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adorn

what's outside counts

Features

26 **The Rhythm of Adornment**

JON SPAYDE

In a Massachusetts pole barn, Charles Thompson carves wonders in wood.

34 **Tufted Joy**

EMILY FREIDENRICH

Melissa Monroe's spontaneous, kaleidoscopic experiments with wool.

www.somak.ir

38 **Ceramic Surrounds**

DEBORAH BISHOP

The cascading tile installations of ceramist Ben Medansky.

46 **Survivors on the Storm**

DAVID SCHIMKE

Seven North Carolina artists reflect on life and work after Hurricane Helene.

ON THE COVER:

Charles Thompson made this bent-handled cherry spoon with decorative chip carving on a quiet winter evening. Photo by Charles Thompson.

THIS PAGE: Carved decoration on Thompson's 2024 oak and pine *Tulip Bench*. Step into Thompson's barn-turned-studio on [page 26](#).

Departments

4 From the Editor

6 Contributors

MAKERS

artists. companies. communities.

8 Slow Style

Punchy fashion by Micah
Clasper-Torch. | JACQUELINE WHITE

11 Runway Ready

Thomas Bliven's handmade jewelry
for the catwalk. | PAOLA SINGER

14 Where Jewelry People Gather

A Manhattan space for jewelry
lovers. | KERRIE MORE

15 Couture Craft

A nonprofit supports artisanship in
the fashion world. | DAVID SCHIMKE

16 All Dressed Up

Samantha Briegel's delicate porcelain
ceramics. | PAOLA SINGER

18 From Canvas to Carving

Felicia Greenlee celebrates
Blackness in wood. | ANITRA BUDD

CRAFT HAPPENINGS

exhibitions. shows. events.

22 Event Listings

Upcoming exhibitions and events
across the country. | JON SPAYDE

25 Made in America

Handwork 2026 marks 250 years of
craft. | SHIVAUN WATCHORN

HANDCRAFTED LIVING

home. apparel. goods.

54 Wearing Difference, Extravagantly

The Alternative Limb Project's
imaginative prosthetics. | JOE HART

58 Would You Dare Wear This Brooch?

The unusual jewelry collection of
Susan Beech. | JACQUELINE WHITE

62 It's a Cinch

Market: Bold, beautiful bolo ties.
KASEY PAYETTE



Margaret
Jacobs's brass
and leather *Mint*
bolo tie is one of
four on offer in our
Market section.
page 62.

MEDIA HUB

books. videos. podcasts. archives.

64 New Releases

A Haas Brothers monograph, books
on Ruth Asawa and *verre églomisé*,
and more. | JON SPAYDE

66 Magazines

Craft publications about surface
decoration. | BETH GOODRICH

67 From the Archives

Newly digitized issues of
American Craft now available.
BETH GOODRICH

72 American Craft Council News

80 From What's Left Behind

End Note: MJ Tyson transforms
household objects. | KAREN OLSON



Samantha Briegel's
fancifully decorated
Purple Teapot. page 16.





Ben Medansky drew partly on views of Arizona cacti, leaves, and cracked earth to create these ceramic tiles for the Proper Hotel in Los Angeles. **page 38**

Adorn. As young immigrants, a pair of my ancestors brought only a few belongings with them when they left Norway for the United States in search of a better life 150 years ago. One of those items is a simple wooden bowl painted with Hallingdal-style rosemaling design. I doubt it ever served a functional purpose—it's still in perfect condition with no wear marks. I imagine that for those young people, having something from their old home to adorn their new one was worth the space it took up in the tiny wooden chest they carried across the ocean.

In craft, the details we add through practices such as embroidery, etching, and carving allow us to carry forward our cultural heritage and to express ourselves. Adornment elevates what we wear, the things we use in our homes, and what we see every day. It changes our lived experience.

In this issue we hope you'll find inspiration from people who make the world more beautiful and meaningful through adornment. Charles Thompson, whose work appears on the cover, fills his life with words and wood in Massachusetts. Susan Beech of the San Francisco Bay Area collects jewelry that challenges us to think. Sophie de Oliveira Barata designs and, with the help of collaborators, crafts stunning and surprising artificial limbs in the UK. Ben Medansky decided to end his production pottery business in Los Angeles to create ceramic tiles that turn walls into sculptures.

In this issue we also visit western North Carolina, a region rich in craft. It's been nearly a year since Hurricane Helene devastated this area where many craftspeople make their home. Here we learn how seven artists coped with the disaster and continue the process of recovery together.

Community, connection, stories, and art. The ability to make things with our own hands that add meaning to our lives. These are fundamental to being human and crucial for us to nurture at this time in history. Please support the people who skillfully make not only what you need, but also the things that adorn your spaces and body and bring joy to your world. Their skills and vision need to be supported and celebrated.

As I sit in my living room writing these words, I'm wearing a pair of earrings I recently purchased from an up-and-coming maker at American Craft Fest in Saint Paul. I'm also admiring the wooden bowl carried across the sea by my ancestors and passed down through generations. It adorns a table in the center of the room.

Karen

KAREN OLSON / Editor in Chief

AMERICAN craft

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Printed in the U.S.A.

LEGAL

American Craft
(ISSN-0194-8008) is published by the
American Craft Council
1224 Marshall St. NE, Suite 200
Minneapolis, MN 55413
craftcouncil.org

Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis,
MN, and additional mailing offices.
Copyright © 2025 by American Craft
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**ACC membership rate is \$48 per year
and includes a subscription to
American Craft, at
craftcouncil.org**

Canadian and foreign orders: email for
rates. Subscription correspondence:
membership@craftcouncil.org
American Craft
P.O. Box 3000
Denville, NJ 07834
844-653-3989 or 612-206-3131
For change of address, give old and new
addresses with zip code. Allow six weeks
for change to take effect.

American Craft Council publishes
American Craft magazine on a quarterly
basis, but reserves the right to change
the number of issues in an annual term,
including discontinuing any format
and substituting and/or modifying
the manner in which the subscription
is distributed. The opinions expressed in
American Craft are those of the authors
and not necessarily those of the
American Craft Council.

Story ideas:
craftcouncil.org/writersguidelines
Feedback: letters@craftcouncil.org

Address unsolicited material to:
American Craft, Editor in Chief
1224 Marshall St. NE, Suite 200
Minneapolis, MN 55413

American Craft (formerly *Craft Horizons*)
is indexed in the Art Index, Design and
Applied Arts Index, and Readers' Guide
to Periodical Literature. Book reviews are
also indexed in Book Review Index.

POSTMASTER:
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CONTRIBUTORS

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



Artist and photographer **Brady Connelly**, who splits their time between the creative communities of western North Carolina and New Orleans, owns and operates a small marketing business, Loam NOLA, that assists artists and arts organizations with their promotional needs. For this issue they photographed some of their friends and peers affected by Hurricane Helene. **page 46**

When we were looking for a photographer to visit the studio of woodworker Charles Thompson, we thought Boston-based **Sophia Li** seemed like the perfect fit. With her passion for holistic wellness and slow, intentional living, her work—which has appeared in *National Geographic*—explores the connection between culture, environment, and the choices we make in everyday life. She loves photographing artisan makers, local farmers, and organic food. **page 26**



A first-time contributor, Montana-based freelance writer **Kerrie More** pitched us her story in this issue about The Jewelry Library in Manhattan. "What's not to love about libraries?" she asks rhetorically. "As a recently retired school librarian, I wholeheartedly identified with the nonprofit's passion for creating welcoming spaces while fostering curiosity and community—something I aspired to do for 30 years." Drawn to art, craft, and creativity, More is a regular contributor to *UPPERCASE* magazine. **page 14**

Senior editor **David Schimke**, who is also head of digital content for *American Craft*, has been an editor and writer at Village Voice Media, *Utne Reader*, *Experience Life*, *Citizens League Voice*, and *Carleton College Voice*. Here he writes about the impact of Hurricane Helene, one year after it devastated the craft-rich communities of western North Carolina. "Nearly every artist I spoke with who was impacted by Hurricane Helene talked about how human distinctions—political, racial, economic, and so on—faded in its aftermath," Schimke says. "And that communal spirit has endured." **page 46**





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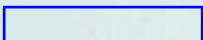


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Photo by Roberto Cortese

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Slow Style

Micah Clasper-Torch brings fashion sense to the punch needle revival.

BY JACQUELINE WHITE

What's an aspiring fashion designer to do in our fast-fashion world when what she truly enjoys is the careful handcrafting required for one-of-a-kind creations? For Los Angeles-based Micah Clasper-Torch, the answer has been to slow down even further and explore “the rhythmic peaceful nature of punch needle.”

The punch needle technique involves using a hollow handheld needle to “punch” yarn through an open-weave backing fabric, creating loops that stay in place within the tension of the surrounding fabric. It was a method of embroidery commonly used for generations in Russia and Japan. But punch needle rug hooking, says Clasper-Torch, is considered a “distinctly North American art form.” It was developed in the 1800s when women in farming communities pulled scraps of

fabric through burlap from feed sacks to create dense, looped floor coverings in their own designs.

Clasper-Torch, a former student at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City and the Politecnico di Milano in Italy, saw the potential for punch needling to go beyond the traditional rugs or the color-coded craft kits now available for decorative wall hangings. What if she could combine her expertise in patternmaking with richly textured fabrics and the bold geometric designs she was already creating? Why not meld art, craft, and fashion? After making her first punch needle coat, she was off. What about a punch needle vest? A hair bow? A purse?

Clasper-Torch has since become a one-woman booster club for all things punch needle, teaching classes, curating a

Micah Clasper-Torch and her punch needle bags and clothing. OPPOSITE: The *Santa Fe Coat*, made from wool rug yarn from New Zealand and cotton monks cloth, is inspired by the colors of New Mexico.





show, and in 2019 establishing the website *Punch Needle World*, where she profiles other punch needle artists—all to spread interest, help lead a revival, and expand the horizons of what she calls her “delightful obsession.”

“As our world speeds up,” Clasper-Torch observes, “there’s something powerful about slowing down and working with our hands.” Her latest endeavor is her first book, *Punch Needle Fashion: 15 Punch Needle Projects for Crafting Accessories and Wearables* (Quadrille, 2025). More than a thorough guide to the needles, yarns, backing fabrics, and techniques of punch needle, the book also offers an overview of the sewing basics necessary to turn the resulting fabric into, say, a corset belt or bucket hat.

What *Punch Needle Fashion* doesn’t provide are color-coded design schemes for the fabric. “Punch your piece in a design or color of your choice,” Clasper-Torch writes. “This way, the designs you make will be uniquely yours.”

Such individuality is central to the contemporary punch needle movement. With the invention of the tufting machine in 1930, leading to more affordable factory-produced rugs, gone almost overnight was a burgeoning cottage industry: artisan punch needle studios with distinctive design aesthetics. In championing the craft, Clasper-Torch is also reintroducing an avenue for original artistic expression.

♦
micahclasper-torch.com | [@claspertorch](https://twitter.com/claspertorch)
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Twin Cities writer Jacqueline White is the daughter of the late Nancy Metz White, a sculptor whose tree forms grace two Milwaukee parks.



This party dress has a punch needle body and tulle skirt. TOP LEFT: A color-blocked punch needle vest. ABOVE: The *Marfa Coat* evokes the West Texas landscape.



Photos by Alexandra Gibbs.



A model at 2025 New York Fashion Week in clothing by Tory Burch with a *Garment Brooch* by Thomas Bliven. TOP RIGHT: Six Bliven brooches, 2025, fabricated brass, bronze, copper wire, 8 in.

Photos courtesy of Thomas Bliven.



Runway Ready

Metalsmith Thomas Bliven crafts handmade accessories for top-tier clothing labels and the celebrities who make their fashions memorable.

BY PAOLA SINGER

Thomas Bliven has had to sign NDAs with many of his clients, which explains, in part, why he is not on Instagram. But it's also because he's been busy—*really* busy.

For the past two decades, Bliven has made one-of-a-kind metal accessories worn by runway models and celebrities at New York Fashion Week (NYFW), the Academy Awards, the Golden Globes, and the Met Gala. He's made oversized rocker-chic brooches that look like spider webs, minimalist cuff bracelets with reliefs shaped like lips, and chunky circular earrings with details made of horn—basically anything his fashion-designer clients can imagine.

Bliven creates these pieces by hand and by himself at his studio in New York's Long Island City, a warehouse-like space packed to the rafters with tools. Some of the labels who have him on speed dial are Marc Jacobs, Alexander Wang, Gabriela Hearst, The Row, Edun, Helmut Lang, Calvin Klein, Narciso Rodriguez, and Derek Lam. And yet he's largely unknown to the outside world. "I sort of missed the boat on social media," he says. "It's a tricky thing, but I'm trying to come up with an idea of how to launch that."



Bliven, who teases that his age is “a secret,” has an endearing mix of self-confidence and sheepishness. He speaks with breakneck speed about his work, yet sometimes hesitates or slows down when speaking about his life, and the professed love of his life, a 14-year-old Weimaraner named Buddy. “I have great pictures of him—maybe he could be my first image on Instagram,” he says, turning the camera around to show Buddy, who is near his workspace, lying on a cushion as we chat via FaceTime.

Growing up in Albany, a “harsh, rough town,” Bliven showed artistic aptitudes early on. He attended a local liberal arts college called Saint Rose (recently closed), where a teacher told him he needed to be in New York City, which is how he ended up at the Pratt Institute’s renowned School of Design in Brooklyn. “I never looked back,” he says. “I met a graduate professor called Axel Sand, a silversmith who had worked under Georg Jensen, and I wound up applying and getting into his graduate-level class.”

Back then, in the 1990s, Bliven was making crosses out of horseshoe nails and selling them on the streets of the East Village as a way to make ends meet. “We grew up poor; I had to hustle to make money,” he says. “I must have sold thousands of them.”

After he’d earned a BFA in sculpture from Pratt, work suddenly seemed to just find Bliven. He was hired by a lighting company to sculpt metal pieces used in large-scale chandeliers. Then he began working with Jeff Koons—the Jeff Koons—molding the artist’s famous metal balloon animals. “Jeff played a big part in developing new technologies for sculpting, but when I arrived, we were doing things the old-school way,” Bliven recalls. “It was an incredible process; we started out pouring resin, then manipulating it to work out any imperfections, then sending it to a foundry, where they’ll do the same thing that every metalsmith does—cast wax into that, and that wax becomes the bronze sculpture.”



LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: Alexander Wang ensemble accented by Bliven’s *V-Ray Logo Earrings*, 2022, gold-plated brass, black enamel, 2 in.; and 2-inch *Candy Jewelry*, 2022, ceramic-coated brass. Bliven created a version of Jeff Koons’s 4-inch *Rabbit* for designer Stella McCartney, 2005, cast in sterling silver. Bliven’s *Croc Crystal Brooch*, modeled for Lacoste in Paris, 2025, brass with rhodium and 18k gold plating, 4 in. TOP RIGHT: Bliven in his New York City workshop with Lou Lou (left) and Buddy.

Working with Koons taught him a lot about process and getting a piece from image to reality. But lost-wax casting is just one of the ways Bliven knows how to sculpt. He's also adept at both additive and subtractive processes, and can rattle off the properties of every known metal.

