

american  
**craft**

Spring 2024

CRAFT THAT CALMS

NAMEPLATE JEWELRY

ELEVATED PIÑATAS

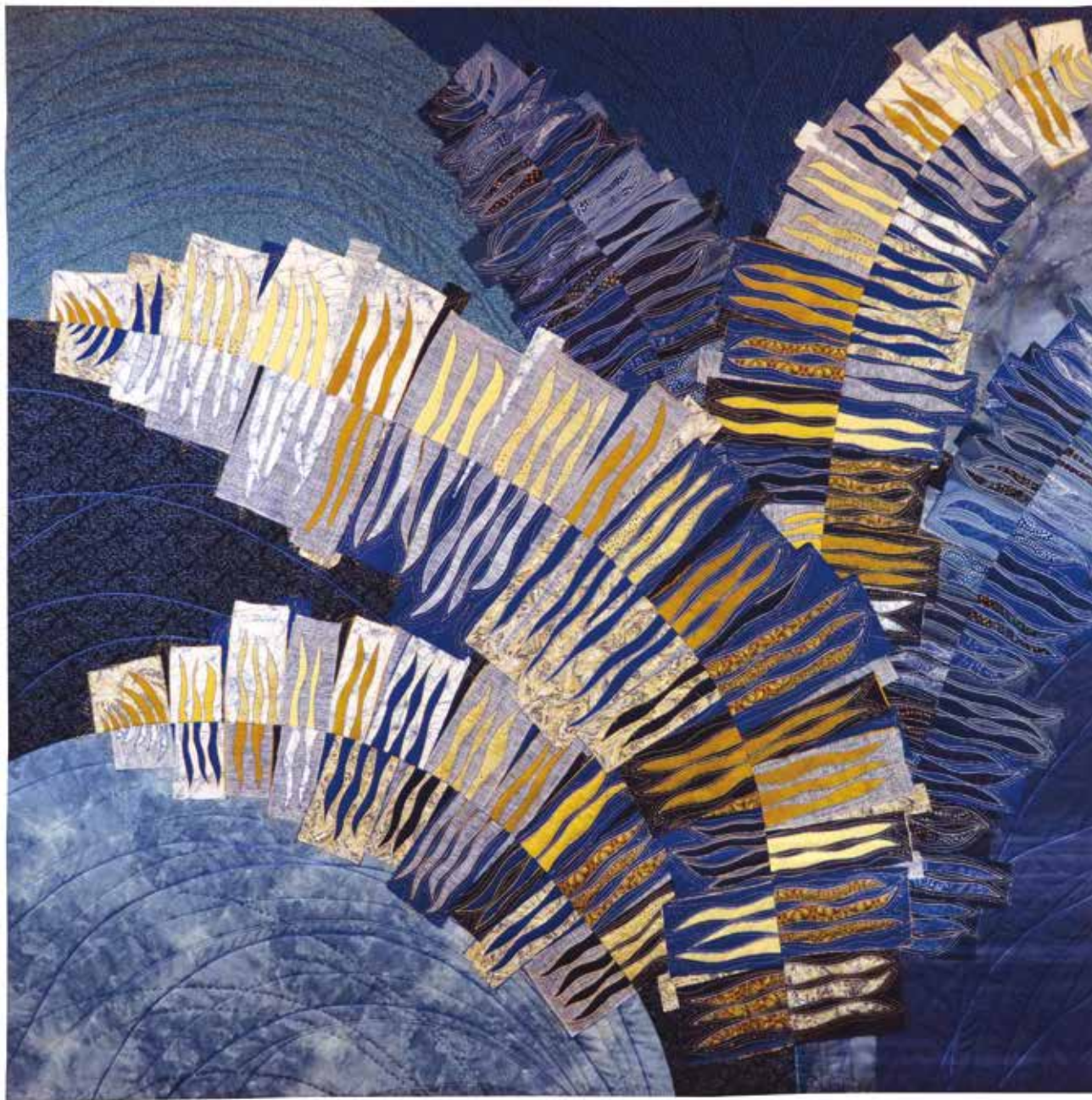
The Power  
of **RITUAL**

Artist Kandy G Lopez  
shares her daily  
creative rituals,  
page 62





Artwork by Noelle Evans



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COURTNEY M. LEONARD

An artist reflects on the ritual practice of making and how craft supports our ability to relate—and heal.



#### ON THE COVER:

Florida artist Kandy G Lopez made *Quavia*, 2023, 60 x 50 in., from yarn, acrylic paint, and mesh canvas. Read about her creative rituals on **page 62**. Photo by Roman Dean, courtesy of ACA Galleries, New York.

**THIS PAGE:** A wood-fired stoneware and wild clay *chawan*, 2023, made by Akira Satake of North Carolina. Read about the art of Japanese tea ceremonies—and more on the craft of calm—on **page 22**.

Photo by Akira Satake.



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## Special Insert: American Craft Council's 2023 Year in Review

TOP: One side of Kiowa jeweler Keri Ataumbi's necklace *Tah's Medicine*. See the other side on [page 8](#). ABOVE RIGHT: Hong Hong made *內/Interiors*, a hand-formed paper work, with the help of the sun. Learn about how she approaches her work on [page 68](#). LEFT: Christopher Kerr-Ayer's whimsical *Coca-Cola Cake and Candle Stand*. Find more candleholders on [page 12](#).





**Ritual.** Before the editorial staff at *American Craft* started work on this issue nearly a year ago, we sought inspiration at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. The exhibition *Eternal Offerings: Chinese Ritual Bronzes* showcased ancient pots, other serving vessels, bells, animal figures, spears, and daggers—stunning metalworks made by hundreds of artisans and craftspeople and used in such settings as temples, banquets, and burial ceremonies. It was powerful to see the way people thousands of years ago honored their ancestors, along with spirits and other intangible forces of life.

Craft and ritual go hand in hand. In all cultures, people create items to help celebrate and mourn, to tend to themselves, and to connect with others. To make this issue, we sought craft at the center of personal, cultural, and spiritual rituals.

Here you'll discover the kinds of objects artists make in order to help us reflect and relax, relate and heal; why nameplate jewelry is so important in Chicano/a culture; the role seder plates play in Jewish traditions; how a monastery is incorporating mentorship into a new center devoted to wood-working and pipe organ building; how the piñata form is being reimagined as high art; and the ways one artist explores spirituality through Egyptian and Islamic ceramic traditions.

When we asked people what first came to mind when considering “craft and ritual,” many said that drinking coffee each morning out of their favorite handcrafted mug was one of the most significant rituals of their day. Clearly, we create rituals both big and small in our lives and our work. With that in mind,

Roberto Benavidez works on a commissioned piñata in his Los Angeles home studio. Learn more about his work—and the history of piñatas—on page 30.

we asked three artists to write about the rituals that spark their creativity.

Just as we were wrapping up the Spring issue, I participated in a beginners wood-working class at the North House Folk School in Grand Marais, Minnesota.

Jim Sannerud, the instructor, mentioned Rick Rubin's *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*, a book sitting on my desk that I had yet to open. Jim's copy was smudged, highlighted, and filled with Post-it notes. Because he found himself looking to the book again and again, he decided to turn reading it into a ritual. Each morning before he goes to the shop, he stops everything else and reads from it, which he says helps him begin his work from a more creative space.

While finishing this note, I opened *The Creative Act* to these words: “To support our practice, we might set up a daily schedule, where we engage in particular rituals at specific times every day or week. The gestures we perform don't need to be grand. Small rituals can make a big difference.” They help us become more aware and mindful. The point, Rubin writes, is to “evolve the way we see the world when we're not engaged in these acts.”

We hope you discover new ways of thinking about craft and ritual in this issue, and that you're inspired to look at their roles in your own life.

*Karen*

KAREN OLSON / Editor in Chief



# american craft

## EDITORIAL

**Karen Olson**  
Editor in Chief

**David Schimke**  
Managing Editor

**Jennifer Vogel**  
Senior Editor

**Shivaun Watchorn**  
Associate Editor

**Loma Huh**  
Copy Editor

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Proofreader

**Outside the Box Designs**  
**Lisa + Adam Maurer Elliott**  
Art Directors

**Rachel Messerich**  
Programs Manager,  
Legacy and Editorial,  
American Craft Council

**Beth Goodrich**  
Librarian

## PUBLISHING

**Hervey Evans**  
Publisher  
[hevans@craftcouncil.org](mailto:hevans@craftcouncil.org)

**Joanne Smith**  
Advertising Sales Manager  
[jsmith@craftcouncil.org](mailto:jsmith@craftcouncil.org)

**Carolyn Huber**  
Membership Coordinator,  
American Craft Council  
[chuber@craftcouncil.org](mailto:chuber@craftcouncil.org)

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[craftcouncil.org/Submissions](http://craftcouncil.org/Submissions)  
**Feedback:** [letters@craftcouncil.org](mailto:letters@craftcouncil.org)

Address unsolicited material to:  
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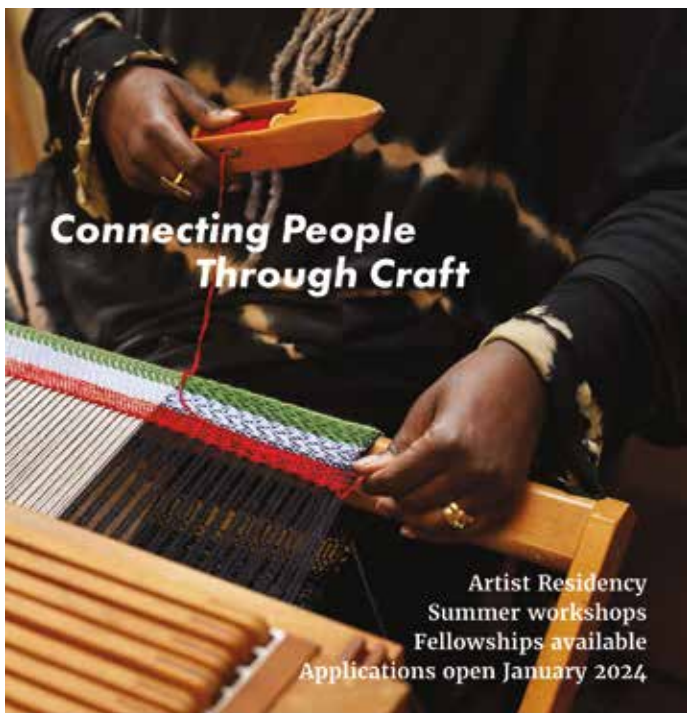
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## CONTRIBUTORS

Meet some of the many writers, artists, and photographers who contributed to this issue.



**James Bernal** of Los Angeles photographed Benning Violins for our Fall 2023 issue. Now we feature the Colombian American photographer's portraits of Roberto Benavidez, who makes stunning piñatas, some of them based on figures in paintings by Hieronymus Bosch. Bernal's work has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and more, and he teaches photography workshops for *National Geographic*. **page 30**

In 2020, publisher Peter Schiffer was at an American Craft Council show in Baltimore and met former Pentagon attorney **Jim Cohen**, now a metalsmith in Durham, North Carolina. Over the ensuing months, the two collaborated on Cohen's *Modern Judaica* (Schiffer Publishing, 2022), which features sacred Jewish objects from 53 artists. In this issue, with Passover approaching, Cohen writes about contemporary seder plates. **page 44**



We reached out to ceramist and filmmaker **Courtney M. Leonard** (Shinnecock Nation) and asked her what she wanted to say to the craft community. The result is an essay that invites relational thinking. Leonard's work is in collections including those held by the US Department of State's Art in Embassies, the Heard Museum, and the Peabody Essex Museum. She is an assistant professor of art and art history at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. **page 50**

Alongside essays by ceramist Horacio Casillas and paper artist Hong Hong, multimedia artist **Kandy G Lopez** gives readers an inside look at the rituals involved in creating her work. Lopez, whose fiber portrait appears on the cover of this issue, is an associate professor and program director of art and design at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. **page 62**



Twin Cities-based photographer **Caroline Yang** drove through snow and ice to document the gorgeous new woodshop and pipe organ-building program at Saint John's Abbey. Yang has shot for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Outside* magazine, and other publications. She recently photographed Amber M. Jensen for our Winter 2024 issue. **page 54**





## Letters from Readers

### Kudos on the Winter 2024 Issue

I think the issue was the best yet. My grandson is spending Christmas in New Orleans, so he got to read about that (“The Scene: Craft in New Orleans”); and my daughter is a new weaver, so she got the issue next (“Immersed in Beauty”) and has since joined the American Craft Council. Your magazine has become a family experience. Maybe next time you could include something about glassblowing, another grandson’s passion. I couldn’t be happier.

—Jacqui Ross, Berwyn, Illinois

This was a very nice edition! As a fellow “Illuminator,” I was particularly intrigued by your feature on lighting (“The Illuminators”). Keep up the good work!

—Art Killian, Heyworth, Illinois

### For the Record

First, let me express gratitude for the inclusion of my work, *Carpenter Gothic #2*, in Jon Spayde’s article “Light Houses” in the Winter 2024 issue. Of the few magazines I subscribe to, I’m most delighted to discover copies of

*American Craft* in my mailbox, and it’s a great honor to be featured inside.

I do want to offer for the record a slight correction. While I believe, as was quoted, that stud-framing is an amazing invention, I would not go so far as to say it takes “more skill than post-and-beam.” Indeed, one of the most valuable features of stud-frame construction is its accessibility. A reasonably handy person can pick up a set of simple tools and build a basic stud-frame structure without years of training. It is a democratized way of building.

Of course there are degrees of difficulty to any task, and while the inclusion of nonlinear surfaces creates additional levels of challenge, the same would be true of a curved post-and-beam.

A small correction, but an important distinction.

Thank you for your work highlighting the many-faceted community of artists, makers, and more. I eagerly watch my mailbox in anticipation of the next issue!

—Ted Lott, Grand Rapids, Michigan



### Cheerful About Crankies

I was so happy to see the article about crankies (“Hand-Turned Tales”). I have always been fascinated by them. In fact, I created my own crankie with a 14.5-foot quilted textile. I decided to motorize it since hand cranking became a problem with that length and depth. It is called *I watch too much tv news*.

You can see it in action on my YouTube channel (@PaulaKovarik). Thank you for always surprising me with new artists and ideas.

—Paula Kovarik, Memphis, Tennessee

While designing a video sequence of historical photos to be projected onto a large window of Newport, Oregon’s Pacific Maritime Heritage Center (operated by the Lincoln County Historical Society), which was to be viewed from the street during the evenings of our darker months, I faced a challenge.

Namely, I was contending with visual interference from ambient light from our local crab fleet docked along the bayfront, as well as from varying amounts of moisture in the atmosphere. Depending on the conditions, it could be difficult to make out the figures and objects in photos from the street below.

Feeling stuck on this technical issue, and also a bit at sea (so to speak) creatively, I took a break and randomly opened my new issue of *American Craft* to land on your wonderful piece about crankies (“Hand-Turned Tales”). This solved my problem! In the spirit of crankies, I created animated silhouettes of the primary figures in the images, which then resolve into the original photos.

I loved referencing this historical American folk art form, which not only serves as a visual aid, helping viewers interpret the images, but also draws the viewer in, wondering what the silhouetted figure might become. You can see the effect at [carolshenk.com/moving-image](http://carolshenk.com/moving-image)

—Carol Shenk, Newport, Oregon

### Talk to Us

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Kiowa jeweler Keri Ataumbi's necklace *Tah's Medicine*, 2017, is one of 75 3D works in *To Take Shape and Meaning* at the North Carolina Museum of Art.

## Craft Happenings

### MARCH

#### **To Take Shape and Meaning: Form and Design in Contemporary American Indian Art**

North Carolina Museum of Art  
Raleigh, North Carolina  
March 2–July 28, 2024

According to its organizers, this gathering of major contemporary Native American artists emphasizes “the wide range of Indigenous world views, ideas, experiences, traditions, cultures, and media” and “the continuity and evolution of Native art.” The works, by the likes of Virgil Ortiz, Raven Halfmoon, Jeffrey Gibson, and Preston Singletary, include many craft and craft-related pieces.

#### **Weaving Abstraction in Ancient and Modern Art**

Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York, New York  
March 5–June 16, 2024

This show juxtaposes pieces by Anni Albers, Sheila Hicks, Lenore Tawney, and Olga de Amaral with Andean works from the first millennium BCE to the 16th century, of which the four pioneering 20th-century artists were avid students. The goal, say organizers, is to illuminate connections and “reposition . . . textiles in global art history.”

#### **Layered Legacies: Quilts from the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts at Old Salem**

North Carolina Museum of Art  
Raleigh, North Carolina  
March 9–July 21, 2024

On view here are more than 30 bed coverings and related objects from a major Southern museum of decorative arts. Bolstered by research on the lives of the women—enslaved or wealthy, Black or white—who created the works, the exhibition aims to illuminate women’s history between the 18th and mid-19th centuries south of the Mason-Dixon Line.



