



AMOS AMIT

### Patrick R. Benesh-Liu

The late autumn of Philadelphia is beautiful of its own accord. As the leaves carpet the city's parks and streets with yellow, auburn and crimson, the temperature usually is comfortable, with a hint of chill generously couched in sunshine and modest breezes. In this natural beauty, the perfect venue is found for the revelation of more splendor, in this case human-made.

The Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show takes place within the Pennsylvania Convention Center; cozy and warm albeit in a very large space, it offers more than physical respite, but also sensual and spiritual. Imagine walking the carpeted aisles; peering into booths, perhaps brilliantly lit, at times more subdued, depending on the exhibitor's taste. All the while, taking in a visual plethora, an ornate cornucopia of the senses—fine porcelain of mellow hues; jewelry, both delicate wireworks with minimal decoration, and sumptuous gemmed items of cobalt blues, opalescent sheens, and coruscant precious metals; lustrous wooden sculptures; subtly woven basketry—the sights go on and on. Many of these objects are worthy of being in a museum, but at the Philadelphia Craft Show, the key differences are one can handle them (carefully!), interact with their makers, and, potentially, taken home.

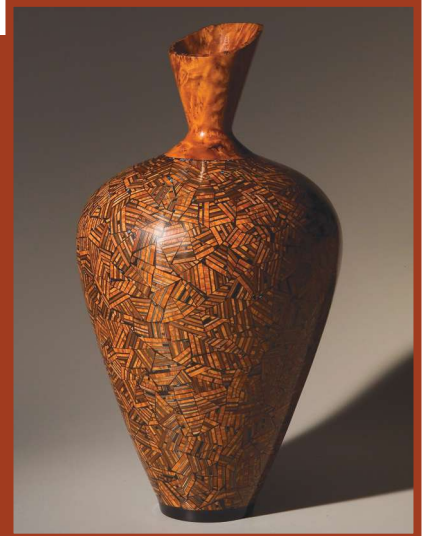
At the Philadelphia Craft Show this year, the foreign contingent derives from Lithuania, one of those shining jewels within the Baltic states of northern Europe. As regulars will know, the Philadelphia Craft Show yearly has a Guest Artist Program which invites craftspeople from around the world to Philadelphia to display and sell their wares. Both an example of international diplomacy and cultural exchange, the guest artists always subtly shift the show's atmosphere with their particular aesthetic, and more important, bring the human element forth from overseas. Interacting with these artists is a window into another culture, and

*CELEBRATING THE HANDMADE, THE THIRTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART CRAFT SHOW MEETS NOVEMBER 7-10, 2013 AT THE PHILADELPHIA CONVENTION CENTER.*

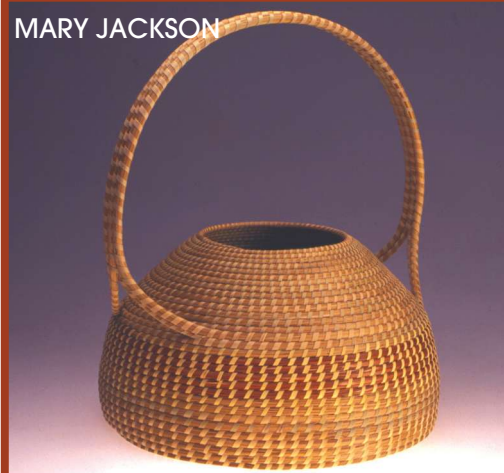
TAKASHI ICHIHARA



JAMES BARNES



MARY JACKSON



AUTUMN CIPALA



NORM SARTORIUS



KARI LONNING





LORI BACIGALUPE



ANDREA HANDY



TERESA CROWNINSHIELD COBURN

it is in the people and personalities that you find the true treasure. Lithuania shows a number of jewelers whose work is an interesting twist to American and other European artists. Tadas Deksnys, for example, has an unusual combination of materials: titanium, copper, precious metals, and enamel. Her clean structures with abstract motifs use bold colors to create contrast.

Now in its fourth year, the University Program has been an entertaining and effective method of introducing student artists to the craft field. There is the work of burgeoning craftspeople from Kutztown University, Moore College of Art & Design, University of the Arts, and the Savannah College of Art & Design. Although SCAD is out-of-state in Georgia, the Philadelphia show has been inviting Pennsylvanian educational institutions for several years, which is a good show of commitment to the local community.

