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The University of Hawaii Art Gallery Honolulu, Hawaii

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Pat Hickman Curator

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March 7 to April 16, 1993

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The University of Hawaii Art Gallery is proud to join in celebration of the Year of American Craft through the presentation of *Baskets: Redefining Volume and Meaning*. The exhibit features the work of eleven contemporary artists whose admiration for craft traditions permeates their thought and creative endeavors.

While many people have worked to make this exhibition a reality, it is Pat Hickman, associate professor of art at the University of Hawaii, whose vision and dedication is most appreciated. I am indebted for her assistance in coordinating details of the exhibition and the accompanying workshops and lectures by many of the artists.

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In conclusion, I want to thank each of the artists who, through their work and participation, have made *Baskets: Redefining Volume and Meaning* possible.

Tom Klobe
Director
The University of Hawaii Art Gallery

Very soon after I joined the University of Hawaii Department of Art in 1990, the Gallery Committee generously supported my proposal for an exhibition of baskets. I am particularly indebted to Tom Klobe, director of the University of Hawaii Art Gallery for his encouragement and support, and for his expertise and hard work. I thank him especially for his unfailing commitment to quality in all aspects of the exhibition which made this experience the greatest pleasure of my curatorial journey. Sharon Tasaka, associate director of the Gallery, was significantly present and extremely helpful in coordinating the many details related to the exhibition. I thank Gail Hovey for her care in editing my essay for the catalogue.

Most of all, I thank the artists for their artwork. The wonder of personally opening the shipping crates and unwrapping these new works was a remarkable experience for me. It completely confirmed my belief that extraordinary work is being done in fiber and that this work deserves to be seen by the widest audience possible. It is a great pleasure and honor to bring this exhibit to Hawaii.

Pat Hickman
Curator

Baskets:
Redefining Volume
and Meaning

by Pat Hickman

Many of today's most adventurous artists are working in three dimensions. *Baskets: Redefining Volume and Meaning* brings to the state of Hawaii a major exhibit of innovative fiber art by Dorothy Gill Barnes, Joanne Segal Brandford, Lillian Elliott, John Garrett, Linda Kelly, John McQueen, Norma Minkowitz, Ed Rossbach, Hisako Sekijima, Claudia Stafinski, and Katherine Westphal. They are among the artists engaged in experimentation and exploration, and their search culminates in redefinitions of form and the attendant meaning. They create objects that we have not seen before. Yet what they make, these works of art, are usually referred to by a humble, everyday word: "baskets."

Are these objects baskets? What does it mean to call them baskets? And if that name no longer fits, what will replace it?

The work in this exhibition clearly shows that material and process—associated with basketmaking—are important to these artists. But form and content are also essential. Concern for material, process, form and content as part of the whole is the result of an evolutionary development that has grown and matured over the last twenty years.

Traditionally baskets have been functional objects: containers for eggs or berries, for bread or picnics, fishing creels, work baskets, storage baskets, carrying baskets, cooking baskets. Specific household baskets for sewing, laundry, and flowers are part of our individual experience. Through museums or international import stores, we may know of ceremonial gift baskets, game baskets, dance baskets, beer strainers, or trays for winnowing. Some basketry techniques such as plaiting, coiling, twining, and wickerwork are familiar to us, as are particular basketry materials such as stiff reeds, branches or bark. But what does all this have to do with the art in this exhibit?

"Basket" is not a word easily abandoned. Many contemporary basket makers struggle with the word. They do not want to forget or disassociate themselves from the origins of the techniques used in their work. More than that, some American artists identify the baskets of disparate peoples and cultures as a major source of ideas and inspiration. For example, a *Taj Mahal* basket from India of complex plaited structure or an Alaskan *Yup'ik* history basket with its integrated meaning are not just objects "existing passively in the past," to use art critic Lucy R. Lippard's phrase.¹ They are alive, challenging the artist to engage in a give and take with peoples and cultures from many times and places. Respect for a long tradition and for recognizable baskets wonderfully made is part of the life of many fiber artists.

Since the 1970s, there has actually been a quiet revolution in the fiber field. Through university or art school fiber programs, a variety of fiber skills, among them non-loom basketry techniques, were acquired by several of the artists in this exhibit. Fiber students had access to textile study collections. Often these were stored in natural history, anthropology or ethnography museums and contained examples of textiles and baskets gathered from around the world. These collections were studied carefully, not as an anthropologist analyzes, but as an artist sees. Students were excited by

techniques, materials, color, scale, and the unexpected juxtapositions created by people playing by different rules.

According to Ed Rossbach, widely recognized artist, writer, and influential teacher, the origin of baskets as an art form lies in handweaving. Through *Baskets as Textile Art*, 1973 and *The New Basketry*, 1976, Rossbach, whose work appears in this exhibition and whose thoughts on baskets are included in this catalogue, opened up the fiber field for a whole generation of artists. He suggests that the "new" basketry is the result of observation of both textiles and baskets, and that it grew out of the experimentation involved with making textiles using traditional textile techniques.

Fifteen or twenty years ago, artists began manipulating flexible and continuous weaving yarns into basket shapes. Many of those early baskets lacked rigidity and had uncertain form. They were limp, soft, and floppy. But freed from the loom and the labor-intensive, slow process of loom weaving, students, as Rossbach observed, were off and running. The challenge of form, as the work in this exhibit so well demonstrates, has now been resolved.

Strong fiber programs across the country continue to offer students a wide range of courses: loom weaving, non-loom techniques, surface design, textile history, wearable art, advanced two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. These and other techniques and methods may now find their way into contemporary baskets. What has happened to baskets is not, then, a straight continuum, not simply an ongoing development growing out of traditional baskets. A "quiet revolution" may sound exaggerated, but that is how it feels to those involved in basketry.

Experimentation with an unlimited range of techniques and materials is accepted and encouraged in fiber arts in the 1990s. Mixed media artists

feel at home here. Openwork textile techniques such as sprang, looping, netting, knotting, and crochet—never used in traditional basketmaking—are the methods used by a few contemporary basket makers including Brandford, Minkowitz, Westphal, and Sekijima. Others such as Garrett with his use of aluminum cans or Barnes in her *Millcreek Willow* devise completely new, individually invented methods to make baskets. What is it when twining, plaiting, metal staples and plastic rivets are all used to hold things together?

Many of the other artists in this exhibition continue to use the very traditional method of plaiting. But Stafinski violates her own plaited surface by cutting right through it. Rossbach sometimes covers his plaited forms with a paper skin. Elliott combines basketry techniques or materials with textile needle techniques in her *Embroidered Rattan*. Elliott, Rossbach, Stafinski, and Westphal travel effortlessly from fiber to drawing or painting, back and forth. They, along with the other artists in this exhibition, move from fiber to sculpture with as much ease.

