

# CRAFT QUARTERLY

CRAFT



James Renwick Alliance

WINTER 2021



CRAFT AND  
EDUCATION

## FROM THE EDITOR



This issue of the Quarterly focuses on craft education, from university programs to international collaborations, and, of course, numerous initiatives produced by the James Renwick Alliance. Our cover image speaks to the important role that craft education has played during

the pandemic, as people from all walks of life learned to sew personal protective equipment alongside acclaimed craft artists. We felt it was important to showcase the face mask in this moment as vaccines are being distributed and our new national strategy for combating this virus is underway. We wish health and safety to all of our readers. - Jennifer Anne Mitchell

## JRA QUARTERLY

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Although significant efforts have been made to eliminate errors of fact, the editor apologizes in advance for any errors that may remain.

### JAMES RENWICK ALLIANCE

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The JRA Craft Quarterly is published three times a year by the James Renwick Alliance, an independent national nonprofit organization that celebrates and advances American Craft and craft artists by fostering education, connoisseurship and public appreciation.

## LEARN MORE

# WWW.JRA.ORG

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Next year, the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery will celebrate its 50th anniversary, and the James Renwick Alliance will celebrate its 40th anniversary. Although it's a year away, we're already making plans to celebrate both events.

As part of that celebration, the JRA has created the 50th Anniversary Acquisitions Fund. The Renwick Gallery curators have identified a wide range of new work for the collection, to fill gaps, to expand the range and scope of the collection and to add artists who are important to the future of craft. It's an ambitious list, and acquiring these works will help to cement the Renwick Gallery as holding the definitive collection of American craft.

The 50th Anniversary Acquisition Fund will support that effect. The JRA has a long history of helping to build the collection, including iconic pieces like Viola Frey's "Lady in Blue and Yellow Dress," Karen LaMonte's "Reclining Dress Impression with Drapery" and Nick Cave's "Soundsuit." Over the years, we've purchased or helped to purchase close to 200 pieces for the collection, so it couldn't be more fitting that we step in once again for the gallery's anniversary. And every dollar donated to the fund will go to acquisitions.

I'm excited to report that we've already raised more than \$30,000, thanks to dozens of generous contributions during Craft Weekend, but we still have a long way to go to reach our goal. You can find out how to contribute to the fund by emailing [jaimianne@jra.org](mailto:jaimianne@jra.org) or calling 301-907-3888. And look in your email, on social media and in future issues of the Quarterly for more news about this initiative and all of our other plans for the Renwick Gallery and James Renwick Alliance anniversaries in 2022.

J.G. Harrington

J.G. Harrington began his term as president in October 2020. He is special counsel at the global law firm Cooley LLP, was previously the JRA's treasurer and is passionate about broadening the Alliance's reach and support for craft in America.

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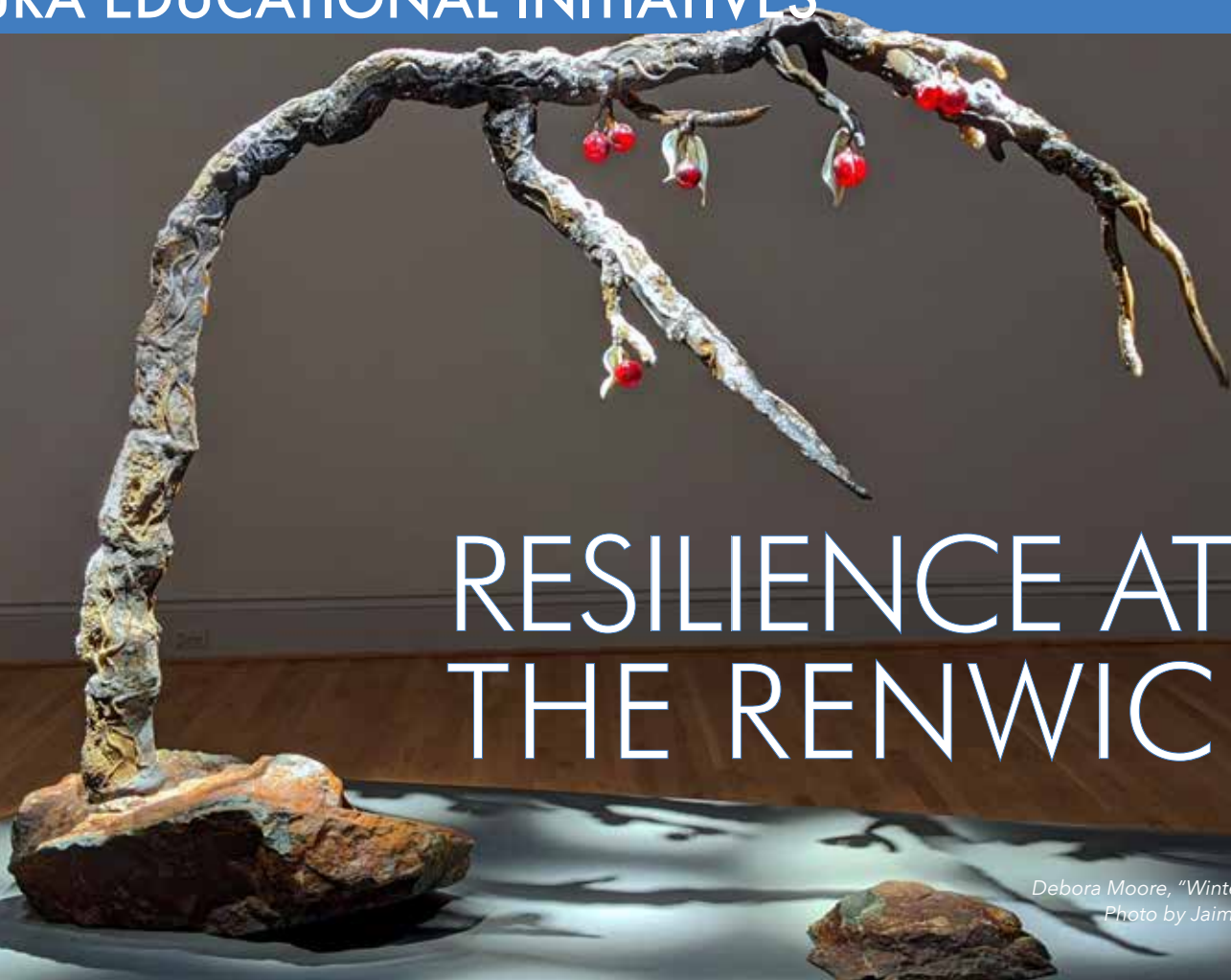
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Cover: Julia Kwon, "Unapologetically Asian," 2020. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Right: Viola Frey, "Lady in Blue and Yellow Dress," 1983, glazed earthenware, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the James Renwick Alliance.



