

CRAFT QUARTERLY



James Renwick Alliance

SUMMER 2019



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The JRA Quarterly is published three times a year by the James Renwick Alliance, an independent national non-profit organization that celebrates the achievements of America's craft artists and fosters scholarship, education, connoisseurship and public appreciation of craft art. Founded in 1982, the Alliance fulfills its mission through public programs, educational trips, publications, recognition of craft artists, and financial support of museums and other non-profit organizations, including the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

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.

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DISTINGUISHED ARTISTS

ON THE COVER:

Distinguished Artist Series participant Tim Harding (page 13) participated as a 2019 James Renwick Alliance Spring Craft Weekend silent auction artist (page 11) and was recently featured on the cover of *Art Quilts Unfolding: 50 Years of Innovation* (page 17).

ON THE BACK:

Furniture designer and wood artist Tom Loeser will be part of the upcoming 2019/20 Distinguished Artist Series (page 15). As part of the series he will be presenting a lecture and workshop September 21 -22, 2019.

ON THE RIGHT:

Metal artist Elizabeth Brim participated in the 2018 /19 Distinguished Artist Series.

LEARN MORE

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DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Fellow Craft Enthusiasts,

My first introduction to the James Renwick Alliance (JRA) was from an invitation to the Annual Meeting in 2014. When I took a seat in the auditorium, the lights dimmed, and the program began. As the annual Distinguished Artist Series was announced, a collective sound of awe came from the crowd as a work by ceramic artist Beth Cavener appeared on the screen. That is when I knew I was amongst others, who appreciated beauty, craftsmanship and most importantly, American Craft.

In this issue of the Craft Quarterly we honor the importance of organizations in the field. We feature a book review of *Art Quilts Unfolding* originated by the Studio Art Quilt Associates (page 17). The Center for Craft announces its new national center (page 18) and we learn about So Young Park, an artist at the American Craft Council ACC Baltimore Show (page 10).

We also have the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the JRA, as we reflect on Spring Craft Weekend (page 11), follow the JRA study tour to Cuba (page 4) and reflect on seven visiting guests, three of whom were artists part of the 2018-19 Distinguished Artist Series.

Additionally, I would like to note the achievements that go unwritten in this issue. The Alliance has donated nearly half of the objects for the Smithsonian Renwick Gallery's permanent collection. We support artists at all levels, from emerging, mid-career to established. We are the only national organization dedicated to collecting craft and we are the DMV's premier organization celebrating all craft mediums.

Today, I am proud to say that I celebrate my first year as the Director of the JRA. I encourage all who read this to also be proud of the JRA's accomplishments and celebrate the Alliance by inviting someone to join a local event, trip, or the annual meeting on November 12, 2019. Maybe they will become a member, an artist awardee or in a number of year's from now, the director, telling a similar story.

Jaimianne Amicucci
Director, James Renwick Alliance

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THE INTERNATIONAL ART OF CUBA

**JAMES RENWICK ALLIANCE
TRIP TO HAVANA , CUBA
JAN 29 - FEB 5, 2019**

By Brenda Erickson

JRA member and trips committee volunteer

From the moment the JRA group touched down at Jose Marti Airport in Havana, the trip promised a bright and intimate view of Cuba. When we left Newark, the skies were filled with snow and the crew were de-icing the wings of the plane. However, Havana was a sunny 75 degrees and the countryside was a lush green.

We flew from Newark with Peter Dunner, our U.S. contact and trip organizer. After clearing customs, we moved quickly into the hands of our local tour guide, Gretell Sintes, who would provide a running commentary on all aspects of the history and life in Cuba, in addition to providing flawless translations.

We soon found ourselves amid internationally known artists, who could not have been more welcoming. Many were preparing for the Havana Art Biennial, which shows contemporary art by over 200 artists from over 15 countries. The government permits and even encourages abstract art, although it is not so tolerant of some forms of humor that include either Che Guevara or the Castros. Subtle commentary in the art does seem to make its way into the international art market and art sales are a major export for Cuba. Some artists are protesting for the repeal of Decree 349 which prohibits artists from commercializing their work without government approval. The group



viewed works by Jose Angel Toirac that he had not been permitted to sell, although that did not stop him from making the pieces.

A major supporter of Cuban artists is the Ludwig Foundation, a non-profit, non-governmental entity created to protect and promote Cuban artists, in Cuba and internationally. The foundation was established in 1995 by Peter and Irene Ludwig, private collectors from Aachen, Germany. The director of the foundation gave us an overview and explained how and why the foundation's location came to be in Cuba. The foundation has been instrumental in getting Cuban art shown in major galleries and museums throughout the world, including in the United States. Among American museums with works by Cuban artists in their permanent collections are the Peabody Essex Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach.

The Instituto Superior de Arte, the collegiate art school established in 1976 is another major arts institution in Havana. On the grounds of the former Havana Country Club, the campus retains the park setting but with new architecture using brick that blends into the soft hills surrounding the studios. Most of the students were on break, but some of the faculty members led us through the workspaces and showed us their work, which included some edgy ceramics as well as prints that reflected the full range of the ethnic and geographic





areas of Cuba. Education in Cuba is a priority and is nominally open to all; art education is also promoted and freely available.

