

JAMES RENWICK ALLIANCE FOR CRAFT

WINTER 2023

CRAFT QUARTERLY





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

JAMES RENWICK ALLIANCE FOR CRAFT

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Cover: Sergei Isupov with his work "On The Way," 2020. Stoneware, underglaze, and glaze, 58.5 x 38 x 18 inches. Photo by John Polak, courtesy Ferrin Contemporary.

Above: JRACraft member Carol Green, trip organizer Sofia Baroso and milliner Candela Cort during the recent JRACraft trip to Spain, 2022. Photo by Rebecca Ravenal.

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



I hope you enjoy this issue themed around the concept of Migration. Read about JRACraft member and collector Peggy Greenfield who migrated a collection from the US to New Zealand and learn more about JRACraft Masters of the Medium Consuelo Underwood, Sergei Isupov and Chungchi Choo. There is also information about an important fundraiser we are hosting in support of glass artists in Ukraine.

We have a number of exciting in-person and virtual events coming up, including a visit to the new Rubell Museum DC, a contemporary addition to the museum scene in the Southwest DC neighborhood (date TBD).

A new season of our Distinguished Artist Series begins in January with these four wonderful artists each giving a workshop and a lecture: Cristina Cordova (ceramics); Susan Taylor Glasgow (glass); Jack Mauch (wood); and Virgil Ortiz (ceramics and multi-media).

Our virtual "Coffee and Conversations" continue in 2023 with some fascinating featured topics, including Sustainability in Craft, "Sloppy Craft," and Emerging Voices.

Group trips near and far include Boston in May, 2023 and New Zealand in February, 2024.

We hope to see you at these events and more!

Rebecca Ravenal

CONTENTS

4 FEATURE

- 4 Circulating: Migration and Art Education in Twentieth-Century America
- 6 Wood and the Everyday as Catalysts in the Work of Humaira Abid

9 JRACRAFT HONOREES

- 9 Warp and Weft: Border Crossing as a Creative Force in the Art of Consuelo Jimenez Underwood
- 12 Chunghi Choo and the Migration of Knowledge
- 14 In Conversation: Artist Sergei Isupov on Immigration, Education, and the Surreality of Everyday Life

17 UPCOMING

- 17 The Wartime State of Ukrainian Glass Art: A Travelog
- 19 Collector's Insight: The Global Contemporary Craft Collection of Peggy and Richard Greenfield



Humaira Abid, "Searching for Home" detail with "Leila, Age 5 ½, Zambia," 2016-17. Pine wood, carved; gouache and pigments on handmade wasli paper; installation: 19 x 72 x 36 inches; "Leila" portrait: 5 x 7 inches (unframed). Photo by Adeel Ahmed, courtesy of the artist.

CIRCULATING MIGRATION AND ART EDUCATION IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

By Erica Warren, writer, curator and the editor of the JRAcraft "Craft Quarterly"

During the second-half of the 20th century, periodicals, including "Craft Horizons" [later "American Craft"] and "Handweaver and Craftsman," proved invaluable for disseminating information about artists, craft education opportunities, exhibitions, materials, supplies, and techniques as well as highlighting debates and innovations in the field. Through their articles and advertisements, these publications chronicle the impact of migration on craft education and practice across the United States, and predict the way in which migration continues to shape the genealogy of contemporary craft practice.

The May/June 1959 "Craft Horizons" included an article highlighting the unity between "fine art and craft" at Cranbrook Academy of Art. In the article, author Joy Hakanson asserted that the artists who have lived, worked, and taught at Cranbrook, such as Marianne Strengell and Maija Grotell, "have attracted students from all over the U.S. and from 27 countries abroad." Strengell, who directed the weaving studio beginning in 1943, and Grotell, who taught ceramics, immigrated to the U.S. from Finland. In making this international journey and relocating to Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, both artists became part of an artist immigrant community that included fellow Finn and Cranbrook's architect, Eliel Saarinen, as well as



Harvey Croze, Marianne Strengell in her Cranbrook Art Academy studio, about 1948. Photographic print, 20 x 22 cm. Marianne Strengell papers, 1904-1980s. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Ruth Ingvarsson and Lillian Holm, weavers from Sweden who worked for Studio Loja Saarinen. As Hakanson noted, during her tenure at Cranbrook, Strengell worked with a variety of students, several of whom would become major figures in the field, including



Mariska Karasz, "Procession," about 1955. Embroidered wool and cotton, 72.5 x 26 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Solveig Cox and Rosamond Berg Bassett in memory of their mother, Mariska Karasz, 1991.132.4.

Olga de Amaral, Jack Lenor Larsen, and Ed Rossbach. These artists went on to find their way in Bogotá, Columbia, New York City, and the San Francisco Bay area, respectively, applying their knowledge, developing their skills, and shaping fellow artists as well as the field.

