

JAMES RENWICK ALLIANCE FOR CRAFT

WINTER 2024

 CRAFT QUARTERLY



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The Craft Quarterly is published three times a year by the James Renwick Alliance for Craft, a national nonprofit organization that celebrates and advances American craft and craft artists by fostering education, connoisseurship and public appreciation. Although efforts have been made to eliminate errors of fact, spelling and grammar, the editor apologizes in advance for any such errors that may remain.

JAMES RENWICK ALLIANCE FOR CRAFT

5335 Wisconsin Avenue #440,
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“Wishing you and yours a craft-filled new year.” Rebecca Ravenal, JRACraft President and Jaimianne Jacobin, JRACraft Executive Director.

Photo from the JRACraft Pop Up, Chevy Chase, Maryland, 2023, courtesy Rebecca Ravenal.

Cover: Susan Taylor Glasgow and Janis Miltenberger, “Couplet,” 2016. Blown, sculpted and kilnformed glass. Photo by Nathan J Shaulis of Porter Loves Photography.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Winter is upon those of us living in the northern hemisphere, and cozy times spent tucked in a comfortable and safe spot are a privilege to be relished. During this season, I hope that this issue of Craft Quarterly will bring light and warmth in the form of insights from our authors, who situate and contemplate the notion of “intimacy” within American craft practice and its history.

The articles in this issue explore what it means to know an object closely, suggest the ways in which practicing craft demonstrates intimate knowledge, and the potential of intimate objects, installations and practices within craft discourse. Reflecting on her experience of slow and close looking, Mariela Acuña provides eloquent insights into the collaborative Davis Street Drawing Room, a space of temporally-based textile study. JRACraft President Rebecca Ravenal looks at the delicate glass sculptures of Susan Taylor Glasgow and examines the way in which her practice, its forms and concepts, depends on intimate knowledge. In an intriguing counterpoint, Jaimianne Jacobin, JRACraft’s Executive Director, considers the intimacy of artist-built environments at the Art Preserve in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Centering the visitor, curator Michelle Millar Fisher and curatorial intern Kennedy Harwood invite readers to investigate the power of intimacy and care in shaping a more accessible museum. With the benefit of practices lasting decades, artists engaged with the Art to Wear movement provide the practitioner’s perspective, reflecting on the space for intimate conversations and experiences that their works foster. Finally, sharing the collectors’ point of view, Karen and Michael Rotenberg share a bit about the process of building their art jewelry collection and cultivating relationships with artists.

Together these articles demonstrate that intimacy is a fertile concept in the craft field. It has the potential to open up a pathway towards a greater awareness of the needs and circumstances of oneself as well as fellow humans.

Thank you for inviting craft and conversation into your space.

Erica Warren

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Marilyn Pappas, "Nevertheless She Persisted #2" (front view), 2018. Cotton embroidery thread, linen, wooden stand. 60 x 19 x 11 in. Wooden stand by Cynthia Pellegrini. Additional thanks to Liz Newman, studio assistant. Photo by Will Howcroft.

Marilyn Pappas has been selected as a JRACraft Master of the Medium, celebrated May 3-5, 2024 at Spring Craft Weekend. Learn more at www.JRA.org

REFLECTIONS FROM THE ARTISTS: INTIMACY IN THE ART TO WEAR MOVEMENT

In her essay "Off the Wall: A Reflection," for the exhibition catalogue "Off the Wall: American Art to Wear" (2019), the collector and former gallerist Julie Schafler Dale wrote "Art to wear is kaleidoscopic in its visual range: a rich collage of color, form, texture, and media; a rainbow coalition of human stories—poignant, celebratory, intimate, heartbreaking, joyous, fantastical, always intensely personal—reflecting the internal and external landscape of a generation that came of age in the 1960s. . . The works are as varied and unpredictable as the individuals who conceived them."

Drawing on this evocative description in which Schafler Dale cites the intimate, we asked a few artists featured in the catalogue to share their perspectives on the Art to Wear movement and the ways in which intimacy plays a role in their practices.

Ana Lisa Hedstrom, Shibori-dyed, pieced coat, 1995. Silk crepe, 46 x 18 inches. Photo by Elaine Keenan.





Intimacy and Adornment
Carol Lee Shanks, Artist

My creative practice includes the overlapping disciplines of art, craft, design and fashion. I make clothing shapes that can be displayed on a wall, hung in a closet, draped upon a chair as adornment, or worn as a layered silhouette. Seeing the swaying motion of clothing on a body sparks my desire to envelope us in simple, unstructured, unencumbered cloth as art for wearing.

I've never wanted my designs to impose or overwhelm, but to inspire feelings of unique beauty, pleasure, comfort and ease. Silk naturally exhibits these qualities and I find it to be a perfect choice for my basic geometric shapes. I spend a lot of time manipulating garments, adding pleated and crushed textural interest to their flat surfaces. A light weight silk fabric works well for this purpose and the results make for a more interesting layered silhouette without compromising ease of motion.

Some of my favorite work developed while experimenting with artisan made fabric from Japan. This unique silk cloth was specifically produced for craftspeople who practice the ancient technique of shibori, shaped resist surface design. The fine woven and finishing properties of this cloth allowed me to permanently add hand stitched, imprinted and pleated patterns to my work. These subtle, yet stunning marks require close observation within the monochromatic palette; while the delicate cloth layers hug the body ever so gently, as a second skin.

