

# Looking & Seeing 3

An introduction to using computer software  
as a creative reference tool in  
woodturning design and making

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In Parts 1 and 2 of Looking and Seeing we briefly investigated a few sources of inspiration. Nature and other subjects we can directly observe are recognised ways of finding helpful visual triggers for design application. If we can't draw well enough to visualise things clearly and accurately on paper then our creative endeavours appear at first sight to be restricted. There are ways to overcome these problems.

In this section of Looking and Seeing I propose to look at how computer software can help to generate new ideas for turning. It is partly an update to previous tutorials on using Draw and 3D software. The first section will take a brief look at some examples of computer assistance with design. The second section will show how I am using these methods combined with conventional research to add features to my work that would otherwise be unavailable to me.

I am aware of the criticism often levied at the use of computers as an aid for design in woodturning. Much of this is unfounded and is usually offered by those who either do not understand how it can be used or are unskilled when trying to adopt this approach. I often hear this is cheating - the computer is doing it for you. Logically this would mean if you are using pencil and paper it is the pencil that does the same. Historically software design and applications mimicked physical/mental/practical skill processes. However it is human interaction and control that make things work. Generally speaking the computer will only produce what it is instructed to do. The main advantage now in design with computing is that some things can be done more quickly and efficiently than with hand processes.

Many give up because the software seems not to be user friendly and/or too complex to understand. The programs may at first sight seem to be too difficult to get to grips with but we all use word processing programs to type our letters etc without feeling the need to learn or use all the facilities in office based software. If we used the same selective approach to other software, just selecting and learning what we need to undertake specific tasks a whole new world of opportunities opens up.

For instance you need to learn surprisingly few techniques in Draw type software in order to design and manipulate curves and create shapes suitable for turning some of these programs are available as free downloads. Some turners seem to want to take what appears, at first sight, to be the easy option and buy turning specific software. These may be fine to start with but anyone wishing to move beyond the basics into creative options will soon find these programs become restricting rather than liberating. No one program can 'do' all that we would like to do and the

ability to move photographs, textures and 3D objects between programs becomes important when we enter into a more creative way of designing. For instance the ability to draw a curve in one program take it into another to lathe or create the 3D form and render the result. In order to do this 'standard file types' become important, some programs have peculiarities in file extensions that prevent this ability to transfer something created into other software. So if you intend to try software for design then try to find out before purchasing which files types are able to be imported, saved or exported. If it is possible to download and try programs before buying - do this too.

It is not my intention here to make any recommendations about specific programs, we each have to find those that suit our working or thinking styles. I do intend to suggest however that keeping things simple can still offer many creative opportunities for turners to explore possibilities without becoming too involved with the technical understanding and long learning curve required of most full blown and expensive 3D software.

At a recent modern dance performance the choreographer gave a pre-performance talk about how his dance moves had been created. The performance notes further explained the approach he had taken. He is working in conjunction and in collaboration with cognitive scientists and computer specialists to look at the possibility of using computers and therefore artificial intelligence to rethink dance movement and the relationship between mind and body. The movements the computer program is devising requires the dancers to retrain their muscle memory as well as thinking and previous training in order to be able to respond.

What you may ask has this got to do with woodturning? Well there are similarities, turning also has this mind body relationship we learn technical skills by repetition, training our hands to hold tools, body position etc until we do it without thinking - the equivalent of muscle memory. The hand/tool combination co-ordinates with the brain to translate what we imagine there into tangible forms. What we see and what we make are governed by the influences we are subjected to both in training and during our developmental stages. Sometimes to move on from the place we are at present to a new one may mean we have to retrain both our muscle memory and our thinking - put aside what we think we have learned and begin again. If we design something to turn, from our current knowledge base, it will probably be interpreted from things we see or have seen and maybe will fit into an idea of what we think is right or possible to make. Computers don't necessarily think in this way and some software can throw up surprising elements that challenge our ideas of what is possible. Some examples of this will be seen in later pages.

So Part 3 is not a 'how to', it is a brief look at some of the ways computer software can challenge the way we work and possibly the way we think about what is possible for us to do as individuals in restructuring our approach to what we make. To do this we may have to forget the debates about art v craft, definitions of what turning is or isn't and begin to concentrate on how we can use the multitude of tools and techniques available to us to enjoy 'making' stunning objects in wood or other materials.

To complete this introduction I would like to pose two questions about the introverted nature of turning today, especially in the UK. Are we as turners paying too much attention to other turners' opinions are on what is right, wrong or indifferent about what we make or the way it is made? Are we demonstrating, making and expressing opinions and ideas for other turners to admire or should we be responding to and addressing a wider audience who may have different needs, opinions and aspirations?

In parts 1 & 2 of this series I showed a couple of examples of how easy to use computer software can aid design. After a short learning period it will be found that using the computer can speed up the idea flow and the investigation of variations on a theme. Many variations can be produced in minutes and for those who cannot draw too well this can be a liberating experience. As well as simulated wood grain, photographed or scanned textures, patterns etc can be applied to a simulated turned surface this will give us ideas on how a turning might look.

To make this more visual and intuitive way of working easy to understand, in the first part of this tutorial I will be using two programs to illustrate how creative possibilities can be investigated. They will be Draw software and Ulead 3D Studio. Draw instructions I have covered in a separate tutorials elsewhere on the site. Here I will be concentrating Ulead 3D Studio, one of many 3D programs. The way I am demonstrating its use requires little or no understanding of the construction of 3D objects.

I tend to work visually rather than mathematically and I like to play in an almost childlike fashion with 'I wonder' and 'what if', I don't need to 'know' how something works - initially I just want to see what happens when I press a button and whether the result is interesting. If you adopt this simplistic approach much of the fear of using software disappears and in the event of unsatisfactory results the 'undo' instruction works for me - I then try something else. Incidentally, this is my approach to turning on the lathe and off lathe processes too. For this reason I dismissed CAD/CAM programs that are more suited to those from an engineering or technical type of background for whom the terms will be familiar and where precision and detailed plans may be a required output.

My personal journey into the use of 3D software began with the simple program Microlathe. I was frustrated by my lack of ability to translate adequately the ideas I had in my head onto paper. Attaching a piece of wood to the lathe and seeing what came out was beginning to be unsatisfactory. I wanted more control over visualising a potential end result before I began turning. I have spent much time over the past five years or so searching for and trying out most affordable software. I have now found some that suit my way of working but I still keep looking for and trying new options.

So before showing some of the both simple and moderately complex things that can be done with ULead, I would like to describe some of the problems I felt I had to overcome during my search for usable programs. This may help if you chose to follow a similar path.

Cost and simplicity were the driving factors coupled with the ability to transfer anything I learned or designed in one program into another program. It appeared to me to be a waste of time if you had to keep relearning procedures within each program because the facility to transfer a line, model or photograph wasn't present. Industry standard formats are desirable features. I soon began to realise that trying to construct well proportioned basic forms (models) in most 3D programs was difficult using the inbuilt drawing facility, if present, or manipulating primitives. It was important for me to be able to have a finished form before beginning to work on the possibilities that 3D programs can offer.

Most Draw type programs save drawings in a native format but also have the option to export in universal formats, .wmf for instance. This file can then be imported into many windows programs and can be resized or reportioned with ease. Most 3D programs have native formats too but some have become industry standards, .obj for instance. This allows the transfer of objects between programs. So with this in mind I looked for a program that is easy to use to draw the initial form, a program that would produce basic 3D models easily in formats that were transferable. Main component required within a 3D suite was a lathing or sweeping facility. Rendering or applying the surface finish and modifications to the form can be done in many programs so long as you can import a standard file.

The two programs I settled on initially for ease of use and flexibility at reasonable cost were Serif Draw and Serif ImpactPlus. Unfortunately ImpactPlus has one drawback, when you import a .wmf file it appears without retaining its original proportions so for this reason I discarded it in favour of ULead. ImpactPlus is still a good program to try 3D for the first time. Currently with a new version available older versions are downloadable either for free v.3 or for very low cost v.4.

There are several full 3D programs, should you wish to extend your knowledge base, available at low cost or as free downloads. For modifying and rendering purposes these are ideal but be warned they need time and patience to understand and make use of. I prefer initially to keep it simple, allow my knowledge to increase at my own pace, to suit my own needs as my aspirations and ideas develop and change.

Overleaf you will see some of the creative possibilities using this easy approach and I hope it may inspire some to 'have a go' and see what this method can add to your work and ideas.

I remind you - very little technical know how is required just the willingness to play and discover. To get started it is much easier

to be shown how to use these selective program facilities visually rather than using texts for guidance. I am aware from the lack of take up for the various offers I have made for both free talks and free one day tuition sessions that there is limited interest in the UK. I may address this by offering screen based, short instruction videos to illustrate how easy this method can be. Feedback via e-mail on this suggestion is welcomed so I can gauge interest.



### A Reminder of Draw Software



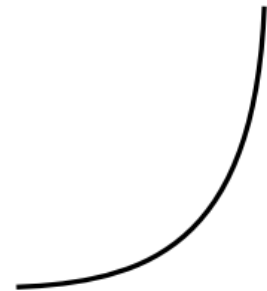
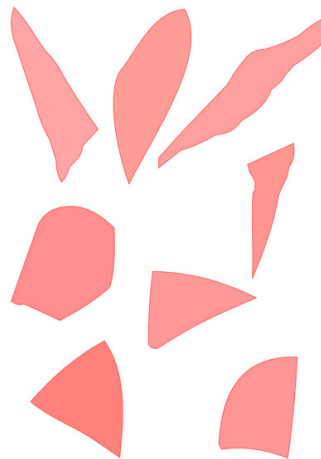
A graphics tablet can make working with lines and shapes easier. There are many versions available.

If you become interested in this approach to investigating ideas I would offer one suggestion to make the drawing and manipulation tasks easier to manage and that would be the purchase of a pen tablet, pic to the left. This is much easier to control than a mouse when using the facilities in draw, paint and 3D programs. Having said this on to the examples and a quick look at what some of the basic tools and facilities in draw software can do for us. Regular use of the program and staged learning will reveal other opportunities. Just like any other tool using it increases confidence.

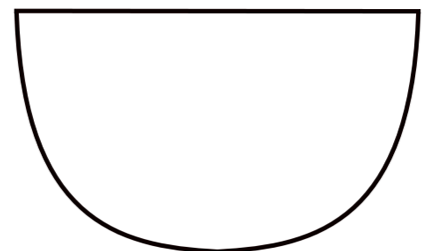
As a reminder and for the purposes of illustration I will go back to one of the drawings created in Part 2 and use this to run through some common basic features in draw software. Draw can provide most of the features we need for basic design and ideas in woodturning.



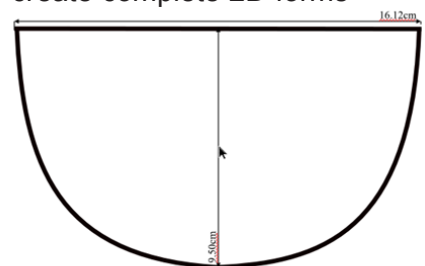
In part 2 it was illustrated that with Draw it is possible to trace around either complete or partial shapes.



