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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.

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*On the cover: Chrysalis Awardee Rachel David, "Cycle Shelf,"
hand forged, formed and fabricated steel.*

*Pictured here: Susie Ganch "Drag," recycled, everyday
disposables. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Renwick
Gallery acquisition made possible by JRACraft.*



A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

It's a landmark year for the James Renwick Alliance for Craft. 2022 is our 40th anniversary, which coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Renwick Gallery.

Since being founded in 1982 as the James Renwick Collectors Alliance to support public lectures and exhibitions at the Renwick Gallery, JRACraft has been a key part of the American craft movement. We held our first Craft Weekend within months of our founding with Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley and Joan Mondale – a longtime arts advocate but also a highly skilled ceramic artist – as the featured speakers at a national forum on connoisseurship and collecting. Soon after, we began offering trips and sponsored our first artist workshop, featuring master wood turners, in 1986.

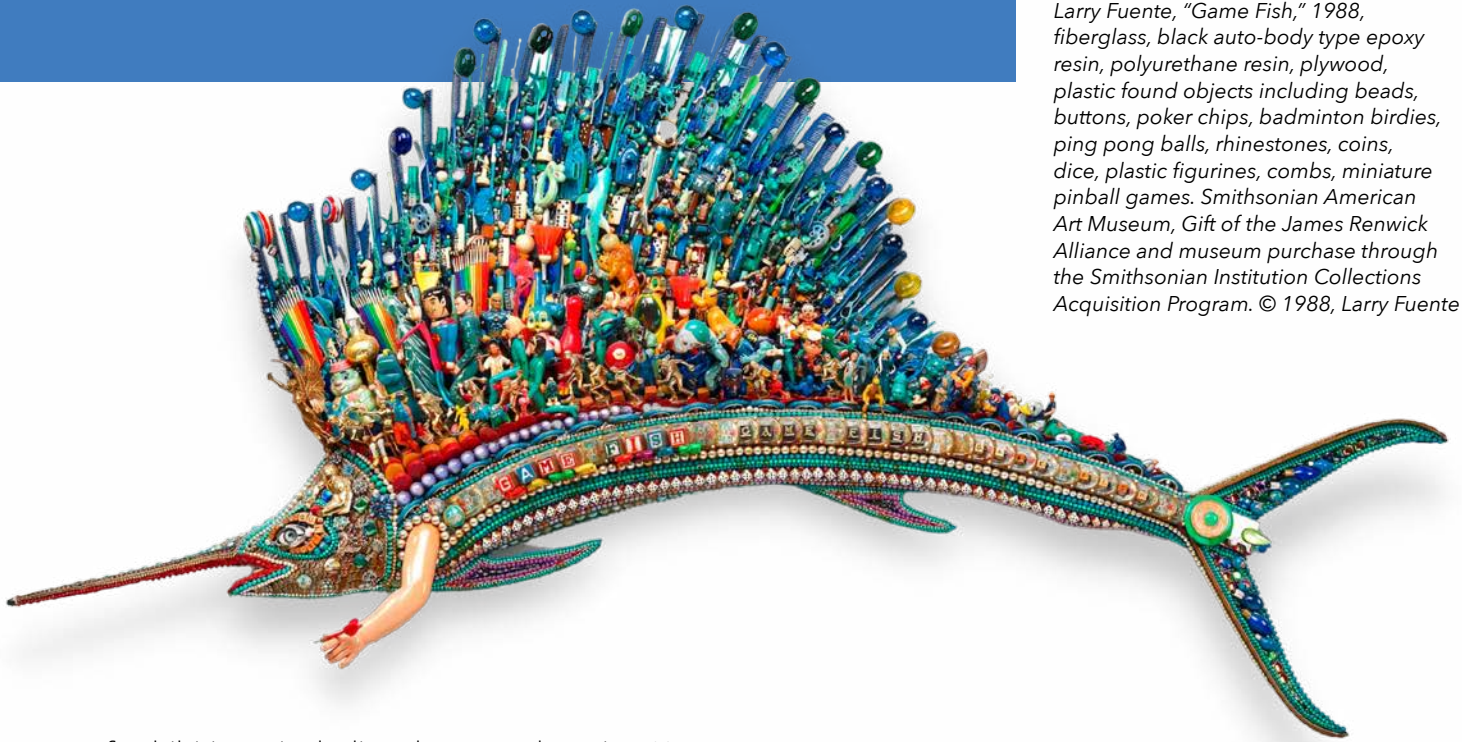
Those events were just a preview of what was to come. Over the last 40 years, we have worked to fulfill our mission to celebrate and advance American craft through public programs, educational trips, publications, and recognition of excellence in craft.