In this context, baskets have been reinvented, redefined. This exhibit brings together and celebrates the result of this creative explosion and focuses on the challenges and experimentation of the eleven artists who are at the forefront of the three-dimensional work presently being done in fiber. The work in this exhibit raises questions and breaks with the past, with the familiar and the expected, with what we thought we knew a basket was. Are these objects baskets? Can baskets be art?

The recent death of composer John Cage brings to mind the profound challenges an artist can present. Early in his career Cage offered a performance that confronted the audience with four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence. Another time, he altered the piano, changing the

instrument's traditional percussive sounds. He welcomed surprising sounds—street sounds and sounds of tug boats—as part of his compositions. What was this "music?" Some angry critics said it was not music at all; it was chaos.

Reminiscent of Cage's challenges to the definition of music, these eleven contemporary fiber artists challenge the definitions of baskets and art. The work shown here demonstrates the integrity and, in several cases, the monumentality of this art. These artists create abstract compositions of constructed volumes and planes. They consider interiors and exteriors, exits and entrances. Structural problems are solved. Forms evolve. The notion of meaning and imagery, often figurative imagery, has become of central importance.

Rossbach draws Greek figures on his baskets in playful reference to classical Greek pots. Brandford creates a reclining figure, a breathing basket. Kelly, Stafinski, and Minkowitz also create forms with obvious visual reference to the human body. Kelly speaks of ordinary posture and position. Minkowitz more aggressively captures human gesture and emotion. In her *Silent Effort* there is identification with the caged bird. This work is sober, evoking loneliness, isolation and despair.

Some of the work speaks of what is extinct or endangered in the natural world. Rossbach, and later, McQueen have made reference to buffalos. Minkowitz's *I Am the Land* speaks of the earth, of human presence and the relationship to the land. Other imagery suggests nostalgia or longing for, or visual reference to, a previous place and time. Elliott does this in *Cistern Column*, Rossbach in *Blue Knight*. There is a desire for escape and adventure, to know the unknown in the work of Garrett, *Midway/Wheel of Fortune*, and *Hellsgate* by Brandford. At the same time that there may be looking back, as in Brandford's *Parfleche*, the artists embrace the present, engaging in our own

place and time. Westphal playfully delights in the current decade and its material products in *Wesing at Guilin* and in *Baroque Palace for Pink Dinosaurs*. When traveling, whether in China or Vienna, she sketches, creating a journal of visual ideas that often translate into three-dimensional form. Nearer to home, in *Aaron's Fish* she responds to a specific reference—a legendary pet goldfish.

Titles of artwork in this exhibit clearly indicate individual artist's hopes and vision, particularly Minkowitz's *Like the Tree She Grows Again*, and sometimes, as in her *Dream Series*, a connection between the real world and dreams. There are formal concerns in Elliott's *Converging Lines*, linear elements defining volume, and pleasure in color in *Refractions* and *Sunsets*. There is exploration of form in Elliott's work and in Rossbach's *Upright Column* as well as in Kelly's monumental forms. Rossbach enjoys structure for structure's sake in *Structural Image*. There is tremendous variation in the methods of communication: imagery, text, constructed color, applied color, a focus on form or line, on structure or on surface design.

The work of these artists confronts the contradictions, the dilemmas of the end of the century. In an age of high tech, they work with their hands. All of their work, in different ways, raises questions of time, how it is used, what matters, what is temporary, what is spontaneous, what endures.

In comparison with traditional sculpture that is expected to last for decades, even centuries, this work can appear fresh, playful, effortless, fragile and temporary. Because of this, the work can have an urgency about it, that it is to be taken in now, paid attention to immediately. These works are no longer containers or vessels for familiar objects as baskets used to be, but conveyors of the aesthetic values of individual, contemporary artists.

The work of these artists shows evidence of an ongoing search. What are these artists making? Can we call them baskets? The overused clichés that surface—"basket case" and "underwater basket weaving"—still burden the field of fiber. Too often the word basket has meant craft, meaning second class citizenship in the art world.

These dilemmas bring to mind Rossbach's direct response to earlier attitudes regarding fiber art. In "Rossbach in Context," from the catalogue *Ed Rossbach: 40 Years of Exploration and Innovation in Fiber Art*, Nancy A.

Corwin and Rebecca A. T. Stevens talk about his use of the image of Mickey Mouse. "The irony of a pop image on an elegantly crafted textile makes

Rossbach's vision very much in tune with Postmodernism and its use of

contradictions." Rossbach turned around the tedious stereotypes and playfully made them his own.

"... They refer to the classes that you teach as Mickey Mouse classes, and everything is just dismissed as 'It's Mickey Mouse' So

*I put a Mickey Mouse on baskets and the most elaborate textile—I wove Mickey Mouse in double damask. I did him on ikats"*²

But the dilemmas remain. And the term persists. In the catalogue of his recent exhibition *The Language of Containment*, John McQueen says there is

an advantage for him to call his work baskets rather than sculpture. McQueen

came to fiber from sculpture. He says, sculpture,

*"... because of its place in the hierarchy of the fine arts, has more rules, requirements, and preconceptions. The advantage of having baskets ignored by modern western culture is that baskets are allowed to be whatever I want—the rules haven't been determined."*³

Lucy Lippard, writing about McQueen in *The Eloquent Object*, (1987),

said, "Containers or not, I would call them sculptures . . . if there were any

reason not to call them what they are—baskets."⁴

"I work to continue and extend basket tradition. Another artist in this exhibit, Joanne Segal Brandford, says : I do not copy the old baskets, neither do I use traditional techniques and materials; rather I explore this form, this idea, and push it as far as I can. . . . Baskets are often linked to domesticity and smallness, the implication being that these qualities preclude significant art work. I could counter with basket-shrines made for ritual, or I could point to house-sized baskets (used, indeed, as houses), and so I could 'elevate' baskets with religious significance or architectural scale. But all such uses/meanings refer to our humanity, and consequently to ourselves and to our families, to life and to death. What can be more meaningful for an artist working in fiber, than to honor the

Yes, but what are we to do with the work shown here, of Norma Minkowitz? Minkowitz thinks of herself as a sculptor. Writing of her work,

Patricia Malarcher says, ". . . neither her materials nor the web-like fabrics she crochets connote basketry," yet she is allied with the basketry movement. "Within these forms, which she regarded as both 'trap' and 'shelter,' she dealt symbolically with issues such as the fragility of existence and the thin web that separates life and death."⁵

Isolation and marginalization are constant companions of the fiber world. It would be nice to be able to agree with John McQueen, that it allows for greater freedom. But it also allows for fewer exhibits, fewer critics addressing this work, fewer reviews, less interaction with other artists, less money for work and growth. Other marginalized artists, mostly women and minority artists of color—within and outside of fiber—know too well the double edge of such so-called freedom.