**Joyce J. Scott:**  
**Walk a Mile in My Dreams**

Baltimore Museum of Art  
 Baltimore, Maryland  
 March 24–July 14, 2024

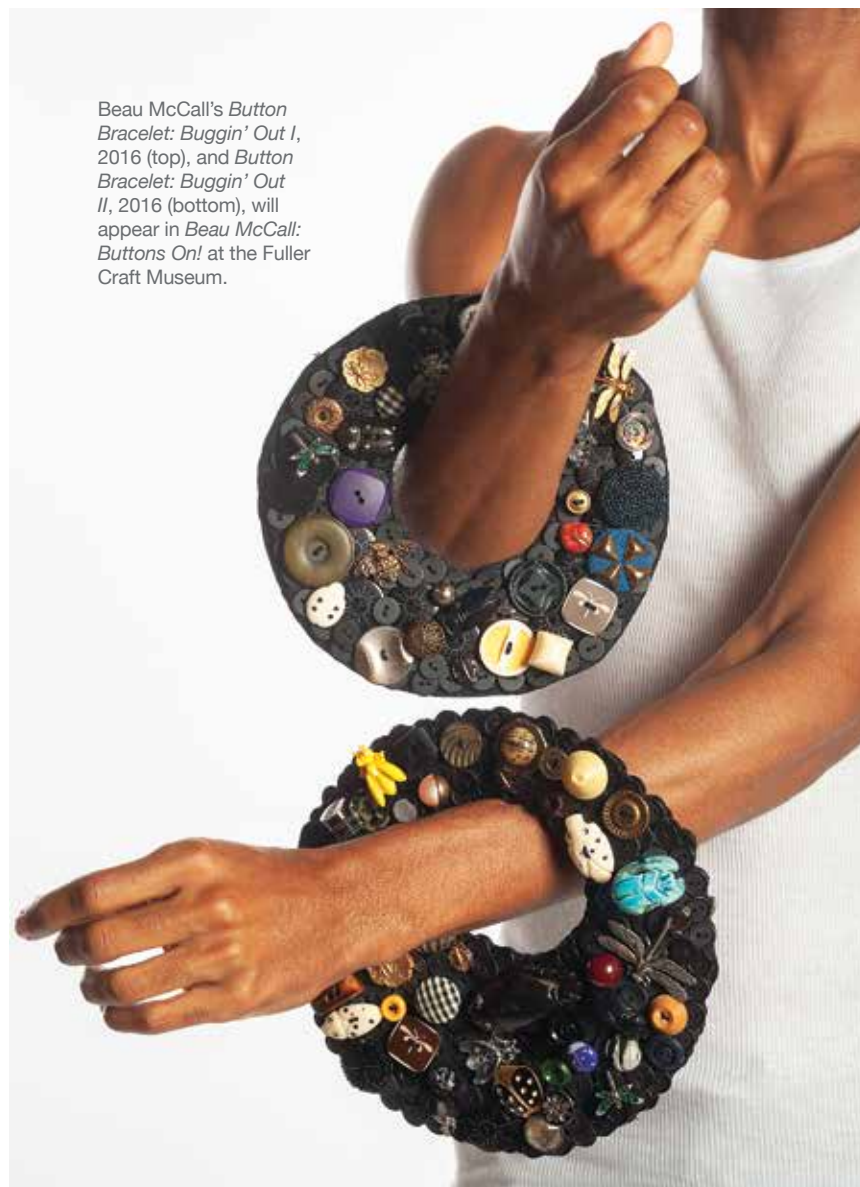
Scott continues a long family tradition of making beautiful objects as a way of surviving and thriving despite the enormous obstacles placed in the way of Black Americans throughout history. Covering half a century of this multifaceted artist's output, the exhibition will include more than 120 works, including stand-alone and wearable sculptural pieces, garments, prints, performance footage, and material from the artist's personal archive. It follows on the heels of an exhibition of work by her mother, the fiber artist Elizabeth Talford Scott, also at BMA.

**Beau McCall: Buttons On!**

Fuller Craft Museum  
 Brockton, Massachusetts  
 March 30, 2024–February 2, 2025

Dubbed “The Button Man” in a 2018 *American Craft* article, McCall creates quirky works by sewing vast numbers of buttons onto various materials and objects. Button-bedecked jackets, vests, yokes, shorts, aprons, sneakers, jewelry, and do-rags will be on display in the artist's first retrospective, along with an installation featuring more than 100 jars full of buttons—and some buttonless artworks, too.

*Layered Legacies* at the North Carolina Museum of Art includes this 1846 hand-pieced cotton quilt, 116.5 x 100 in., from the household of Margaret Ann Bynum Jordan Ridley in Southampton County, Virginia.



Beau McCall's *Button Bracelet: Buggin' Out I*, 2016 (top), and *Button Bracelet: Buggin' Out II*, 2016 (bottom), will appear in *Beau McCall: Buttons On!* at the Fuller Craft Museum.



## APRIL

**Kristi Cavatara**

Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum  
 Ridgefield, Connecticut  
 April 7–October 20, 2024

Cavatara creates stained glass unlike anything ever seen in a window. She makes her twisting, tubular sculptures by cutting stained glass into small panes, then soldering them into tubes and tori that are then twisted, woven, and combined in other ways. This exhibition, her first solo museum show, brings together work made over the past five years.

**Layo Bright: Dawn and Dusk**

Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum  
 Ridgefield, Connecticut  
 April 7–October 20, 2024

These glass and pottery works by a versatile Nigeria-born artist tell stories of ancestry, feminism, migration, and the African diaspora. Blown-glass busts of Black women, their heads adorned with West African head ties; a working fountain in black glass; and masks and caryatids that pay homage to important women in Bright's world will be on display in the artist's first solo museum exhibition.



Janice Jakielski's intricate porcelain *Lattice Book Vase with Lilies*, 2021, 8 x 6 in., will appear in *A Material World* at the Canton Museum of Art in Ohio.

#### Marie Watt

Carnegie Museum of Art  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
April 12–September 22, 2024

Honoring the deft and courageous Indigenous ironworkers who have been building America's skyscrapers for generations, Watt creates unique assemblages that incorporate steel beams and blankets, both of which symbolize the passing of skills and stories from one generation to the next. Here she presents new works in steel and glass that view the Pittsburgh region's industrial history through Native eyes.

#### A Material World: Janice Jakielski's Impossible Objects

Canton Museum of Art  
Canton, Ohio  
April 23–July 28, 2024

The "impossible" aspect of Jakielski's works begins with the fact that they're built of ultrathin sheets of beautifully decorated porcelain, which she puts together like the pages of a book or assembles into "sliced" objects. "The details of workmanship and the excessive fragility of the porcelain," write the organizers of this vivid show, "act as a whisper, flirtatiously demanding investigation."

#### Objects of Affection:

##### Jewelry by Robert Ebendorf from the Porter-Price Collection

Mint Museum Randolph  
Charlotte, North Carolina  
April 27, 2024–February 16, 2025

More than 180 items—jewelry, metalwork, drawings, and archival material—from Ebendorf, whose career as an artist and teacher is rooted in traditional gold- and silversmithing, will be on display. His inclusion of unconventional materials, such as newspaper texts, acrylics, ColorCore, animal parts, and other surprises, makes Ebendorf's work unmistakably distinctive.

#### MAY

#### Chris Bathgate:

##### The Machinist Sculptor

Fuller Craft Museum  
Brockton, Massachusetts  
May 18–November 3, 2024

The Fuller presents more than 50 of Bathgate's sculptures and technical drawings, celebrating the artist's fascination with machine forms and his penchant for combining industrial process with craft. The works on display—created with handmade tools, automated milling and drilling equipment, computer design, and handwork—suggest machines whose sole purpose is their own intense presence.

#### Pforzheimer

##### Collection of Studio Glass

Peabody Essex Museum  
Salem, Massachusetts  
May 18, 2024–December 31, 2027

In 2022, New York collectors Carl and Betty Pforzheimer donated works by glass artists from the 20th century to the present, significantly expanding the Peabody Essex Museum's already highly regarded collection of historical and studio glass. This show of work by more than 40 of those artists offers a comprehensive view of modern achievement in the medium.

#### Robert Chapman Turner: Artist, Teacher, Explorer

Black Mountain College  
Museum + Arts Center  
Asheville, North Carolina  
May 31–September 7, 2024

This show will reintroduce the ceramic artist who enriched the now-legendary Black Mountain College by founding its studio pottery program in 1949. Turner's influence on American pottery continued after he left the college in 1951, established his own studio, and taught for 19 years at Alfred University, Penland School of Craft, Anderson Ranch, and other major ceramics centers.

#### Subversive, Skilled, Sublime: Fiber Art by Women

Renwick Gallery  
Washington, DC  
May 31, 2024–January 5, 2025

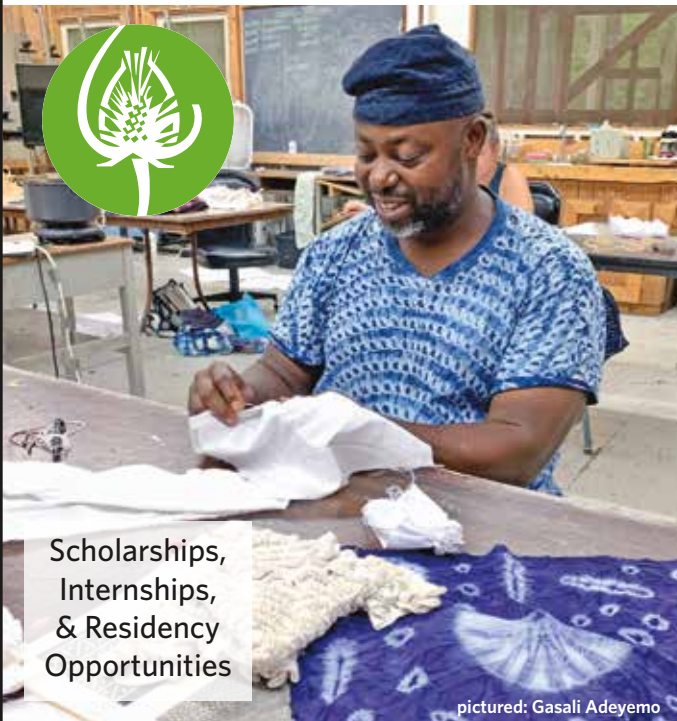
Faith Ringgold, Lia Cook, and Consuelo Jiménez Underwood are just three of the pathbreaking female fiber artists in this exhibition in which 34 works illustrate what organizers call "an alternative history of American art." The show demonstrates how women brought what art criticism originally dismissed as mere domestic labor—weaving and sewing—into the mainstream of contemporary artistic expression.

#### More Craft Happenings!

Discover additional exhibitions, shows, and other events in the online version of this article at [craftcouncil.org/CraftHappenings](https://craftcouncil.org/CraftHappenings).



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**Christopher Kerr-Ayer's** *Dripcastle Candelabra*, 23 x 20 x 9 in., is as much a thrill to see as it was to make. "The work is constructed incrementally from the base up in a series of balanced glue-ups," says Rollinsford, New Hampshire-based Kerr-Ayer of this glass and cubic zirconia sculptural work, which combines Slavic, Scandinavian, and Italian glassmaking techniques, and is being sold through Blue Spiral 1 in Asheville, North Carolina. / \$8,000

christopherkerrayer.com  
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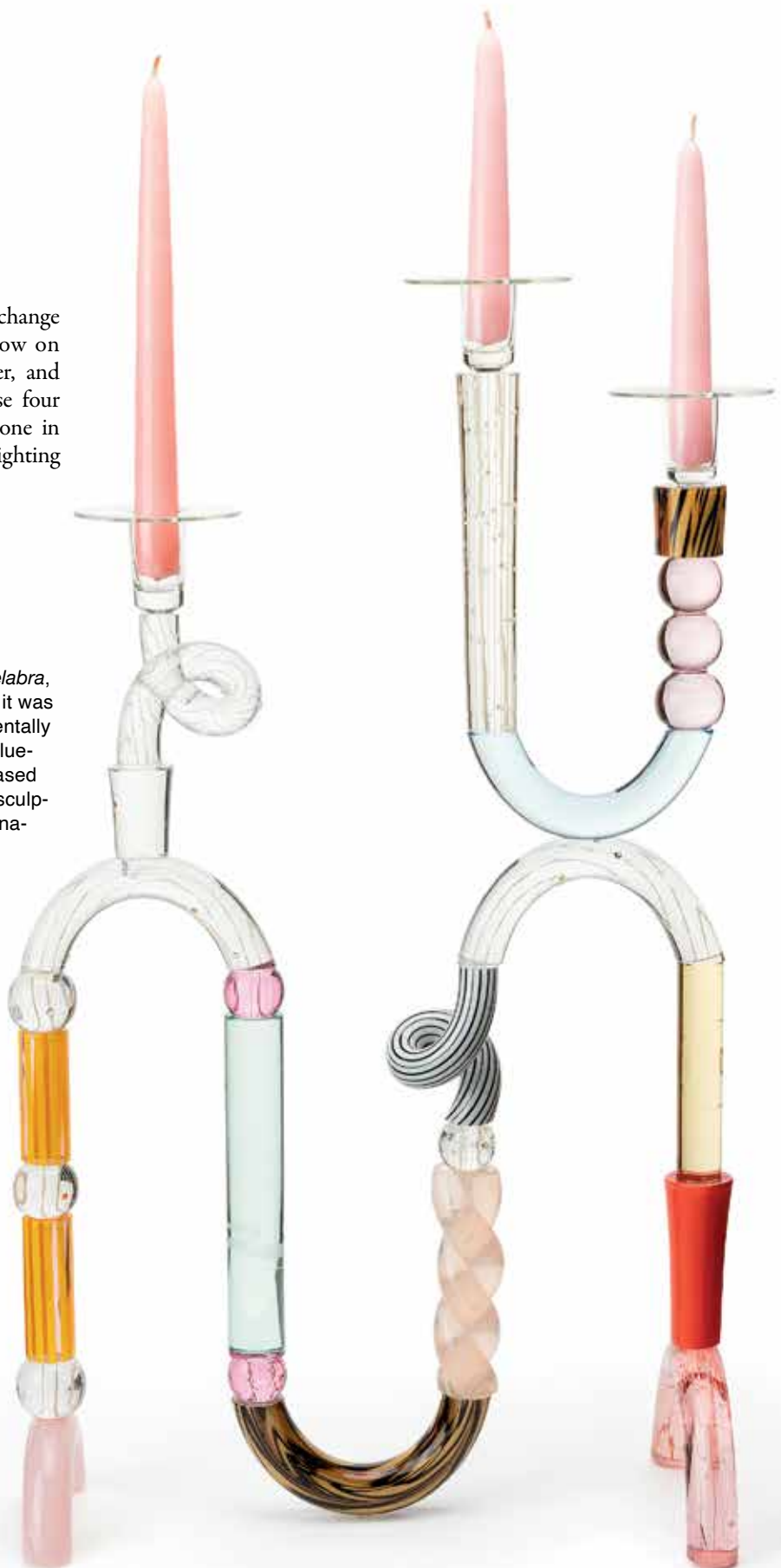


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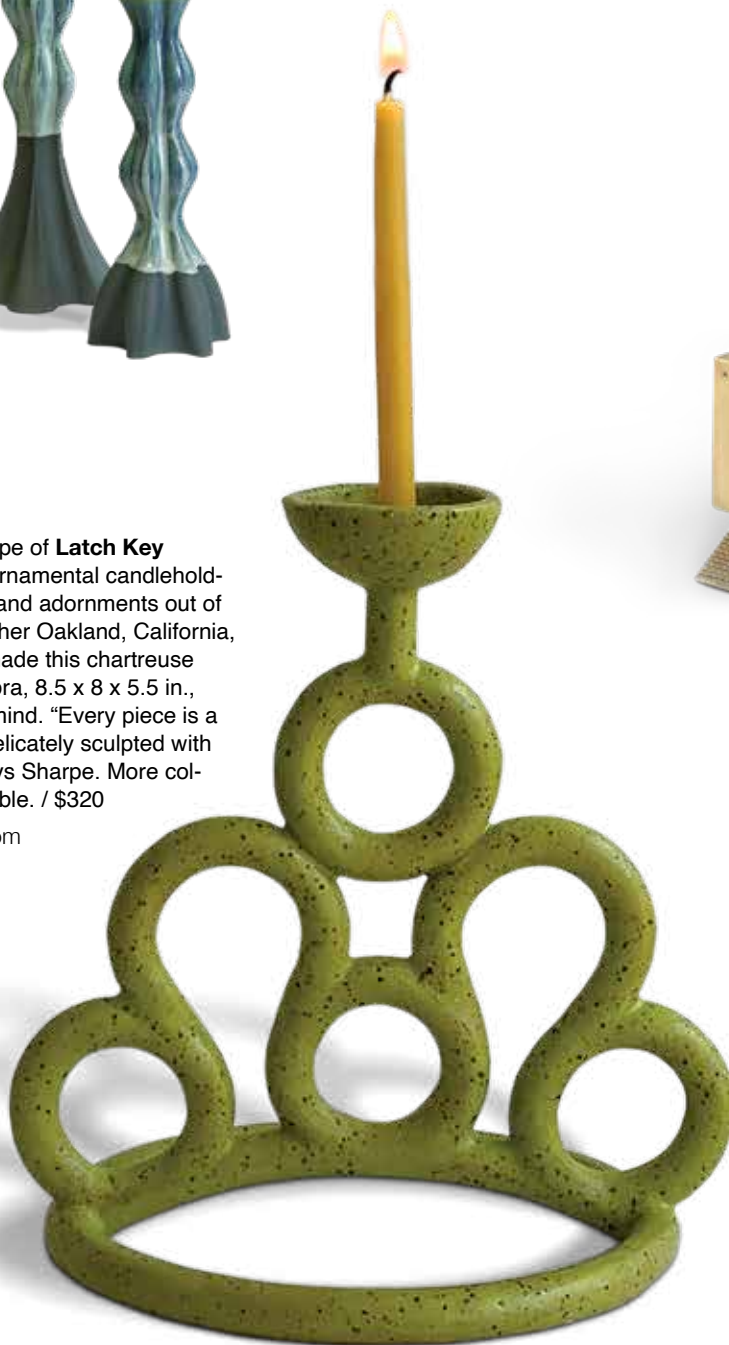
Brooklyn-based architect and ceramist Alejandra Rojas of **By Alejandra Design** takes inspiration from capillary waves for her candlesticks, which she digitally conceptualizes and 3D prints before slip casting and kiln-firing them. Made from stained white clay and shimmering glaze in lime moon-dust, the smallest of these candlesticks measures 8 x 4.5 x 4.5 in. / \$130 and up  
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Headed by artistic director Gabriel Hendifar, New York City-based **Apparatus Studio** makes these brutalist candle blocks, 5.5 x 3.5 x 2 in. each, in aged brass and blackened brass. The studio cites precision tools, M.C. Escher, and temple architecture as influences on the interlocking modular candleholders. / \$800 each  
apparatusstudio.com  
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Whitney Sharpe of **Latch Key** hand-builds ornamental candleholders, vessels, and adornments out of stoneware in her Oakland, California, studio. She made this chartreuse lace candelabra, 8.5 x 8 x 5.5 in., with ritual in mind. “Every piece is a meditation, delicately sculpted with intention,” says Sharpe. More colors are available. / \$320

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♦  
Researched and written by Shivaun Watchorn, associate editor of *American Craft*.