## RESILIENCE AT THE RENWICK

Debora Moore, "Winter Plum," 2018.  
Photo by Jaimianne Jacobin.

### THE 2020 RENWICK INVITATIONAL FINDS NEW MEANING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Emily Zilber

Director of curatorial affairs and strategic partnerships at the Wharton Esherick Museum and guest curator of the Renwick Gallery's *Forces of Nature*

*Forces of Nature: Renwick Invitational 2020* was designed, installed and opened to the public in the midst of a global pandemic, although the theme and participants were selected before the world went into lockdown. The ideas and artists in this show developed new meaning as the world changed, and they are a testament to craft's ability

**4** to illuminate and offer perspective on even the most challenging moments.

When planning *Forces of Nature* in the summer of 2019, the exhibition's curatorial team (including Nora Atkinson and Stefano Catalani) quickly settled on four talented artists—Lauren Fensterstock, Timothy Horn, Debora Moore and Rowland Ricketts. For each of these artisans, nature is inseparable from craft. While each has a deep interest in the ways humans find meaning in the natural world, as well as a keen understanding that both nature and art are capable of reframing perspectives and



offering moments of release, they explore these themes using wildly different materials, techniques and installation formats. *Forces of Nature* focuses on just a few works from each artist—and in some cases just a single large-scale, site-specific piece—providing an immersive, meditative and powerful experience for visitors.

This exhibition structure also provided an unexpected benefit: reasonable social distancing in the galleries. Layout was just one of the ways the 2020 invitational had to adapt to COVID-19.

We found ourselves walking many new paths: coordinating installation timelines and schedules based on quarantine needs, test results and interstate travel restrictions; developing modes of virtual couriering and installation to minimize the number of people onsite; scrapping plans for an education space with materials to touch or books to peruse; and reconfiguring virtual versions of in-person experiences, including the opening event and conversations with each of the artists.

The pandemic also opened up new perspectives on the exhibition's content. Fensterstock's site-specific work "The totality of time lusters the dusk," made in 2020, is her first piece in a new series looking at the metaphorical capacity of weather and celestial activity. She constructed rain clouds and an ominous comet above a dark garden, setting each blade of paper grass or glittering black piece of obsidian, glass and crystal by hand. This landscape reflects research into how weather has been interpreted as a sign of divine intervention or used in various eschatologies (theories of the end of the world) across a variety of cultures. Fensterstock's installation is set within a series of white columns; it becomes a space to confront nature's capacity for otherworldly beauty alongside our inability to fully control it.

For the past two decades, indigo has been Ricketts' primary medium *and* subject matter. "Ai no Keshiki - Indigo Views," a work created in Japan, was adapted to the Renwick's galleries for this exhibition. It consists of 450 blue cloths, each faded by exposure, which become an arched curtain that brings to mind natural cycles of change and time. They are accompanied by a soundscape developed by Ricketts' longtime collaborator Norbert Herber, a musician and sound artist. Music is generated in real time in the galleries, using individual shades of blue to guide each tone. Inspired by this format, the Renwick design team worked with Ricketts to develop a lighting program that shifts in real



Lauren Fensterstock, "The totality of time lusters the dusk," 2020. Photo by Jaimianne Jacobin.

time in response to new global, national and local COVID-19 statistics. These collaborative elements deepen the work's exploration of beauty in the face of uncertainty.

Moore's tour-de-force "Arboria" is a human-scaled suite of glass trees. These remarkable objects emerge from large, natural stones and culminate in intricately rendered flora. They are full of beauty in contradiction: both strong and fragile, natural and fabricated, technically astonishing and seemingly effortless. Moore intended "Arboria" to offer room for respite and meditation, and our need for this kind of reflective space seems even more critical as the pandemic rages. Horn's gallery offers a similarly transcendent experience. His hybrid wall works link lichen and coral to baroque adornment and opulent blown-glass pearls, showing where nature and culture meet. We see the artistry and resilience of the natural world even as it is manipulated by human hands.

As of Nov. 23, 2020, the exhibition—and the whole of the Smithsonian system—has been closed to the public and next steps remain unclear. Just as bringing the show to fruition has been an exercise in managing and finding inspiration in uncertainty, so too can the precariousness of nature lead us down unexpected trails. Hopefully this enables more people to see *Forces of Nature*, whether through a virtual event, the exhibition's gorgeous catalog or in the galleries once they reopen.

Left: Timothy Horn, "Mother-Load," 2008. Photo by Jaimianne Jacobin.

# TRANSFORMATION AND EMERGENCE

Supporting emerging artists at pivotal moments in their careers is a core value of the James Renwick Alliance. Since 2016, the JRA has awarded the Chrysalis Award; the name is inspired by the transitional state (known as the “chrysalis”) of a butterfly or moth. The 2020 Chrysalis Award focused on ceramics and the \$5,000 gift to the winner was underwritten by JRA board member Rebecca Ravenal.

