

# UPROARIOUS RECIPROCATION

## *The 2018 Women in Turning eXchange*



Photos by Andi Wolfe, unless otherwise noted.

Women in Turning (WIT) is a committee of the AAW, bringing together women worldwide who share a passion for woodturning. WIT is dedicated to encouraging and assisting women in their pursuit of turning, to sharing ideas and processes to

further members' skills and creativity, and to increasing participation of women in the field of woodturning. For more, visit WIT under the "Services" tab on the AAW website ([woodturner.org](http://woodturner.org)). Women in Turning also has a public Facebook page.

Word tile photo:  
Dawn Herndon-Charles

On the afternoon of September 4, 2018, thirty-nine women, including six members of the Women in Turning (WIT) committee, gathered at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, for the first AAW WIT eXchange. Participants came from across the United States and ranged in skill level from beginners to professionals. The purpose of the gathering was to spend three-and-a-half days exchanging ideas, techniques, and fellowship. The goal was to empower participants by building skill and con-

fidence, with an emphasis on process, not product. We also came together for inspiration, enrichment, experience, fun, friendship, and adventure. The natural beauty and serenity of the setting aided on all counts.

### **The collaborative process**

The first evening, participants were assigned to groups of three, each a mix of women who had self-identified their skills as beginning, intermediate, or advanced. Using a word-play approach devised by Jean LeGwin, each group blindly drew a wooden word tile

from each of two bags, one containing nouns, the other containing modifiers. (Elizabeth Amigo, with contributions from other WIT committee members, had carefully selected these words in advance for their possibilities.) After a few minutes of individual reflection on the words—and with the option to trade them if a group deemed them unfruitful—the groups discussed ideas their two words inspired and what kind of object might express that inspiration.

The next morning, groups refined their ideas and gathered at their assigned full-sized lathes in the lathe

room. Then the fun began! Each group had an identical bundle of wood with which to work. Groups could use all, some, or none of their wood and were free to barter, trade, and raid the Arrowmont scrap bins. Also available for everyone's use were mini-lathes, grinders, band saws, drill presses, sanders, reciprocating carvers, and all the rest of the equipment and tools in Arrowmont's well-furnished wood shop. In addition, the fiber studio was set up with tools for embellishment: pyrography equipment, micro-motors for rotary carving, paints, dyes, colored pencils, pens. We also had an NSK Presto for piercing. WIT committee members served as facilitators to help locate tools and equipment and instruct in their use. With the emphasis on process and exploration, no group had to actually finish a project; nonetheless—and despite constant reminders that these were “sketches, not museum-quality pieces”—every group worked hard, and sometimes overtime, to produce work they could stand by.

Groups were asked to document their work by taking pictures throughout the day and selecting five photos to upload to a Dropbox account. Andi Wolfe also took photos, and each evening she assembled two slide shows: one of her candid shots, the other of the groups' documentation of the day's work.

After dinner each day, we convened in the large auditorium to view Andi's slide shows and each group's creations, set up in an instant gallery on the stage. Each group had a spokeswoman talk for up to four minutes about how their words inspired the piece and the actual making, as Andi projected their pictures of the process. These off-the-cuff presentations were revelatory. After much-deserved collective appreciation of the work, new groups were formed, and they chose their words for the next day. Lather, rinse, repeat! The groups were arranged so that, while maintaining the mix of skill levels, each day



The day's wood stock in the full-size lathe room. Each team began with the same materials: a 12"- (30cm-) long segment of a maple or ash baseball-bat blank, a 10"- (25cm-) long block of 5½"- (14cm-) square green cherry or poplar, and a 3"- (8cm-) thick blank of 9½"- (24cm-) square kiln-dried maple.



(Left) Ena Dubnoff, Aviva Furman, and Joan Busby work on their design. (Right) Their design sketches.



Anna Duncan, Ana Marie Lappegard, and Pat Reddemann on some of the mini-lathes.



Sally Ault, Pat Reddemann, Lynn Reece, and Adrienne Lobel learning and teaching sharpening on a grinder.

every woman was working with new people. (This strategy also allowed for every woman to take home one piece she had worked on over the three days.)

On both Thursday and Friday, we were able to invite Arrowmont interns to participate. To accommodate them and still keep our groups of three, two of the WIT committee members served as participants those days rather than facilitators.

On Friday, Greg Schramek, current AAW President, stopped by to talk to the group. One of his messages was the ▶



Dixie Biggs facilitates activity in the fiber studio cum surface embellishment room.



Kimberly Glover paints some pieces.