In addition to his artistic endeavors, Larsen authored publications intended to establish a critical craft discourse and further the field. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of his articles highlight or touch upon artists who immigrated to the U.S. In "The Weaver as Artist," which appeared in "Craft Horizons," Larsen detailed his summer of 1955 spent teaching at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine alongside Anni Albers, Lili Blumenau, and Mariska Karasz. The presence of these noteworthy instructors had drawn the attention of "Handweaver & Craftsman," which went into detail about the summer course offerings. The notice described Albers as "internationally known" and mentioned her experiences at the Bauhaus in Germany



"Olga de Amaral: To Weave Rock," Cranbrook Art Museum, 2021-2022. Image courtesy Cranbrook Art Museum, photo by PD Rearick.

and Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Blumenau was noted for her "European train[ing]" and Karasz as "distinguished for reviving interest in embroidery." All three of these artists immigrated to the U.S., and Albers was among the many Bauhaus artists (including Josef Albers, Marli Ehrman, and László Moholy-Nagy) who, fleeing Nazi persecution, left Europe in the wake of World War II. Their experiences at the experimental Bauhaus, with a program centered around equality among the arts as well as design for industry, had poised them to teach students at similarly idealistic institutions in the U.S.

Following on the heels of this lauded summer experience, the instructors for the "1956 Summer Session" were advertised in the pages of "Craft Horizons." Ehrman and Trude Guermonprez received mention alongside Svea Kline and Antonio Frasconi. Kline immigrated to the U.S. from Sweden before the Great Depression and studied at Cranbrook in the early 1940s, working with Grotell as well as Swedish sculptor Carl Milles. Both Guermonprez and Frasconi came to the U.S. after WWII, Guermonprez from the Netherlands and Frasconi from Uruguay.

Although Guermonprez and Frasconi took distinct paths, both ended up in California, Guermonprez making an initial stop at Black Mountain College,

where she taught until the weaving program dissolved in 1949. She then moved westward to join Marguerite Wildenhain, a German émigré, Bauhäusler and ceramist, and former schoolmate, at her Pond Farm Workshops. Guermonprez eventually went on to teach at the California College of Art & Design, chairing the Crafts Department for close to two decades. Among Guermonprez's students is the artist Anne Wilson, who is professor emeritus of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). As a professor of Fiber and Material Studies, Wilson followed in the footsteps of Ehrman, who had taught Else Regensteiner, a German immigrant, who would go on to establish SAIC's weaving program.

With this limited and all too brief look, it becomes clear that these publications trace the impact of immigration on art in America, and indeed show a flourishing and interconnected artistic genealogy. Through teaching and practice, Strenge, Grotell, Albers, Blumenau, Karasz, Ehrman, and Guermonprez had an immeasurable impact on the evolution of the American Studio Craft movement and art in America. While many connections, networks, and relationships have surfaced in writings on craft history, the pages of foundational publications, such as "Craft Horizons" and "Handweaver and Craftsman," contain myriad stories waiting to be surfaced and told.

WOOD AND THE EVERYDAY AS CATALYSTS IN THE WORK OF HUMAIRA ABID

By Jennifer-Navva Milliken, Executive Director and Chief
Curator at the Center for Art in Wood in Philadelphia

Humaira Abid is an immigrant by choice, not by circumstance. Born in Pakistan to a family that nurtured her independence, she was, in time, able to convince her parents that art school was a respectable alternative to medical school and offered a path that would lead to success.

Even so, her story is one of persistence and defiance of limitations. Woodcarving was not a practice deemed suitable for women to pursue, so she embraced it; Mughal miniature painting and illumination portrayed women as decorative objects, so she perfected her artistic and manual skills in this traditional discipline in order to subvert it. The beauty in her work is a tactical decision, it provides a platform for the stories and experiences that society believes too difficult or impolitic to discuss. Beauty seduces and beckons for a deeper look, and then the unsuspecting viewer is drawn into stories of miscarriages, school massacres, refugee camps, personal loss, and wide-scale genocide. Amidst a pile of sandblasted wood bricks, we spot personal effects carefully carved in pine, mahogany, and tulip wood: a sweet pacifier, a set of spectacles, a cell phone, a single sandal. These items would never be purposefully abandoned and as we stop to admire the verisimilitude of these wooden carvings, a wave of understanding washes over us. Delight turns to horror, appreciation to despair. Beauty is harmony, to some, but it can also be frightening, engulfing, and truthful.