What is the role of craft shows like Philadelphia? In a word, it is three-fold: one, to provide funding for a public institution, the Philadelphia Museum of Art; two, to host a marketplace for craftspeople; three, to curate craft. Hold on. What does it mean to curate craft?

The answer is somewhere between the purpose of museums and the shaping of the artistic environment as a whole. A museum is meant to store, protect and present to public scrutiny objects of knowledge and value. In creating its collection, it judges what is valuable and interesting. In a similar manner, through its jurying process, a craft show decides what is

innovative, technically-superior, aesthetically intriguing, or flat out beautiful.

However, a renowned craft show's responsibilities do not end there. In being at the forefront of its kind, a famous and enduring craft show like Philadelphia is also responsible for affecting the entire field. It shapes collectors awareness, and gives its stamp of approval; what is shown here is the best in craft. Therefore the field is subtly directed, as the craft show acts as a grand curator, in effect deciding the national collection.

This is a necessary role, as otherwise there are few major public venues for crafts, but without selectivity one is left within a sea through which one must swim endlessly, trying to determine what is worthwhile and what is still becoming mature. By being a platform, craft is lifted, and those who are at the peak of their skills and aesthetic sensibility become visible.

To put this in perspective, imagine a department store. Walking down the aisles, you will see the cosmetics booths, full of rows of lipstick; you will stroll by the jewelry station, where glass cases harbor gold and silver rings and necklaces. Of course, it is inevitable that your path will pass the shoe department, where rows of foot apparel lie along shelves, or singled out for presentation. Racks of clothes take up most of the store, divided into men's and women's sections, and further categorized into jeans, skirts, shirts, dress jackets, and other apparel.

Now, in your mind's eye take that same stroll through the Philadelphia Craft Show. While one will



TADAS DEKSNYS



ANDREA WILLIAMS

find clothing, jewelry and other accessories, instead of brand names like Levi's and Armani, each booth's "brand" is the artist, the maker. An object in a store may have been produced by someone in a factory setting, however here every single object was crafted by one individual's attentive hand, or had finishing touches delivered by it.

Curatorship does not end with the show; if you have an inclination to purchase, you are a participant in the curating of craft. It is a partnership between those who provide a venue for art and those who buy it which determines the field's progression as a whole; and the role of the collector is the most vital. Whether you purchase several pieces of jewelry or other craft every year, or you simply choose to buy one ring or scarf for yourself or a friend, you are a collector. Most important, you are supporting the artist, without which there is no craft to curate.

Despite the material riches they produce with their hands, craftspeople in general are not prosperous. This

has been the case for most of human history; it was not the craftsmen who made the tiaras, coronets, fur-fringed cloaks and other finery who were rich, but those for whom they were made. Neither are the folk artists nor the makers of clothes in Miao society or the aboriginal craftspeople of Australia well-endowed. However, by using techniques and abilities that have taken that most precious resource of all, time, they continue to use their life essence to produce beauty in the world. And for that, they deserve our support.

In standing by an institution like the Philadelphia Craft Show, by attending it, and then by supporting the artists, by judiciously selecting an ornament, textile, or sculpture you can afford (or perhaps just a bit above your budget), you are fulfilling a new type of American dream. A dream where our limited funds are not continuously directed down the endless vortex of cheap, mass-produced items that must be replaced, but towards longevity, ingenuity and caring. While you are about it, attend your local farmer's market, if

JACLYN DAVIDSON



CORNELIA GOLDSMITH







you cook, or donate to an open source program, if you use the computer.

All of the artists in the show have been juried in because their craft is handmade, so whomever you choose is worthy. If someone's work calls to you, and you will know that sensation when you see it, then all the more power to you. Here is simply a small preview of some of these illustrious artisans.

Jaelyn Davidson is a frequent attendee to the Philadelphia Craft Show, and her work is a personal favorite, due to her use of an unusual material for jewelry, steel, as well as her sublime employment of natural motifs. Gold leaf is usually the term used to describe paper-thin sheafs of gold that provide surface decoration, but in Davidson's torque it is literally leaves of gold, delicately rendered ginkgo leaves that stand starkly against the blackened steel of forged metal.

Another longtime participant, Teresa Crowninshield Coburn has always offered a different strain of haute couture. Her silk and cashmere jackets and evening coats project the image of a fashionable businesswoman, sleek and sharp similar to those found in high-class department stores. However, what you will not find is the incorporation of East Asian surface design that she effortlessly blends into these chic outfits; nor will you find the handcrafted, consciously designed within that other environ.