Nick Cave, "Soundsuit," 2009, mixed media. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the James Renwick Alliance and museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment. © 2009, Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo by James Prinz Photography.



Since our first Craft Weekend in 1983, we have sponsored hundreds of public programs, including 14 in 2021 alone. The Distinguished Artist Series, one of the longest-running public programs in craft, began in 1992. We have supported scholarship through fellowships at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, exhibition catalogs and other publications. We have helped the Renwick Gallery build its collection by purchasing 200 artworks, including iconic pieces like Nick Cave's "Soundsuit," Larry Fuente's "Game Fish," Beth Lipman's "Banquetje (Banquet)," and Judy Kensley McKie's "Monkey Settee." We have sponsored trips across the country and around the world, including a trip to Australia that the craft community there still talks about today. We have supported dozens



Larry Fuente, "Game Fish," 1988, fiberglass, black auto-body type epoxy resin, polyurethane resin, plywood, plastic found objects including beads, buttons, poker chips, badminton birdies, ping pong balls, rhinestones, coins, dice, plastic figurines, combs, miniature pinball games. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the James Renwick Alliance and museum purchase through the Smithsonian Institution Collections Acquisition Program. © 1988, Larry Fuente

of exhibitions, including the record-setting *No Spectators: The Art of Burning Man* and the most recent *Renwick Invitational*. Since 2008, we've featured JRACraft member artists in the annual JRA Day craft show, which this year was held both online and in person. We've also honored more than 100 artists and educators with our Master of the Medium, Distinguished Craft Educator, and Chrysalis awards.

For our 40th anniversary, we're planning even more. This year's Distinguished Artist Series looks both to our history and to the future, pairing artists who have been part of the series in the past with emerging artists identified by the Center for Craft in Asheville, North Carolina, for workshops and lectures. These eight artists have both shared interests and contrasting perspectives, and we think that their interactions will help to understand how craft has evolved and will continue to change. Like last year's series, both the workshops and the lectures will be streamed free and recorded, so anyone can watch them.

Craft Weekend, always a highlight of the year, will be particularly special as we acknowledge this year's milestone, and look forward to what comes next. This year, Craft Weekend will honor Distinguished Craft Educators who are responsible for teaching the next generation of craft artists.

Later this year, we will choose the winner of

the Chrysalis Award, our newest award, which provides financial support and a platform for promising emerging artists. There's also more in the works, as we're planning to keep celebrating all year long.

And the Renwick Gallery's big anniversary is part of our celebration as well. We are proud to be supporting the Gallery's 50th anniversary exhibition, and even more excited that, through the generosity of members and friends of JRACraft, we raised close to \$160,000 in just over a year and are supporting seven significant new acquisitions at the Gallery. Our funding is bringing works by artists Susie Ganch, Mariko Kusomoto, Roberto Lugo, and Paul Scott to the collection for the first time, and adding important pieces by artists honored by JRACraft, including 2021 Master of the Medium award winners David Harper Clemons and Preston Singletary and our 2021 Chrysalis awardee, Rachel David. There's more about these acquisitions in this issue of the Quarterly in an article by Nora Atkinson, the Fleur and Charles Bresler Curator-in-Charge of the Gallery.

With all we've achieved in the last 40 years to advance American craft, there is still much more to do. We can hardly wait to begin.

J.G. Harrington,
President, JRACraft



2021 MASTERS OF THE MEDIUM SHAPING THE LEGACY OF THE CRAFT COMMUNITY

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

*Pictured Above: Wendy
Maruyama "Zenmetsu,"
2011, tamo ash, paper,
glass, pottery shards.*

*Pictured Right: Consuelo
Jimenez Underwood,
"Line Fixations," 2016,
tapestry, leather, wire,
linen, cotton.*

JRACraft helps shape the legacy of American craft with the Masters of the Medium award. In alternating years the awards switch between recognition for the Master of the Medium and Distinguished Educator. These coveted awards, akin to lifetime achievement awards, honor some of the most significant craft artists and educators in the field. The first awards in 1997 honored artists Peter Voulkos, Sam Maloof, Harvey Littleton, Albert Paley and Ed Rossbach. In 2021, the awardees represent a much more diverse perspective and reflect the future of the American craft field.