The subject Lucy Lippard explores in *Mixed Blessings, New Art In Multicultural America*, is suggestive of the problems faced by fiber artists. Lippard argues that the disappearance of boundaries, and they are disappearing and being tested, is both exhilarating and deeply challenging to the mainstream art world that is still dominated by the limitations of "high" or "fine" art and elevated art that discourages communication among certain mediums and minorities. Lippard says that modernism opened art up to a broad variety of materials and techniques as well as cultures. This wider, more open definition of art means seeing art differently and that some of the most substantial art produced today is being created by minority artists.

Fiber artists are among those who have been treated as minorities creating "minor" art. Their minority status is based on the association with "women's work" and the dominance of women in the field of fiber art. And it is, to a large degree, the focus on materials and process that has relegated basketmaking to a second class art. Generally speaking, when a painter buys a tube of acrylic paint in an art supply store, it is an entirely different experience from that enjoyed by a fiber artist buying or collecting and preparing bark or reeds for construction. For the fiber artist, the materials are expressive and the process matters in a way that is significantly different from that of the painter.

Imagine for a moment the artistic process. To oversimplify for the sake of brevity, the artist begins with a concept, a vision. The artist selects materials and techniques. The process involves elimination, organizing and reorganizing, standing back and looking critically. While the process differs tremendously for each artist, and for the medium and piece involved, limits are always present. And whatever they are, they are resisted. The artist pushes as hard as possible against them, using every ounce of ability and potential.

The eleven artists in this exhibit have stretched and pushed against the limitations of the word basket. Unlike traditional baskets, much of their work cannot be characterized by well-defined bottoms or expected openings. They are pushing themselves beyond the basket form. But into what?

The work in this exhibition demonstrates that material and process are only half the story. As much as any sculptor or painter, these fiber artists are grappling with form and content. But since this new three-dimensional artwork has developed with closer ties to basketry than to sculpture, the name basket endures. To call this work "baskets," is to emphasize process and material. To call it "sculpture" is to emphasize form and content. But for fiber artists, process and materials, and form and content, are always essential.

The hope is that these works will provoke a lively exchange of dialogue among artists and critics, teachers and students, curators and the larger audience—a conversation which will finally reveal the name of this new work. It needs to be a name that maintains the connection to a complex and rich past and also expresses the engagement in exactly the same concerns addressed by other artists in other media. Sculptors and mixed media artists working in stone, metal, wood, glass, ceramics, and fiber are all grappling with form and content, and image and meaning in this last decade of the twentieth century.

That is exactly what is demonstrated by the works in this exhibit. Call it art. Call it sculpture. The ideas addressed in these works are no different from the ideas addressed by all visual artists.

What is new and fresh is that baskets in their form and meaning—as in the work exhibited—have truly been redefined. A name for this new work must be found, a name which catches up with what has happened. Or it must be called and accepted as sculpture by both fiber artists and sculptors. This exhibition,

Baskets: Redefining Volume and Meaning, is evidence of the assertive leap that has been made in the field of three-dimensional fiber art. And if the name is as yet elusive, the work itself can be confronted critically. It can be appreciated and celebrated.

1. Lucy R. Lippard, *Mixed Blessings, New Art in Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 11.

2. Nancy A. Corwin and Rebecca A. T. Stevens, eds., *Rosbach: 40 Years of Exploration and Innovation in Fiber Art*, (Asheville, North Carolina: Lark Books, 1990), 134.

3. Vicki Halper and Ed Rosbach, *John McQueen: The Language of Containment*, (Washington D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 22.

4. *Ibid.*, 11.

5. Patricia Malarcher, "The Vessel Form." *Fiberarts*. 19, no. 1 (Summer 1992): 25.

*The Walls
Come Down:
The Crafting of
Art in America*

by Laurel Reuter

Two changes mark the beginning half of twentieth century art: first, the art center shifted from Europe to the New World, from Paris to New York. Second, abstraction came into full bloom. An additional development unfolded during the latter half of the century that further altered the course of art history: the "crafting of art in America." Between the middle and the end of the twentieth century, craft materials, craft techniques, craft ideology and craft makers invaded and subsequently democratized contemporary art. By 1950 New York had become the unchallenged center of the commercial and critical art world. It was not until the commercial center dissolved in the 1980s recession that the larger population realized that the creative center had already been decentralized for more than two decades. Not only had the creative center been decentralized for a long time, creative life had become democratic. Just as the center didn't hold, the traditional hierarchy that placed painting and sculpture at the top collapsed. The crafting of American art inevitably spread across the Western art world, and like most movements, it was a *fait accompli* before most observers even noticed.

Even while exhibitions such as *Baskets: Redefining Volume and Meaning* flourish throughout the West, there are those who still resist art's

democratization, maintaining that the hierarchy of the arts based on media is unassailable. Centuries ago art patrons—the European upper class and its cohort, the Christian Church—decreed that painting and sculpture were the noblest art forms. Even democratic America accepted this legacy by relegating to second class all art forms except painting and sculpture. Then one day the Berlin wall outlived its usefulness even to its builders. It crumbled. The world watched in astonishment. Years had been spent chipping away at the foundation from both sides, yet no one really believed that the wall would one day just come down. Within the span of a few days the seemingly unassailable bricks and mortar were reduced to collectibles, to souvenirs. The wall was smashed not by war but by a protester in one place, a small movement anchored in will or belief somewhere else, a breath of freedom that swelled unchecked in another place.

The chipping away at the art world began in the first half of the century with the Bauhaus, with Sonia Delaunay, with Picasso and Braque and their invention of collage, with Duchamp and the Dadaists. Each of these artists, or groups of artists, infused the art world with unexpected challenges. Each made outrageous claims: the design of a textile was worthy of the same attention as architecture. A quilt might become a painting. A work of art is anything the artist chooses to call a work of art. These artists nicked away at the old ideology. They set the stage for the 1960s with the anti-war protesters demanding a new moral order; the women's movement with its conviction that women could make art from the materials and techniques they knew from domestic life; the hippies with their tie-dyed clothes and macramé wall hangings, their rope sandals and their experiments with mind-altering drugs; and the Peace Corps, which internationalized significant numbers of a whole generation. The battle against "all that was and might be" began in earnest. Creative activity in all media, considered revolutionary in the beginning, soon became standard throughout the United States. Only the New York gallery

system, supported by museums with curators from the old guard, failed to notice. This entrenched blindness dissolved into silliness when in April of 1992 New York University sponsored the "first major conference on criticism in the craft arts" and invited Clement Greenberg to be the keynote speaker. The organizers could not have found a speaker less attuned to crafts than this modernist critic who staked two decades of critical work on the premise that any artist not painting abstractly was working in a minor mode.

As "the future that was" ceased to exist, great change swept the art world. Ceramic superstars claimed their work akin in both value and intent to that of their fellow painters, the Abstract Expressionists. Fiber departments opened at leading universities, and the *Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie* in Lausanne, Switzerland, became the movement's showcase. By the mid-sixties Ed Rossbach was advancing the idea of basketmaking as a legitimate fine art to artists and students in the San Francisco Bay Area. By the late 1970s Japan had established an art glass movement. Women challenged men for gallery space—and began to earn recognition. The American Craft Museum became the glittering New York venue for exhibitions from this vital, burgeoning world that, almost without exception, thrived outside New York.

