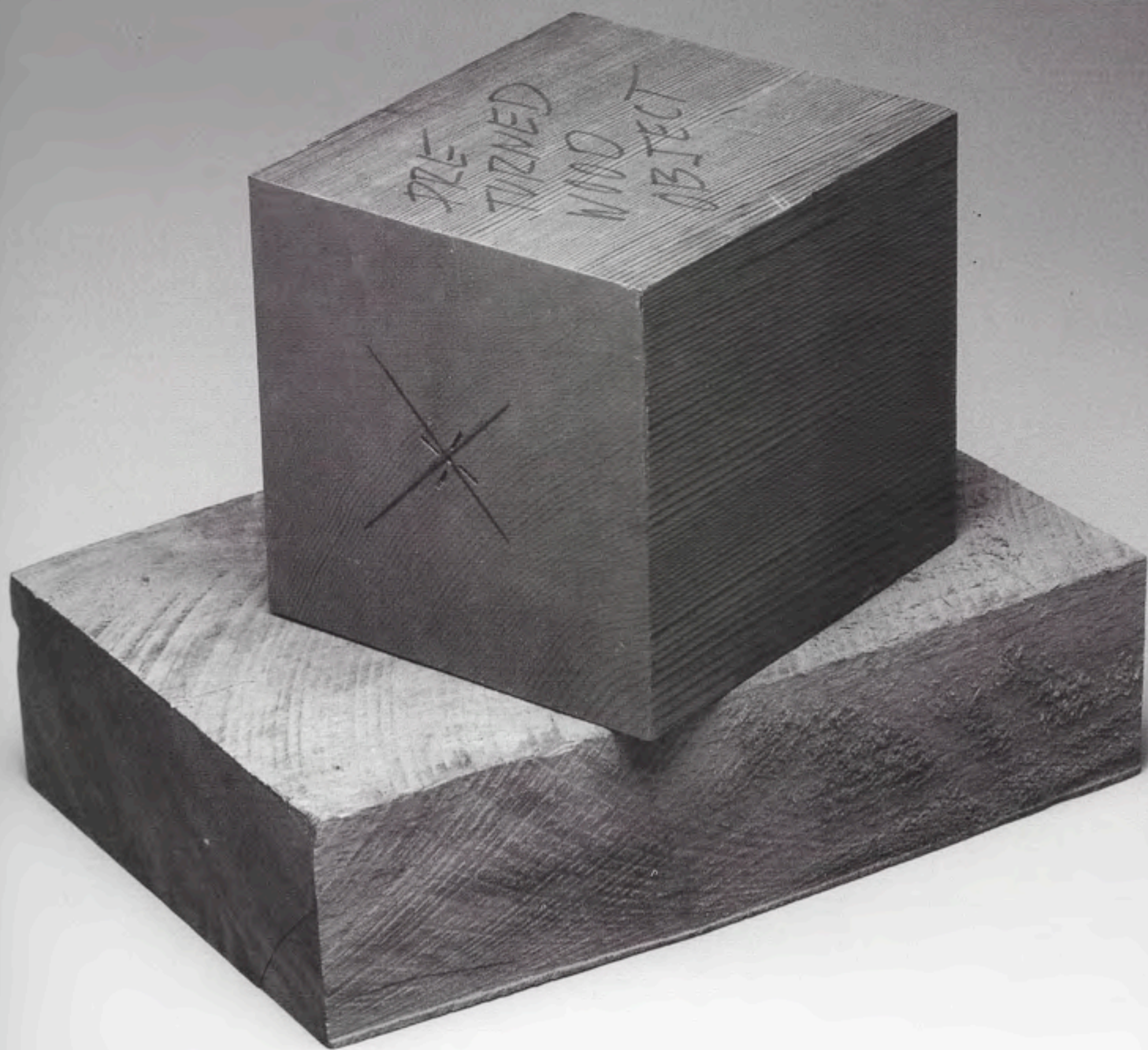
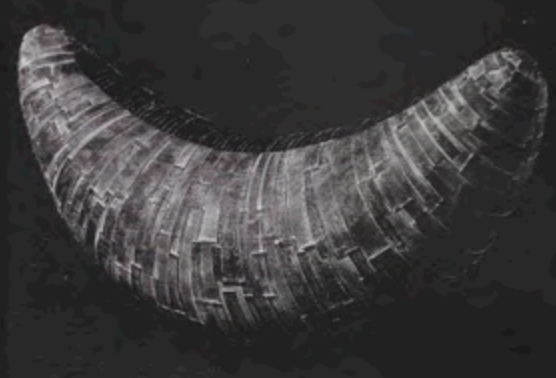