These skills have since made him a hot commodity in the fashion world, a planet he landed on by accident. He was having lunch in Chelsea one day in the early aughts, near Koons's studio, and someone asked him what he did for a living. Bliven explained his métier. Within minutes, that person commissioned a piece of hardware for a handbag. "I was making six-foot sculptures, so making a piece that's two inches seemed like no problem at all," says Bliven. "He gave me the drawing and I turned it around in a few days. It was for Derek Lam."

One piece of hardware led to another. A few years later, Bliven started working steadily for Calvin Klein under creative director Francisco Costa. Their collaboration lasted almost 10 years. Among many pieces, he made the boning used to hold up Gwyneth Paltrow's geometrically shaped neckline at the Oscars in 2011, and a series of metal-rimmed cutout details inset with geodes, sewn into a handful of dresses that walked the Fall 2016 runway at NYFW. Like most of Bliven's handiworks, these were one-offs, made using stones that Costa himself had brought back from his native Brazil.

"I don't know anybody who does the work he does," Costa says. "He has the sensibility to know what's needed and often comes up with solutions."

Bliven established his first studio in Astoria, Queens, while working with Calvin Klein, and by the time Costa parted ways with the label in 2016, Bliven was taking commissions from multiple designers. He's perennially on deadline, getting pieces ready for a photo shoot (Taylor Swift on the cover of *Vogue*), a red carpet (Brie Larson's armor-like halter dress, also by Calvin Klein, at the Golden Globes), or a fashion show (tentacle-shaped headpieces for Khaite's spring collection). "There are a lot of last-minute requests during runway season, and things get chaotic," he says. "I've always lived and worked in the same space, and the great thing is I can work anytime, all the time."

Bliven's current setup in Long Island City, a 2,500-square-foot former factory with whitewashed brick walls, is "a great space" for him. There's a showroom in the front, an open kitchen and living area in the center, and a workshop in the back. Hundreds of prototypes and tools—flex shafts, burrs, hammers, files, pliers—surround his chair, almost all placed at arms-length ("A jeweler's bench is like a cockpit to a pilot," he quips).

His recent pieces include a set of crocodile-themed pins he made for Lacoste earlier this year, marking his debut at Paris Fashion Week. He began with a drawing provided by the client, from which he created a 3D rendering and 3D print. Bliven then hand-molded the object before casting it in brass. Next, he used a rubber wheel to smooth out the "skin," soldered the pin's different parts, finessed the piece with small burrs, and finally gold plated it.



TOP: Bliven designed the *Penny Crest* pendant necklace and bracelet for Tommy Hilfiger, 2025, brass with 18k gold, 2-inch coin, and custom-made chain. ABOVE: *The Eleanor* handbag, created by Bliven for Tory Burch, 2024, fabricated nickel, silver, and brass, 8 x 6 x 3 in.

While Bliven has significant input during the design process, these pieces aren't really his own, not in the way the jewelry he sold on St. Marks Place back in the day was his own. "I have some intimate pieces that I started working on but haven't finished; I put my art on the back burner," he says. "I've focused my energy on my business, and it's been successful."

He pauses. He rehashes his plan to have an Instagram account, almost as if in a brainstorming session, and then says, "I've been underground for so long."

♦

thomasmodelart.com

Paola Singer, a freelance writer in New York City, is a frequent contributor to *American Craft*.



Where Jewelry People Gather

The Jewelry Library in New York City fosters scholarship and creativity while building community.

BY KERRIE MORE

“Everyone has a jewelry story,” says Karen Davidov, founder of The Jewelry Library (TJL), an inclusive, ever-evolving collaborative space that is, according to its website, “curated for jewelry people, by jewelry people.”

The one-of-a-kind adornment hub, located in the heart of Manhattan, embraces the same forward-thinking mission that America’s traditional public libraries have adopted in recent years: providing access to resources while fostering scholarship, creativity, and community. More than just a physical space, it’s the inspirational axis for a collaborative network of makers, researchers, curators, collectors, and jewelry wearers, both casual and cutting-edge.

Drawing on her experience as both a vintage jewelry dealer and a library consultant, Davidov opened TJL in 2018 to facilitate and promote jewelry literacy. “I’ve always wanted to learn about the jewelry I’m buying. Who made it? What inspired it? What materials were used?” she explains. “I wanted the serendipity of discovering something new or having an enlightening encounter with a maker. Mostly, I wanted to speak the language of jewelry with others who spoke it.”

The library’s reading room houses a diverse print collection where monographs on contemporary art jewelers sit alongside rare books about Italian jewelry. (“I don’t have everything,” Davidov says, “but I do have some great surprises!”) And, of course, there’s the jewelry archive itself, an eclectic collection of pieces, primarily from the 20th century, frequently sought out by artists, stylists, and design students. For most patrons, though, the library’s main draw is its inventive programming, which combines exhibitions, workshops, discussions, demonstrations, storytelling events, and even walking tours, many of which can be accessed both online and in person.

TJL’s robust calendar of offerings has garnered a devoted following, especially during NYC Jewelry Week, an opportunity

every November for audiences to interact with other “jewelry people,” such as curator and educator Helen Drutt English, master maker Keith Lewis, or artist-lecturer Luci Jockel. “We often highlight makers who have been left out of the history books or whose stories have yet to be told,” Davidov says. Recent examples include an exhibition curated by art historian LaMar R. Gayles, Jr., showcasing the work of Black American artisans; and an online presentation by artist Sugandha Gupta, whose limited vision inspires her to create multisensory wearables and advocate for inclusive approaches to design.

Multimedia artist Sulo Bee says, “I appreciate the platform Karen provides for emerging makers like me, whose work doesn’t always identify with typical jewelry standards. The networking opportunities, in particular, have been invaluable.” Journalist Jennifer Altmann, who specializes in writing about contemporary jewelry, echoes this sentiment. Whether she is leading a panel discussion, facilitating a writing workshop for artists, or attending an exhibit opening, she says, “I always meet new people and have fascinating conversations—many of which have led to long-term professional relationships.”

Kiff Slemmons, artist and friend of The Jewelry Library, says, “Jewelry is all about connection.” These words reflect the sentiment that guides Davidov’s future planning. Collaborative partnerships with public libraries and galleries, as well as ramping up opportunities that focus on mentoring artists, are all in the works. “More than anything,” Davidov says, “I want to offer jewelry experiences that help people discover, craft, or tell their own unique jewelry story.”

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

Kerrie More is a freelance writer exploring art, craft, and creativity from the mountains of northwest Montana.

TOP RIGHT: Photo by Karen Davidov. OPPOSITE TOP LEFT: Photo by Josephine Winther. ALL OTHER IMAGES: Photos by Aida Sulova.



“I wanted to speak the language of jewelry with others who spoke it.”

—Karen Davidov

TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: Visitors view Penny Morrill's *Open Book: Dreaming in Silver* exhibition at The Jewelry Library. Helen Drutt English curated this collection of books for *Hidden Treasures*. Karen Davidov, founder, wearing *The Gold Brooch* by Mette Saabye. A 1970 piece by Bill Smith for Richelieu. LEFT: Paper bracelets designed by Kiff Slemmons, crafted in collaboration with Oaxacan artisans.



Couture Craft

A new nonprofit, Closely Crafted, advocates for skilled makers in the fashion industry.

Since the pandemic, a resurgent interest in the handmade has created a little-talked-about human resources crisis in the luxury fashion space, especially in the US, where makers with niche skill sets—hand sewers, leather and lace makers, hand blockers, flower makers, and many others—are retiring or shifting careers without having mentored their replacements. This is partly the result of fast fashion, mass production, and outsourcing that, until just recently, dampened demand for domestically crafted couture. Making matters more challenging, students populating most fashion schools are more interested in becoming designers (a narrow career path in the best of times) than learning a particular skill set that would render them more employable and stock the industry's bench with specialized workers.

“A shared sentiment in the fashion world is that it's become more challenging to find talent that can produce quality and really beautiful luxury goods here in the US,” says Gigi Burris O'Hara, a milliner who runs an atelier in New York City's fashion district. “And that some of the biggest hurdles aren't price, but people.”

To address the situation, Burris O'Hara launched the nonprofit Closely Crafted, which uses live events and cross-platform storytelling to emphasize the economic and environmental benefits of small-batch American production in fashion and to excite a new generation of specialized artisans at a grassroots level. The organization also facilitates mentorships to ensure generational knowledge is preserved.

—David Schimke

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To learn more about Burris O'Hara's passion and Closely Crafted's mission and programming, visit ACC's newly designed website, where digital-only stories about craft complement American Craft's magazine archive. craftcouncil.org/closelycrafted



All Dressed Up

Inspired by textiles, ceramist Samantha Briegel adorns her work like a stylist.

BY PAOLA SINGER

ABOVE: One of Briegel's 2025 porcelain teapots with six-layered underglaze, floral print, and lace inserts, with a soft-squared twist cup with floral print. LEFT: The ceramist holds a cross-stitch dimple mug on her farmhouse porch.

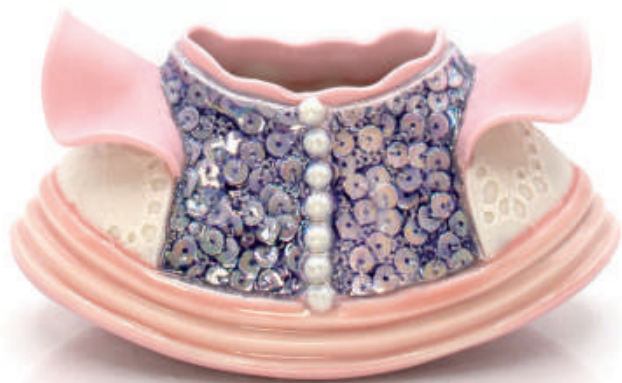


Samantha Briegel's sweetly feminine ceramics draw inspiration from textile crafts such as quilting, weaving, and cross-stitching, all traditionally carried out by women. Every time she designs a new vessel—her collection includes shapely cups, bowls, vases, and plates—Briegel imagines dressing a Southern belle from head to toe, layering detail upon detail the way a stylist might add pearls, gloves, or kerchiefs to a gown.

Briegel's process involves the use of actual fabrics, giving her work a realistic fashion feel. She pours plaster over sheets of textured fabrics such as lace or sequined mesh. Once the plaster dries, she carefully peels the fabric off, revealing a mold with which she can emboss the texture onto porcelain.

The colors and patterns seen in the smoother sections of her vessels also derive from clothes. She'll scan a garment—usually a vintage item that she loves—into her computer and then use Adobe Illustrator to make a screen print, which eventually becomes an underglaze

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT: Photo courtesy of Worcester Center for Crafts Handcrafted Shop. ALL OTHER IMAGES: Photos courtesy of the artist.



CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT: *Quilted Floral
and Lace Mugs*, 2025.
*Rick Rack Cross Stitch
Flower Vase*, 2024, 11.5
x 6.5 x 6.5 in. *Pink and
Red Scalloped Platter*,
2024, 12 x 12 x 1.5 in.
*Mermaid Sequin Ruffle
Pocket Vase*, 2024,
4.5 x 6.5 x 2.5 in.

for porcelain. “I have amassed a large collection of textures and prints over the last five or so years,” Briegel says. “I use this catalog to generate slabs of porcelain to piece together, and have all the details I’ve always wanted to include in my work.”

While her pieces look much too precious for everyday use (rickrack rims! tiny protruding flowers!), Briegel insists they are fully functional.

Born and raised in Tennessee, she now lives and works on a four-acre farm outside of Baltimore, where a barn holds the various kilns needed to fire up her dainty pieces, some of which will be on view this fall at the American Pottery Festival in Minneapolis.

◆
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Paola Singer, a freelance writer in New York City, is a frequent contributor to *American Craft*.





From Canvas to Carving

Felicia Greenlee transforms wood into layered narratives that challenge history, celebrate Black identity, and spark conversation through texture and form.

BY ANITRA BUDD

Wood collagist Felicia Greenlee's journey as an artist is one of evolution—of materials, of purpose, and of self. From visual arts to textile design, her work has always been rooted in narrative. But it wasn't until she discovered the dimensional possibilities of woodworking that she could fully tell her stories.

Born in Philadelphia and later settling in Seneca, South Carolina, Greenlee's early artistic influences were shaped by her family and surroundings. "I was inspired as a young child, like anyone else, by having a good time and being creative," she recalls. But moving to the South was a shock: "Unlike in Philly, there were no Black teachers—not in high school, not in college—and definitely no Black artists in the curriculum." That absence shaped her artistic trajectory.

After earning a BFA in drawing and painting from Clemson University, Greenlee turned to freelance textile design, one of the few creative roles available in the South. As a young mother, freelancing allowed her to work from home while still making art. As her son grew older, Greenlee began experimenting with wood, discovering a medium that offered the depth she had long sought.

"I outgrew the two-dimensional nature of paper and canvas," she says. "I wanted to create depth and dimension, work that couldn't be printed."

Greenlee's wood collages are layered, textured, and deeply narrative, exploring themes of racial justice, Black cultural identity, and historical reckoning. "Growing up, the stories told in history classes didn't reflect people who looked like me," she says. "So my art is about creating that narrative."

Her process is meticulous. She sources scrap wood, metal, and plexiglass from projects around her home, preferring older,

ABOVE: Felicia Greenlee's wood collages explore themes of racial justice. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *Sign of the Times #Too*, 2022, inspired by Black Lives Matter, wood, stain, printer ink, spray paint, and acrylic paint, 36 x 22.5 x 5.5 in. *Justice for All*, 2022, wood, paint, stain, colored pencil, and printer ink, 23.5 x 37 x 5.5 in. *American Made (In Memory of McKinley Reid)*, 2021, the artist's first wood-collage portrait, 37.25 x 21.75 x 6 in.

“Growing up, the stories told in history classes didn’t reflect people who looked like me. So my art is about creating that narrative.” —Felicia Greenlee





LEFT: Greenlee uses a hand chisel to begin work on a new piece, tentatively titled *When I Grow Up*.

denser materials that carry their own history. She carves individual wooden pieces with band saws and scroll saws, refining details with chisels and sanding tools. Finally, the layers are fixed together with wooden dowels for stability. From start to finish, each piece takes an average of 400 hours.

Greenlee's *Sign of the Times #Too* (2022) showcases her use of repeated motifs to amplify her message. Circles in the activist's Afro, earrings, buttons, and Black Lives Matter sign represent the cyclical nature of history (which, she notes, "you can definitely see happening right now"). The chain-link bracelet represents the enduring impact of slavery, while the bull's-eye target at the woman's chest symbolizes the racial bias the Black community endures.

For Greenlee, art isn't about commercial success—it's about storytelling and holding people's attention long enough to make them think. "I want people to stop and really pay attention to what's going on in my pieces," she says. "If someone stops long

BOTTOM LEFT: Photo by FishEyeStudio_2025. ALL OTHER IMAGES: Photos courtesy of the artist.

OPPOSITE TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: The beginnings of *Déjà vu*, 2022, one of Greenlee's largest portrait pieces, 48 x 23.25 x 6.5 in. (left). While making the portrait, the artist puzzles individual pieces together until the proper layout presents itself (middle). *Déjà vu* under construction (right). THIS PAGE: The finished piece, created in response to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. For Greenlee, the Black woman represents both past and present America.

enough, maybe they'll think about what's happening in the world."