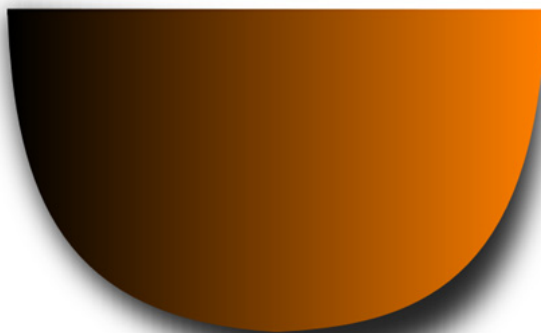
Curves from reference or using the geometry within the program can be created and manipulated.



Curves can be combined to create complete 2D forms



Drawings can be scaled and dimensioned



Completed drawings can have colour and other features added to simulate a 3D appearance.

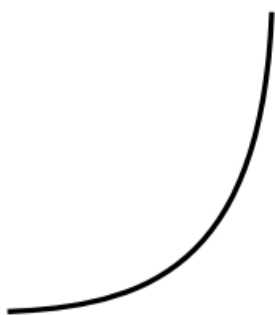


So here's where some fun begins. Taking the simple curve from the previous page and saving it as a .wmf file we can import this into ULead 3D Production Studio and see what can be possible using some basic 3D manipulation procedures. Ulead lathing will obviously only spin a line in a circular fashion so complex non circular objects that may need surface alteration after forming is not a practical, controlled option within the program. We can still play and discover some exciting shapes by using either preset or controlled distortions. Textures, colours etc can be selected from a range within the program and we can also import bitmap (.jpeg for instance) textures in graphic or photographic form from our cameras, texture making programs and other sources. The imported line will create a solid/open form onto which a texture or graphic pattern can be rendered overall. With a bit of ingenuity it is possible to render an object with more than one texture. Experimenting with the features in the program is the key. The instructions in the manual only describe the operations and facilities within the program which was design and produced for video animation and titles - not woodturning. I have adapted and experimented to devise methods to suit my required outcomes.

To begin I am showing the start line and start object - a bowl unrendered and in wireframe format. Then with a basic wood texture applied from the wood palette in the programme followed by some textures already seen in Part 2. Then there will be some variations to show how the program can assist in visualising new opportunities. I would like to remind you at this stage no technical or mathematical knowledge of 3D procedures is needed to create these effects.

Basic or complex models formed from lines and curves created in Draw can be taken from Ulead into other 3D programs for alteration and further development by exporting the model as a .3ds or direct x file.

An image file can also be exported and saved.



A basic curve saved as a .wmf file is imported into ULead.



Basic lathed and unrendered form



Wireframe form as it would appear if exported.



Basic wood texture rendering from the program's materials palette

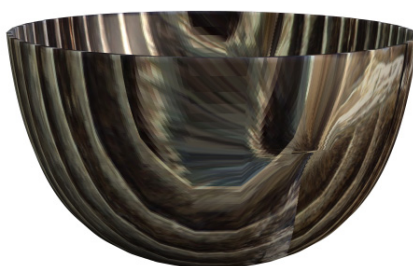


Left shows a start texture which is a section taken from one shown in Part 2 of this series. Depending on which option is chosen the texture will wrap around the form in four basic ways. This texture is a straightforward jpeg cropped and saved in Photoshop. Any paint or photo editing software will do the same job.

You can use any graphic, pattern or photograph. You will tend to get a joining line where the texture or graphic meets using this method. You can apply all the usual filters and effects found in a photo editing program before transferring the image as a render. Unusual effects can be achieved in this way.



The four basic renders

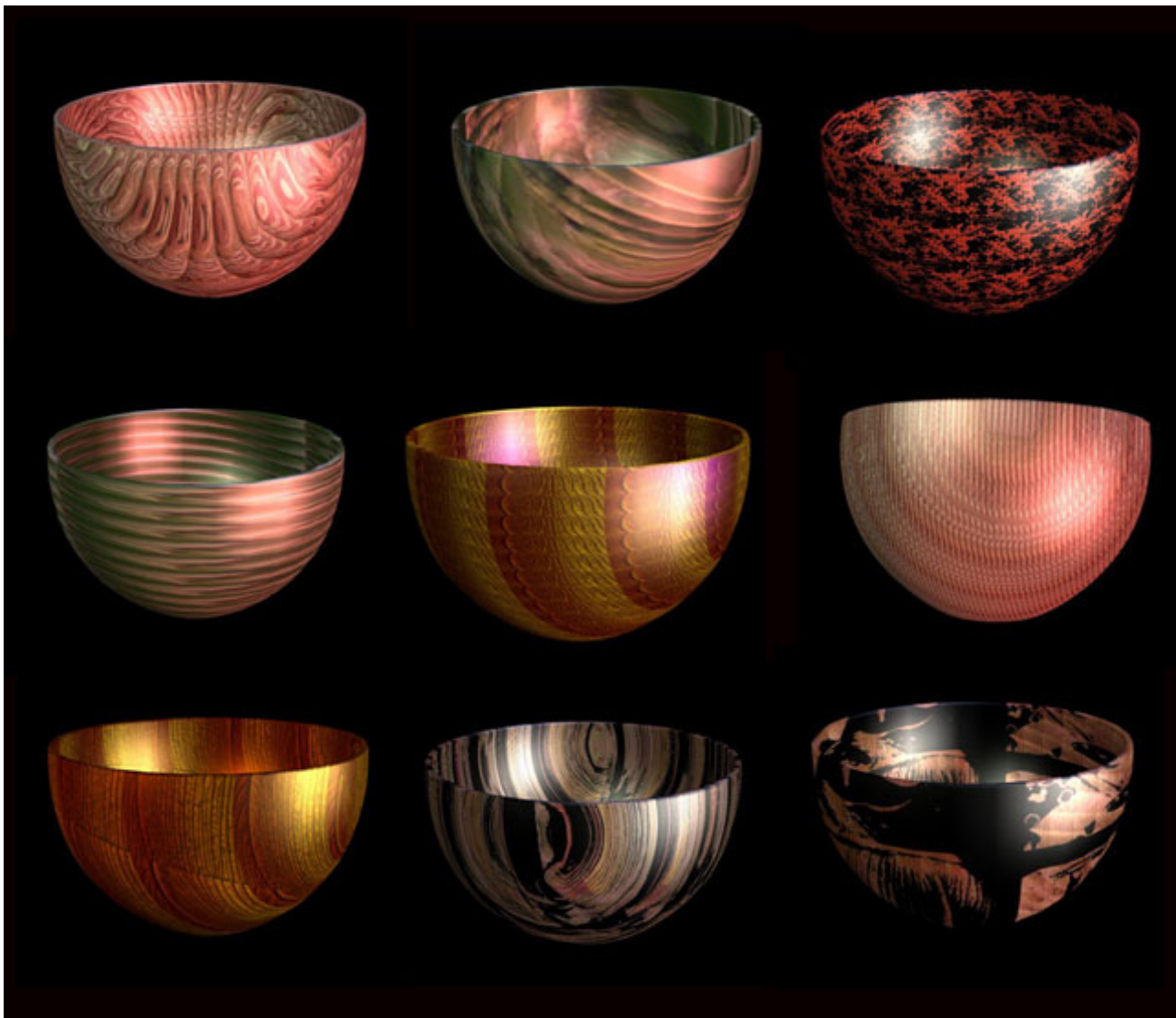


Example of enhancing the above texture in Photoshop before importing.

By creating tiled textures yourself with a texture making program it is possible to produce photo-realistic seamless renders. There are also free textures including wood, downloadable from Internet sources.

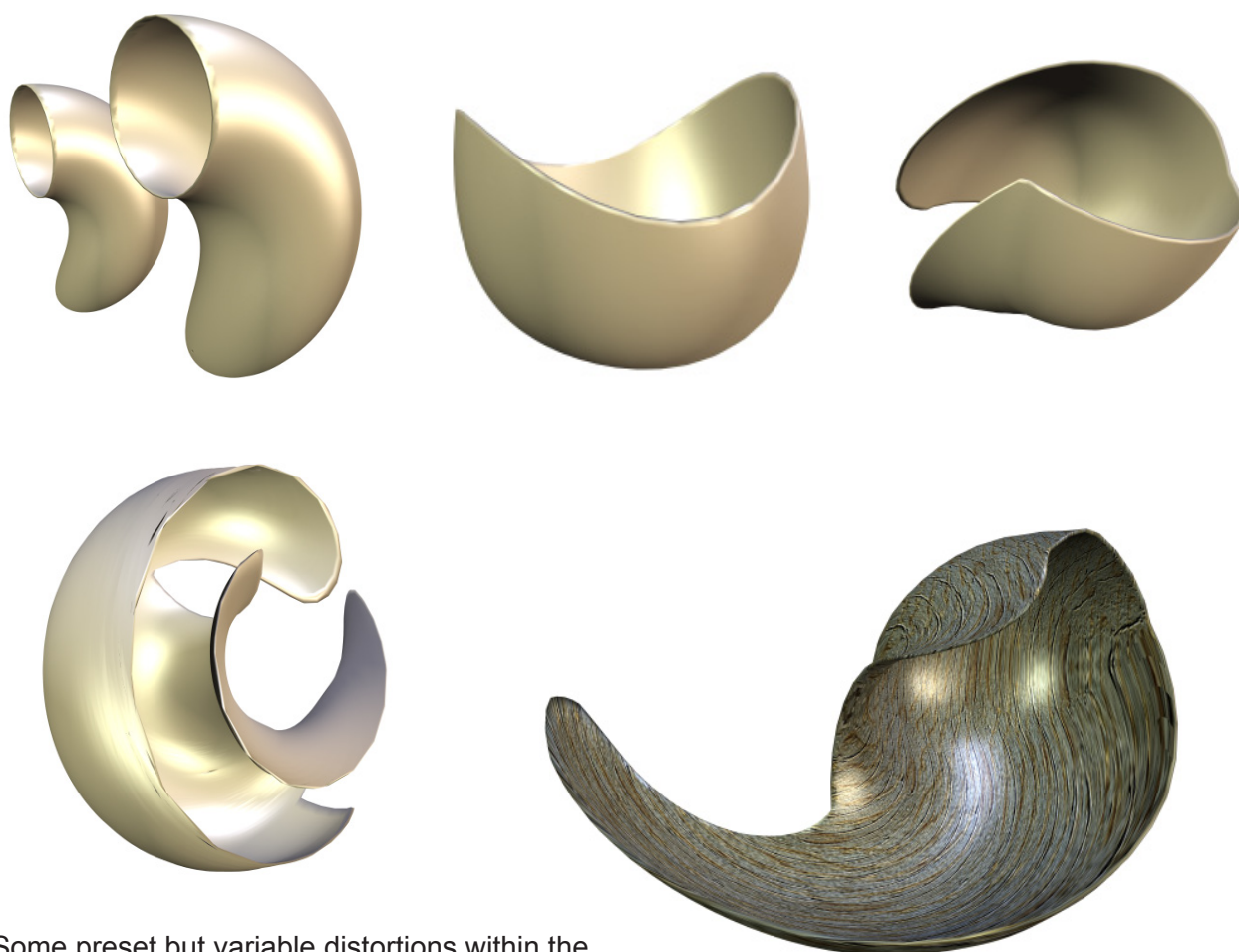
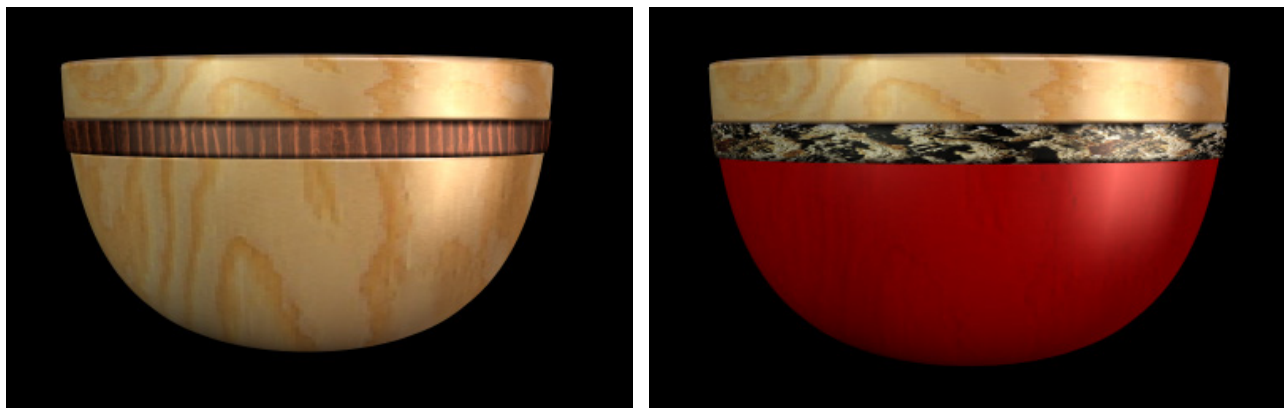
Right is an example of a seamless texture render.