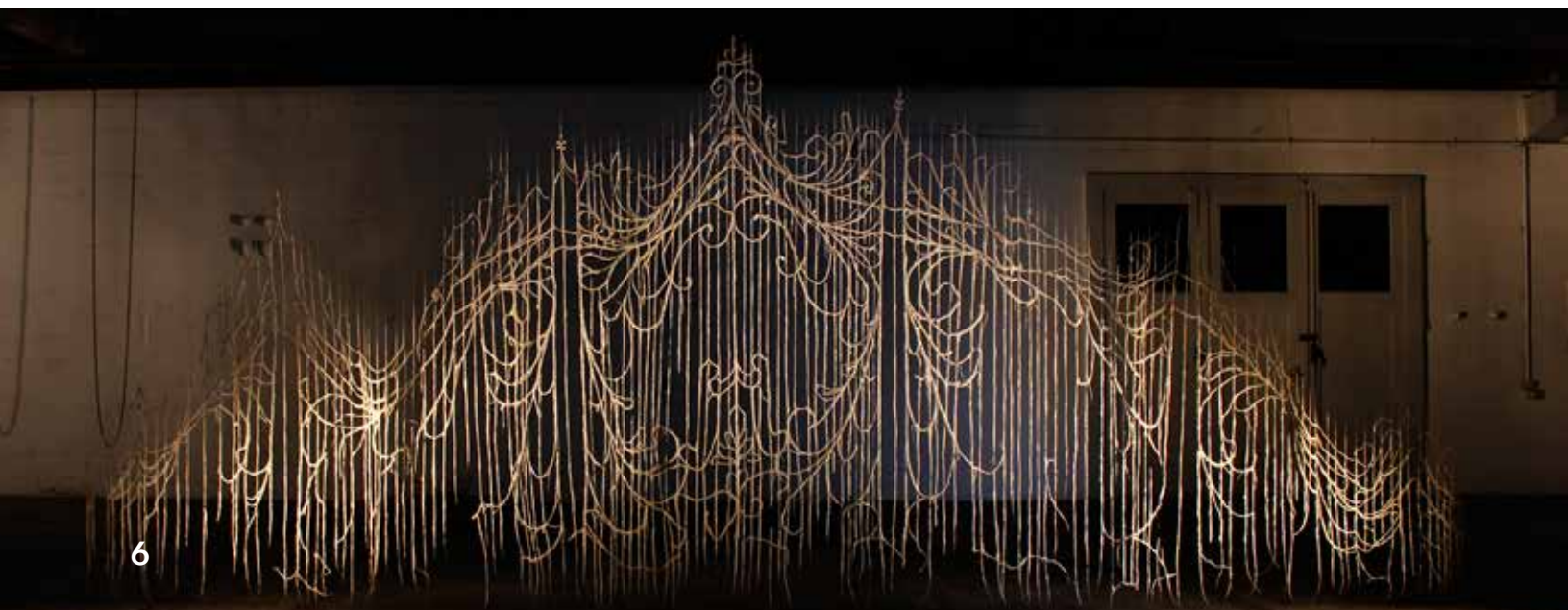
In total, the JRA gave \$8,000 for the 2020 Chrysalis. In response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the JRA raised an additional \$3,000 and provided an award of excellence. Three artists received \$1,000 each. The award and the funds help the artists extend their practice. In addition, the jury selected five artists for honorable mentions and—for the first time ever—the application fee was waived in light of the economic hardships that artists are facing due to the pandemic.

For the 2020 award, the Alliance received more than 100 submissions. The jury of three independent arts professionals was composed of Michelle Erickson, a ceramic artist and scholar based in Hampton, Virginia; Cass Johnson, a JRA board member



## CERAMICIST KATE ROBERTS WINS THE 2020 JRA CHRYSALIS AWARD

Michelle Manatt  
Immediate past president, JRA



and executive director of District Clay, a ceramic educational center and gallery in Washington, DC; and Ibrahim Said, a ceramicist and adjunct faculty member at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

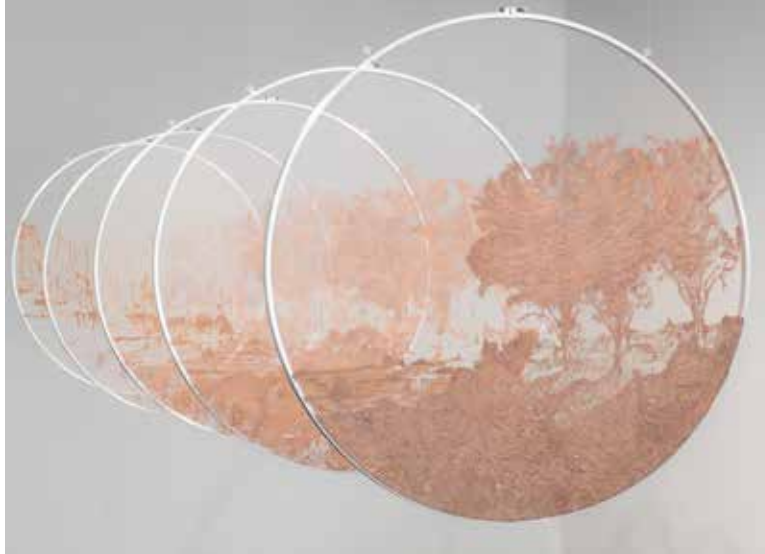
"The application process alone challenges artists to curate their work and articulate how their conceptual approach and material practice informs their unique artistic expression," said Erickson. "Just the requirement for artists to describe how award funds would benefit their career can help them focus on something often overlooked. For those who were awarded, the funds can be a catalyst for breaking out into areas previously inhibited by financial constraints and the honor of acknowledgement can create crucial momentum in advancing their career."

The 2020 Chrysalis awardee is Kate Roberts, who lives and works in Memphis, Tennessee. Her parched, cracked clay and vitreous porcelain that emulates states of decay in nature, yet are built and mended by hand, are the foundation of her work. "Kate Roberts' ephemeral landscapes and architectural features, whether captured in glass and wood or adorning other fabrications, abandon conventional notions of ceramic artwork to explore the medium as environmental," the jury explained. "Kate's perishable ceramic expressions earned her the distinction as winner of this award among the many impressive applicants."

Three awards of excellence were given to ceramic artists in different parts of the United States. Maxwell Mustardo works in New Harmony, Indiana; Eliza Au works in Lake Dallas, Texas; and Chris M Rodgers works in Charleston, West Virginia. Rodgers did an artist residency at the Clay Studio in Philadelphia during the fall of 2020. "I plan to use the funding to invest in tools, equipment and materials," he said.

The 2021 Chrysalis Award will be in the medium of metal. JRA member Stan Asrael has committed to underwrite the \$5,000 award. The applications for the 2021 award will open in May and be due mid August.

*Left: Kate Roberts, "Gate to Nowhere," 2017. Photo courtesy of the artist.*



*Kate Roberts, "Walking on Ghosts," 2019. Photo courtesy of the artist.*



*Gallery exhibition view. Photo courtesy of the artist.*

## KATE ROBERTS JRA CHRYSALIS AWARD PRESENTATION FEBRUARY 28

Meet 2020 JRA Chrysalis award Kate Roberts virtually as she speaks about her innovative use of the ceramic medium in untraditional, delicate forms.