Now working part-time at the Clemson Area African American Museum, Greenlee finds herself in a space where she can engage her community in ways she couldn't in the textile industry, where she was often the only Black person in the room.

As for what's next, she's considered large-scale public installations but is mindful of logistical challenges. "If I made them any bigger, I wouldn't be able to move them," she laughs. Instead, she envisions smaller, modular components that could come together to form a larger whole.

Greenlee's work is a testament to patience, persistence, and the power of craft. And after decades of refining her voice, she's exactly where she wants to be: creating art that speaks volumes, layered with history, depth, and truth.

♦

feliciagreenlee.com

Storyteller Anitra Budd is a Minneapolis-based consultant, speaker, copywriter, and editor.





A porcelain basket by Heesoo Lee, one of 24 artists whose work will appear at the Northern Clay Center's American Pottery Festival.

AUGUST OPENING

State Fairs:

Growing American Craft

Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian
American Art Museum
Washington, DC

August 22, 2025–September 7, 2026

Seed art, butter sculpture, narrative textiles, and more appear in this celebration of the distinctive craft culture of state fairs. With live demonstrations and 240 artworks dating from the 19th century to the present on view, this first-of-its-kind exhibition brings together artists and 4-H clubs from 43 states and tribal nations to evoke the energy and spectacle of the fairgrounds within a museum setting.

SEPTEMBER OPENINGS

American Pottery Festival

Northern Clay Center
Minneapolis, Minnesota
September 5–7, 2025

Ceramic artists from across the country will gather for this confab, the Clay Center's annual fundraiser. Attendees will be able to examine works by 24 artists, chosen to reflect a diversity of approaches, aesthetics, materials, and cultural backgrounds. The organizers promise plenty of opportunities to interact with the artists through talks, workshops, demonstrations, and informal chats.

CraftTexas 2025

Houston Center for Contemporary Craft
Houston, Texas
September 6, 2025–January 31, 2026

Abraham Thomas, curator of modern architecture, design, and decorative arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was the juror for this exhibition of craft made in the Lone Star State. Artists in clay, fiber, glass, metal, wood, and found and recycled materials will display their work in an exhibition that, say the organizers, "strives to broaden the understanding of contemporary craft."



**Transformation 12:
Contemporary Works in Wood**

Contemporary Craft

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

September 19, 2025–January 17, 2026

The emerging and established artists working in wood in this show are finalists for Contemporary Craft's Elizabeth R. Raphael Founder's Prize. They'll display a broad range of techniques, including intarsia, marquetry, woodturning, carving, and sculptural construction. All the works, say the organizers, demonstrate intricate detailing and push against traditional technical and conceptual boundaries.

**Nancy Callan and Katherine Gray:
The Clown in Me Loves You**

Fuller Craft Museum

Brockton, Massachusetts

September 20, 2025–March 1, 2026

In what the Fuller calls "a sculpted fusion of kitsch and catharsis," West Coast artists Callan (Seattle) and Gray (Los Angeles) collaborated for four years on a body of work that explores how we understand and experience the world of clowns and clowning. The pieces on display, executed with venerable Venetian glassblowing techniques, reflect childhood memories of clowns, the mythology of the circus, personal and political associations with the entertainers, and more.



Swedish marquetry artist Klara Knutsson's *Change*, 2025, will be in *Transformation 12* at Contemporary Craft, 39.5 x 59 x 1.5 in.

OCTOBER OPENINGS

Judith Schaechter: Super/Natural

Museum of Craft and Design

San Francisco, California

October 4, 2025–February 8, 2026

In this show, first featured at the Michener Art Museum in Pennsylvania, one visitor at a time will be able to enter a gorgeously colorful and complex stained glass structure by Philadelphia artist Schaechter—a three-tiered "cosmos" that invites contemplation of our outer and inner worlds. Accompanying it are a number of her other works, which draw on natural elements to create what organizers call "biophilic beauty."

Wunderkammer:

The Collection of Susan Beech

Museum of Craft and Design

San Francisco, California

October 4, 2025–February 8, 2026

The 17th- and 18th-century *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities, was a private collection of marvelous objects, reflecting the owner's sensibility, including curiosity about new worlds being opened by exploration. In this exhibition, visitors will get a glimpse of San Francisco Bay Area collector Beech's expansive, sometimes surreal sensibility, as reflected in nearly 100 works from her sumptuous and eclectic assemblage of art jewelry. Learn more about Beech on page 58.

Clay as Care:

Ceramic Art and Wellbeing

The Clay Studio

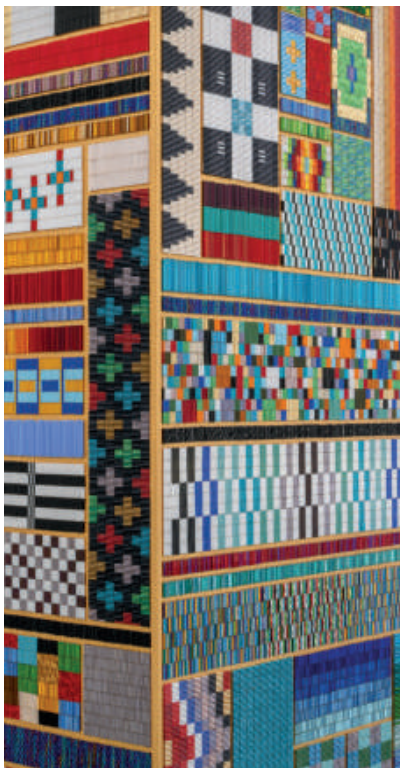
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

October 9–December 31, 2025

The work of artists who address healing, rest, and resilience—including Jennifer Ling Datchuk, Adebunmi Gbadebo, Ehren Tool, and Maia Chao—will anchor this show, which, the organizers write, will focus on "ways in which care manifests in ceramic art and how viewing art and working with clay can promote personal and communal health."

Judith Schaechter's 2025 stained glass installation *Super/Natural* (detail) will be on display at the Museum of Craft and Design in San Francisco, along with other works by the 2014 ACC Fellow.





Dyani White Hawk: Love Language

Walker Art Center
Minneapolis, Minnesota
October 18, 2025–February 15, 2026
This survey of the Lakota artist's work—including paintings, sculpture, video, beadwork, quillwork, glass mosaic, and more—documents 15 years of her efforts to foreground Lakota artistic forms and cultural teachings while reminding audiences of the legacies of settler colonialism and oppression. A highlight is her series of paintings enhanced with shimmering beadwork, entitled *WopilaLineage*.

Water's Edge:

The Art of Truman Lowe

National Museum of the American Indian
Washington, DC
October 24, 2025–January 2027
This is the first major retrospective of the versatile Ho-Chunk artist, bringing together 50 pieces—28 of them from the museum's collection—including charcoal and pastel drawings and minimalist sculptures made of organic materials such as willow branches and feathers. The works reflect memories of the Wisconsin woodlands, Native cultural traditions, and perspectives on the place of humanity in nature.

A detail of the beaded panels that comprise *Visiting*, 2024, by Dyani White Hawk (Sicangu Lakota). The 10-foot-tall sculpture will be on display in *Love Language*.

Ruth Asawa: A Retrospective

Museum of Modern Art
New York, New York
October 19, 2025–February 7, 2026

"I'm interested in what the material can do," renowned artist and educator Ruth Asawa (1926–2013) once said. Her work—ranging from intricate wire sculptures to bronze casts, paintings, prints, and public works—bears out this experimental mindset. Here some 300 pieces from her six-decade career paint a definitive portrait of an avant-gardist who loved natural forms. Learn about the book on page 65.

Sarah Tector: Overgrown

Alma's Gallery & Shop
Richmond, Virginia
October 25–November 29, 2025

The Raleigh, North Carolina-based artist's jewelry-making practice is rooted in concern for the environment—she's careful to use only recycled metals and responsibly sourced gemstones. In this show, she'll present some 150 delicate, expressive sculptures and wearable artworks that depict plant life, crafted from sterling silver and found objects.



Constellations: Contemporary Jewelry at the Dallas Museum of Art

Dallas Museum of Art
Dallas, Texas
November 9, 2025–May 3, 2026

This survey of more than 350 works by designers from around the globe brings together established masters and up-and-comers. The beauty on display includes artistry in metals and precious stones, of course, but also pieces made from paper and plastic bags. Other surprises: crowns formed to look like cardboard and brooches that resemble pieces of toast.



TOP: Sarah Tector's silver and wood *Ikebana*, 8 x 12 x 12 in. ABOVE: Donte K. Hayes's ceramic *Balance*, 2024, 10.5 x 11 x 12 in.

NOVEMBER OPENINGS

Cosmic Artifacts, Donte K. Hayes

Greenwich House Pottery
New York, New York
November 6–December 19, 2025

Hayes's work exists, he says, at the intersection of the legacy of the African diaspora and contemporary popular culture. His imposing clay forms, painstakingly decorated with repeating motifs, are inspired by a galaxy of influences: Afrofuturism, superheroes, African art objects, textiles, fashion in the era of colonialism, soundwaves, hair, and science fiction.

Discover more
Craft Happenings at
craftcouncil.org/crafthappenings

Made in America

Handwork 2026 invites Americans to discover, explore, and celebrate the country's craft legacy.

To celebrate American craft during the country's 250th birthday, Los Angeles-based Craft in America partnered with the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum to spearhead Handwork 2026, a yearlong initiative that includes new TV episodes, a book, craft tourism, a national exhibition, and much more.

Major partners, including the American Craft Council, Americans for the Arts, the Craft Emergency Relief Fund, PBS, and *Ornament* magazine, will help to organize and promote the initiative. More than 200 smaller regional craft museums and organizations will also participate in programming throughout the year.

"Craft is not nostalgic. Craft is alive," says Carol Sauvion, founder of Craft in America. "That's something we can be very proud of in our country."

The initiative recalls 1993's Year of American Craft, when Michael Monroe, then the chief curator of the Renwick, gathered 75 craft objects for display in the White House and brought the likes of Sam Maloof and Dale Chihuly into the storied building.

Visual arts consultant Harriett Green, who is an American Craft Council trustee, suggested doing something similar for the country's semiquincentennial in 2026. Why not a full year of celebration of the craft that made—and continues to shape—the United States? Here's what you can look forward to.

TV and Video. Starting in December, a four-part television documentary produced by the team behind the PBS program *Craft in America* will air on PBS and online, aiming to capture the full range of craft in the US. Three separate video initiatives—*Handmade America*, *Craft Across America*, and *Crafting History*—will also stream on PBS, YouTube, and Craft in America's website.

A Book. *Handwork 2026*, to be published in spring 2026 by Monacelli Press, will feature under-told stories about craft histories, artists, materials, and processes.

Residencies and Education. Handwork 2026 artist residencies at select universities are being funded by the Windgate Foundation. Dr. Marilyn Stewart, an arts educator and textbook author, will oversee the creation of a curriculum for K–12 students that will "take a wide look at the history, cultural traditions, and impact of craft in the United States, from Indigenous origins until today," according to organizers.

An Exhibition. The capstone of the project will be an exhibition at the Renwick Gallery, opening in November 2026, which will draw on the Smithsonian's permanent collection and include 10 objects acquired specifically for the show. The exhibition will tour the country beginning in 2027.



Philadelphia potter Roberto Lugo will appear in "East," a special episode of *Craft in America*.

Regional Programming. Organizers also hope to connect Americans to the country's craft history through programming with regional partners. In Houston and upstate New York, for example, neighboring organizations plan to offer "craft trails," where people can visit a handful of craft sites over a weekend.

Ultimately, the goal is to deepen Americans' appreciation of the craft artists, materials, and processes that have shaped the country in its past 250 years, divided as the country may now be.

"Craft is unifying and craft is gratifying, and there aren't many things in this world that have those two traits," says Sauvion. —Shivaun Watchorn

♦
handwork2026.org | [@handwork2026](https://twitter.com/handwork2026)





Charles Thompson sits on a brettstuhl in his Massachusetts pole-barn-turned-studio.

The Rhythm of Adornment

Massachusetts woodworker Charles Thompson astutely pairs fanciful carving and expert joinery in green wood furniture. BY JON SPAYDE

A decidedly modest man, Charles Thompson works, mostly by himself, in what he describes on his website as “a humble workshop on a humble hill in Heath, Massachusetts,” a little village tucked away in the northwest corner of the state. In a pole barn, with mostly hand tools, he turns green wood into furniture such as simple three-legged stools, Windsor chairs, and fanciful brettstuhls—four-legged chairs with imaginatively shaped and ornamented backs that originated in German-speaking Europe and came to America via Moravian immigrants.

The results display a mastery of joinery and a loving absorption with carving floral and other repeated motifs.

“When I was little, I would do the rosary, and lots of carving is like that—just one thing repeated over and over again,” he says. “It’s musical, it’s rhythmic, and a chance to be outside of yourself. And it connects you to history: those are motions and cadences that people have been doing for a really long time.”

That kind of informed thoughtfulness about his craft comes readily to Thompson, whose initial calling was essay writing. The Nashua, New Hampshire, native earned an MFA in creative nonfiction from The New School in New York City. But as he attempted to launch his literary career, he hit a snag.

“I was working on this writing project that just kept getting bigger and more nebulous,” he says. “I just started making things with wood. What it was didn’t matter, and the quality didn’t matter. It was just nice to do something that was tactile, that existed in the world, that you couldn’t backspace and retype.”

These forays into physical making included furniture for his family’s apartment. As visiting friends noticed the work, they began to offer him commissions. “I’d always say yes,” he



Thompson made *Dedham Panel*, 2025, mahogany, at North Bennet Street School in Boston, where he teaches, 18 x 12 x 1 in.

recalls. “And even if I couldn’t do it, I would use that opportunity to figure it out.”

After a short post–New York stint in Greenfield, Massachusetts, he and his family relocated to Heath in 2017. By a combination of trial, error, attendance at a couple of workshops, and diligent application, he was turning himself into a master craftsman.

RIGHT: Thompson shaves a blank for the undercarriage of a chair.
BELOW: Projects underway in a work area in the studio, including a perch stool getting a coat of paint. Chairs and hand tools fill the building. OPPOSITE, TOP TO BOTTOM: A red oak log and shave horse in front of the studio. Using a favorite elm maul and froe, Thompson splits butternut wood for a spoon project. An in-progress brettstuhl in cherry, hickory, and ash reads "Let the Light In," an homage to a song by Lana Del Rey.





“In exchange for some manual labor, I can get a lot of cool-shaped wood from orchards.”

—Charles Thompson



Input, Direction, Thoughtfulness

Thompson may have given up writing—except for the elegant comments on Instagram photos of his work—but the feeling for structure and meaning that he learned from it stays with him. “The symbols and forms, the shapes and joinery in woodworking, are like phrases or words in a vocabulary,” he says, “and you use the ones that you need to get a certain effect or shape, or to decorate and evoke something.”

He achieves these effects by shaping green wood, sourced many different ways. “I contact tree services. I have a relationship with some sawmills and I’ll buy logs from them. And I have friends who are arborists and cider makers and both of them prune orchards. In exchange for some manual labor, I can get a lot of cool-shaped wood from orchards.”

Sourcing is part of Thompson’s ethic of sustainability. “A lot of the wood that I use is essentially firewood or would be destined to be firewood,” he says. “I try to be mindful and not waste things.” All of his wood comes from within a 25-mile radius of his home, and, he notes, all of it gets used—for furniture, to heat his house, for mulch. Shavings become bedding for his chickens.