In 2017, a selection of Abid's work was presented in the exhibition "Humaira Abid: Searching for Home." Through objects, portraits, and installation vignettes, the exhibition centered the plight of refugees, primarily women and girls, and attempted to humanize an immense global crisis. At that time, the UN Refugee Agency counted the world's displaced population at more than 65 million people. In the five years since, that figure has expanded to over 100 million people due to the ongoing sociopolitical instability in Afghanistan, the Russian war on Ukraine, and conflicts and humanitarian issues in Syria, Myanmar, Ethiopia, and Venezuela, among many others. Environmental disasters exacerbate these issues and have led to an increase in displaced populations, and impacts on neighboring countries like Pakistan and Turkey, who have absorbed and provided shelter for many hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Abid's work centers on the objects that fill our daily lives, such as breast pumps, irons, shoes, bricks, rearview mirrors, suitcases, and fences. On their own, at face value, they are benign, helping us through our day by facilitating our waking and working, nurturing

Humaira Abid, "The Stains Are Forever," 2016. Pine wood, carved; red wood stain, epoxy, putty, paint; wire, gouache on art board, framed in plexiglass, 49 x 36 x 20 inches. Photo by Adeel Ahmed, courtesy of the artist.

and traveling, dressing and worshiping. Craft is inherently concerned with objects and the stories told about those who make and use them. The intimacy and familiarity generate empathy; when we demystify the unknown, connections are made. Everyone has experienced the warmth of wood, traced the patterns of grain and growth rings, or enjoyed the shade of a favorite tree. When we view a wooden object, we immediately know how it feels in our hands. Abid's deliberate use of wood appeals to our aligned experiences and our multi-generational intimacy with our shared material culture.

When designing "Searching for Home," we envisioned it as an endless path or journey, with no promise of resolution. Abid was always insistent that the exhibition give room for people to tell their own stories, as embodied experiences,

that are spontaneous, confrontational, emotive, and unfiltered. Taking this journey was difficult but redemptive, especially for visitors who had experienced displacement in their own past.

An artist is not a journalist or a politician—she communicates her own experiences and ideas. She speaks not in data, nor in slogans, but uses materials, images, shapes, environments, sounds, and scents with intention, care, and deliberation to engage her audience: humans, who have experienced love, rejection, frustration, exclusion, loss, desperation, and grief in their own lives. These experiences connect us and give through lines into the lived experiences of others. In Abid's case, she draws from her own identity—as a woman, a mother, a Muslim, an immigrant, and an artist—to scale down global issues to human proportions.



Humaira Abid, "Searching for Home" detail, 2016-17. Pine wood, carved; red wood stain, 19 x 72 x 36 inches. Photo by Adeel Ahmed, courtesy of the artist.



The care and attention demanded of art and craft is embodied by this artist, who will often render a portrait detail with a single-haired brush. The marginalized, vulnerable women and girls who are the heroes in Abid's "Searching for Home" works have rarely received this amount of attention and concern from the public. They will probably never be aware of the love and care given to them by the artist, but perhaps her powerful voice will stoke action that results in lasting, positive global change.

"Humaira Abid: Searching for Home," curated by Jennifer-Nava Milliken, premiered at the Bellevue Arts Museum in Washington (March – September 2017) before traveling to the Center for Art in Wood in Philadelphia (February – October 2020), and Contemporary Craft in Pittsburgh (April – August 2021). It will open at the Northwest Museum of Art and Culture, in Spokane, Washington, in April 2023.

Pictured above: Humaira Abid, "Searching for Home" installation view at the Center for Art in Wood, February 7 - October 3, 2020.



Humaira Abid, "The World is NOT Perfect," 2014-17. Pine, mahogany, and tulip wood, carved; wire, epoxy, putty, and paint, 40 x 100 x 72 inches. Photo by John Carlano, courtesy of the Center for Art in Wood.

WARP AND WEFT: BORDER CROSSING AS A CREATIVE FORCE

IN THE ART OF CONSUELO JIMENEZ UNDERWOOD

By Carmen Febles, Associate Professor of Latinx culture and literature and Velina C. Underwood, manager and daughter of the artist

Consuelo Jimenez Underwood has been crossing borders her entire life. Her artistic viewpoint is a result of her lifetime engagement with the United States/ Mexico Border. As the daughter of a Chicana mother and a Huichol Indian father from Mexico she grew up on both sides of the border with an understanding that her heritage encompasses and spans territorial designations. Her belonging to and relationship with the bifurcated borderlands is implicit in her tricultural heritage that predates the arrival of European settler colonists. Jimenez Underwood imbues her work with an ethos, drawn from her Indigenous heritage, that centers the interconnectivity of all living beings with each other and their natural environment.



Consuelo Jimenez Underwood, "Run, Jane Run!," 2004. Woven cotton, linen, fabric, barbed wire, and CAUTION tape, 120 x 72 inches. Collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible by the Alturas Foundation. Image by Ruben Diaz.