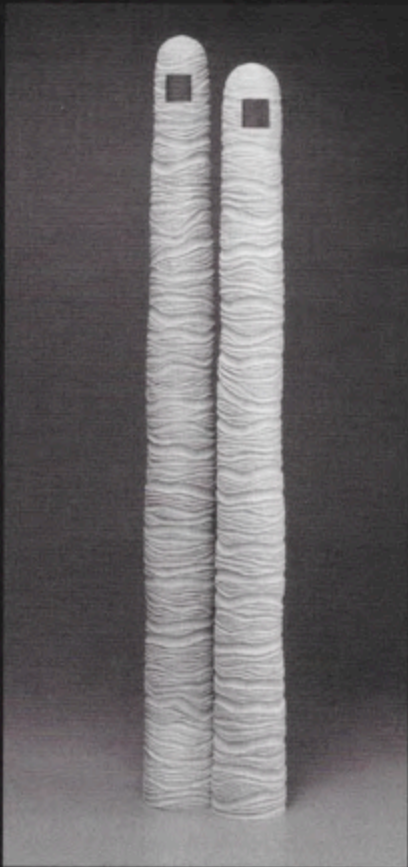
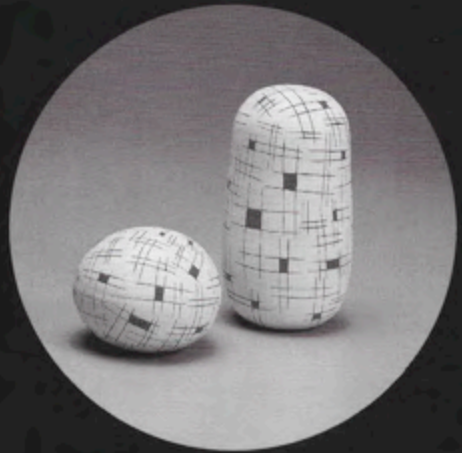