I work in a quiet, open studio space. It is an intimate environment, perfect for my clients to visit and enjoy. I want them to feel relaxed, to leisurely gaze at garments and other art works on display. They are encouraged to touch, to try on pieces and to ask questions about my practice. We talk about adornment, personal expression and the importance of wearing clothing that reflects the way we feel inside. This is the place where art, craft, design and fashion merge. And where I get to see the results of my creative visions come to life as moving sculpture on a body.

On the Meaning and Use of "Intimacy"
Ana Lisa Hedstrom, Artist

As a practicing studio textile artist, I experience intimacy in the process of making. I often say that my craft as a dyer is a conversation with cloth. I respond to the fiber content, the weave structure, the weight . . . how dye is resisted, absorbed, wicked. In fact, the fabric seems to talk back as I respond to the results...sometimes saying "I won't do what you want." This can lead to the next step.

My practice is based on the concepts of Japanese shibori, a resist dyeing technique, to produce art clothing and textile art. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, I was inspired by Asian costume and the use of flat geometric fabric shapes to construct garments. I embarked on my work in an era when exchange and inspiration was wonderfully evident in the fiber arts. When I was in Japan, Issey



Miyake was in Paris. I experienced it as a time of openness, curiosity, learning, and respect.

Intimacy in my wearable art is in the eye and mind rather than the physical body. I hope that the wearer of my clothing will be drawn to my use of color, pattern and piecing, responding to my aesthetic and then sharing it in their own world. In that way, continuing the conversation.

Clothing often serves as a social marker identifying the wearer's community, age, gender, class, marital status, and/or religion. Woven patterns and embroidery as well as other textile designs can be read as a "language" that communicates culture, myths, and history. In my work, the cultural markers are still there, but personal expressions is paramount. Enjoyably, there is a global conversation full of experimentation and narrative.

Intimacy and Art Making **Janet Lipkin, Artist**

Closeness in every stitch makes the act of crochet very intimate and personal. It is a slow process like meditation, stitch by stitch I grow my image. I surrender to and trust that the stitch will take me on a journey, creating a garment of transformation. The act of creating "African Mask," 1970, involved dying the yarn, punching holes in the leather, painting the buttons, and crocheting. Step by step, I slowly moved towards the completion of the piece. When worn, "African Mask," transforms the wearer, covering all parts of the body except the face. The intimacy created by trusting this experience in which garment and wearer are one, combines the souls of maker and wearer.

Along similar lines, with my work "Transforming Woman," 1992, I interpreted an intimate personal

story (midlife crises), on a kimono-like garment. It is a story about looking at history, a story that speaks of a woman's search for freedom, and a story of transformation. I, the maker, share with the wearer a personal, transformative experience. The garment when wrapped around the wearer creates comfort and freedom, as the garment is without structure. The body is free to move without restriction. The wearer must

trust the feeling the garment provides, that to me is an intimate relationship between the work of art and the body.

Making each piece involves many levels of intimacy. One must trust each step in the making or creation process. The conversation between the creator and the process is a long ongoing one. The artist must remain open to changes that occur as the work evolves. I feel my work attracts only a certain kind of person. One who understands the depth of intimacy and closeness the artist experiences during the process.

The garments tell a story, the wearer brings the story to life. It is the heart, energy, time, care, and love that is put into making the garment that creates a deep magic. The garment and wearer become one. What can be more intimate than that? The artist must surrender their creation and trust it will find its proper home in the world.



Page 5: Artist Carol Lee Shanks in Berkeley, California studio, 2012. Photo by Elizabeth Opalenik.

Page 5: Ana Lisa Hedstrom, "Origami Folds, Patterning Paper Yukatas" (1 of 5), 2017. Indigo on paper (detail). Photo by Don Tuttle.

Janet Lipkin, "Transforming Woman," 1992. Wool, approx. 30 x 60 inches. Photo by Barry Shapiro.

INSIGHTS FROM COLLECTORS KAREN AND MICHAEL ROTENBERG

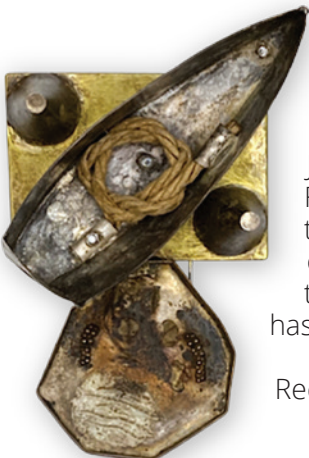


Karen and Michael Rotenberg are long-time members of the James Renwick Alliance for Craft and of the Art Jewelry Forum. Karen, now retired, was a gallerist, she owned Alianza Contemporary Craft for forty years, and has served on the Board of Advisors of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Board of Trustees of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

Our interest in contemporary art jewelry spans over fifty years, but our focused collection began in the early years of the 21st century. Innovation, construction, and a compelling visual statement had always informed our discussions with artists. But suddenly, the artists' need to question and expand notions of concept, material, and practice seemed to be on a fast track. New technologies and greater involvement in social and environmental issues encouraged dramatic innovation. To maintain

and encourage the growth of 21st-century art jewelry, we decided to focus our collection on young and mid-career art jewelers. Excursions to galleries and European trips (often led by the James Renwick Alliance or Art Jewelry Forum) generally transformed temptation into purchases. The opportunity to view the work and test its ability to relate to the body has been of prime importance to us.

