

Michael Hosaluk:

2025 POP Merit Award Recipient

Albert and Tina C. LeCoff



Photo: Michel Choquette

Each year the AAW's Professional Outreach Program (POP) awards its esteemed Merit Award to an artist who has shown exceptional development and whose artwork and creative practice have directly influenced or had a significant impact on other artists within the woodturning field. This year, this prestigious award goes to Michael Hosaluk of Saskatchewan, Canada. Learn more about the program, the Merit Award, and past recipients at tiny.cc/AAWPOP.

When you have witnessed the career of someone as creative and technically off the wall as Canadian Michael Hosaluk, it's natural to look back on how it all happened and to wonder what comes next. Betty Scarpino's February 2021 AW article, "What Else Can a Spindle



Photo: Andi Wolfe

Be? The Playful Creativity of Michael Hosaluk" (vol 36, no 1, page 44), masterfully dissects Michael's creations and mind-blowing techniques, which are often strange and mathematical, leaving viewers wondering, *How did he make that?* This article instead examines what earned Michael Hosaluk—father, teacher, student, artist, and so much more—the AAW's POP Merit Award.

True to his passion

Who we are born to is the luck of the draw. Michael grew up on a farm

and spent hours in nature, learning to use his hands. He noted, "I have always loved making things. I grew up in an environment where handwork was a way of life, in a culture that was vibrant and colorful, where my imagination could run rampant."

Michael's schoolteachers saw his potential and set him loose in the woodshop. In ninth grade, he took manual training: "They had old Delta lathes, and it was all scraping. They showed me the gouges, [but] they did exactly that! Turning was so immediate: the material, the process, and the objects. We made bowls and candlesticks. My shop teachers let me have fun on the lathe and make whatever I wanted."

It's a good thing people recognized Michael's hand/mind coordination ►



SYMPOSIUM DEMONSTRATOR IN SAINT PAUL!

Michael Hosaluk will be a demonstrator at AAW's International Woodturning Symposium in Saint Paul, Minnesota, June 12-15, 2025, where he will share his wealth of experience with attendees. Don't miss this chance to learn from Michael, live and in person! For the latest details, visit aawssymposium.org.



Michael Hosaluk founded the ever-popular Emma collaborative event, which continues today and has inspired similar initiatives around the world. A spirit of fun and open creativity prevails. From left: Michael Hosaluk, Andy Buck, Kim Kelzer, Mark Sfirri, Russell Baldon (2018).

Photo: Laura Hosaluk

and aptitude. Although most of his friends went straight to college after high school, Michael's mother told him, "You don't need that." He went off to trade school at Kelsey Institute of Applied Arts and Sciences in 1974 and studied cabinet making and mill work. Then he started MH Cabinets and built residential and commercial cabinetry. This produced a middle-class income but never satisfied the direction Michael wanted to take. He decided to follow his passion to create unique wooden objects that excited him and gave up his commercial business to do so. When he told his wife Marilyn he was quitting MH Cabinets, she responded with encouraging support. Monetarily, their income changed to poverty level, but their lifestyle turned to gold.

Bold expression

Michael's father influenced his wood-working career. He recalled, "I borrowed his lathe but [in return] had to do all of his turnings for furniture restoration." After reading articles in *Fine Woodworking* in the 1970s by Del Stubbs, Alan Stirt, and David Ellsworth, Michael discovered the broader world of woodturning. He received a call for entry in the mail for a 1981 exhibition, *The First North American Turned Object Show*, and two of his pieces were accepted. He and Marilyn attended the conference, and the people he met were so open and helpful that it confirmed his choice of career. He explained, "I came for the woodturning and stayed for the people."