On October 30, 2021, David Harper Clemons, Sergei Isupov, Wendy Maruyama, Preston Singletary and Consuelo Jimenez Underwood received the JRACraft Master of the Medium award and gave thoughtful presentations about their artwork, influences and histories. The individual perspectives, identities and variation in each artist's work speak to the wide breadth of contemporary craft in the United States and inspire generations of artists, scholars and the like.

Wendy Maruyama is one of a very select few to have received both the Master of the Medium award (2021) and the Distinguished Educator Award (2012). During her presentation, she introduced herself as an Asian American woman with a hearing impairment and cerebral palsy. She spoke of her residencies in England, France and Japan which led to her ultimate rise as a preeminent force in the field. Her early stylized works are uniquely hers, often featuring colors defined by her Japanese heritage and forms reflective of her gender in a male-dominated field. While she imbues her furniture works with her identity, she directly confronted her cultural





history in a conceptual series titled *E.O. 9066* (2008). This was named for the Executive Order in 1942 authorizing the evacuation of all persons deemed a threat to national security, including all Japanese-American citizens, from the West Coast to internment camps further inland. Maruyama continues her work in social justice issues with her *WildLIFE* series and other identity and environmental concerns.

Glass artist Preston Singletary also spoke about his identity. Being from the Tlingit tribe, he often uses traditional iconography and stories in his three-dimensional glass sculptures. One exhibition he spoke about, "Raven and the Box Of Daylight" is on view January 28 2022 through January 29, 2023, at the Museum of the American Indian. The show features his narrative works, infused with music and video works to create an all-encompassing narrative, tied to traditional Tlingit stories. Singletary also spoke about his techniques in steel casting, lost wax casting and his journey to art through music and mentorships, as a self-taught artist.

Narrative is the principal focus of the ceramic works of Sergei Isupov, who weaves sculptural forms with surrealist illustration. Isupov immigrated to the United States in 1993 and spoke about his early exploration of language, culture and art after originally moving to the U.S. where he felt a strong sense of freedom to explore his ideas. His works are often colorful and dream-like without a singular storyline, mixing thoughts and ideas that he admits are easier to express through art than with his own words.

David Harper Clemons also makes works with narrative undertones but is equally drawn to the technical aspects of working in small-scale metals. One of the first metal pieces he shared in his presentation was

a teapot titled the "Trees We Construct," directly inspired by the poem "Strange Fruit" by Abel Meeropol. Clemons noted how the poem vacillates between written images of beauty and atrocity. In some ways, this reflects the artists' own work that is made with exquisite mastery of skill but often reflects societal ills.

Textile and mixed media artist Consuelo Jimenez Underwood shared her societal concerns and identity as the daughter of migrant agricultural workers, with a Chicano mother and a father of Huichol Indian descent. Her textile work often symbolically depicts flags, or representational fauna from the American/Mexican border. In her presentation, she noted the birds that transcend borders and inspire her work and the native species of wildflowers that live on both sides of the border and are represented in her tapestries.

Throughout our history, almost 60 Masters of the Medium and just under 40 Distinguished Educators have been honored. These awards afford the artist a level of recognition that supports their artistic legacy and brings attention to their thoughts, concerns and creative expression. When accepting the award, Underwood said, "I hope to encourage us all to be better people and to take care of our nation and our family." As the field of American craft matures, the diversity of thoughts, materials and concepts expands to form a dynamic future for the field. Underwood's statement reminds us of the larger family that we share and the collective legacy we can leave through our support for the craft community.

COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATIONS

THE 2022 DISTINGUISHED ARTIST SERIES

By Rebecca Ravenal, Ceramic Artist, JRACraft Board Member and Chair of the Distinguished Artist Series

The 2022 season of the Distinguished Artist Series will be a fitting celebration of JRA Craft's 40th anniversary. In recognition of our illustrious history and a look into our bright future, we are bringing back four artists from past seasons and pairing them with four emerging craft artists. This exciting program is in collaboration with the Center for Craft, which celebrated its 25th anniversary recently.

The compatible missions of JRACraft and Center for Craft make for a natural partnership, furthering our mutual efforts to increase scholarship and appreciation for American craft, recognize individual artists and organizations that are making lasting contributions to the field and provide direct support to artists and academics to help ensure the future of this domain.