# THE ROUGH POETRY OF LIFE



*Vessel by Ani Kasten. Photo courtesy of the artist.*

## CERAMIST ANI KASTEN SCULPTS CONTEMPORARY PIECES LAYERED WITH MEANING

Rebecca Ravenal

Ceramist, mixed media artist and JRA Distinguished  
Artist Series chair and board member

Ani Kasten's compelling combination of sculpture and vessel work stems from her formative experience in potteries in England and Nepal. Drawing on training in British studio ceramics, she then worked in Nepal for several years, helping to revive a flagging pottery tradition with some newer techniques. Kasten's cross-pollination with artisans of many cultures grew into her uncommon approach to working with clay, which developed further during her residency at ceramist Margaret Boozer's Red Dirt Studio in the Washington, DC area. Currently, Kasten has a studio on her farm in Minnesota. She will present programs on Feb. 27 and 28 as part of the JRA Distinguished Artist Series.

Kasten's pieces are tangible metaphors for the rough poetry of life, which feels especially relevant during these difficult times. Reflecting natural phenomena and human interactions, Kasten's works depict the inevitable collisions of opposing or attracting forces, which result in abrasions, ruptures, unlikely intermixes or happy meldings, all shown in her clay surfaces.

The uncentered shapes evoke a visceral response. Lopsided bowls with delicate torn edges nestle against each other gently, leaning on broken feet. Tall-necked bottles with black-stippled lips congregate in off-kilter clusters, like flightless birds. Fragments of seemingly mismatched pieces are patched together or stitched with wire, strangely



**8** *Ani Kasten with MGM National Harbor Casino commission.  
Photo by Pete Duvall.*





Vessel by Ani Kasten. Photo courtesy of the artist.

revivified into fascinating sculptures. Ceramic or plaster wall pieces containing scraps of wood, metal and other detritus command attention with strong lines and layered raw-edged slabs. By including discarded and broken bits in her work, Kasten says that she is building “something more whole and meaningful to address the pain and injustice in society.”

The artist combines commercial and “wild” clays that she digs and processes from various locales. Full of impurities, inclusions and stones, the different substances add visual interest and signal her deep connection to the earth, her chosen artistic material. She embraces a limited palette, which, unconstrained by decorative necessity, allows limitless exploration of form and content. The stark contrasts of black and white are bridged by myriad textures made by scratching, thickly layering slips, appliquéing multiple clay slabs, embedding coarse grit and debris, and purposely cracking the surfaces. Unexpected appendages appear, such as slivers of clay that jut out of the rims or wires that curl around the forms and up to claim more emotional space.

Recently, Kasten has begun to use more color. Perhaps in response to the wintry climate of her northern surroundings and the strife she sees in the world at large, she “wanted to infuse some joy” into her work. As she experiments with different chemicals, which display their true appearance only after firing, she feels like an “intuitive painter” trying to predict how the finished piece will come

together. By playing with color, Kasten says that she has “opened a secret sense I didn’t know I had.”

This work demands contemplation. Each piece is like a small ceramic lightning bolt: barge-like shapes freighted with meaning at the edge of articulate thought; dark orbs covered with crusty crawling glaze; a cluster of columns that complements the surrounding modern architecture while channeling the classic forms of long-dead civilizations. Her pieces are like ancient shapes unearthed, repositories of forgotten rituals that still retain their majesty and mystery, despite the decay.

Kasten’s ceramics visually encompass the current global mood. They evoke fragility and loss, but also convey strength and monumentality, an ability to outlast adversity and a dogged continuation of the rituals of daily life. They embody the importance and grounding of the elemental and our unyielding connection to nature and each other.



Vessel by Ani Kasten. Photo courtesy of the artist.

## ANI KASTEN DISTINGUISHED ARTIST SERIES FEBRUARY 27 – 28

Join ceramic artist Ani Kasten for a virtual Saturday workshop and a free Sunday lecture.

Learn more at [www.jra.org](http://www.jra.org)

# STATEMENT PIECE

## LEARNING FROM JULIA KWON AND KATE KRETZ'S THOUGHT PROVOKING FACE MASK ARTWORK

Caroline Kipp

Curator of contemporary art at the George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum, and JRA board member.

As the novel coronavirus pandemic sweeps the world, masks have become an iconic, singular symbol of this global moment. Presented with this new canvas for identity and expression, artists have taken the material of their time and created interesting, arresting and even playful responses. In their regular studio practices, Kate Kretz (a featured artist in the April 2021 JRA Distinguished Artist Series) and Julia Kwon are both politically and socially minded, and this is no exception when it comes to the masks they've produced.

Kwon's artwork is composed of traditional and hybrid Korean textiles in the format of object-wrapping cloths known as *jogakbo*, or more generally as *bojagi*. Often constructed of delicate silk, *jogakbo* is a type of piecework that can serve as a symbol of femininity, beauty and resourcefulness. Using this format, Kwon has adapted the textiles to the mask form, celebrating her cultural identity through overt display. She draws connections between what may be seen as a benign, domestic textile and subtly links it to the discrimination that occurs towards Asians generally and the more overt racism encountered during this moment of the coronavirus. Kwon routinely engages in community-based projects, such as collective quilting, and has extended this practice to her masks. Unlike Kretz, she has made multiples of the masks, which allows others to become active participants in the conversation and show empathy for the experiences of Asian people. Calling the

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Julia Kwon, "Unapologetically Asian," 2020.  
Photo courtesy of the artist.

series *Unapologetically Asian*, Kwon's work, in all its beauty and calm, is a reminder that understanding the particularities of how and why something is made can only add to the viewer's greater understanding of the work, the artist and the world.

Kretz's work, by contrast, is an active confrontation with this current crisis. On May 3rd, she posted her mask titled "Social Murder" on Instagram. This early adoption of the mask as 2020's version of the slogan T-shirt was precedent-setting, and predated what would become common through the protests that arose following George Floyd's murder on May 25, 2020. Kretz routinely employs text and "the language of oppression" that was used by the Trump administration to draw connections between the present moment and historic examples of fascism and racism. Using the visual culture of this regime, "Social Murder" and her other "Hate Hat" works employ counterfeit "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) hats as their reformed material. When asked about her choice of phrase "social murder," Kretz quotes German philosopher Friedrich Engels, who used the term in his 1845 book "The Condition of the Working Class in England" to describe actions of the bourgeoisie that lead to "a too early and unnatural death"

for proletariats. "And, to my mind," Kretz says, "it doesn't get more bourgeoisie than wanting other people to risk their lives so you can get a mani-pedi or a root touch up or some sushi." Through the reconstruction of appliqué letters from MAGA hats, the literal fraying of the seams works metaphorically for the moments we as a nation have reached during this ongoing, rolling, evolving crisis.

