looking back at the response to the work in the '70s. 'There were reactions ranging from shock to outrage that a bowl with "imperfections" or a "second" was being sold. In each case it became a matter of presentation and "spinning" to enable and promote acceptance.'

This "spinning" came in the form of presenting the work in a bold new manner. Never one to play by the rules, Lindquist was not satisfied with the manner in which artists presented their work in craft show booths in the '70s and created exhibition spaces that took their cue from leading art galleries. Similarly, the work was priced in line with the art world, as opposed to the world of craft. If the complaint was that it was not following the rules of craftsmanship, the answer was that it was art.

Mark Lindquist represented a new breed of artist that emerged in the early 1970s – educated in the fine arts but turning to the traditions and tools of craft. It was a period of great expansion in the arts, and Lindquist's work in wood paralleled the explorations of Peter Voulkos in clay, Dale Chihuly in glass and Albert Paley in metal. Across the world a new generation was rebelling against the *status quo* that accepted racial inequality, sexism and war, and this new breed of artists recognised the same need to break down the walls that separated art and craft. They simultaneously embraced the self-expression of modern art and the ideals and cross-cultural respect shared by craftspeople.

'Because wood is the least permanent of the primary sculptural materials of metal, stone and wood, it has largely been underrated as an enduring sculptural medium,' says Lindquist. 'Although many notable European sculptors have employed the material, the time span of usage, from the academic perspective, has been limited mainly to a relatively short-lived period of modernism in the 20th century. Sculptors of the 20th century did not choose their materials for their inherent beauty. In fact, rather they eschewed burl and highly figured woods in favour of homogeneous materials, fearing that the attraction of the grain would interfere with the purity of their forms. In addition, they scorned technical exper-

tise. As academia embraced conceptual art and other intellectual offshoots from modernism and postmodernism, wood was mostly relegated to the scrap heap of art historical discard. These attitudes, to me, are symbolic of the art world's attempt to separate its ideas from the world of nature, the laws of cause and effect, and a sense of responsibility to society.'

Lindquist continued to explore sculptural approaches to the bowl form, marrying these works with larger conceptual concerns and meeting considerable resistance. In 1977, he was featured in the group exhibition "Young Americans" at the Museum of Contemporary Craft, and the following year in "The Art of the Turned Bowl" at the Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, which also featured his father, Melvin Lindquist, as well as Ed Moulthrop and Bob Stocksdale. Soon after, when the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York acquired his *Brancusi Cup* and *Lapping Wavelet Bowl*, this new artistic direction was legitimised. It was the first of many acquisitions of work by public collections, opening the door for the artists in wood who followed.

In a 1978 issue of *Fine Woodworking* magazine, Lindquist shared his bold new approach to the wooden bowl form by stating: 'I turn my bowls for appearance and artistic expression more than for utilitarian function. This may be a controversial approach among woodworkers, although it is in accord with artists and sculptors who accept a work for itself and not for its utility. As I see it, the "bowl's" function is to command the space of a room, to light its environment. Its function is to display the beauty of nature and to reflect the harmony of man. The bowl is already full. It contains itself and the space between its walls. The bowl is simply a vehicle in which the grain and the patterns of the wood may be displayed. The patterns and colours are natural paintings, the bowl a three-dimensional canvas ...'

However, Lindquist felt that scale could also be further explored, and in 1979 he had the opportunity to test his ideas during a two-month fellowship at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, the oldest artist colony in the US, where he created his largest work yet.

'I stacked 40 cords of firewood into giant bowls and

'So Long Frank Lloyd Wright Bowl', 1994, maple burl, ht 21.6 x 26.7 cm

forms on a hillside in the colony grounds,' Lindquist recalls. 'People were shocked by the scale. At the time, of course, I was doing research on texture and the idea of grand scale for woodturning.'

Returning to his studio, Lindquist began working on a series of textural pieces, coupling the chainsaw to the lathe. 'People were again shocked,' he says. 'Comments ranged from outrage at improper treatment of the material to sheer doubt that what I was doing was serious.'

Lindquist was indeed serious. He continued to experiment with texture and explore the hidden identity of wood that had been lost in the polishing process that was common in woodturning practice. Inventing new techniques, he developed ways of turning the wood to reveal the fibrous nature of the material. His explora-

PHOTO: JOHN MCFADDEN

'DaVinci Bowl', 2005, maple burl, ht 34 x 61 x 40.6 cm

'Moonrise Over Hoodoo Mountain' (Amalgam Series), 2008, madrone burl, cherry, walnut, steel, ht 177.8 x 61 cm

'Unmet Friend #5' (Totemic Series), 1990-2008, pecan, spalted pecan and English walnut, ht 199 x 55 x 49 cm

tions at MacDowell Colony soon resurfaced when he began creating totemic sculpture by stacking very large, turned, textured forms. His approach to the medium of wood was sculptural, long before others in the woodturning field, and concerned with surface, form and scale. Pioneering altered surfaces using both standard turning tools and chainsaw techniques, he produced surfaces with a three-dimensional motif that became integral to his work.

Beginning in the early 1980s, Lindquist began combining his work with bases, in a manner that echoed the manner in which modern sculptors presented their work. Taking his cue from Constantin Brancusi, Lindquist often made the base such an integral part of the work that its volume was greater than the piece that sat upon it. In explaining such approaches, Lindquist said: 'As they say now in the computer industry – "think outside the box". I said then, "think outside the bowl". It was a challenge to view the vessel form as a language and suddenly I found myself thinking of these new sculptures as self-portraits with a language all their own.'