The pairs of Distinguished Artist Series presenters will give insight into how studio artists through several decades have approached techniques of making, whether treasuring, transforming, or completely torpedoing the traditions of previous generations. They will explore commonalities of their process and materials and examine changes in the

craft world. Several of the returning encore artists have careers that span more than half a century, providing a rich view into how the practice of studio artists and existing career opportunities might differ between then and now. Each encore artist chose their emerging artist partner from the Center for Craft's recent Windgate-Lamar fellows, honing in on intriguing aspects of the newer artist's work and philosophy that piqued their interest and would make for a particularly interesting conversation between the two artists.

The Distinguished Artist Series programs will be presented online on four separate weekends from January to June 2022. The virtual Saturday studio visits will focus on how the artists work, their methods and techniques. Free Sunday discussions will elaborate on why the artists make their unique work, their careers and influences. The paired presentations include: Mary Barringer (ceramics) and Danielle Burke (fiber); Michael Puryear (wood) and Nathaniel Atkinson (wood); Josh Simpson (glass) and Geoffrey Bowton (glass); and Jennifer Trask (mixed media) and Shenequa Brooks (textiles).



Michael Puryear



Josh Simpson

RENWICK GALLERY

50TH ANNIVERSARY ACQUISITION CAMPAIGN

Nora Atkinson, the Fleur and Charles Bresler Curator-in-Charge for the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

*Preston Singletary, "Safe Journey," 2021.
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Renwick
Gallery acquisition made possible by JRACraft.*



What an incredible journey it has been! Despite the ongoing pandemic, as we enter into 2022, the Renwick Gallery and the James Renwick Alliance for Craft both have much to celebrate, with the Renwick Gallery's 50th Anniversary and the James Renwick Alliance for Craft's 40th year. In honor of this important milestone, the Renwick launched an ambitious acquisitions campaign in late 2019, with a goal of transforming the collection through 100 significant objects honoring the museum's legacy and looking to the future, filling gaps in the collection, building on our strengths, and addressing our weaknesses, to remain the preeminent museum of American Craft, and a thought leader in the field.

Most particularly among these goals, we aimed to address what we identified as our greatest failing: inclusive representation within our collection and exhibitions. In 2019, an analysis of our collection revealed that we were not living up to our own ideals, with only one-third of the collection by women artists, and scant representation of artists of color, so we set out to make a change. Now, as we reach the end of a successful campaign, I am pleased to share a few of our successes, reached in no small part by the continued support and dedication of JRACraft and its members, who share many of our goals.



*David Harper Clemons, "The Weight of Deferred Gratification,"
2019, sterling silver, stainless steel, brass, mahogany, glass, grains.
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Renwick Gallery acquisition
made possible by JRACraft.*



Chawne Kimber, "still not," vintage scraps from mid-century clothing, quilting cotton, denim, cotton sashiko thread. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Renwick Gallery acquisition made possible by Nedra and Peter Agnew.

The campaign was kickstarted by a generous gift from the Windgate Charitable Foundation, seeding the Kenneth R. Trapp Acquisitions Fund, in honor of the Renwick's former curator. We leveraged this fund to find over \$150,000 in matching resources from foundations and private donors, and in 2021, the foundation further awarded the Gallery \$2M to establish the largest acquisitions endowment in the museum's history, the Windgate Foundation Living Artists Acquisitions Fund. We received grants from the American Women's History Initiative in support of two important acquisitions by women of color, Sonya Clark and Tanya Aguiñiga, the latter in collaboration with our sister institution, the Cooper Hewitt Design Museum.

We were invited into many collectors' homes virtually or in person, to see the wonders collected and select works to enhance the museum's holdings. Building on our strengths, we hand-selected 30+ works from the Bresler Collection and 43 works from the Bernstein Chernoff Collection of Art in Wood, as well as significant gifts from Sharon and Robert Buchanan, John and Colleen Kotelly, Clemmer Montague, Marc and Diane Grainer, and others. I would also like to thank JRACraft members Chris Rifkin, Jackie Urow, and Judy Weisman for generous offerings from their collections. Meeting our goal of increasing diversity and inclusion in the collection, more than 50% of these acquisitions (73% of purchases) were by

women, and almost 40% (78% of purchases) were by artists of color, including 23 works by Native American artists, 24 by African American artists, 16 by Latino artists, and 13 by Asian American artists to date. Although this remains a work in progress, we are pleased to report huge strides towards the representation of African American artists, and increased our representation of Indigenous artists over 85 percent. Maybe more significantly, we have also signaled a shift towards diversity and inclusion within our community, and begun to build allies along the way. In this regard, the campaign is only a starting point, and we look forward to watching those relationships grow.