The iconic "CAUTION" sign is a recurrent symbol in Jimenez Underwood's work. The sign itself is the central focus of "Run Jane, Run!." Although the piece was woven on a large floor loom, the completed work is framed by two wooden sticks, evoking a backstrap loom, a tool emblematic of Indigenous art practice in Mexico. The alternating black and yellow chevrons, above and below the sign, reference Indigenous woven designs. Jimenez Underwood's father migrated to the U.S.



Portrait of Consuelo Underwood with "Undocumented Border Flowers," Triton Museum of Art, 2010.

as a bracero, or temporary worker, during World War II. Once the war was over, he was repatriated to Mexico and forced to leave his family behind. The memories of her father being systematically deported across the border were seared into her psyche as a young child. In "Run Jane, Run!," the depiction of the "CAUTION" sign with a human family running registers as a critique of the crass characterization of migrants, who are making a perilous journey across the border, as simply one more traffic hazard. As Jimenez Underwood recounts, "When I first zipped past the "CAUTION" sign at 75 mph, on my way from San Diego to Los Angeles, way back in the early 1980s, I almost braked. I was appalled, angry, and shocked that the citizens of our nation were asked to accept this image of a running family crossing the Interstate 5 Freeway. Plus, I totally identified with the little girl." Ostensibly, the road sign, ominously reminiscent of "Deer Crossing" signs, is a warning to motorists to be alert for migrants darting over freeways. "Run Jane, Run!" confronts the spectator with the dehumanizing rhetoric implicit within the "CAUTION" sign and poses the ethical questions of who needs protection in this border crossing scenario, and from what.





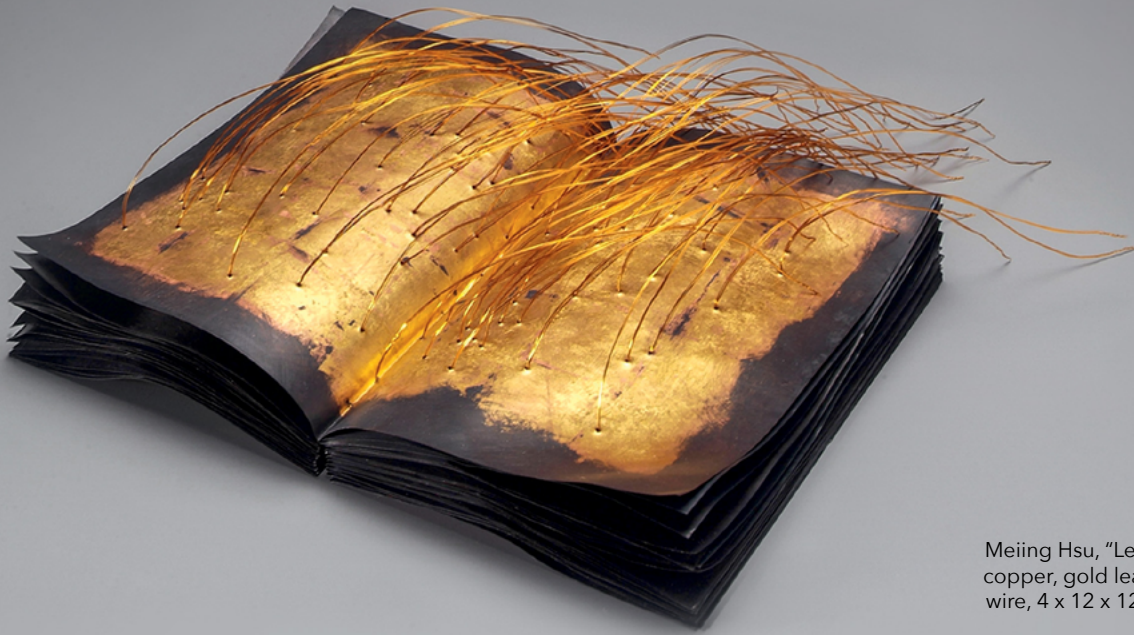
Jimenez Underwood's "Borderlines" installations, such as "Undocumented Border Flowers," bring to the forefront the ecological and environmental impacts of the U.S./Mexico border. These large-scale works have as a backdrop a wall mural of the U.S./Mexico borderland painted in situ onto the local geography or extant architecture, over which the artist adds various mixed-media elements. The border is represented as a jagged incision that traverses the landscape, but the flora and fauna depicted in these pieces thrive around, through and in spite of the dividing line. The "Borderlines" series dramatically represents the regenerative power of the natural world and serves as a reminder that humans are merely one life-force that acts upon and matters in the world. Eschewing the notion of powerlessness or passivity in the face of the ever-increasing invasiveness of artificial border structures, Jimenez Underwood's work often evokes the agency of the natural world in resisting, subverting or simply outlasting human-erected barriers. Her 2021 work, "Broken: 13 Undocumented Birds," brings into stark relief the environmental and economic destruction wreaked by the U.S./Mexico Border Wall, highlighting the agency of the Red-Tailed Texas Blackbirds that deploy a small contingent of their flock into, instead of over, the wall. Jimenez Underwood wove six border wall slats and 26 pairs of red and black shapes -- rendering bodies, wings, and tails -- to document the moment of impact. In her words, "Isn't that wild? How they just separate from the group? And then they smash into the wall, and apparently their broken bodies disappear overnight, everything's gone because of insects and other border critters."