Below is a composite showing various render experiments

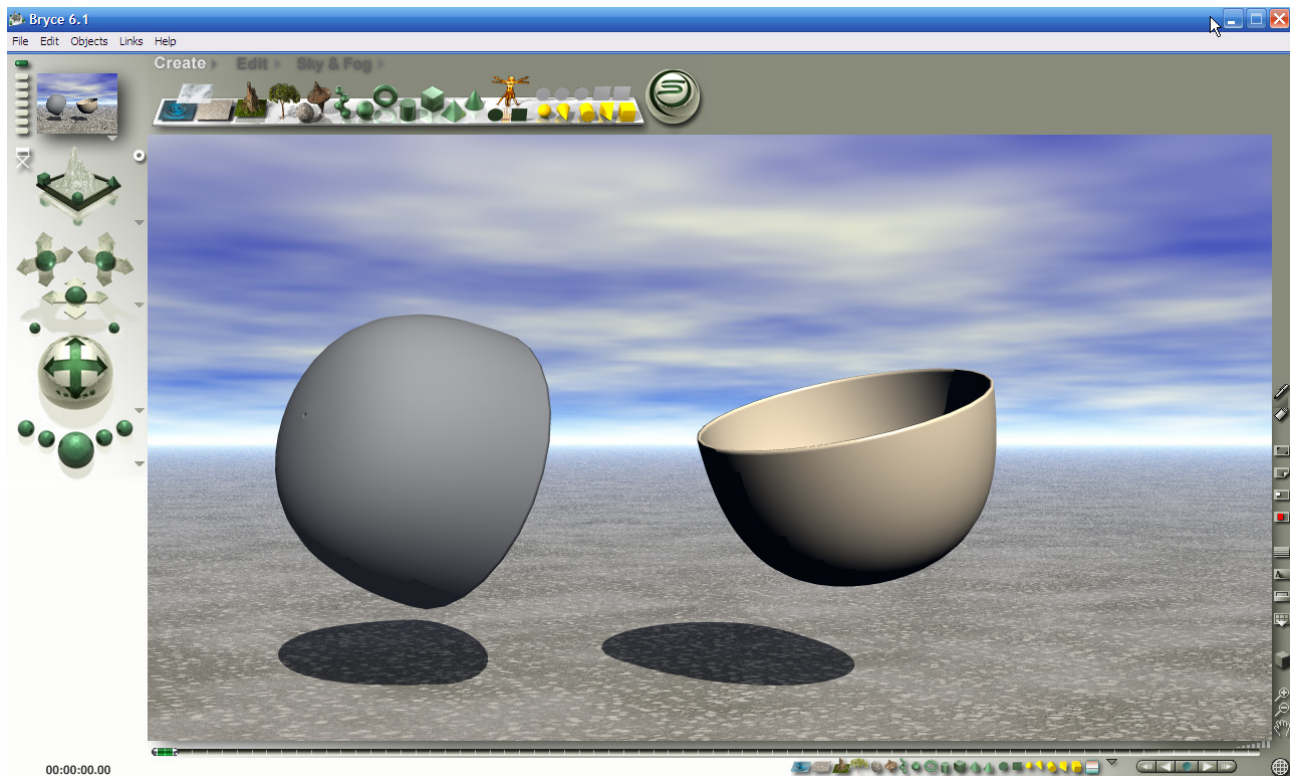




It is possible with a little ingenuity to simulate multiple textures on one piece



Some preset but variable distortions within the program can provide some interesting forms

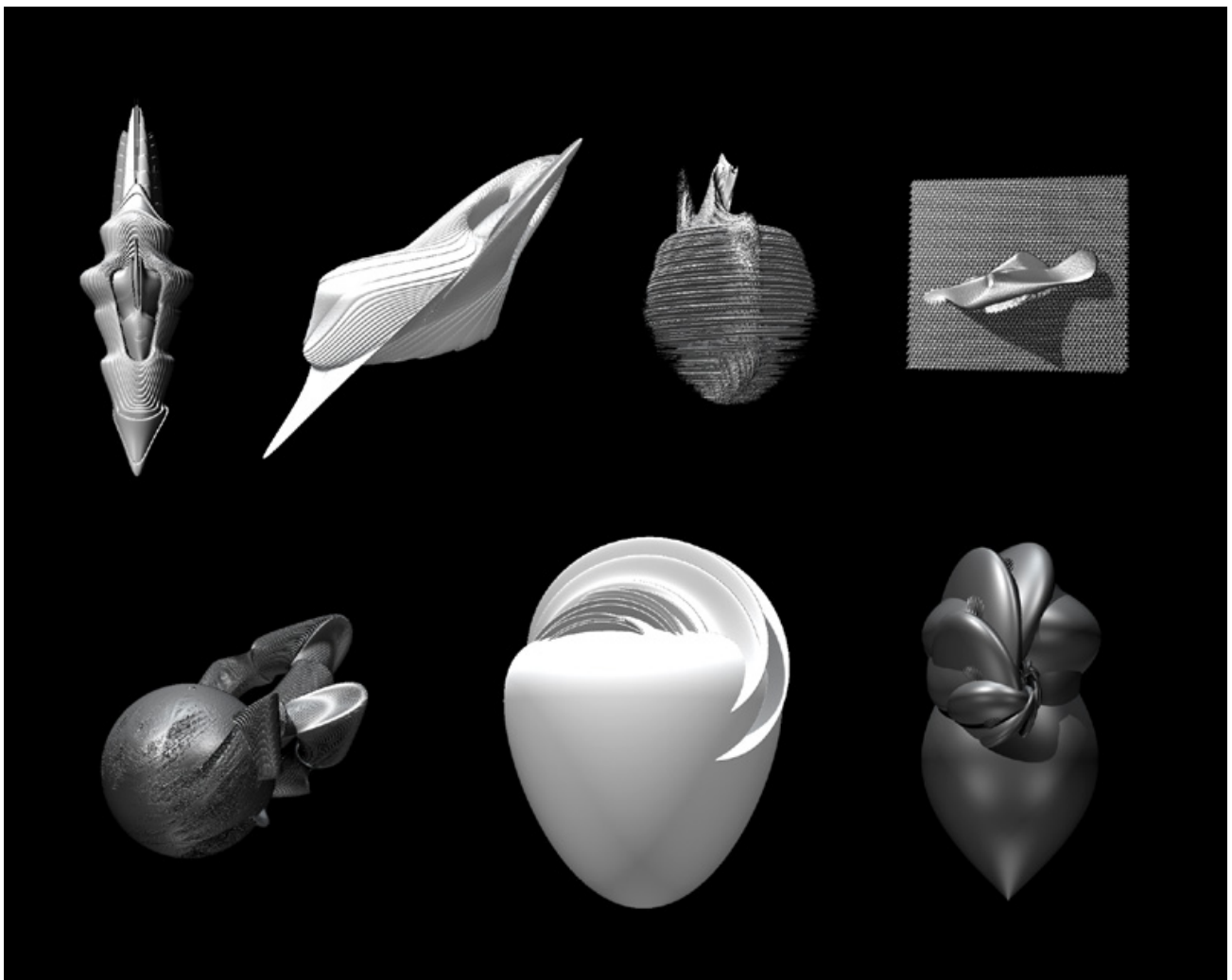


Finally in this section on ULead the bowl form has been exported then imported into Bryce 3D with a basic render. Normal 3D program variations, procedures, more sophisticated texturing and lighting can be applied to the model here.

### Unconventional 3D

There are many other programs that can offer different types of opportunities for creative play. Some are not conventional 3D programs. They produce different types of models and can challenge the way we see things. Sometimes unusual objects appear and as complete pieces may be impossible to turn but they may suggest shapes and textures within them that could be interpreted for turning. Many models may be more sculptural in appearance. Some programs require you to key in strings of numbers and letters to control procedures, others are more user friendly but still difficult to understand. Here are some more unusual shapes from programs I use.

Below you will see some unrendered forms that begin to show the exciting possibilities that are produced if you are prepared to play. These images are not strictly AI they are constructed by the computer against variables keyed into the program. Although it is possible to predict outcomes or partially predict - the surprises gained by random inputs are very satisfying.



Remembering the initial proposals in Parts 1 & 2 on 'seeing' what images, subjects or objects in nature etc. can offer, it will be interesting to look into some of these computer images and see what might be used. Some are more challenging than others and some might alter your view of woodturning or woodturning plus off lathe alterations. These are a few of hundreds of experimental images so far produced. These might challenge the view often heard 'it's all been done before' the computer does not see things the way we do and it can be stimulating to be subjected to a new way of seeing or doing.

Dismissing or not seeing how these relate to woodturning could be an easy option but if you look into the detail there are many small shapes, textures and patterns that can be used for new starting points.

