Sanding a Woodturning Prior to Carving

When in 1968 I was learning to carve -- with hand tools -- my mentor, a professional woodcarver, advised me and all of his students to never sand a wood surface prior to carving it. The reason he gave was that the sanding would leave some of the abrasive grains imbedded in the wood which would dull or damage the tool edges.

Now I am learning to carve on turnings with power carving burrs. In discussions with one professional turner/carver I learned that that carver sands the turned surface prior to carving with no noticeable problems. So, I decided to do some research. I sent the following email to both Klingspor Abrasives and to Norton Abrasives. Below are the original email and the responses.

It appears that with modern abrasives sanding a turning prior to carving will not leave abrasive grains imbedded in the surface and so no damage to cutting edges should be experienced. This conclusion is borne out by the experiences of the professional turner/carver with whom I have been communicating.

Original Email

Hello:

I am doing some research on behalf of woodturners who also carve on the surfaces of the turnings.

Hand-held carving tools are made of high-carbon steel while power carving burrs are generally made from carbide or a stone material.

The question that we all have is this:

Most of us make our own sanding pads from the J-weight 9x11 sheets in grits from 80 to 600 and in sizes up to 2 inches diameter. If an artist sands the turning prior to the carving, how much residual grit will be left in the wood after completing the sanding? We are concerned about potential dulling and/or damage to the cutting edges caused by the residue. This would be similar to the effects of carving teak which is notoriously hard on tools.

Reply from KLINGSPOR Abrasives

As far as I'm aware, the woodturners most likely would be sanding with intermediate and finishing grits only as they aren't doing any major

shaping this way. Sanding stars and various fingered mop type tools or even psa or velcro discs are going to have a fairly slow and consistent shed rate during this type of sanding and if being used properly, shouldn't be leaving any abrasive grain "imbedded" in the piece. There may be residual "grain and wood dust" left behind on the surface of the piece, but that could be wiped or blown off prior to using any of the carving tools you speak of. Or at least this has been my experience.

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Reply from Norton Abrasives

No reply received as yet. 4/13/08