With the help of donors like you, we purchased over \$1M in artworks, predominantly from living artists, as we made a concerted effort to support the larger American craft field during these difficult times. The James Renwick Alliance and its individual members played a substantial role in this, and I am particularly grateful to President J.G. Harrington and Executive Director Jaimianne Jacobin for their commitment to this campaign, and to Judy Weisman for her consultation in the early stages. Through their advocacy, the Alliance pledged support for the Renwick's 50th anniversary exhibition, as well as six important acquisitions by artists new to the collection: David Harper Clemons, Rachel David, Susie Ganch, Mariko Kusumoto, Roberto Lugo, and Preston Singletary, while individual members graciously stepped forward to purchase additional works from our wish list, including a stunning quilt by Chawne Kimber, donated by Nedra and Peter Agnew, a film basket by Gail Tremblay, donated by Brenda Erickson, a protest banner by Aram Han Sifuentes, donated by Jaimianne and Anthony Jacobin, a commissioned glass work by April Surgent, donated by Gwen and Jerry Paulson, a tapestry by Guillermo Bert, donated in part by Michele Manatt and Wolfram Anders.

Mariko Kusumoto, Necklace, fabric. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Renwick Gallery acquisition made possible by JRACraft.

Additional highlights of the campaign that you'll see in the exhibition include a pivotal early work, "Vestige," by Karen LaMonte, promised from the collection of Myra and Hal Weiss, a tour-de-force fiber work by Olga de Amaral, promised gift of Sharon and Bob Buchanan, a rare and precious egg by Daniel Brush from the collection of Fleur Bresler, a charming "nut case" by Katie Hudnall, a warrior figure by Wanxin Zhang from the collection of David and Pamela Hornick, a carved slate teapot by Japanese-American internee Homei Iseyama, gift of Carolyn Holden, and perhaps the largest and most important work to date by artist Sonya Clark, recently purchased by the museum. You'll see these and many more old favorites and new acquisitions in our 50th Anniversary exhibition, *This Present Moment: Crafting a Better Future*, curated by Mary Savig, which opens May 13, 2022. We can't wait to see you there.

Finally, as I reflect on the current state of this crazy world, from the isolation of the pandemic, to the political polarization of our nation, to the global environmental crisis, and even to the proliferation of NFTs in the art marketplace, I can't help but think that craft and all the values it engenders has never been so important. So in this present moment, we are proud to represent this vital piece of American culture, and look forward to the next fifty years.



JRACRAFT CHRYSALIS AWARDEE

RACHEL DAVID:

A BLACKSMITH BREAKING STEREOTYPES

By Anne Bujold, Visiting Assistant Professor of Sculpture at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette and Mentorship Program lead for the Society of Inclusive Blacksmiths.



Rachel David's work is heavy. Not just heavy, materially, but hefty, conceptually. It carries the weight of its meaning through the effort of its making. Blacksmithing, as an artistic effort, is monumental. The requirements of equipment, work space, and energy are significant. The dedication to traveling miles to receive instruction in this somewhat esoteric art is only a part of her story. It also requires years of practice to hone the body and the eye to read and respond to steel, which is malleable when glowing yellow at 2,200 degrees Fahrenheit. David's work engages not just the

materiality of metal, but dives deeper, asking questions about environmental degradation, systemic prejudices, and the lasting impact of Western imperialism.

Her forms are a mix of undulating lines and tumescent planes, and the use of sheet metal in combination with forged elements gets to the heart of her work. Thin sheet is stretched and hammered through openings, portals, or frames, and this act of pushing perhaps defines David most succinctly. She pushes, on every level. While many craft disciplines embrace new ways of imagining their material and investigating their traditions, blacksmithing has lagged behind, mired in the weight of its utilitarian and predominantly masculine history. David uses blacksmithing as both material and meaning, and this pushes her work into contemporary conversation in a revolutionary way.

Rachel David. Photo by Thom Bennett Photographs.

Rachel David "Bound Sideboard," 2017, hand forged formed and fabricated steel.





Rachel David "Cloud Coffee Table," 2017, hand forged formed and fabricated steel.

David's passion for making traces back to her childhood, and she fondly remembers building a firewood holder in 7th grade shop class. While attending Evergreen College in Olympia, Washington, she secured a job as a technician in a wood and metal shop. When her teacher Bob Woods told her if she "got the metal hot and hit it with a hammer it would do what you want it to do," it rocked her world. For her final quarter, she traveled to Penland School of Craft in North Carolina and took a two month class with blacksmith Maegan Crowley.