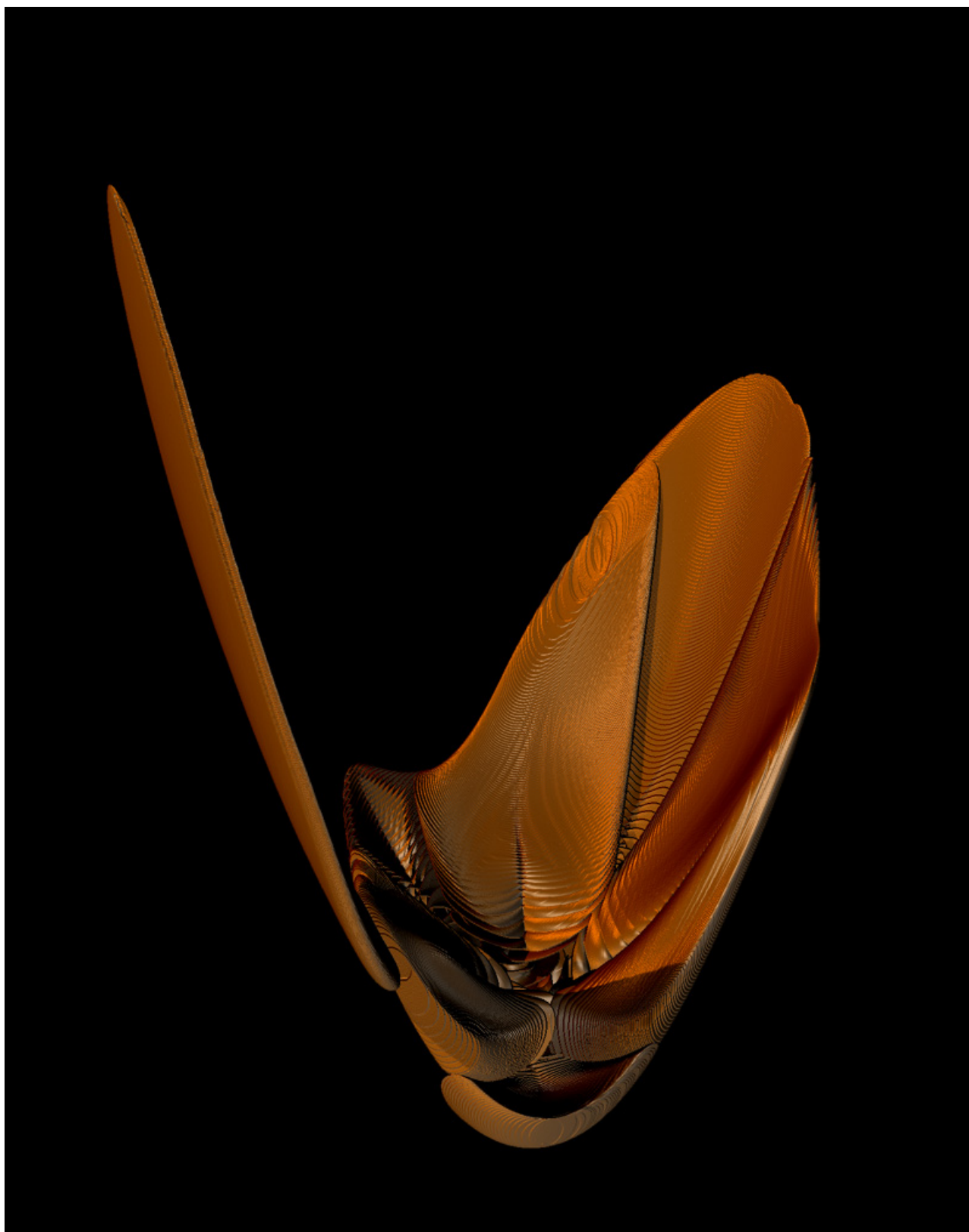
The programs used for these images were designed to produce elements that could be placed into 3D scenes, mostly plant, landscape, planetary and sci-fi type objects. You will see however that more familiar looking things can be produced too.

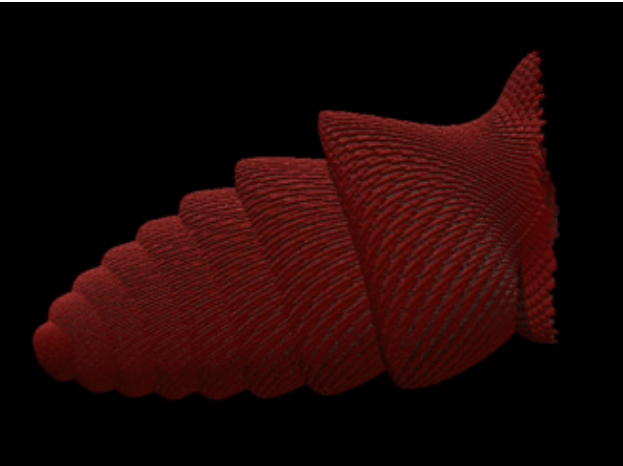
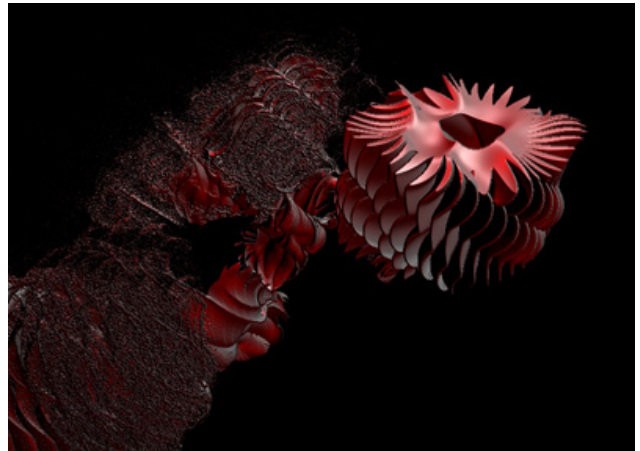
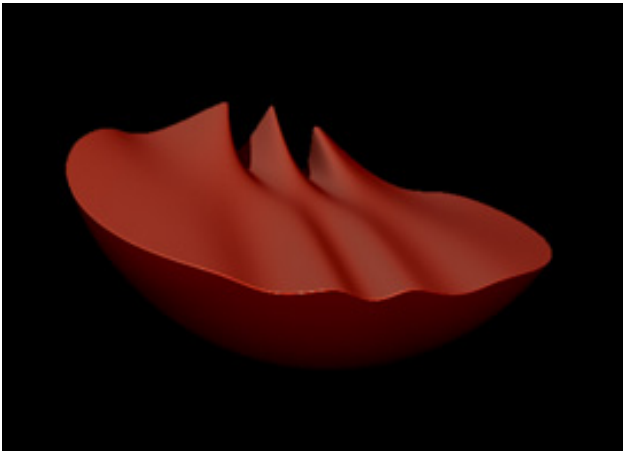
Sometimes the imagination can be stimulated by trying to make sense of unfamiliar things and then trying to apply what looks the impossible into a practical if somewhat simplified solution.

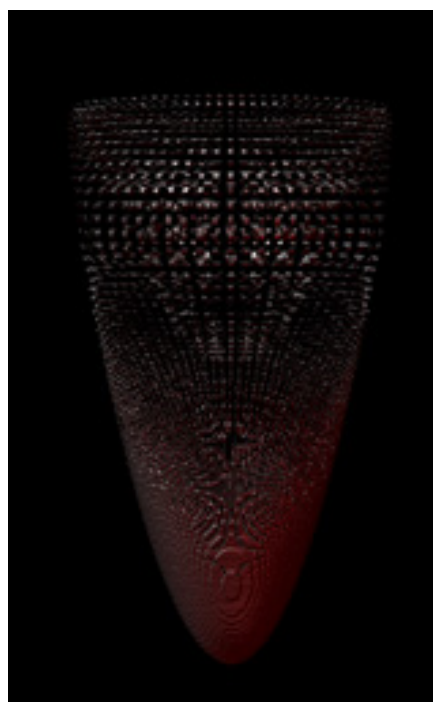
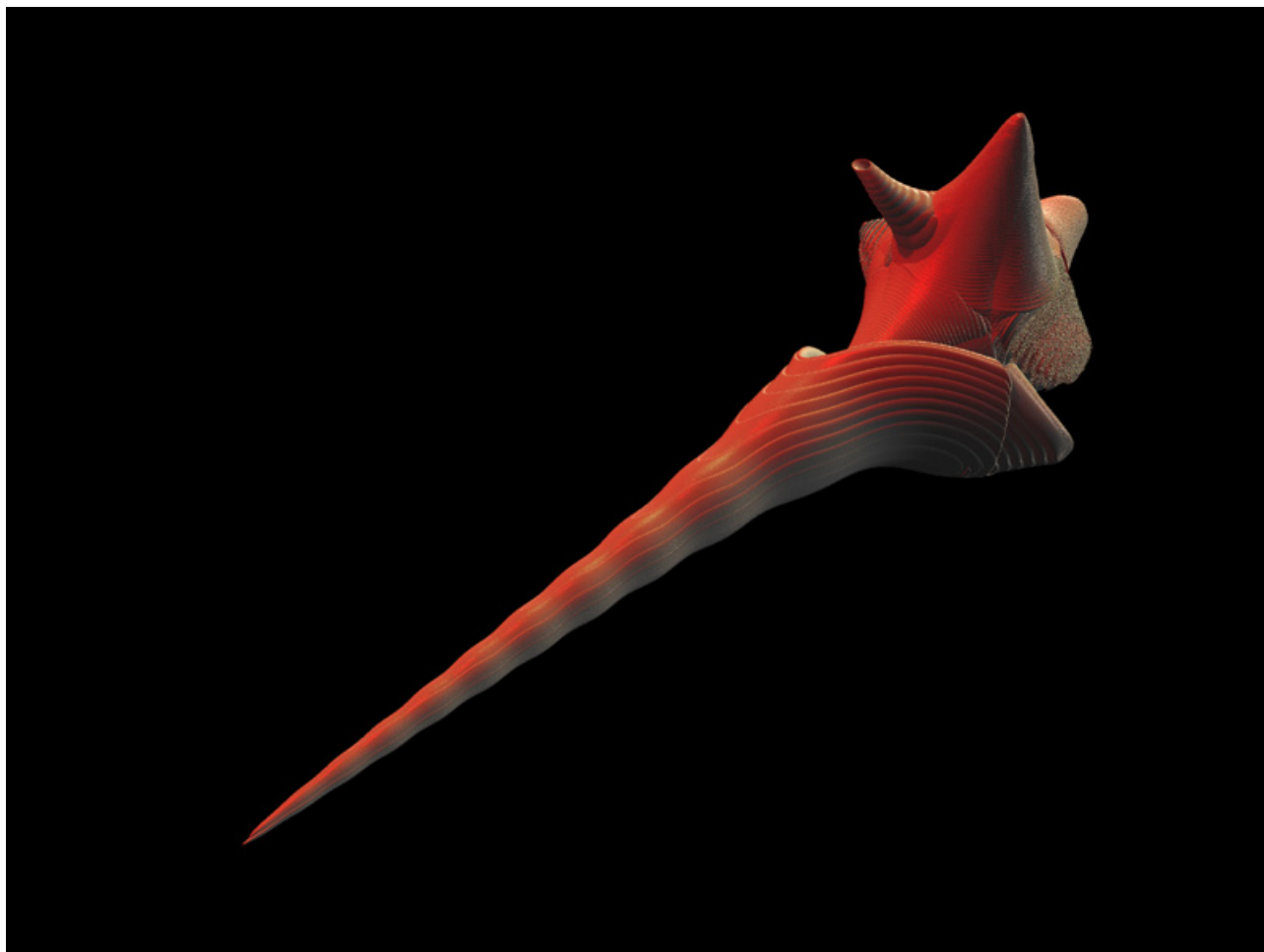
Other crafts are using computer software to solve problems or to investigate ideas - I see no reason why woodturning should be different.