In her work, we observe a consistent but evolving message that the policies and structures of border enforcement are antithetical to the natural and essential movement of living beings in our world. Jimenez Underwood posits that the birds' flight pattern is a self-sacrifice -- a form of protest, akin to the self-immolation of Buddhist monks protesting the Vietnam War. Bringing her critique full circle from the "CAUTION" sign, the artist poses the question, "If we don't care about the tragedy of humans who die crossing the border, perhaps we care about the tragedy of animals' migratory patterns being impeded, resulting in their loss of life?"

Consuelo Jimenez Underwood, "Broken: 13 Undocumented Birds," 2021. Woven and stitched wire, fabric, threads, 72 inches x 47 inches. Collection of the artist. Image by Finger Photography.

CHUNGHI CHOO AND THE MIGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE

By Lois U. Jecklin, arts
professional, writer
and JRACraft member



Meiing Hsu, "Leaf Book 1," 2005. Oxidized copper, gold leaf, and PVC-coated copper wire, 4 x 12 x 12 inches. Image courtesy of Arnoldsche Art Publishers.



In the arts, migration of knowledge can set free something quite mysterious and wonderful: an ephemeral thought takes the shape of an object. Through care and dedication, the masterful silversmith Chunghee Choo has shaped objects as well as artists, and made a profound impact on the field of metalcraft.

As I wrote in my essay "Chunghee Choo: Fine Friend and Sterling Mentor," in Jane Milosch's recently published volume "Chunghee Choo and Her Students: Contemporary Art and New Forms in Metal," (Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2022), Choo came to the University of Iowa in 1968, specifically charged with improving the delivery of knowledge in her field. Her background was rich indeed, coming as she did from a highly cultivated and powerful family in her native Korea.

For hundreds of years, Choo's family had been comprised of prominent philosophers, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists—her grandfather Myung Kee Choo operated a rice export business as well as a textile enterprise. After the wars of the 20th century, the family's contacts in business and connections in the arts (including fine cuisine) enabled them to present concerts in their home and find tutors to encourage Choo's development as an artist. This creative, successful, and supportive family history has affected every aspect of her teaching.

I became friends with Choo soon after her arrival in Iowa City. At the time, I headed a nonprofit artist-in-residence program, and at Choo's invitation, I often dropped into the studio before we went to lunch together. Prior to meeting Choo, I had taken a silversmithing class with another professor and the difference in Choo's methods was immediately apparent. Choo practiced an "in loco parentis" pedagogy, in which she nurtured her students and guided them to identify their artistic vision. Her students recognized her familial form of teaching, and, as artist and former student Jocelyn Chateauvert recalled in an article for "Metalsmith Magazine," dubbed her "Mama Choo."

While transmitting the basic manual skills required of a metalsmith, Choo became acquainted with her “children,” and helped them locate their inner vision and see it more clearly, thus instilling the necessary mental skills as well. Choo did not encourage her students to mimic her work, but rather, to focus on their own vision and gain confidence as well as an understanding that it was possible for them to be successful in expressing it through material form. This process of empowering her students finds expression in Meiing Hsu’s sculpture “Leaf Book I”; the copper wires suggesting knowledge flying off the page.

Choo worked beside her students in the studio, which, as former student Mary Merkel-Hess recounts in Milosch’s book, proved a great strength of her teaching. Choo struggled and learned, providing an example of pivotal importance. After studying with Choo, Merkel-Hess became a renowned artist; and as she developed her own vision, she shifted from working in metal to working with grass, leaves, and related materials.

With the aim of showing students the ways to bring their work to an audience, Choo introduced them to other artists, collectors, gallerists, and museum curators and directors. These relationships are essential for survival and success as an artist.

In addition to her practical instruction, Choo also nurtured her students and instilled in them the essential skill of sharing joy. She cooked meals, for and with her students, that were enjoyed in her home, at times with others in the art world and often accompanied by music. Annually Choo hosted a luncheon for her students’ parents as well as donors to the school. This meal, prepared by herself and her students, served as a thank you to those providing crucial support to fledgling artists.

After their studies, confident in their vision and preparation, her students were ready to move

ahead on their own. Often, as for Hsu, this meant a return to their home country where they would carry with them the experiences and teachings of their metalwork studies. For other students, such as Jon Ryan, moving ahead meant spending several years abroad, broadening their knowledge of diverse cultures and the opportunities available to them in various locales, helping them decide the right place for them to execute their particular artistic vision.