Recently, the collaboration of art



jewelers has been a new source of intriguing work. The internet opened the world to contemporary art jewelry and the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the need to share and collaborate. The online exhibition AMEND (2020), curated by Kerianne Quick and Jess Tolbert (their collaborative partnership is Secret Identity Projects) honored the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which gave some women the right to vote. Billie Jean Theide's "Inside Looking Out," a brooch and plinth that honors protesting Suffragettes was one of the 100 works included in the show.

On many occasions, the messages of 21st-century art jewelry seem timeless. For example, the brooch "The Boat on the Shore," by Saskia Detering, speaks about migration and desolation. It is constructed of rope, burnished brass, and a cut stone. The empty boat and the materials send a powerful message of concern about those compelled to take life-threatening journeys in the hope of finding safety and greater freedoms. These works often start a conversation.



Karen Rotenberg wearing Zdeněk Vacek and Daniel Pošta, "Untitled," 2010. Rope and crystallized stone. Photo by Cheryl Richards.

Billie Jean Theide, "Inside Looking Out." Plinth and brooch. Photo courtesy of Karen Rotenberg.

Saskia Detering, "The Boat on the Shore." Mixed media. Photo courtesy of Karen Rotenberg.

Karen and Michael Rotenberg receiving the Museum of Arts and Design "MAD About Jewelry" award, 2018, with event curator, Bryna Pomp. Karen is wearing Emily Cobb, "No Egrets." Michael is wearing Atai Chen, "Cityscape." Photo courtesy the Museum of Arts and Design.

SUSAN TAYLOR GLASGOW BARES IT ALL

By Rebecca Ravenal,
President of the James
Renwick Alliance for Craft

In her artworks, Susan Taylor Glasgow appears to bare the intimate immediately. Her pieces feature glass corsets, bejeweled bras and other frilly undergarments, even a scantily clothed couple popping out of a toaster. But the real intimacy lies beneath.

The scale, subject matter, visible construction method, and emotional content of her work all create a sense of closeness with the viewer. Commentary on the “complexities of domestic life” and personal subject matter mined from Glasgow’s own life and family are often served up with formidable and constricting undergarments, beguiling chocolate cakes, and misshapen domestic objects. For example, in “Chained to Love,” a work from 2009, she shows a delicately-decorated teacup chained to a deflated and drooping teapot. With these two ordinary items, she suggests a bright and hopeful relationship somehow gone sadly, maybe even dangerously bad. This emotional honesty resonates with the viewer and creates a deep connection.



Susan Taylor Glasgow, “Rock, Paper, Scissors,” 2016. Glass and mixed media, approx. 30 x 30 x 72 inches. Image courtesy Habatat Gallery.

By probing in such a public way subjects that are usually private, Taylor Glasgow presumes the possibility of intimacy between the artist and the viewer, and even more so with the collector of her work. There is almost a private language here, some kind of understanding not necessarily found in the wider world. A collector gets to know the artist in a certain way, to trust and appreciate their world view and its visual manifestation. Objects purchased and displayed in the collector's personal space become part of their intellectual and emotional life.

Although it may seem incongruous, Taylor Glasgow has a unique knowledge of her craft that derives from her long experience as a seamstress. This enables her to design glass in a way that many would not even dream, much less be capable. Working with flat panels of glass, she cuts her forms, like pattern pieces on fabric, making shapes that allow her to create volume later. After several transformations in the kiln, including enameling, slumping, and other processes, she "stitches" the dimensional forms together. It is through her deep familiarity, her intimacy, with the



qualities of her materials, both fabric and glass, that her work is achieved.

By concentrating on familiar objects produced in a surprising material and exploring sensitive emotional content, Taylor Glasgow forms a furtive and tender connection with her audience that can be difficult to articulate. After all, as the artist recently asked in an interview for the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Washington: "isn't that what art should be about? Helping you tap into a feeling that is hard to put into words."

Susan Taylor Glasgow was a 2023 participant in the JRACraft Distinguished Artist Series.