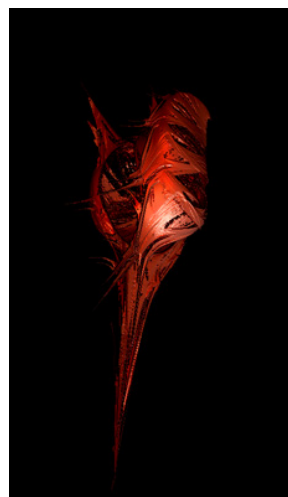
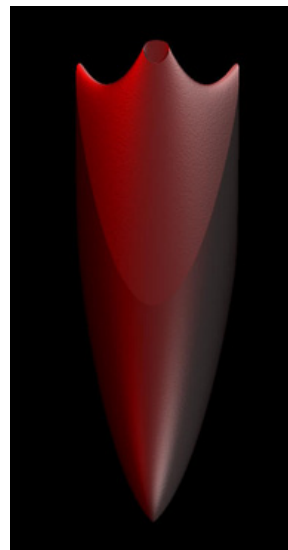
On the following pages you will find a mixture of forms, semi-rendered, some simple, some complex. I have selected pictures to include a wide range of contrasting styles and also featured some objects to show them with more clarity of detail.





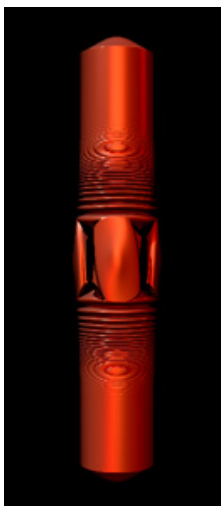
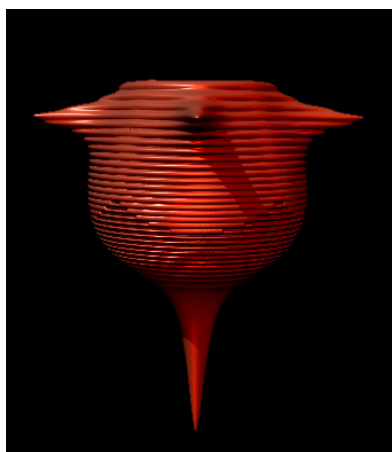
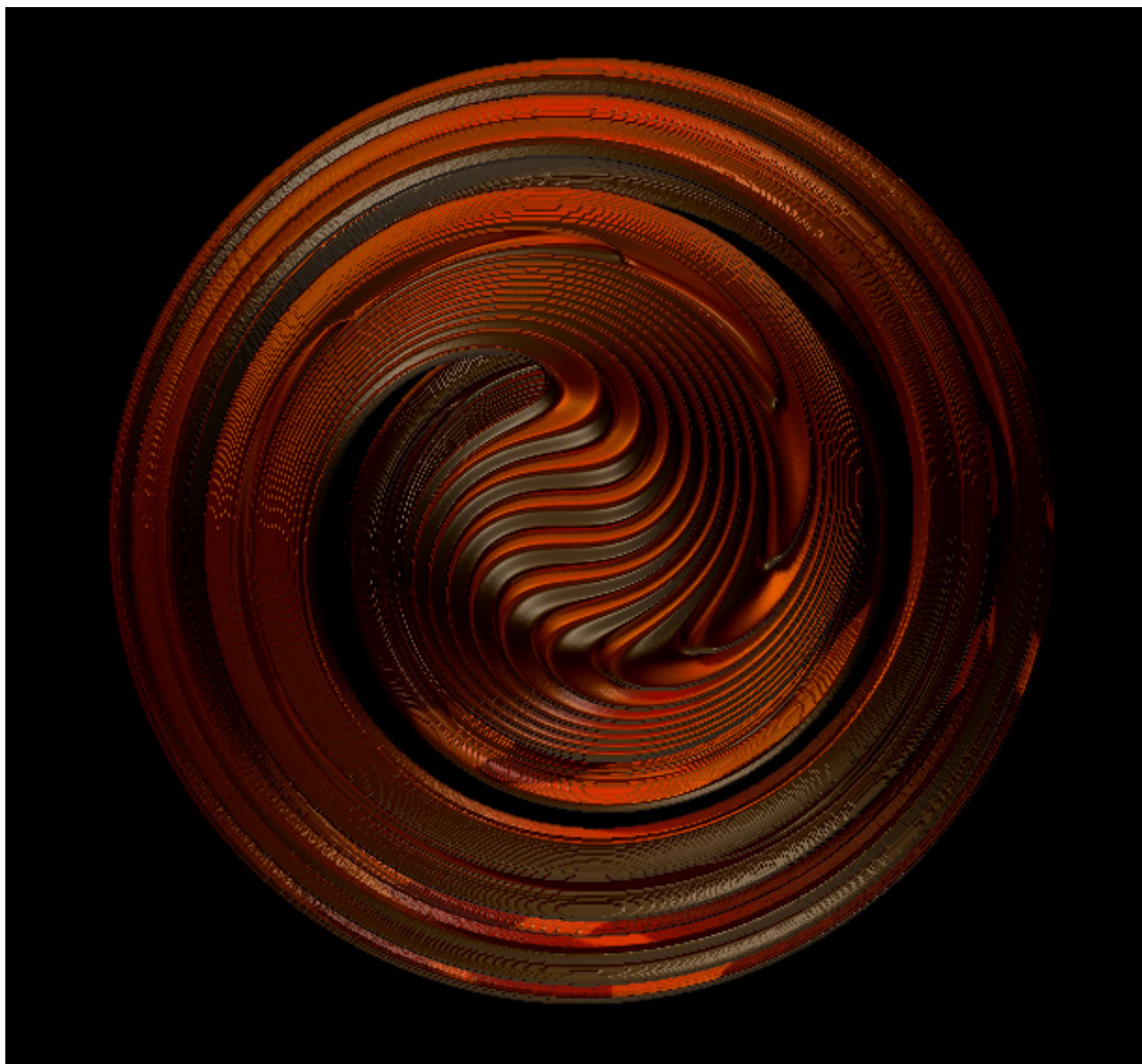


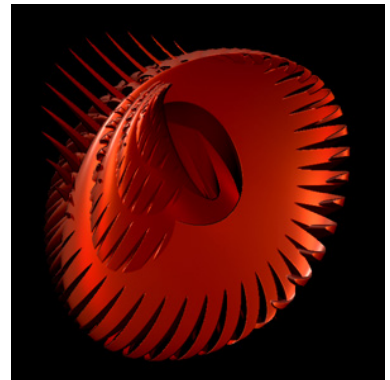
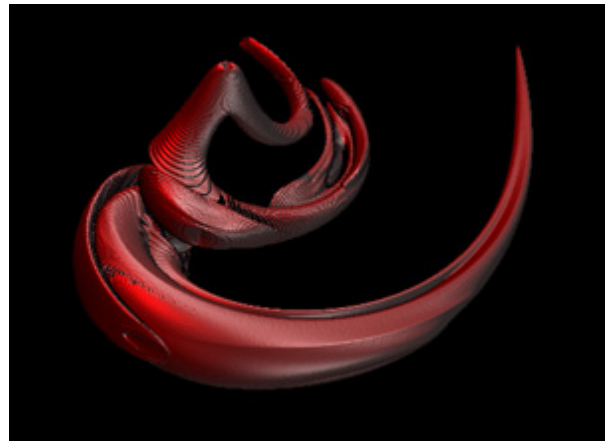
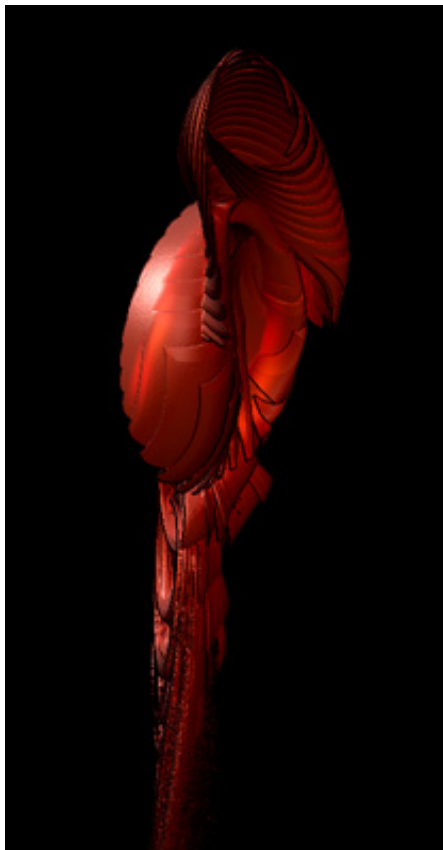
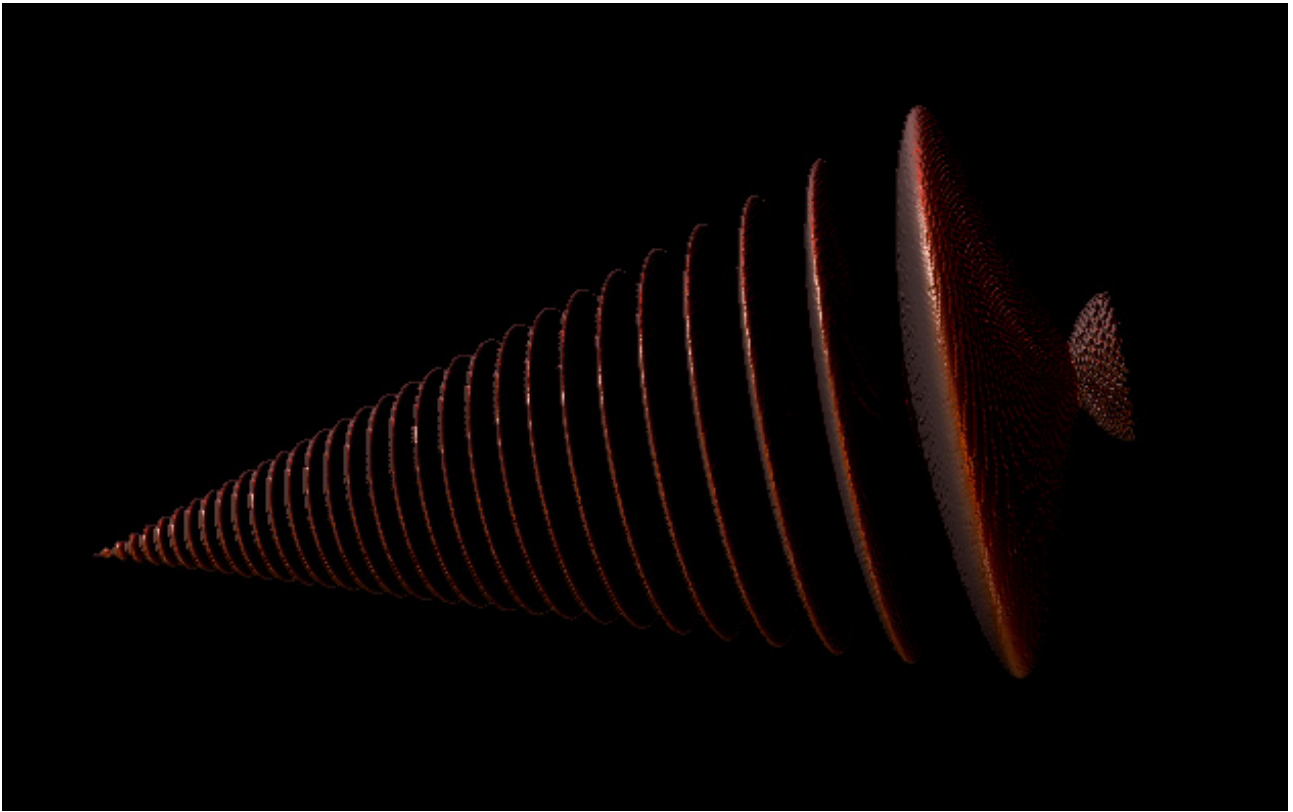