Not surprisingly, evidence of disease in the old system of assigning value to art by technique and material became first apparent in the ill health of the American Craft Museum. During the eighties it floundered. The diagnosis varied; the canon of artists exhibited was too small. The endowment was insignificant. The Museum needed a new building, a showcase, and they built one. It was time for new management and they hired a new director. They also brought a new curator on board—and a good one. They sandwiched a shop into the entrance foyer of the new building that was already looking rundown. They closed the lower exhibition space and converted it into a temporary and uninviting video room. The exhibitions began to resemble reruns of earlier

exhibitions—or worse yet, exhibitions at museums all over New York. The role of the American Craft Museum as the alternative museum of fledgling and neglected art forms was being subsumed.

Across the street, in the winter of 1990, the Museum of Modern Art showed the cotton-muslin embroideries of Kiki Smith in its "Projects Series." They were the most interesting textiles seen in New York all season. A few months later MOMA invited Kyoko Kumai, a Japanese artist known for her work in fiber, to create a large installation. Both MOMA and the Metropolitan Museum of Art added significant numbers of contemporary "crafts" to their design collections. The Los Angeles artist Mike Kelly exhibited his crocheted dolls and rugs in the *Whitney Biennial*. The American Craft Museum was co-opted by every museum in town. As the century comes to a close the museum faces a severe identity crisis: how will it define itself in a "united Germany," in a world where "craft" shares equal stage with "fine art?" Because the Museum has served point for the whole field of crafts (more so than any crafts museum in the country including Washington D.C.'s Renwick Gallery and Textile Museum), its future is the bellwether of the larger crafts field. Will the American Craft Museum become a contemporary decorative arts museum? Will it become the center for the preservation of traditional crafts? Will it fold? The artists who gave it reason for existence have gone on making their own art, with little sympathy for the schism they created in the old craft world, having long ago dismissed the idea that craft and art need to be separate entities.

Basketry played a seminal role in the crafting of art in America, in large part because of the movement's stellar leaders, Ed Rossbach and catalysts such as John McQueen who followed. Both men are quintessential, private artists. Neither wanted to do anything but pursue a focused existence that would include his own vision of art. That they found their individual voices

through the ancient craft of basketry was happenstance. Both took readily available materials, thought through their ideas, and taught themselves whatever techniques they needed to realize their objectives. Both found honor in the making of baskets, but both understood that all baskets are vehicles for the ideas of the time and culture from which they come. As artists they understood that craft could be a means to art, but not in itself be art. Art came when intellectual intention was given form. The contemporary basket movement was strengthened in that McQueen and Rossbach harbored the best attitudes available to artists: they valued their own vision more than recognition from the official art world and so did not compromise themselves to the market. These were remarkable men seeking to make art from the materials they found at hand—McQueen finds his in the woods; Rossbach in the waste basket. Because of deep-seated security in the rightness of their choices, they made their baskets without apology. Rossbach pioneered basketry from everyday materials based on present day culture. A generation later McQueen pioneered the creation of sculpture through basketry techniques and traditional materials. Today a John McQueen basket is installed beside a Cy Twombly painting at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. Today an Ed Rossbach basket is hard to come by because the artist liked to keep them for himself, as one keeps the pages of one's diary or sketchbook intact. Only in recent years have they begun to appear in the marketplace on a regular basis.

Two other artists spring to mind as the counterparts of McQueen and Rossbach—Patrick Dougherty and Martin Puryear. Their art is equally informed by the basket but they were the artists on the other side of the wall, chipping away at the traditional hierarchy, insisting that one could craft great sculpture.

Dougherty uses basket materials and techniques to create monumental shelters and abstract presences that activate space. He became an artist when one day it dawned on him that he was an artist. His master's degree was in

hospital administration, but by choice he was a stay-at-home father, building the family house, caring for the children while his wife nursed. Upon seeing his North Carolina home, people would exclaim, "But you are an artist." One day he went to hear visiting artist Martie Zelt lecture. Zelt is known for her mixed media works in which she incorporates both fabric and printmaking techniques. Dougherty noted that she began her working life as a trained seamstress who continues to sew her works together. He asked himself, "What do I already know that I could transform into art?" He answered himself, "I know how to build with wood."

Today Dougherty builds site-specific installations from the natural materials he finds nearby. For example, in August 1990 he went to the North Dakota Museum of Art to create an installation. He spent the first few days gathering truck-loads of swamp willow. Then he went on to build three shelters, or baskets of gigantic proportions, one earthbound, the next ten feet into the air, and the third twenty-five feet into the upper reaches of the soaring gallery space. He built them to flow one into the other like a grand series of connected tree houses. The work was enhanced by the aroma of freshly cut trees that filled the museum for several weeks. Like all basketry, Dougherty's work is known through the senses before it is translated into intellectual experience. Ordinary people, including most artists, respond to it warmly; critics steer clear.

Somewhere buried in the contemporary thought systems of those who subscribe to hierarchies in art is the belief that technical naïveté underlies serious intellectual work. Well-crafted art is somehow not substantial. This charge was given voice by Roberta Smith who damned Martin Puryear's sculpture for its "excessive craftsmanship."¹

Martin Puryear is singular among American sculptors in his desire to build with wood and to do so as skillfully as the master woodworkers he encountered

as a Peace Corps worker in Sierra Leone in West Africa (1964-66). Like the artists in this exhibition, Puryear understands that the concept of "making" is different from fabricating and producing. Just as contemporary basket makers place value on the making process, Puryear takes pleasure in his fine

craftsmanship. In truth, he demands it in his work. As Robert Storr writes, *"The care [Martin Puryear] lavishes upon piecing together and embellishing his work harkens back to*

notions of artisanal integrity that stir an uneasiness in those for whom the unmarked boundary between art and craft represents persistently problematic reality.

Puryear shares that uneasiness neither in principle nor in practice. Quite the opposite, he manifestly enjoys the freedoms afforded him by the lack of any certainty about where one domain ends and the other begins. He has in fact dedicated his time to filling in and so enlarging the no man's land which joins them with markers that further confound attempts to fix an exact frontier. If any criterion adequately resolves the distinction between "fine" and "applied" art, it is probably one based upon a division of "useless" from "useful" objects, to which former category Puryear's sculpture would appear to belong. Except, of course that things addressed to or accommodating of the "spirit" are only considered

"useless" in societies such as ours which take a narrowly

At the core of Martin Puryear's work is the search for a place, a container, *materialist account of experience and need."*²

a resting spot for the inner spirit. Whether a box, a cone, a pole, a circle, or a yurt, Puryear is creating or activating a space apart wherein the human spirit can rest quietly. Elegant in their simplicity, and without personal narrative, they remain human—a perfect synthesis of any number of the baskets in this exhibition. Over the years Puryear actually made basket forms with basketry techniques including his 1989 rattan and gumwood work, *The Charm of Subsistence*. That same year he was selected to represent the United States

at the *São Paulo Bienal* where he won the grand prize. Shortly after, he was awarded a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Prize Fellowship—America's most prestigious and most lucrative honor, and one that is awarded without nod to the commercial gallery system. The crafting of the art world became even better recognized.

