**Fine Arts: Craftsmanship and innovation on display at 23rd Annual Works in Wood exhibition**

**By**

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The Works In Wood exhibition now on display at the New Hope Arts Center celebrates 23 years since it made its debut in 1999 in the Rago Auction Center. It has now become a holiday tradition anticipated not only by the local arts community, but by collectors and appreciators of finely crafted works. Each year the selected works are regarded as marrying the heritage of Bucks County woodworkers and contemporary artists of this region and beyond.

“Works In Wood, since its beginning in 1999, always focuses on craftsmanship as well as innovation. This year, the 23rd annual, showcases great examples of the wide variety of works in the medium — all worthy and interesting,” says Carol Cruickshanks, New Hope Arts executive director. “The national draw of this exceptional exhibition features the finest contemporary examples of fine furniture, turned objects and sculpture and innovative uses of the wood medium. The exhibit features works by more than 50 artists and welcomes 10 new woodworkers into the fold of seasoned woodworkers who consider Works In Wood a holiday tradition. The exhibit is sponsored by The First National Bank of Newtown.”

A gallery visitor a few years back offered this sound advice about viewing this particular exhibit. “As you first enter, just stop and let your eyes sweep all around this big space,” he said. “Don’t focus on one thing yet. Just take in all the shapes and sizes, the various wood tones and subtle colors. It’s a feast for your eyes.”

Only then, after absorbing the enormity of the collection on display, do individual pieces catch your eye and draw you in—such as Rob Herion’s “Horn of Plenty” displayed early in the show amid a grouping of colorful and imaginative small works. His inventive work is well crafted in walnut with pad auk inlay and lacewood as well as a hand-dyed silk pad and a goat horn. Although this piece alone can rivet your attention, there’s a whole big exhibition awaiting.

There are several turned wood vessels by Carter Sio who teaches at The George School in nearby Newtown. One that is especially outstanding and makes you want to run your hands over the natural graining in the wood and its beautiful curves and roundness is his “Fat Bowl” which is turned ash detailed with milk paint delicate green encircling stripes.

But then your eyes may be drawn to where Maine craftsman Carl J. Solberg’s large “River of Consciousness” is hung on the broad back wall in the stage area. Solberg carved and mounted dozens of wood slats composing a bright edged orange design that flows across deeper-toned slats. Those are positioned so, when the viewer’s body or eyes move, the “river” seems to flow.

Although expert craftsmanship is always foremost in the minds of the judges for this exhibit, Executive Director Cruikshanks says, inventiveness and innovation are also important. David P. Horowitz’s “Bau-Blox Modular Personal Office” is a prime example of both those characteristics. Created from laminated Baltic birch plywood blocks, maple and leather, it is a desk on a base of round modular shapes flanked with three round modular stacks on each side and modular seat, all of which can be rearranged to suit the user’s needs. Horowitz was honored with the Juror’s Award for a first-time exhibitor in the 2019 Works in Wood show for a gracefully carved spalted maple work that is quite different from this assembled grouping that is both innovative and functional.

Also functional, but graceful and elegant in design is Nick Martier’s “Sofa Table” in walnut with zebra wood accents. And don’t miss his curved seat tiger maple rocking chair displayed nearby

And while you’re in that area of the exhibit, enjoy the four sculptures created in fine woods by Aaron Kellner whose hand-crafted works that incorporate repeated patterns and symmetry can be found in galleries and private collections in the U.S. as well as in Reykjavik, Copenhagen, Berlin and the Czech Republic.

And to simply rest your eyes on something beautiful, stop and spend time with Michael Palladino’s “Snowflake” series. These are four exquisite snowflake shapes, each carved in Baltic birch. Note how the intricate carvings reveal the wood’s natural striations, how the colors come to life in a lacy pattern.

These are but a few of the chosen works on display ranging from massive to delicate, from kooky and fun to functional. Plan to spend a good long time in this exhibit.