Both of these DC artists have formed masks that are constructed of pieced cloth, but visually this is where the comparison ends. One is fraying at the seams and speaks to the existential dread we've come to collectively live under; the other seeks to take leftovers and reconstruct the whole into something beautiful, and life-affirming. Kretz and Kwon represent a spectrum of reckoning. They took the moment, in all its complexity and totality and uncertainty, and condensed it into iconic objects. Placed side by side, these pieces actually help to deepen the conversation. They remind us that objects are not simply things. When made by smart artists, they can come to embody so much about our lived experiences and illuminate what we are not always able to articulate. These artworks make visceral the feelings and experiences that shape our days and our lives.

## KATE KRETZ DISTINGUISHED ARTIST SERIES APRIL 24 – 25

Join mixed media artist Kate Kretz for a Saturday workshop and a free Sunday lecture.

Learn more at  
[www.jra.org](http://www.jra.org)



Kate Kretz, "Social Murder," 2020.  
Photo courtesy of the artist.

# THE JOY OF MAKING

## THE CRAFT FUTURES FUND HAS UPLIFTED A WIDE RANGE OF COMMUNITIES DURING THE PANDEMIC

Juliana Rowen Barton  
PhD, American Council of Learned Societies Leading Edge Fellow,  
Center for Craft



*The Hand Medal Project. Photo by Maximiliano Rios.*

Over the past 10 months, the Center for Craft has distributed \$175,000 in one-time unrestricted grants through the Craft Futures Fund, offering critical support for efforts to serve, strengthen and foster growth in craft. “The coronavirus will impact craft communities in ways that we have not yet begun to understand,” said Center for Craft Executive Director Stephanie Moore. “As a national arts nonprofit with a nearly 20-year history of grantmaking, the Center for Craft has the unique opportunity to help the field nimbly respond during this pandemic.”

This new grantmaking initiative, made possible with the generous support of the Windgate Foundation, awarded more than 30 grants of \$5,000 each to individuals and organizations with craft-based education projects. For the purposes of this opportunity, craft education is understood through a broad and expansive lens, focusing on projects that share knowledge, skills and value through craft. In the wake of COVID-19, Craft Futures Fund recipients share common goals: to seed resilience, to foster community and to amplify impact.

**12** The Craft Futures Fund sought to recognize and invest in craft education projects that cultivate strength and sustainability

within the field of craft, supporting the work of established craft artists like Tanya Aguiñiga and schools like the Touchstone Center for Crafts in their efforts to promote community-driven resolve. After seeing the positive impact that working with clay had on asylum seekers at the border, Aguiñiga (represented at *Disrupting Craft: Renwick Invitational 2018*) started Ceramica Mariposa, a U.S./Mexico ceramist’s collaboration to build a clay studio at the most vulnerable migrant shelter in Tijuana. When the border closed this spring, the funding aided Aguiñiga’s transition to virtual clay classes that provide students, ages 2–70, with much-needed creative and emotional relief.

Through collaborations, workshops and lectures, the artist said her work underscores the ability of craft to transform civic life: “Using clay to discuss trauma, border and LGBTQ issues, [Ceramica Mariposa gives] our migrant communities a safe space to create in a world that has sought to erase them and an opportunity to direct their own narrative.” Touchstone Center for Crafts—a three-season craft school in Farmington, Pennsylvania—also received support to translate its in-person community workshops to a virtual platform, and used the opportunity to connect and develop stronger relationships with new audiences that it hopes

to welcome to its campus in the future. So far, Touchstone reports that the project has brought much joy to its communities. "In a difficult time, a difficult year, giving artists a platform to talk about the joy of making, the joy of their lifelong careers and the joy that our school has provided them through teaching, it reminded all of us about what is still good and inspiring and worthy and why we are so committed to the work that we do," said Lindsay Ketterer Gates, Touchstone's executive director.

By funding creative, collaborative and grassroots projects, the Craft Futures Fund has also worked to foster community. The Hand Medal Project, an early grant recipient, aims to bridge the craft and healthcare worlds during this unprecedented time. Organized by artists Iris Eichenberg and Jimena Ríos, the project enlisted over 3,000 makers in 66 countries to craft medals that honor the service and sacrifice of healthcare workers. The simple design in the shape of a hand is infused with the tribute of a medal and the gratitude of an Argentinian *ex-voto*—a votive to a saint in gratitude or devotion. "This singular hand design creates a collective voice," Eichenberg observed, "reinforcing the shared gratitude that is the project's mission." As of Nov. 8, 2020, 60,000 medals have been pinned on healthcare workers across the world as a symbol of collective appreciation.



*The Hand Medal Project. Photo by Maximiliano Rios.*

Educators Omolara Williams McCallister and Maya Valladares took a different approach to fostering community in their project. The pair are using their funding to fill a glaring omission in the digital space: Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant virtual instruction that provides a high level of quality and detail comparable to in-person learning, and featuring BIPOC craftspeople. In addition to teaching craft, they are trying to subvert the

dominant narrative of white culture in fiber and textile arts. According to McCallister and Valladares, their project "presents BIPOC craftspeople as the experts we are, imparting skills. This counters the normative depiction of BIPOC in crafts communities, which generally present us through an anthropological lens as objects or study."

Several Craft Futures Fund projects directly addressed the isolation that many marginalized communities felt as a result of the tight social distancing restrictions, from isolated seniors to queer and trans artists—all without access to community spaces. After speaking with her grandmother who lived in a nursing home, artist Julia Gartrell conceived of an outreach project extending out of her Radical Repair Workshop to target self-isolating seniors. Using oral histories and an exchange of repaired items and skills, her project gathers stories of repair and cultivates a social and creative outlet for this impacted community. "This project has been so joyful!" reported Gartrell. "I cannot understate the value of having an excuse to create deep and meaningful conversations during the pandemic."

Hannah Rubin saw similar isolation in the queer community in Los Angeles, particularly as the pandemic disrupted annual Pride celebrations. Engaging a group of clay-based queer artists, Rubin's project, "In Touch: Hand Building Queer Community During COVID-19," offered queer people of all skill levels the opportunity to build kinship with and through clay experimentation. Though the gatherings took place virtually, Rubin reflected that they felt very intimate and connected. "I could really feel through the computer that everyone had come because they wanted to be in relation with one another through a love of and curiosity with clay," they observed. "I've loved getting to ... bring more and more people into the exploration with me."