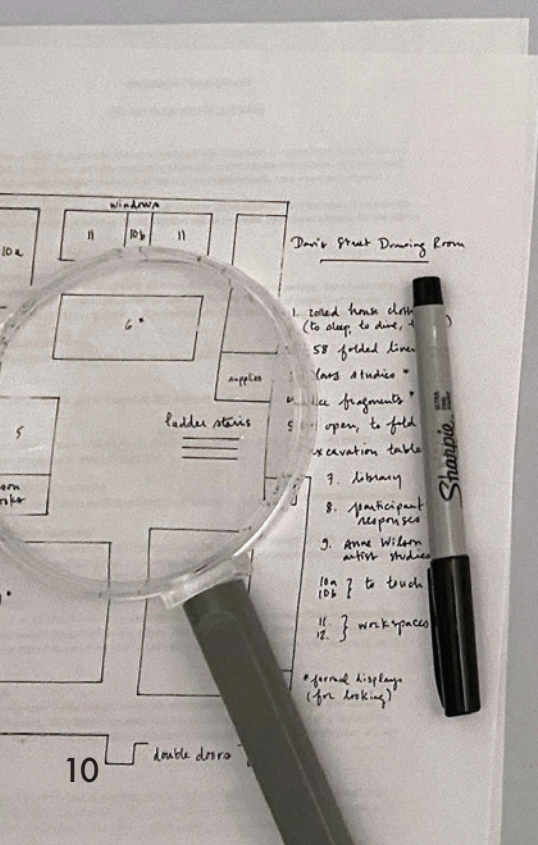
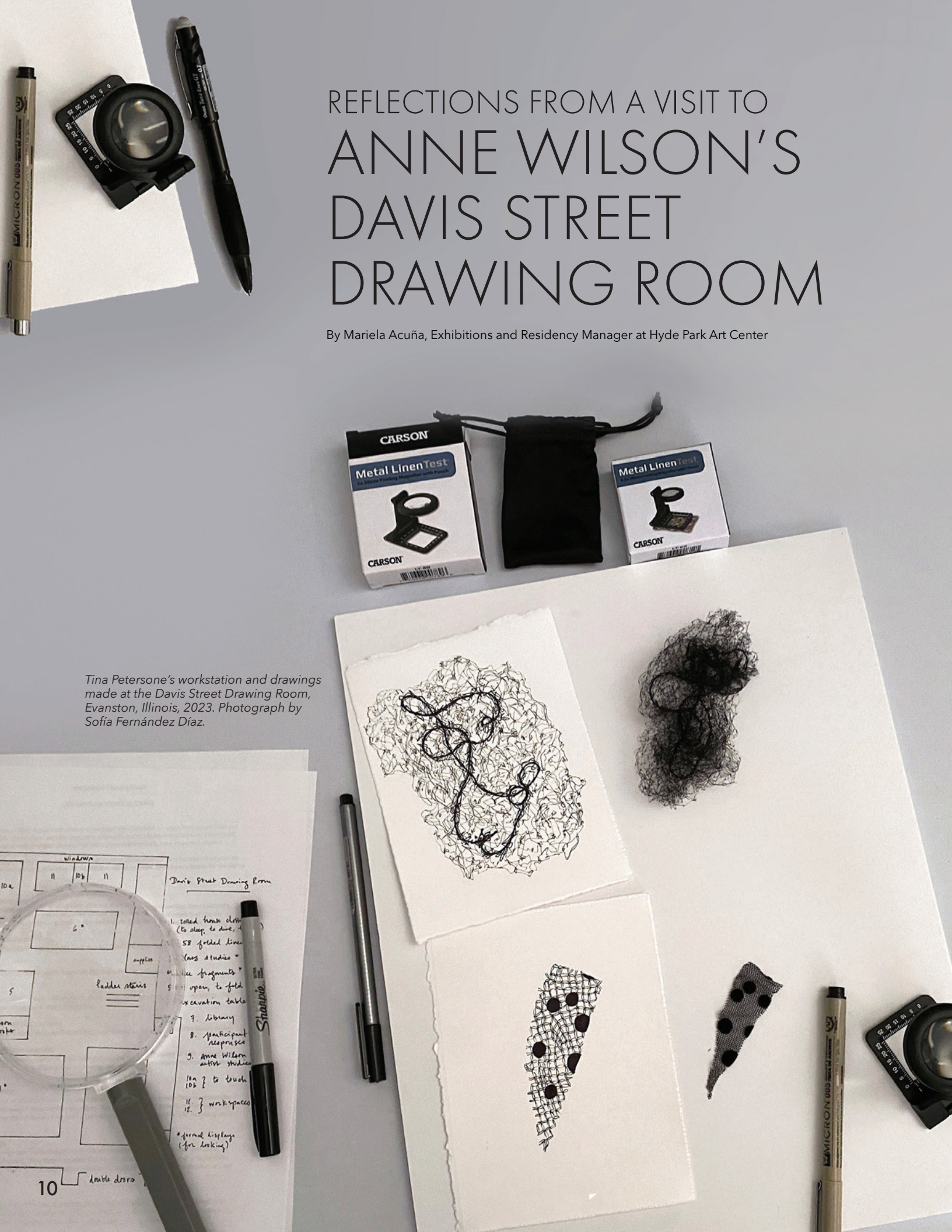
Above: Susan Taylor Glasgow, "Just Right Coffee Pot," 2005. Glass and mixed media, 14 x 7 x 11 inches. Photo by Heritage Auctions.

Left: Susan Taylor Glasgow, "Look But Don't Touch Corset," 2005. Glass and mixed media, 15.5 x 12 x 10 inches. Photo by Bonhams.

REFLECTIONS FROM A VISIT TO ANNE WILSON'S DAVIS STREET DRAWING ROOM

By Mariela Acuña, Exhibitions and Residency Manager at Hyde Park Art Center

Tina Petersone's workstation and drawings made at the Davis Street Drawing Room, Evanston, Illinois, 2023. Photograph by Sofía Fernández Díaz.



For a year, from fall 2022 to fall 2023, the artists Anne Wilson and Sofía Fernández Díaz invited small groups of artists, scholars, curators, and writers to look intently at Wilson's delightful collection of textiles and textile fragments as part of the experimental art project, Davis Street Drawing Room. So named because the project's site, within Wilson's home and studio in an 1887 townhouse, is a beautiful sun-drenched room that Wilson believes was intended to be a drawing room. In Victorian-era homes, like Wilson's, a drawing room was meant for entertaining, and for its users (typically women) to withdraw into and, at times, to draw.