That conference changed Michael's life. Upon returning home with a carbon steel bowl gouge, he bought a new lathe and proceeded to fill his



Maple Burl Bowl, c. 1980, Maple burl, 3¼" x 7" (8cm x 18cm)

Photo: Grant Kernan-AKPhotos

shop with shavings. He was also inspired to venture into unconventional uses of materials such as ColorCore® (a multi-color polymer sheet) and metal. His large round metal table titled *Zap* was displayed in the 1988 International Turned Objects Show, organized by The Wood Turning Center (now The Museum for Art in Wood). The table was reviewed as "painted beyond redemption," perhaps a foretelling of the boldness in Michael's life-long body of work.

Collector David Waterbury would later comment that Michael's piece, *History of Woodturning Compressed Archives #1-Bird Bowl/Blue Bowl*, was "way ahead of whatever [anyone was] trying to think about."

Another early Hosaluk piece that stood out from the crowd was his



Zap, c. 1987, ColorCore®, aluminum, maple, glass, acrylic glass, threaded rod, lacquer, 18½" x 37" (47cm x 94cm)

Photo: Eric Mitchell



Ceremony Series, c. 1987, Ebonized ash, porcupine quills, ivory, 10" x 4½" (25cm x 11cm)

Photo: Eric Mitchell

white triangular vessel, *Tri-Cone*, which was radically different from the round-and-brown forms others were creating. *Tri-Cone* combines the intricacies of a vessel form with the rigors of furniture design. It was turned on a lathe, with wood subtracted to create triangles. The legs are attached by mortise-and-tenon joints.

Eventually, teaching became an option for Michael, and he

traveled up to three months a year. Woodturning took him around the world to share his experiences, and his journeys inspired him to tell stories through his work. He observed, “Once you develop the technical [side] of woodworking, personal content becomes the focus.”

Michael loves sharing his knowledge and thrives on what he learns from others, noting that “teaching is learning; everybody knows something.” In fact, his long boats of “strange fruits,” such as *Bowl of Strange and Unusual Objects*, germinated from the mix and match of people he has met over the years—“all of us together but so radically different.”

Community organizer

Michael’s excitement for the field led him to organize Canada’s first woodturning conference in 1982, which brought together woodturners from across North America. However, his involvement in community didn’t start there. He had previously founded the Saskatchewan Woodworkers Guild, the first of its kind in Canada, and was active in the Saskatchewan Craft Council. He was also instrumental in forming The Furniture Society and was a founding member of the AAW.

Michael continued to organize furniture and woodturning conferences that morphed into the Emma Lake International Collaboration. Today, this biennial event is called, simply, ►

History of Woodturning Compressed/Bird Bowl/Blue Bowl, 2018, Yellow cedar, acrylic paint, dye, copper, graphite, maple, acrylic glass, 12" x 12" x 2" (30cm x 30cm x 5cm)



Photo: John Carlano



Photo: John Carlano

(Above) *Tri-Cone*, 1987, Birch, maple, 6" x 10" x 10" (15cm x 25cm x 25cm)

The Museum for Art in Wood Collection, Gift of the Artist

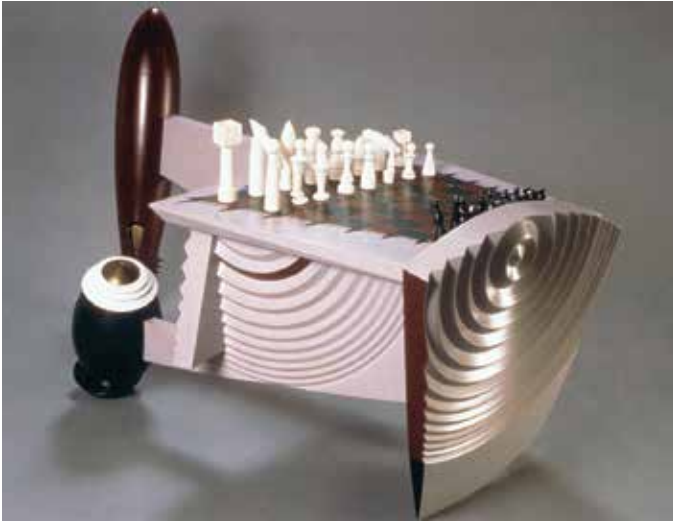
(Left) *Mach IV*, 1986, ColorCore®, aluminum, glass, acrylic glass, Renaissance wax, 24" x 18½" (61cm x 47cm)