In 1983, Lindquist created a second studio and home in an enormous brick packing plant built in 1904 in Quincy, Florida. While viewing his work within the context of the larger art realm, Lindquist was very much aware of his impact on the burgeoning woodturning movement and helped develop the turning program at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. This led to him working closely with David Ellsworth and Sandy Blain, then director of Arrowmont, to develop the "Vision and Concept" conference in 1985, which led to the creation of the American Association of Woodturners. In 1986, Lindquist's book *Sculpting Wood: Tools and Techniques* was published and it remains an essential primer for the field.

Lindquist's "Captive Series" grew out of his art historical studies and the cover photo of a 1978 *Fine Woodworking* magazine, which featured one of Lindquist's turned spalted bowls resting within the remainder of the turning blank from which it came. In 1982, the artist created *Evolutionary Bowl,* the precursor of the series, using the cone-cutting technique he developed in the mid-1970s to enable separating of the interior of a bowl from the blank. By not completing the cone separation, the central vessel form was held captive within the outer form of the block.

The captive concept became particularly meaningful for Lindquist following injuries he received in a serious automobile accident. Throughout his lengthy recovery he had to find new ways of working because of restricted movement that prevented him from using a chainsaw. In order to overcome this problem, Lindquist developed an innovative use of robotics which allowed both total control of the process and the opportunity to explore the "happy accidents" that he learned to embrace working alongside a Zen potter.

It was during this phase of his career that Lindquist started to approach his work in a manner similar to a musician in a recording studio – simultaneously acting as a Beatle writing a song and George Martin improvising studio tricks to bring it to fruition. While the earlier work, using simple processes and hand tools, was similar to a song composed while strumming an acoustic guitar, or performing "unplugged" in live performance, this new work represented his *Sgt. Pepper* phase, filled with innovation, layering and sophisticated techniques. Just as the basic songwriting process remains the same, Lindquist drew upon his understanding of structure, form and communication through his craft to create works that were unlike anything that came before.

'Having grown up with the advantages of technology influenced my approach to working,' Lindquist says. 'I've used modern tools, such as the chainsaw, to shape timber quickly, but at times turn to hand tools to slow down the process. Sometimes the tool or the process drives the form or mode of expression. For instance, the chainsaw is used to shape, while simultaneously texturing surface areas – so developments of form and texture evolved concurrently.'

Today, Lindquist continues to push at the boundaries

'Tranquil Forming Bowl', 2006, black ash burl, 28 x 33 x 28 cm

of art, craft, nature and technology. He is revisiting earlier series of works as well as pursuing new directions in monumental sculpture. His exploration of photography, particularly in how it can best capture the subtle textures and intention of the artist working in wood, has become an increasingly important pursuit. The continuum of his work in wood, however, remains central.

Tranquil Forming Bowl, from 2006, finds him revisiting an area of interest that began during his studies in the 1960s. Drawing from the "direct carving" approach for creating expressive organic forms utilised by sculptors Jean Arp and Henry Moore, Lindquist allows the material to influence the form. Revisiting this approach today, the artist is able to take advantage of a robotic device that securely holds, positions and rotates the wood as he works upon it.

'In 1968, I began by sculpting in soapstone and marble but made few pieces in wood since the techniques for sanding and finishing wood at that time were laborious and awkward,' Lindquist says. 'Many of the problems associated with working on sculpture on this level have been solved to my satisfaction, so I feel free to again work in this realm that I enjoy so much.'

Buonarroti I, from 2008, is named after Michelangelo, though it has a direct relationship with the work of Leonardo Da Vinci. 'Being influenced by Leonardo and Michelangelo while I was in art school in the '60s and early '70s, I have finally done a more recent form that evolved out of my studies of direct carving,' Lindquist says. 'The form on the top comes from one of Da Vinci's anatomical drawings of the womb which, as a young student, I found fascinating. But Michelangelo was so incredible the sculpture is a tribute to him. It concerns the confluence of influences: Da Vinci's inventiveness of machines and process, and Michelangelo's expressiveness as a sculptor. I'm interested in the confluence of art and invention, of seeing and making and how these things come together in terms of reiteration.'

The work also makes clear Lindquist's interest in the lineage of sculptors from Michelangelo to Rodin to Brancusi to Noguchi, and the legacy that current direct carvers rely on for inspiration. Like much of Lindquist's work, it is also both self-referential and inspired by ancient Asian works. The base, similar to his *Ichiboku Series*, plays with the dynamics of hip-slung sculpture as in "Fudō Myō-ō" Heian period works, with figurative aspects referencing Indian and Greek sculpture.

Mark Lindquist's day at work still begins by entering the studio to continue his long-standing dialogue with the material to which he has devoted his life's work.

'When I work with wood making a sculpture I begin dealing with the unexpected flaws that are encountered until I have a grasp of the nature and possibilities of the piece,' he says. 'The material suggests changes to my preconceived vision, and is resisted by the formal ideals that I want to express in my work.

'In order to sculpt wood I must, therefore, forget everything I know about woodworking, then put aside all I know about art,' he continues. 'I begin free of thought to allow the thoughts to come through the wood and form in the hands – in the making of it.

'After 40 years of this kind of struggle, I have begun to see how analogous my work is to my life. Both the material and the vision must be respected in the final piece, yielding a revision of form which reflects the clash between maker and material. One good thing about the struggle is that the resolution finally does come, and it is the business of art.'

Kevin V. Wallace

'Tranquil Form #1', 2005, black ash burl, 21.6 x 47 x 40.6 cm

'Buonarroti #1', 2008, cherry burl, walnut, ht 142 x 55 x 46 cm

PHOTO JOHN MURADEEN