A good teacher is like a good parent, imbuing the relationship with the teacher’s strengths, but perhaps more important to the effort, creating the equivalent of a fully formed adult in the field of their choice, capable of raising the level of that field as they move their work to a new level. Hsu’s later work “Departure IV,” provides an apt vision of a student moving forward on their own, branching out from a strong foundation.

Walking with Choo one cold day in Iowa City, the streets icy and sleet falling from the sky, she became concerned that my feet might be cold. She darted into a store and bought me a pair of heavy socks. Dedication and empathy are desperately needed in every area of human endeavor. Through her life and teaching, Choo has lived intuitively, and guided her students “in loco parentis,” as a parent. That is, arguably, the best way to aid the migration of all forms of knowledge.

Pg 12: Chunghi Choo cooking for students and donors in the University of Iowa’s Metalsmithing and Jewelry studio. Photo by David Luck, image courtesy of Arnoldsche Art Publishers.

Below: Meiing Hsu, “Departure IV,” 2013. Cast bronze, wood, and shell powder, 26 x 10 x 8 inches. Image courtesy of Arnoldsche Art Publishers.



IN CONVERSATION:
ARTIST
SERGEI
ISUPOV
ON IMMIGRATION,
EDUCATION,
AND THE SURREALITY
OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Interview with artist Sergei Isupov edited by Lauren Levato Coyne and Leslie Ferrin, co-curators of the exhibition "Our America/ Whose America?" at Ferrin Contemporary, North Adams, Massachusetts

Sergei Isupov graduated from the Art Institute of Tallinn, Estonia with an M.F.A. in Ceramics in 1990. He immigrated to the United States in 1994, and has lived and worked at Project Art in Cummington, Massachusetts since 2006.

How has migration shaped your artistic education?

When I arrived in the U.S. from Estonia in 1994, I was young, newly married to an American artist, Dana Major and we started a studio, Nine Pines Art in Louisville, Kentucky. Selling work became my first American education. My work was highly detailed, figural and immediately appealed to collectors at the ACC [American Craft Council] and Smithsonian Craft Fair. With each series, I added more details and bold narratives, and I received more attention and support; my skills became more accomplished as I mastered the material.

The most significant change for me was the access to unlimited choices of ceramic materials and art supplies. You could go to a store to sample and use an endless variety of clays, glazes, whatever you wanted was always there! That's not how it was in the Baltics or Russia where I had worked or Ukraine where I grew up and went to school. In the USSR, I could only work in basic colors, black, white, gray and occasionally cobalt when available. I did not have access to my own studio or kiln so I had to use the equipment at residencies, symposia or factories, and during Soviet times I worked as a designer-artisan rather than freely

Installation image "Sergei Isupov: Past & Present," Ferrin Contemporary, May 7-July 9, 2022. Photo by John Polak, courtesy Ferrin Contemporary.





Sergei Isupov, "Mixed Thoughts," 2017. Porcelain, slip, and glaze, 8 x 8 x 5 inches. Photo by John Polak, courtesy Ferrin Contemporary.

and expressively. As soon as I arrived in the U.S., I had a studio with equipment and could use color all the time. This allowed my work to be wild and expressive in new ways.

Learning from other artists was another education. We met at fairs and I saw their finished work in their booths, and at galleries and museums like the Renwick Gallery and American Craft Museum [now the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City]. In Europe, I had only seen photos of American work in magazines, so when I saw the work of masters like Jack Earl, Viola Frey, Richard Shaw and Robert Arneson for the first time it was inspiring and motivating to know they had made this work and it was collected. Really, I wouldn't be the artist I am today if I had not moved to the United States.

Sergei Isupov, "Long Journey to Nowhere," 2022. Porcelain, underglaze, and glaze, 12.5 x 11.5 x 11 inches. Photo by John Polak, courtesy Ferrin Contemporary.

What has been your genealogical impact on successive generations of ceramists?

Well, this is hard to know about oneself during one's own lifetime, so I'll tell you what other people have told me. Leslie [Ferrin, Isupov's gallerist] has explained that during the late 1990's when my work first started showing at SOFA [The Sculpture Objects Functional Art and Design Fair, now Intersect in Chicago], there was a shift from the vessel and abstraction; and my work fed the momentum that built around figural and narrative work. My successes gave permission to other artists to take risks, expand their scale and explore personal narratives.