Our visits to art venues started with the workshop of the graphic arts, which is next to Cathedral Square and an obvious stop for tourists. Many of the artists are well established and have gallery representation in the United States, Spain, Germany, and elsewhere in Latin America. The increase in tourism from around the world has allowed the development of galleries and the sales of art with prices and ambiance such as one might see in any major city. We saw works by artists representing a full range of ages, styles and influences. A personal favorite, Nelson Dominguez, was a great raconteur and created evocative humidors shaped like clothespins, which he said represents both the male and female form. Another favorite was the sculptor José Villa Soberón, who is known for abstract sculptures that we first saw in the Havana Fine Arts Museum, but who also creates figurative sculptures, including Ernest Hemingway in the Floridita bar and John Lennon in Parque Menocal.

Many of the artists have created art spaces that combine studios, a gallery, and living space in houses that they inherited or have swapped with other Cubans. Nelson Dominguez, Flora Fong, Abel Baroso, Beatriz Santacana, Mabel Prolet, among others, maintain such houses. Damian Aquiles, who repurposes painted steel into large canvases, has renovated an old villa complete with full-size chandeliers. Yoan Capote, who needs cranes to make his large scale work, found old steel pillars that still had the Carnegie stamp, an indication that the beams go back to the 19th century. His works exemplify the

fact that, in addition to being creative, many Cuban artists are innovative, obtaining the necessary hardware and adapting repurposed fixtures.

Places that were dedicated galleries reflected the range of art spaces. 331 Art Space is situated in a townhouse, renovated in a modernist style and complete with custom furniture. It shows a range of young contemporary artists, including works of paper by Ariamna Contino. By contrast, Gustavo del Valle exhibits his metal multiples in a small third-floor apartment. William Perez runs a gallery in a hollowed out building that resembles scruffy art spaces seen everywhere. His display of *Twenty Ways to Love* was irresistible to the group. Most would recognize his large aluminum rhinoceros complete with air horns that is on display at the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, CA. "Fusterlandia", an immersive outdoor art installation and a happening all by itself. It was started by mosaic artist Jose Rodriquez when he decorated his house with exuberant sculptures. The art kept expanding out of the complex and down the street.

The colors, variety, and joyous demeanor reflect how the Cubans approach their lives. As with the rest of Cuba, the art and economy is changing and evolving while still retaining that joyous beat that seems to permeate the air and soul of the country.

J. FRED WOELL: AN AMERICAN VISION HONORING THE LEGACY OF AN AMERICAN MASTER JEWELER

By Athena Naylor

Arts writer, illustrator and recent graduate of George Washington University



The film *J. Fred Woell: An American Vision* represents the 18th installment of the “Maine Masters” artist documentary series produced by filmmaking duo Richard Kane and Melody Lewis-Kane. The first of their films to highlight a craftsman, *An American Vision* examines the legacy of renowned jeweler Fred Woell (1924-2015).

The documentary considers Woell as a distinctly American artist and contrarian. When New York galleries told Woell in 1965 that they would not sell his work unless he made it with gold, Woell went on to craft jewelry from discarded objects, rejecting the idea that an artwork’s value derives from the price of his raw materials. Woell’s pieces resemble wearable sculptures more than traditional jewelry, and comment on American culture by repurposing society’s detritus.

Analyses of selected pieces provided by artist Robert Shetterly within the film uncover and applaud Woell’s intelligent aesthetics. The documentary aligns Woell with notable artists like Robert Rauschenberg and Edward Kienholz, and further reinforces his significance through interviews with the *grande dame* of American craft, Helen Drutt, who describes Woell as “an iconic American artist.”

6 Speaking at the DC premiere of the film at Montgomery College on March 19th, 2019,

Richard Kane emphasized that Woell’s “American vision” constituted a political act, redefining and democratizing jewelry and expanding the possibilities of the field.

An American Vision extends Woell’s impact beyond his individual achievements by celebrating his distinguished career as an arts educator at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, where he taught intermittently beginning in 1973. The film regards Woell’s pedagogy with as much reverence as his jewelry and includes interviews from students and teaching assistants. While popular culture often idolizes lone mavericks as archetypes of the “quintessential American artist,” Kane and Lewis-Kane recognize that Woell’s ability to foster and inspire creative communities is just as important to his legacy as his cleverly subversive artwork.

Completed in 2017, two years after Woell’s death, *An American Vision* provides an engaging introduction to Woell’s work for all audiences. Honoring Woell’s life and work, the film celebrates the ability of art to provoke potent cultural commentary, no matter the medium.



The James Renwick Alliance presented a film screening for *J. Fred Woell: An American Vision* on March 5, 2019 with director Richard Kane in conjunction with the Washington Goldsmiths Guild and Montgomery College Metals Department.

A LOOK AT LOOT

By Robert Sinclair
JRA member and past Quarterly editor

Bryna Pomp, an internationally recognized expert on contemporary jewelry, gave an impressive and insightful presentation to James Renwick Alliance (JRA) members of the Craft Leaders Caucus at the home of Bruce and Leslie Lane on November 18, 2018. The setting, Leslie and Bruce Lane's home, is a collection with major craft art pieces, all stunningly displayed. According to JRA member and event organizer, A more impressive site for Pomp's talk could hardly be imagined. Gwen Paulson, Bryna knows "just about everyone" in the jewelry field.

