

Breaking Boundaries and Removing Limitations

The 2020 Virtual WIT eXchange

Two thousand twenty started off looking like a great year. The planning for the third Women in Turning (WIT) eXchange was at the top of the list for the WIT committee. We'd tentatively scheduled with Arrowmont for the third week of September 2020. But we all know what happened next—the pandemic forced us to change our plans. The committee needed to shift its focus quickly from planning an in-person event to finding alternatives to keep the WIT community connected.

Going virtual

As the year went by and it became evident the pandemic wasn't going to end anytime soon, we adapted to our safe-at-home circumstances. We found options that would allow for a different type of WIT eXchange that might be just the ticket to bring this community some much needed focus. We were going Virtual! The September WIT newsletter included an article with an invitation. WIT committee member Andi Wolfe stated, "The past two years have shown us how important the eXchange has become

to a community of women turners in stimulating creativity, fostering collaboration, and facilitating self-confidence."

The next challenge was to spread the word. Linda Ferber and Marie Anderson started promoting the Virtual WIT eXchange through social media. We broke the mold, reaching audiences like never before. Previous limitations such as geography, artistic genre, finances, and skill level were no longer obstacles to participation. By the beginning of November 2020, we had more than 100 inquires.

FOR FURTHER READING

EXPLORE!

Log on at woodturner.org and use the Explore! tool to find these *American Woodturner* articles about the 2018 WIT eXchange and WIT's approach to creativity.

- "Uproarious Reciprocation: The 2018 Women in Turning eXchange," by Lynne Yamaguchi and Kathleen Duncan, February 2019 (vol 34, no 1, page 42).
- "Abundant Imagination: A Case Study in Fostering Creativity" by Lynne Yamaguchi, August 2019 (vol 34, no 4, page 37).



Team Northern Lights (Janese Evans, Linda Ferber, Rosanne Gold, Ellen Starr), *Fluid Containment*, 2020, River birch, boxelder, cherry, wool felting, birch plywood, gilding, paint, 13" x 9¾" x 9¾" (33cm x 25cm x 25cm)

Women of different backgrounds were willing to take a risk, jump into the unknown, and step outside of their comfort zone.

The process

So, how would we do this? We decided the Virtual eXchange would be similar to the prior in-person eXchanges in structure only. Linda and Marie would facilitate the process, which included setting up teams of three or four women to work collaboratively on a project inspired by randomly selected word pairs, a noun and a modifier. At the in-person eXchange, all the teams were supplied the same materials and a limited time to create their projects. The emphasis was on the process, not on completing a project, which allowed freedom to experiment and explore.

The challenges of working on a virtual team definitely added to this

intense collaboration. The first change would be the timeframe. Instead of six to eight working hours per project, we had to consider the constraints of social distancing, geographic location, shipping, time zones, and more. The individual teams managed their own timing, working with (or around) shipping schedules. We were all working together, embracing flexibility for a successful outcome.

We committed to twice-weekly Zoom meetings to accommodate the wide range of time zones involved. Many of the teams came together after our first week of orientation meetings in early November. (In fact, we welcomed new teams as late as the first week of December.) These Zoom meetings proved essential for community building and communication throughout the collaboration. ▶



Team Symposium Chums (Linda Ferber, Dawn Herndon-Charles, Cindy Sing), *Reckless Position*, 2020, Ash, oak, walnut, copper, glass, paint, 15" x 6" x 6" (38cm x 15cm x 15cm)



Team Accents from Across the Pond (Mary Ashton, Margaret Garrard, Jay Heryet, Helen Bailey), *Voluptuous Gifts*, 2020, Sycamore, gold leaf, acrylic paint, corrugated cardboard, 12" x 12" x 12" (30cm x 30cm x 30cm)



Team Brainy Handfuls (Cindy Sing, Sandy McLain Hochmuth, Marie Anderson), *Diverse Evolution*, 2020, Manzanita, spalted maple, organic fibrous banana/silk, refined perle cotton, organic cotton boll, precious metal clays, fused glass, resin, copper wire, peacock feathers, 36" x 12" x 3" (91cm x 30cm x 8cm)

Team Nye Venner
(Bitten Eckhardt-Hansen, Laura VanLeeuwen, Iris Laven), *Escaping Turbulence*, 2020, Plywood, poplar, glass, 10" x 13½" (25cm x 34cm)



The 2020 Virtual WIT eXchange included more participants than ever—twenty-one teams comprising sixty-two women from seven countries: the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom, and France.