**Coffey's bold combination** of functionality and a sculptural freedom inspired by natural forms and forces is on lavish display in this large-format volume. A number of two-page spreads are devoted to single works such as *Swahili Cabinet*, in which clearly defined doors and drawers are swept by elegant indentations that evoke ocean tides. The dramatic photography is interspersed with short chapters in which the artist shares his life story, working methods, and philosophy of making.

**MICHAEL COFFEY: SCULPTOR AND FURNITURE MAKER IN WOOD**

By Michael Coffey  
Pointed Leaf Press, 2023  
\$85







**CRAFT ACROSS  
CONTINENTS:  
JAPANESE AND  
WESTERN OBJECTS:  
THE LASSITER /  
FERRARO COLLECTION**

Edited by Annie Carlano, Joe Earle, and Rebecca E. Elliot  
Giles, 2023  
\$40

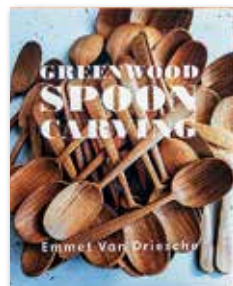
Lorne Lassiter and Gary Ferraro's dual focus as collectors—of European and American works, mostly in a sculptural vein, and Japanese pieces owing more to functional traditions—is showcased in this catalog of an exhibition at Charlotte, North Carolina's Mint Museum that closes in May. The couple's tastes range from an elegantly simple woven bamboo basket by Sōhō Katsushiro to Russell Biles's *The Passion of Andy*—perky porcelain characters from the *Andy Griffith Show*.



**JEWELRY JOURNEY**

Podcast by Sharon Berman  
thejewelryjourney.com  
2023

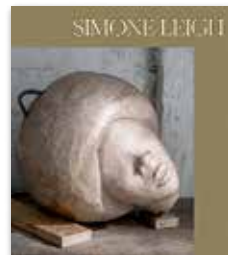
Launched in 2018, the *Jewelry Journey* podcast is encyclopedic in its coverage of the art, craft, collecting, and commerce of jewelry. Berman, a PR professional with jewelry industry clients who is training as a gemologist, pulls in a wide range of guests for conversations—from artists and designers to appraisers, curators, and retailers. The emphasis is on teaching jewelry folk new things; the write-up of each episode has a "What You'll Learn" summary with bullet points.



**GREENWOOD  
SPOON CARVING**

By Emmet Van Driesche  
Mortise and Tenon, 2023  
\$75

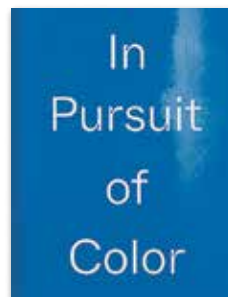
This read-and-watch combo is for those who, in the publisher's lively phrase, "have wandered down the spoon-carving rabbit hole." In the amply illustrated book, veteran carver Van Driesche addresses issues such as how to design a beautiful spoon, how to make a clean carving transition from handle to bowl, and how to sell your spoons. In the accompanying online course, he walks viewers through the making of a spoon, from green wood to handsome utensil.



**SIMONE LEIGH**

Edited by Eva Respini  
DelMonico Books /  
Institute of Contemporary  
Art, Boston, 2023  
\$75

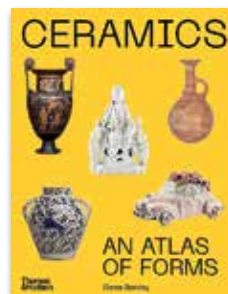
Leigh, a multimedia artist who often employs ceramics in her sculpture, represented the US at the 2022 Venice Biennale. This comprehensive monograph is being published on the occasion of the first museum survey of her two decades of work. The book combines a generous offering of images of the works with scholarly essays by some 24 contributors. It illuminates an oeuvre that fuses Black feminism, traditional African imagery, and ideas and forms from across the African diaspora.



**IN PURSUIT OF COLOR:  
FROM FUNGI TO  
FOSSIL FUELS:  
UNCOVERING THE  
ORIGINS OF THE  
WORLD'S MOST  
FAMOUS DYES**

By Lauren MacDonald  
Atelier Éditions/DAP, 2023  
\$49.95

How humans have colored cloth reveals a lot about history, our relationship with nature, and the shifting patterns of global trade and power. Textile artist and anthropologist MacDonald takes up the histories of 19 dyestuffs—derived from flora, fauna, fungi, and fossil fuels—to tell the story of how dyeing has evolved from communal ritual to global industry. There's plenty of information about how natural and industrial dyeing work, too.



**CERAMICS:  
AN ATLAS OF FORMS**

By Glenn Barkley  
Thames & Hudson, 2024  
\$65

This is a lively history told in full-page photographs and concise studies of 114 works, ranging from a 3500 BCE Egyptian jar to piles of ochre arranged on a gallery floor by Indigenous installation artist Dean Cross, one of the many Australian makers featured. There's deep scholarship here, with an eye for unusual work—such as a Meissen bust of an 18th-century comedian and a Victorian polychrome peacock.

Photo by Sarah Sampedro.

# Remembering the “Craft-Ins”

BY ACC LIBRARIAN BETH GOODRICH

**When I think of *ritual*,** I think of a ceremony or gathering held in a specific place. Even more, the term seems to encompass long-held traditions built around activities, objects, and materials. In July 1971, the South Central Regional Assembly of the American Craft Council held the first of several back-to-the-land gatherings in Colorado. It was designated a “Craft-In,” in reference to the sit-ins of anti-Vietnam War activists. The purpose of the event was to revert to the more elemental “in order to open windows to the beauties around us,” according to promotional materials, putting participants in touch with nature and stimulating creativity.

The first Craft-In, held in Steamboat Springs, was open to all craftspeople and their families, with volunteers from among the 400 attendees leading the activity sessions. Jewelry artists were invited to create pieces from plant materials or found objects, or they could pan for gold and extract metal from ores found in the area. Weavers shared knowledge of spinning with drop spindles or extracting fibers from stems, bark, and leaves. Dyers worked with local plants, producing an array of colors. Potters gathered local clay and improvised glaze materials from crushed ore. The Pete and Martina Aquino family of San Juan Pueblo—now known as Okhay Owingeh—demonstrated their pottery-making techniques, which included firing in a hand-built dung kiln.

At the second Craft-In, held in Breckenridge in 1972, the Aquino family returned, along with weavers Grace Bitz (Diné) and Lorissa Payne (Tohono O’odham). At least two additional Craft-In events were held in Colorado, in 1973 and 1975. Stripping away access to studios, supplies, and fine tools, Craft-In participants shared in gathering materials, simplifying processes, and enjoying the community of making.

These historical events and others are documented in the ACC Library & Archives at [craftcouncil.org/Library/The-Archives](https://craftcouncil.org/Library/The-Archives), and in the ACC Digital Collections at [digital.craftcouncil.org](https://digital.craftcouncil.org).



ABOVE: Craft enthusiasts learn the art of netting at ACC’s 1971 Craft-In, the first in a series of back-to-the-land gatherings held in Colorado.

## About the ACC Library

The American Craft Council Library & Archives in Minneapolis contains the country’s most comprehensive archive of contemporary American craft history, with more than 20,000 print publications, files on nearly 4,000 craft artists, four major archival collections, and a robust digital collection. For information about joining the Friends of the ACC Library & Archives, contact ACC Executive Director Andrea Specht at [aspecht@craftcouncil.org](mailto:aspecht@craftcouncil.org).





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
Ceramist Bill Alexander throws unrefined, locally dug clay on a wheel constructed by ceramist and teacher Paul Soldner at the 1971 Craft-In. Kids participate in a macrame class. A group builds a kiln, with Soldner crouching in the center foreground. A participant scrapes an animal hide to prepare it for tanning.

# craft that calms

*Four artists share the stories behind objects they make to help us rest and reflect.*

BY JON SPAYDE



Jo Andersson pours water into her *Light Vessel 4*, 2020, 23.5 x 11 in.  
OPPOSITE: Andersson's *Light Vessel 15*, 2019—made of blown glass and water—radiates a sense of calm, 14.5 x 10.25 in.



**Slowing down the pace of life.** Making time for relaxation, for reconnection with what matters, for meditation. It's not easy in a fast-paced world full of instant communication, information overload, and the clutter that comes with the American habit of accumulating mass-produced goods.

Establishing rituals can help—especially when the objects used in those rituals are made by hand. Craft's earthy materials and natural aesthetics, and the way it embodies the careful attention of the maker, can be grounding. Like people involved in the slow food, slow fashion, and slow living movements, those who are drawn to craft are often seeking a more meaningful life, and a slower, more engaged pace.

The four craft artists we profile here make works that support more contemplative living, and all four understand the connections between that way of living and their own soulful, patient craft practice.

## Calm and Reflection

The big, irregular blown-glass orbs that Jo Andersson creates in her studio in Alingsås, Sweden, are called *Light Vessels*, and they're designed for fascination and meditation. You fill them with water and then apply light—with a moving source such as a cell phone flashlight or with a stationary lamp—and there's a contemplative magic in the play of light, shadow, reflection, and refraction. "I think it has a very calming effect," says the artist. "People just get lost in it."

Helping people become calm and reflective is part of the life mission of Andersson, an American-born child of Swedish parents. She turned to working with glass as a way to recover from early traumatic experiences.

"I was suffering from PTSD," she says, "and what glassblowing did for me was help me come into the now, which is one of the most healing things that you can do for trauma. If you're not present, you lose the glass piece. There's just no spacing out."

Andersson relocated to Sweden to get her master's degree at the prestigious Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts, and Design and to establish her professional practice. The *Light Vessels* began as an accident, she says. She was spending long hours in the hot shop at Konstfack, experimenting with forms. A particularly unpromising shape emerged. "It wasn't at all what I was envisioning," she says. "But I wanted to work with water and light, because water has really awesome energetic properties. So I filled the glass with water anyway, and used my cell phone to light it up, and the light play was just phenomenal. I was like, 'This is gonna be good.'"



"I think it has a very calming effect. People just get lost in it."

—Jo Andersson

Andersson sells the vessels individually, but her originals were made for an installation titled *Being*—a darkened room containing 12 illuminated vessels. *Being* traveled to several Swedish galleries and the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis. In November she debuted a new iteration of the installation at the *Light 23* exhibition in London.

"I'm hoping it'll be picked up by designers or architects," she says, "because I'd like to get it into larger spaces where people can see it. I just want to help people on their journeys."

♦  
joanderssonstudios.com | @jo.andersson.studios

## Soaking in the Warmth

Bathing in a wooden tub can be both aesthetically pleasing and restful. Wood retains heat better than porcelain, allowing for a longer soak without adding hot water. The beauty and feel of wood can be grounding, too, and help us feel closer to nature.

Port Townsend, Washington-based furniture designer and wood artist Seth Rolland's *Salish Sea* bathtub has these qualities in abundance. It also embodies an experience of peace and pleasure that Rolland remembers with joy—"one of the favorite days of my life," he says.

"One of my best friends built a sixteen-foot wooden dory, and he and I spent a few months driving it across the country, putting it in every bit of water we could. We got to Charleston, South Carolina, and sailed for five days between islands. We kept changing direction and the wind was always behind us. Going downwind is the nicest part of sailing."

On that favorite day, which was particularly beautiful, Rolland lay low in the small boat, enjoying the view of sky and horizon beyond the graceful shape of the prow.

"This bathtub is very much that idea," he says. "You're immersed in warmth. You have this beautiful shape in front of you. I felt like I could put the best visual and physical aspects of sailing into a tub."

While bathing in wood may be delightful, making a wooden tub is a real challenge because, as Rolland points out, "wood and water don't mix. Especially wood and hot water. You have to create the reverse of a wooden boat; instead of keeping the water out, you're keeping it in. My having done some boatbuilding made me feel like I could make it work."

He made it work by putting together more than 200 pieces of durable sapele mahogany wood and sealing them with epoxy, then adding a fiberglass layer and six coats of varnish for internal "seaworthiness." The tub's sculptural energy and simplicity resonate with his other work—chairs, tables, and other pieces that combine a lively inventiveness with an organic, less-is-more aesthetic.

♦  
sethrolland.com | @seth\_rolland\_furniture

"I felt like I could put the best visual and physical aspects of sailing into a tub."

—Seth Rolland



Photos by Myron Gauger.







Seth Rolland's *Salish Sea Bathtub*, 2013, is made of sustainably harvested sapele mahogany, which is noted for its durability, 36 x 95 x 36 in. OPPOSITE: An inside detail of the bathtub, which resembles a small boat.

“I collaborate with clay and  
fire. It’s like improvising  
with other musicians.”

—Akira Satake







Akira Satake adds *dobe* (mortar) onto the surface of a *chawan*, a bowl for sipping tea. OPPOSITE: Satake's *Hikidashi Chawan*, 2018, stoneware, 4 x 4.5 x 4.5 in.

## Spontaneity and Peace

The internationally celebrated ceramist Akira Satake, born in Japan and based in North Carolina, makes a range of works, including vessels for the thoughtful, peaceful drinking of tea—teapots, *yunomi* (cups for everyday tea drinking), and *chawan*, the bowls from which tea is sipped in the *cha-no-yu*, the exquisitely simple but historically and culturally rich Japanese tea ceremony.

For Satake—who was a musician and a record producer before burning out on the business and finding ceramics in his 40s—making these pieces, and everything else in his repertoire, requires a special mindset that, if not exactly meditative (wood firing is too demanding for that), is in the moment: open, accepting, collaborative.

“I work with the personality of the clay,” he says. “I collaborate with clay and fire. It’s like improvising with other musicians. And it’s like producing music and cooking, too; you find talented artists or fine ingredients, and you try not to do too much!”

Satake considers his pieces for everyday tea drinking to be small works of sculpture, and he’s mostly satisfied with them. But the *chawan* is another matter.

“I practice the tea ceremony from time to time,” he says, “and I understand the philosophy behind it. But the *chawan* is the biggest challenge of anything I make. The shape, the color, the surface, everything goes into the *kesbiki* (scenery) of the bowl. Every element is important, and you just can’t explain the combination. It’s like an old bluesman said in a documentary I saw: ‘What makes good blues? Man, you either *got it* or you *don’t*.’”

There’s a resonance between the inspired, intuitive knowingness that makes for a good *chawan* and the spirit of the tea ceremony itself, a ritual of relaxation and aesthetic appreciation that’s both formal and informal. There are set procedures for entering the tearoom, making the tea, and other elements of the ceremony. Yet it’s also a pleasant social occasion in which conversation is relaxed and real, and it’s meant to refresh the eye, the palate, and the spirit. It’s that fusion of the careful and the spontaneous that Satake works, and hopes, to put into every one of his *chawan*.

♦

[akirasatake.com](http://akirasatake.com) | [@akirasatake](https://twitter.com/akirasatake)



## Untangling Your Beautiful Story

Megan Winn, who creates opulent leather-bound journals, is a dedicated journal keeper. “There will be nights when I am going to bed but I feel like I can’t rest,” says the Indianapolis-based artist. “There’s something in my mind I can’t think through on my own. To get up and put pen to paper and just get it all out—it untangles those knots and then I feel like, okay, I got this. And then I can sleep. I’m an external processor, and I can sometimes do that through talking with my husband or friends, but there’s something intimate about being able to do it in the pages of my journal—with myself.”

Of course, it’s perfectly possible to journal in mass-produced spiral-bound notebooks, but in Winn’s case, the peace she attains

ABOVE: Megan Winn holds a stack of her handbound journals, created using reclaimed leather, handmade cotton rag paper, and antique findings. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: The cover of *Your Secret Is Safe with Me*, 2020, latches with a working lock and key, 6 x 5 x 2 in. Winn hand-binds a leather journal using the long-stitch method. An antique metal toolbox contains closure components and binding tools.

Photo by Kelley Schuyler. OPPOSITE TOP: Photo by Megan Winn. OPPOSITE MIDDLE AND BOTTOM: Photos by Kelley Schuyler.





“Your thoughts  
matter, your days  
matter, your story  
matters enough  
to have a beautiful  
place to put it.”

—Megan Winn



from journaling is connected to the sensuous pleasure of making fine books. As a college student, she joined a women's craft group in which another member was studying bookbinding. “She did a workshop for us, and that was the moment when I found my home as a maker,” she says. “I think it was . . . the tactile nature of it—I really love getting to make things with my hands—but it also felt like magic, making a book, this thing that I have loved my whole life.”

Her journals are eco-friendly, crafted from small batches of leftovers from a local leather distributor; and the paper is made to her specs, then shipped to her, by an Indian company that uses leftover cotton rags. She adds straps, clasps, and metal ornaments. These elements make for a journal that can become an heirloom. “They’re meant to last a lifetime or longer,” she says. “They’re meant to be handed down, if that’s what people choose to do.”

In fact, she adds, sometimes people are intimidated by the journals’ qualities. “They say, ‘Oh, I don’t have anything important enough to write in a book like that.’ My rebuttal is, ‘Of course you do.’ Your thoughts matter, your days matter, your story matters enough to have a beautiful place to put it.”

♦

[etsy.com/shop/bindingbee](https://etsy.com/shop/bindingbee) | @bindingbee\_megan



Jon Spayde is a frequent contributor to *American Craft*.







# THIS IS WHO I AM

*Chicana musician and fashion label founder  
LaLa Romero on the power of nameplate jewelry.*

BY LALA ROMERO

**Growing up, I always felt like a nameplate** was a rite of passage. If you accomplished something and leveled up a step in your life, you might get this badge of honor, this medal. My earliest memories of nameplates were seeing the girlfriends of my older cousins and the older women in my family wearing them, and me feeling like, “when will it be my turn?”

I’m from Van Nuys, California—it’s the 818, it’s in the Valley. I grew up in an apartment complex that was very Black, Latino, and Asian American, and I think that when you grow up with not very much, you take extra good care of the little things and you show out in a different way, whether it’s through your sneakers or even the way you iron your clothes. You take care of your white T-shirts. That’s how you assert who you are. I always felt a nameplate was a way to show off your fly, to let people know like, “I’m here, this is who I am, this is what I do. Maybe you can or can’t pronounce my name, or maybe this is the only name that you get to know, because this might be a nickname, this might be an aka, but this is the me that I choose to present to the world.” My family is Chicano (Apache, Navajo, Mexican, and white) and I also have nieces who are Filipino, Black, and Latina. Our identities can be really complicated, but the commonalities of the nameplate bring us together. These objects are heirlooms: a precious metal with the most personal thing you have—your name.