# Turning Points

Wood Turning Center

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# Thierry Martenon

BY TERRY MARTIN PHOTOGRAPHY BY THIERRY MARTENON

Clockwise from Top Right:

*Pommes de Terre*, 2003

6 7/8 x 3 1/2" diam, 3 x 4" diam  
(17 x 9 cm, 7.5 x 10 cm)

Walnut, acrylic

Tony Darnel and Jane Pollot Collection

Made during the 2003 ITE

*All Wrapped Up and No Place To Go*, 2003

14 x 14 x 6" (35.5 x 35.5 x 15 cm)

Walnut, wax, linen

Wood Turning Center Collection

27022004, 2004

9 x 16" (23 x 40.5 cm)

Walnut, slate, burr veneer

*Deux Guinness, s'il vous plait*, 2003

34 x 3 3/8" diam (86 x 8.5 cm)

Mahogany, wax, linen, bleach, acrylic

Larry Gabriel Collection

14022004, 2004

36 x 6" diam (91.5 x 15 cm)

Walnut, elm, veneer, slate

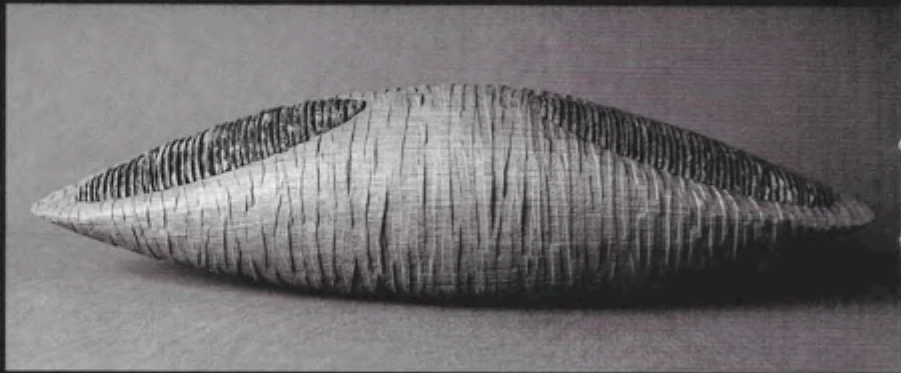
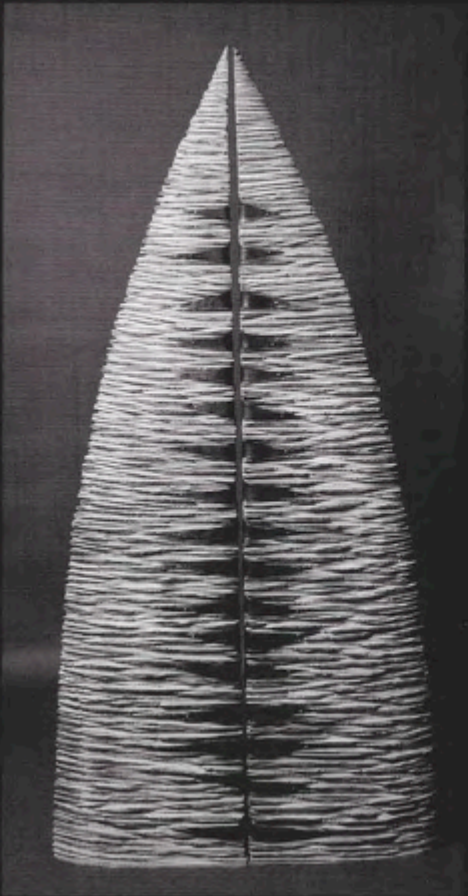
The field of Wood Art has had more than its share of true innovators. In the early years the innovations came thick and fast as the largely unexplored field grew exponentially. Although there are now more wood artists than ever before, because so much new ground has already been broken it becomes increasingly hard to create truly new ideas.

This is one of the best reasons for the internationalization of the field. Even though there is a risk of imitation because we all see new world-wide developments as soon as they happen, newcomers from different cultures can see things differently. French wood artist Thierry Martenon has only recently arrived on the scene, but he has taken wood art to a new high with his unerring eye for line, a remarkable sense for combinations of materials, and a flair for texture and patina that is second to none. Although there are sometimes echoes of other work in his pieces, his work is never derivative and it fits perfectly into the continuum of evolving wood art. Martenon's work shows more maturity and resolution than many who have been struggling for decades to establish a

reputation. At first glance the rapidity of his achievement might suggest that it is the result of raw talent. While his talent is not in doubt, his success is also due to a steady process of research, refinement and exploration.

He was born in Le Désert near Grenoble in eastern France in 1967 and claims to have been passionate about the idea of working in wood from a young age. His village only has 100 inhabitants and he says, "This is a land of wood. If you are not a farmer, you are a carpenter or a logger." He finished his training as a cabinet maker in 1990, then worked at that profession for six years. He also was fascinated with graphic arts and continued to learn all that he could. This has clearly influenced his development as a wood artist—the lineaments of his work often look like sketches solidified, drawn concepts brought to three-dimensional fruition.

Although Martenon began his working life as an artisan who joined and sanded wood to make furniture, subduing the material with technique, his discovery of wood art unlocked his pent-up creative urge. With a rapidity I have never seen



Clockwise from Top Right:

05052004, 2004

22 x 6" diam (56 x 15 cm)

Walnut, slate

Kochman Collection

15122005, 2005

31 x 10" (78.5 x 25.5 cm)

Maple, metal

24122004, 2004

32 x 11 x 6" (81.5 x 28 x 15 cm)

Walnut, metal

Roux Collection

09012005, 2005

43 x 11 x 3" (109 x 28 x 7.5 cm)

Maple, metal

before, he reinvented himself as an artist who uses wood for the expression of his creative ideas. He spent more and more time researching materials—choice of woods, effects which can be obtained through texture, color and patination. Now he enjoys combining different techniques to help his work develop in a more sculptural direction.

Working from a restored barn in his home village, Martenon is determined to keep his processes simple. He is not obsessed with equipment: "It's good to work with almost nothing. I tinker and invent. I've achieved textures simply by rubbing a handful of gravel on the wood. You can waste quite a lot of time freeing yourself from technique." He likes to use local species, such as walnut, boxwood and pear tree. He exploits the characteristics of each species and often achieves startling results by combining them with unexpected materials, such as copper, tin or stone.

