

Conversations with Wood: Selections from the Waterbury Collection

June 17–September 4, 2011



William Hunter, American, born 1947, *Garden Songs*, 2004, cocobolo,
Collection of Ruth and David Waterbury

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The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) presents works from one of the nation's finest collections of wood art in the exhibition "Conversations with Wood: Selections from the Waterbury Collection." Ranging from exquisitely turned wood bowls to large, sculptural pieces, the exhibition highlights approximately 80 objects from the 500-plus piece collection of Minneapolis collectors Ruth and David Waterbury. "Conversations with Wood" reflects the evolution of the field over the past 25 years, from a focus on the lathe and wood turning to an artistic field that now includes many more processes. The exhibition is on view June 17 through September 4, and is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication, *Conversations with Wood: The Collection of Ruth and David Waterbury*.

Over the past 25 years, artists working in wood have produced increasingly diverse examples of their craft. Formerly known as "turned wood" because of its origins on the lathe, wood art in the late 1990s came to include the various processes practiced today, including carving, piercing, and painting.

The Waterburys have embraced the changing field of wood art and its artists since the late 1980s, collecting pieces from simple turned bowls, to objects conceived around irregularities within the material, to works that explore imaginative ways to manipulate the medium. Longstanding supporters of the MIA and founding members of the organization Collectors of Wood Art, the Waterburys have not only built one of the nation's premiere collections, but also have given support to and forged enduring relationships with many wood art artists. "Ruth and Dave Waterbury really helped develop the field of wood art as it's known today," says MIA associate curator

Jennifer Komar Olivarez. "They became so taken with the beauty and artistry of wood vessels, they have traveled the country and other areas of the world seeking out artists and their work. In some cases, their visits spurred artists to experiment more and take chances. This kind of symbiotic artist-collector relationship is very special to the field of wood art. Ruth and Dave have also collected so broadly that it was a great pleasure to select from their diverse collection—from large sculptures to exquisite pieces only a few inches in size."

Both the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue feature the artists' voices, which gives another dimension to understanding the works of art in this collection. These "conversations" came from the nearly 130 living artists represented in the collection; they shared comments or memories about their particular Waterbury Collection pieces. Prominent international artists in the exhibition include David Ellsworth, Mark Lindquist, William Hunter, Ron Kent, Michelle Holtzapfel, Robyn Horn, Bob Stocksdale, Michael Mode, Michael J. Peterson, Hayley Smith, and Todd Hoyer.

The exhibition also reflects the great variety of artists and the multiple scales of objects that define the field today. For example, works range from a several-hundred-pound sculpture turned from laminate birch plywood by Connie Mississippi, to J. Paul Fennell's tabletop-size, carved, basket-weave vessel, to a four-inch high top by Bonnie Klein, turned on an ornamental lathe that houses a tiny top inside. Stunning sculptures, such as William Hunter's *Garden Songs*, and Derek Bencomo's *Shadow Dancer, Fourth View*, showcase amazing technical and artistic skill combined with exceptionally beautiful specimens of wood. Mark Sfirri's *Rejects from the Bat Factory*, inspired by baseball bats, and Giles Gilson's "gravity detecting" bottle are among the exhibition's more playful pieces.

"Conversations with Wood: Selections from the Waterbury Collection" is held in conjunction with the 25th Anniversary Symposia of the American Association of Woodturners, at RiverCentre in St. Paul, June 24–26, 2011, and the biennial Forum of the Collectors of Wood Art on June 23, 2011.

Artists Christian Burchard, William Hunter, and Ron Kent will present related gallery talks on Sunday, June 19, from 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. in the US Bank Gallery.

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The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA), home to one of the finest encyclopedic art collections in the country, houses more than 80,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history. Highlights of the permanent collection include European masterworks by Rembrandt, Poussin, and van Gogh; modern and contemporary painting and sculpture by Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, Stella, and Close; as well as internationally significant collections of prints and drawings, decorative arts, Modernist design, photographs, textiles, and Asian, African, and Native American art. General admission is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee. Museum hours: Sunday, 11 A.M.–5 P.M.; Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, 10 A.M.–5 P.M.; Thursday, 10 A.M.–9 P.M.; Monday closed. For more information, call (612) 870-3000 or visit www.artsmia.org.