By investing in learning, sharing and thinking led by an expansive group of educators, the Craft Futures Fund and its recipients are engaging craft to meet societal needs and empower their communities.

# THE ART OF INNOVATION IN CRAFT EDUCATION

## AN OVERVIEW OF WARREN WILSON'S MA IN CRITICAL CRAFT STUDIES

Diane Charnov

Independent arts writer, JRA board member and 2019 Jentel Critic at the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts

*What is the role of craft in a disposable culture?  
Who cares about craft?  
What's the difference between a maker and a craftsperson?  
Whose stories can I tell?  
Why are we so attached to objects?*

These are just a few of the 101 questions that emerged in a workshop with artist and educator Lisa Jarrett in the only craft studies program of its kind in the United States. Warren Wilson College's MA in

Critical Craft Studies, located in Swannanoa, North Carolina just outside of Asheville, North Carolina, was founded in 2018 and graduated its first class in 2020. There, students pursue innovative research methods alongside archival research and experiential learning. They challenge the boundaries of craft as they examine modes of presentation from street fairs to museum exhibitions and seek to shape an inclusive field that Namita Gupta Wiggers, its program director, describes as "non-canonical and anti-racist."

Wiggers, alternately called visionary and revolutionary, brings an impressive background as founding program director. She is the former director and chief curator of Portland, Oregon's Museum of Contemporary Craft at Pacific Northwest College of Art, and a freelance curator, educator and writer. She is also widely known as the leader of the Critical Craft Forum podcast and online group, which includes over 13,000 Facebook members. As a curator, Wiggers excels at innovative programming. In the interactive exhibition *Touching Warms the Art*, visitors tried on handmade objects and over 1,600 images of the craft-adorned were shared on social media.

In the graduates' first publication, "Mapping Craft: This is how we meet," Wiggers welcome letter states, "Dear students ... our expectation is that you



14 Visit to the Western North Carolina Archives, Asheville, NC. Pictured here: Black Mountain College curricular materials. Photo by Lydia See, 2019.

will engage and further develop the core principles of the program by continuing to ask questions ... reframe the question 'what is craft' to ask 'which craft'... open a space for craft to be about objects and economies and folk craft, queer craft, studio craft, and more." Not surprisingly, Warren Wilson students' projects go far beyond academic papers. Their presence in the field takes the form of embracing new media and podcasts to curating shows with established institutions and new venues.

The program, with support from the Windgate Foundation, was initiated with the Center for Craft, its founding program partner. Students are paired with a diverse group of professors, mentors and makers. Many are well known to the JRA, from Glenn Adamson, former director of the Museum of Arts and Design and senior scholar at the Yale Center for British Art who addressed the JRA in 2016, to Sonya Clark, renowned artist and educator who was honored as a JRA Distinguished Educator in 2018, to Marilyn Zapf, assistant director and curator of the Center for Craft who gave a special presentation to the JRA in 2020.

"Mapping Craft: This is how we meet" is a refreshingly original compilation of craft writing and showcases how the graduates are poised to expand the field as makers, curators, oral historians and more. Chapters include interviews with studio kite makers in Massachusetts and essays on craft, place-making and regionalism in Southern Appalachia and Wyoming. The cover is printed in brilliant blue, a visual metaphor for a program that has developed a blueprint for an exceptional approach to craft studies. In other essays:

- Phoenix Booth explores therapeutic craft as he writes about the Peace Paper Project, which addresses trauma through the deconstruction and reconstruction of veterans' uniforms in papermaking.
- Sarah Kelly examines how North Carolina potters use tradition and innovation in craft. In the exhibition *Muddying the Waters*, which she curated for the Asheville Art Museum, Kelly looks at how craft tradition is augmented by innovation,

"especially in reaction to trends of marketability and ... inspired by practices ... far beyond regional borders."

- Woodworker Nick Falduto investigates craftsmanship and explores labor and material culture, examining "the choice to use a dovetail joint." He studies tool marks "left by the maker" and how they "can be analyzed as evidence of how, why, when, for whom, by whom it was made, and can open up new ways of understanding the craft of woodworking both past and present."

The final page of the book is fitting for such a unique program. It reads, "This publication can, and should, be reproduced in whole or parts without permission. Please print many copies on recycled paper, fold them into paper airplanes, and wing those from treetops and river banks." All readers interested in craft would be well-advised to purchase a copy and explore how Warren Wilson's MA in Critical Craft Studies is playing a vital role in the field.

*Pictured left: "Mapping Craft: This is how we meet" cover, Warren Wilson's MA in Critical Craft Studies, 2020.*

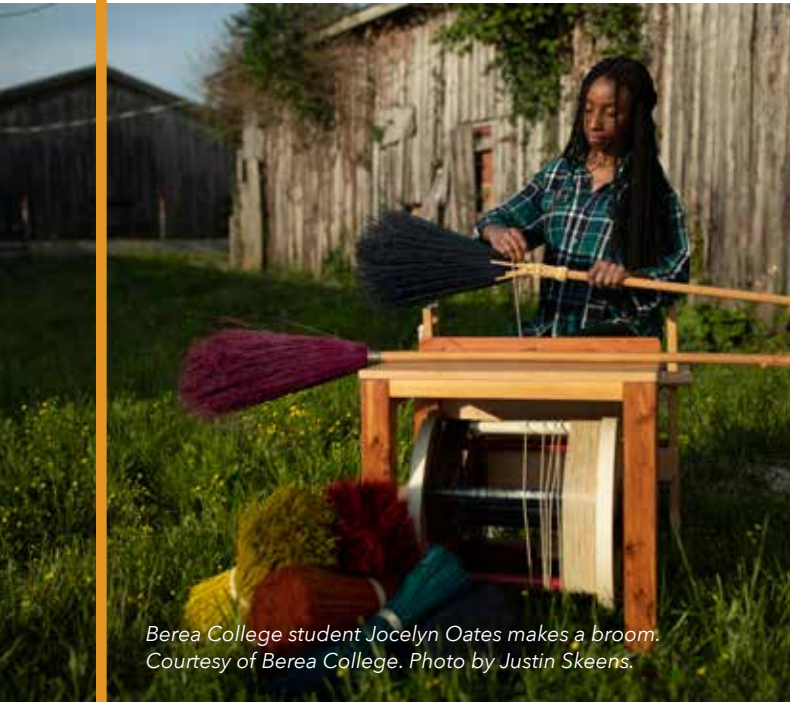
Go to [www.bookshop.org](http://www.bookshop.org) to purchase "Mapping Craft: This is how we meet." All proceeds from the sale of each publication go directly into a scholarship fund to support graduate students who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color in the Warren Wilson College's MA in Critical Craft Studies program.



