

# Molly Winton Demo

## Inland Northwest Woodturners

### April 1 & 3, 2010

For our April meeting we had the good fortune of having Molly Winton of Edmonds, WA demonstrate for us. She gave a very informative glimpse of her work and select techniques at our regular club meeting on Thursday and a full day, in-depth demonstration on Saturday. With Molly's permission, what follows is a summary of her presentation.

Molly covered two broad themes in her presentation; the making of "minis" and the various forms of surface embellishment that she employs in finishing her work to obtain her distinctive look. One of her stated goals in woodturning was to develop a signature style so that when attending an instant gallery or exhibition people would say "Hey, Molly is here!" upon seeing her work before they saw her. By her own admission, Molly can not draw, yet she has developed a recognizable style inspired by her brief exploration of pottery and her interests in Native American and prehistoric art.

"Since childhood I have always had an interest in Native American cultures, lore, and artwork. I have also been fascinated by prehistoric cave drawings and petroglyphs. These interests have served to be an inspiration for my artistic interpretations." Molly Winton

Molly shared freely in explaining and demonstrating tools, materials and techniques. She understands that if she shows it we will try it and that we may end up making something that looks like hers. She only asks that we don't sell it, exhibit it or sign her name! Instead, take her techniques and develop your OWN style with hers as an inspiration.

If you did not see Molly and her work in person, please visit her website, [turningmaven.com](http://turningmaven.com), before finishing this article so that you may gain some context for what follows.

### **Minis**

Molly recommends making miniature versions of one's work for three reasons: they sell well, are a great use of scraps and are easier to learn embellishment on given the smaller surface area. Making the outside of a mini is just like making a larger vessel. The challenge becomes hollowing out a small vessel through a small opening. She showed us a homemade tool made from an allen wrench that fills the bill nicely. She started the hollowing process by "drilling" a small hole with a spindle gouge. A quarter turn to the left with the spindle gouge on center makes a very nice hole on end grain. Once the depth is established the homemade hollowing tools come into play. She recommended two configurations for the allen wrench tool. One set at the existing 90 degree angle for hollowing under the shoulder and another bent to 45 degrees for getting the sides and bottom of the vessel. To bend the wrench as seen on the next page, use MAPP gas. Also note the ground angle for the cutting surface. The quarter inch allen wrench seems to be about the right size for this tool as it has enough rigidity to reach over the rest.

She also recommends the comfort rest by Robust as it allows the short tool to get over the rest more. Of course one of Karl Paetow's round rests would work, too! Key points to observe when hollowing are to leave enough mass in the bottom for weight and to clear shavings often so that one is not recutting shavings. Another tool that Molly showed was a small fluted cutter for making grooves that is made from 3/16" square bar stock. She likes it better in some instances than the three point tool made from round stock because the square cutter removes material more cleanly since one is cutting rather than scraping. She attributes the latter tool to John Jordan.



## **Surface Embellishment**

Molly showed us four different ways to embellish the surface of turnings. Carving combined with coloration, faux raku finishes, texturing with a Dremel engraver and finally branding and burning.

**Carving** – For her carved pieces, Molly uses gesso to color the vessel and then carves with a reciprocating carver to make a relief cut into the wood. Over a light wood such as maple, she uses black gesso. She has also experimented with tinting clear gesso with acrylic paints and painting over a dark wood. Either way, one wants the contrast between the wood color and the surface colorant. See the Dzilla Series on her website for examples of this technique. Experiment with the different blades to obtain your desired effect. Wear a glove to protect your hand, since those blades are supposed to be kept sharp! In general try to carve across the grain to minimize tearout.

Though no longer made, Molly recommends the Ryobi DC500 carver. They can be found on ebay and craigslist for often more than they sold for new, however. A new set of Flexcut blades is recommended along with the maintenance jig, all of which are available at Woodcraft. Absent the Ryobi, Flexcut and Proxxon also make reciprocating carvers.

**Faux Raku** – Though not demonstrated, Molly gave a good description of the process that she uses to get the "raku" finish. This finish can be seen on the "Minis" page of her website. This finish starts, once again, with the gesso. Gesso is what painters use to prepare their canvases and can be found at Michael's. Since gesso dries quickly, for this process it is mixed with gel to prolong its working time. Once the surface is covered with the gesso/gel mix, begin to daub powdered pigments of different colors onto the surface. One can also use pigments that have a metallic quality and others that are pearlescent. The key to success is to go layer by layer, alternating pigments and gesso mix. As Molly said, "work past the ugly" by emphasizing the layering effect of the colors and texture. Once the desired effect is achieved, finish the piece with a spray on semi-gloss finish.

**Dremel Engraver** – To get what she refers to as her “orange peel” effect, Molly uses a Dremel engraver with the standard tip that it comes with. On the high setting, she simply scribbles randomly going over and over the surface in tight movements. She uses the same tool to sign her work, though she uses the number 2 setting. She can write remarkably small with this tool!

**Branding/Burning** – Perhaps the most dramatic part of Molly’s demonstration was the branding that she does – smoke and flash always grab one’s attention. Her signature brand is the basket weave. To accomplish this, she makes her own brands out of nichrome wire and uses a shop made burning pen with the Burnmaster burning unit. One can obtain written instructions for making the brands and pens as well as a source list for the wire directly from Molly.

Branding is a somewhat tedious endeavor, especially on large pieces. When you look at her two-tone pieces, remember that the black portion is all branded. She estimates that a large basket weave takes several hours to complete.

To create mustangs, buffaloes and hunters, she uses various tips in a woodburning pen. Much experimentation and practice with varying temperatures, tips and technique is required to obtain satisfactory results. Move the pen too slowly and you get an uneven line, too fast and you skip over the wood without fully cutting and burning. Most tips will need to be sharpened on a stone initially. After that, periodic honing on a leather should keep them in working order.

Hopefully Molly’s visit has inspired some of you to try something new and expanded your knowledge a bit. Keep turning and experimenting – it is only wood!

John Altberg  
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