For the past seven years, Pomp has been the curator of *LOOT*, an annual exhibition and sale of international studio and art jewelry at the Museum of Art and Design (MAD) in New York. When she presented to the JRA, she was fresh from trips to jewelry centers in Europe and Asia; as such, the whirlwind tour she gave the Caucus group could not have been more up-to-date.

Bryna makes the point that in art jewelry, unlike other parts of the art world, there are few opportunities to gain a comprehensive view of what is being created. To fill this gap, she says, every year she presents collections of jewelry for MAD that represent "the best of what is being made worldwide." Since 2014, *LOOT* has given more than 450 jewelry artists the opportunity to show their work. Her slide show gave the group a clear indication of the variety in materials and creative workmanship currently available.

Materiality variety included metals (gold, silver, niello, copper, aluminum, brass, bronze, steel, titanium, zinc), semiprecious stones, glass, paper, concrete, enamel, glass, wood, and natural materials including dried leaves, dried potatoes, grapevine, rose petals, pebbles, and eggshells. She reviewed textiles, including silk, stretched hosiery, canvas, crochet and felt. The JRA's own Danielle Montanelli, daughter of past JRA president Barbara Berlin, received special mention. Recycled materials included plastic bottles,



X-rays, inner tubes, skateboards, and catalogues. Narrative works filled another highlighted category.

What was apparent from Pomp's presentation spanning a myriad of materials was the creative workmanship in a variety of new media present in the contemporary international jewelry field. When searching for artists, she not only searches for innovative materiality but master craftsmanship and originality.

Top: Bryna Pomp at *LOOT*, an annual exhibition and sale at the Museum of Art and Design (MAD)

Below: JRA Caucus Members at the home of Leslie and Bruce Lane listening to the presentation by Bryna Pomp

LINE MEETS FORM

A SPECTACULAR COLLABORATION

By Diane Cooper Cabe
JRA member and glass artist



What happens when two glass artists with vision and passion get together to discuss their work, their lives, and their collaboration? The result is a lively conversation about line, form and friendship.

The members of the James Renwick Alliance were treated to a compelling presentation by Mel Douglas and Nancy Callan at American University Museum, Katzen Arts Center on March 14, 2019. The artists introduced themselves as collaborating glass sculptors with two distinct, but harmonious voices. In a hour-long talk before an appreciative audience, Callan and Douglas portrayed both their separate journeys in the world of glass art and their joint work as collaborators.

Callan and Douglas have enjoyed similar but unique challenges in their love affair with glass forms and their inquiry into the formal and spatial relationship of line. Callan has previously described her “quest for the perfect form matched with the ideal surface, color, or pattern.” Douglas has described searching for the intersection “when the form is not just a substrate for drawing but a three-dimensional drawing itself.”

Douglas, who lives in Australia, and Callan, who lives thousands of miles away in Washington State, have been friends for years, meeting periodically at glass events throughout the world. The idea of collaboration came easily to them when they realized they had the same interests, and the desire to make something new and different together, while using their separate voices.

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Although living and working on different continents, modern technology supported their efforts, making it easy to send ideas and drawings around the globe.

The most satisfying period of collaboration came when they taught together and when it was possible to work in the same studio on their projects. The works that they created during their recent residency at the Chrysler Museum of Art, portray the interest they both have in line and form. Their sculpture, *Tied.Tethered.Bound*, which they co-produced, represents the personalities of both artists, revealing their interest in mark-making and their commitment to line and form.

The obvious chemistry between Douglas and Callan was particularly apparent during their choreographed talk before members of the Alliance. They began their conversation by stating that their collaboration is like “mixing complementary colors.” Taking turns at the podium, the pair presented a compelling narrative of their lives and their art, illustrating stories with words and projected images.

First, they revealed their “Defining Moments”, recalling events in their lives that helped form their art. For Douglas, who is a PhD candidate in the Glass Workshop at the Australian National University, going back to school as a student and a teacher was one such moment. Callan recalled a class at Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle, Washington that resulted in her being a member of Lino Tagliapietra’s glassblowing team for nineteen years.

Turning from those special moments in their lives, the sculptors discussed their inspirations, the ideas, objects, and motifs that inform their art. For Callan, graphics, comics, and fashion are sources that animate her work. Adopting color themes from comics, Callan creates large kinetic sculptures, like her Stinger series, which delighted the audience during her slide presentation. Principles that influence Douglas' work include geometry and lines, along with architecture, emphasizing its "ability to conceal and reveal." These elements are apparent in her Curvilinear series which impressed the audience.

The guests then had the opportunity to view Callan and Douglas' portfolio when the artists presented their Greatest Hits - those works they considered most successful. The works Callan displayed, including her String Theory series, emphasize her exploration into the nexus of linear and spatial complexities. Douglas focused on the formal and spatial dimensions of objects and on mark making, apparent in her sculpture *Wove.Woven.Weaving*.

The artists were especially animated when discussing artists they admire. The list ranges from sculptors Louise Bourgeois and Ellsworth Kelly to the ballet costume design of Oskar Schlemmer and the hand puppets created by Paul Klee. Encompassing varied art movements, the eclectic list is a reflection of Callan and Douglas' interest in three-dimensional work, in color, and in form.