A job offer from Wet Dog Glass, welding and insulating glass kilns, took her to New Orleans. She tried to get involved with local blacksmithing groups, but was discouraged by condescending attitudes and troubling behavior she encountered as a young woman. It was difficult to find a job working for other metal artists, so she began selling work at local craft shows, eventually building her own client base.

By 2011, she established Red Metal in New Orleans, producing sculpture and commissioned

work, such as furniture, gates, and railings. She also made efforts to expand the visibility of contemporary blacksmithing, curating the group exhibitions *Nü Iron Age* in 2017 and *Meta-formations: Experiments and Rituals* in 2019. For

the latter, she produced an accompanying catalog with written contributions from blacksmiths Daniel Miller and Jeffery Funk. In 2020, she relocated to Waynesville, North Carolina. There, she has a 3,500 square foot shop, built her own cabin, and finds value in the rich arts community of the region.

Perhaps because she does not fit the paradigm of the stereotypical blacksmith, she has the power to consider the process from a unique perspective. Opening the gates of the craft to others who

face systemic barriers is an important aspect of David's practice. Beyond simply engaging in questions of politics through her work, she is a founding member of the Society of Inclusive Blacksmiths (SIBs). The organization was concretized during a collaborative project with 12 female-identifying smiths at Cascadia Center for Arts and Crafts (Government Camp, OR) in 2018.



Rachel David "Cycle Dripping," hand forged, formed, and fabricated steel.

SIBs is the only organization in the country focused on expanding diversity and equity in the field of blacksmithing, and provides access to resources for historically excluded makers through scholarships, grants, and a mentorship program. SIBs operates largely as an online nexus and community. The website and Instagram account provide a platform to share opportunities and distribute resources, unrestrained by the limitations of location. Aspiring and established smiths use this virtual space to access an international progressive community, which some may not find available at the local level.

SIBs does the crucial work of creating what David calls “an actual, honest support system to our younger selves.” She reflects that she needed something like this 15 years ago, and strives to develop a community where people feel safe, seen, and respected. SIBs allows artists to learn from each other and provides critical support to those who feel marginalized in a largely white and primarily male craft discipline.

As a James Renwick Craft Alliance for Craft Chrysalis Award emerging artist, David hopes to share her experience, encourage others, and create dialogue around issues that impact historically underrepresented makers. From the daily act of manipulating metal to the larger arc of her personal beliefs, Rachel David combines the craft of blacksmithing with the conceptual concerns of transformative politics, changing more than mere metal along the way.

Rachel David. Commissioned cabinet, hand forged formed and fabricated steel.



WE ARE NEVER OTHER

By Aram Han Sifuentes, artist, writer, curator, and adjunct professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Recipient of the 2021 American Craft Council Lois Moran Award for Craft Writing.

Who sits comfortably at the center? Who is pushed to the peripheries and has to fight to be seen, acknowledged, and considered? In “Ghostly Matters: Hauntings and the Sociological Imagination,” social theorist Avery Gordon writes, “Complex personhood means that even those called ‘Other’ are never never that.” My goal as an artist is to disrupt, unsettle, and rupture dominant narratives to assert, demand, and claim space for those who are commonly othered, particularly immigrants of color. We are never never other, and especially in this moment of widespread national and international xenophobia and hate, we have to push beyond the margins and occupy the center.

As an artist and arts educator, I am constantly asked, “Can art create social change?” Over the years, I have been writing notes in an attempt to answer this question. The following points are particularly intended to respond to the concerns of BIPOC artists. In this ongoing and constantly evolving text, many of the listed points are layered and overlap with one another. Rather than a comprehensive list, this is a constellation of thoughts and realizations.

TELLING OUR STORIES

Through art, music, and writing we have the power to tell our own stories. These stories are often not told, actively forgotten, and/or suppressed, perverted, distorted, and oversimplified by dominant culture. Through art, we tell our own stories and truths on our own terms.

CENTERING: SHIFTING THE FRAME

By telling our own stories, we shift the frame and put ourselves in the center. We live in a society where most things are defined by whiteness. When we tell stories and truths from our own perspective, we rupture white narratives and define ourselves and our experiences to ourselves and our communities.