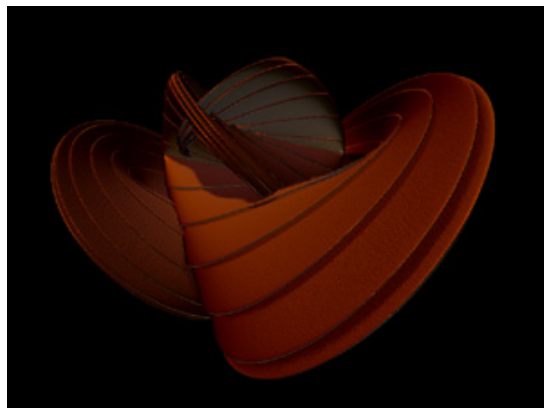
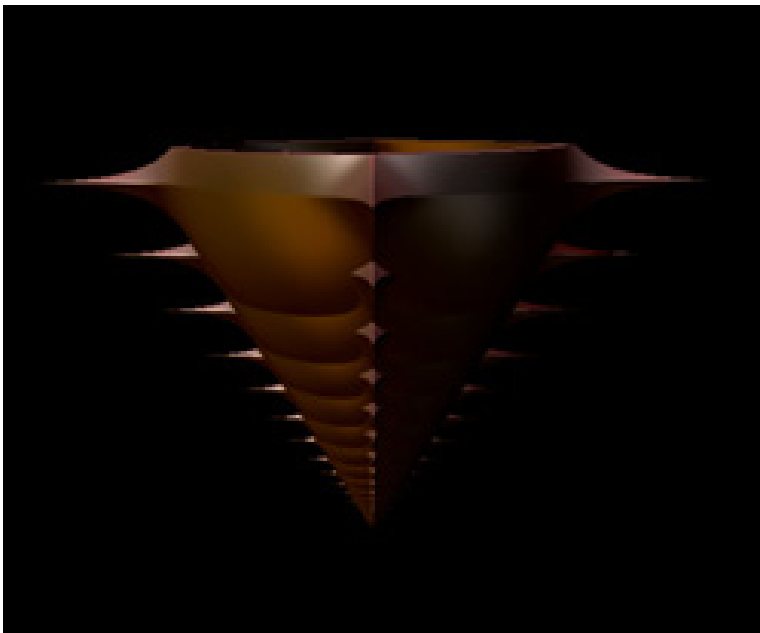
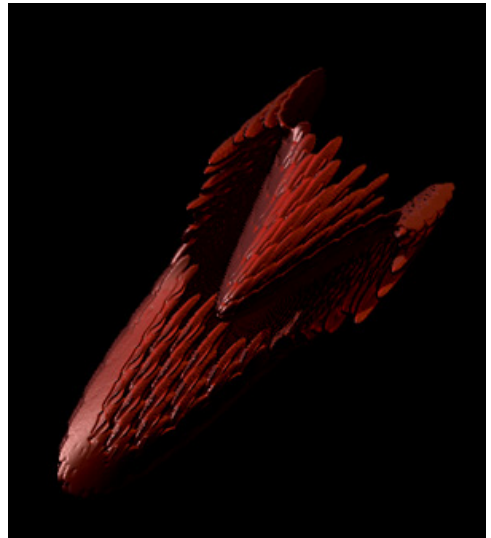
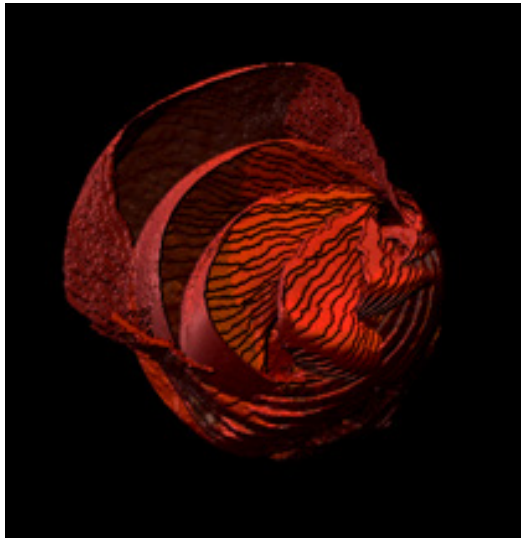


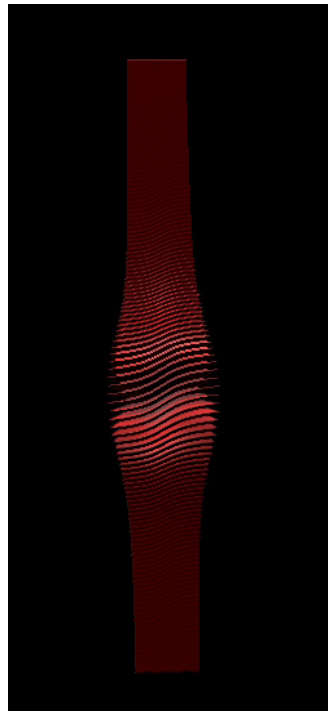
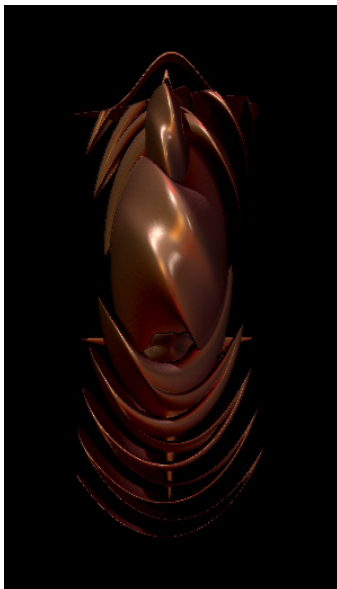
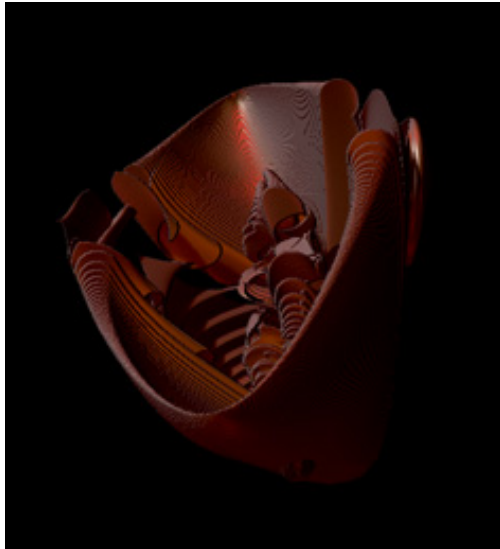