The Museum for Art in Wood Museum Collection



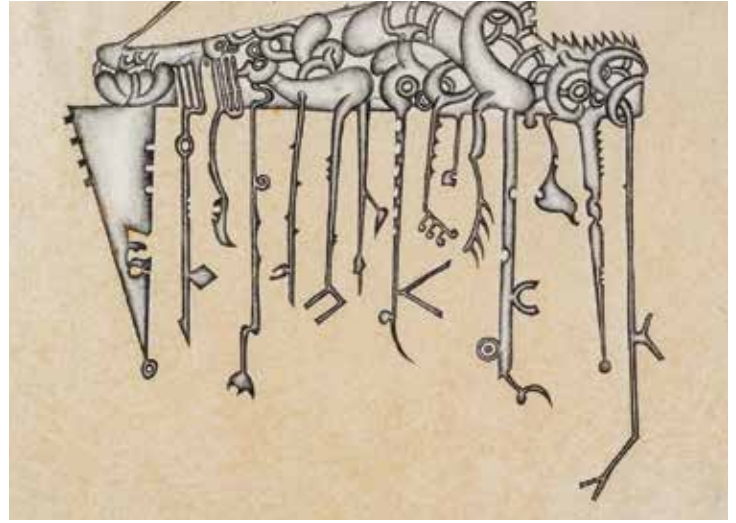
Bowl of Strange and Unusual Objects, 2019, Birch, maple, arbutus, horsehair, bronze, acrylic paint, dye, milk paint, 9" x 32" x 6" (23cm x 81cm x 15cm)

Photo: Trent Watts



Collaboration of Michael Hosaluk, Steve Loar, Mark Sfirri, and Graham Carson, *Chessed Table*, 1997, Poplar, maple, acrylic paint, 28" x 54" x 24" (71cm x 137cm x 61cm)

Photo: John Carlano



Collaboration of Michael Hosaluk and Lyonel Grant, *Finding Your Roots*, 2014, Pencil and charcoal, 24" x 36" (61cm x 91cm)

Photo: Trent Watts

Emma International Collaboration (see emmacollaboration.com). The website notes, "Every two years, one hundred artists from across the globe come together in the boreal forest of Saskatchewan to share in an experience of raw creation and open possibility." The event spurred a movement of gatherings in this format, emphasizing the sharing of knowledge where everyone is student and teacher, no hierarchy. Canadian wood artist Gord Peteran summed it up, "Emma sends a ripple that is felt globally."

Testimonials

Michael's daughter Laura said that his workshop was a constant source of play for her and her siblings, a cherished place where they could let their imaginations run wild. She reflected on the many experiences related to his career that "brought our family closer together. From demonstration trips, to visits to other artists like installing a chair in a tree at Garry Knox Bennett's studio, to welcoming students from regional and international backgrounds into our home to work alongside him, these moments

fostered a unique culture. This brings to mind the concept of craft culture—the value of working with our hands to create things with care, commitment, and curiosity. I feel incredibly fortunate to have been raised by someone with such a distinct vision of the world; joy from creativity continues to inspire me."

Most recently, Laura and Michael have collaborated on bangles, which Michael turns and Laura paints.

Not surprisingly, Michael has inspired a deep reserve of other tributes that make it clear why he is receiving this year's POP Merit Award:

- **Mitch Ryerson:** "It is safe to say that Michael is a life force. His creativity and enthusiasm are without bounds, but his truly unique power, which he wields joyfully, is his ability to get other artists off their high horses and out of their ivory towers to join the fracas of genuine collaboration."
- **Dale Larson:** "Michael is one of the best demonstrators and technical turners in North America."
- **Richard Raffan:** "Michael has a formidable array of woodworking

techniques to back his imagination and support his energy. He's one of the very few turners I'm always happy to watch for hours at a time."