I visited the Drawing Room in November 2022 with a group of colleagues, fellow curators, and the artist Robert E. Paige. After a warm greeting, our visit began with an introduction to the history of Wilson's home and to the project, still early in its development. We were invited to observe Wilson's collection of lace fragments, rolled linen, worn fabrics, and mended clothes as well as artist studies from her decades-long practice. The archive of artist studies included handmade glass bobbins as well as hair and cloth drawings. Other textiles in the collection were inherited from Wilson's mother, aunts, or cousins. Wilson noted that many of the textiles in her archives are contemporaneous to the house, a reminder that everyday objects and their histories are both material and conceptual drivers in Wilson's practice.

In the light-filled space, the textiles were presented in carefully organized displays that were introduced by Wilson and Fernández Díaz in choreographed sequence. After the introduction, we were invited to spend time with the beautifully-arrayed materials in the room and to respond creatively by way of drawing, photographing, or writing. The act of close looking, which has been core to Wilson's practice as an artist and educator for years, is offered as a starting point. Despite my training as an art historian and previous experiences, as a museum educator, with encouraging visitors to slow down and look at artworks, sustaining my own looking required some effort.

Each visit to the Drawing Room lasts three hours and guests are asked to allocate enough time to engage fully. Participating in the Drawing Room is an exercise in being present that invites visitors to connect what we see with our eyes and what we feel with our hands to what we know and

how we know. I chose to look at and draw delicate lace fragments with a pen on tracing paper. As often happens in Wilson's practice, the materials I chose to observe became a source of inquiry. Where were they made and by whom? How long ago? How did they come to be in Wilson's collection? What were the social, economic, and technological conditions that led to their creation? And most importantly, what if we approached other objects and beings with the same care, consideration, and curiosity that the Drawing Room inspires?



Anne Wilson, Gervais Marsh, Robert E. Paige, Mariela Acuña, Tina Petersone, and Allison Peters Quinn at the Davis Street Drawing Room, Evanston, Illinois, 2023. Photograph by Sofía Fernández Díaz.

Hundreds of people have visited the Drawing Room. Wilson and Fernández Díaz steward the project's archive of participant responses, which includes approximately 450 entries including drawings, collages, poems, short stories, photographs, and more; a living record of intimate encounters and of the generative process that is close and sustained looking. It wasn't immediate, but my visit to the Drawing Room revealed to me my own humbling capacity to connect, and to see myself in relationship with things, people, and systems, near and far. During my visit to the Drawing Room, I felt connected with myself, my fellow guests and gracious hosts, the materials in front of me, and the histories that brought us together, both known and unknown.

Anne Wilson was a 2022 JRCraft Distinguished Educator in fiber, honored in Washington DC at Spring Craft Weekend.

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PUBLIC OR PRIVATE: THE ARTIST'S SPACE

By Jaimianne Jacobin, Executive Director
of the James Renwick Alliance for Craft



Walking into an artist's space is often like walking into the mind of its creator. It can be clean, orderly and organized or bursting at the seams with creative experiments. Whether a living room turned studio, a private installation or purpose-built place, each space is a unique reflection of the artist's ideas, inspiration, imagination, and process. A new museum surfaces questions about preservation and public consumption of these intimate spaces.

In June 2021, the Art Preserve of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center opened as the world's first museum devoted to artist-built environments. Located in a natural setting on 38 acres in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, the Art Preserve showcases an expansive collection of experiential and immersive spaces and private studios. The collection of more than 35 artist-built environments includes the New York City apartment of textile artist Leonore Tawney, Dr. Charles Smith's project The African-American Heritage Museum + Black Veterans' Archive, and the home of Stella Waitzkin, an epicenter for creatives during the flourishing 1970s New York City art scene.



Lenore Tawney's 20th Street Studio, 1985. Digital file from the negative, dimensions variable. Photo by Paul J. Smith.



Lenore Tawney's studio, installed at the Art Preserve of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2023. Photo by Jaimianne Jacobin.



Dr. Charles Smith, African-American Heritage Museum + Black Veterans' Archive (site view, n.d.), Aurora, IL, c. 1985-1999. Photo by Lisa Stone.

Unique not only in its mission, but also its exhibition practices, the Art Preserve juxtaposes the reinstatement of artist-built spaces with curated displays of artwork and open storage. The dozens of visible movable storage racks reinforce the institution's commitment to accessibility, preservation and conservation. "Dedication to conservation is a necessity when bringing objects from an artist's site into the Art Preserve's carefully monitored and controlled environment," says Jo Bjorkman, collections manager at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. "Many of the components have spent their entire existence outdoors, and pest treatments, without the use of chemicals, and light cleaning are typically the first steps for most objects. Our dedication to conservation is about sustaining the original as we



Works by Dr. Charles Smith installed at the Art Preserve of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2023. Photo by Jaimianne Jacobin.

found it. It's about sharing with our visitors the life the objects have lived without changing or making new as if the artist just completed it." Walking through the space, questions about the intention of the makers come to mind. Some of the displays call into question the original intended audience, the anticipated experience, and the motivations of the artists, many of whom have long since passed.



Open storage at the Art Preserve of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2023. Photo by Jaimianne Jacobin.