On my block of 10 apartment buildings, every single one was packed with families with intergenerational living situations. In our house, sometimes my grandpa was living with us, sometimes my *tias* were there, too. Everything you imagine LA looked like in the 1990s, my block was just like that. I was in middle school at that time and car shows were popping, but I was still too young to go. I wanted to use Aqua Net and lip liner, but I had to sneak to do it when I was already at school. It was all still very aspirational, but I got to watch through the older sisters of the girls in the building. I have a cousin who is seven years older than me, and all his girlfriends had their hair gelled, their lips lined, their acrylic nails, and their nameplates. Everybody had a nameplate. And if it wasn’t a nameplate necklace, it was a belt, even just with your initial. Every little opportunity you could get to assert, “This is who I am, this is where I’m from, this is what I rep,” you would take it. It was also something shared cross-culturally. On Saticoy,

Photo by Brandon Moninga.

LaLa Romero wears her favorite nameplate necklace and chunky gold hoops on the Joshua Tree, California, set of the music video for her 2017 song “Who’s Playing Who?”



ABOVE: Romero purchased her gold nameplate necklace at the Slauson Super Mall swap meet in South Los Angeles after receiving a publishing deal. RIGHT: On a table in Romero's home office: her gold nameplate, custom bamboo gold hoops, and custom bamboo ring—all with the name "LaLa." Her company Bella Doña makes the "Babygirl" bamboo hoop rug on the floor. OPPOSITE: Romero purchased these custom "LaLa" bamboo hoop earrings at the Slauson swap meet while in high school.



the street where I grew up, we were all from very similar socioeconomic backgrounds, and despite our ethnic and cultural diversity, the styles and aesthetics I've described were not perceived as specific to one group. I was lucky to grow up in a family that was also very conscious of the roots of hip-hop, so that legacy informed my perspective, too.

The first nameplate I ever got—not my current one, but my starter one—I had to buy for myself. I always worked, even in high school. Big up to Macy's that gave me a job while I was still in tenth and eleventh grade. At first I could only afford the pendant, and I had to wait to get the chain. Luckily, you could do layaway at the swap meets, so you'd lock in what you were going to get and then make your payments on it.

When I first started doing music and got my publishing deal, I was like, "What am I gonna buy myself?" And it wasn't even that kind of money, but every rapper gets a chain, so I wanted to level up my nameplate. I got my *pave* double-plated pendant and it cost like five hundred bucks—that's still a lot of money! It was a big deal for me. The fact that I was able to do that for myself, to treat myself, was very significant. When you have to work to earn something, you treat it very differently than if it was gifted.

Growing up, I didn't have a quinceañera, which was how a lot of girls got jewelry when they turned 15. I associated nameplates with coming-of-age events and religious ceremonies, especially in a Latina's life. A lot of babies get their first little gold bracelet with their name on it when they're baptized, or for their first Communion, then their confirmation or quinceañera. When I notice that someone close to me doesn't have a nameplate, often I will get them one for a birthday or something like that. It feels very special to be part of the moment when someone receives a nameplate. Even if you don't wear it, even if you hang it on your mirror in your bedroom, you just gotta have it.

When I started doing shows at circuit tours for Art Laboe and *Lowrider* magazine, I also had a ring made. I was like, "What if we took a bamboo nameplate earring and added a ring to the back?" because I wanted my name to be visible when I was holding the microphone. And it was still small! I was doing venues with like 10,000 people. Nobody was seeing this little thing! But I wanted to represent, and I wanted to feel connected to home, even when I was traveling through different states and cities. No matter where I was, I was always reminded of the little swap meet that I got her from.

Photos by Brandon Moninga.



These objects  
are heirlooms: a  
precious metal with  
the most personal  
thing you have—  
your name.

I had another nameplate, too, because for music my handle for everything was LASadGirl@hotmail.com. My *LASadgirl* nameplate was huge, and it was gorgeous. But then I decided to do a giveaway for fans, and my management at the time was like, “Oh, you should give away the chain” because girls would always ask me about it. To this day, I still regret doing that giveaway. If I post on Instagram, “Who won that nameplate?” I might be able to find her, even though this happened close to 15 years ago.

I still have a relationship with the jeweler who did my first nameplate, and my double plate. Almost all of my jewelry is from the same spot. It’s important to know the jeweler and their work—the cuts, the fonts, the details. When you find someone you like, you stick with them. When I was growing up, there were more swap meets. Swap meets were the one place you could get everything—your sneakers, your jewelry, your cellphone, your incense. You could probably get a tattoo, a piercing, airbrushing, colored contact lenses. A lot of the smaller ones don’t exist anymore, so I think people tend to get their jewelry at Slauson or downtown.

To me, the single-plated etched gold pendant is LA’s signature nameplate style. That’s what I initially had. The Old English or Gothic font is also very LA and very Chicago, as Chicago is also very Chicano. That script is synonymous with Chicano aesthetics. In Chicano culture and on the West Coast, we have a subculture around lowriders. If you have a lowrider and you’re in a car club, you have a plaque that sits in the back. The plaques look exactly like a nameplate. I think that if you’re a woman who grew up in or around car culture, your nameplate is your version of a plaque, because cars are often owned by men. They are the men of the family’s heirloom, and a car typically gets passed down to a boy, even if there’s a girl who could receive it. I’ve always wondered about the relationship between plaques, nameplates, and the women who support the culture and who the cars are often

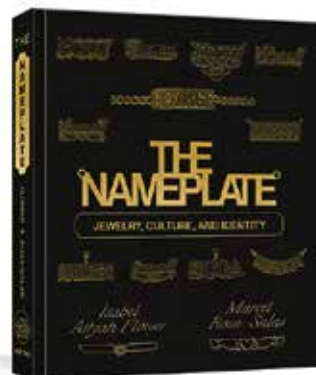


named after. The women are usually sitting shotgun. They are the muse for the car. And, just like for a nameplate, you gotta earn your plaque; you don’t just get a lowrider and plaque up. There are a lot of steps to earn that. It’s a big deal to represent who we are and where we are from.

♦

[bella-dona.com](http://bella-dona.com) | [@alaromero](https://www.instagram.com/alaromero)

LaLa Romero is a musician, actor, and cofounder of Bella Doña, a clothing and accessories brand with roots in Chicano and LA culture. She lives in Los Angeles. Originally titled “Rite of Passage: Nameplates and Coming of Age,” this essay was reprinted from the book *The Nameplate: Jewelry, Culture, and Identity* by Marcel Rosa-Salas and Isabel Attyah Flower. Copyright 2023 by Marcel Rosa-Salas and Isabel Attyah Flower. Published by Clarkson Potter/Publishers, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.



Roberto Benavidez's *Stigmata Piñata*, 2023, takes imagery from Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. It includes a piñata star, representing the seven deadly sins, that pierces the hands and feet. Made from paper, glue, and wire, 28 x 22 x 11 in.





# raising the piñata

*LA-based sculptor Roberto Benavidez makes extravagant piñatas based on artistic masterpieces that you wouldn't think of hitting with a stick.*

BY PAOLA SINGER

In Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, a triptych painted between 1490 and 1510, we see bizarre animals mingling with disrobed men and women, some placidly splashing in the water, others engaged in amorous activities, and yet others taking bites of giant red fruits. It's an enigmatic masterpiece that has been interpreted as either the ultimate romp or a cautionary tale against sin. One wouldn't expect to see its images, conceived by a Dutchman in the late Middle Ages, turned into a piñata—those papier-mâché candy containers often seen at kids' birthday parties—but that's exactly what Los Angeles-based artist Roberto Benavidez has been doing for more than a decade.

One of his recent sculptures, 2023's *Stigmata Piñata*, focuses on a small vignette of the famous painting: a young boy lying on the grass with one leg up, a bird perched on his raised foot, and a plump berry in one hand. Benavidez's three-dimensional creation looks almost exactly like Bosch's composition, except he substitutes the fruit with a Mexican-style seven-pointed star, intentionally creating a cultural mashup.

"I think of the hybrid creatures in this painting as a subtle reference to myself being mixed-race," he says. "As a sculptor, I get so much joy in re-creating them in 3D form. I really like the balance between cute and scary in them. That being said, there is also this religious parallel between the piñata and the theme of the painting that connects the two."



Benavidez grew up in a small town in South Texas, in an area where “art wasn’t a thing.” He was raised Catholic by his mother, who is white, and his father, who was born in Texas but identifies as Mexican. As a young boy, he remembers going to Mass and being much more interested in the visuals of the church than in religion itself. “That may be where I developed my medieval aesthetic,” he says, tongue in cheek.

His curiosity, and an ability to observe the world around him from a sort of distance, led him to study theater in college and, a few years later, visual arts. He had been exploring different mediums, including ceramics and bronze casting, when he happened upon a Pinterest photo of a sculptural piñata that caught his attention. He decided to try his hand at making one. “I saw something that interested me and I pursued it,” he says, adding that he didn’t really have many memories of piñatas growing up. “And I stayed with it because, as I learned about the history of piñatas, I realized it’s a multicultural tradition that traveled from country to country before it even got to America, and that resonates with me. Also, I love color, and I can go hog wild with them.”

While some sources say that piñatas originated in China, most history books agree that, starting in the 14th century, clay piñatas were broken in Spain and Italy on the first Sunday of Lent. Two centuries later, they were brought to the New World, most notably to Mexico, and used as tools for conversion to Catholicism. The modified Mexican piñatas became seven-pointed stars, each point representing one of the seven deadly sins, and the confections inside it representing temptation and sin. The rest of the story almost writes itself: the blindfold around a person’s eyes stands for blind faith, and the act of beating the piñata with a stick is the struggle against evil. Mesoamerican people already had a tradition resembling piñatas, with colorfully decorated earthenware pots

Photos by James Bernal.





ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Benavidez uses tape to apply paperboard to a papier-mâché balloon form, the base for most of his works. The artist cuts minute details into a multilayered piece of crepe paper fringe, which creates a desired pattern when applied with glue to a piñata sculpture. Here he glues crepe paper fringe to a completed form. RIGHT: Benavidez works on a commissioned piece from his *Illuminated Piñata* series, examining the flow of patterns.

OPPOSITE: The artist in his studio surrounded by completed works, including *Sugar Skull Piñata No. 1*, 2009, his very first piñata sculpture, which hangs just below the tail of one of his Bosch birds.







that were shattered with a blunt object, their contents falling to the feet of a deity as an offering. There is clearly something universally appealing about this ritual: the mysterious sealed-off object, the physical exertion to pry it open, and the reward of discovering its treasures.

While Benavidez's piñatas are meant to be kept intact, he has broken a couple of them on special occasions. For the opening of his 2019 solo exhibition at the AD&A Museum at UC Santa Barbara, titled *Piñatas of Earthly Delights*, he hung an eight-foot-tall black birdlike creature from a tall *brise soleil* outside the museum's entrance and allowed attendees to take swings at it. Eventually, candy and confetti fell out, to raucous cheers.

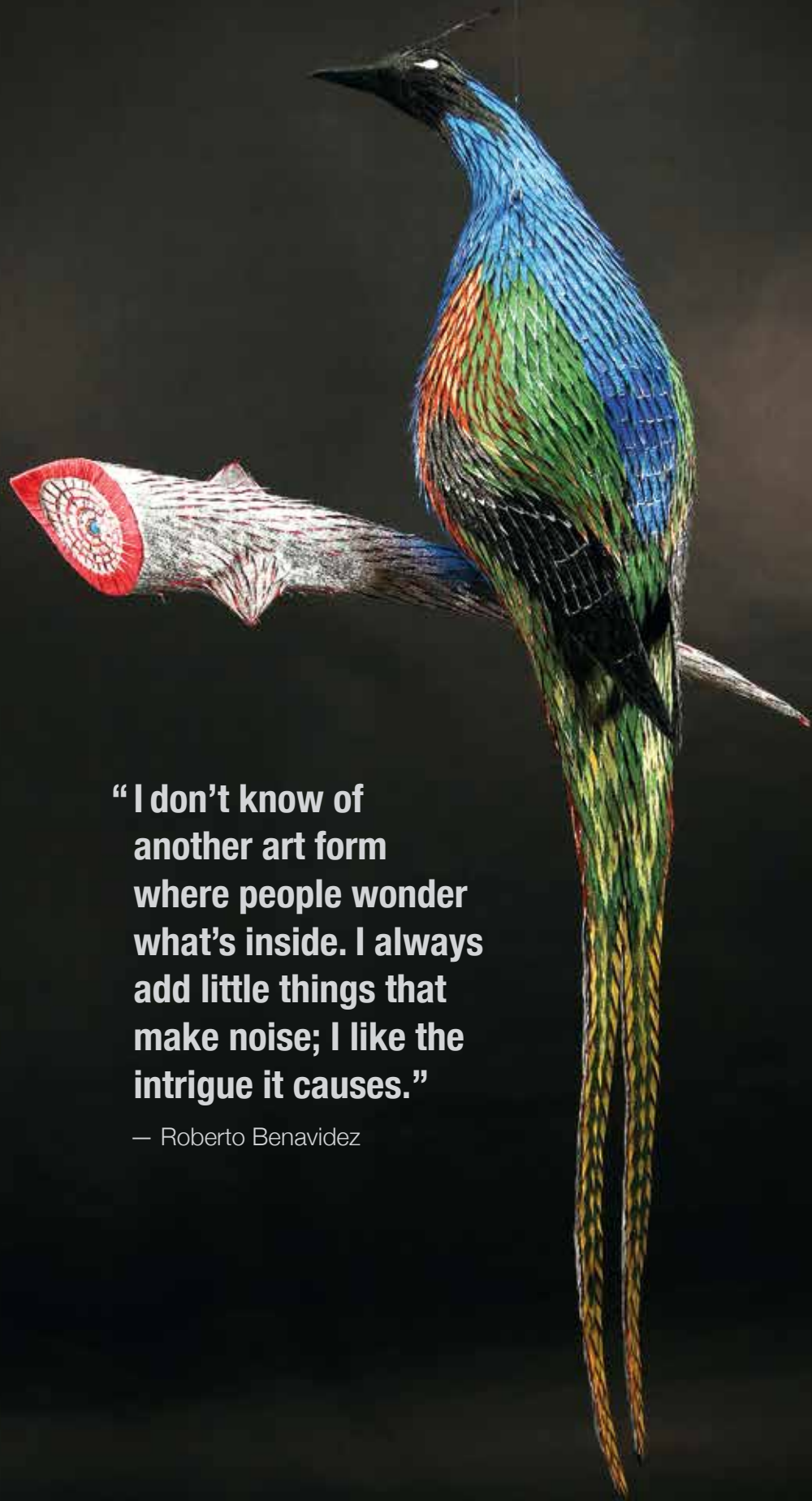
"I don't know of another art form where people wonder what's inside," he says. "I always add little things that make noise; I like the intrigue it causes."

The first of Benavidez's piñatas that caught a gallery's eye was a bright sugar skull made in 2009, but it wasn't until 2017, when *Hi-Fructose* magazine wrote about him, that his career took off. Since then, his works have been shown in various cultural institutions and museums, including the aforementioned AD&A, the Fuller Craft Museum, and the Mingei International Museum. In December, he appeared in an episode of PBS's *Craft in America*.

To make his sculptures, Benavidez starts with a balloon or series of balloons, either round or oblong, depending on the desired final shape, and uses them to form the core of his piece, wrapping them in paperboard and a pH-balanced glue to create a papier-mâché structure. Then begins a very labor-intensive process of giving it color and detail. Using an acid-free crepe paper from Italy that comes in myriad hues, he stacks several long strips together, glues them on one end, and then cuts into these multicolored strips to create a serrated edge. The result is a trademark style that makes each piece look like it's covered in paper feathers.

TOP TO BOTTOM: A corner of Benavidez's studio contains an ample supply of crepe paper, completed and incomplete works, and Bosch inspirational prints. The artist's rolls of crepe paper are made in Italy, reflecting the cultural journey of the piñata. Bins of leftover crepe paper fringe, which Benavidez keeps for future projects. OPPOSITE: *Bosch Bird No. 8*, 2018, paper, glue, and wire, 54 x 29 x 16 in.





**“I don’t know of  
another art form  
where people wonder  
what’s inside. I always  
add little things that  
make noise; I like the  
intrigue it causes.”**

— Roberto Benavidez

TOP: Benavidez's *Illuminated Piñata No. 19*, 2021, is inspired by a medieval manuscript and explores hybridity, 33 x 20 x 12 in. BOTTOM: *Bosch Beast No. 3*, 2017, 24 x 12 x 12 in.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Comedores de Huevos (Birdr No. 4)*, 2023, is from Benavidez's *Birdr* series and shows a same-sex bird coupling, 7 x 17 x 6 in. A detail of *Grotesque Piñata No. 1*, 2023, 46 x 16 x 10 in. *Bosch Beast No. 5*, 2017, 9 x 11 x 3 in. *Human Hybrid Piñata No. 1*, 2020, 10 x 11 x 5 in.

When asked how long it typically takes to finish a piece, he says, “long enough,” and explains that he doesn’t time it for fear of getting discouraged. “I put in eight-hour days,” he adds, showing over FaceTime several unfinished pieces in his LA studio, which occupies a room inside the home he shares with his husband.

Being part of the LGBTQ community has informed Benavidez’s work just as much as his mixed heritage. Both of these identities are clearly reflected in his *Paper Bird* and *Birdr* series, which include a “half-breed” creature with a hummingbird silhouette, the colors of a phoenix, and the tail feathers of a peacock—as well as a pair of robins, both with male plumage, performing a courting ritual.

After a wildlife magazine did a story on his papier-mâché birds, Benavidez was flooded with commission requests. “People who love birds, *love* birds,” he quips. That doesn’t mean he’ll be abandoning his exploration of Bosch’s work, nor of another fascination, the *Luttrell Psalter*, an illuminated manuscript from the 1300s depicting rural scenes in medieval England, which inspired him to make a series of fantastical-looking metallic-hued animals.