The sweetgrass baskets of Mary Jackson are the result of a lifetime of dedication to tradition. This Southern handicraft lived for generations within black communities, and has artfully found its expression within Jackson's continuation of this legacy. Like Chinese porcelain, or Mexican Oaxacan animal carvings, African-American sweetgrass basketry is a crystallized artform that demands patience, attention, skill, and knowledge. Jackson fulfills all of these, and they can be seen in the tight coils of sweetgrass, the sublime curvature of the basket's form, and the gentle variegation of shades upon its surface. Jackson has already won innumerable accolades for her craft, and as readers may remember, an illustrious appearance on the PBS documentary series, *Craft in America*.

Stone in sculpture, stone in architecture. These uses for the earthen material are well popularized, but rocks in jewelry are a bit of a surprise. However, Andrea Williams transforms them into precious, simple beauty. By inlaying gold, glass and silver into beach and river stones, tumbled by nature itself into smooth surfaced gems, Williams creates wearable nuggets of harmony.

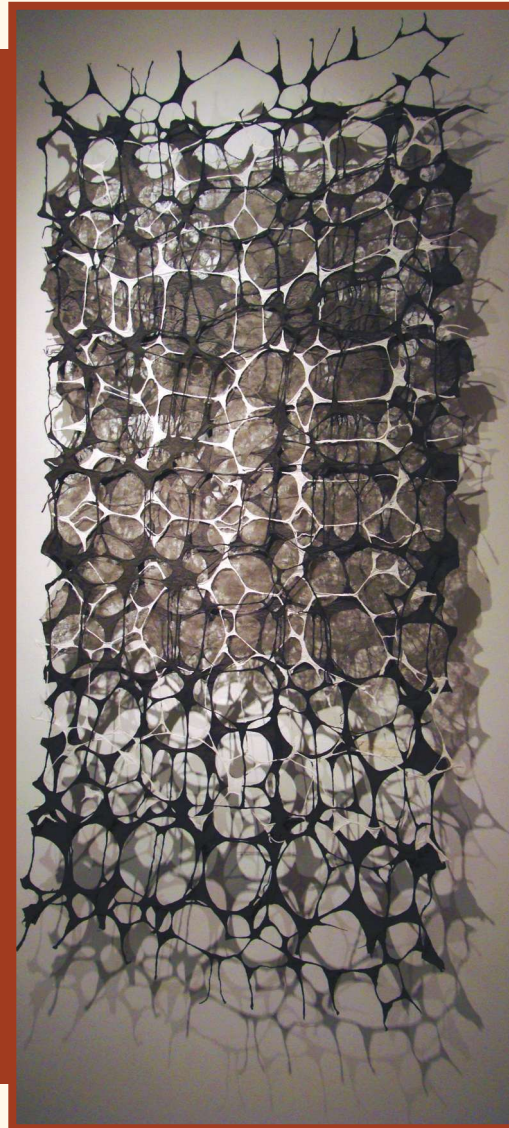
The work of Autumn Cipala, a first-time exhibitor, yields that delightful simplicity of pastel-shaded



BARRY NEWSTAT



NIELSEN & WORTHINGTON



DAVID NORTON

JIYOUNG CHUNG

porcelain. The elements of silk-like texture, rounded form and near-translucent shimmer of the glaze are a basic recipe, but a successful one.

Jiyoung Chung has taken the difficult path of paper sculpture, and exceeded the limitations of imagination through dedication to her craft. Using the Korean papermaking method of *joomchi*, Chung has moved from chromatic constructions to pieces that play with light and shadow to produce an ephemeral penumbra. This latest development is astonishing. While the effect relies on strong lighting to cast its magic against a wall, it is a very real, consciously orchestrated pronouncement by Chung. In their diaphanous interplay, black, white, light and shadow create a visual dance that is enchanting.

This responsibility of guiding American craft is shared between the nation's leading shows—and the Philadelphia Craft Show has been one of its most important curators. Through judicious selection and innovation, it has successfully found a way to balance two distinct roles; that of the conservator of the best mature artisans, as well as a place to debut the brightest of upcoming generations. If you are a visitor to the craft show, you are also involved in this process.

As you enjoy the peaceful and creative environment provided by both nature and nurture in Philadelphia, consider your role in it, and contemplate whether you can become an active participant. If so, make your choice wisely and judiciously, or on the other hand, passionately, intemperately and impulsively. ☞