M. Dale Chase

b. 1934, Grand Rapids, Michigan

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC

Woodturners Museum, Philadelphia, PA

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2004 Sculpture, Objects, Functional Art Exposition, Chicago, IL

2002 Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

While a vascular surgeon, with no education in art or woodwork, I began the woodturning of bowls in 1972, and converted to Ornamental Turning of boxes after acquiring a Holtzapffel lathe in 1974. Proficiency in Rose Engine work was acquired over the next 10-15 years, leading to development of the new and unique techniques of internal Rose Engine ornamentation. Most of these boxes sold in galleries in the United States and Japan. Although I had never been aware of traditional Japanese boxes, I learned that my boxes were typical incense boxes and tea caddies (Kogo and Natsume).

In 1989, an inspirational experience changed my entire approach to box making and ornamentation. While making a special box for the professor who mentored and inspired my becoming a scholar more than 25 years earlier, I remembered how he changed my life. At the same time, I had a vision of a box design that was several levels above anything I had previously attempted. In one marathon 40-hour weekend, with tears running down my cheeks, I made a landmark box so beautiful that I marvel at it today. Upon receiving the gift, instead of his annual perfunctory letter of thanks, he called to thank me, leaving no question of the tears on his cheeks. I was stunned.

Discussing these events with a professor of art at as nearby university, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "On this day, you became an artist. Any time you can put your heart into a piece of work and communicate your deepest inner feelings to another person and bring him to tears, you have created art."

Thereafter, the new design ideas flowed thick and fast with confidence that I could create new and more beautiful boxes if only I could acquire the tooling to make it possible. “When the student is ready, the teacher appears”. Walter Balliet, a retired tool and die maker and ornamental turner, translated my ideas into sculpturally beautiful tools and fixtures for my lathes, beginning a long working relationship. Hearing loss, arthritis of the hands, and a deteriorating medical practice environment in 1991 convinced me that it was time to retire and to become a full time artist. Boxmaking hours went from 10-20 hours per week, to 60-80.

After a ten year “sabbatical”, I have returned to exotic hardwood boxes in 2004. Having visited several collections of my exotic hardwood from the mid-90’s, borrowing some and studying all, I spent two months drawing future boxes that were far more successful than those ten years prior. After three months, I began making boxes with more failures than successes initially. Eventually I was able to reproduce the complex boxes from 1995 and finally to accomplish their much more complex and beautiful successors. The boxes still require at a minimum 50 intense hours to make. After 32 years of persistent development, the three layer boxes represent the pinnacle of my efforts to date.

(via Janel Jacobson, The Carving Path Forum, 2008, https://www.thecarvingpath.net/index.html)