As vibrant as these sculptures are, they are also fragile, and it’s likely that the intensity of their colors will fade after several years (even indoor fluorescent light can degrade paper dyes). “If well taken care of, they can last for a lifetime, but some have already faded a considerable amount,” he says. It’s bittersweet to think of an artist’s work as transitory, especially when we see the lasting relevance of a painting like *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, created more than 500 years ago. But Benavidez has made peace with his chosen medium. “They are ephemeral. I’m fine with that.”

♦ [robertobenavidez.com](http://robertobenavidez.com) | [@roberto\\_benavidez](https://twitter.com/roberto_benavidez)

Paola Singer is a frequent contributor to *American Craft*.



Photos by Roberto Benavidez.









# Inside Out

*In search of hidden beauty and universal meaning, ceramic artist Ibrahim Said shatters technical boundaries with ingenious takes on ancient forms.*

BY DAVID SCHIMKE



ABOVE: Ceramicist Ibrahim Said. OPPOSITE: With its 7-foot-tall, sail-like panels, Said's *On the Bank of the Nile*, 2021, is a structural marvel. It was commissioned by The Clay Studio in Philadelphia.

More than once since meeting him in 2015, curator Jennifer Zwilling had seen ceramic artist Ibrahim Said throw a sizable vessel in public in less than 20 minutes, leaving other accomplished ceramicists slack-jawed.

The 48-year-old Said had also demonstrated to Zwilling—at prestigious showings in select East Coast cities, during workshops and symposiums, and at the wheel—that he possessed the technical skill, “feel for the clay,” as Zwilling defines it, and wisdom to routinely realize his generative, seemingly borderless imaginings.

But the ways in which Said was beginning to define his next project, set to premier in April 2022 at The Clay Studio's newly built, state-of-the-art building in Philadelphia? If the scheme were hatched by almost anyone else, it could've been dismissed as brash and ill-fated.

After all, it would ultimately involve engineering and then somehow displaying three sheets of kiln-blasted clay that were each nearly seven feet tall, two feet wide, a half inch thick, meticulously engraved, and brilliantly glazed. A feat that would require an almost superhuman understanding of the material's molecular makeup, not to mention a saint's patience. Which is why Zwilling, who serves as curator and director of artistic programs at The Clay Studio, decided it just might materialize. And if it didn't, something enthralling would result regardless.

With financial support from the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, Said and two other artists (Kukuli Velarde and Molly Hatch) were commissioned to create work for The Clay Studio's space-christening exhibit, *Making Place Matter*. Said's contribution, titled *On the Bank of the Nile*, finally came to fruition after three failed, time-consuming, heartbreaking attempts. And it is, as Zwilling anticipated, even more stunning than the original concept.

“One of the things about us being able to give him funding is that it allowed him the space to experiment. He's brave enough and skilled enough to take risks,” she says. “After trying again and again, and [the work] breaking every time, he actually pushed even further. You only do that if you have incredible knowledge and deep understanding. You need that much-talked-about ten thousand hours. And he passed that a long time ago.”



“It’s the culture I lived.  
It’s a feeling that comes  
from daily rituals. . . .  
It shaped me and it  
shaped my world.”

—Ibrahim Said



### Bustling Beginnings

At the age of 6, Said began visiting his father’s humming ceramics studio in Fustat, a neighborhood in Cairo that was the first Muslim capital of Egypt before being absorbed by the larger city; it remains renowned for its titanic, high-octane commercial pottery industry. “I was always playing around in there. It would make my mother crazy,” Said says, animated by the memory. “Seeing all the pottery and forms that people made was very important for my development. It was my college. It was my art school.”

The family business demanded speed and concision. By the time he was a teenager, Said says he was throwing so many pots in so little time he came to briefly loathe the wheel’s potential for mass production, preferring to hand-build and hand-carve the clay whenever possible. His father supported these impulses in his son—without necessarily intending to—by occasionally letting the “production cycle” lapse and lingering over a detail or a distinctive flourish in his own work. It was a practice that made his studio a hangout for groundbreaking makers. “My father had a lot of artist friends,” Said says. “Over the years, many people would come to him to help do something on the wheel. So I saw what artists were thinking and how their ideas were growing.”

At the same time, the maturing Said consistently found himself enchanted by his surroundings: The traditional Egyptian

architecture, exemplified by the oldest mosque in Africa, which he walked past most every day of his adolescence. The geometric patterns and arabesques typical of the Islamic art that crowded his favorite museums and everyday haunts. The smell of wood fire in the air. The dust from marble and granite quarries.

“Egyptians are really rich in culture,” says Said, who emphasizes that what he’s referring to transcends any particular type of carving or design. “It’s more than that. It’s the culture I lived. It’s a feeling that comes from daily rituals. . . . It shaped me and it shaped my world.”

With the full-voiced encouragement and material support of his proud father, Said left Egypt for the first time in 2002 to attend a craft fair in Belgium. The experience convinced him to further explore his passions, including specific types of Egyptian pottery, such as the vase forms from the Naqada III period in Egypt (3200 to 3000 BCE), as well as broader creative concepts involving storytelling, tradition, and remembrance.

A decade later—after participating in competitions and showcases in Qatar, Spain, Oman, Kuwait, and Shanghai—Said emigrated to Greensboro, North Carolina. “It’s a really incredible town,” says Said’s wife, the painter and art professor Mariam Stephan. “It’s big enough and small enough. It’s a really rich community, where artists can stay and grow.”



## Seen and Unseen

Before leaving Fustat, which he now visits once or twice a year, Said found himself pushing boundaries out of necessity. “In Egypt, artwork is often copied. You’d find your piece in a show before you’ve even made it,” he says. “I would make myself do work that would be so hard to copy, so daring, that I hoped those who might take my ideas would think it easier to make something of their own.”

It’s clear that Said’s kind of risk-taking is actually rooted in the technical confidence he developed as a commercial potter. Elizabeth Essner, Windgate Foundation Associate Curator of Craft at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and co-curator of *Making Place Matter*, says it’s this sort of real-world, market-level experience—where invention is born of an almost existential necessity to produce work—that makes Said’s tool box so formidable. “Ceramics is the understanding that the hand is an extension of the mind,” she says. “You understand it and know it as an embodied experience. And while Said’s background might not fit into some academic ideas of what ‘training’ looks like, he’s been training his entire life.”

“His innate understanding of his material allows him to have certain freedom. He knows how to push to that very edge of his potential.”

For Said, the medium demands commitment and trust: “There’s a relationship when you work with clay that you can’t

ignore. It is the only material that will listen to you—that will do what you ask it to do. You are easy with it. You are hard on it. And you will usually fail. Once. Twice. Three times. But if you’re very patient, I believe you can do anything with it you can imagine in your head. That’s why I try to have conversations *with* clay, not *about* clay.”

When Essner and Zwilling describe Said’s distinctive approach, they alternately reference the size of his creations and his delicate, detailed carvings. Both of these characteristics are present in Said’s most recent vessels, including *Hourglass*, *Gold Rings*, and *Karnak*, which will be exhibited beginning in April at the Yossi Milo Gallery in New York City.

“He is going against the nature or rules or laws that the viewer believes define what’s possible,” Stephan says of the upcoming show. “In this case, finding the lightness and balance in the positive and negative spaces is what pushes him to be more inventive.”

Upon examination, the pieces in the series appear somehow inverted. This is deliberate, a riff on a design conceit that solidified Said’s place on the international map not long after his arrival in the United States: a preoccupation with the relationship between the inside and the outside.

His carvings on a variety of vases continue to be directly inspired by artifacts of water jugs made between 900 and 1200 CE in Fustat. These early jugs had filters inside to strain out river



LEFT: Said started hanging out in his father’s ceramics studio in Fustat, Egypt, at the age of 6. Today, he can throw a large vessel in 20 minutes. OPPOSITE: The artist working on panels for *On the Bank of the Nile*. Its geometric shapes, colored Nile green, reflect patterned light.



LEFT: Pieces in Said's new stoneware *Kamak* series combine papyrus flower forms seen atop ancient Egyptian architectural columns. The pieces range from 26.5 to 64.5 inches tall. OPPOSITE: Front and side views of *Hourglass*, 2023, an earthenware sculpture inspired by Egyptian water filters, exploring the concept of inner and outer beauty, 55.5 x 22 x 22 in.

sediment. Cut into geometric, floral, and animal designs, the strainers weren't visible until a person actually took a drink. By making the engravings visible on the outside of his jugs and other ceramic objects, Said reveals what was previously unseen. This is a career-long throughline designed to spark dialogue about public and private, inner and outer, perception and reality. "We might hide things from each other, but you're always vulnerable," Said says. "Every person has inner beauty. God doesn't care how you look on the outside. God cares about your heart."

Stephan says her husband is also grappling with whether it's possible to hide something and reveal it at the same time. "This has been an intellectual and formal struggle for him over the past decade," she says before pivoting back to a discussion of Said's newest innovations. "He wanted to carve the inside components, but open up the middle. That's what sort of brought those cutaway sections."

Even *On the Bank of the Nile* involves a visual nod to the inside out. The first prototypes were modeled after the *mashrabiya*, a type of wooden lattice screen associated with Islamic architecture, often covering windows on the upper

floors of a building. Carved into culturally recognizable geometric patterns, its basic purpose is to create privacy and discreteness between private and public spaces.

Thin and light in their native form, when made of Said's clay the *mashrabiya* needed a unique support. So Said taught himself marquetry and built a decorative wooden base for the three ceramic sheets, which, after being bolted in, looked like undulating sails. The resulting title all but wrote itself, thanks to Said's feelings for the great river.

"The Nile is one of my most beautiful memories," Said says. "When I was a child, I would go to the bank and sit and watch the sky and water and be in a new world. Cairo was busy with people. Sitting by the Nile was different. I could think about my career, think about life, think about the beautiful stuff I wanted to create. It felt like being in heaven."

◆  
[ibrahimsaidceramic.com](http://ibrahimsaidceramic.com) | [@ibrahimsaidceramic](https://www.instagram.com/ibrahimsaidceramic)

David Schimke is a Minneapolis-based writer and managing editor at *American Craft*.





# Telling the Story

*A silversmith honors his memories of Passover by celebrating modern makers and their inspirational interpretations of the traditional seder plate.* BY JIM COHEN





**Passover is an eight-day Jewish celebration** of the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt during the 13th century BCE. Its centerpiece is a meal called the *seder*, which usually takes place on the first night. Participants gather then to tell the story as outlined in the *Haggadah*, an ancient Jewish text.

When I was a boy, our family Passover tradition involved a trek from Dayton, Ohio (and later Arlington, Virginia), to my grandparents' home in Youngstown, Ohio, where my parents and I would join my father's siblings and their families for the seder. The kids, who only

got to see each other once a year, would run around and entertain themselves with games. The men would complain about the Cleveland Indians while playing pinochle. And as the festivities unfolded, my *Zede* (grandfather) and *Bubba* (grandmother) would rule their respective turfs with an iron hand.

The seder itself started at sundown and seemingly lasted *forever*. It was all in Hebrew and involved a reading of the Exodus story, as well as commentaries from ancient sages, and a tradition during which the youngest person present asks The Four Questions, a rhetorical device to prompt a discussion about what made this night different from any other.

The seder plate is at the center of the evening from beginning to end. It holds five or six traditional foods (there is disagreement on the number), all of which play a part in the storytelling. Three of the foods symbolize the Jews' slavery: *maror*, a bitter herb, often horseradish;

*charoset*, a paste made out of fruits, nuts, and wine representing the mortar Jews used for the Pharaoh's construction projects; and *chazeret*, a second bitter herb. Three others are emblems of their freedom: *beitzah*, a roasted egg; *karpas*, a vegetable, usually parsley, eaten after being dipped in salt water; and *pesach*, a lamb shank. After hearing the story and the roles these foods play, we would (finally!) get to feast on a host of delicious delicacies, including homemade gefilte fish, brisket, chicken, macaroons, and whatever else Bubba and her daughters and daughters-in-law prepared.

These trips were a constant until Zede's death in 1962, when I was 12 and my parents adopted a new tradition. We stayed home and had seder with the Sprechers, the first family we met after moving to Virginia. Over the next 60 years, some 40 relatives and friends—whom I've long since come to think of as my "family"—have come from around the United States, Israel, and the Netherlands to mark Passover at the Sprechers' home; it's a tradition that's lasted through the deaths of my parents and the elder Sprechers, countless marriages, and the birth of beloved children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

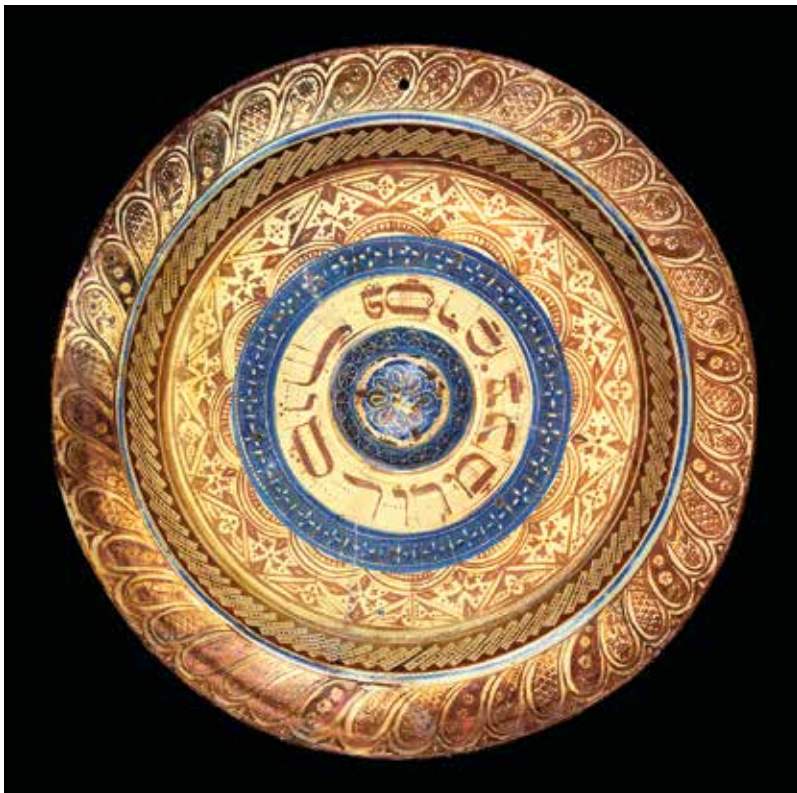
Before I became a metalsmith, I didn't pay much attention to what the seder plates looked like. In my memory they were simply round, silver or ceramic, and big. As I've reviewed my memories of seders past, though, I've come to appreciate that what ties my family's ongoing practices together—making them traditions as opposed to one-off dinners—is not only the emphasis on family (biological and beyond), the Exodus story, and the customary foods, but the seder plate itself. I've also become convinced that the best way to examine almost any tradition is to understand the rituals and ritualistic objects that give it shape.

## Making Judaica

I came to metalsmithing as a second career, following more than 20 years in the US Air Force and another five years as a Pentagon-based attorney. It was during those last five years that I began taking night classes at the Torpedo

Chicago architect and Judaica designer Amy Reichert's stone and brass **Seder Plate** (2008) tells the Exodus story by focusing on bondage and liberation. The foods of slavery—*maror*, *chazeret*, and *charoset*—are found on the stone base, representing Jerusalem. The polished brass disc is for the foods of freedom: *pesach*, *beitzah*, and *karpas*. A channel exists between the levels for the salt water that moistens the karpas, representing the Red Sea. One of Reichert's goals was to allow everyone access to the holiday, so there is no Hebrew on the plate.

amyreichertjudaica.com



This is **the oldest known seder plate**. From pre-expulsion Spain, it's housed in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. A ceramic lusterware plate created in the 15th century, it's one of a very few ceremonial pieces known to have survived the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492. Like many of the contemporary pieces featured on these pages, there are references to elements of the seder written on the plate. In this case there are four: pesach, *matzah*, maror, and the word seder itself. Interestingly, there are slight errors in the Hebrew on the plate. This likely reflects the fact that, for hundreds of years, restrictions kept Jews out of the metalworking guilds—so many traditional objects were made by Christian craftspeople unfamiliar with Hebrew.

Factory Art Center in Alexandria, Virginia, and the Thomas Jefferson Community and Fitness Center in nearby Arlington. With a fool's confidence, I resigned from my Pentagon job and went to the University of Wisconsin–Madison to get an MFA. Not long after graduation, I began specializing in Judaica—the ritual objects of Judaism—and attempted to adhere to three factors: whimsy, aesthetics, and function. I wanted to challenge preconceived notions of what a *kiddush* cup or a seder plate should look like, evoke “oohs” and “aahs” from viewers, and ensure the objects function as they're meant to (for me, a founding principle of craft).

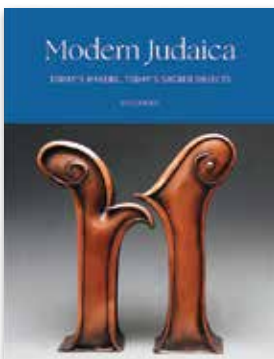
During this 25-year journey, I've repeatedly been vexed by the interface between Judaica and Jewish art. At one time, I actually tried expressing the relationship through a Venn diagram. While that appealed to my sense of empiricism, I realized it was, at best, not a very good representation. While writing and assembling *Modern Judaica: Today's Makers, Today's Sacred Objects* (Schiffer Publishing, 2022), I decided

to look at that issue through the lens of what Judaica and Jewish art contribute to being Jewish. This led to the book's slogan or catchphrase: “Jewish art tells the story; Judaica lives the story.”

There is a concept in contemporary Jewish thought called *hiddur mitzvah*, which can be roughly translated as “beautify the good deed.” This idea has engendered a wide-ranging expansion of Judaica as an expressive art form. In part, that's because, while a biblical prohibition against the portrayal of God remains, *hiddur mitzvah* permits the Judaica maker to create “beauty” in works that facilitate the practice of Judaism and its rituals.

So, as an example of contemporary Judaica, the seder plate has no boundaries except those broadly established by the Haggadah. Do its various makers employ unusual materials or unfamiliar aesthetics? It really doesn't matter. Those choices show the flexibility and freedom found in ritual life.