Remarkably, in less than three years Martenon has made so many good pieces that there is an embarrassment of riches to choose from. Starting with his work from 2003, I chose *Pommes de Terre* as the first piece because it is not a startling departure from much of the work which typifies the field. It is the patterning which lifts this piece to a standard of simple excellence—lightly incised lines on a bleached background, occasionally filled with a delicate cerise color. The relationship of the two forms is also fascinating. In much of Martenon's work there are two differing forms which are nevertheless similar enough to evoke feelings of relationship, family, friendship.

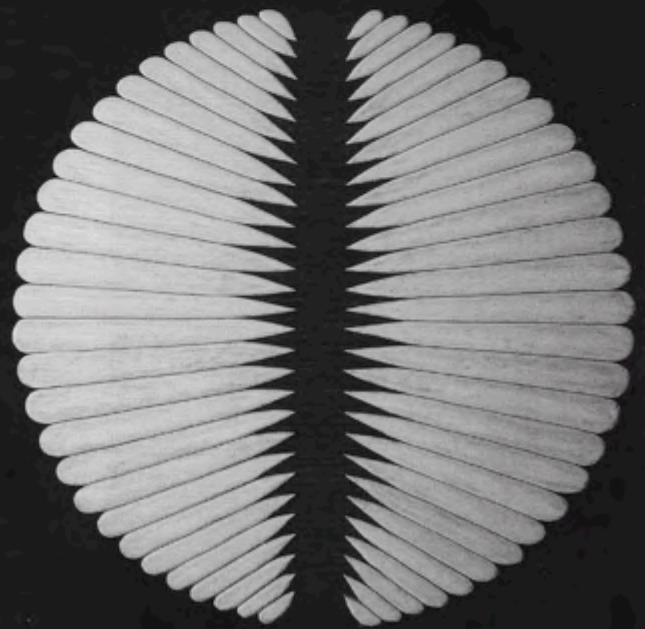
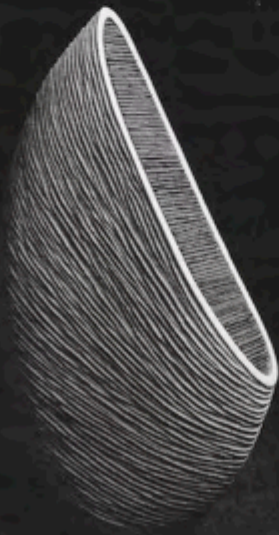
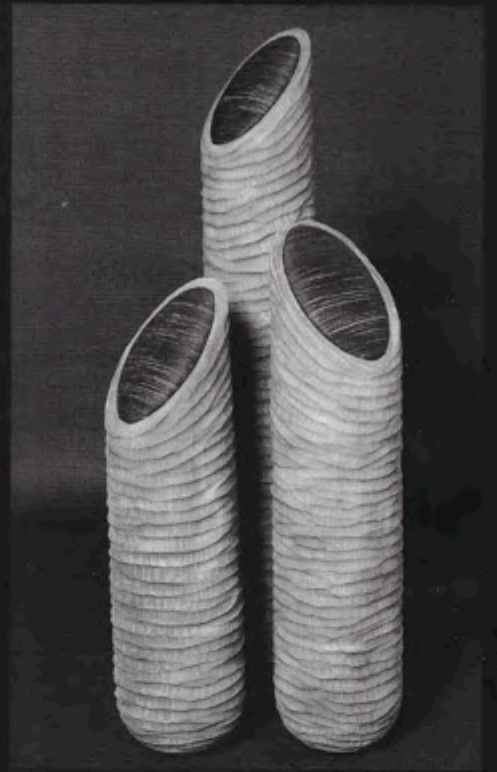
This relationship is beautifully shown in *Deux Guinness, s'il vous plait*. These could be simply viewed as two matching sculptural forms, beautifully textured to catch the light. But they also resemble two tall, thin figures standing closely, even protectively together. Their humanoid quality is emphasised by the insert at the level of faces. This is an example of how

much of Martenon's work can be completely changed by altering the distance between the pieces. Here, they are huddled together, facing the same way. They could be separated and made to face each other, or even look away from each other, creating a different tension between them. The simplicity of these paired, lingam-like forms is inspired. There is an ageless quality about them. What are they, who are they, what do they represent? All of these questions rush through my mind when I see them.