The teapot was the first form I had success with. At that time the teapot was popular but also classic. I began changing the form and making it both figural and narrative. It caught on with both collectors and artists. It shifted the field away from





Sergei Isupov with his work "Past & Present," 2022. Mixed media, wood, metal, paper, paint, and ceramic, 130 x 80 inches (133 x 88 inches, framed). Photo by John Polak, courtesy Ferrin Contemporary.

functional wares. And a lot of friendly competition developed between me and the artists who were popular with collectors at the time - we pushed each other's works forward in ways that really helped art and craft grow overall. I think, I hope anyway!

The surrealist nature of your work lends itself to multiple narrative possibilities, can you speak to this strategy and how it effectively conveys a particular and universal experience?

Surrealism is a category of art, but I don't set out to make it that way. I portray things we can all relate to, the sometimes comforting and sometimes unnerving moments of our daily lives—things are simultaneously exciting, scary, romantic, loving, or fraught with tension and indecision every day. The fact that many of these internal and external actions and feelings are happening all at once makes them seem surreal when depicted graphically. And maybe they are surreal to experience, but they seem normal to me when we consider how much happens to everyone in any single day.

Your recent show at Ferrin Contemporary "Sergei Isupov: PAST & PRESENT" surfaced anxieties about the war in Ukraine. Can you

share a bit about how the closely felt impacts of the war have found expression and/or form in your work?

Confusion, I think. There's a lot of confusion and fear but also love and protection. This is what I referenced in the surreal question—it's all happening at the same time and certainly to a much more intense degree during war. My own emotions around my family's safety and security came through in the work. I didn't set out to depict it, or intend to make war pieces, but my mother, father, brother and his children were all in Kyiv when the invasion began. They are safe as I write this, the children have escaped out of the country, but the others are still in Kyiv. I worry every day. My parents were barely three years old at the end of World War II and both carry trauma of how they survived both the war and the decades that followed. In September, bombs destroyed the sanctuary and garden where my mother, Nelli Isupova had her solo exhibition, which ended just days before the space was bombed. From a distance, I am safe, but day by day we are all experiencing the impact of the war. The tension of this time makes me cherish my family's beautiful and safe life, and appreciate and value the fact that it was made possible through my work as an artist living and working in the United States.

THE WARTIME STATE OF UKRAINIAN GLASS ART

A TRAVELOG

By Jeff Hiram, collector, entrepreneur
and JRACraft member

This past September, my family and I visited Lviv, Ukraine. One of our goals was to see if there was a way to support Ukrainian glass artists. Before we went, I contacted Mykhaylo (Mike) Bokotey, Executive Director of the Lviv Glass Museum, to see if it would be possible to visit. He enthusiastically responded that the museum was open in spite of the current Russian invasion. He also offered to give us a tour of the museum when we arrived.

Though Lviv was safe at the time of our visit, the signs of wartime preparation were everywhere. Blockade equipment littered the roadways, ready to be used at a moment's notice. We encountered military checkpoints and public displays of national solidarity along the way. Old churches had metal sheets installed over their stained glass windows to ensure that bombings would not shatter their beauty. Statues were covered and shielded with canvas and rope, to protect the city's cultural heritage. And there were no tourists. One museum docent told me that my children were the only foreign children who had visited the museum since the war's beginning in late February. But what stood out brightly in contrast to the darkness of these visuals was the steadfast Ukrainian determination to maintain normalcy, optimism, and hope.





Svetlana Fedorova demonstration at the 10th International Blown Glass Symposium, 2016. Photo courtesy Lviv Academy of Arts.

We arrived at the Glass Museum, situated on Lviv's beautiful main square, in mid-afternoon. Bokotey met us at the bottom of a steep stone staircase, and walked us through the museum's broad international collection, sharing stories and the history of glass art in Ukraine. We learned that modern Ukrainian glass art unites scores of artists who work in different cities, but that Lviv remains the nation's glassmaking center. It is here, at the Lviv National Academy of Arts, that the only Ukrainian glass art university department exists, and it has been operating since 1962. The Glass Museum in Lviv, the only one of its kind in Ukraine,

regularly organizes symposiums, international exhibitions, and projects aimed to support young glass artists. These initiatives build on an almost thousand-year-old tradition of glassmaking, which emerged in western Ukraine, thanks to the presence of raw materials, and most importantly, the generational transmission of glass blowing skills. Bokotey also touched on some of the specific challenges facing Ukrainian glass artists, most of whom have stayed in Ukraine. These include the difficulties of operating a hotshop under the heavy weight of wartime inflation and Russian effects on gas prices.

At the end of our tour, the lingering questions Botokey and I had were: how can an artist continue to produce and sell art when war has decimated their market, sales channels, and collector base? What can we do to ensure art flourishes in the face of war and economic turbulence? Although these queries do not have straightforward answers, the museum certainly has done its part. Bokotey shared that they proceeded with the 12th International Glass Symposium in early October 2022, despite opening the symposium with a session held by flashlight due to a lack of electricity. The symposium provided a crucial opportunity for artists to show their work, a radical statement in the face of aggressive attempts to limit independence and foreclose on expressive freedoms.

