

Inspiration to succeed

Contributed by Derryck
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I found this article by Steven Russell and it occurred to me that many people may have this problem. I personally don't suffer from lack of inspiration as I change my focus often from turning to joinery and then carving. But if you have a single focus then inspiration and inactive design may be a problem for you.

Woodturning Tips - Finding Inspiration For Artistic Woodturnings By Steven Russell

Overview

Woodturners often ask me how I can continually find inspiration for my artistic woodturning projects. Sooner or later, you may need a little inspiration to move in a different direction with your work, or perhaps just revitalize your current focus. As artists, we all need to be inspired from time to time -- this is normal. No one is an unlimited vessel of creativity. Finding the right kind of inspiration is the key to overcoming a creative wall and keeping your work fresh.

Finding Inspiration

There are many techniques that I use to find inspiration. One of the best ways that I have found is to visit art museums. Somehow, just being in the presence of great artwork has a beneficial effect. I am sure all of the artists represented in the museums collection at one time or another, faced a creative wall. They all overcame the wall and you can too.

Not long ago I was struggling with finding a new direction for my artistic work. Trying to clearly define a new creative focus for your artistic work can be a daunting task. It can make or break you as an artist, so it's something that requires a significant amount of thought to get it right.

There are so many art forms that have excited me through the years. I've always enjoyed the fifth century Grecian water and wine vessels, as well as the early Chinese, Japanese and Egyptian vessels. In the Houston, Texas area, we have some nice museums and I visited several in order to zero in on the exact time frame I wanted to concentrate on. While visiting the museums, I looked at every exhibit -- paintings, sculpture, wood, clay vessels, pottery, baskets and everything else I could possibly see.

When I left, my head was filled with possibilities, but no clear direction was apparent. As luck would have it, my wife and I had the opportunity to visit one of her sisters, who lived just outside Philadelphia. We took a day out of our trip to go into New York and sightsee. High on our list of places to visit, was the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Although I had been to New York before, I never had the time to spend much time sightseeing, so I was thrilled to finally be able to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art. As it happened, the museum had a huge exhibit of fifth century Grecian art, including several amphora jars. There were numerous examples of water and wine vessels made from Terracotta and painted with exquisite scenes on the outside.

There were also exhibits of early Chinese and Japanese carved stone pieces and china. Everywhere I looked, I was enjoying the visual feast and trying to figure out how I could adapt wood and my lathe to execute a similar piece. I did not want to copy any of the work, but merely use it as a basis for a direction to explore. It's comforting to know that the shapes we find pleasing today, were also pleasing more than 1,500 years ago.

My mind was going a thousand miles an hour and we both lost all track of time. We stayed until they began to close the museum and I left filled with inspiration and a clearly focused path for my artistic work. I settled upon the Grecian water and wine vessels of the fifth century. My goal was to find a way to execute my interpretation of these beautiful vessels in wood, with authentic scenes on the exteriors. Without my visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I'm not sure I would have been able to focus so clearly on my new artistic direction.

Additional Ways To Find Inspiration

Another favorite technique of mine is to look to nature for natural inspiration. Take a walk in the woods near your home, or spend a day visiting the seashore, or a local park. Observe the textures and colors of the rocks, the earth, the animals and the surroundings. Take lots of pictures for later reference. Some of my best surface textures have come from my attempts to duplicate natural rock formations, clouds, seashells and tree bark. You can even find artistic inspiration in your own backyard.

Early one morning I found a mushroom fungus formation growing on a rotten tree stump in my backyard. I knew that as soon as the sun came up it would ruin the beautiful multi-headed growth. I quickly grabbed my digital camera and took several photos from different angles. Later that day when the sunlight hit the formation, it was totally ruined. The beauty may have only lasted for a few hours, but it was incredible. This inspired me to use the pictures as inspiration for a hollow form that I want to turn which will replicate the look, texture and color of the fungus.

Closing Thoughts

Inspiration can be all around you, but you have to pay close attention and look beyond a casual glance to find the beauty that awaits you. Don't be afraid to try new techniques and to work with new materials in your studio. Stretching your creative limits redefines your inner muse and allows you to grow in new and exciting ways. Remember, there is an artist in every one of us and inspiration is around every corner.

About The Author

Steven Russell is a professional artist, demonstrator and writer. His studio, Eurowood Werks specializes in hand turned bowls, platters and hollow forms with unique visual and tactile treatments. Steve's website, Woodturning Videos Plus, <http://www.woodturningvideosplus.com> offers educational DVD videos and eBooks for woodturners of all skill levels. To learn more about woodturning, visit his resource library at <http://www.woodturningvideosplus.com/education-articles.html> which offers tips and tricks to master the art of woodturning.

In addition to his studio work, Steve frequently writes educational articles for international woodturning magazines, which are published in more than 75 countries around the world. As a highly sought after demonstrator, he has performed more than 1,760 woodturning demonstrations throughout the United States in the last eleven years.