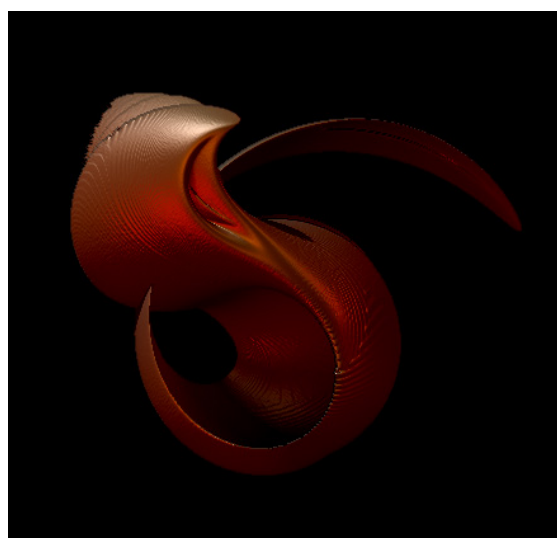
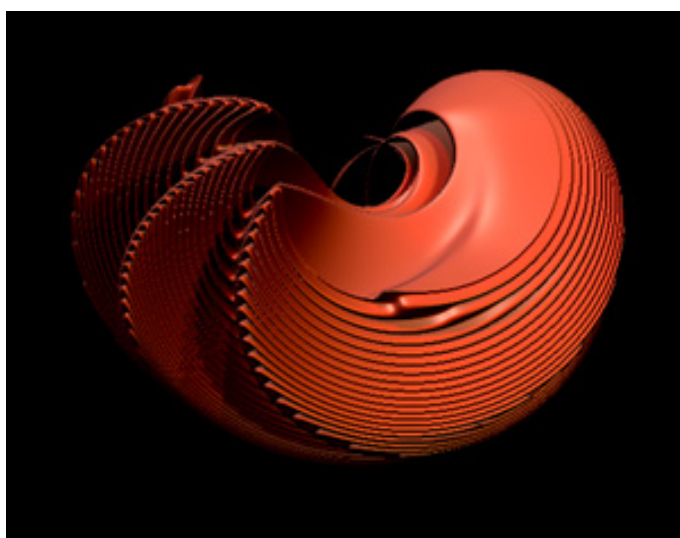
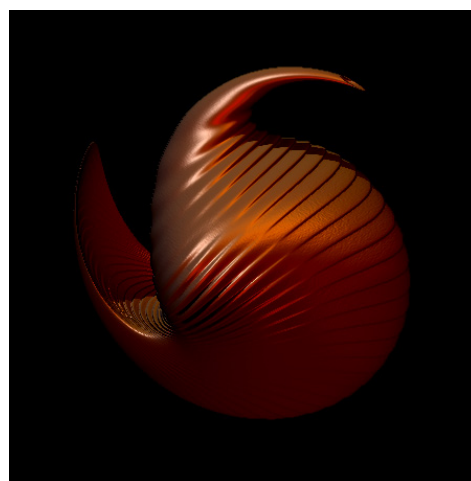
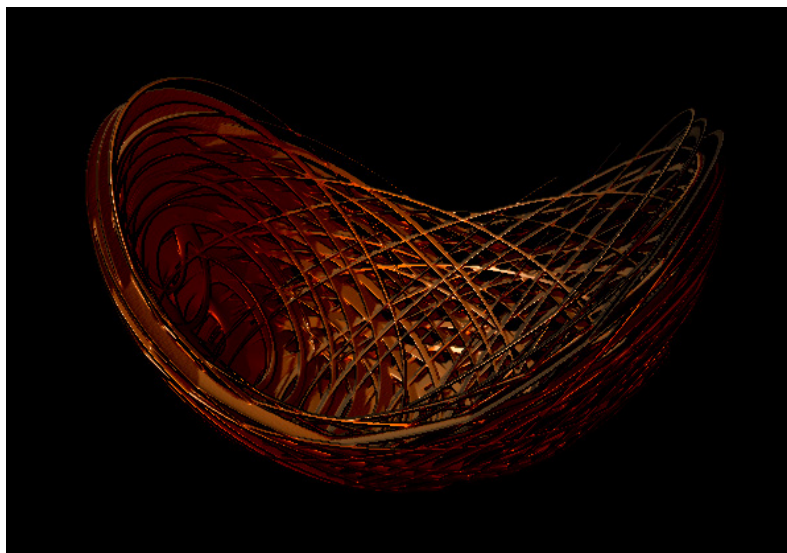
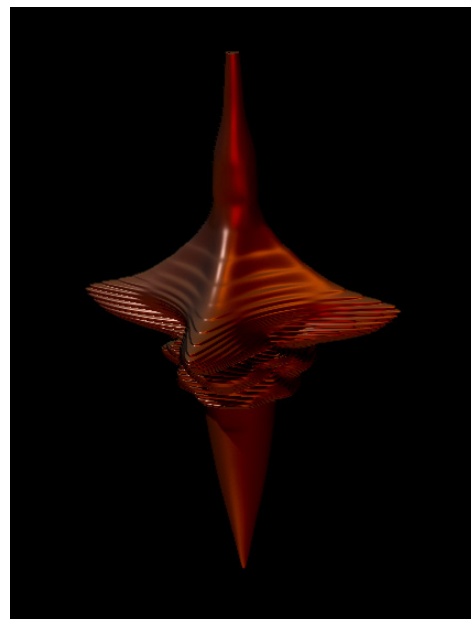
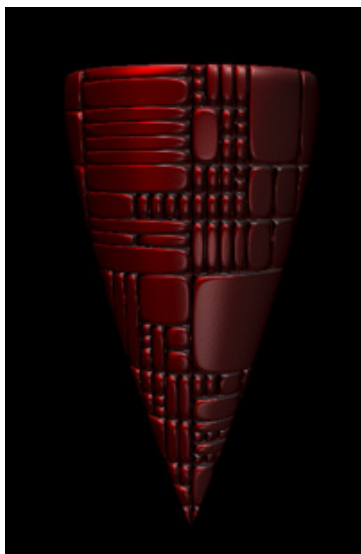
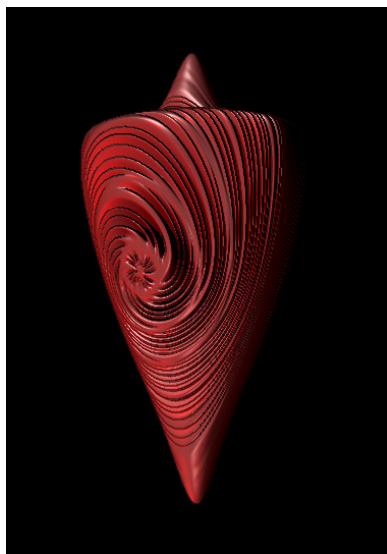


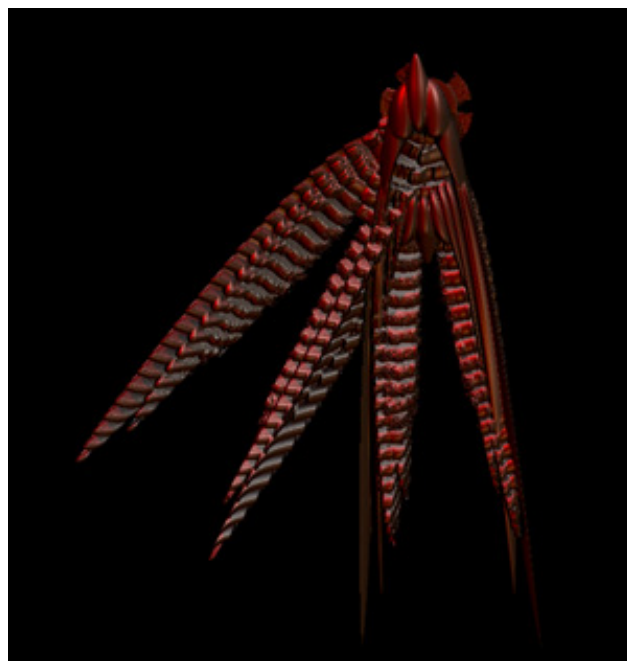
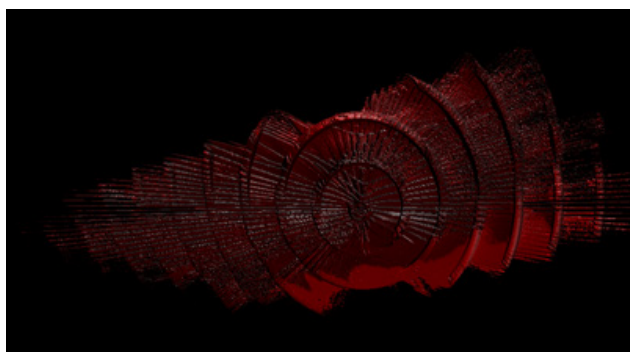
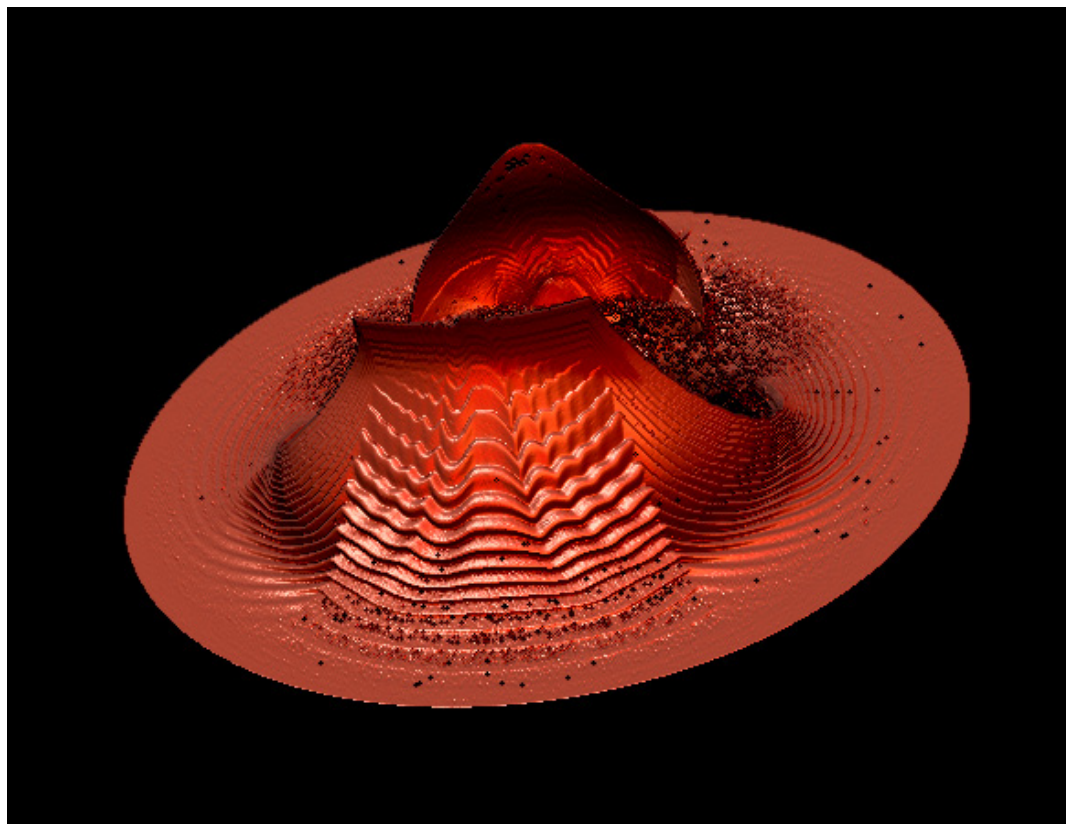














## Summary

By looking through the pictures on the previous pages I hope I will have convinced some that new technology has much to offer the turner in terms of reassessing what might or might not be feasible. Sometimes things only appear feasible if you look at them within the boundaries of a current skill or knowledge base. Sometimes it might be necessary to be creative and invent or modify a method or a process to achieve an outcome.

Looking and then seeing will hopefully cause you to ask questions about what you make. For instance does a turned box always have to be vertical, are there more opportunities for off lathe work e.g. carving or texturing if we reassess off-centre or multi-axis turning/hollowing, can spindle turning be re-visited with different eyes. Some of the outlandish shapes on the previous pages may be possible to interpret and work with if you approach them with an open mind.

By being responsive to new opportunities it is possible to change ingrained thought patterns that may be inhibiting your progress with woodturning. This suggestion is not to say traditional skills are unimportant, obviously the understanding of equipment, materials, tool technique and use is still of paramount importance in any making process. The learning of basic skills and safe practice cannot be avoided and there are no short cuts. Finishing skills are important too. The danger is that if you focus too much on where you work fits within mainstream and prevailing thought and take too much notice of your peers in woodturning, you may soon find yourself unwilling to take risks.

The point I have tried to make throughout this series is that we hopefully progress to a stage where relative competence has been achieved in practical skills. Once we have arrived there, then to move on, some kind of personal vision about what you want to do with those skills becomes important. What you are making then becomes a focus of attention. I hope I have illustrated some paths to success in that endeavour. Design and a creative approach to your work brings many benefits, the main one being the satisfaction that the completed piece is all your own work. The same comments are true whether you choose to produce functional turning or more art based turning. Acknowledgement of current ideas, trends and design styles are key factors if you wish your work to sit comfortably beside artifacts from other craft disciplines.

Each turner has their own way of solving problems, the next section will summarise my working style and describe how one or two of my pieces came to fruition.

### **Some examples and explanations of my work**

It is hard to describe my approach to turning but I will try. I will start from the premise that attitudes to making are the sum total of your previous knowledge, training and experience combined with the current knowledge, appreciation and skill base of the materials and processes you are using.

To put this into context my background is in art, design and teaching so my work will reflect those experiences. Someone from a more technical or practical baseline would probably have a different approach. This is what makes any craft activity diverse and interesting. Woodturning is not unique in being a craft that has many late starters or 2nd career entrants. There are opportunities for all to take an individual path to personal success in making.