JRACraft is partnering with Rago Auctions to host a fundraiser called "Unbreakable Ukraine" to support the Glass Museum in Lviv as well as the glass department at the Lviv National Academy of Arts. Additionally, Rago Auctions will feature several works by Ukrainian glass artists in their upcoming Modern Design auction on January 20, 2023. The proceeds of any object purchased at auction will go to the artist, and donations to the art academy and museum will go directly to the institutions.

Page 17: Alisha Hillam, Jeff Hillam (holding a work by Andriy Bokotey) and Mykhaylo (Mike) Bokotey at the Lviv Glass Museum, 2022. Photo courtesy of Jeff Hillam.

COLLECTOR'S INSIGHT

THE GLOBAL CONTEMPORARY CRAFT COLLECTION OF PEGGY AND RICHARD GREENFIELD

Interview by Lila Stone, JRACraft Programming & Operations Coordinator



Peggy and Richard Greenfield are lawyers specializing in complex financial litigation. They live in Auckland, New Zealand eight to nine months each year, and spend the rest of their time traveling in and around New York City. Deeply interested in both the visual and performing arts, they actively support social

welfare and arts programs in the United States and New Zealand. For the past 20 years, Peggy has been making and exhibiting her ceramic, painting and multi-media art.

What drew you to craft in the first place?

Process — how materials are shaped and manipulated — has always been of great interest to us and naturally drew us to art constructed from alternative materials.

Can you elaborate on the focus of your collection? Has it changed over time? Do you gravitate towards a certain medium?

The focus is on what brings us joy. While we have many ceramic and glass (both cast and blown) pieces, we also like welded steel, wood and constructions of found objects. We consider ourselves to be accumulators rather than collectors in that we don't follow a particular script or theme in acquiring art. We travel extensively and have found pieces all over the world in large and small galleries, markets and studios. In acquiring art, we don't distinguish between "art" and "craft" — only between what we regard as "good art" and "bad art," admittedly very personal, idiosyncratic and sometimes illogical distinctions. We do not invest in art but rather acquire pieces that we like regardless of their provenance or the prestige of their makers.

What was it like to move pieces from your collection overseas to New Zealand?

We use regular movers since we don't think the value of most of our art warrants the expense of professional art movers. Our one experience with professional art movers (courtesy of a gallery returning a small piece that they had held on consignment) was extraordinary. The 12-inch piece came back to us in Auckland from New York by air freight packed in multiple cardboard and wooden boxes like a Russian matryoshka, or nesting doll. The outside crate surrounding the piece was over four cubic feet. Moving art is risky, and we have had both outstanding and miserable experiences. Luckily, in Auckland we found a conservator who skillfully restored two ceramic sculptures for us that had been badly damaged in transit from our California home to Auckland.

How do you live with your collection?

This photograph by Kathleen McNeil was taken in the breakfast area of our Auckland, New Zealand apartment. I think it demonstrates how various creative mediums have made their way into almost every aspect of our lives. As we watch the news in the morning the art surrounding the (inevitable) television reminds us of the good in this world. It brings us joy, regardless of whether it was created with canvas and paint, clay, glass, metal, photography, paper or whatever and whether created by ourselves, unknown creators or recognized artists. Art enriches our lives every day.



Photos of the living room (upper left) and breakfast nook (lower right) in the Greenfield's Auckland apartment, 2022. Photo by Kathleen McNeil, courtesy of Peggy and Richard Greenfield.

SAVE THE DATES

JANUARY 21

Final day to contribute to "Unbreakable Ukraine" fundraiser (page 17)

FEBRUARY 1

Deadline for Spring Internship Applications

FEBRUARY 4 - 5

Distinguished Artist Series Weekend featuring Cristina Cordova

MARCH 4 - 5

Distinguished Artist Series Weekend featuring Virgil Ortiz

MARCH 25 - 26

Distinguished Artist Series Weekend featuring Jack Mauch and Chrysalis Awardee, Morgan Hill

APRIL 15 - 16

Distinguished Artist Series Weekend featuring Susan Taylor Glasgow

MAY 5 - 7

JRACraft Spring Craft Weekend
"On View / What's New"

MAY 17 - 21

South Shore to North Shore, Craft Study
Trip to Boston

SAVE THE DATE:

FEBRUARY 13 - 24, 2024

Caucus Member Craft Trip to New Zealand including a visit to the collection of Peggy and Richard Greenfield (page 19)

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Cristina Cordova, "Cosmología isleña (Island Cosmology)," 2021. Ceramic, metal, resin, and wood, 90 x 45 x 44 inches. Photo by Loam Marketing. This work was recently purchased by friends of JRACraft for the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.