Thompson appreciates the special qualities of green wood, which bends more easily than dried wood. Taking a living log and splitting it rather than sawing it crosswise, he points out, preserves the integrity of its fibers, making it stronger and fitter for creating slender and sturdy forms like panels, chair legs, and spindles.

To work the wood, he depends on basic freehand tools—a hand plane, a draw knife, and “just a regular knife, which I use more or less on everything,” he says. “Those tools require a lot of input, direction, thoughtfulness, and awareness of the material. You’re making a lot of decisions as you’re using the tool, several small decisions every second. The tools I like are the ones that allow for that.”



“The symbols and forms, the shapes and joinery in woodworking, are like phrases or words in a vocabulary.”

—Charles Thompson

Passing It On

As a former nonfiction writer, Thompson understands the role of research and knowledge in making his handwork powerful and expressive. He’s steeped in the furniture traditions of New England, which he discovered all around him in his family home and other familiar places when he was growing up, and he’s knowledgeable about woodworking in the cultures that make up his background: his mother is Filipina, his father African American and Japanese.

“My ethnicities all have different woodworking traditions,” he says. “Some of them are erased or overwritten, and some of them are thriving. That’s in the back of my mind when I’m making things. I’m very aware of lost and unknown craftspeople and ways of doing things, and trying to find some continuous thread or reconnection there.”

One way that Thompson combines his knowledge base with the skill of his hands is through teaching. “For a long time, I would make things on commission,” Thompson recalls. “What that meant was making palatable stuff, to suit a taste. My creativity was sublimated or secondary.” Then, in 2022, Gabe Strand of the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina asked him



TOP LEFT: *Escabelle*, 2024, elm, 24 x 18 x 16 in. LEFT: Made from red oak, *Crib from a Tree* takes inspiration from 17th century Connecticut Valley blanket chests, 55 x 32 x 30 in. OPPOSITE TOP: *Tulip Bench*, 2024, white oak, red oak, pine, linseed oil paint, shellac, 34 x 46 x 18 in. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Milking stools.

TOP LEFT: Photo by Sophia Li. ALL OTHER IMAGES: Photos courtesy of Charles Thompson.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Thompson chip carving a Breton spoon. *Looky Here Spoon*, 2022, cherry, 9 x 2 x 1 in. Combs of various species and sizes in progress. Knives for spooncarving rest on an oak panel.



Thompson applies a coat of black milk paint to a perch stool.

to teach a class—on any topic he chose. “It was an opportunity for my work to become more speculative and more researched,” he says. For the class, he focused on the *brettstuhl*, with its long tradition and opportunities for lively decorative carving.

In the same year, he enrolled in a class for aspiring teachers of chair making offered by The Chairmaker’s Toolbox, a non-profit based in Boston that creates opportunities for historically marginalized woodworkers. The friendships that Thompson struck up in that class have been sustaining him ever since.

“I still do things alone,” he says, “but it’s really nice to know that I’m not alone. I have people who are in parallel and to whom I can reach out. After that class, I joined Chairmaker’s volunteer base.” Currently he’s co-chair of the organization’s Tools Committee, gathering donated tools from crafters who no longer need them.

Since then, too, Thompson has taught furniture making, pattern carving, and spoon carving (a favorite pursuit) at craft schools from Maine to Tennessee.

In 2024 Thompson was awarded the John D. Mineck Fellowship in furniture making, administered by Boston’s Society of Arts + Crafts. He plans to devote the \$25,000 prize money to creating an instructional tool kit he can bring with him on teaching gigs and to improving his studio so he can host classes there.

“Doing craft changed my life,” he says. “It recontextualized the things I cherish. My bet is that there are other people who might feel the same way. Hopefully, something like making a chair, making a carving, can have some resonance for them and allow them to see the agency that they have. To see the influence that their internal world can have when they express it and use it to manipulate tools and wood to make something.”

◆
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Jon Spayde is a contributing editor to *American Craft*.

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TUFTED JOY

*With wool dyed
to match her
imagination's palette,
Melissa Monroe
creates rugs, furniture-
inspired sculptures, and objects
filled with life.*

BY EMILY FREIDENRICH



What happens when you mix the cozy craft of rug tufting with the wild imagination of a painter? Picture a mid-century lounge chair sprouting patchwork fur, a bench shaped like a two-headed cat, cubed poufs sided with mask-like faces, or a tapestry of a grinning tiger in profile on a mossy green background, surrounded by a striped, shaggy border. These are the work of Portland, Oregon-based multimedia artist Melissa Monroe. In her home studio, repurposed from a 1960s church classroom space, Monroe conjures a menagerie of textile creatures and objects that are as likely to sprawl across a floor as to hang on a wall.

Entirely self-taught, Monroe has been a working artist since 2013, mainly painting, though no medium has been off-limits. She also builds furniture-inspired sculptures, dabbles in ceramics, and makes masks from papier mâché, with which she performs at gallery show openings and in videos posted to her vibrant social media pages. In tufting she found a way for these pursuits to coexist. “The idea of it seemed so magical,” she recalls, “like painting with yarn.”



TOP: Melissa Monroe in her Portland, Oregon, studio. ABOVE: *Tiger's Rest* rug, 2025, tufted wool, 26 x 36 x 2 in. OPPOSITE: Monroe reupholstered a vintage chair with hand-tufted wool to create *Candy Scoop*, 2024.

RIGHT: *Painful Blanket* wall hanging, 2025, tufted wool, 21 x 16 x 2 in.
 BELOW: *Perception Circle*, 2025, vintage stool upholstered with tufted wool, 23 x 20 x 23 in.

In 2020 an affordable tufting gun hit the market. Before long, cheery rugs and wall hangings in geometric patterns and fluffy emoji-like designs were all over RugTok (TikTok for rugs and tufting, naturally) and Etsy shops galore. But when Monroe spotted a lusciously drippy rainbow stair runner by tufting genius Trish Andersen, she “felt a rush” of inspiration. “I immediately saw all these things that I wanted to do with it that no one else was doing yet.” Monroe had taken an upholstery class and saw a throughline of possibility between tufting and three-dimensional, functional objects.

While the world stood still in pandemic isolation, Monroe’s art exploded into motion. With tufting gun in hand, she began creating vibrant, tactile sculptures that caught the eye of galleries and art fairs across the country. “Tufting very quickly took over my entire art practice,” she recalls. “Galleries wanted to show it, especially 3D objects. I’d started with rugs for people’s spaces, but it evolved into building masks and incorporating furniture-building techniques.”

Monroe shows her work frequently in Portland galleries, Seattle’s AMcE Creative Arts and Lynn Hanson galleries, and the Seattle Art Fair, as well as HeyThere Projects in Joshua Tree, California, and Mortal Machine in New Orleans.

Plan like a Tufter, Improvise like a Painter

When painting, Monroe rarely starts with a plan; her process is more like laying down a series of visual beats (she’s also a



musician, doing vocals and keyboard for her band, Soft Memory) that build as she works. Tufting though, as she learned early on, requires more up-front planning and preparation. Yarn was the first problem: “I hated all the color choices at the craft stores,” she recalls. “I had a specific vision of the palette I wanted.” Eventually Monroe found a fabricator to dye durable, high-end wool to her painterly specifications, and today she keeps her studio’s covetable wall of color happily overstocked.

Her pieces start with a rough sketch of her object—a rug, a chair, a mask—and a design before she sets tufting gun to tufting cloth. “I love shapes, figurative expression, and vintage stuffed animals,” she says of her imagery. From there, the “painting with yarn” begins. “I get my sense of color, shape, texture, and form from my painting practice,” she says, and that gives her the confidence to let her work emerge organically with punchy visuals, curious creatures, sometimes words, and often lots and lots of color.

Once she gets going, her sense of painterly improvisation kicks in. “As I work, I’ll choose colors and pile height, a lot of it based on past experience of what works and what does not,” she says. “You can get stuck in ideation. If you have the *whole* thing planned out, there’s no excitement. A plan sets an expectation you’re never going to meet, and a lot of the excitement for me is finding the piece as I go.”

Art (and Love) in a Coffee Shop

Monroe’s first hint that she could be an artist came in 2012, when she was in her mid-20s, a married mom of three working in a coffee shop to help make ends meet. A muralist was painting a wall in the café, and watching him work and talking





LEFT: An in-progress tufted wall hanging in Melissa Monroe's studio.
BELOW LEFT: Monroe displays her work in the Lynn Hanson Gallery booth at the Seattle Art Fair.



with him “blew my mind,” she says. “He didn’t have a plan, he was just layering paint and color. It was so casual, and I just could not wrap my head around it. *People paint like this? And this is your job?*”

Monroe went home that night, scrounged house paint and glass from her contractor husband’s projects plus craft supplies from an old job at Michael’s, and threw them together in an emotional outburst of art. “Making art helped me release a lot of anger that I didn’t realize I had,” she reflects. Her first marriage ended not long after.

She soon earned enough to become a full-time artist, selling her work on eBay to buyers as far-flung as Greece and France. She also kept in touch with the muralist, a local painter named Jesse Reno—and they are still together, 11 years on.

Art and Life

These days, Monroe and Reno work side by side in their shared studio. They’re raising the children (teenagers now) while making music and a lot of art. The pair show together frequently and notice a fond cohesion in color and form—Monroe reads it as a comforting mutual “understanding” in their work.

Monroe and Reno have found a strong and supportive community in the Portland art and music scenes, and Monroe finds ways to give back. “I try to be a resource for people learning and getting into tufting. I’m impressed, looking back, that I got through my first projects, and I enjoy working through new problems and playing with different materials.” She sells her custom yarn as well as tufting supplies, hosts tufting workshops in her studio, and even curated a show of local and national tufting artists dubbed *Tuft Crowd* at Portland’s Brassworks Gallery.

Monroe is enjoying a busy year of shows, pushing her tufting sculptural work to greater scale, and incorporating playful handmade ceramic elements like little clawed feet. She loves that tufting is fast and allows her to get her ideas out quickly—a “joyful release” for her buzzing inner universe. That energy is palpable in her work: the grinning alligators and languid tigers, the kooky faces peering from a chair cushion, the mélange of textures, the melting rainbow palette. Tufting, for Monroe, is utter joy.

◆
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Emily Freidenrich is the author of *Almost Lost Arts: Traditional Crafts and the Artisans Keeping Them Alive* (Chronicle Books, 2019). She lives and works in Seattle.

ceramic surrounds



Ben Medansky, a former production potter, creates bespoke wall art for clients around the world.

BY DEBORAH BISHOP

If Ben Medansky's ceramics studio hadn't been engulfed in flames nine years ago, it's possible he might still be making mugs.

Mind you, those weren't your garden-variety coffee cups—four of his architectural drinking vessels reside in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's permanent collection. But Medansky—who graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010, moved to Los Angeles, and apprenticed for such legends as Peter Shire—had been hankering for a change even before a downed power line sparked the inferno. “I was so done being a production potter—I needed to make things by hand and I wanted to stop repeating myself,” says Medansky, whose sculptural work often took a back seat to his bread-and-butter business.

From the disaster came the seeds for transformation. The fire had turned his downtown studio into a giant raku kiln, and Medansky sold hundreds of unfinished objects at an aptly named fire sale—with LACMA snapping up one of the beautifully charred vases. With the help of GoFundMe and a grant from the Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF+), he was able to buy a few thousand pounds of clay and start over.

LEFT: Glazed ceramic tiles from Ben Medansky's 2024 wall piece *Grade A*.
OPPOSITE: Medansky with a tile-clad credenza and wall.

Photo by Emma Sher / Ben Medansky Studio. OPPOSITE: Photo by Phoebe Hono.



A New Leaf

By 2018, Medansky, who is now 37, had changed almost everything about his business model. He rented a house in an artsy enclave dubbed Frogtown (also known as Elysian Valley) with a studio in the back garden. Instead of getting into his car, he starts the day rollerblading along the Los Angeles River. He replaced his trademark Speckled Buff stoneware with terra-cotta clay, an homage to the Spanish-style roofs prevalent in Los Angeles and the tiled floors of his native Arizona. And he kicked his potter's wheel to the curb.

On a sunny day in mid-April, Medansky is juggling some 12 commissions, and his studio is filled with thousands of pieces waiting to be fired and glazed. Pinned to a board are a color rendering of a stacked, geometric sculpture in orange, red, and yellow destined for a Louis Vuitton store; plans for a 40-foot mural for a Thomas Keller restaurant in Santa Barbara in ocean-echoing shades of aqua; and sketches for a fireplace surround in Athens, Greece. Lining the walls are the collectible ceramic tile paintings that often serve as studies and maquettes for his scaled-up installations: "To get to one finished piece I make at least 10 smaller versions," says Medansky. "If I'm not experimenting, I feel stagnant."

Although his tiles start out as squares or rectangles, Medansky often cuts them into different shapes while the clay is wet—part of the process of subverting their rectilinearity and abstracting the final composition. He carves, adds extruded bits, and stamps into the clay's surface, creating patterns and embedding fossils by "smooshing" in such objects as twigs, obsolete iPhones, childhood toys (such as lizards and frogs), and two-by-fours—"my love letter to Stan Bitters," Medansky says with a smile, referencing the venerable ceramic sculptor. Before installation, Medansky lays all the tiles out on his floor and plays with configurations—like assembling a giant jigsaw puzzle with multiple solutions. "I'm kind of a Dadaist," says Medansky. "I thrive on the chaos of not knowing exactly how something will turn out."

He takes the same approach when building his totemic stacked sculptures, using intuition to dictate the procession of shapes that he arranges, like giant ceramic beads, onto a tall metal rod. Some of these elements are rounded, shaped with molds made from mixing bowls used by his father, who was a chef. Others are more angular, inspired by Constantin Brancusi's 98-foot-tall *Endless Column* (a cast-iron monument to Romanian soldiers in World War I).

Thanks in part to social media, Medansky is on the radar of architects, designers, galleries, and collectors, and feels he can stay more accessible without the added markup of a middleman. And although his work has scaled up considerably in size, he still has a way to go: "My ultimate goal is to clad an entire building or skyscraper in ceramic. In a way, everything I do is a step toward that."