Another piece from this year is *All Wrapped Up and No Place To Go*. This is an enigmatic piece. It stands like some symbolic icon, horned and challenging, yet is it bound and restrained by waxed linen cord. The bonds seemingly cut into the surface, tightly restraining its energy. Is it simply a clever use of material in unexpected ways, or is it deeply symbolic? Of course it can be whatever you want it to be and I suspect Martenon would rather leave it up to the viewer to decide.

By 2004 Martenon stopped naming his pieces, instead numbering each of them, with the last four digits signifying the year he made it. So #14022004 was made in 2004. It is another of his works which bring to mind relationships. In this case the two tall forms, again unequal in size, lean towards each other conspiratorially. Their relationship could equally well be changed by repositioning. The texture of these pieces is simply marvellous. It looks like strips of metal have been hammered onto the surface, but it is actually a masterful application of veneer combined with color and lighter texturing to give a feeling of rightness that is unmatched in my experience. As if that were not enough, the use of thin sections of slate laid edge-on to fill the tops of the vessels is pure genius. It is a device which Martenon returned often to in 2004 and I think this use of unexpected earth elements is one of his trademarks.

He also used slate in #27022004, laying it into a horned vessel which looks like it is



Clockwise from Top Right:

03012005, 2005

26 x 5" diam (66 x 12.5 cm)

Maple, waxed linen

30072005, 2005

47" diam (119.5 cm)

MDF

20072005, 2005

28 x 16 x 4" (71 x 40.5 x 10 cm)

Maple, slate

Wornick Collection

26062004, 2004

47 x 16 x 9" (119.5 x 40.5 x 23 cm)

Maple, slate

meant to be grasped at both ends and lifted as an offering. Again, in #05052004, he has inlaid slate at both ends of an intriguing prostrate hollow form, beautifully complimenting the texture on the wood. Pieces like this are deceptive. They have a robust finish, but the precision required to combine these materials is particularly challenging.

This suggestion of symbolic importance is taken even further in #26062004. The sections of slate inlaid in the monolithic bleached form surely must mean something? And yet I suspect they are simply the application of his drawn fantasies. By numbering and not naming these pieces, he challenges the viewer to interpret as they will.

By 2005 he is redefining his themes. #03012005 is now a group of three, expanding the possibilities of arrangement. What was slate inlay has become waxed thread wrapped around an insert to create both visual and tactile effects. Over the past ten years French wood artists have explored texture perhaps more than any other country's artists, and Martenon shows here that he is master of this style.

By introducing another earth element, iron, Martenon expanded his vocabulary even further. In #09012005 he has wrapped tongues of iron at the edges of two not-quite matching monolithic forms. The hinge-like metal pieces both link and separate the wood. By contrast, #15122004 is clearly bound by tendrils of iron which wrap around and reach out to each other, vine-like in their organic embrace. It is not hard to see how this piece might have begun as a drawing. In #24122004 the two materials, as always in his work, look exactly like they belong together.

A closer view of these pieces shows just how well Martenon has combined the earth elements. #24122004 has that organic feeling common to much of his work. It looks like it grew that way. By contrast, #22122004 looks like it was stamped out on a steel mill, manufactured in a harsh environment to forge the two elements together.

Martenon's most recent work continues his distinctive exploration of stylistic and technical themes. #01052005 is an intriguingly layered pair, as inscrutable as Easter Island statues. The vessel #20072005 is a piece that will fit well in any collection of wooden vessels, but it will challenge the genre and stand out in any distinguished company. It confronts preconceptions.

Martenon's range of work is astonishing and the wall piece #30072005 confirms this. Its striking bleached fins drive the eye towards the naturally colored central spine, a delightful exercise in line and contrasting tones.

My bottom line when I see new work is the simple question: would I have it in my house? I have yet to see a piece by Martenon that I would not proudly own. I can't think of any other artist that I can say this of. He has a long and fruitful career ahead of him, so won't it be wonderful to see what he does next? ·