The Italian artist, Mario Merz, on the other hand, with his igloo shapes and his masses of brush and twigs, is still fabricating his work, still assembling and amassing. Although he utilizes the materials of basketry, his work lacks the necessity of material and the insistence of the hand in its construction that so align Dougherty and Puryear to McQueen and Rossbach. A Dougherty installation or a McQueen basket demands from the time of inception the materials of basketry; a Merz igloo could be constructed of almost anything. Yet Merz is indebted to the crafts movement, and to basketry in particular, for insisting that art can be made from any material. He is also indebted for his eclectic materials to artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, one of the early explorers of mixed media, the most prevalent trend in all of present art making.

Through hindsight it becomes possible to see the first cracks in the wall between art and craft in the work of two artists who came to mainstream prominence in the latter half of the sixties: Eva Hesse, today an art world icon, and Frank Viner, an artist who has slipped into obscurity. In 1966 Lucy Lippard included them both in *Eccentric Abstraction* at the Fischbach Gallery. They appeared together in *Abstract Inflationism/Stuffed Expressionism* that same year at the Graham Gallery. Both were interested in exploring non-traditional and industrial materials. Hesse's preference for wrapping, binding and layering aligned her with basket makers—although no one recognized it then—and gave rise to accusations that her work was too close to crafts. Hesse, with her interest in the expressive use of materials, in the organic, and in the sensory edge, felt a particular affinity between her work and that of Frank Viner.

Always drawn to art that was ambiguous, Viner created a powerful body of work that he called *Spirit Catchers*. Even back in the late sixties and early seventies, Viner, a New Yorker, created art that was full and dense. It developed against the grain when painting and sculpture were becoming increasingly minimal. Unfashionably out of step with the times, created from humble and ephemeral materials, Viner's objects and installations remain eerie and intelligent.

According to John Bernard Myers in his 1981 exhibition catalog, *Tracking the Marvelous*, Viner's work "borders on what might be termed 'craft.' The use of anything near at hand from rags to raffia, from shells to string, from fabric to paper produces arabesques of complication which would delight the Eastern Muslim."³ (Viner had lived in the Middle East, especially Turkey, and was to be forever smitten with that part of the world.) Myers included a *Spirit Catcher* in *Tracking the Marvelous*, a giant, tubular, enclosed basket form made by stretching silk over an armature of wood, reed and wire and embellished with paint and more reed and wire.

Twenty years later artists who never heard of Frank Viner are still creating his kind of art from sticks and stones, from cloth and bones. Most notably, basket makers Lillian Elliott and Pat Hickman worked collaboratively in the 1980s stretching gut over wooden armatures to create asymmetrical forms that come alive when engulfed with light. Because both artists came out of the contemporary basket tradition, they considered these baskets. About the same time Carol Hepper began to tan hides in order to stretch them over structures made of bones she had collected on the Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota where she lived. Her three-dimensional floor pieces allowed light to pass through them, thus revealing their structure. She was trained as a sculptor so she viewed them as sculpture. All three artists shared an affinity with Eva Hesse's experimentation with latex, an impermanent material noted for its ability

to conduct light. Although their forms are both sparer and cleaner than Viner's installations, all three artists are indebted in essence to Frank Viner's *Spirit Catchers*—even though they might not have known Frank Viner's work.

According to Lippard, "Viner was permanently omitted (from the art world), probably because his ideas were too fantastic and his materials too garish, not chicly drab enough."⁴ One can speculate that had he lived further from the New York scene, and in California in particular where he might have found support in the emerging contemporary fiber field, his work might have had a better chance of taking hold. As it was John Garrett emerged from the California fiber world over a decade later to pick up Frank Viner's torch.

His art seems outlandish at first sight. No one is better at fashioning glitz into garish glamour than Garrett. Yet as one spends time with his work it becomes subtle, dark, and probing, even as it remains witty, gay and light. The desire to investigate the human psyche is another tenet absorbed by basket makers from mainstream art. John Garrett, a master of psychological investigation, makes some of the most satisfying art being made in the basketry world—if one can define "satisfying" as continuing to hold one's attention long after the first encounter. Garrett makes art of the first order whether it be in the form of baskets or room-size installations.

To visually illustrate the crafting of art in the Western world, one only needs to place a series of objects in a row: *Europakugel*, a Mo Edoga entry in the 1992 *Documenta* in Kassel, Germany; *Thicket* the 1990 Martin Puryear work that appeared on the February/March 1992 cover of *AmericanCraft* and reappeared on the cover of the July/August 1992 issue of *ARTSPACE*; Hisako Sekijima's *Untitled* 1992 kudzu vine basket; and *A Body of Sticks*, John McQueen's 1991 willow basket.

The shapes of all four works echo one another, and all four embody techniques or materials aligned with basketry. Even scale is similar as the basket makers begin to take on the larger scale of sculptors just as some sculptors are taking on the materials and techniques of the basket makers. It must be remembered that there are no one-way streets in the movement of ideas. Mainstream art has affected basketmaking even as basketmaking has participated in the crafting of America. The walls come down on both sides.

Sculptor Patrick Dougherty builds large-scale basketry architecture rather than containers on a human scale. Mo Edogo created a second work for *Documenta*, a twenty-foot non-Euclidean tower of driftwood lashed together with plastic rope. For this exhibition McQueen, Claudia Stafinski, Joanne Segal Brandford, and Linda Kelly have all made baskets "as large as a human figure." Although historically basketmaking techniques were an important means in early architecture, the expansion of scale is a new development in contemporary basketmaking, one that stems from the modern-day urge to value large works of art. Scale was the last frontier for basket makers, the only condition left unchallenged in defining what a work of art must be to be called a "basket." (The idea of container was done away with some time ago. For example, a Norma Minkowitz figure can be called a container only if one accepts the human figure as a container which "contains" the human innards.)

California, a land unto itself, saw the birth of basketry as an art form in the twentieth century—with Ed Rossbach serving as midwife—in part because California was ripe with cross-fertilization by the great basketry traditions of both Asia and the American Southwest. Almost all of the early practitioners of basketmaking as a contemporary art form were women. These were educated women, exposed to many cultures, wanting to make baskets but also wanting to make art. Their work was matched by artists from the mainstream art world, artists like Patrick Doughty, Martin Puryear, Eva Hesse and Frank Viner who

opened the door for the materials and techniques of basketry to be accepted as appropriate materials for "high art." The crafting of art in America, however, has been notably quickened by the rapid internationalization of the Planet Earth—not just California. It was significant that the only work influenced by basketry in the above mentioned *Documenta* (other than that of Mario Merz) was by an artist from Africa, Mo Edoa, a Nigerian physician who now lives in Mannheim, Germany. As artists from the Third World join the mainstream of Western art, and they are at an escalating pace, they will bring their own ideas about making art. Those ideas will be rooted in other cultures, in other hierarchies where the art of basketry floats closer to the top.