*Workshop with Faye Junaluska and Louise Goings, Qualla Arts and Crafts, Cherokee, NC. Pictured here: Mellanee Goodman, Faye Junaluska and Amy Meissner. Photo by Lydia See, 2019.*

# THE CONTINUUM

## STUDENTS, THEIR CRAFT AND OUR DEMOCRACY



Berea College student Jocelyn Oates makes a broom.  
Courtesy of Berea College. Photo by Justin Skeens.

### DISTINGUISHED EDUCATORS AND YOUNG PEOPLE EXPLAIN WHY CRAFT EDUCATION MATTERS TODAY

Kelly McDonnell  
Day Eight arts writing fellow and  
managing editor of the Life section of  
American University's student newspaper  
The Eagle

On Dec. 11, 2020, the Los Angeles-based nonprofit Craft in America premiered "Democracy," an installment of the organization's ongoing PBS documentary series. It explored all that crafting encompasses and the overlap handmade items have with our systems of ideology and representation in America.

Craft in America was awarded the James Renwick Alliance's Distinguished Educator Award in 2020, along with esteemed professors Syd Carpenter; a ceramic artist and professor of

studio art at Swarthmore College; Warren Seelig, a mixed media artist and professor in the craft and material studies program at the University of the Arts; and Sondra Sherman, a jewelry artist and head of the jewelry and metalwork program at San Diego State University. All four awardees spoke about their personal teaching pedagogy and the work of their students during the October 2020 James Renwick Alliance Craft Weekend Symposium, moderated by Leila Cartier, Director of CraftNOW Philadelphia.

The PBS series adds to the conversation. "Democracy" teaches viewers about different communities and their artifacts that demonstrate how crafting is a form of expression and reconciliation with democracy. Students wove multicolored fabrics to express their emotions, at times of confusion, and conceived new forms of creation. War veterans used clay sculpting to heal from traumatic overseas experiences. Indigenous communities collaborated on pottery to document their cultures and histories.

In the episode, Joanne Hyppolite, a museum curator for the National Museum of African American History and Culture who wrote about Jessie B. Telfair's 1975 "Freedom Quilt" in the fall issue of the Quarterly, said crafting is "making a way out of no way." Some crafters like Telfair use their handy skills to address challenges of representation, oppression, collective action and personal identity. Universities are critical creative breeding grounds for young people who are reckoning with the world they're growing into and are hoping to impact through their artwork. For example, the thesis pieces of Masters of Fine Arts students at American University are featured in an online exhibition titled "Theoretical Dilemmas." Students used wooden dowels, oil paints and fabric in their crafts to interrogate their own identities and connections to society.

In one scene of "Democracy," Berea College student Em Croft is weaving a baby blanket. "Being a member of the LGBTQ community," she said, "it's really, really exciting for me to be in this space



at Berea where identity is not only accepted and supported, but I get to express that through the creation of this blanket.”

In an interview with the Quarterly, Carol Sauvion, the executive director of Craft in America and the executive producer of the organization's PBS documentary series, said it was crucial that this episode included students. “If we don’t have students involved, how will we go forward in the crafts?” Sauvion said. “They’re the continuum.” “Democracy” suggests that through their artistry, young people decide how their generation will express themselves in society. Sauvion not only said that the arts are crucial for democracy but also that education is crucial for democracy.

“Working materially is a political statement,” Seelig said in an interview with the Quarterly. “Young people respond to what they see and feel and what things look like and what kind of expression emerges from that work, whether it’s glass or whether it’s sculpture, whether it’s painting or whether it’s furniture.”

At the JRA Craft Weekend Symposium, Sherman emphasized the importance of access to craft education in K-12 schools. “Students learn other things while they are learning craft and making. There’s science. I’m always talking physics; I never had a physics class. They’re learning math. I call it visual geometry,” she explained. “It’s a way of different learners also having more access and maybe building more confidence across areas of education.”

Craft in America’s programming has brought crafting into LA middle and high schools with visits from professional artists who teach students what it means to craft. The nonprofit’s website provides teachers with lessons dedicated to developing both creativity and critical thinking skills.

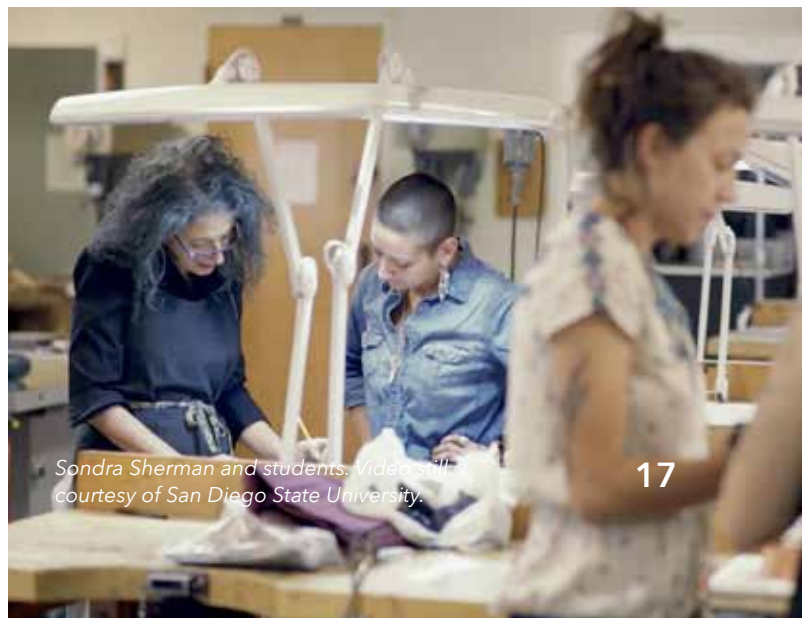
The most resonant point of Craft in America’s “Democracy” episode is that craft is collective. The episode highlights examples of how craft gives voice to groups that may have gone long unheard, like Native American veterans who are finally represented on the National Mall with the National Native American Veterans Memorial, which was designed with the input of Native American artists like Harvey Phillip Pratt (Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma).



*Syd Carpenter. Photo by Matthew Bender.*

Carpenter said art enables self-identification. “When there are issues that the student wants to grapple with, problematic situations that might arise, groups form ... They want to find visual ways to express to the community what their feelings are,” she said in an interview with the Quarterly, recalling her students making posters and drawing on sidewalks with chalk.