As the first museum of its kind, the unprecedented access to artists' spaces invites a questioning of the private and/or public character of these domains. Of course, the preservation of artists' studios is not a new concept, and studio visits have long been part of curatorial work, the patron experience, and arts tourism. People across the world pilgrimage to the homes of Georgia O'Keefe, Frank Lloyd Wright, and a favorite in the craft field, the home of Wharton Esherick. At the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the studio of ceramist Lucie Rie is installed near the open ceramic storage and visiting artist studios. Motivated by curiosity or a quest for insights into artists' creativity, people have sought a way to connect with artists they have admired, and appreciated an opportunity to get to know them better. The artist space turned museum changes

how we engage with the space and provides fodder for questions about the artist studio as an intimate vignette or a stage for performance.

Michelle Fisher, the Ronald C. and Anita L. Wornick Curator of Contemporary Decorative Arts at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston has been working on a multiyear project entitled Craft Schools that has resulted in a 48-state cross country odyssey. Fisher's research encompassed visits to public craft institutions and private home workshops, resulting in artwork acquisitions for the MFA's collection, in preparation for a much anticipated publication and exhibition (in progress). She reflects on her experience by saying:

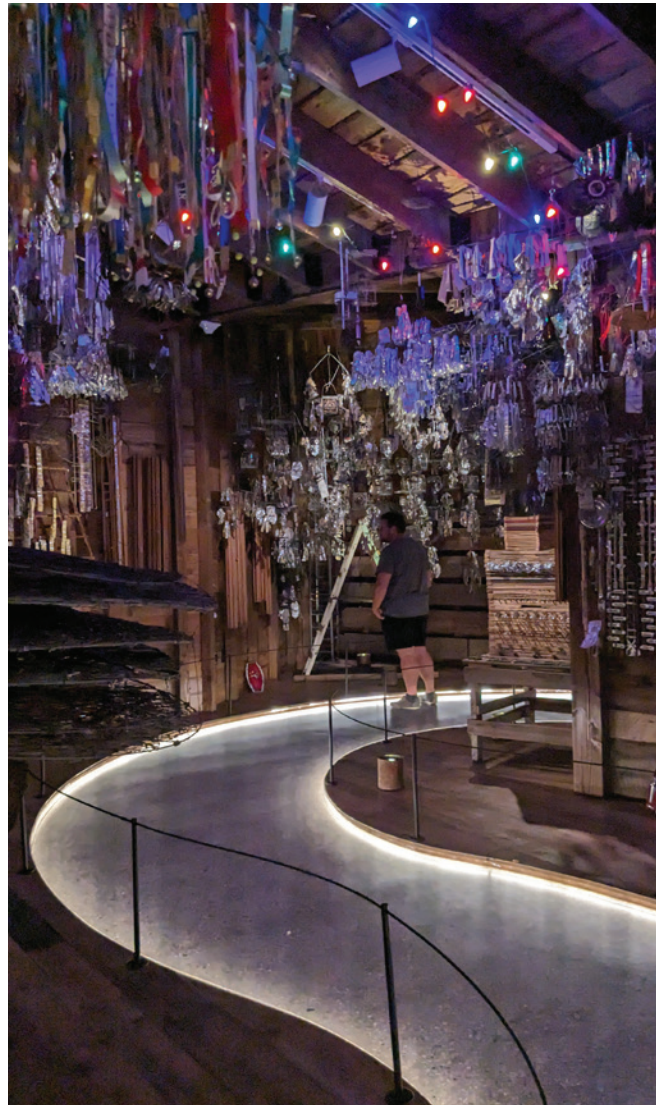
"For me, artist studios seem very private, akin to domestic spaces where you need the invitation and trust of an artist to enter, and where you ask before you take a photograph or touch something. I think of my writing desk -- my notes to self, scribbled test sentences, and drafts-in-progress -- as very private and something to be shared only when I offer to. The same is true for an artist's studio, which is why I think it's the most special part of my job to make a studio visit."

Are artist-built environments different from studios? Are they public or private or somewhere in between? How should artworks, without their original context, be displayed? Is it ethical to share what was intended to be private? Curators at the Art Preserve will continue to grapple with and explore these questions. Curator at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Laura Bickford, offers her perspective, noting:

"The question of whether artist-built environments are public or private spaces is a difficult one, mostly because of the implied access that is associated with those distinctions. I think that almost all environment-builders are motivated by a desire to connect with other people; they're making work that considers, and yearns to contribute to, a larger collective understanding of the world and society. Sometimes this feels very overt and straight-forward, like Fred Smith constructing more than two hundred large-scale concrete sculptures on the very public-facing property surrounding his Phillips, Wisconsin, bar. Often, their site is linked to a larger goal, like educating visitors about Black history as in Dr. Charles Smith's African-American Heritage Museum + Black Veterans' Archive in Hammond, Louisiana.

For some sites, the nature of the environment can obscure the artists' quest for connection - like Emery Blagdon's "Healing Machine" that was built in a shed on the back of his property. But at root, Blagdon was making work that sought to establish his relationship to his surroundings, circumstances, and community. He felt compelled to suggest alternative ways of being in the world, often remaking the reality of their everyday experiences to center his convictions, aspirations, and experiences."