In my own case I am best described as one of those late starters in woodturning. My background may cause me to see the craft I am participating in differently from others. I don't see the need to learn every aspect of turning to call myself a turner, be accepted by other turners or to express my ideas. I will only learn what I need to at a particular moment in time to achieve the task I am undertaking or wish to undertake. This may be contrary to the views generally expressed in the UK but it works for me. Much of what I do is off lathe and many of the ideas I have could not be expressed just using wood and lathe techniques.

Working with theories, ideas and mixed media may place contemporary turners in conflict with those who take a more traditional route to express themselves and who may produce functional ware or demonstrate historical methods. This seems to be a shame because the same tools and techniques are being used, it is all turning - just differently expressed.

So, my choice is to work intuitively, responding to the materials and ideas I have while working on a piece. Because my pieces take a long time to produce there is room for change and development to occur during the making activity. What I am observing or using as stimuli governs the outcome. Mistakes I make are sometimes opportunities to change or review the objectives. Overleaf there are a few pictures of my work showing how the objects were conceived and some have work in progress pictures.

It will show how reference, 'looking and seeing' and my background experiences have been applied. Hopefully this will encourage you to apply your own creativity in a thoughtful way to your work in whatever genre you choose.

Let's start with an older piece of work.

This bowl was carved and decorated using direct observation of natural elements. It was produced in response to a woodturning competition brief some years ago. The brief required the solution to reflect an ecological/environmental theme. It was not selected as a prize winner.

The source of the ideas was photographic reference, pictures taken at the coast near to where I live. In the river estuary there are mud pools of varying shape created by the ebb and flow of water combined with riverlets that fill and empty with the tide. At low tide, birds wander round the mud pools looking for food and in doing so leave complex patterns of foot trails, feathers etc. Worms create funnel like eruptions in the mud surfaces.



I have reflected these shapes, patterns and textures in the piece. No preparatory drawings were produced before starting the work. It developed at its own pace while I responded to and interpreted the elements within the reference pictures.

Wood: Mahogany (questionable now as an ecological choice)  
Size: 21 cms dia.





This piece has two components, the first is my liking for beach pebbles. The stone is a hand polished serpentine pebble from Cornwall. Picked up from the beach, coarsely modified with a power file and sanded with various grades of wet and dry paper.

The wooden component surfaced from an error I made. I purchased the piece of Elm as a turning blank and made the mistake of placing it near a workshop heater. The obvious happened and a crack appeared almost overnight. Undaunted I turned the hemispherical shape knowing I could not hollow too deeply into the volume of the blank.

Most cracked or split wood I have seen turned is usually filled with a contrasting material or stitched in some fashion to decorate the fault and appear as a repair or inhibitor. I chose to cut some wedges from ebony and drive these into the crack making it look as though these had caused the split. The colour of the wedges echo the colour of the stone. The split was treated to prevent further expansion. The piece has been stable since its making (several years) and will hopefully remain so. Textured by power and hand wire brushing following the grain

This is an example of accident and chance determining the outcome of a piece.

Size: 23 cms dia. x 15 cms deep



A more recent piece using the same hemispherical form used in the previous piece.

This piece again started with a beach pebble, marble this time collected on a Greek holiday. The stone carving is influenced by a computer image of mine. The carving was done with standard metal work files and polished with successive grades of wet and dry paper. It represents in my mind a kind of seed structure and an emerging form.

The bowl was turned, textured and coloured to be a contrasting container/carrier for the stone. Simply a decorative sculptural piece.

Wood: Sycamore

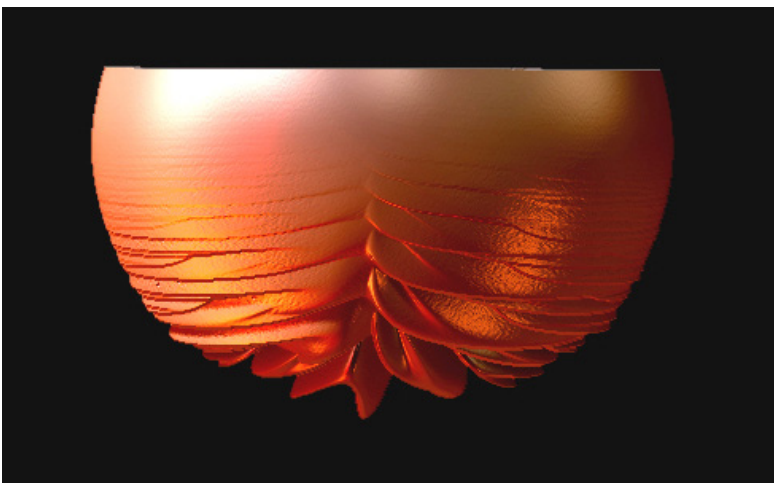
Size: 13.5cms dia x 9cms deep



The stimulus for this piece was a 3D image I created and filed for reference. The view you see offered a point of departure for me. By looking head on to the object I was left wondering what the other surfaces may look like. It required imagination and letting things develop as I worked on it.

As well as the initial 3D image, other influences enter into the process of making. Other artists work (on this piece I was influenced by H.R. Giger's art).

Many day to day thoughts, feelings and activities may add to or subtract from the emotional reaction to what I am doing at any one time. All these factors enter into decision making along my journey to the finished piece and any or all of them will influence my responses to the work piece and to my reflection and assessment of the success or failure of the final outcome. Either way I will try to explain.





This image of the workpiece shows it still on the lathe, fixed to a screw chuck with a recess turned into the base. The intention was to square up the top surface and then use the chucked work on my carving stand - using both the screw chuck or standard chuck - giving me options to work on the piece either way up. As I wished to retain the hemi-spherical form and because it is not a functional item - I didn't want a foot to the form. However, I turned the recess too shallow and when starting to square up the top, the turned piece broke away from the lathe. It was returned to the screw chuck and I removed the recess. First challenge then. I now had to work on the piece upside down only, throughout the initial stages just using the screw chuck i.e. without the option of using the dovetail chuck in the recess and then had less flexibility later on when I began hollowing out the top. It meant holding the piece in one hand while using rotary tools in the other. Not ideal from a Health and Safety aspect but a manageable risk with a gloved hand. I should add here that I always wear safety glasses and a dust mask or respirator at all times when using rotary power tools, substantial quantities of fine dust is generated and there is always the chance of a burr breaking or coming loose in the chuck rotating at high speeds.



The next image shows the initial carving and is my interpretation of the 3D image, simplified in a way that I feel is appropriate to the material and the size of the piece but keeping the spirit of the image. It is using the image as reference point for the development of a sculptural form based on the familiar bowl shape.

The next image shows the development of the bottom surface.



This is where the object begins to build its shape in an organic fashion i.e. there is no further reference or content based on the original image. It now develops from internal references and emotional responses - my imagination of what might have been or be occurring in the unseen parts of the original 3D image.





Next a side view where the carving from the underneath ends with a change in shape and a narrowing down.



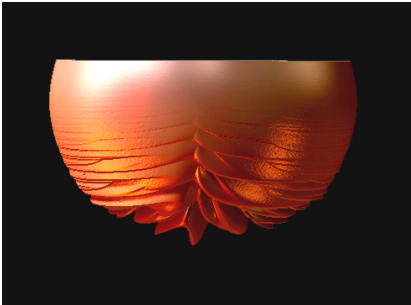
This image shows the form removed from the screw chuck and the start of the carving of bowl recesses on the top surface. Then a deepening and a refinement of the recesses and work not showing, continuing on the other surfaces of the form.



This picture shows work continuing on the underneath surfaces where I am beginning to refine the carving by deepening and reshaping. Further hollowing out under the carving is also continuing.

Having finished the carving I then textured the inner recesses of the bowl forms, refined the tube shapes, hand sanded overall then stained and sealed the surface.

Overleaf you will find pictures of the finished bowl



A reminder of the starting influence

The result is a non-functional decorative bowl, self-balancing with no foot.

Wood: Sycamore

Size: 14cms dia. x 7.5cms deep





### Current work

The piece shown here is from a body of work I am currently producing. I have used the theme of Fetish as the starting point for stimulus and research for this series. This is the test piece for the series and for the sake of description I have given it the title of 'Ritual Vessel'.

It is an example of working with ideas, theories and cultural references.



References for the work include the following:

Selected texts:

Karl Marx on Consumerism

Museum visit and Guide for Musee Quai Branly Paris

Fetish and Erotics of Culture Henry Kripps, Cornell University Press 1999

African Vodun Art, Psychology and Power, Suzanne Preston Blier University of Chicago Press 1995

H R Giger, Taschen 2007

Visual references include museum visits, Internet searches and book references. Examples of Fon Fetish sculptures can be seen below and overleaf reproduced by Courtesy of the Hamill Gallery. Many more African artifacts can be found on the Gallery site. [www.hamillgallery.com](http://www.hamillgallery.com)

Art references are many and varied but include Hans Bellmer, Giger and surrealist sources. Example images of these sources can be found with a Net search.



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So that's the context and where most of the ideas come from but the starting point for the shape was a computer generated object shown left.

I was intrigued by the idea of a tall vase form on top of a base. I have interpreted and developed this into a kind of box/vase/ bowl form. It was spindle turned and then hollowed.

The main features of the final piece are woodturning or wood turned elements. Only the adornments are other materials.

It has been produced using three different woods, tulip wood for the main section, African hardwoods for the base and miniature pieces. Conventional and unconventional methods have been used in the making process. Close observation could reveal faults if you are a perfectionist turner. The finish on the main piece and base has been achieved using stains and shoe polish.

The piece took some 150 hours to complete from idea and experiments to completed piece. Research and reading time is not included.

So those are the factual pieces of information.

The journey from initial ideas to completed piece is difficult to completely describe in words because intuitive working means things change along the way as you respond to the piece and it is a gradual transformation from turned object to a completed expression of ideas.



In reading about Fon Fetish figures it is clear that they express a multitude of complex beliefs found in the culture they originate from. In simple terms they are part of what we would call in the West psychotherapeutic symbolism. Various actions or protections are invested in the piece during the making and activating processes. Adornments describe or have attributions to enhance the power of the sculpture. They can help to overcome problems the purchaser has or invoke good or bad influences on third parties, events or activities. The power of the pieces comes from the belief system the communities have. They can also form part of a divination ceremony.

My piece you see here tries to emulate the primitive power of an object to signify something that is not quite understood. By calling the piece Ritual Vessel the implication is that it might be used for some kind of ceremony.

Clues in the form of adornments expand the possibilities of interpretation. The carving on the lid furthers the intrigue. Elements around the base and inside the lid provide further clues.



So the making process becomes similar in its methodology to that undertaken in forming a Fon sculpture the reduction i.e. of ideas or meanings to symbolism. The difference being the client there would be revealing to the originator the problem or issue they wished to address. Only the two participants would know what the content of the piece was representing or the power/ effect it is intended to invoke. My piece is expressing just my thoughts, reflections and response to the stimuli - it is left for the viewer to decipher meaning.

Materials: wood and mixed media  
Height: 70cms high



If you have found this tutorial interesting or helpful or if you have any suggestions, please let me know. I welcome feedback that helps me in the production of further free publications that may help woodturners.

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