To wrap up their conversation, the duo talked about the rewards and challenges of being artists at mid-career. To define the rewards, the artists asked, "Why



Do We Do It?" Douglas replied, "I like to see an idea in my head come to life, become reality." Callan's response: "It is a primal urge that is so satisfying."

The magic in the relationship between the artists was most visible when they discussed each other's work. Both expressed admiration for each other's skill and conceptualization. Their partnership is one of mutual respect mixed with an appreciation for the processes that each of them utilize.

The challenge that both artists identified as they move on to new ventures, as individual artists, and as collaborators is to face the issue of "What's Next?". Whatever comes next for Douglas and Callan, they will continue to work together, as they have found the experience exhilarating.

Pg 8: Nancy Callan and Mel Douglas at private lunch hosted by collector J.G. Harrington. Photo by Michael Janis.
Above: Artist lecture at American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center
Below: *tied.bound.tethered droplets* collaborative work by Nancy Callan and Mel Douglas



2019 JRA ACC AWARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR INNOVATION

By Rebecca Ravenal

Chair of the Distinguished Artist Series and ACC Award



So Young Park's jewelry is a kind of alchemy. In her new body of work, she combines multiple metal-working processes to create pieces that become something else entirely. She crochets and coats silver wires, forges textures onto tiny discs, adds beads and soldered balls, and turns these into magical expressions evoking botanical and aquatic life



For her bold and unique approach, the James Renwick Alliance honored So Young Park with the JRA Award of Excellence for Innovation at the 2019 American Crafts Council Show, Baltimore. Since 2015, the awardees have included artists Lisa Klakulak (fiber), Stacey Lee Webber (metal), Marion "Mau" Schoettle (mixed media), Seung Jeon Paik (metal), and Richard Haining (wood).

So Young's artistic development stems from her childhood playing by the seashore in South Korea. The textures and patterns of shells, pebbles and sea life sparked her curiosity and informed her unique aesthetic sense. Examination and understanding of nature carried her through some tragic experiences, giving her an appreciation of the inevitable cycles of birth, sacrifice, death, rebirth that can bring overall meaning to life and work.

So Young has found a way to present those views through her jewelry: "my pieces express desire, hope, and the power of life through organic plant forms that are artistically rendered... The use of wires, small discs, textures, and other small elements represents the single cells that make up all life. Each piece contributes to a long and painful process to create beautiful and unusual art forms."

Above: Brooches by So Young Park

Left: So Young Park and JRA President Michele A. Manatt at the ACC Baltimore Show.



SPRING CRAFT WEEKEND

A CELEBRATION OF CRAFT IN WASHINGTON DC

Once a year, DC becomes the epicenter of contemporary craft with the James Renwick Alliance (JRA) Spring Craft Weekend and Smithsonian Craft Show. *Crafts Today: The 1983 National Forum on Connoisseurship and Collecting* was the first of what is now known as Spring Craft Weekend and it took place in correspondence with the very first Smithsonian Craft Show. The weekend has continued annually and become known as the jewel of the JRA, where collectors, members and supporters now honor Masters in the craft field.



This year, with three days and four events, the total attendance was almost 400 guests. Supporters gathered to celebrate the achievement of five Masters of the Medium, all exemplary in the field of craft: Nancy Crow (fiber), Michael Hurwitz (wood/furniture), Myra Mimplitsch-Gray (metal), Michael Sherrill (ceramics) and Therman Statom (glass). The weekend began on Friday with a tour of two collector's homes for JRA Members of the Craft Leaders Caucus. The weekend continued Saturday morning with a free public Symposium featuring presentations by the 2019 Masters of the Medium; a Saturday evening Soiree and Auction; and concluded Sunday with an Awards Brunch honoring the achievements of the Masters.



All of the 2019 Masters of the Medium are represented in the collection of Smithsonian American Art Museum Renwick Gallery, many because of purchases funded by the JRA. One such example is *Sugar Bowl and Creamer III*, by Master of the Medium Myra Mimplitsch-Gray, that was on view at the Renwick Gallery during the weekend as part of the re-installation of the permanent collection. One attendee of the Saturday Symposium, Mary Rousselot, noted "Through the years the JRA has drawn together masters of their fields to talk about careers and work. I was reminded how long we've been enjoying these, when several artists referred to their mentors who, years ago, had been highlighted on similar Saturdays."



In addition to the many long-time supporters, new guests were in attendance from around the country, many of whom were students of Master of the Medium, Nancy Crow. In a unforgettable and heartwarming introduction at the Sunday Awards Brunch, friend and fiber artist, Judy Kirpich, asked students of Crow to stand and her astounding impact on the development of the Art Quilt Movement was realized when a third of the room stood with pride.



As the crowd applauded throughout the Awards, guests heard about the impact of the Alliance on the field of craft. Hurwitz accepted his award by thanking the JRA, not only for supporting him, but for not being afraid to use the word "craft" at a time when the field continues to be in flux. Therman Statom spoke about the importance of the Alliance and the museums in DC at his lecture on Saturday morning. In many ways, Statom's award was a homecoming, as he remembered growing up in the area and skipping school to visit the Smithsonian Museums.