- **Mark Sfirri:** "Michael took the idea of collaboration to a whole new level with his creation of the Emma Lake conferences. Inviting artists from around the world to convene for a weeklong event has served to greatly broaden the world of woodturning as well as that of many other media. Michael's work is a rare combination of production turning as well as ever-changing artistic output. An artist can easily stick with a series that becomes their most signature work, but to evolve and expand is to grow as a creative artist, and Michael is all about that."

- **Bonnie Klein:** "Mike's quirky imagination and enthusiasm are extremely contagious. If I wasn't already a woodturner, I would just have to give it a try after being around him. I've been fortunate to cross paths with him many times over the past twenty-five years or so. He is an inspiration and a great demonstrator."

• **Andi Wolfe:** “Michael has been an inspiration for so many of us. His playfulness in making has especially left a mark on the field of woodturning. I remember seeing his whimsical teapots for the first time, and wondering what kind of mind comes up with such a creative expression of art. After having the opportunity to interact with him at symposia, club demonstrations, and at the Emma International Collaboration, I’ve come to realize that his overactive imagination is who he is, and it is a privilege to see the results of his creative energy.”

• **Jamie Russell:** “Mike decided that it was worthwhile to dedicate entire conferences to the free exchange of skills and knowledge, and the Emma International Collaboration was born. Mike was the catalyst and, in addition to the Craft Council, he partnered with the Windgate Foundation and the Wood Turning Center for the event. He generated

enough energy in our community that folks brought all the tools we needed, two three-ton truckloads and several pickups full, to give 100 people from a wide range of disciplines from all over the world some of the most exciting creative times of their lives.”

• **Gord Peteran:** “All those artists from around the world enthusiastically clamoring to join Michael repeatedly in a remote corner of Saskatchewan! ...says a lot about the man. Corraling a dedicated team around him to organize every aspect so that these conferences run smoothly, and still remain light-hearted, energetic, gracious, and searingly innovative, [he] always seemed superhuman to me.”

• **Merryl Saylan:** “[When I first met Mike, he] seemed like a teenager to me. We just became friends. And we’ve always had fun. We set up a room for paint and texture at the early Furniture Society conferences.

I remember one year, we made a load of fish blanks for people to play with. Of course, somehow I bought them all at the auction at the end. Mike has always been creative and experimental, all the things I admire in a maker.”

What’s next? What now?

Tragically, Michael lost his life partner Marilyn after a two-year illness. While he was her caretaker, he was not actively turning, but new work was percolating. During the pandemic, Michael and Marilyn visited a cancer clinic two or three times a week. Except for dire circumstances like this, people had stopped getting together. Michael noted that every face was covered with a mask. After acquiring permission, he took photos of people. ►



Unusual Fruit Tables,
2002, Maple, acrylic paint,
acrylic gel, hair, steel,
Each: 27" x 28" x 16"
(69cm x 71cm x 41cm)

Photo: Grant Kernan

**Collaboration of Michael Hosaluk
and Mark Sfirri, *Trumpot*, 1996, Maple, paint,**
7½" x 7" x 5" (19cm x 18cm x 13cm)

Photo: John Carlano

The Museum for Art in Wood Collection,
Gift of the Artist



Tower of Babble, 2022-2024,
Baltic birch plywood, acrylic
paint, birch, 9½' (2.9m) tall

Photos: Trent Watts





Tribal Gathering, 1991, Elm, willow, linen thread, copper leaf, acrylic paint, beads, 20" x 8" (51cm x 20cm)

Photo: John Carlano

Yale University Art Gallery Collection, courtesy of Ruth and David Waterbury, B.A. 1958, Fund