Charting a newly emerging field, the Art Preserve is a groundbreaking exploration into the creative environments of artists with the potential to inspire all of us to further understand and respect the creative process as well as the artist's domain.



Emery Blagdon, "Healing Machine," 1955-1986. Installation at the Art Preserve of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2023. Photo by Jaimianne Jacobin.

AN INVITATION TO PLEASE BE SEATED

By Michelle Millar Fisher, Ronald C. and Anita L. Wornick Curator of Contemporary Decorative Arts and Kennedy Harwood, Department of Contemporary Art Intern, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Museums advertise themselves as places of sanctuary, contemplation, and care, yet visitors can often be hard pressed to find a place to rest in the company of a work of art – or simply with their own thoughts or each other. Where ample seating is provided, it's usually in spaces like a café where a visitor can spend money, not just time. However, at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Please Be Seated (PBS) program has commissioned artists and makers to create comfortable and beautiful seating for museum visitors to use for almost fifty years. This ongoing program is a direct invitation for our visitors to do something almost unheard

of in a museum setting: touch the art. We hope that the embodied reciprocity between artworks and visitors at the heart of the Please Be Seated program fosters care, intimacy, and curiosity for those who take a pew.

The program began in 1975 when legendary MFA craft curator Jonathan Fairbanks applied to the National Endowment for the Arts for seed money.



Over the next two decades, Fairbanks and his colleagues – including Gerry Ward, Ned Cooke, Jeannine Falino, and Nonie Gadsden – commissioned work from some of the most inventive and exciting furniture makers of their time, including Tage Frid, Sam Maloof, and Jennie Alexander.

Today, PBS works can be found across the MFA's galleries, including in the current Toshiko Takaezu exhibition, where a 1979 George



Nakashima bench sits. In the contemporary collection rehang “Tender Loving Care,” there are nine examples – from Barbara Gallucci’s grassy “Topia” bean bags to Rosanne Somerson’s “PoMo” bench – beckoning visitors to indulge in a moment of rest as they pass through 8,000 square feet of gallery space.

If the act of sitting on an artwork is a type of intimacy, it’s one with the potential to engender further intimate interactions through providing an environment that encourages close, slow contemplation of other artworks nearby. Research, as reported by Sarah Cascone at Artnet News, tells us most museumgoers spend less than thirty seconds in front of an artwork. Providing ample seating for visitors encourages them to spend time with works of art. The functionality of some craft objects – including those in the PBS program – is frequently used as a way to separate them from painting and sculpture. Yet, because they’re a place to connect more deeply with work across all media, the benches that dot the MFA’s galleries – artworks in their own right – push against such arbitrary distinctions and hierarchies.

The liberal inclusion of PBS works in “Tender Loving Care” was catalyzed because the exhibition making process was, from the very start, undertaken in collaboration with more than 100 colleagues in Education, Design, Interpretation, Conservation, and – above all else – Access. Accessibility in museums encompasses many

things: the ability of differently-abled bodies to move through the institution, the cost of entry (which for many US museums, including ours, can be prohibitive for many), resources for people with hearing or vision impairment, or the tone and translations of the didactic language used. The MFA’s Manager of Access, Jessica Doonan, reported that seating across the museum – or its perceived lack – is often mentioned in visitor feedback surveys. By installing more PBS works than usual, we responded in an intentional way that uniquely connected to the institutional collection.

The inclusion of these PBS objects required multiple trips to our offsite storage and close collaboration with the Head of Furniture Conservation, Christine Storti. Alongside Christine we assessed works from the PBS series that were too fragile to be used by visitors and required “retirement.” We also encountered the very “intimate” souvenirs that prior visitors had left on some of the benches and seats – including their fingerprints and, in one instance, their chewing gum.

PBS has generated 70 works by 37 artists. The newest entrant, Finnegan Shannon, is someone whose entire practice is dedicated to accessibility in all kinds of institutional spaces – including museums. In 2022 the MFA acquired a bright blue bench, from their series “Do You Want Us Here Or Not?,” which is emblazoned on its back and seat with the punchy and provocative

phrase: “museum visits are hard on my body / rest here if you agree.” As Finnegan noted in a recent interview with Claire Lucas, access is not just about universal design of physical objects or spaces but is “rooted in relationships” of care, trust, and active listening. This is a level of intimacy that can be hard for an institution to enact, let alone maintain. The inclusion of Finnegan’s work in PBS keeps the question their series asks – and the work of informed and international access – alive at the MFA. By making designated spaces for visitors to find comfort, the Museum is working to create necessary moments of rest, acknowledging the bodily presence of its attendees and expressing care through intimate experiences with well-designed seating.

Care is evident in each work’s shape and material, chosen to provide comfort and a sense of ease. Now on view in “Tender Loving Care,” Joseph van Bente’s settee caresses sitters with organic, flowing forms. Nearby, Rosanne Somerson’s blue-cushioned bench provides soft seating in front of a painting by Joan Snyder, the bench’s abstract applied wood shapes echoing the artwork on the walls. Just outside our offices in the Art of the Americas wing, John Lewis’ “Glacier Bench” offers a place of rest between gallery spaces with beautifully textured green-blue glass. We often hear it in use through the glass doors of our office

– perhaps a phone call to a loved one, or a quiet moment taken with a recalcitrant toddler.

