

Anniversary Profiles Michael Brolly, Member #284



What motivated you to join the fledgling AAW?
I was at Arrowmont when they decided to form AAW. I had tried to get into the show that the symposium was organized around. My work did not get in. I brought the "Mother" part of "Mother/Daughter; Hunter/Prey" with me even though it did not get in. They let me display it in a sort of participants area. A couple of people said that they liked it. I explained to Michael Hosaluk that I was trying to do what Stephen Hogbin was doing with his walking bowls without doing what Stephen was actually doing. Most people hated it, but Michael went to Australia after that and came back with his version of a walking bowl so I guess he liked it. But anyway I was too broke to join right away but wanted to stay connected to the field even though a lot of turners back then, and for years to come, actually looked like they wanted to take me out and tar and feather me. Alan Lacer said it best when we met in person years later when he said, "Man, people either love or hate your work, there is nobody in the middle."

When you look at your pieces from 1986, what



In the thirty weeks leading up to AAW's 30th Anniversary Symposium in Atlanta, we will be sharing the stories of members who joined in 1986 and are still members today. We hope you enjoy their memories and insights!

Click [here](#) to read this and other profiles online.

About Michael Brolly

Michael Brolly is an internationally-recognized wood artist, and a faculty member at Moravian Academy in Pennsylvania. He is known for his craftsmanship, creative fearlessness, and idiosyncratic (and often humorous) insights. His work has toured in solo and group exhibitions, and is held in many private and public collections, including the Museum of Art and Design in New York, the Detroit Institute of Art, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

While working his way through college as a steelworker, Michael was introduced to the lathe, an event he describes this way: "In the Movie *Sleeper* - it is an oldie - Woody Allen's character is disguised as a robot and he has to hand a 'pleasure orb' from one human to another. When he gets it in his hand he has real trouble trying to leave go of it. When

do you see?

When I look at my work from 1986 I see work that was way ahead of its time.

Who or what was your greatest teacher?

My greatest teacher was John Stolz, even though he could not turn. He showed me enough for me to teach myself. My greatest influences in the field are Albert LeCoff and Stephen Hogbin.

What was your funniest turning moment?

My funniest moment was at a show that David Ellsworth got me into after seeing my work and meeting me at Arrowmont when AAW formed. The show was in CT somewhere and I was standing near "Mother" when I overheard two women talking about the piece and one exclaimed, "It's almost like Sculpture."

What was your happiest turning moment?

One of my happiest turning moments was when I was working on a jewelry box and realized that it really was a "Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man." And that is the moment it got its title and I began to realize that my work really is very, very personal.



Self Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, 1988. 27" x 17" x 11". Lacewood, maple, purpleheart, mahogany, ebony, bubinga, variegated gold leaf

What is your favorite wood and why?

I have to admit, and here I shuffle my feet and avert my eyes, I love a good scraper and holly.

What do you see as the biggest change in the field?

Accepting sculpture.

If you couldn't be a woodturner, what would you do instead?

Sculpt.

Do you still have American Woodturner back issues? Where do you keep them?

Yes, I teach now so I have them all in school for the students.

Has being a part of AAW affected your life and work? How?

Yes, it is a wonderful organization filled with kind, loving, truly great people. And for a long time I got a real kick out of those turners who looked like they would love to de-flesh me and throw me kicking and screaming into a vat of salt.

I was a kid I hand-carved things that should have been turned, like a chalice and a ciborium and wooden nails. When I hit college and met the lathe it was like the pleasure orb in *Sleeper*. I just did not want to let go." He went on to earn an MFA in wood and furniture design from UMass Dartmouth.

As one might expect from his artwork, his school projects are far from ordinary. You can learn about one undertaking, *Sephira*, a traditional Scottish skiff that is also a musical instrument tuned to the range of whalesong, in his Tedx Talk, "[How Do We Say We Are Sorry: Singing to Whales](#)".



Sephira

Michael lives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania with his wife Lynne Eshleman, a creative force in her own right. They have two sons, Hugh, 15 and Liam, 13.

AAW AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF WOODTURNERS
Like what we do?
Join or renew!
You'll get *American Woodturner* journal and have access to information, resources, tips, projects, videos, free digital publications like *Woodturning Fundamentals*, and our huge library of relevant woodturning content.
woodturner.org | 877-595-9094 (toll free)

What is your favorite piece?

Oh man, it is like Picasso said, "My favorite piece is my next one." I don't do them if I don't like them. I mean really like them. I have probably thrown away more pieces than I have actually finished.

Favorite piece turned by another artist?

Probably "Walnut Bowl For Walnuts" by Hogbin. You probably have a picture of that.
(Ed. note: We do!)



Stephen Hogbin, Walnut Bowl of Walnut, 1981. Walnut, paint. 10.25 x 5.25 x 7.25. The Center for Art in Wood's Museum Collection, promised gift of Albert and Tina LeCoff.

If you could give your 30-years-younger self some advice about being a turner what would you say?

I would probably just reiterate what Albert LeCoff said to me when I was lamenting about how no one would buy my work. I asked if I should start making bowls or what and he said, "What do you like doing?" And that stuck and I stuck with doing what interests me, turners be damned.

You can see more of Michael Brolly's work at michaeljbroly.com