Emma collaboration of Michael Hosaluk, Jan Hopkins, Karen Ernst, Lynn Szymanski, Eva Seidenfaden, Joan Carrigan, Lyonel Grant, Andy Buck, Wendy Naepflin, Russel Baldon, Bob Rotche, Adrian Legge, Grant Irons, and John Monteath, *Ripple*, 2024, Wood, various binding materials, found objects, steel, 1m x 1m (100cm x 100cm)

Photo: Matthew Joseph, PearFilms



His 9½'- (2.9m-) tall *Tower of Babble* is inspired by the bible story that explains the existence of different languages and cultures. Michael said the idea took a while to germinate, but the premise is, "When we all get together, we babble." He asked a bunch of people to send him a photo of their mouth. Finally, he rough-turned the tall form, then began to carve the mouths of friends from around the world. His family

is on top. Toward the bottom are two carvers who Michael respects and works with, the Māori Lyonel Grant and the Tlingit Dempsey Bob. The results are contemplative and autobiographical.

A new series for Michael, created collaboratively, is *Ripple*, which maps the location of collaborations that have occurred worldwide. It is inspired by his love of maps and working with people around the world—and by the various ways different cultures depict

Bangles are an ongoing collaboration between Michael, who turns the bangles in quantity, and his daughter Laura, who embellishes them.

places and information. The first is a wall piece, but he foresees them becoming 3D sculptures and a “map” of his life history.

Patricia Kane, Friends of American Arts Curator of American Decorative Arts at Yale University Art Gallery, noted, “The Yale Art Gallery is delighted to have recently brought Michael Hosaluk’s *Tribal Gathering* back to New Haven where this work was exhibited in 2002 in the exhibition *Wood Turning in North America* organized by the Gallery and the Wood Turning Center (now the Museum for Art in Wood), Philadelphia. It was chosen for the exhibition since Hosaluk was one of the leaders in the use of paint, mixed media, and found objects.” Michael made *Tribal Gathering* after returning from two months teaching in Australia. While it reflects aspects of ancient cultures, it also addresses the current movement of woodturning, which has evolved into a kind of tribe of people from all over the world, connected by an incredible openness that leads to sharing and exchange.

Production turning may be the last thing you’d expect from Michael Hosaluk, given the years of colorful, impossibly playful and distinctive furniture and objects he has made. But guess again: the shavings are flying. Currently, he’s turning bowls for four upcoming exhibits “to use up accumulated wood and stuff.” He has made stacks of uniform bowls, most with colorful finishes. Ideally, he would like to show them as a huge pile. Then there’s the multitude of bangles he turned for Laura to paint. Michael laughs, “I’m like a machine at the lathe.”

Even as his production exhibits are happening, Michael is completing an atypical commission: an 11' (3.4m) table made from reclaimed fir. He also has donated all of his archival

materials to a university library. And he’s making and assembling a body of work to exhibit at the 2025 AAW International Symposium in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where he will receive the POP Award (visit aawsymposium.org for more).

Michael’s creative practice is brimming with new ideas, adding to his prolific body of work and his legacy as an organizer, teacher, student, and collaborator. Given his talents and ingenuity, it is a mystery how he has remained so humble. It is truly a pleasure to congratulate the 2025 POP Merit awardee. ■

For more, visit michaelhosaluk.com.

Albert and Tina C. LeCoff, both trained in art and design, have been married and writing collaboratively since 1990. Work for *The Museum for Art in Wood* (formerly the *Wood Turning Center*, which Albert co-founded), inspired joint articles for *Turning Points*, exhibition catalogs, and other publications covering early wood artists. Architecture, sculpture, folk art, and long-time friendships with artists are all major inspirations.



These days, Michael is content to churn out beautiful functional bowls in production mode.



Photo: Trent Watts

Photo: Trent Watts