What is the future of the PBS program? One dream is to commission PBS seating that responds to the intimacy and need of parents and carers who bring their young infants and children to the museum. What would it look like to create something practical, comfortable, and hygienic to breast-, chest-, or bottle-feed in? Another hope is to create seating that actively invites visitors into conversation with one another, an everyday luxury that not one of us has been able to take for granted during the pandemic. What sparks, ideas, and exchange might fly if taking a seat meant connecting with someone new? Can seating offer not just rest but forms of healing? These are open questions, and ones we are lucky enough to be able to ask and, hopefully, start to answer through the program imagined by our predecessor half a century ago.

The “Tender Loving Care” exhibition is on view until July 2025. Find out more: www.mfa.org/exhibition/tender-loving-care

Members of JRAcraft had the opportunity to go behind the scenes at the Museum of the Fine Arts, Boston during our 2023 South shore to the North shore trip.



Page 15: Finnegan Shannon, “Do you want us here or not,” 2020. Baltic birch, poplar wood, Formica laminate. The Wornick Fund for Contemporary Craft. © Finnegan Shannon.

Page 15: Sam Maloof chair in “Tender Loving Care: Contemporary Art from the Collection,” July 22, 2023-July 28, 2025, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Image courtesy the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Page 16: Barbara Gallucci, “Topia” bean bags installed in “Tender Loving Care: Contemporary Art from the Collection,” July 22, 2023-July 28, 2025, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Image courtesy the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Left: John Lewis, “Glacier Bench,” 1997. Glass, cast; metal; rubber. Museum purchase. Photograph © 2023 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

JOIN US FOR THE UPCOMING DISTINGUISHED ARTIST SERIES



Jayden Moore. Photo courtesy the artist.

JRACraft is excited to share the upcoming artists featured in our Distinguished Artist Series. Dates for these visiting artists can be found on the back cover.

JAYDEN MOORE

Jaydan Moore was born into a family of fourth-generation tombstone makers in Northern California. Most of his childhood was spent at the family business. Through these experiences he began to value the heirlooms and objects chosen to become markers for significant moments of human experience. In his practice, Moore deconstructs and reassembles silver-plated tableware into new forms designed to commemorate the individual's ability to do the same to their own valuables and memories.

ZEMER PELED

Zemer Peled's work examines the beauty and brutality of the natural world. Her sculptural language derives from her surrounding landscapes and nature, and she engages with themes of memory, identity and place. Her works are formed from thousands of porcelain shards constructed into large and small scale sculptures and installations.

TAMARA KOSTIANOVSKY

Argentine raised Tamara Kostianovsky creates colorful, fleshy sculptures out of discarded textile and clothing inspired by "animals and abattoirs alike." Her discovery of a world concealed behind the skin took place in her adolescence while working at a surgeon's office. A fascination with these encounters put the body at the center of her work, allowing Kostianovsky to use this imagery to reflect on consumption, ecology, and the voracious needs of the body.

JRACRAFT EVENTS IN REVIEW



DEBORA MOORE AT HILLWOOD

Nature and glass took center stage September 30 at our first Distinguished Artist Series of the season with Debora Moore, famed for her botanically inspired glass sculptures. Attendees were regaled with presentations from the artist followed by a viewing of orchids, both real and sculpture, at the stunning Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens in Washington, D.C. where Debora was featured in the exhibit, "Glass: Art. Beauty. Design."

CAUCUS MEMBER APPRECIATION

In October, we recognized our Caucus Members with an exclusive tour of the private St. Bride's Farm Sculpture Park in Virginia on October 15. Members walked the grounds with the curator and enjoyed breathtaking views matched by impressive outdoor sculptures. Our second event on October 29 allowed our members to get creative with artist KeKe Cribbs who led a mixed media workshop.



JRACRAFT POP-UP SHOP

Beautiful works lined the shelves of a former luxury storefront in Chevy Chase, Maryland where the public shopped and perused our first Pop-up Shop. We had a blast with old and new friends who popped in to purchase unique works of art October 21-22. All artwork was generously donated by our members from their private collections and re-sold as a fundraiser to benefit our free educational programs.

Photos courtesy Jaimianne Jacobin.



Zemer Peled, "In Eden," 2018. Porcelain, variable dimensions. Photo courtesy the artist.

SAVE THE DATES

JANUARY 9 & 13

Distinguished Artist Series featuring Jayden Moore

JANUARY 30

Coffee & Conversation: Beads in Contemporary Art

FEBRUARY 13 - 24

JRACraft Caucus Member Trip to New Zealand

FEBRUARY 27 & MARCH 2

Distinguished Artist Series featuring Zemer Peled

MARCH 26 & 30

Distinguished Artist Series featuring Tamara Kostianovskys

APRIL 9

Coffee & Converaion

MAY 3 - 5

JRACraft Spring Craft Weekend

SAVE THE DATE: MAY 19 - 23

JRACraft will be hosting a trip to New York City to coordinate with the International Contemporary Furniture Fair and WantedDesign Manhattan. Details forthcoming.

LEARN MORE

REGISTER FOR EVENTS AND LEARN MORE

WWW.JRA.ORG

Debra Moore, "Cherry," from the series Arboria, 2018. Blown and sculpted glass and natural boulder, 90 x 28 x 20 inches. Installation view, "Forces of Nature: Renwick Invitational 2020," Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