Fortunately, the AAW had recently launched an online tool to help facilitate various woodturning communities (called AAW

Exchange). We formed a WIT group, where facilitators and teams could post updates, including video tutorials, process photos, and comments. This virtual learning platform was an important tool for supporting community growth.

Beyond woodturning skills

At the in-person eXchanges, projects were completed daily and presented after dinner to the entire group. Participants were then re-assigned to new teams, and new words were



Team We Got Lathed
(Cheryl Lewis, Jackie Cheyne, Noele DeSafey), *Fragile Diversity*, 2020, Black oak, cedar, red oak, encaustic wax, yard debris, shou sugi ban charring, epoxy, paint, 20" x 7½" (51cm x 19cm)



Team East West Explosives (Christine Smith, Susan McCoy, Anne Ogg), *Escaping Turbulence*, 2020, Maple, boxelder, walnut, 20" x 12" x 12" (51cm x 30cm x 30cm)

In Their Own Words

"Such a supportive force!"

"I must tell you COVID really has done bad things with my mental health. My workshop has been closed, so this project really lifted me up."

"Thank you for making this virtual eXchange a really positive event in these gloomy days of COVID."

"We made new connections, stretched our creativity, and had fun!"

chosen for the next day. Enter the virtual element. How would the projects, skills, and creative journey be shared? Andi Wolfe taught us how to create a five-minute “speed talk” presentation in PowerPoint. She did this by creating and presenting the lesson via her own “speed talk,” which was presented live at the weekly Zoom meetings, recorded, and archived on the WIT community page. This enabled women to review it at any time and/or share it with members in their own Zoom team meetings. Creating these presentations proved to be daunting, to say the least—limiting each presentation to five minutes forced teams to focus as they reflected on their journey. We had to introduce our team members, then discuss the creative thought process, challenges we faced, and our learning adventures. We then had to review the process(es) used to create the project and ultimately unveil the completed work (all in five minutes). These women really stepped up, further expanding their skill set beyond woodturning.

This positive creative journey encompassed women of all skill levels

and invited the use of a variety of media. We worked beyond “round and brown,” exploring metal, glass, fiber, poured acrylics, paper, and even digital photo manipulation. We hope this expansion to other media will have a lasting influence on woodturning. We don’t (and shouldn’t) always stay in the woodturning “lane.” Opening our minds to different choices of media created unlimited opportunities to break boundaries and explore new avenues.

Huge benefits

The 2020 Virtual WIT eXchange was by all accounts a huge benefit to those who participated. We have received very positive comments, including stories of feeling uplifted, supported, and inspired. The women who shared in this journey said they appreciate having a reason to get to the lathe and create. More than anything else, we have all gained new friendships and new skills. To be honest, in this one instance, we can say we were thankful that COVID caused the shift to a Virtual eXchange, as it allowed us to include

For More About WIT

For more, visit tiny.cc/WIT, where you can learn all about AAW’s Women in Turning program, view video recordings of past WIT



Presents artist talks, read WIT newsletters, and see the full array of collaborations from the virtual 2020 WIT eXchange.

many more women from all over the world.

The ripple effect of the 2020 WIT eXchange is widespread. As the teams shared their progress with their local woodturning communities, they were inspired to create programs based on the format of this experience. It will be exciting to see the results of these ripples. Now, get to your lathes and create something! ■

The WIT committee is deeply grateful to Ruth Niles (nilesbottlestoppers.com) for sponsoring the 2020 Virtual WIT eXchange.

—Linda Ferber and Marie Anderson



Team Ring Masters (Rebecca DeGroot, Linda Ferber, Janice Levi), *Joyful Passage*, 2020, Cherry, maple, paint, 6½" × 13" × 8" (17cm × 33cm × 20cm)



Team Lakes to Ocean (Heather Marusiak, Phyllis Moffitt, Dima Tawakkol), *Iconic Generosity*, 2020, Cypress, walnut, onyx, 13½" × 8" (34cm × 20cm)