At the Awards Brunch on Sunday, Statom noted "I feel part of something bigger... I feel as if everyone in this room is an advocate". Supporting and celebrating American Craft is a mission that continues and is made evident at events like Spring Craft Weekend. In June 2019 to January 2020, Master of the Medium Michael Sherrill will have his retrospect travel to the Renwick Gallery from the Mint Museum. In part, this was made possible, with funds from Spring Craft Weekend 2017. This year, funds from Spring Craft Weekend support further contributions and programming like the Distinguished Artist Series, and the Chrysalis Award for emerging artists.



1. JRA President Michele A. Manatt with Masters of the Medium: Michael Sherrill, Myra Mimlitsch-Gray, Therman Statom, Nancy Crow and Michael Hurwitz (right to left)
2. Michele A. Manatt speaking at the SCW Soiree and Auction
3. JRA Director, Jaimianne Amicucci with intern Bridget Galvin and Office Manager, Emily Schimmel (right to left)
4. Masters of the Medium speaking at the symposium: Myra Mimlitsch-Gray, Nancy Crow, Therman Statom, Michael Sherrill, and Michael Hurwitz (right to left)
5. Collector Roger Pratt explaining his collection at the Caucus Members' tour of his home
6. President Michele A. Manatt and Director Jaimianne Amicucci
7. Audience at the Saturday morning Symposium
8. Lloyd Herman speaking at the Saturday Evening Soiree
9. JRA Members Kathy Furlong and Gwen Paulson at the Awards Brunch
10. Auctioneer Jeff Olson from Bonhams at the Soiree & Auction
11. JRA Members J.G. Harrington and Chris Paulson at the home of Marc and Diane Grainer during the Caucus Member Collector Tour
12. Robyn Kennedy and Michael Sherrill at the Awards Brunch
13. JRA Caucus Members Kathryn Van Wyk, Bob and Sharon Buchanan at the Soiree and Auction. (right to left)

DISTINGUISHED ARTIST SERIES

TIM HARDING: PAINTING WITH FABRIC

by Rebecca Ravenal
Chair of the Distinguished Artist Series and ACC Award

Tim Harding began his artistic life as a painter and photographer. Once he discovered textiles, he became "intrigued with the intimacy of fibers," and left behind other media. But, he didn't let go of the theoretical or aesthetic considerations involved. With fiber, he can manipulate bits of colored silks as effectively as the pointillists. He can build a forceful wall of varied hues as effectively as any color field painter.

Part of Tim's fascination with fabric comes from breaking the cultural taboos of textiles, "violating" the preciousness of cloth, and mining the vulnerability of being able to tear, scorch, layer, fray, fold, and cut his materials. He uses traditional and self-developed innovative techniques to build texture, pattern, and dimension into each piece, rising above the flat plane of traditional cloth works.

Light/shadow, figure/ground, abstraction/representation, obscure/reveal are some of the relationships Tim likes to explore. In his latest body of work, he plays with images placed under the cut layers. Figures and faces peek through the cuts, flickering in and out of recognition like a colorful mirage. He loves that "aha!" moment when the viewer discovers the image. Although he has been a fiber artist for forty years, he is still finding tangents and interesting new directions to spur his creativity.

During his Distinguished Artist Series Weekend, March 9-10, members and friends of the James Renwick Alliance had the opportunity to meet Tim Harding and learn, in detail, about his unique, awe-inspiring process and perspective on art making. During his workshop, he demonstrated his inventive processes using "reverse-applique" and lecture attendees had a unique and rare opportunity to hear his first lecture in 15 years about his influences and experiences.

Tim Harding brings together elements of fine art and applied art to create textile pieces that defy any strict category and allow them to be considered for their intrinsic beauty. His artworks are included in The Renwick Gallery and numerous other museum and private collections around the world and most recently on the cover of *Art Quilts Unfolding: 50 Years of Innovation* (page 17).



BENNET BEAN: THE ADVENTURER

By Cass Johnson
Director of District Clay and JRA Board Member

There is something both grand and audacious in Bennet Bean's vessels. He takes the "lowliest" of clays - plain ol' earthenware- and subjects it to the most ancient of firing methods - an outdoor pit fire. He then takes the smoke marked results and applies that most precious element, gold, over the inside. In a neat twist, he has made gold the mere backdrop for the explosion of color and design to come. He then assembles his motifs, a decorative pattern from a, say, a kimono he admired, and arrays them over the outside of the pot. He finally painstakingly paints (not glazes, paints) the outside of the pot with a blaze of brilliant colors. What emerges must be some of the most unique and beautiful ceramic pieces of the last 50 years.

But try and get Bennett to say they are beautiful is



JRA Member Pat Arnold with applied gold leaf at the Bennet Bean Distinguished Artist Series workshop.



14 Bennet Bean Distinguished Artist Series Workshop

a trick in itself. His favorite comment to hear about one of his pieces? "I'll buy it." The worst? "It's too expensive." He is a businessman. This is how he makes his living and how he has for 40 plus years. In that time, he has seen the craft movement rise and fall, the gallery system largely fail, the art movement begin to move into the craft world and the studio artist forced to become his own marketer, salesman, and promoter.