The concept of *hiddur mitzvah* also allows makers the luxury of creating seder plates that fit with the portions of the ritual they want to emphasize—as you'll see in the plates on these pages (all of them, except the antique plate on this page, are also featured in *Modern Judaica*). In other words, rather than form following function, function may follow form. ♦







For all of its nuanced differences from home to home, Passover, perhaps more than any other Jewish holiday, adheres to a kind of baseline in its celebration. Berkley, Michigan-based Lynne Avadenka's **World Book** (2009) brings the idea of this universality to the fore. Featuring a hand-lettered *Haggadah*, the cardboard globe opens in the center to display a seder plate and a tray for matzah, the unleavened bread that's another important element in the Passover observance. This piece was done for a show at the San Francisco Contemporary Jewish Museum.

lynneavadenka.com | @lynneavadenka



Working from her studio in Jerusalem, Israeli silver-smith Iris Tutnauer employs contemporary design and craftsmanship to convey traditional Jewish concepts and values. Her designs also adhere to the principles of *l'chadesh* ("to renew"), a word that signals the effort to move Judaica in new creative directions. The sterling silver and silver-plated copper **Haari Seder Plate** (2012) is designed to reflect the Jewish mystical tradition called Kabbalah and one of its greatest sages, Rabbi Isaac Luria.

In Luria's view, there are 10 modes or attributes (*sefirot*) through which God manifests. In this plate, the glass bowls are assigned to correspond to six of them: *chesed* (kindness/love), *tiferet* (beauty/mercy), *gevurah* (strength/fear), *netzach* (victory/prevaling), *yesod* (foundation/bonding), and *hod* (splendor/sincerity).

iristutnauer.com | @irisjudaica

Husband-and-wife potters Renee and Howard Vichinsky of Ulster Park, New York, have been making Judaica for over 40 years. On the front half of their **Splitting Sea Seder Plate** (2020) are written the ritual foods of the seder. Each has a compartment in the shape of the little basket that Moses was placed in before he was released into the Nile. The paths of the Hebrew people, represented by the lines between the foods, all lead through the split sea (the vertical half of the plate) to Jerusalem. On the waves of the splitting sea is written God's promise from the Bible: "I will take you, I will free you, I will gather you unto me, I will bring you to the land."

judaicapottery.com | @judaicapottery



In creating **Eons of Exodus** (2008), classically trained silversmith Harriete Estel Berman of San Mateo, California, incorporated silhouettes from a 1923 Hebrew Union Haggadah. She coupled this with architectural images from the then newly renovated Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco. The figures, with their various headwear and backgrounds, combine to address the universal significance of the Exodus for Jews throughout generations. The background pictures—of places important in Jewish history,

including Ellis Island, Ottoman Turkey, and the Pyramids—make the message of exile even more effective. One panel represents the forced migration of women and children from Sudan; like the Jews leaving Egypt, they carry bundles on their heads. The material list for this piece is a classic example of Berman's eclecticism: recycled tin cans, steel from toy appliances, 10k gold, and sterling silver and aluminum rivets.

harrieteestelberman.com | @harrieteestel

TOP: Photo by Howard Vichinsky. BOTTOM: Photo by Phillip Cohen.





A great example of *hiddur mitzvah* (“beautify the good deed”), the principle that allows for great creativity in Judaica, is ***Veins II*** (1996) by Cynthia Eid, who lives near Boston. This piece was produced for the seder plate competition sponsored by the Spertus Institute in Chicago. As Eid researched the plates, she realized that most of them had six divisions, but the one she used at home had only five. After consulting

with her rabbi, she kept her family tradition intact, creating this seder plate from a single sheet of sterling silver. There is no lettering, which reflects Eid’s belief in texture as a substitute for the visual interest that the Hebrew letters provide on other plates.

[cynthiaeid.com](http://cynthiaeid.com) | [@cynthiaeidmetalsmith](https://www.instagram.com/cynthiaeidmetalsmith)



For Allan Wexler, who lives in New York, Judaica is not about the past, it’s about the now. Trained as an architect, he has a contemporary sensibility, but he recognizes that the seder plate provides a conduit from one generation to another and that he has to deal with boundaries established by religious rules and a shared sense of history. Within these broad guidelines, he has found that there are unlimited possibilities. His deconstructed ***Scaffold Seder Plate*** (2009)—made of brass, ceramic, and cotton cloth—has only five “plates” for the foods: clockwise, pesach, beitzah, charoset, karpas, and, in the center, maror.

[allanwexlerstudio.com](http://allanwexlerstudio.com) | [@allanwexlerstudio](https://www.instagram.com/allanwexlerstudio)

♦ Jim Cohen is a metalsmith, past president of the American Guild of Judaic Art, and past board member of the Society of North American Goldsmiths. He lives in Durham, North Carolina, with his wife and muse, geriatric psychologist Dr. Seren Cohen. His 2022 book, *Modern Judaica: Today’s Makers, Today’s Sacred Objects* (Schiffer Publishing), includes over 250 full-color photos of Judaica objects from 53 artists, including the seder plates featured on these pages.







# Voyage to Resiliency

*An artist reflects on the ritual practice of making and how craft supports our ability to relate—and heal.*

BY COURTNEY M. LEONARD

**Take hands. Grasp helm.** We are carriers utilizing our skills from genetic memory. A codex of medicine. An existence of craft and as craft.

In times of silence, of paused reprieve, we center ourselves, afford time to breathe, take in sips more than gulps, and swallow the calm of embodied desires. To flourish, we must nurture the landscapes that honor us. A gift for a gift. For it is from these environments that we harvest our existence.

Craft is a voyage bound by memory and ritual. Our cerebral relations extend as fibers soaking the essence of skills set before us. Swabbing a deck of salted preservation, each sail we set merely cups the bellowing winds of intentions amidst a vast and open ocean.

How often do we produce? How often do we pause? Observe our daily intake? Our import of ideas? Our export of material relation? And for whom do we construct the labor?

We seek craft to heal. To communicate. To relate.

As the world came to a time of stillness during the pandemic, ceasing to travel and shifting to virtual relations, our calmness lessened our extraction of materials. In return this pause, this calm before the return of a creative storm, opened a shift of opportunities to think locally; to exist within the atmosphere of mindfulness; and to acknowledge our



ABOVE: Artist Courtney M. Leonard. OPPOSITE: *BREACH: Logbook 17 "Walking Cochiti Dam,"* a performative work with Anna Macleod, was part of Leonard's 2017 water rights residency with Santa Fe Art Institute.



ABOVE: Water vessels in *BREACH: Logbook 17 "Walking Cochiti Dam | The Return"* in Cochiti Pueblo Territory, New Mexico. OPPOSITE: For *BREACH: Logbook 14 "Archetype,"* Leonard wove bound local saplings into a whale tail breaching off Ship Harbour, Nova Scotia, Mi'kmaq Territory, holding space for what's above and what's below, and for interspecies relationship.

reduced footprints on or off deck. When docked on an island of solitude, we sat with our thoughts, our worries, our resiliency, and developed a resourcefulness of creative resolve.

Some shifted to learning to harvest closer to home so as to teach themselves, or others, that resilience is not dependent on the import and export of goods, but on an ability to walk, to relate to the cultural landscape we exist within, to be present, to harvest, and to exert energy through all of the layers of processing material relation.

Relationality is not a hindrance. Appreciate these pauses. Bear witness to the depths of possibilities.

Weaving a record in and out of time is such an expansive endeavor. A cordage extended and rooted from the elements of our emergence. A woven ancestor. A recognition of time. Often forgetting our tangible and collective energy.

Being accessible to one another may have expanded in a digital age of virtual video workshops and lectures and meetings, but as those times have reduced, we remain in our secular settings. Remaining within the home may have taken on a newer meaning however we define it. And by doing so we witnessed moments of observations that at times shifted our daily patterns.

Will we continue to carry the awareness to be still? To be calm? To be present? And to be mindful that for every action

. . . there is an opposite and equal reaction? Will the healing we seek with our relation and creation of craft continue to be a living resource? Can we be responsible and mindful stewards of these resources?

Those who know water in all of its truths know balance. The balance that we cannot exist without water. That we are water. That just as water can be calming and healing, it can also be chaotic and destructive. Are these the same truths for craft? The same balance? With or without permission, we extract. From birth we begin consuming. A bold gesture indeed. To flow from seed, to be sown. We ground ourselves with ambition and flourish in the resiliency of knowing that we are not alone. That the collective essence of our existence within each creative action is a ritual practice, a record of resiliency. What will they hold for the generations that carry them?

♦  
courtneymleonard.com | @courtneymleonardart

Courtney M. Leonard is a Shinnecock artist and filmmaker who has contributed to the Offshore Art movement. Through her work, she explores marine biology, Indigenous food sovereignty, migration, and human environmental impact. Her current projects articulate the multiple definitions of the term *breach*, and investigate and document Indigenous communities' historical ties to water, marine life, and Native cultures of subsistence.

Photo courtesy of the artist. OPPOSITE: Photo by Courtney M. Leonard.





**We seek craft to heal.  
To communicate.  
To relate.**





# A Higher Plane

*The new 28,000-square-foot workshop at Saint John's Abbey houses a 150-year-old woodworking program and one of the premier pipe organ builders in the country. Its mission is to teach the next generation.*

BY JENNIFER VOGEL

**Wearing a plaid shirt and a tool apron,** renowned pipe organ builder Martin Pasi sits at a large wooden workbench littered with tools and an unnervingly hot soldering iron, rolling sheets of lead-tin alloy into a pipe. “We are going to put a bevel on the edge here,” says Pasi, who recently moved his shop from Roy, Washington, to the grounds of Saint John’s Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Collegeville, Minnesota. “Everything needs to be very clean. This is 28 percent tin and the rest lead. The tin is in there to strengthen the lead up.”

The alloy sheets, formed in-house, are coated with sizing, a white powder made of gum arabic and chalk. “It protects the metal from burning,” says Pasi, rubbing the edges with wax. “When I’m soldering, the metal is very close to the solder. It wants to melt. But we don’t want it to. So that’s why we protect it with a sizing. It washes off really easily with warm water. This is an ancient method.”

Pasi uses a series of mandrels—basically, metal rods—to roll and shape the pipe, all the while banging on it with a piece of wood. Then he reaches for the soldering iron and carefully dabs the edges to seal them. “Now, the temperature and the speed with which I’m doing this is all-important.”

Pasi goes through the remaining steps of making a finished pipe—trimming, filing, soldering, forming the “lip,” cutting the “mouth,” adding a flat plate called a *languid* to control the angle of air flow—with the skill of a master. “Just the sound itself” drew Pasi to organs as a kid in his native Austria, he says. “It’s unique. It tries to imitate orchestral instruments. But, of course, it’s only an imitation. So it’s really its own thing.”

Hand-building an organ takes between a year and a half and two years. Currently, Pasi and his crew are making one for a church in Leawood, Kansas, that will have more than 3,000 pipes. “And the beautiful thing about pipe making and organ making in general is it’s a lot of handwork, still,” Pasi says. “It’s not something you can automate, because each pipe has a different measurement.”



OPPOSITE: The spacious new Abbey Woodshop, dedicated in October 2023, contains state-of-the-art equipment. ABOVE: Renowned organ builder Martin Pasi, who moved his shop from Washington state, solders a lead-tin alloy organ pipe.

**“I don’t think there is another organ shop like this in this country.”** —Martin Pasi

Pasi is one of just a handful of pipe organ builders in the US who make these hulking instruments using the old ways. He first came to Saint John’s in 2019 to oversee an expansion of the abbey church organ, which involved creating thousands of new metal and wood pipes. The project, completed in 2020, boosted the sound in the church, a stunning Bauhaus-style structure built in 1961—arguably the heart of a campus that includes a university, a preparatory school, and 2,500 acres of woods and lakes.

Once Pasi got to know the community, moving his operation to Saint John’s made sense. “It really was the desire to find a meaningful place for the tools and the templates and ideas and knowledge to go further,” he says. “I didn’t want to continue my business once I’m turning 70 or something like that.” The plan is to take on apprentices and pass on his craft. “I had a lot of time to be here and get to know the people, and Father Lew.”

“And then getting something like this,” Pasi says, standing at a new tub sink, washing the sizing from the now-formed pipe. “I don’t think there is another organ shop like this in this country.”

### **A New Home for Craftspeople and Artisans**

Fr. Lew Grobe is director of Saint John’s Abbey Organ Builders and the 150-year-old Saint John’s Abbey Woodworking program, both housed in the bright, modern, two-story Abbey Woodshop. Grobe, a woodworker himself, was integral to planning and fundraising for the \$12.3 million project, which opened in October 2023. “For us, we worked out of seven buildings before, all around campus,” he says, including a main woodshop that was outfitted in the early 1900s. “So we had to go outside all the time and it took a long time to get things done. This has been a dream for a long time.”

The project drew more than 2,000 donors, says Grobe. “So it’s much wider than Saint John’s. We captured some people’s imaginations about passing on this tradition, both in the woodworking and with the organ building.”

TOP: Martin Pasi makes the “lip” on a new pipe, using a mirror to keep track of the seam. MIDDLE: Here, Pasi shapes the pipe using a form called a mandrel. BOTTOM: Pasi shows a finished pipe. He will make thousands more for a church organ in Leawood, Kansas.







He views handwork as integral to Benedictine principles and to monastic life, which emphasizes simplicity, integrity, reverence, and beauty. “I love that balance between prayer, work, and study,” says Grobe, who wrote his master’s thesis on the value of manual labor. In fact, the Saint John’s campus is brimming with such efforts, including candle making, sculpture, painting, bread making, and ceramics. The Saint John’s Pottery is housed near the new workshop and helmed by longtime artist-in-residence Richard Bresnahan.

“We’re still moving in,” Grobe says, entering the new workshop, the buzzing of machinery and smell of fresh sawdust in the air. “I think what you’ll see today is a mixture of older hand-working traditions—we still build all of our furniture out of solid wood, with mortise and tenon and dovetail and things like that, for durability—and then some new additions like these dust collectors,” which press sawdust into briquettes that can be burned for fuel.

ABOVE: Abbey Woodshop Director Fr. Lew Grobe believes in the power of handwork and hopes to pass along woodworking and organ-building traditions and skills. BELOW: Woodworker Rob Lillard perfects part of a red oak cradle for a Saint John’s Bible stand.



Photos by Caroline Yang.



**They build the Bible cabinets—which have found homes at the Washington National Cathedral in DC and with the archbishop of Canterbury—and also much of the furniture on campus, including . . . the simple pine coffins in which the monks are buried.**



The workshop includes everything a woodworker or organ builder might hope for. Besides state-of-the-art tools and expansive work areas, the facility features a large wood storage room, a dedicated “small projects” area, a finishing room with a spraying cove where coatings are applied, locker rooms for men and women (complete with ADA-compliant showers), and three studios for “abbey artisans” such as Fr. Jerome Tupa and Fr. Nathanael Hauser, both painters. The space is populated by an array of monks, lay woodworkers, students, and volunteers. Grobe hopes the new facility will draw even more.

At one station, woodworker Rob Lillard makes a cradle for a Saint John’s Bible cabinet, which will hold a copy of the renowned handwritten Bible created in 1998 by the abbey and university, and calligrapher Donald Jackson. “I’ve been here for about fifteen years,” Lillard says. “It’s been a good experience for me. I enjoy working with solid wood. That’s unusual these days.” Much of the wood used by Abbey Woodworking is red oak from the Saint John’s property. They build the Bible cabinets—which have found homes at the Washington National Cathedral in DC and with the archbishop of Canterbury—and also much of the furniture on campus, including doors, beds, tables, chairs, urns, and the simple pine coffins in which the monks are buried.

The rest of the workshop is dedicated to pipe organ building, such as the well-ventilated casting and hammering room where the tin-lead alloy is made, a space with a 38-foot-high ceiling and crane where organs are

Photos by Caroline Yang





assembled before being disassembled for delivery, and a voicing room where pipes are tuned. “I was the one who traditionally took care of the abbey organ,” says organ builder K. C. Marrin, crouched in the voicing room over a box of reclaimed pipes. “But this was a little too big for me.” When it came to the recent expansion, “I said Martin Pasi was the one. We always say the room is half the organ. He realized this was a special place to have an organ. He got shivers from the room.”

### Built for Meaning and Purpose

When entering the Saint John's Abbey and University Church, which was designed by Marcel Breuer, a Hungarian-German modernist architect and furniture designer, the first thing you notice is the breathtaking wall of stained-glass windows shaped like honeycombs. “They came up with this idea of a hive,” says Grobe. “We are all together for this purpose. And all of these cells matter. This is kind of an abstract view of a liturgical season.”

The church is built of concrete, with a cantilevered balcony and unexpected clear glass windows overlooking planted courtyards. “It gives it an airiness,” says Grobe. “But it kind of changed our theology as well: What happens outside isn't different from what happens in here. You take what is out there in here and what is in here out there.”

At the front stands the organ and its colossal bank of about 6,000 pipes of all sizes, from tiny metal whistles to wooden columns that reach 32 feet tall. The pipes are accessed via a spiral metal staircase. On the way up,



TOP: A wall of stained glass illuminates the Saint John's Abbey and University Church. BOTTOM: The striking church was designed by Hungarian-German modernist architect Marcel Breuer. OPPOSITE TOP: Grobe holds a bread paddle made of wood harvested from the Abbey Arboretum. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: A handmade wooden coaster.



ABOVE: Grobe at the Abbey church organ, its pipes obscured by a red screen. RIGHT: Martin Pasi recently expanded the church's 1961 Holtkamp organ to include a total of 6,000 pipes.



Grobe points out the instrument's various features. "Those are the bellows," he says. "Those would fill up with air. This is a swell box. That is how you control the volume, with shutters. This is part of the addition here. These are some of the larger metal pipes. And then here is the biggest pipe. Remember that mouth Martin was making and it was so small? Well, look at how big it is here."

Standing on an elevated platform next to an open cupboard containing clusters of metal pipes, Grobe says, "Think about the engineering that would go into setting these up and then

Photos by Caroline Yang





actually making them sound right. This is what they call the *vox humana*. It's supposed to sound like the human voice, but it sounds like a frog. I don't know how Martin does that. I don't know how you tune something like that. But he made it."