Through the creation and presentation of art, students are taking democracy into their own hands. “They’ve seen it throughout history, how art has been used as a source of information and a source of expressing ideas and values,” Carpenter explained. “They want to be artists.”



*Sondra Sherman and students. Video still courtesy of San Diego State University.*

# CRAFTING A CROSS-CULTURAL JOURNEY

The Kala Chaupal Trust is a nonprofit based out of Gurgaon, Haryana, India with an objective to promote the arts, culture and environmental sustainability by working with artists around the world and in India through collaborative projects. The Trust was incorporated in May 2018 and is helmed by JRA Distinguished Artist Helen Frederick as an organizational curator.

The journey for the Kala Chaupal began in the summer of 2016 when Frederick and Shanti Norris, a curator and the former executive director of the DC nonprofit Smith Center for Healing and the Arts, visited India. They participated in Jaipur Kala Chaupal 2017, an art festival that celebrated the crafts of Rajasthan and the water conservation that is woven into the cultural fabric of the state. Frederick gave the festival its curatorial title, “Our Body and

## A LOOK AT THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF CRAFT ART

Leenika Jacob  
Managing trustee of The Kala Chaupal Trust

*Pictured Right: Cheriya Plate. Courtesy of Sai Kiran, Cheriya artist in Telangana.*



Hands in Water,” and officially joined the Kala Chaupal Trust. Norris has informally supported the Trust’s activities.

The Kala Chaupal Trust has continued to work with Indian crafts and artisans during COVID-19. The organization has pivoted to launch a craft marketplace called ShopChaupal that supports artisanal livelihoods through craft histories and cultural narrations. Most of the crafts are geographically tagged to the region of birth and practice as a way to protect their uniqueness and originality. For example, Prabhat Kumar Mahatao and the artisans of Seraikela created a prototype of a Chhau mask as personal protective equipment. The mask is made the traditional way, layering paper mache, cloth and clay, with an additional three-ply fabric used inside to cover the nostrils.

The artisans that the Trust works with throughout India highlight local techniques like bandhani, a tie-dye technique practiced in Gujarat and Rajasthan. “Traditionally, we all did block printing, batik



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*Helen Frederick with her paper installation for “Our Body and Hands in Water.” The artwork incorporated sand from the Pushkar region of India to represent the dry nature of the area. Photo courtesy of The Kala Chaupal Trust.*

and bandhani—three forms of resist dyeing,” says Adil, who creates his designs along with his wife, Zakiya. Both artists learned their crafts from family members whose knowledge was passed down over generations. “Taking these as bases, we add new ideas to take our art forward.”

Another traditional artform is the Cheriya mask. It is made with sawdust, tamarind seed paste and natural colours. They are a modified version of the Nakashi art, distinctive to the Cheriya village, of the Warangal district in Telangana. Wandering storytellers used painted Cheriya masks to build intrigue for the gathered crowd in any festival and to tell religious stories and folklore.



The Kala Chaupal Trust also works with contemporary artists worldwide through collaborative projects with local craftsmen in India. One such collaborator is Paula Sengupta, an associate professor specializing in graphics at Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata. Her recent projects focus on forced migration and the resultant physical and psychological displacement in the Indian subcontinent and its immediate environs. One of her artworks, “The Camel’s Path,” was created with natural and pigment dyes, appliqué and embroidery on cotton cloth. She incorporated elements that are native to the water-sensitive Jaipurian craft traditions, and worked with Raj Kanwar of the textile manufacturer Ojjas.

“Appropriating the pictorial language of the Shekhawati frescoes, I created a picture map of the migration from this dry, arid region, plagued by a paucity of water, to the rapidly industrializing city of Kolkata in fertile Bengal, where water flows in great abundance,” Sengupta explains.

Moutushi Chakraborty, an alumna of Wimbledon School of Art in London, has also collaborated with the Trust. Her work “River Chronicles” is a paper collaboration of painted and printed handmade paper scrolls made of cotton rag. It was made with Kagzi, a craft collaborator in Sanganer, Jaipur.

“The River is revered as a Goddess in this country,” Chakraborty notes. “People bathe in her to wash off



Male Chhau mask by a dancer and artisan from Seraikela in Jharkhand and the Kalamandir NGO. Photo courtesy of Prabhat Kumar Mahatao.

their sins and become purified. They pay obeisance to her and yet remain oblivious to the fact that the Goddess, too, needs nurturing, caring and cleansing.”

In 2019, a tropical cyclone, Cyclone Fani, hit the shores of the artistic village Raghurajpur, Puri. A Patachitra painting by the artist Kirtan Das was acquired by Norris and displayed at the Inova Schar Cancer Institute in Annandale, Virginia. Her purchase supported the artisans in the crisis. Survival of Indigenous crafts is indelibly linked to the sustainability of art, culture and environment. Age-old craft practices and techniques inspire a new learning daily and are chronicles to the civilisations and their cultures.

Female Chhau mask by a dancer and artisan from Seraikela in Jharkhand and the Kalamandir NGO. Photo courtesy of Prabhat Kumar Mahatao.



# SAVE THE DATES

## FEBRUARY 2021

- 2/27 Ani Kasten Distinguished Artist Series Workshop
- 2/28 Ani Kasten Distinguished Artist Series Lecture and Chrysalis Award presentation with Kate Roberts

## MARCH 2021

- 3/4 Coffee & Conversation with JRA Chrysalis Awardees of Excellence
- 3/14 Pewabic Pottery Tile Tour
- 3/20 Distinguished Artist Series Workshop with Claire Oliver Gallery
- 3/21 Bisa Butler Distinguished Artist Series Lecture

## APRIL 2021

- 4/10 Tour of the Capitol Grounds with curator emerita Barbara Wolanin\*
- 4/24 Kate Kretz Distinguished Artist Series Workshop
- 4/25 Kate Kretz Distinguished Artist Series Lecture
- 4/29 – 4/30 Craft Study Tour to Washington DC

## MAY 2021

- 5/1 Collection Tour with Carl and Jan Fisher
- 5/11 A Vision for Contemporary Textile Art with Caroline Kipp

\* All events are hosted online, unless marked with an asterisk



Berea College student Mary Beth Mullen in the Broomcraft Shop.  
Photo courtesy of Berea College.

## MEMBERSHIP

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