Adrienne Lobel, Lynn Reece, and Betty Scarpino consider their next step.

importance of women's involvement in local AAW chapters, at the national level, and in leadership roles at every level of the AAW.

Almost everyone tried something new during the eXchange: new turning and sharpening techniques, pyrography, piercing, painting, sandblasting, carving, planing, power sanding, and more. The foremost new skill was collaboration: most of us had no or limited experience working cooperatively with others on a creative project. The challenge was daunting but rewarding. As Pat Reddemann described it, "I was incredibly nervous about collaborating, as I had never done that before. I was afraid I wouldn't have anything meaningful to contribute. But once I got to the eXchange and we began our teams and drew our words, I saw that I could learn a lot from the process. We each came to the project with different ideas, and I loved building ideas off each other's thoughts. Seeing the ideas that others came up with and combining or discarding them, then refining them, was really a pleasure. I believe that I will look at creating in a whole new way after experiencing this collaborative play."

### Varied approaches

Every group worked differently. Some worked collectively on every aspect of their piece. Other groups worked together to come up with their idea, then divided tasks and worked sepa-

rately until final assembly. Others alternated working together and working separately. Sometimes a group couldn't agree on a single idea, so the members went off and made their own pieces and brought them together at the end of the day; remarkably, even these contentious efforts ended with a unified piece.

Thinking "artistically" was also new for many. As Lynn Reece put it, "I've been turning for several years now, but I've never really felt creative. I have pretty much only turned brown, round bowls. Many times, I have said, 'I just don't think like those people.' A friend and mentor often adds *yet* to my statement. The eXchange opened the *yet* window for me. Working alongside so many free-thinking people gave me insight into how to explore my creative side. I am so glad I got out of my comfort zone and embraced the eXchange."

The sharing wasn't limited to the defined groups. Participants across groups freely chatted, consulted, and helped one another, as we shared space, tools, meals, insights, and laughter. A spirit of playfulness infused the whole experience—which was also exhausting in the best way, as everyone gave her all for the entire weekend.

The outcome was thirty-five remarkable pieces. But, more importantly, every woman went home with a sense of community and confidence she could translate to her own work—and to her local AAW chapter. As one

"I had a lot of firsts at this eXchange. I tried pyrography. I tried staining. I tried power-carving. I used new equipment, including a vacuum chuck, a planer, and various sanders. One refreshing aspect to me was having egos checked at the door and everyone willing to put in the work to make this a true eXchange: a place where talent, ideas, knowledge, and processes were freely shared."

—Marie Anderson

"The energy in that room for those three days was wild, crazy, fun, rewarding!"

—Joan Busby

"Although participants had different levels of turning skills, in each group I found that each person brought important skills to the project that didn't involve turning. Each person's contribution to the concept of the project came from personal experience and knowledge that had nothing to do with turning skills and couldn't have been known beforehand."

—Ena Dubnoff

"Turning is usually a very focused and solitary activity. With the collaboration, you give up some of the control, let other people in, have them challenge your ideas and present their own—and usually come up with a completely different but ultimately better product. Even when the result is not objectively successful, there is development and learning in the process to apply in future work."

—Dawn Herndon-Charles

"I learned that there are as many ways to approach collaboration as there are personalities. Each group tackled the words in different ways. I got to know members of my groups in ways I would never have in an ordinary workshop or demonstration."

—Anne Ogg

participant stated, "What happens at a WIT eXchange doesn't have to stay at a WIT eXchange." eXactly!

The next WIT eXchange will take place September 5-7, 2019, at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts. There will be a maximum of forty-five participants due to space restrictions. Please watch the WIT webpage and Facebook page for details. ■

—Lynne Yamaguchi and Kathleen Frey Duncan

# Collaborative Works from 2018 WIT eXchange

Noted at the start of each caption are the pair of words used as inspiration.



**Dimpled Imagination:**  
Susan Canfield, Ettasue Long, Kim Wolfe



**Luxurious Friendship:**  
Ana Marie Lappegard, Anna Duncan, Crystal Earley



**Inspiring Happiness:**  
Marie Anderson, Lou Kinsey, Sue Janis Bergstrand

**Pastoral Independence:**

Julie Schmidt,  
Patricia Rasmussen,  
Adrienne Lobel



**Relaxed Form:**

Connie Rayburn,  
Susan Rennie,  
Julie Schmidt



**Joyful Opportunity:**  
Ena Dubnoff, Aviva Furman, Joan Busby



**Fortunate Evolution:**  
Sue Janis Bergstrand, Aviva Furman, Kimberly Glover



**Empty Balance:**  
Lynne Yamaguchi, Connie Rayburn, Bina Rothblatt