1. Roberta Smith, "Around Town." *Village Voice*. 29, no. 36 (September 4, 1984): 85.
2. Neal Benezra with an essay by Robert Storr, *Martin Puryear*, (New York and Chicago: Thames and Hudson, and The Art Institute of Chicago, 1991), 131-132.
3. John Bernard Myers, *Tracking the Marvelous*, (New York: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, 1981), 77.
4. Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 137.

*Some Random
Thoughts About
Baskets*

Excerpts from an
unpublished manuscript
THOUGHTS ABOUT BASKETS

by Ed Rossbach

BASKETS AS ART

It seems to me that contemporary artists who undertake the making of baskets become involved (whether intentionally or not) in extraordinary evocations and resonances, in problems of commonness, foreignness, distance, nearness, persistence, impermanence, as well as the conventional problems of materials and construction techniques.

All the meanings and associations that have accrued to the concept "baskets" are to be acknowledged and dealt with. Throughout the basketmaking process the artists keep defining and redefining, inventing and reinventing.

In making baskets, contemporary artists relate themselves to artisans of the past and to the constructional/aesthetic problems that concerned them. Beyond that, they relate themselves to all of today's other artists—painters, sculptors, and the rest—who are reacting to the modern world and creating that world.

Dealing simultaneously with tradition and innovation, basket makers produce works that are often paradoxical and seemingly anachronistic. Yet, I suppose, all of today's art can be so interpreted.

PUGET SOUND BASKETS

A few days ago I received a small book about Indian baskets of the Puget Sound area of Washington State. The book lies on a table beside the chair where I often sit to drink a cup of coffee. I idly leaf through the illustrations and read a few sentences. I imbibe the baskets along with my coffee.

For more than thirty years I have owned a couple of these baskets. Now I discover that one shows a pattern of flounders while the other shows interconnected rectangles identified as starfish. I am glad to know. I had been enjoying these images without knowing, without reading the symbols. Maybe knowing adds another dimension to my appreciation. But maybe it diminishes it. I don't know. Certainly it encourages a different kind of appreciation, or a different way of looking. Still, I was content without flounders and starfish.

Anyway, Puget Sound baskets, especially the imagery or symbols that appear on their surfaces, are in my mind. Gradually I sense a relationship between these traditional figures and those that I incorporate, one way or another, into the baskets that I make. This awareness arises slowly from a kind of meditative looking at the Puget Sound images while, at the same time, thinking of the images that I choose for my own works. Vastly different visual representations appear together in my thinking, becoming superimposed, or becoming one, or at least becoming somehow alike.

I believe that images in baskets occur out of responses to shapes and materials and construction techniques, and also out of intentions brought to the basketmaking, and out of preoccupations that might seem to have nothing to do with basketmaking. Something happens in the conjoining of images and physical matter. Baskets acquire new meanings, and so do the images.

An artist using the same images over and over creates his or her own traditions. Such images function as potently on a personal level as tribal images function on a group level.

BASKETS WITHOUT UTILITY

Non-utilitarian baskets are not something new. Yet always before now they existed in conjunction with the utilitarian baskets of a culture. They were

similar to the utilitarian baskets, but more refined, more highly decorated. The most skilled basket makers were selected to make the most prestigious works. A clear distinction between utilitarian and non-utilitarian probably was not recognized. The meaning of one was intimately related to the meaning of the other. There were the sumptuous non-utilitarian gift baskets of feathers and beads, just as there were the useful baskets with only a few feathers and a few beads. Both kinds of baskets carried spiritual meaning. There were presentation baskets impeccably worked to satisfy a society's most rigorous aesthetic demands while exhibiting features that evolve from utility. At the same time there were useful baskets of vegetal materials scarcely at all transformed by the manipulation of basketmaking.

Today's art baskets can be perceived as existing in conjunction with the constructions of cardboard and plastic that are replacing baskets. The art can be thought of as arising from baskets remembered and also from all the utilitarian packaging and crating which characterize our society. They can be seen as raising the cardboard/plastic substitutes to expressive levels, with meanings and associations growing out of contemporary life. They can also be interpreted as essential reactions to the disappearance of baskets; as such they are expressions of deeply felt loss. They can be regarded as the products of a familiarity (for the first time in history) with all the baskets and other art objects made throughout the world and throughout time—creating new conditions in which art basket makers work.

INDIAN BASKETS

Anyone who thinks about baskets as art must sooner or later consider Native American baskets. They are the ones that appear most frequently in American museums, secure in relation to other works of art, acknowledged to be the finest art expressions of entire cultures.

Without our being aware of it, Indian baskets have established standards for contemporary basket makers. They define all baskets. Regardless of how free a person wants to be in thinking about baskets—what they are, and what they can be—the Indian baskets are somewhere in his or her mind, to be dealt with. They are irresistible antecedents of anything a maker of baskets will do. They infuse today's art baskets with a resonance, a sort of re-echoing of meaning that is ancient, obscure and mysterious.

MORE BASKETS AS ART

The intention of artists who make baskets is to make art without limiting conditions. Their baskets are, like all works of art, expressions of ideas through art means. Yet being a basket, even being called a basket, imposes qualifications no matter how non-specific—so vague perhaps as to be no more than a reference to baskets as objects—a reference which only the artist comprehends. A basket as a work of art is linked to all baskets, even the most utilitarian, ordinary, and anonymous, while it stands apart as the work of a specific artist at a specific time, as something exceptional and unfamiliar.

PUYALLUP

I first started teaching school almost fifty years ago in the small town of Puyallup, Washington. I had room and board in a large Victorian house at the edge of town. The building was set squarely on a flat piece of ground surrounded by acres of holly trees in neat rows. The holly had recently replaced hundreds of berry bushes that had been cultivated there for many years.

The woman who owned the house had been born and raised there. She occasionally spoke of the old days when Indian migrant workers came through to pick the berries. Every year the same families appeared to camp somewhere on the property. They brought with them small baskets that the women had made over the winter. Throughout much of her life this landlady had bought the baskets, which she kept in a china closet in the living room. The entire closet was filled with little brown baskets, all remarkably similar in appearance, and all appearing ancient. One day the landlady sat before the china closet and removed the baskets one by one to show me. With care and affection she held them while she spoke. To her they were all quite individual. I am sorry to say that at that time the baskets themselves were of little interest to me although I valued the reminiscences.

The baskets were like those in museums across the country, set in cases out of the way where people seldom approach them with interest or affection. And yet, there they were. More and more I am moved by Indian baskets—even the most inconsequential items that turn up in antique stores along with other discarded knickknacks—perhaps those baskets most of all. Even in my own

house, in the midst of all the objects that I love and feel so comfortable with, the Indian baskets seem removed—they speak silently of emptiness and loss.