Grobe hopes the new Abbey Woodshop will help keep pipe organ building and woodworking traditions alive. "There is a fear of them being somehow lost, along with the places that are able to keep them up," he says. "I don't think it's something

romantic. It's just kind of, we're doing it because it serves a purpose. I think of pipe organ building as the combination of the liberal arts. You have architecture, you have engineering, you have music and design. And it all comes together."

♦  
[sjawood.org](http://sjawood.org) | [sjaorgans.org](http://sjaorgans.org)

Jennifer Vogel is senior editor of *American Craft*.



# Rituals of Making

*Three artists describe the rhythms that spark their creativity.*

ESSAYS BY KANDY G LOPEZ,  
HORACIO CASILLAS,  
AND HONG HONG

**Consider the things you do** to get ready for your day. Maybe you make a cup of coffee, take a shower, turn on music, and check your schedule. This routine might simply be habitual—so ingrained that you undertake each action unconsciously. It's when actions are carried out mindfully, with purpose, that they become rituals.

To put yourself in a good mindset each morning, you might drink your tea from a handmade ceramic mug that reminds you of someone you love, wash your dishes with focused attention, then lay out the tools you plan to use in a pleasing pattern. These morning rituals help set the tone of your day.

We asked three artists working in various mediums—Kandy G Lopez, Horacio Casillas, and Hong Hong—to describe how ritual plays a role in their work. In the following pages, they talk about what they do to spark the inspiration to create, and about their deeply rooted patterns and cadences. Rituals open spaces where something meaningful can grow—and sometimes they are perfect expressions of originality. —The Editors

LEFT: Photo by Shooméjade. MIDDLE: Photo courtesy of Horacio Casillas. RIGHT: Photo by Justin O'Brien, courtesy of the artist. OPPOSITE: Photo by Roman Dean, courtesy of ACA Galleries, NY.





Kandy G Lopez's *Jeremi*, 2023, yarn and acrylic paint on mesh canvas, 60 x 50 in.

## Kandy G Lopez

*Afro-Caribbean multimedia artist Kandy G Lopez creates ultra-vivid portraits in fiber, stained glass, and oil. Her fiber portraits, made of thread and yarn, are as intricate as her oils, but with a three-dimensional quality that makes her subjects look as though they might step or dance right off the mesh canvas. Born in New Jersey, Lopez is a professor and program director of art and design at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She makes art at home but also keeps a studio on campus.*

### It's in the Eyes

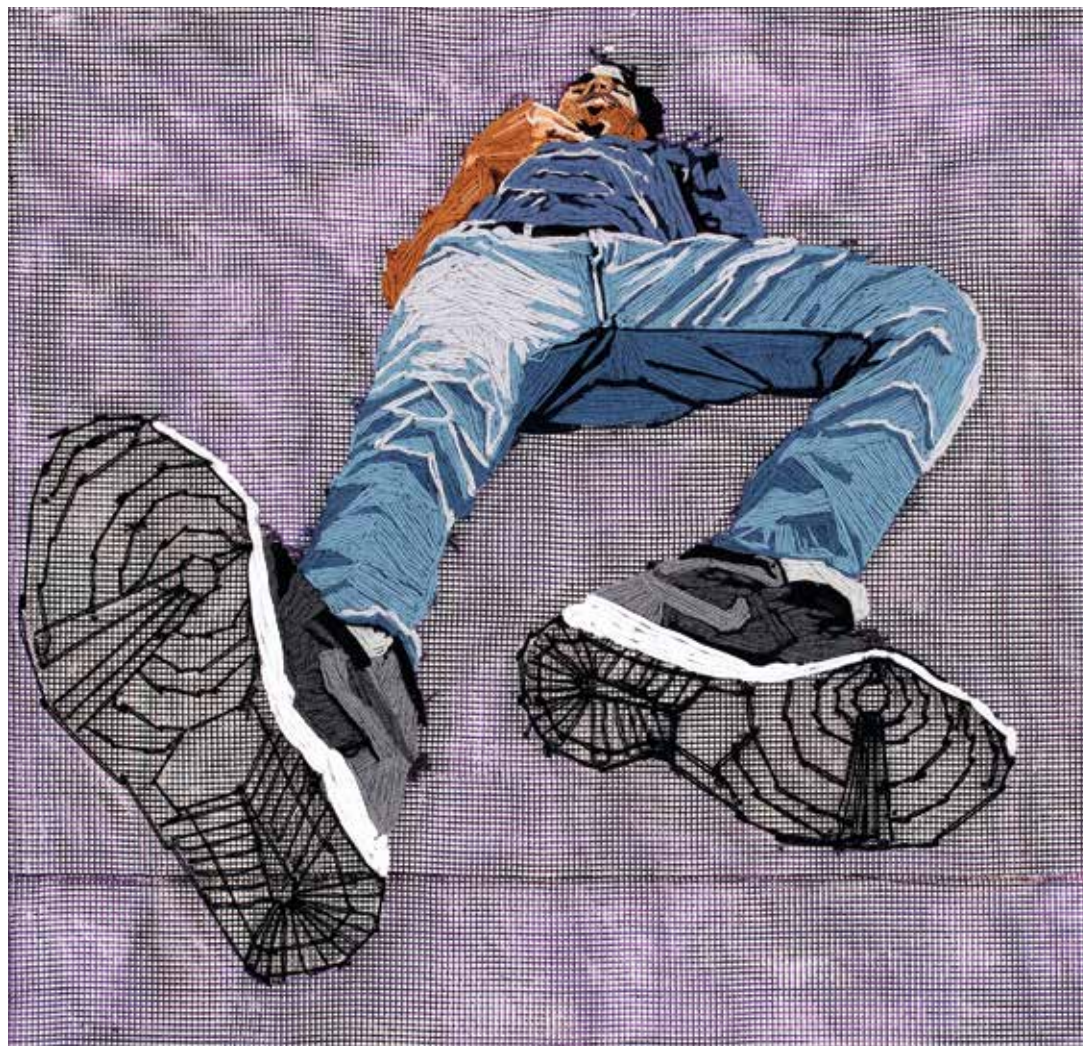
**My first step in any piece is inspiration.** That usually comes in the form of a photograph I've come across on Instagram or a person who stops me in my tracks and makes my heart beat frantically. Readings also inform my work, because the words create pictures in my brain that I add to the visuals in my sketchbook. Once I know what I'd like to create, I start with a clean slate. I schedule a morning to organize my studio and color-code my threads and yarns. OCD sets in. I pick up the pieces of leftover yarn and thread from the floor in my kitchen or studio space.

If I'm working at my kitchen table, I'm planning to create a small, intimate piece. This usually happens when I get overwhelmed and exhausted with the laborious nature of my 8-by-5-foot fiber paintings. The small ones are a break for me. They are also a challenge. My mind switches from yarn to thread, from bigger holes to very tiny ones. Depending on the size of the holes in the plastic canvas, I have to pull the strings apart to get three strands instead of six. The thinness of the strands gives me the ability to create sharper details. It's easier to manipulate the curve of the eyes with smaller thread. It's like switching paintbrushes.

If I'm working from home, it's usually after my husband has put our two kids to bed. The night is quiet, the dogs are settled, and I wind down by making myself a cup of Bustelo coffee, which is like hot chocolate to me. Once the table is cleared and







LEFT: Lopez's *Lamenting Luis*, 2023, 50 x 60 in. OPPOSITE: Lopez at work in her studio.

I've set my podcast or music—usually hip-hop or Bad Bunny—I think about my color choices. I usually have five colors picked out at a time. I run out of black and burnt sienna constantly.

If I'm working on bigger pieces, it's typically in the studio. I've cleared my desk as much as possible and set the yarn balls in their place. I've printed my image on an 11-by-17-inch piece of paper and pinned it to the wall, and pre-cut my hooking mesh and hung it so it's ready to draw on. I use Expo dry erase markers to make my figures. I love measuring and editing. It's another challenge—the game is to try to get it all correct on the first go. I fail every time, but feel satisfaction when a limb is correctly placed.

I make sure my ladder is nearby so I can get to the high spots on the mesh, and I have water or, again, coffee as a snack. At times I purchase M&Ms or a Dunkin' donut, especially if it's past 8 p.m., because I know I'll be at the studio until 11 or midnight and I need the sugar boost.

Once the image is sketched in, I pick out yarns for the skin. I pray that I have all the colors I need. I go through a lot

of browns and blues. It depends on the light within the image and the person's complexion. Once that's set, I thread at least three colors: black, off-white, and brown.

My ritual is to start with the eyes. Eyelash line first, then iris, then pupil, then whites. There are pink and gray shades within the eye. There are browns and highlights within the iris. After that, I work around the eye socket to get the eyelids, eye bags, and eyebrows. This usually takes 30 minutes to an hour. I try not to get too caught up in the details, and focus on the shapes and colors that make the person unique. Each eye is different, even right to left. The eyes create the connection with the viewer. It's important that my subjects look directly at the camera so their presence is felt.

Then, at some point, I look at the clock and know it's time to wrap things up and snuggle in bed with my husband.

—Kandy G Lopez

♦ [kandyglopez.com](http://kandyglopez.com) | [@kandyglopez](https://www.instagram.com/kandyglopez)



## Horacio Casillas

*Born in Chandler, Arizona, and raised in Jalisco, Mexico, artist Horacio Casillas makes holy water fonts for use in the Catholic church, elaborately carved clay jars, and other ceramic works. He is currently taking a break from his Texas-based artistic practice and serving in an orphanage in Honduras.*

### Balancing Inspiration, Interpretation, and Execution

**As creatures of habit,** we are often trapped and tormented by the repetition of the vices we can't seem to shake, yet in our habitual nature we find solace in the repetition of virtues. Like everyone, I have good and bad habits when it comes to working in the studio.

At the heart of a craftsperson's rituals lies the initiation. My most peaceful and productive days are the ones when I practice my best habits: getting up early, going to morning Mass, and doing my morning prayers. These rituals orient my mind, body, and soul toward God. By quieting my mind, assuming a posture of humility, and surrendering to the difficulties the day might bring, I open myself and my creative work to endless potential.

One of my worst habits that usually ruins the flow of the day is spending too much time on social media. The world is often so loud and divisive, I can't hear myself think. As much as Instagram and other platforms can be a source of inspiration and fraternal connectedness, for me they do more harm than good. If I'm going to be creative, I need to clear my head and look to the Creator, the author of beauty, for inspiration.

I have traveled a lot in the past five years, and the thing I appreciate most about going to new places is being able to visit different churches. A few of my favorite churches are the Cathedral of Saint Paul in Saint Paul, Minnesota; St. Joseph in Macon, Georgia; and St. Lucien in Spruce Pine, North Carolina. As much as my desire to create comes from the Lord, a lot of my design inspiration comes from the aesthetic of Byzantine, Gothic, and Baroque architecture.

Because of my travels, I've had many different workspaces. One of the rituals I enjoy most is one of the most important: setting up a new workspace or studio. As a maker, I spend close to 90 percent of my time in the studio. For me, it represents a sacred space, much like the chapel I find consolation in. So I spend a good amount of time making sure it's peaceful by finding the best place for all my tools, considering the direction I'll face when I throw on the wheel, and taking into account where the windows are and where the sun is coming from.



ABOVE: Horacio Casillas's *Rose Window Vase*, red clay, terra sigillata, underglaze, fired to cone 5, 11 x 8 x 8 in. BELOW: *Morning Glory* holy water font, stoneware, fired to cone 10, 18 x 11 x 7 in. OPPOSITE: Casillas at work in a studio at the University of North Texas.



Photos courtesy of Horacio Casillas.





Along with having an efficient setup, continual maintenance is also important. My most productive days start the day before, when I've cleaned up my mess—my work table is decluttered, my tools are washed and laid out, and my wheel is spotless. This allows me to use my time more wisely and be creative in the morning, when I feel most energized. As the day goes on, I'll drink hot tea, mostly green tea but sometimes chamomile, depending on whether I need some caffeine. Either way, it's calming.

Throughout the day, I usually listen to music, most often Texas country (I know, for the most part I'm alone in that boat, ha ha). But I also listen to *rancheras* and other old-school Mexican music, and when I feel like I've lost focus, my go-to is Gregorian chant.

Making sure my space can facilitate productivity is a gesture of my openness to co-creation with the Creator. This is something I will always have to work at, because by no means are all my ideas divine revelation. The number of failures I've had is proof of that. But in the sphere of artistic expression, the act of creation is not just technical; it is a balance between inspiration, interpretation, and execution.

One of my final rituals at the end of the day is to take a step back and contemplate how the day went. Did I work collaboratively with God? Did I work productively? How do I prepare for the next day? Do I focus on something, or should I walk away entirely? —Horacio Casillas

♦  
horaciocasillas.com | @horacio\_casillas\_jr

## Hong Hong

*Each summer, interdisciplinary artist Hong Hong travels to faraway and distinct locations to make paper under the sky. These environmental investigations map interstitial relationships between landscape, temporality, and the body through cartographic, symbolic, and material languages. Born in Hefei, Anhui, China, Hong currently lives in Massachusetts.*







TOP: Photo by Justin O'Brien, courtesy of the artist. ALL OTHERS THIS PAGE: Photos courtesy of the artist. OPPOSITE: Photo by Tom Peckham, courtesy of Tuseen Takk.

## Summer to Fall

*to wake, to walk a distance, no speaking, darkness, unravel, open, walk around, accumulate, submerge, stir, bend at waist, lift, wetness, weight, to pour, to spill, to turn, to lower, to empty, to walk back, to reach, to lose balance, some light, a few birds, squat, touch, pinch, push, lean, the sky, the ground, to walk again, to accumulate again, to submerge again, to lower again, to pour again, to spill again, to empty again, to lose balance again, the sun burns, feel for thinness with fingers, press against thickness with palms, to empty one last time, to gather, to sweep, to turn away, and then to return*

The process begins outside, in darkness, as movement. It is physical. I cannot see, but I remember.

December 2021, in notebook: My dad took out several large bags from the back of his closet. I opened one. It was filled with hundreds of bracelets, each made of knotted paracord and then carefully wrapped in layers of red embroidery thread. No one knew he was doing this. Not my mom. Not his own mother. He told me that he made the bracelets in the early morning, before the sun rose. He couldn't see as well as he once did, but his body knew the necessary movements: where to tighten and then loosen, when to turn and in which direction. I am just like my father.

November 2023, in an email: *the same sequence of movements are repeated. but the gestures are like memories in that they are not static. they transform each time i revisit them. something new is born. i go back to the past in order to connect more fully to the present and the future.*

I enter into time.

—Hong Hong



[honghong.studio](http://honghong.studio) | [@honghongstudio](https://www.instagram.com/honghongstudio)

LEFT: Hong Hong with *内/Interiors*, 2023, hand-formed paper made with water from Lake Michigan, sun, repurposed paper products, fiber-reactive dyes, and fallen foliage, 92 x 131 in. RIGHT, FROM TOP: Hong works on an in-process environmental pour in Hartford, Connecticut, in 2018. A completed environmental pour in Leland, Michigan, in 2023. Hong's *家/Home*, 2023, comprises hand-formed paper made with water from the Atlantic, sun, repurposed paper products, yarn, fiber-reactive dyes, ink, graphite, thread, and fallen foliage, 97 x 122 x 38 in. Debris from the external surroundings fell into and became part of *家/Home*.



# Morning Practice

*A multidisciplinary artist tells the story of a Oaxacan candle that's part of a daily ritual.*

BY TAMARA SANTIBAÑEZ

On my dining room table, lit by the early morning sun, sits a carefully curated selection of handmade objects, including terra-cotta candleholders with red tapers, a ceramic incense burner, and a set of Mexican folk art coasters sent to me by my mother as a housewarming gift. The arrangement's anchoring object is a small Oaxacan floral candle—its color somewhere between sage green and pale kelly—with a skirt of trumpet-shaped flowers around its base, leaves shaped from wax extending up toward the wick.

For years, I've admired the work of makers in Oaxaca, such as those in the three-generation family workshop Casa



Viviana (led by matriarch Doña Viviana), who employ traditional techniques in processing, dyeing, and shaping elaborately decorated candles, originally called *velas de concha*. The tapers, laden with wax flowers colored with cochineal and other natural materials, sometimes stand as high as their creators, the floral shapes overlapping in concentric layers.

In my own practice as a tattoo artist, I often work with clients for a number of sessions over months to complete a large piece. After finishing one such back piece, my friend and client gifted me this candle, saying he had found it in a local shop. Thrilled to get a Oaxacan candle for myself, I have carefully preserved it through moves to and from multiple apartments and studios. The object offers a small connection to a craft whose process I hope to see in person one day. And while it's too precious to me to burn, each morning I light incense in the ceramic dish next to it, drink my coffee, and think about how to bring the shape and spirit of such ritual objects into my studio practice.

♦  
[tamarasantibanez.com](http://tamarasantibanez.com) | [@tamarasantibanez](https://www.instagram.com/tamarasantibanez)

ABOVE: Tamara Santibañez. TOP RIGHT: Santibañez contemplates this Oaxacan candle, and other ritual objects, while sipping coffee and burning incense each morning.

Tamara Santibañez is an interdisciplinary artist living and working in Brooklyn. Their practice spans writing, ceramics, tattooing, oral history, and leatherworking, and other disciplines.

Photos courtesy of the artist.



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Orange Artifact by Karen Wallace

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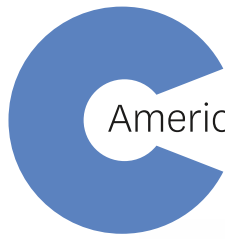
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# 2023 Year in Review



# Dear friends,

The American Craft Council celebrated 80 years of advancing craft and its makers in May—a fitting context for reflecting on our organization's purpose today. The world is profoundly different from how it was five years ago, to say nothing of eight decades prior. In the early 1940s, the work that would later evolve into ACC's programming focused on fostering the livelihoods of rural New York craftspeople by connecting them with an urban market for their work. With a nod to those origins, this year our board of trustees unanimously adopted a restated mission and three core strategies—the Strategic Framework at right.

This Year in Review is notable for ACC because we adopted this Framework while continuing to serve craft artists and enthusiasts in ways they value. We are pleased to share what we accomplished in our Fiscal Year 2023\* with your support and participation.