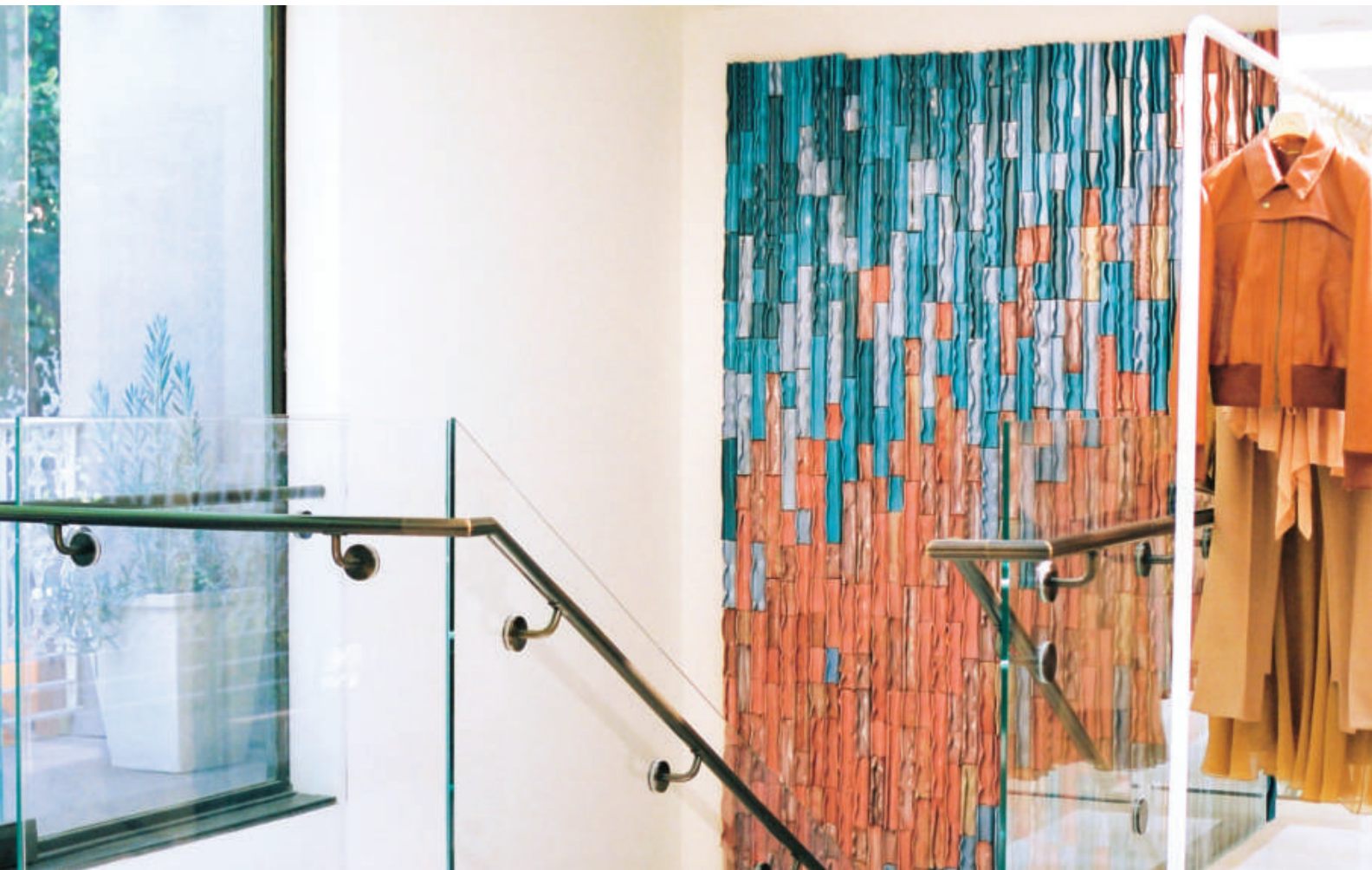


TOP: Photo by Sean Hazen. BOTTOM: Photo by Sarah Leshet. OPPOSITE TOP: Photo by Michael Clifford. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Photo by Nick Delisi.

“My ultimate goal is to clad an entire building or skyscraper in ceramic.”

—Ben Medansky

OPPOSITE TOP: Terra-cotta sculpture *Stacked III*, 2024, at Richard Neutra's Hailey Residence. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Medansky sculpts terra-cotta tiles. RIGHT: *White on White Waves*, 2024. BELOW: *Cloudscape*, 2024, on the wall of luxury boutique Chloé Melrose Place.



***Ceramic Cladded Columns (2024),
The Manner, SoHo, New York City***

Milan-based architect Hannes Peer is known for designing bespoke spaces that are chic, immersive, and richly layered with work by a cadre of artists and craftspeople. In *The Apartment*, a private gathering spot for guests at The Manner hotel, two monolithic columns frame a geometric fireplace (a hat tip to Milanese architect Gigi Radice). “Architects so often view columns as the enemy—something to hide,” says Peer, who discovered Medansky on Pinterest. “When I described a hotel in my hometown of Bolzano that once commissioned the artist Lucio Fontana to construct a ceramic column, Ben freaked out—he was excited but also a bit nervous; he had never worked in the third dimension. His tiles actually wrap

the columns,” Peer explains, “so every corner piece is like a little sculpture.”

Medansky used eight sizes of tile and embedded motifs rife with personal meaning to create a rhythmic texture. “Every now and then there’s a leaf, smiley faces, frogs—because I’m in Frogtown—centipedes, bugs . . . it’s like a scavenger hunt,” says Medansky, who met Peer’s desire for a California vibe—blue sky, fluffy clouds—by layering his glazes. “Ben continuously pushed himself, showing us new iterations far beyond what we asked,” recalls Peer. “If you were to remove these two columns . . . well, without his genius, the project literally does not work.”



Photo by Chris Mortolini.



***Tangled Rectangle Wall* (2020),
Kapoor Residence, Hancock Park, Los Angeles**

Television producer Raj Kapoor fills his home with original work by artists and makers from Los Angeles and beyond and is always on the hunt for new discoveries. After Medansky's Instagram popped up on his phone, Kapoor reached out to commission two teak-framed tile paintings to complement his collection of vintage Alvino Bagni pottery. Once those were hung in his sunroom, he enlisted Medansky to clad an entire 8-by-10-foot wall in his black-and-white powder room. "I asked him for something very textured and tactile—a conversation piece," says Kapoor, whose credits include such shows as the Academy Awards and the Grammys.

The resulting mural is the antithesis of your typical smooth, grouted-tile bathroom wall. Medansky took sticks and two-by-fours to etch and press texture into the clay, appended tabs that protrude from the surface, and slipped spacers behind selected tiles to jut them out, revealing glimpses of the terracotta edges. Using black glazing to visually break up the "tangled" rectangles even more, he created the ceramic equivalent of a giant crazy quilt.

"I asked him for something very textured and tactile—a conversation piece."

—Raj Kapoor

ABOVE: Raj Kapoor commissioned Medansky to create *Tangled Rectangle Wall* for his LA home.
OPPOSITE: *Ceramic Cladded Columns*, a 2024 installation at The Manner hotel in New York City.



***Pool Wall* (2024),
Proper Hotel, Los Angeles**

One of several collaborations between Medansky and global interior designer Kelly Wearstler—whom he calls his “fairy godmother” for fostering an environment of creative experimentation and artistic growth—this 40-foot-long wall adorns a private room with a pool in downtown Los Angeles’s Proper Hotel. After a year of testing glazes, the palette morphed from a patchwork of Southwestern colors—adobe, cerulean, umber—to cool, monochromatic shades of cream.

Like a quilt rendered in clay, the tiles have their own iconography. Some allude to the view during drives Medansky took to visit his family in Scottsdale, Arizona—tire treads in the dirt, cacti, cracked earth, leaves—while others are plucked from architectural details and his own imagination. Working with a scaled-down model of the wall, he spent months rearranging the squares in order to resolve the composition. “For example, the saguaro started out pretty literal—like a straight-up cartoon cactus with the arms,” says Medansky. “When I pulled the elements apart, they read more like abstracted gestures than carbon copies—and it became much more interesting.”

ABOVE: *Pool Wall*, 2021, is installed at the Proper Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. RIGHT: Medansky’s ceramic work in the 2023 exhibition *Ferns & Freeways*. OPPOSITE TOP: *Stacked*, 2023, was also part of *Ferns & Freeways*, terracotta, glaze, micro quartz, steel base, 96 x 10 x 10 in.





Ferns & Freeways: An Ode to Frogtown

While Medansky has his hands full with commissions, he also carves out time for passion projects. *Ferns & Freeways*, a 2023 show at the Bianca Chen Gallery, explored the interplay between nature and urbanity in his pocket of Los Angeles. “It was a kiss to my wonderful, quirky, tucked-in neighborhood that is surrounded by the river and all these freeways,” says Medansky.

Titles toggle between the bucolic—*Nine Branches from the LA River*—and the prosaic: *The 110 to The 10 and The 10 to The 5 to The 101 to The 60*, a set of driving directions familiar to anyone who has navigated the city’s labyrinthine freeway system. Medansky also coil-built several botanical-inspired vessels—and intentionally made them useless. “Nothing irks me more than being asked what a piece is for, what can it *hold*. So I added holes to counter this idea that ceramic art has to be functional. Why can’t it just look beautiful?”

Embracing everything from river flora to navigation systems, the artwork ranges from lustrous greens to gritty, tarmac-like surfaces created by mixing sand into black glaze. “I wanted to evoke the texture and hues of the foliage while acknowledging the industrial beauty of the asphalt-blanketed freeways,” he explains. “It’s a delicate equilibrium.”

Medansky has achieved equilibrium in his own life by balancing personal work with original commissions and one-off collaborations—including swim trunks (Pangea), sneakers (Koio), and coasters (Areaware) patterned on his ceramics. And he is a creative consultant for Zia Tile, for whom he’s designing a custom collection. Almost 10 years after losing his studio in a fire, Medansky has found the sweet spot where he can both make art—and make a living by making art.

“There is this romantic idea about the starving artist, especially in school,” says Medansky. When he graduated from the Art Institute, one of the Guerrilla Girls gave the commencement speech and part of it has stayed with him. “She told us, ‘Sell out. If people start paying attention to you, don’t waste your time wondering if you’ve lost your edge.’” Medansky says it took a while to understand, but 15 years on, the words can be read as a kind of benediction. “Here’s the thing: I love being able to make art every day. I also love having health insurance, paying my assistants well, and taking a vacation once in a while. If I were over here making only conceptual art, none of that would be possible.”

♦

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Deborah Bishop is a frequent contributor to *American Craft*.

survivors on the storm

Instantaneous access to an insatiable, 24-hour news media means we're never more than a few clicks away from a pivotal crisis or sugary bit of gossip.

Artificial intelligence in the workplace. Fires in California. Celebrities in court. Floods in Texas. The headlines pile up persistently as we endeavor to live our lives and pursue our passions. Is it any wonder, then, that we sometimes become distracted or overwhelmed and lose track of a particular storyline—no matter how impactful or urgent?

To those of us who didn't live through the horror of Hurricane Helene, for example, one of the deadliest tropical storms to hit the US mainland in nearly 20 years may now seem a distant memory. But for the craftspeople living and creating in places like the Mountain Region of western North Carolina (WNC), it's barely been a year—a long, taxing year marked by feelings of loss, existential uncertainty, and galvanizing bouts of hope.

The region's storied educational institutions (Penland School of Craft, John C. Campbell Folk School, Haywood Community College), organizations (the Southern Highland Craft Guild, the Center for Craft, Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc.), and countless other foundations, civic groups, craftspeople, and their patrons stepped up immediately after the storm with economic aid and moral support—and they haven't stopped. Six of the seven makers featured on the following pages, for instance, are part of a 40-person WNC Craft Futures Cohort at the Center for Craft that was awarded a total of \$600,000 and spent the summer in a peer-to-peer support network. And that's just a drop in the bailing bucket.

A generation's worth of work and an estimated \$50 billion is still required to restore WNC. In the meantime, local artists and makers are returning to their online shops and exhibition spaces, and hoping craft lovers the world over do the same. "Our doors are open!" exclaims Asheville-based jeweler Laura Lau Klein, who hopes readers of *American Craft* will spread the word. "People are welcome to come back and visit."

Lau Klein also stresses that those who can afford it should donate to organizations like the Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF+), which provides emergency support to craft artists. And everyone you'll meet here says they agreed to revisit September 27, 2024, and its aftermath—no small or easy thing—in hopes that, no matter what's spinning in the news cycle, Hurricane Helene doesn't fade from our collective consciousness.

A year after Hurricane Helene ravaged western North Carolina, seven craftspeople talk about the aftermath, the ongoing recovery, the importance of community, and the creative consequences.

BY DAVID SCHIMKE





The Day After

RACHEL MEGINNES, TEXTILE ARTIST
Bakersville, North Carolina

It takes Rachel Meginnes 12 minutes to drive to the Penland School of Craft, where she did a three-year residency beginning in 2012. Her studio space is another 12 miles down the road in Spruce Pine, where, in 2023, she created an extraordinary series of pieces made from disintegrating quilts “found stuffed away in attics or tossed at the Goodwill.” She’s also a sought-after creative life coach who conducts virtual counseling sessions nationwide.

Like almost everyone in the Mountain Region, Helene left Meginnes and her partner, software engineer Jacob Huston, without power or access to local roads. They did, however, have a Starlink for internet connection, and Huston had a battery to power it up. Just a day after the storm passed, the couple decided to pack up the invaluable equipment and haul it across an overland path to Penland.

“You have to go through the woods and it usually takes about 30 minutes, but we had to climb over I don’t know how many trees and it took nearly two hours,” Meginnes remembers. “When we showed up with a jar of pickles and Starlink, everyone there was like, ‘Are you kidding me!’ And it was so amazing to see people connect with loved ones that we decided to leave [the Starlink] there and hike over when we wanted to use it.”

This *esprit de corps* proved inspirational. “I found that when creatives are in a place where they need to, say, chainsaw a hundred trees rather than go into the studio and make, being surrounded by people who still identify you as a maker is huge. Because part of what happens in situations like this is that you lose a sense of self; you lose a sense of place and purpose. So to be surrounded by people who see those things in you? Nothing matters more than that.”

The emotional upheaval of the past year also impacted the way Meginnes views her own internal work and creative process. “I’ve always been drawn to the beauty in disintegration and chaos,” she says, noting that while the sort of natural devastation Helene wrought may have previously struck her (from a distance) as “breathtaking or awe-inspiring,” it now leaves her “emotionless” and leaning toward a “brighter and clearer aesthetic.”

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



Ceramist Daniel Garver’s studio in Spruce Pine, North Carolina, was flooded by Hurricane Helene just three months after it was purchased.

TOP: Photo by Loam NOLA. LEFT: Photo by Daniel Garver.



A Call for Help

MORGAN HILL, SCULPTOR AND JEWELRY DESIGNER

Penland, North Carolina

After graduating with a BFA in woodworking and furniture design in 2013, Morgan Hill left her native Arkansas to take a workshop at Penland, which she followed up with a two-year Core Fellowship. She's been living near campus ever since, designing and selling vibrant jewelry to support larger multimedia projects. "It's a pretty common story," she says. "People take a workshop and they're like, 'Oh my gosh, what is this place? I have to be here all the time!'"

Hill was not in Penland when Helene landed, however. She was visiting New Hampshire. Worried about water damage as the storm intensified, she tried to stay in contact with the co-owners of Treats Studios, a makerspace she cofounded in nearby Spruce Pine. "And then the power went out and I couldn't communicate with anybody," she says. "Because I wasn't there, I knew how bad it was. People on the ground didn't understand the extent of the damage because they didn't have access to the news and they

couldn't talk to each other. So the morning after, I started to think about what I could do to help."

Within days, Hill had conspired with two colleagues who were also out of town—Cami Leisk, owner and operator of Loam WNC, and textiles designer Sarah Parkinson—to turn the Treats Studios website into an online clearinghouse for impacted artists to sell their work and set up mutual aid. "It was a direct form of funding," Hill says. "That was important when a lot of sources for artist relief in the area were without power or in need of help themselves."

Hundreds of craftspeople benefited from the site. And when the Center for Craft was in a position to award grants to impacted makers soon after, they tapped the database to expedite the process. "It was a grassroots thing," says Hill, who didn't return home until January and still isn't sure she'll remain in the area. "We created a web of help."