Throughout all that, he calls himself "the luckiest man." Lucky because he found early success in the art world but somehow knew early on it was not the world he wanted to create in. Lucky because he was the "last generation" to leave art school with a teaching job virtually guaranteed. Lucky because the teaching world fired him (for the 3rd time) just as the craft world was exploding as a new viable market. And that meant he was lucky enough to hit the workshop circuit with his catalog of ceramic techniques, (including the use of paint, still heterodox in some ceramics studios); and was able to develop a secure client base for the rest of his life.

Of course, it was not just luck. And it was not just about the sale. It is about a vision in his mind that is always a little out of reach. Of his work, he says "I try to get it as close as my fantasy world will allow." So Bean is really a fantasist who simply will not admit ultimate failure. This is what has driven him to transgress the boundaries of ceramic art. To put gild on the interiors of his pots. To put paint on the exteriors. To slice his pots up and reconstruct them. To develop a casebook of hundreds of decorative motifs and then to use 5, 10 sometimes 15 on one piece of work. To start with the most common and fragile clay and then to transform into something almost ethereal.

He is still a man in a creative hurry. He admits that during his career he "stole, every place I could" in an effort to learn. "I had serial art affairs - I could fall in love every week." As an emerging artist, he started with Japanese Mingei, as many artists did in the 60's. He flirted a bit with Chinese ceramics, and with airbrushing a la Art Nouveau. But it was when



he discovered abstraction in the masking tape section of Perry's Supplies that his palette began to take hold. His most revolutionary move was next when he saw beyond glazing and began using acrylic paints to pump up his color choices. Along the way, he became enthralled with the richness and "amorality" of gold leaf. In a serendipitous accident, he tore the lip of a pot but then decided that maybe the tear was "a thing". The rims of his pots then became geometric edges and curves, sometimes doubling into one another. He made a commission for two collectors and smushed their two pots together. This led to two, three or even four pots being sliced and re-arranged together. This created more space to paint and apply motifs and more space for that amoral gold to shine through.

After 40 years or so, his pieces are veritable symphonies of color. A Bean vessel is typically framed by walls that bend backward and flare up. The piece is open, reaching for the sky. On the upper rims, the edges are frayed and ripped. They have become real vessels, magnificent sailing ships of the most fabulous dream you can imagine, with their sails whipping the wind. The stern is scored and marked by the sea but the ship plunges on, a swirl of color and pageantry, speaking of glorious ages past and perhaps of brilliant ages to come.



ANNOUNCING THE 2019/20 DISTINGUISHED ARTIST SERIES

Four times a year, the James Renwick Alliance brings notable craft artists from around the country to Washington, DC for a Saturday workshop and Sunday lecture.

SEPTEMBER 21 - 22, 2019

TOM LOESER

- 9/21 Workshop, 9:30am - 12pm
Home of collector's Leslie & Bruce Lane, Bethesda, MD
- 9/22 Lecture 2pm - 3pm
AU Museum at the Katzen Arts Center

NOVEMBER 16 - 17, 2019

REBECCA HUTCHINSON

- 11/16 Workshop, 9:30am - 12pm
District Clay, Washington, DC
- 11/17 Lecture 2pm - 3:30pm
AU Museum at the Katzen Arts Center

MARCH 7 - 8, 2020

ANNIE EVELYN

- 3/7 Workshop, 9:30am - 12pm
Artists & Makers, Rockville, MD
- 3/8 Lecture 2pm - 3pm
AU Museum at the Katzen Arts Center

MAY 16 - 17, 2020

KATE KRETZ

- 5/16 Workshop, 9:30am - 12pm
White Point Studio, Mt Rainier, MD
- 5/17 Lecture 2pm - 3pm
AU Museum at the Katzen Arts Center

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ELIZABETH BRIM: STEEL & PEARLS

By Chris Shea
JRA member and artist



Elizabeth Brim demonstrating at her Distinguished Artist Series Workshop.

For the fourth and final Distinguished Artist Series event of the 2018/19 season, the JRA brought blacksmith Elizabeth Brim to DC from her home and studio in Spruce Pine, North Carolina. Through a career spanning decades, Brim has become well known for her beautifully realized sculptural renditions in forged iron of stereotypically feminine items such as tiaras, tutus, flowers, lacy pillows, and camisoles. She is closely associated with the Penland School as an instructor, studio coordinator, and all-around resident spirit.

On Saturday, May 4, participants came to the Brandywine, MD studio of metalsmith Chris Shea for an intimate demonstration of blacksmithing techniques by Brim. Working primarily with only a hammer, tongs, anvil, and fire, Brim invited spectators into the moment-by-moment process of transforming standardized steel bar stock into expressive organic elements of sculpture and functional art in iron. As she worked on a few foundational forged elements such as a leaf and a hook, Brim expounded on the finer points of crafting and manipulating the coal fire she uses to bring her material to a glowing, more malleable state, and, under the right conditions, to weld separate elements into a unified whole. In every aspect of her

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demonstration Brim's care and deliberateness were highlighted.

Wearing her signature pearls (an ongoing response to her mother's early insistence that blacksmith work was not "ladylike"), Elizabeth regaled participants - in between heats at the anvil - with stories about her beginnings in Georgia, her long-time relationship with the Penland School of Craft in NC, and her experiences as a finalist for the Balvenie Scotch Rare Craft Challenge, which brought her on tour around the country with a simulation of her own studio and gave her the opportunity to hobnob and sip scotch with celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain.