ADAK

Toward the end of World War II, I spent a year with the Army on an island in the Aleutian chain. Everything about this island and the whole vast panorama of distant islands, was moist, glistening with water reacting crazily to flashes of sunshine which unpredictably broke through the fog that was propelled by violent winds.

Sometime during my stay on the island I began drawing rainbows. I had brought a small pad of paper and a set of colored pencils. In the evening I would sit on my cot, the way we all used to sit to write letters. No one needed to know that I was drawing. My rainbows were fractured, suspended, incomplete, hovering over grassy hills and distant volcanic cones. Sometimes they appeared amidst hillsides of flowers, and other times over windswept grasses. Sometimes parka-clad men, leaning into the wind, were shrouded in fog transformed into rainbows. Sometimes the rainbows hung over scenes of pink roses on what I knew was a grave. Roosevelt had just died, and the emotions aroused by this frightening event had to be expressed indirectly.

Remembering those drawings now—so delicate and pretty on their little sheets of paper—I think of Aleut baskets. Years after the war I first saw the baskets in a museum, and was astonished by their delicacy of color and the refinement of their workmanship. I remember them as patterned in pink and pale green on backgrounds of dried grass. So fine, the constructions seemed formed of threads. The island's wild harshness seemed, for the Aleuts and for me, to have promoted expressions of mildness and control. Our works, their baskets and my drawings, were highly ordered, understated, and mild—even precious. The Aleuts in their almost underground dwellings, and I in my Quonset dug into the mountainside, with all the windows blacked out against air raids, preoccupied ourselves with small refined works that speak poignantly of the human condition, the human potential, the will to create.

Thinking about the Aleutian experience I realize that for me few memories remain. On the rare occasions when I have been able to hold an Aleutian basket, I have felt a sudden connection with a landscape and a time that I can

never again directly experience. It is as though the grasses which created the Aleutian landscapes so totally, have been wondrously transformed for me into more than baskets (although baskets would be enough). They have become objects beyond comprehension, holding emotions and awareness, not in any great flash of recollection, but more in a quiet savoring of things long ago. Such times I am reminded of the Indian baskets that my landlady collected and preserved in her china closet and which she sometimes used to hold, lovingly, one by one.

METAPHORS

Now that the writings of Henry David Thoreau are so well-known and so highly regarded, especially the account of his reclusive life at Walden Pond, it is difficult to believe that he had trouble getting anything published, and that what did appear in print caused little stir. When he died he left a pine box (which he had constructed himself)—a sort of coffin filled with his failed writings and his thirty-nine notebooks of daily jottings.

In telling about his manuscripts, Thoreau narrates the story of a strolling Indian. Seeing . . . *his white neighbors so well-off that the lawyer had only to weave arguments, and, by some magic, wealth and standing followed, [the Indian] had said to himself, I will go into business; I will weave baskets; it is a thing I can do, thinking that when he had made the baskets he would have done his part, and then it would be the white man's to buy them. [The Indian took his baskets to the house of a lawyer. The lawyer didn't want any.] 'What!' exclaimed the Indian as he went out the gate, 'do you mean to starve us?' [The Indian] "had not discovered that it was necessary for him to make it worth the other's while to buy them, or at least make him think that it was so, or to make something else which it would be worth his while to buy. I too had woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture, but I had not made it worth any one's while to buy them. Yet not the less, in my case, did I think it worth my while to weave them, and instead of studying how to make it worth men's while to buy my baskets, I studied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them. The life which men praise and regard as successful is but one kind. Why should we exaggerate any one kind at the expense of the others?"*¹

For me, the metaphor takes over. I keep wondering what the baskets were that Thoreau had in mind—what they looked like, what they were made of. I become too interested in the predicament of the strolling Indian. I think of the migrant workers who made baskets over the winter in the Pacific Northwest. There is such a continuity to the desperation.

Thoreau's metaphor that I had paid little attention to when I first read it many years ago, has acquired special meaning for me.

But then, everything that a person read when he or she was young is different by the time he or she is old. The world's culture, including baskets, keeps being recycled to satisfy new needs. Meanings keep altering. How could Thoreau dream that one hundred years or so after he died, someone would be more concerned about his strolling Indian and his baskets than about Thoreau himself and his writings?

BASKETS AND UTILITY

Baskets, that are not intended to satisfy any utilitarian purposes, yet perpetuate utilitarian features. They show handles, supports, legs, closures, eccentric forms borrowed from some long forgotten time when such features were devised for utility. These features appear in contemporary baskets—as Proust says about literary style—to strengthen “by a tradition that lies concealed behind them.”² Such survivals, vague and uncertain as they may be, allude to vanished ways of living. They operate with peculiar, undeniable force. According to Proust such survivals evoke feelings “pensive and secret.” Such vague references to past times determine and intensify the non-utilitarian basket. This is a curious phenomenon.

THE FLAG BASKET

I have a small covered basket, called a trinket basket, from Washington State. It is only about four inches across, one of many similar baskets that were made for the tourist trade. On opposite sides of the basket are American flags carefully worked in cedar bark and bear grass. By now the red stripes have virtually faded from sight so that a curious symbol stands alone—the

parallelogram that was the field of stars, and the stick that held the flag. It appears as something unknowable from another culture, like the flounders and starfish that decorate my Puget Sound baskets. When you lift the lid, the two flags are revealed as American flags since the inside remains unfaded. The red stripes suddenly transform the two images into something familiar. The sensation is one of surprise and delight. You are obliged to return to the outside to detect the faded stripes and compel the faded image to declare itself there, too. The basket becomes a sort of magic toy. You find yourself lifting and replacing the lid, again and again. It is a sort of joke that involves insides and outsides and meanings and mysteries.

CONTEXT

For the first time the world of basketry, which has been notably insular, is seen whole. Artists have before them the whole world's baskets, in museums and books. And they have access to the world's traditional materials—raffia from Madagascar, pandanus from Oceania, rattan from Southeast Asia, splints from North Carolina, as well as all the new materials that come on the market. And they have the documentation of the anthropologists, transcribing what basket makers from other cultures have said about their baskets, their spiritual and symbolic meanings, their standards of judging quality, etc.

Artists have the option—indeed they are encouraged—to explore, discover, invent their own shapes, techniques, materials, and motifs. The new awareness of all baskets, and the new options, inform contemporary baskets. If they are to be significant and meaningful, baskets must reflect today's uniqueness. They have to be different from baskets ever before. Artists are on their own, expressing themselves, but of course, they are reflecting the place and time, and the circumstances in which they exist. They are challenged by the meanings of baskets—their implications, associations, connotations. As artists, these basket makers contemplate the idea of a basket. They explore how this object which has been commonplace in lives throughout centuries, can become a vehicle for expressing not only their sense of order, structural logic, sensuous responses to materials—but also their playfulness, wit, ingenuity, emotional states, anxieties, concerns.