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



Community Trust

DANIEL GARVER, CERAMIST

Spruce Pine, North Carolina

Three months before Helene, Daniel Garver and his partner, printmaker Jamie Karolich, purchased a two-story commercial building in downtown Spruce Pine that was built in 1942 and had been vacant for 15 years. It was a rare find, since the area's real estate market is limited and prices have skyrocketed since the pandemic. Before they could turn the 4,000-square-foot space into a working studio, however, Helene dropped 24.2 inches of rain, burying the first floor in mud. And while the couple's residence rests on higher ground, Garver also lost \$10,000 worth of work in nearby Asheville. "There were two mentalities after the storm," says the clay artist, who produces functional and sculptural slip-cast ceramics. "I'm leaving, or I'm staying and doubling down on what I believe in here."

Garver threw in all his chips, largely because he was just finishing a three-year residency at Penland, which he says is invested in "really getting you situated in the community and encouraging you to stay." He guesses, in fact, that some 70 percent of those who spend significant time at the school choose to settle nearby—a significant number in an area that otherwise experiences significant transience. "When you show that you're invested in staying, doors open up and others become more invested in you," says Garver, who has lately benefited from consulting on a regular basis with neighbors who've experienced similar infrastructural loss—something that would've been "harder to access where people aren't as close to each other."

Perhaps most heartening to Garver and Karolich is that their community has not only tightened, it's unexpectedly expanded and diversified. "Our county, Mitchell County, is predominantly conservative and socially divisive in certain ways. But none of that mattered after Helene. It was all just about altruistically helping one another. And that's continued to this day—people setting aside personal differences in pursuit of a higher goal."

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The Long Haul

RACHEL DAVID, METALWORKER

Waynesville, North Carolina

It's early May, and Rachel David is talking to me while driving home from Louisiana. It's been a long road trip. Before selling her work at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, the metalworker—who sculpts and designs furniture by forming, forging, and machining steel—also exhibited at the Smithsonian Craft Show. Along the way, she's found herself reflecting on the differences and similarities between living through both Hurricane Helene, which flooded her house in Waynesville, and Hurricane Katrina, which struck New Orleans when David was living there in 2005.

“One of the things I've learned is how important it is for artists to be involved in recovery, especially in economies that are tourist driven,” she says. For a number of reasons—“demographics, the national mood, structural racism”—it took a few years for New Orleans's creative community to find their footing and begin not only rebuilding, but creating what has since emerged as a vibrant arts scene. In western North Carolina, people have been able to pivot more quickly. “We have this amazing network of support organizations that led with funding, which was incredible. Because, first and foremost, we need money to rebuild our homes and studios.”

Because of the enduring physical and emotional toll of Helene, David emphasizes that there's still an enormous amount of work and healing to do, and while local efforts are encouraging, national visibility and engagement will remain crucial over the coming years. “There are still so many people without homes, and families living with deep uncertainty,” she says. “And then there's all the uncertainty that this regime in Washington is imposing, which is only hindering a difficult recovery period.”

One of the bright lights for David has been the Center for Craft's WNC Craft Futures Cohort, to which she was named at the beginning of the year. Along with receiving funding and being included in a group exhibition, the 40 participants are leaning into an energizing, peer-to-peer network. “It's such a fascinating, diverse, and brilliant group of people,” she says. “We see each other's spaces. We have interesting, inspiring conversations. I've fallen in love with the whole process.”

In mid-July, David was further heartened to hear that the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts has joined the Asheville-based ArtsvilleUSA and River Arts District Artists to produce *A Tale of Two Cities*, which will explore “the role of art in the wake of environmental disaster.”

redmetal.net | [@__redmetal__](https://www.instagram.com/redmetal_)



Triage

GEOFFREY BOWTON, GLASS ARTIST

Bakersville, North Carolina

While serving in the US Army in Iraq and Afghanistan, Geoffrey Bowton says, there was “always a ‘quick response force’ on standby.” His experience there proved invaluable after the 80-mile-per-hour winds generated by Helene—which Bowton remembers as sounding like “a NASCAR race coming over the mountain tops”—decimated the area around Penland School, where he was in residency.

Just after the storm passed, Bowton walked the school grounds and came upon a woman whose home, where she’d lived for 40 years, was rendered uninhabitable. “It was like walking inside a wet cloth,” he remembers. “She was soaked, her dog was soaked, her bed was soaked, everything was soaked, and she was kind of moving around like nothing had happened.”

The veteran, who’d endured what he calls a “hip explosion” and fractured vertebrae in the Middle East, spent the next two days helping the neighbor. And while he couldn’t manage certain physical tasks, it’s a good guess his presence served as a psychological salve.

After leaving an Oregon-based construction career to enlist at age 32, Bowton created the makeshift 6Whiskey wood shop in Iraq, where he and fellow troops fostered a sense of camaraderie. Upon returning home six years later, he decided to use his GI benefits to train as a craftsman and, over the past decade, has explored his PTSD by perfecting a particularly realistic glass-casting technique to turn military artifacts (helmets, combat boots, etc.) into art. He also began teaching nearby vets to use creativity as a healing tool, and now hopes those who lived through Helene can do the same.

“People here experience post-traumatic responses when it rains or they hear a tree creaking. The memories are still raw,” he says. And when a person chooses to create an object to embody such memories, “they can stand back from it, examine it, and share it with others,” which is often equal parts freeing and empowering.

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Reimagining

**LAURA LAU KLEIN, JEWELER,
MULTIMEDIA ARTIST**

Asheville, North Carolina

Just before Helene bore down on West Asheville, Laura Lau Klein was evacuated. The next day they biked back to the area and found that while their residence had just escaped flooding, the communal studio space they used in Asheville's River Arts District was badly water damaged. "It was really amazing, because everybody was out on the streets and already helping each other," Lau Klein says. "Everyone was so in each other's lives for that first month or two. I feel really sad thinking about it, but simultaneously really enlivened. I feel a lot of love thinking about it, too."

A painter, Lau Klein studied anthropology in Delaware and then, after discovering the craft scene in western North Carolina, became immersed in the handmade. After stints at Penland and the John C. Campbell Folk School, they studied jewelry making at Haywood Community College and graduated just a few months before the hurricane came. Immediately embraced by their peers, Lau Klein was offered a temporary studio space in nearby Weaverville and, last winter, received a two-week residency at Penland. In total, the journey has led them to reevaluate the pace and purpose of their practice.

"Immediately following the storm, I did what felt necessary to show up for my community and to recover my craft business," they say. "This spring, I have finally begun prioritizing new routines . . . including spending time in the woods every week and prioritizing pleasure and rest. This approach feels crucial to maintaining a craft practice while our area rebuilds."

"My work is heavily influenced by the local ecosystem, using elements of our river—such as found stones I set in jewelry, and plants I cast in metals. Since the storm, I've started working on a series of designs that incorporate photoetching ambient patterns seen in the aftermath of the storm, such as cracked earth. It feels cathartic to use this imagery to adorn the body, turning something hard to look at into an object worn to express the beauty in life."

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Rebirth

**KWADWO SOM-PIMPONG,
FURNITURE MAKER**

Arden, North Carolina

Going to bed the night before Helene, Kwadwo Som-Pimpong assumed his house might lose power. And then? “My wife [Faith Som-Pimpong] sprinted into the bedroom, nine months pregnant, because a tree fell right next to our house. She woke me up and everything was swirling around. It was surreal,” he says. “By the time it died down, we were blocked in by fallen trees, and we were supposed to go to the hospital at any moment.”

The neighbors rallied, cutting a path so the couple could get to Mission Hospital in Asheville. Four days later, the couple welcomed their first child, Dzidzor, which is pronounced “jeejaw” and means “joy” in Ewe, the language in Faith’s native Ghana. “People just jumped at the occasion to help one another,” Som-Pimpong says. “And now it’s showing in the form of the city and surrounding areas slowly coming back. It’s been a beautiful thing.”

The ordeal also proved clarifying. Originally from Greensboro, by 2015 Som-Pimpong had relocated to Arden to work at a manufacturing company and was looking to furnish his first house. Unable to find something affordable that wasn’t mass produced, he began building a side table and, falling in love with the process, spent the ensuing years learning to

make other pieces. In 2017, he discovered Etsy and logged enough sales to open Crafted Glory, a furniture brand inspired by West African artistry and Scandinavian design.

Som-Pimpong still works at his day job, but after Helene, circumstances encouraged him to deepen his relationship with local entrepreneurs via organizations such as Mountain BizWorks. Last winter he was named to the Center for Craft’s WNC Craft Futures Cohort, exposing him and Faith to workshops where business fundamentals are the topic du jour.

“Our plan has been for me to transition away from my corporate job, and while Helene was very jarring and disorienting, all the coaching and mentoring has since accelerated our process,” Som-Pimpong says. “I believe great lessons can come through tragedy. But people should not forget that many people are still stuck, trying to figure out what they’re going to do next. Support is still needed for many, many people.”

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

♦

David Schimke is senior editor and head of digital content at *American Craft*.



Wearing Difference, Extravagantly

UK-based Sophie de Oliveira Barata's imaginative prosthetics reframe the conversation around disability and difference.

BY JOE HART

Kelly Knox never thought of herself as disabled. The British model and activist was born with only one hand; her left arm ends shortly below her elbow. That didn't stop her from riding a bike, learning to swim, washing her own hair—all the same activities that her able-bodied friends did. So when she was first fitted with a prosthetic limb, she found it clumsy and awkward.

"Without the false arm, I felt completely abled," she told an interviewer in 2013. "When I was wearing the false arm,

that disabled me, because I wasn't able to do stuff that I could do without it."

This paradox is in part what inspired her to work with Lewes, England-based artist and prosthetic designer Sophie de Oliveira Barata to design a false limb—not to blend in with "normal" people, but to stand out from them.

The result is *Materialise*, one of dozens of artful prosthetics created by de Oliveira Barata. The bottom half of the arm

“The materials are grounding yet otherworldly. They speak of nature, yes, but also of transformation.”

—Sophie de Oliveira Barata

was molded from a digital scan of Knox’s right arm and crafted from ultrarealistic silicone, which is de Oliveira Barata’s primary specialty.

The top half consists of nearly two dozen interchangeable parts held in place by magnets—steel, rock, earth, wood, moss, oil, cork, wool, bronze, rhodium, gold—that can be swapped out depending on Knox’s mood.

“It was just the idea of changing different sections of your body, depending on your feeling,” de Oliveira Barata explains. “What materials resonate with you, depending on what you’re wearing or how you’re feeling?”

The Body as Alchemy

De Oliveira Barata makes traditional prosthetics designed to look like realistic body parts. But a growing number of her works are, like *Materialise*, more akin to jewelry or accessories.

Cuckoo is a leg carved from cherrywood that contains a working clock. The *Electric Spark* leg embeds a Tesla coil that ignites a miniature firestorm behind plexiglass. *Snake Arm* features a foam-constructed snake that appears to be emerging from a lifelike silicone arm. *Smoke and Mirrors*, a leg made from blown-glass elements held in place with a silver-plated armature, is fitted with a bowl and stem and doubles as a marijuana pipe. Another commission for Knox is *Vine*, a vegetative appendage that she controls with electric sensors in her shoes.

OPPOSITE: Sophie de Oliveira Barata, Dani Clode, and Jason Taylor created the *Materialise* prosthetic arm for model Kelly Knox. TOP: Silicone molded from a digital scan of Knox’s right arm forms the bottom half of *Materialise*. MIDDLE, LEFT AND RIGHT: Nearly two dozen mix-and-match magnetized parts form the top of the arm. BOTTOM: Knox wears *Vine 2*, another bespoke prosthetic arm co-created by de Oliveira Barata, Clode, Taylor, and Rory Thompson.



Each project is different, but the process usually begins with a mood board via Pinterest, according to the artist. If the client has approached her, they sometimes have a preconceived notion of the type of prosthetic they want. De Oliveira Barata often tries to push them to go deeper.

“At times they’re inspired by, for instance, what they see in the movies,” she explained. “I quite like to pause and say, ‘Okay, let’s explore something deeper about you.’”

A recent example was a boy just starting middle school. Nervous about fitting in, he sought de Oliveira Barata to construct an arm. His first request was for a robotic arm, but when the artist dug deeper, she discovered his passion for off-road bicycling and incorporated BMX imagery into the final design.

In the case of *Materialise*, Knox said the interchangeable parts speak to her deeply. “For me, *Materialise* is about connection between the earth and the spirit. The materials are grounding yet otherworldly. They speak of nature, yes, but also of transformation—representing myself as living alchemy.”

The natural substances, Knox says, “evoke forests, soil, life cycles, and landscapes—a visceral reminder of the human body as part of the earth, not apart from it.”

Steel and oil represent strength and power, she continues, while bronze, rhodium, and gold are “rare, precious, and mythic” and “elevate the limb into something ceremonial, spiritual. These are not materials of prosthetics; they’re materials of relics and icons.”

A Team of Craftspeople

After de Oliveira Barata and her client agree on a basic design, the artist assembles a group of craftspeople with various specialties to help her execute the project. “Each limb is completely unique, so I’ve got different processes. I collaborate with different people with different skill sets,” she says.

One important member of every team is the prosthetist charged with fitting the new limb. Most often, that’s someone brought by the client to marry a medical grade function to de Oliveira Barata’s more artistic process.

Many of her projects, including *Materialise*, were constructed with the help of Dani Clode and Jason Taylor. Clode is a designer at the Plasticity Lab at Cambridge University, where she’s part of a team exploring how the brain responds to augmented body parts. Taylor teaches digital design at the Manchester School of Architecture, where he has developed a new ultralight, manipulable artificial hand.

TOP: Wood-carver Samuel Rudman works on *Cuckoo*, a cherry prosthetic leg outfitted with a working cuckoo clock, bell, and pendulum, custom made for dancer Welly O’Brien. MIDDLE: De Oliveira Barata assembles parts of *Cuckoo*. BOTTOM: At the ding of the bell, a cuckoo pops out of the knee. Rory Thompson also worked on the sculptural leg.



TOP and MIDDLE: Photo by Free Bird Film. BOTTOM: Photo by Becky Dann.

The extraterrestrial-inspired *Vine 1*, another commission for Knox, is controlled by sensors in her shoes. It was created by de Oliveira Barata, Clode, Taylor, and Hugo Elias.



Taylor explains that the collaboration for *Materialise* involved a hybrid approach to process. The project began with digital scans of both of Knox's arms, which were used to make a 3D printed lightweight plastic "chassis" to contain the interchangeable parts. Each material featured on the arm was processed according to its properties.

"I've always been an advocate for mixing analog and digital to create a kind of hybrid methodology," he said. "In our process, you've got elements of the traditional where we're doing things like casting, using drills and band saws and various hand tools. But we combine it with the precision you can now get with CNC machines, 3D printers, and laser cutters. I think it's just drawing out the strengths of both."

Thus, the wood and cork inserts were turned on a lathe and hand finished, real moss was encased in resin, while other elements were 3D printed in various media.

"It was a particularly tricky project," Taylor says. "We needed something that was lightweight enough to support all of the materials, also strong enough to support all of the materials, but something with tolerance tight enough that the whole thing doesn't all just fall apart."