REPRESENTATION

By telling our own stories, we claim space. We become visible. Representation is: “I see you. I am you. You are not alone. You are important. We are proud.” There is something profoundly powerful about seeing the many nuances and complexities of your story and your experiences reflected back to you; it’s a sigh of momentary relief. Then we fight for more. Pushing Back: Talking Back to



Protest Banner Lending Library, 2016 – present. Installation: Chicago Cultural Center. Photo: eedaham.

POWER

This is one of my favorite ways to use art: to talk back to power. Vulnerable communities, such as non-citizen immigrants, don't have freedom and the space to talk back to power without fear of reprisal. Art can create this space under the guise of creativity.

A PATHWAY TO HEALING

In a thought-provoking conversation, my dear friend Willi Farrales, a somatic therapist said, "We live in a society where so many pathways to healing are cut off, corporatized, or just made inaccessible (including art)." It is undeniable that art is a pathway to healing, and even if this society makes it hard for us to make art in our everyday lives, we must do so for our well-being.

SHARING COLLECTIVE AND COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE

I feel immense joy and power when I make art with my communities. In many non-Euro Western cultures, 'art' is made collectively, not by an individual. Making art together creates spaces for our knowledge—connected through lived experiences—to be shared and uplifted. These spaces of collective making become radical spaces to speak, listen, validate each other, talk through our political differences, share stories and resources, learn about the self and others, and playfully come up with strategies to live and fight.

IMAGINATION AND ACTION

Art is the language of imagination. Art allows us to imagine and present alternate



pasts, presents, and futures. Through art, we can see our imaginations come to fruition. I use art in this way to create socially engaged projects—such as voting stations for those who legally can't vote—that reimagine what civic engagement can look like if it were truly made accessible to all. At its best, art can work outside structures of capitalism, white supremacy, and power to imagine and create new worlds.

Once we see these worlds, it is up to us to make them a part of our everyday. Imagination and dreams are the inspiration for action. We demand change because we can see different and better worlds. Imagination is what gives us hope. The seeds for action are indignation with the way things are and imagination for the way things can be.

In these ways, art is integral to an ecosystem fighting for change, as noted by artist and educator William Estrada. Making art is radical. In our collective making, sharing, expressing joy, and creating culture, we declare that we are never never other. We are here. We are resilient. And we will continue to fight for our human rights to create better worlds.

*Protest Banner
Lending Library,
2016 - present. Multi
Culti Cuties Unite
flag as part of the
Wave Your Freak
Flag! Installation at
Lillstreet Art Center.
Made by: Aram Han
Sifuentes, Ishita
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and Tabitha Anne
Kunkes. Photo by
Nora Renick Rinehart.*

CRAFT IN CONVERSATION:

CERAMIC SCULPTOR SHAE BISHOP & PENLAND'S GALLERY DIRECTOR KATHRYN GREMLEY

By Diane Charnov, Independent arts writer, JRACraft board member and 2019 Jentel Critic at the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts

Recently, I sat down with ceramic artist Shae Bishop and Penland's Gallery Director Kathryn Gremlay to learn more about the show, "I/Another." Gremlay, Penland's Gallery Director for 25 years, is also a textile artist in her own right. She has mounted a unique show pairing Bishop's sculptural ceramics with photographer Corn Wagon Thunder's vibrant photographic narratives. Bishop's ceramic garments have a life outside the gallery walls and off the pedestal and plinth. He has fitted each piece to himself, sewn with hundreds of meticulous stitches, and worn them, from his clay shorts on a quest for snakes in Indonesia to his porcelain bathing suit while seeking rare salamanders in the rivers of North Carolina.



Q. You live in one of the best-known craft communities in America (Penland) yet are known as a solo maker. What is the role of community in your making and in mounting this show?

Bishop: Working in a community, in a studio with four other artists lets me do way more things than I could on my own. Compared to a studio by myself, in a vacuum, I have access to resources as well as drawing on others, from communal equipment we share, like Annie Evelyn's (JRA Distinguished Artist 2020) industrial sewing machine to borrowing tools from studio mates Jack Mauch and Morgan Hill.

Gremlay: Penland is a unique definition of community. It's global and local. There are currents of people who cross back and forth across the country and cite Penland at the intersection. Regarding community and this exact show, it's unique. Shae and Corn worked in the same community, but never collaborated. I had this opportunity to watch them grow and could put their work together, in conversation. Penland is a rare place of intersection.

Q. From clay chaps to porcelain bathing suits, you craft objects typically rendered in traditional materials like leather and textiles. Why clay?