The artist displayed examples of her work, including one pair from her series of forged steel high heel shoes, created as a kind of intervention into the fable of the Twelve Dancing Princesses. It was a special treat to be able to examine the objects up close and enjoy the details and textures of expertly forged metal that can be hard to appreciate in a photograph.

On Sunday, Brim presented a more formal slide lecture at American University's Katzen Arts Center in upper northwest DC. From a grade-school clay bust of James Brown to the fluid and frankly sexy steel camisole the artist had finished just the week before, Brim outlined her transition from ceramic artist to blacksmith. She shared exciting video of her various experiments in using compressed air to actually inflate welded sheet steel into pillow forms boasting etched patterns and even pleats. Throughout the presentation Brim made clear her love for and commitment to the Penland community in particular, as well as for the many other artists, blacksmiths, and friends with whom she has taught, studied, socialized, and collaborated.



BOOK REVIEW

ART QUILTS UNFOLDING: 50 YEARS OF INNOVATION

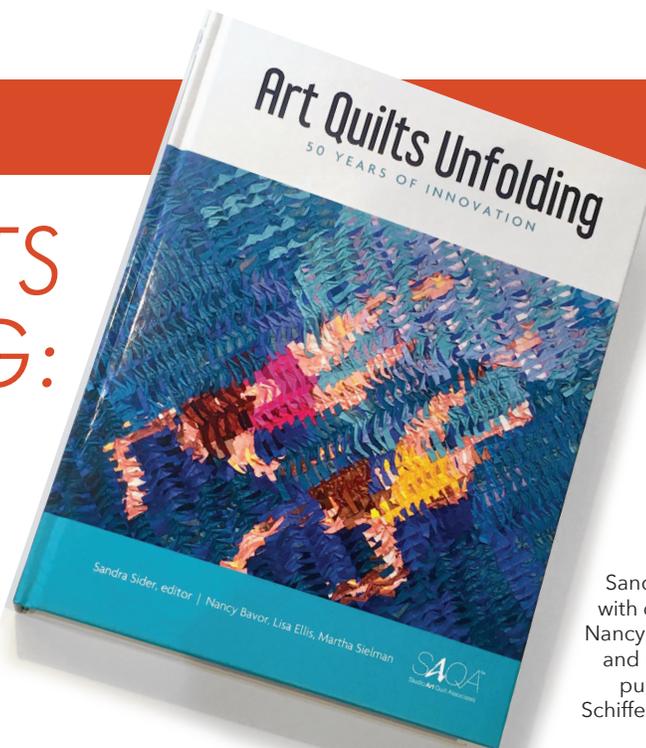
Book Review by Teresa Duryea Wong
Quilter and author, known for *Magic and Memories: 45 Years of International Quilt Festival*.

At 351 pages, this is no ordinary book. This hefty volume is a serious attempt to cover a half-century of history, technique, leadership, style and collecting of an evolving and elusive art form known as the art quilt.

Art Quilts Unfolding: 50 Years of Innovation is a collaboration between four individuals with deep experience in the world of textile and quilt art. One can only imagine the deliberation and determination it took to attempt such a project, especially considering the wide definition of this specific genre. The four authors had to first decide what an art quilt is and what it is not. Then came the undoubtedly daunting task of deciding who to include, who to leave out, and where to start.

Each investigation of these questions was deeply considered, and as a result, this book is a seminal authority on how art quilts began, who the early influencers were, what's happening right now, and what the future holds.

The book begins with a thorough look at the 1960s when the movement began and includes a timeline of critical events in art history that helped propel the quilt from an underappreciated domestic object to fine art - a struggle that continues to this day. Early adopters of quilts as fine art share the progression in their own words. Leslie Gabriëlse began making fine art quilts in the 1960s and he explains that for 20 years he did not realize he was part of a 'movement.' Joan Schulze was inspired by her family's fabric scrap bag as a child, which led her to a widely recognized career as a textile artist. Penelope McMorris began curating and collecting art quilts in the 1970s because she felt someone needed to give these studio quilters permission to know they were making art.



Sandra Sider, editor,
with contributions by
Nancy Bavor, Lisa Ellis,
and Martha Sielman,
published 2018 by
Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

By documenting these early histories, *Art Quilts Unfolding* provides an excellent grounding in how and where the movement started. After that, each new decade is introduced with a well-researched timeline and includes a gallery of innovative work from those years.

Throughout the book, selected artists share their story as makers in their own words. These brief narratives are interspersed with compelling images and side stories, such as the founding of the Women of Color Quilters Network, the origins of important collections such as the International Quilt Festival Collection, and the founding of trade media outlets and quilt-specific museums.

Even if you never read one word of this beautifully illustrated book, you will be astounded by the art. The art quilts featured are in fact treated as fine art, with many pages featuring a single, large quilt image. It would have been easy, and frankly more economical, for the publisher to cram multiple images on one page to save space. Yet, the airy design of this book allows the reader to absorb the image, appreciate it, and savor its beauty without distraction.

The astute graphic design and striking illustrations make this hefty volume truly special. But its real beauty is the preservation of an important history. Fifty years from now, this will be the definitive book on the profound journey of art quilts.

PROFILE

CENTER FOR CRAFT: BUILDING A FUTURE FOR CRAFT



At the epicenter of craft in western North Carolina in the heart of downtown Asheville, the Center for Craft is a leading cultural asset that honors the legacy of craft in the region while building a bright future for craft across the country.