A Shift of Perspective

While de Oliveira Barata's many limbs take an astonishing variety of forms and materials, an inevitable common thread is that they comment on difference and the concept of disability. For some of the owners, it's a way of coping with the loss of a limb or of shifting the conversation about disability.

"Ultimately, what unites them all is that the wearers want to stand out for a different reason, other than being seen with pity," the artist says.

As a model, Knox experiences this dynamic in a very public forum. Her body is not disabling, she says. It's the societal barriers that are disabling. De Oliveira Barata's artistic limbs confront society on its assumptions.

"It's rupturing the frame of how society has been taught to see bodies, function, beauty, and power, and it radically shifts the power dynamic," Knox says. "I wear my difference openly, ornamentally, extravagantly—not for vanity, but for sovereignty."

♦
thealternativelimbproject.com | [@thealternativelimbproject](https://twitter.com/thealternativelimbproject)

Joe Hart is a freelance writer based in southwestern Wisconsin. He's also served as an editor for *Utne Reader* and *Public Art Review*.

Would You Dare Wear This Brooch?

Susan Beech's provocative jewelry collection is featured in a new book and an exhibition.



Jewelry is meant to be worn, but to what end?

In many cultures, draping a woman in jewelry offers visual proof of a family's wealth—the more extravagant, the better. The wearer's own sensory experience is of little consequence.

Jewelry aficionado Susan Beech of Tiburon, California, defies that traditional conception. Since becoming a serious collector in the late 1990s, she has built an edgy collection around the “tingle” she feels upon seeing and donning a potential new acquisition, which is as likely constructed from thumbtacks or plastic yogurt containers as from precious metals or pearls.

The cover of *Feast: Contemporary Jewelry from the Susan Beech Collection* (Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2025) immediately introduces her aesthetic. Among other pieces, Beech is shown wearing David Bielander's titanium *Python* necklace (2019). The snake's body encircles her waist, goes up over her shoulder, and drapes down the front of her torso. Her hand grasps its phallic head. Beech willingly channels the femme fatale of the noir movies she loves so much, game to make a stir when she enters a room. Hers is a living collection, meant to evoke a thrill in the wearer as much as in the viewer.

Many pieces in Beech's collection can be classified as “narrative jewelry.” The wearer takes on the role of emissary, bearing stories that can ask more from viewers than oohs and aahs. Take, for example, Sari Liimatta's beaded necklace *Hopeless* (2007), which depicts a polar bear at risk of drowning in a blue sea of melting ice. The subject of climate change is heavy, as is this piece, which wraps around the shoulders and neck like a shawl. Beech can only tolerate the physical weight of it for a few hours.

Each day presents Beech with an opportunity: What pieces will she wear? She can look through the art deco–style jewelry cabinets she commissioned from Daniel Peters, Kent Townsend, and Jonathan Maxwell to go with the art deco style of her home, with

Bruce Metcalf's *Harvest* brooch, 2017, made from maple, holly, Micarta, and gold-plated brass, exemplifies Susan Beech's surprising (and often macabre) narrative jewelry collection. OPPOSITE: Susan Beech wears Terhi Tolvanen's 2009 *Couronne Nacre* necklace while trimming flowers at her home.

Photo by Robert Diamante. OPPOSITE: Photo by Lenny Gonzales.





ABOVE: Eunmi Chun's illusory *Wings of the Blue Bird* necklace, 2019, is made from cow intestine, thread, and ink. TOP RIGHT: In Lola Brooks's brooch *twinthehand*, 2015, a net of silver mesh holds two taxidermy quails in an eternal embrace. RIGHT: Bruno Martinazzi's *Goldfinger II*, 1969, 20k yellow gold, 18k white gold.



"I like twisted nature. I like dead birds. I have pieces made from animal skins and fur, human hair, burned hooves."

—Susan Beech



its spectacular view of the Golden Gate Bridge. With the book's publication this summer and an exhibit, *Wunderkammer: The Collection of Susan Beech*, opening in October at the Museum of Craft and Design in San Francisco, she is opening those cabinet doors to the public.

Wunderkammer literally means "room of wonder" but is more commonly translated as "cabinet of curiosity." These premodern museum collections were sometimes depositories for wealth, such as royal jewels, but could also serve as storehouses for cryptic specimens gathered from faraway lands. Was the horn of the narwhal evidence that unicorns exist? Attempts to make sense of these natural phenomena prompted broader conversations about the material world and our place in it.

Given Beech's penchant for what she calls "twisted nature," the *Wunderkammer*

TOP LEFT and TOP RIGHT: Photos by Robert Diamante. BOTTOM: Photo by John White.



LEFT: A selection of pieces in Beech's collection. ABOVE: The physical weight of Sari Liimatta's 42-inch-long beaded neckpiece *Hopeless*, 2007, reflects the heaviness of its subject matter.

title fits. Take Eunmi Chun's necklace *Wings of the Blue Bird* (2019), which appears to be exactly what its title describes but turns out to be made from cow intestine, thread, and ink. Can we trust our own eyes?

Or consider Lola Brooks's brooch *twaintheband* (2015), in which two taxidermy quails are encased in silver mesh, their eyes replaced with diamonds. Positioned beak to beak, they form a heart. The effect is both repulsive and surprisingly tender. Do two in the hand really equal one in the bush? The brooch becomes its

own philosophy seminar, prodding viewers to examine their assumptions about death, killing, possession, and partnership. It would be quite the brooch to wear into a room—and quite the conversation to start.

At its core, Beech's collection asks us to consider our capacity for provocation. Do we want to use our bodies as a setting for conventional expressions of beauty? Or do we have an appetite for something more daring? —Jacqueline White

♦
arnoldsche.com



MARKET

It's a Cinch. A bolo tie is neither a necklace nor a necktie, but something in between. Consisting of a string or cord draped around the neck and fastened with a decorative clasp, this simple form invites experimentation, drawing on the bolo's close ties to the American West and Indigenous silversmithing practices, as well as its recent resurgence as a playful, gender-neutral accessory. For these four makers, the bolo is a canvas for personal and cultural reflection and an opportunity to showcase materials and technique.

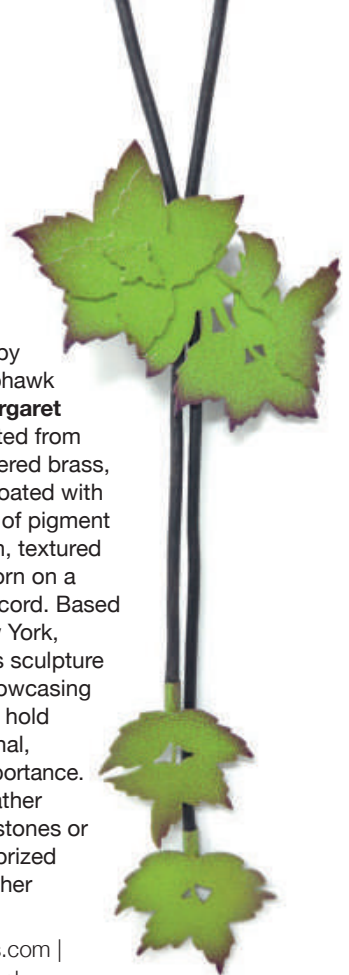
Inspired by the Western style and ranch history of California's Santa Ynez Valley, this versatile ceramic bolo on a leather cord is hand-built by **Courtney Reilly Goodwin**, whose jewelry line, **Jeanne**, is named after her grandmother. Each one-of-a-kind bolo pendant is slab rolled, bisque fired, decorated with wax, and glazed in colors that reflect the landscape near Goodwin's home base in Santa Barbara. / \$195

jeanneceramics.com | @jeanneceramics



The *Mint* bolo by Akwesasne Mohawk metalsmith **Margaret Jacobs** is crafted from sawn and soldered brass, then powder-coated with multiple layers of pigment to create a lush, textured centerpiece worn on a simple leather cord. Based in upstate New York, Jacobs creates sculpture and jewelry showcasing botanicals that hold cultural, personal, and familial importance. Food plants, rather than precious stones or gems, are the prized focal points of her bolos. / \$295

margaretjacobs.com | @margaretofsteel



Carin Jones combines collage, forging, welding, and inlay techniques to create her *Urban Taxidermy* bolo ties, including this *Waiting on a Schoolbus* bolo. The Seattle-based artist collects vintage tins as mementos of time and place, then deconstructs them and sets them within hand-forged sterling silver frames. The result is a lightweight and surprising assemblage of artifacts on an adjustable cotton cord. / \$400

jonesingforjewelry.com | @jonesingforjewelry

Contemporary metalsmith **Pat Pruitt**—of Laguna Pueblo, Chiricahua Apache, and Anglo descent—made *SpaceCowboy Bolo Tie* in his New Mexico studio using a custom laminate of zirconium and titanium that he forge-welded under intense heat and pressure, then cooled in a controlled environment.

This process allows the titanium's crystalline structure to expand into iridescent patterns, which shimmer when worn on a braided kangaroo-leather cord. / \$3,500

pat-pruitt-metalsmith.square.site | @patpruittmetalsmith

Researched and written by Kasey Payette, editorial assistant, *American Craft*.





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Based in Boston, NBSS offers nine career training programs and over 200 short, hands-on courses for beginners and experienced makers alike.



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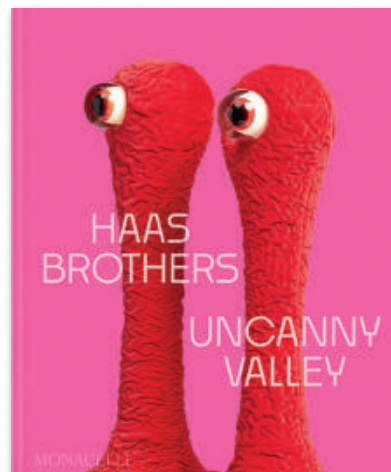


BOOKS

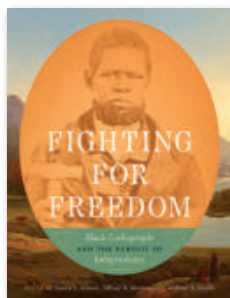
Twins Niki and Simon Haas are exquisite cartoonists in three dimensions. Their cheeky furniture and loopy sculptures reveal a sensibility that fuses a sense of the absurd with a winning charm. This volume, sporting a hot pink padded cover, is the first full-length monograph on the pair, displaying over 100 works in the full spectrum of craft materials, along with essays and the brothers' personal stories.

HAAS BROTHERS: UNCANNY VALLEY

By Laura J. Mott
Monacelli, 2025
\$79.95



Mixed Assemblage: Hand-stitched and painted with gold luster; and lacquer



**FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM:
BLACK CRAFTSPEOPLE
AND THE PURSUIT OF
INDEPENDENCE**

Edited by Torren L. Gatson,
Tiffany N. Momon, and
William A. Strollo
University of North Carolina
Press, 2025
\$35

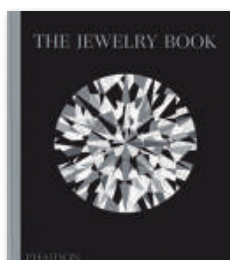
This companion to an exhibition of the same name at Daughters of the American Revolution in Washington, DC, contains works such as mahogany tables, stone-ware jugs, and silver tableware. All tell the story of early Black craft and the fight for freedom and recognition by the likes of Dave the Potter, free craftspeople of color in Canada, enslaved quilters, and many more, who are finally receiving the attention they deserve.



**WITH HER OWN HANDS:
WOMEN WEAVING
THEIR STORIES**

By Nicole Nehrig
W. W. Norton, 2025
\$32.99

Nehrig, a psychologist and avid knitter, fills this book with stories of women's liberation and empowerment rooted in textile work. The works and stories range from 18th-century Quaker embroidered samplers that taught girls school subjects to the history-rich "story cloths" of the Miao women of southern China and the famed quilts and quilters of Gee's Bend.



THE JEWELRY BOOK

By Melanie Grant
Phaidon, 2025
\$79.95

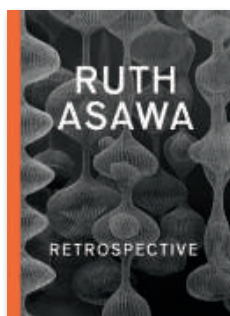
This sumptuous, image-rich volume covers 300 of the greatest names in jewelry over the past 200 years, exploring the profound connection between jewelry and style, art, and culture. An alphabetical presentation of designers, artists, houses, collectors, and style icons includes legendary names like Boucheron, Cartier, Lalique, Tiffany, and Van Cleef & Arpels, along with innovative contemporary designers and makers.



**CERAMICS:
A GREEN APPROACH**

By Kevin Millward
Bloomsbury, 2025
\$35

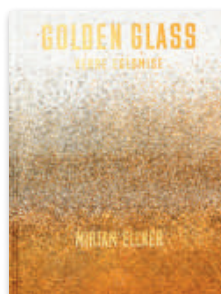
As more and more craft artists pay attention to the environmental effects of their work, Millward offers this timely and comprehensive guide to greening the ceramic process. Chapters consider the responsible choice of kiln fuels, best practices for clay extraction, the toxicity of oxides and colors, responsible disposal of materials, and even the ethics of shipping pieces in bubble wrap.



**RUTH ASAWA:
RETROSPECTIVE**

Edited by Janet Bishop
and Cara Manes
Yale University Press, 2025
\$65

Central to this catalog of an exhibition organized by MoMA and SFMOMA surveying Asawa's career are beautiful full-page images of her works, including intricate wire sculptures, bronze casts, paperfolds, drawings, and prints. Essays explore her love of the natural world and describe the avant-garde sensibility that the Black Mountain College-trained artist shared with the likes of mail art pioneer Ray Johnson and photographer Imogen Cunningham.



**GOLDEN GLASS:
VERRE ÉGLOMISÉ**

By Miriam Ellner
Pointed Leaf Press, 2025
\$120

Gilding the reverse side of glass with precious metals, then etching and coloring it—*verre églomisé*—is an ancient technique that author/artist Ellner has mastered. Here she displays a generous selection of her works, including luminous "glass paintings" and sculptures, plus design elements she created in some of her many collaborations with major architects and interior designers.

Photo courtesy of Monacelli.

MAGAZINES



Adornment in Print. In the field of craft, we often focus on the materiality of objects through physical properties of the medium, such as heft, transparency or opacity, or texture. This issue's theme of *adorn* invites us to explore an additional aspect of objects: surface design. Each major craft medium has a number of periodicals devoted to its particular forms and materials. Here are several that pay particular attention to surface design treatment.

The Surface Design Association, rooted in the fiber arts, defines surface design on its website as “the coloring, patterning, and structuring of fiber and fabric.” Its quarterly publication, *Surface Design Journal*, encompasses all aspects of fiber art and design, including papermaking, dyeing, sculpture, stitching, knitting, weaving, embellishing, and collage. The British publication *Selvedge* explores and celebrates the skill of international makers and the significance of textiles in our daily lives. *Fiber Art Now* covers both two-dimensional and three-dimensional fiber arts, including wall and floor coverings, basketry, and sculpture.

Glass Art covers all aspects of hot, warm, and cold glass, including surface treatments such as etching, painting, engraving, fusing, and stained glass. In *Chip Chats*, the publication of the National Wood Carvers Association, readers can find patterns and inspiration for figural carving, pierced relief, wood-cut print blocks, and more. *Metalsmith* covers cutting-edge adornment in contemporary jewelry, design, and fashion.