*Shae Bishop "Shorts to Wear while Looking for Pythons."
Photo by Hannah Patterson.*

Bishop: For me, the material metaphor was thinking of clay as something that is weighty and rigid and equating it with history as a concept of something weighty with an aura of being unchanging. In contrast, textiles are flexible, made to fit our own bodies, one of the most personal things in our lives. What is more personal than things that touch our skin? The act of trying to make the rigid into something personal, take something heavy and make it lightweight and take something fragile and make it more durable and bridge the gap through union of fiber and ceramics – that was a physical manifestation of my journey.

Q. The phrase “fragile masculinity” comes up in your work. Would you elaborate?

Bishop: The hyper-masculinity of the cowboy myth in America is strong. Culturally, the cowboy is an icon of masculinity, but the visual culture of cowboys includes elements that exist as an interesting exception to the rule. High heels come to mind in cowboy boots. For a “manly man” to wear a 2-inch heel, well there’s a lot





Shae Bishop "Eternal Cowboy" and "Eternal Cowboy" (detail). Photo by Myles Pettengill

to think about along with the use of florals in Western wear, from Indian decorative techniques in beadware, to Hollywood creating a larger than life aesthetic on the silver screen. In my fragile masculinity series, there was a thread of ideas around the form of the cowboy hat which has a lot to do with the archetype of masculinity. The piece, *You Looking at Me 'Pardner* (two men nearly nose to nose in double cowboy hats) holds the body in a different relationship for two masculine entities. I'm interested in gender and exceptions where culture bleeds into things we think are traditionally masculine or feminine. I'm also fascinated by the legendary Ukrainian tailor Nudie Cohn (Nuta Kotlyarenko, famous for Western wear rhinestone studded Nudie suits). His non-traditional garments got everyone excited about wearing glamorous sparkly pink and turquoise pastels, from Hank Snow to Marty Robbins. There are different ways to interpret what is masculine and what is feminine and at times things slip beyond the general norms. Those are interesting to me.

Q. What are you currently working on? What next?

Bishop: I could potentially see down the road making functional custom footwear as a separate but related practice to what I do now. I recently took Amara Hark-Weber's shoemaking concentration at Penland. Making boots is

not just a one time experience. It is a new and creative endeavor, bleeding together dreams in my creative life and my identity as a maker.

Q. What else would you add about Shae Bishop and this show?

Gremley: I'm flabbergasted watching someone do what Shae has done. I don't think there are many craft artists using garments as a means to explore personal mythology. What a great gift that Penland has this space thanks to the Horns (John & Robyn Horn Gallery). I hope Shae's work will be part of permanent collections beyond the top of our hill. He has high level skill in ceramics, and slipcasting in particular, which is incredibly difficult. Now that he has added shoes to his repertoire, that will not be something he will let go of. I imagine we will see more of that in the future and in pulling feminine and masculine together and what confusion can be played out in that.

Pictured page 18, top right: Shae Bishop "A Swimsuit to Wear While Looking for Hellbenders." Photo by Myles Pettengill.

Pictured page 18 lower right: Shae Bishop "You Looking at Me 'Pardner?," pictured with Shae and Jason Biggs Burnett. Photo by Loam.

SAVE THE DATES

JANUARY 22 - 23

Distinguished Artist Series Weekend
Mary Barringer and Danielle Burke

FEBRUARY 3

Chrysalis Award event with SNAG &
Furniture Society honoring Rachel David

MARCH 26 - 27

Distinguished Artist Series Weekend
Michael Puryear and Nathaniel Atkinson

MARCH 30 - APRIL 3

Durham Craft Delight Trip
Raleigh/Durham, NC

APRIL 9 - 10

Distinguished Artist Series Weekend
Josh Simpson and Geoffrey Bowton

MAY 2 - 5

Houston Craft Trip
Houston, TX

MAY 13 - 15

Spring Craft Weekend
Symposium, Events and Awards

JUNE 3 - 10

New Mexico Treasures Trip
Santa Fe, NM (Caucus member trip)

JUNE 11 - 12

Distinguished Artist Series Weekend
Jennifer Trask and SHENEQUA

OCTOBER 27 - NOVEMBER 4

Exploring Spanish Craft Trip
Madrid, Spain (Caucus member trip)



Distinguished Artist Series Artist SHENEQUA, "Wooden Black & Gold Beads," 2021, synthetic and Kanekalon hair, cotton, polyester, and wooden beads. Photo by G Nicole Studios.

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