

REVIEW OHIO CRAFT MUSEUM

Sculpture in spiraling wood

Turning creates wonderful works

By Jacqueline Hall

FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Wood-turning is an ancient craft that involves shaping forms -vessels, spindles, nails - on a lathe. As craftmaking continues to advance into the realm of art, the turning technique - which can be used with metal, plastics and laminates as well as wood - has found new acceptance.

Michael Brolly's wood-turning, however, is distinctive.

Brolly is a sculptor. As he wrote in his statement for the exhibition "Cradle to Cradle: Turned-Wood Sculptures by Michael Brolly," at the Ohio Craft Museum, he uses the lathe as a design tool, "a starting point to get where I want to with my work."

The result is generally a fascinating mixture of humor and wild imagination wrapped in superb craftsmanship.

"Cradle to Cradle" is a small exhibition with just more than a dozen pieces. Its impact is much larger, however, captivating visitors as soon as they enter the gallery and holding their interested throughout.

Weird creatures, not the gentle vision of cradles promised by the title, confront visitors. That puzzling situation is explained by the fact that the Ohio Craft Museum can accommodate only a fraction of the original traveling exhibition, organized by the Erie Art Museum.

The original show was intended as a midcareer retrospective for the artist and was very large. It included many of the works he created between 1973 and 2001.

In each of those years, Brolly created a cradle: The first one is very crude; the second one is the product of a sophisticated mind with a slightly sinister twist -- the exterior is covered with thornlike clusters of spikes. The cradles are represented on the front and back of the exhibition catalog, which is available at the museum.

Sinister twists certainly inhabit several of the pieces in the show. But they are so beautifully built, so exquisitely finished and so fantastically imaginative that they have an irresistible appeal.

The first piece to catch visitors' attention is a huge eye floating on three tall legs, *Juvenile Tryclops*. The disconcerting imagery harks strongly back to the surrealist movement of the 1920s and '30s.

A tall, weird-looking bird in the center of the room quickly becomes the object of fascination. With the unlikely title, *Thinking of My Mother-In-Law Marianne and Those Magnificent Mahogany Breasts*, it intrigues by its complexity. The body opens into wings and reveals four rows of breasts,

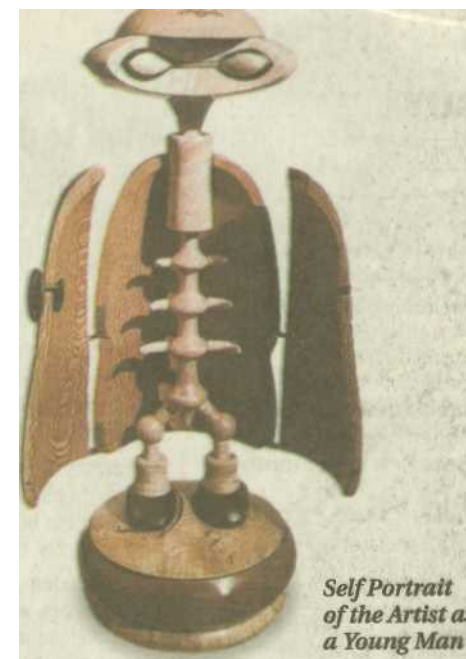


Juvenile Tryclops

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which rotate, exposing drawers carefully lined with suede. The head with a mean-looking bill and rotating sunken eyes gives the sinister creature the appearance of a bird of prey. The ingenuity that presided over the conception of such a sculpture, and the superb craftsmanship that realized it, leave viewers breathless. But a disturbing feeling of nature-run-amuck in this work lingers.

Fortunately, *Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* can quickly dispel the sinister mood created by *Thinking of My Mother-in-Law*. It has an amusing resemblance to E.T. It is humorous and reveals an interest in science fiction. It also clearly shows that



Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man



Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Very, Very Young Man

Brolly's lathe techniques have become extremely inventive and that he has adapted them to many demands of a fertile imagination. This delightful self-portrait, in which the artist reveals himself literally to the "bare bone," leaves visitors wanting to see more of his work.

Even when he stays close to the bowl shape, as in *Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Very, Very young man*,

Brolly manages to use much imagination - here he makes it look like a cell and embryo. And in his *Dancing Lidded Containers*, the vessels seem barely to keep their long tentaclelike legs still. He transforms the simplest form into the most unexpected creature.



Thinking of My Mother-In-Law Marianne and Those Magnificent Mahogany Breasts

'Cradle to Cradle: Turned-Wood Sculptures by Michael Brolly' is showing through Dec. 24 at the Ohio Craft Museum, 1665 W. 5th Ave. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 1 to 4 p.m. Sundays (closed Thanksgiving). Call 614486-4402.