Ceramic Arts Network offers two publications for ceramists: *Ceramics Monthly* addresses a broad range of topics, from glaze recipes to current happenings in museums and galleries, while *Pottery Making Illustrated* features practical tips and techniques to apply in the studio.

Most fitting for this issue's theme is *Ornament* magazine, which is devoted to the art of personal adornment. Straddling wearable fiber arts and jewelry, the publication covers the historical roots, aesthetics, and materials of adornment, as well as present and historical technical processes. Sadly, *Ornament* may soon cease publishing. A recent letter from editors Patrick Benesh-Liu and Robert Liu announced their commitment to publish through the final issue of 2025, with a wait-and-see approach to follow as they assess whether to continue the publication. The cessation of *Ornament* magazine would be a significant loss to the field of craft and craft publishing. —Beth Goodrich

ceramicartsnetwork.org
chipchats.org
fiberartnow.net
glassartmagazine.com

ornamentmagazine.org
selvedge.org
surfacedesign.org
snagmetalsmith.org

FROM THE ARCHIVES

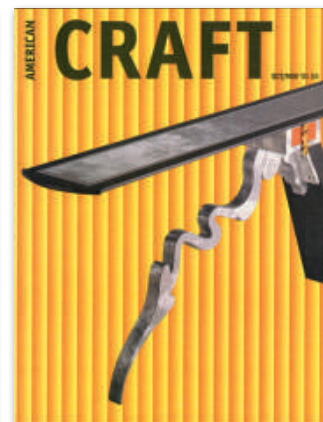
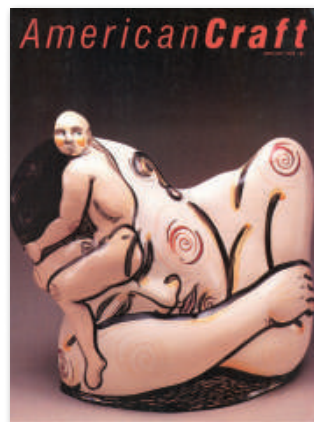


More Issues of American Craft Now Available Online.

ACC Archives staff are nearing completion of a 12-month project to digitize 20 years of *American Craft* issues—dating from the February/March 1991 issue to the June/July 2011 issue—for ACC's Digital Collections. Highlights from these issues include a profile of artist Karyl Sisson and her sculptures made from ordinary household objects (December 1995/January 1996), beading artist Liza Lou's 528-square-foot sculpture *Back Yard* (February/March 1999), and a feature story about ACC Gold Medalist Nick Cave from early in his career (October/November 1998). Initially funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the project received additional funding through the Susan Elson Library Endowment following the abrupt termination of the NEH grant in April 2025.

Other materials digitized through this project include newsletters from the six ACC Regional Assemblies that were active between the late 1950s and the early 2000s, as well as issues of *The Voice*, the newsletter for the American Craft Association, a professional membership group that functioned in tandem with the American Craft Council from 1990 to 1998.

All of these materials and more can be found in the ACC Archives Digital Collections at digital.craftcouncil.org. —Beth Goodrich



Beth Goodrich is the archivist for the American Craft Council. The ACC Archives hold historical documentation of ACC dating back to 1939, as well as the early history of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts/American Craft Museum (now the Museum of Arts and Design) from 1956 to 1990. Many materials from the archives are available online at digital.craftcouncil.org. Questions about the archives? Contact Beth Goodrich at library@craftcouncil.org.

AMERICAN CRAFT COUNCIL ARTIST SHOWCASE



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ELLEN KENNEDY HANDMADE PAPER

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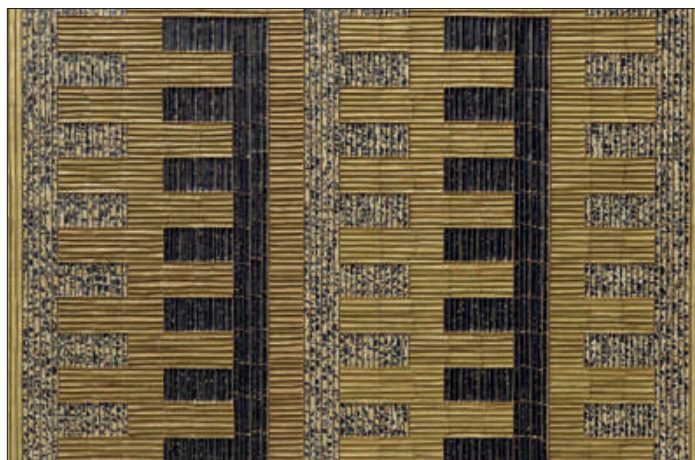
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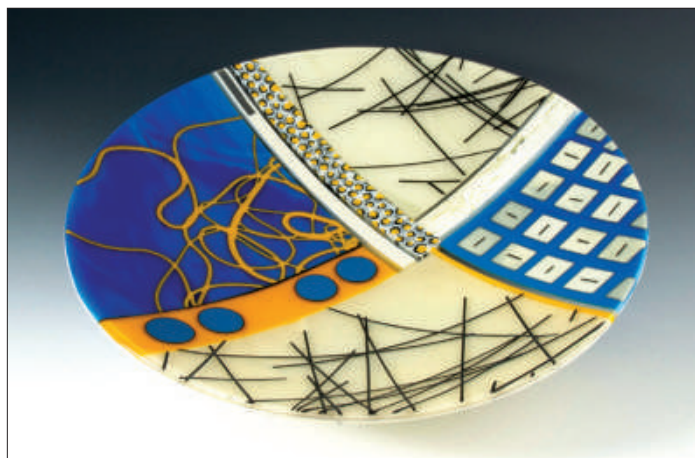
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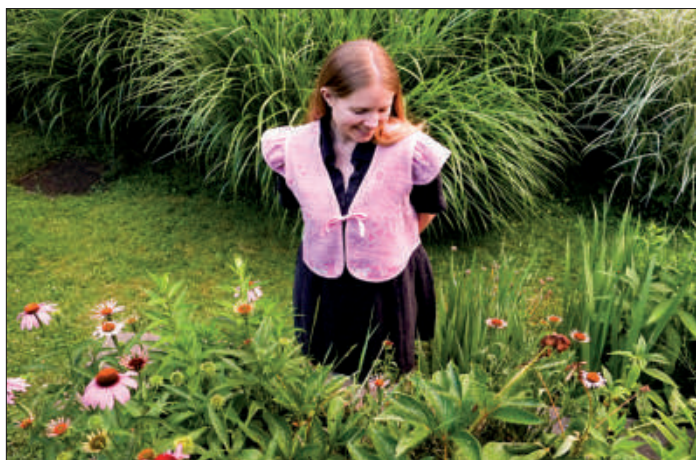
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AMERICAN CRAFT COUNCIL NEWS

The American Craft Council is a national nonprofit based in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

We foster livelihoods and ways of living grounded in the artful work of the human hand, creating a more joyful, humane, and regenerative world.

We offer visionary storytelling via *American Craft* and other platforms; resources for artists and makers; and events that build community around craft, including American Craft Made Baltimore, February 20-22, 2026.

Learn more at craftcouncil.org.



Photos by Max Franz.

From Our Board Chair



Warm greetings to our members and craft enthusiasts!

As Chair of the Board of the American Craft Council, I am deeply committed to our responsibility of care and stewardship—of our history, our present, and our future. In today's fast-moving digital and AI-driven world,

I believe that craft and the handmade matter more than ever. Craft connects people—across generations, cultures, and experiences—and these connections foster empathy, understanding, and resilience. For me, craft is about the human touch, imbuing material with meaning—the subtle signatures of the maker's hand, the care and thoughtful choices, the sense of time, and even timelessness, that transform the material. From tapestries and furniture to pottery and jewelry, every handmade object carries the spirit of its maker, telling a story of patience, tradition, creativity, and individuality that stands apart from the uniformity of the mass-produced.

What inspires me most is how craft has the power to humanize our increasingly digital lives. As we become more

immersed in screens, algorithms, mechanical automation, and robots, we naturally begin to crave the authentic, tactile connection that making by hand can offer. Craft grounds us, letting us experience the intangible through the tangible. It reminds us that behind every beautiful material object is a human story, a pair of hands, and a creative heart.

At the American Craft Council, we are driven by a vision of building a community of care—valuing the craftspeople and the handmade, sharing meaning-making and storytelling through craft. Blending tradition with innovation, we are excited to have you join us as we shape a future where craft and technology enrich one another, celebrating human ingenuity and keeping the heart of the handmade alive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Preeti Gopinath".

Preeti Gopinath
Board of Trustees Chair, American Craft Council

From Our Executive Director



Dear friends and supporters,

How can we best use digital technology's tools to advance craft and craftspeople? This is one of the most salient questions for ACC.

We are an 82-year-old organization with beloved programs and activities that began decades before the digital age. ACC has published a print magazine continuously throughout our existence, and our American Craft Made Baltimore event descends from ACC's earliest outdoor fairs of the 1970s. This storied legacy creates different opportunities and challenges from those of younger organizations—especially in the realm of leveraging digital technology and related trends.

The "Craft in a Time of Tariffs" panel described on page 74 is a recent example of using technology well. Produced in partnership with the Craft Emergency Relief Fund and The Furniture Society, this virtual convening allowed ACC to

bring the perspectives of nationally recognized journalists and makers to a nationwide audience of hundreds of craftspeople. As virtual convenings and other digitally based experiences proliferate thanks to widely available technology, nimbleness becomes more critical to our success. Event topics, our approach to storytelling, and other key parts of our programming must advance ACC's mission in a way that is timely and useful for the people we serve.

Thank you for your support and interest as ACC continues evolving to create a world where objects matter, makers thrive, and craft connects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andrea Specht".

Andrea Specht
Executive Director, American Craft Council



Convening to Foster Agency and Community

ACC's collaboratively produced "Craft in a Time of Tariffs" event drew hundreds of makers seeking solidarity and perspective.

Craft is a social good and an economic force. For individual makers, collectives, and small businesses focused on the handcrafted, staying on top of shifting economic policies and their implications can be overwhelming.

The American Craft Council plays an important role in helping craft artists cut through the noise generated by external forces that have big impacts on their livelihoods. In May 2025, ACC stepped up as convener and collaborator, co-hosting a virtual panel discussion titled "Craft in a Time of Tariffs: Implications and Possibilities for American Makers," with the Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF+) and The Furniture Society.

"The idea for this event emerged when I was driving to work and listening to national news on the radio, feeling a bit overwhelmed," says ACC Executive Director Andrea Specht. "By the time I reached the office, I was on the phone with a couple colleagues, asking if we could bring our shared constituencies together to reflect on the challenges and opportunities of this moment."

Ruby Lopez Harper, executive director of CERF+ and cohost of the program, says, "When organizations collaborate to call attention to matters of interest and importance to the craft community as a whole, it shows leadership and collegiality that are vital parts of the infrastructure that supports the craft community."

Such collaborative efforts are the foundation for stronger networks that can ultimately sustain further action. Lopez Harper adds, "Acting in concert without ego lifts up not just our individual organizations but also the collective. I will never shy away from contributing to collective action and providing whatever resources we have to make it happen."

The craft community's interest in convening was clear. More than 600 people registered for the panel discussion, craving not just answers and guidance but connection. Designer and craftsperson Robert Sukrachand, who served as a panelist, says, "Solo craftspeople and small craft-based businesses need community to survive. Learning from one another's experiences is not only valuable—it's cathartic." Many of the panel attendees run one-person or very small operations, and the panel's conversation returned frequently to the vital importance of maintaining and developing connected networks of makers. Sukrachand says, "It can't be overstated how much it lifts morale and spirit just to know that others are navigating the same challenges as you."

ACC always has makers in mind. A program like "Craft in a Time of Tariffs" serves as both an outreach effort and an establishing statement. Shoemaker and panel attendee Amara Hark-Weber says, "For me, and small craftspeople like me, craft in a time of rapid social change is an important topic." She adds, "I always feel like I'm hanging on by the thinnest thread, and this time is no different. I think that because of that, I am always hungry for conversations amongst my peers and am so thankful that the ACC is hosting events like this." Feedback like Amara's emphasizes the value of responsive conversations with trusted collaborators and solidifies ACC's commitment to convening with makers in mind.

Monica Hampton, executive director of The Furniture Society and program co-host, echoes Hark-Weber's point about the value of convening in uncertain times. "A conversation of this nature promotes action by transforming concern into informed agency. It empowers craftspeople to think strategically about their practices, to advocate for policies that support creative livelihoods, and to develop resilience through collaboration and resource sharing. By highlighting concrete examples of adaptation and identifying avenues for both individual and collective response, the discussion serves as a catalyst—not only for understanding but for mobilization within and beyond the craft community."

ACC thanks our partners CERF+ and The Furniture Society, and the distinguished craftspeople and journalists who contributed valuable insights to this conversation: panel moderator Julie Lasky, writer, editor, and critic on design and popular culture for The New York Times and other publications; Brett Binford, artist and co-owner of Mudshark Studios; Chris Farrell, senior economics contributor for Minnesota Public Radio News and American Public Media's Marketplace; Robert Sukrachand, designer and artist; and Sharon Zimmerman, artist and principal of Sharon Z Consulting.



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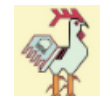
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September 25, 2025, for the 2026 Winter/December-January-February issue.

MJ Tyson's *96 Beachmount Avenue*, 2017, is made from melted household objects.



From What's Left Behind.

MJ Tyson likes to browse antique shops and estate sales. "I think a lot about the lives of people and the lives of objects," says the artist, who lives in Morristown, New Jersey, and doesn't consider herself a collector outside her artistic practice. "Objects tend to live longer than the people who owned them."

By the time she visits an estate sale, Tyson says, all the precious things are gone, whether to family or to buyers. "But the objects that remain still have the imprint of the people who lived in the home—sentimental objects, serving ware, platters. You can see how a person lived."

Over time, Tyson gathered enough objects that she began to create series of works based on them. The first was *Homes*, in which each sculptural piece is made from metal materials from a single home. "The variety across that series comes from the variety in what the metal objects are made of. A home might have a lot of aluminum—or a lot of brass," says Tyson. One mesmerizing piece in that series is *96 Beachmount Avenue* (2017), made from melted, mixed metal objects from the deceased residents of a home with that address.

Because she's a jeweler and metalsmith, it made sense to Tyson to start with the *Homes* series, which involved transforming the materials themselves. "But in the hunt for materials for *Homes*, I would come across so many other objects. I wanted to make use of those, too," she says. Two years ago she started work on a series called *Safe Keeping*. Each work in this group of nine vessels is made up of things that accumulate in a drawer or home—like scissors, keys, thimbles, and ceramics in various states of disrepair.

And so the items that once adorned a home or helped make it functional become something new, beautiful, and thought-provoking in the hands of MJ Tyson. "Whether I'm recycling these things or someone else is, or they go to the trash, someone has to deal with them," says Tyson. "That's the reality of living among excessive objects." —Karen Olson

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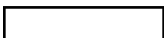
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Liz Schreiber, *State Fairs: Growing American Craft*, 2024-2025, various seeds and flower petals, courtesy of the artist. Photo by Arts District Imageworks in Minneapolis