---

**"ACC has truly helped me build community and friendships with other makers that have opened my heart and world."**

— Etiti Ayeni, Artist

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Artists have told us how much they value the ways we connect them to craft enthusiasts and one another. Our in-person marketplaces in Baltimore and St. Paul together featured 497 artists, and our Online Artists Directory expanded to feature 251 artists. As evidenced by the joy we could see and feel at our flagship Baltimore show, our vibrant community of craft

appreciators was equally grateful for the opportunity to gather and revel in their shared love of craft and its makers.

To help artists develop their business acumen and create a supportive peer community, we developed Craft Lab—a series of online workshops free to member artists, led by experts in topics ranging from photographing objects to financing tools and marketing strategies for small, craft-centered businesses. Our intensive Emerging Artists Cohort program, which includes professional development, one-on-one coaching, and \$10,000 grants to artists at the end of their first year, grew to serve a total of 34 artists.

Once again, *American Craft* was honored at the prestigious Folio Awards in New York. This year we won an Eddie for editorial and an Ozzie for design, placing our work among the best magazines in the publishing industry. And our quarterly American Craft Forums drew 750 attendees eager to hear from presenters ranging from birchbark canoe builder Jim Jones, an enrolled member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, to third-generation violin maker Eric Benning.

Our choice to spotlight the exquisite craftsmanship and connections to culture and community, present in Jones's and Benning's work, reflects one of the most important ideas underpinning our new Strategic Framework: a commitment to support artists and makers on the diverse paths they follow as they build craft-centered

livelihoods. This means we will continue to welcome those who know about and enthusiastically join our community while also seeking out artists and makers who have been underrepresented in our programs. This includes BIPOC artists, artists whose work is sometimes described as traditional or heritage craft, and artists who derive their livelihoods from social impact work, exemplified by ACC trustee Pearl Dick of Project Fire. As we look to the future, we challenge ourselves to recognize and serve a broader range of craft and craft artists. Our work in this area will be ongoing, and we have much to learn.

Thank you to the current and prospective members and donors reading this report—for embracing and investing in our vision and making our continued evolution possible.

With great appreciation,



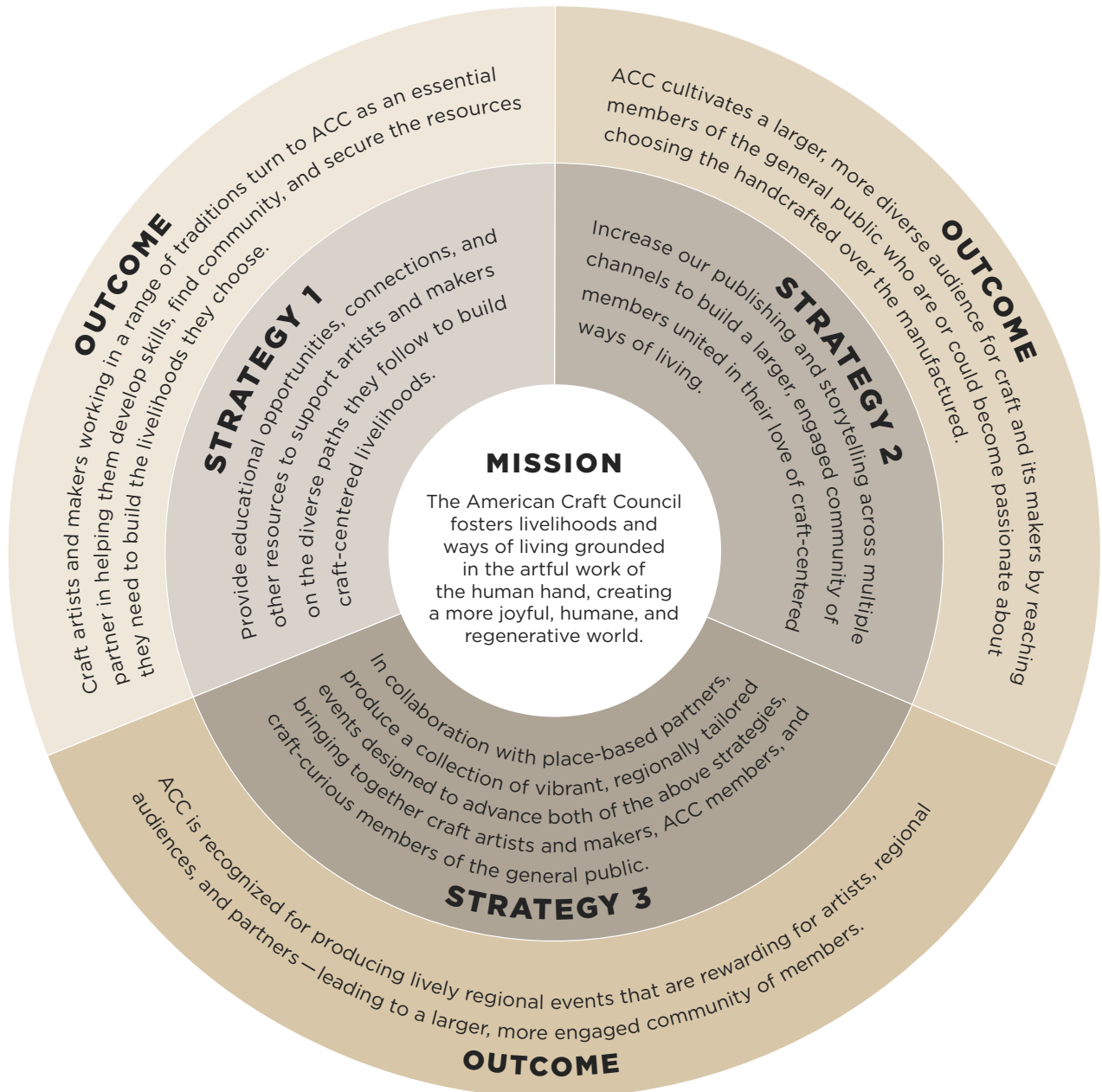
**Andrea Specht**, Executive Director



**Gary J. Smith**, Chair, Board of Trustees



# Strategic Framework



# 2023 By the numbers



**15**

Presenters at quarterly American Craft Forums



**34**

Artists served through our Emerging Artists Cohort program

**76**

Average number of craft-related organizations mentioned in each issue of *American Craft* magazine



**251**

Artists in our Online Artists Directory (OAD)

Pillows by Léna Designs, a participant in the Online Artists Directory

**315**

Number of Library and Archives users assisted by ACC staff

**321**

Writers, photographers, and contributors engaged to produce *American Craft*

**474**

Artists featured or named in *American Craft*



Tiny pitcher by Kiva Ford, as included in the Spring 2023 issue of *American Craft*



**690**  
Artists served through educational workshops and coaching sessions

**750**  
American Craft Forums attendees

**821** —  
Exhibiting artists in our in-person and online marketplaces

**7,750**  
Complimentary member tickets reserved for the American Craft Made Baltimore Marketplace

**10,000+**  
Tickets sold for the American Craft Made Baltimore Marketplace

**51,000** —  
Estimated readers per quarterly issue of *American Craft*

**97,344**  
Digitized library collection page views

**\$525,000+**  
To artists through in-person and online marketplaces\*



Exhibiting artist Danielle Gori-Montanelli at the American Craft Made Baltimore Marketplace, 2023



Ceramic artist Jiha Moon in her studio. Photo by Ari Skin, as included in the Fall 2023 issue of *American Craft*

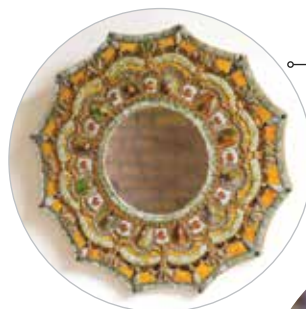
FIGURES IN THIS SECTION ARE FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2023 [UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED].

FIGURES ARE NOT DEDUPLICATED.

\*SALES AT IN-PERSON MARKETPLACES ARE REPORTED BY ARTISTS WHO CHOOSE TO PROVIDE THIS INFORMATION TO ACC.

# Thank you to our supporters

The people and organizations on these pages have been generous partners in our efforts, and we thank them deeply for their commitment to the continued vitality and growth of the craft field. This report recognizes those who made annual fund, designated purpose, and in-kind contributions to ACC between November 1, 2022, and November 15, 2023. Every contribution is important, and all of our supporters have our heartfelt thanks.



Mirror from Healing Mosaics by Shelley Beaumont, an exhibitor at the American Craft Made Baltimore Marketplace 2023



Shoppers at the American Craft Made Baltimore Marketplace 2023  
Photo by Max Franz



Woven textile by Carol Rajala Johnson, a participant in the Online Artists Directory



The American Craft Council extends special thanks to our **Craft Champions Circle** members for supporting ACC's work with annual fund gifts of \$1,000+.

## \$100,000+



This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

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Ceramic teapot by Polina Miller Pottery, an exhibitor at the American Craft Made Baltimore Marketplace 2023



Omolara Williams McCallister, one of 11 artists selected to participate in the 2023 Emerging Artists Cohort

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#### \$100-\$249

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Skip Abelson  
Shoshana Abrass  
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Judy Ackerman  
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Richard Adler  
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**The American Craft Council  
fosters livelihoods and  
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The American Craft Council has valued, celebrated, and advocated for craft and its makers since 1941. ACC's work includes publishing the award-winning *American Craft* magazine and a variety of online content; providing educational opportunities, funding, and other resources for craft artists and makers; producing in-person and online events; and more. As a national nonprofit, we rely on members and donors who share our passion for fostering craft-centered livelihoods, developing an audience for craft, and building community among artists, makers, and those who value their work.

## MISSION

The American Craft Council fosters livelihoods and ways of living grounded in the artful work of the human hand, creating a more joyful, humane, and regenerative world.

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The American Craft Council is committed to justice, inclusiveness, and equity. Drawing on craft's rich legacy of openness and its deep roots in all cultures, the Council will work to create opportunities for creative people from all walks of life.

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#### Planning and Goal Setting for Artist Entrepreneurs with Azriel Weaver

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 6-8 p.m. ET

#### Creative Budgeting: Making the Impossible Possible with Elaine Grogan Luttrull

Tuesday, May 14, 2024 6-8 p.m. ET

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suzye@suzyeogawa.com (310) 490-3737



## ASHLEY BENTON

ashleybentonstudio.com  
@a\_bentonarts



**LORIENE PEARSON**

lorienepearson.com  
L1960P@yahoo.com



**SANDY TEEPEN**

sandieslabel.com  
sandyteepen@gmail.com (404) 874-1421



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sidecarartanddesign.com  
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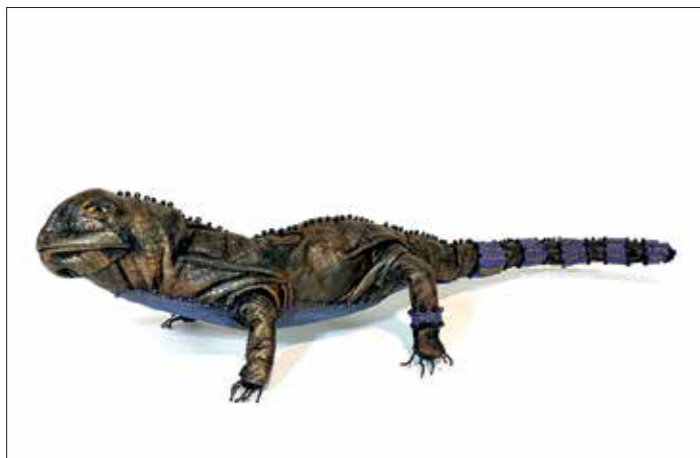
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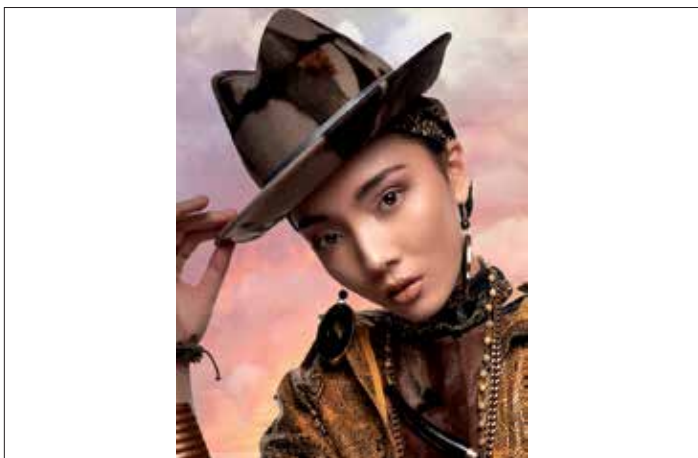
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[lorikatz.com](http://lorikatz.com)

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Workshops

BLACKBERRY HILL ART CENTER, Orford, NH

- 2024 Hands-on Workshops:**  
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**Sarah Anderson**, Sgraffito Designs, July 12–14.  
**Ben Lambert**, Slab Happy Swimmers, July 22–26.  
**Lakyn Bowman**, Mono-Printing on Clay, August 2–4.  
**Ariel Bowman**, Animals in Clay, August 12–16.

**For more information:**  
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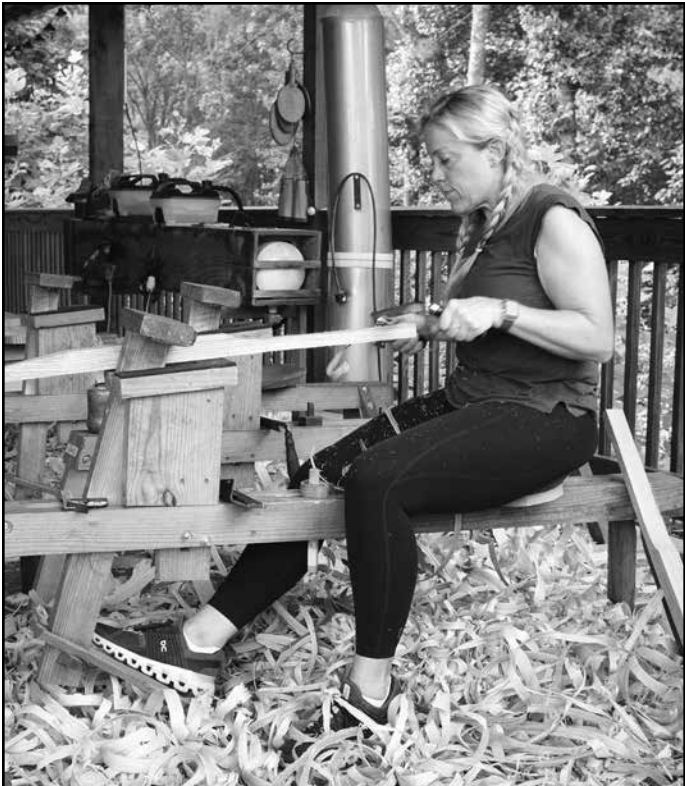
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## Across Time and Space.

*American Craft* recently visited the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City. As we entered, we were delighted to find gallery guide Nili Baider just beginning a tour. She took us straight to Canadian artist Shary Boyle's recent *Outside the Palace of Me* exhibition. "It's something," said Baider, who was a jeweler before starting her career in interior design, and whose name has appeared several times in this magazine.

Boyle's whimsical, piercing, multi-sensory, multimedia exhibition was a revelation—especially in its exploration of identity and the power of handcraft. One piece felt especially meaningful to us: a 23-inch-high terra-cotta and porcelain sculpture called *The Potter II*, featuring a headless potter seated behind a stack of pots.

See, we had vessels top of mind. We were in the city for the Folio Awards, where *American Craft* won two: an Ozzie design award for our 2022 coverage of ACC Award recipients, and an Eddie editorial award for our full Spring 2023 issue on the theme of *vessel*.

In *The Potter II*, the body of the potter seems to emerge from red clay. The sculpture's stacked vessels represent traditional ceramic styles from China, Ghana, France, Greece, and Peru. This work illustrates how vessels are a fundamental form that connects us as humans across time and space. It speaks to our desire to make the functional beautiful.

We're grateful to artists like Shary Boyle and to all the makers who not only create the things we need but also invite us into the world of our imaginations and of our shared humanity.

— The Editors

♦

[sharyboyle.com](http://sharyboyle.com) | [@magiclanterns](https://www.instagram.com/magiclanterns)

Photo by John Jones, courtesy of the artist and Patel Brown Gallery.



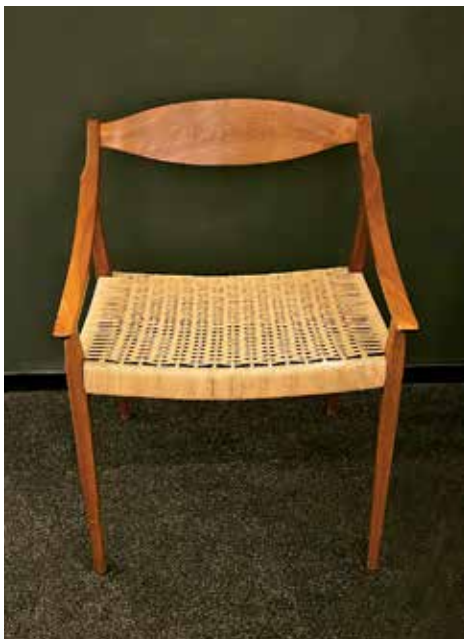
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*Vestigal Remnants*  
by Shalya Marsh  
for the group show *For the Wall*  
at Signature, through March 15.  
Porcelain, vinyl.  
8 x 7.75 x 2 in.



*Lotus Pendant*  
by Timo Krapf, TBK Jewelry  
at Gravers Lane Gallery.  
18k yellow gold,  
fantasy cut lavender quartz  
cut by Darryl Alexander.  
black leather cord.



*Tulips, Two Ears, One Moon*  
by Valerie Savarie  
at White Bird Gallery.  
Altered book, acryla gouache,  
acrylic, watercolor, vintage thread  
(book: *Tales Told in Holland*).  
11 x 8 x 1 in.



Chair by Joel Nichols  
at The Grand Hand Gallery.  
Walnut, Danish cord.  
29 x 22.5 x 22.5 in.

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