For 16 years, the Center was nestled just west of Hendersonville, North Carolina, on a remote property owned by the state. The Center was challenged in its ambition to become an academic craft campus with its distance of only 30 miles from the University of North Carolina, Asheville. In addition, renowned craft schools within a few hour radius like Penland School of Craft and Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts had already captured the market for rural retreat settings to learn and experience craft. Yet, the pastoral setting allowed for the incubation and seeding of key programs that are nationally recognized today. One of these programs - the Center's Craft Think Tank - pulled together a cross-section of scholars, artists, and leaders to identify the greatest needs and possible solutions for the field of craft.

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These Think Tanks paved the way for groundbreaking contributions, including *Makers: A History of American Studio Craft*, by Janet Koplos and Bruce Metcalf, the first textbook to document ten decades of studio craft artists' extraordinary accomplishments in the United States, and two key grant programs, the Windgate Fellowship and the Craft Research Fund. The Windgate Fellowships, awarded to graduating college seniors, provide a platform for the Center to work with colleges and university art departments around the country to identify the best emerging craft talent. At the time the Fellowships were created, most grant programs were focused on graduates and artists; few targeted the undergraduate level. The Craft Research Fund, an equally ambitious program, was the first to support research in craft - to capture not only craft's past but also to delineate critical investigations about where craft is heading. This grant program legitimizes the study and practice of craft through providing resources for grant recipients and fostering craft studies, exhibitions, and conferences.



Today, the Center is at the forefront of discourse in thought-leadership in craft as a result of these programs, and is poised to explore the field's emergent questions: What does the next generation of talent in craft look like? And what are the investigations and trends in scholarship that are defining the field today? The Center's grant recipients do much to answer such questions. The Center is also a good steward of private funds, pulling together panels of experts in diligent selection processes to ensure that donors' investments are well-spent. As a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the field of craft, the Center administers more than \$300,000 in grants each year.

After a decade of maturation and evolution, the Center's mission to advance the understanding of craft has accomplished much to secure craft's prominence in written history, and to identify notable examples of research and practice in the craft field. Since 1996, the Center has invested \$2.3 million in fellowships and grants to over 300 recipients in 35 states and working with 180 participating institutions. As the Center was advancing its mission of expanding research, critical dialogue, and professional development in craft, it was also stepping into another, parallel phase of growth. The Center needed a new home, not just to operate, but to encourage future enthusiasts to understand, participate, and appreciate craft. Visitors and residents have long appreciated Asheville's vibrant craft community, and a downtown building was ready for the Center to move in.

Recognizing that Asheville and the surrounding area

has been a bastion for craft in the United States dating back to the pre-colonial era, the Center purchased this building six years ago and is actively working to preserve and advance the craft legacy in the Southeast. The Center provides craft-focused programming to a regional and visiting audience through exhibitions, lectures, workshops, conferences, and residencies. These cutting-edge exhibitions and associated public programs have distinguished the Center as a Statewide Arts Resource recognized by the North Carolina Arts Council.

Currently, the Center is in the process of renovating its historic 1912 facility to step into its next phase as a destination for a networked community dedicated to craft. Coined the National Craft Innovation Hub, artists, designers, entrepreneurs, scholars, tourists, and the general public will connect through expanded galleries, shared workspaces, optimal lecture and event spaces, all amidst one-of-a-kind maker commissions. Beginning November 2019, the Center's renovated location aims to provide opportunities for regional, national, and international makers and seekers to convene in a space where future possibilities coalesce with the vibrant past, in our contemporary moment.



Top: Panelists at the 2018 *Shared Ground: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches to Craft Studies* symposium in New York City. From left to right: Edward Cooke, Mahmoud Keshavarz, Alicia Ory DeNicola, Namita Gupta Wiggers, Adrienne Childs, and Steven Jackson

Above: *WAKE II* by 2010 Windgate Fellow Dustin Farnsworth in collaboration with sign painter Timothy Maddox, part of the Center for Craft's 2018 *Scale Up: 10 Years, 10 Fellows, 10 Projects* exhibition. Photo by Cory Podielski.

SAVE THE DATES

AUGUST 2019

8/9 - 8/10 Penland School of Craft
Annual Summer Auction
Spruce Pine, NC

SEPTEMBER 2019

9/20 Private Member tour of the
Ginny Ruffner and Michael
Sherrill Exhibitions
6pm - 7pm at the Renwick Gallery

9/21 DAS Tom Loeser Workshop
9:30am - 12pm, location TBD

9/22 DAS Tom Loeser Lecture
2pm - 3pm at AU Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center

OCTOBER 2019

10/3 - 10/5 Craft Study Tour to Norfolk, VA

10/10 American Craft Council
Conference
Present Tense: 2019
Philadelphia, PA

10/14 - 10/20 Craft Leaders Caucus Trip to
Scotland

NOVEMBER 2019

11/12 Annual Membership Meeting
7pm - 9pm at AU Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center

11/16 DAS Rebecca Hutchinson
Workshop
9:30am - 12pm, District Clay

11/17 DAS Rebecca Hutchinson Lecture
and Chrysalis Award Presentation
2pm - 3:30pm at AU Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center



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