FLOWERS

It is most instructive to observe a recently opened tulip—preferably a yellow Appeldorn—while plaiting a basket, or if not while plaiting a basket, while holding a plaited basket in one's two hands to experience the tension visually and tactilely in a room by one's self, perhaps as a sort of quiet meditation. The sensation is almost one of imbibing, absorbing the opening flower and the taut basket. The plaiting seems as alive as the tulip that is in ecstasy confronting the full sun.

Sometimes the petals seem to be trying to stretch beyond what is possible. Sometimes, indeed, a petal will split at the edges in its attempt to open even farther, to confront more and more sun, to expand beyond its being. There is not so much an exuberance about the effort as a desperation that communicates itself to the beholder. The phenomenon is exhausting to watch.

Like flowers, a basket, especially a plaited basket, displays a vital tension. Forces interact to stretch a plane concave or convex, controlled by the resisting edge of the basket. The result is the tension of a bubble. Each element in the basket influences each other element in extending the form, shifting the relationships of the intersections, changing the angles of intersection from right angle to obtuse or acute.

Long after I wrote this, I read, in the "random thoughts" of the great ceramic artist Rosangin, his feelings about flowers that are opening, and flowers that have already opened. He notes the special qualities of half-opened flowers—the "wonderful vitality and sense of latent energy" that give way to the splendor of flowers in full bloom that "conceals the pathos of impending ruin."³

CRAFTSMANSHIP

I realize that in my basketry I feel myself to be an amateur. An artist who chooses to work in the crafts today must come to terms with this feeling early, insofar as it is ever fully possible to come to terms with it. I can not avoid viewing my baskets in relation to traditional works that display such craftsmanship they seem to diminish my work, reducing to nothing the

significance of the ideas that underlie my work. It is as though a painter were obliged to have a Cezanne—not a reproduction—alongside his easel as he worked. The professional baskets seem to challenge all other meaning by their elevation of skill. A person feels presumptuous to proceed without traditional craftsmanship, which he or she does not even want.

MUSEUM BASKETS

The baskets on display in a museum of anthropology or natural history or ethnography or whatever it is called, are not the achievements of any one individual, but of a society. They continue to be wonderfully satisfying even after the culture from which they arose is quite unknown. An artist must contemplate these baskets. The layer upon layer of their meaning remains intact, to be intuited and somehow felt. They invite musings about human societies and their continuation through time, one way or another. Really, they invite musings about connections with the past, and pride in human accomplishment that have become anonymous, that have become part of our heritage.

How presumptuous they make a person feel who sets out today to make a basket. There is no time—I mean, generations and millennia.

Today the making of baskets has become a bold search for something fresh and individual, quite opposite to the endless repetition that so often occurred in the history of baskets, and opposite, too, to the modest modifications that were successful in societies where life patterns were relatively stable and slow to change. The new baskets arise, not from the classic conventions but from the uncertainties of a rapidly changing technological society in which the role of baskets is, to say the least, equivocal. The viewer is confronted with forms that speak of a moment, a place, an artist. The results speak of a time different from that in which the artisan knew that he or she was making a basket, and knew pretty well what it would look like without making a sketch, and what it would be used for, and how it would fit into the culture of the society. The basket maker was not concerned with defining, or redefining the basket.

WORKSHOP

Once when I was more interested in a meditative approach to basketmaking than I am now, I tried to teach a short workshop in basketry, encouraging a quiet, thoughtful, slow approach to the work. This was not appealing to my students. Experiencing a meditative response to nature was not a sufficiently concrete accomplishment for three days in a workshop. I believed in what I was trying to impose. But then I discovered that I believed just as much in the eager pell-mell response that finally swept the workshop along in directions that no one could have predicted. I felt that I stood aside and observed a happening. (I have often felt this way about teaching.)

In a most surprising way, an unselfconscious response to nature came through in the pell-mell work. This was not trance-like. There was no meditative state of suspension, only high-intensity thoughtfulness. All was experimentation: figuring out, making things happen, responding in new ways to what was there. It could be interpreted as a twentieth century kind of paying attention to nature, and reacting to it.

As much as anything, this experience convinced me that baskets made today by people who approach the work as art, will inevitably differ from traditional baskets. This is not to suggest that artists making baskets today are forbidden to love nature, to hug trees, or to reflect their knowledge of nature in their baskets. Simply that, with or without love of nature, baskets will continue to be made and they will be different from what they ever were before.

BASKETS IN A SUPERMARKET

Not long ago I saw baskets for sale in the local supermarket. They were dumped together into a large cardboard carton across the aisle from potted plants—African violets, azaleas, chrysanthemums, and some larger house plants. The pots were wrapped in shiny foil with ruffles of cellophane printed to look like lace, and bows of plastic ribbon printed to look like satin—bows with no sense of a constructed bow (which can be so beautiful) but instead a series of loops held together with Scotch tape. The plants appeared as synthetic as the wrappings; you had to touch them to know whether they were artificial or real. The plants all needed to be watered, something that was not going to happen unless a customer bought them, since the supermarket found it more profitable

to throw away the plants than to pay someone to maintain them even for a few days. (It is painful for me to see such desiccated plants. I always think of the growers who brought the plants to such states of perfection. I long to take a watering can into the supermarket when I go shopping.)

The baskets were treated with as little regard as the plants. They formed a brown woody jumble at the end of neat shelves of laundry detergent, all strident reds and oranges—Tide, Bold, and the rest. The contrast was dramatic—the pop look of the detergent cartons with their brand names seemingly larger than the boxes themselves, and the baskets in disorder, so rustic and handmade, not designed to fit compactly on supermarket shelves. Yet the detergents and the baskets were meant to appeal to the same customers, and I suppose they did.

I took time to look at the baskets, one by one, the same way that other shoppers read the labels to compare quantities and ingredients. The baskets were widely varied in size and shape. They were meant to accommodate the various plants across the aisle. They were all from China, which surprised me since they so obviously were copies of traditional baskets from the Philippine Islands. The shapes were the same as those illustrated in a small book of Ifugao basketry that I often leaf through. I thought that someone must have presented that little book to a basket factory in China. How easily the Chinese seemed to be turning from their ancient traditions. But perhaps it wasn't easy; perhaps it was a sort of tragedy for those involved. Or perhaps the Chinese were glad to be doing something different. Who knows?

Although the supermarket baskets hadn't the sense of refinement that characterizes even the traditional work-baskets of both China and the Philippines, they were not without vigor and appeal. The stepped-up scale of the elements imparted a sort of slapdash look, a kind of rustic charm. Effects were achieved with the minimum of labor.

What seemed most remarkable was not the corruption of traditional basket forms (after all, this is a time of destruction of traditions everywhere) but the power of a careless display of counterfeit baskets to evoke instantaneous thoughts about ways of life quite unrelated even to the people who made the baskets. There was enormous power in those baskets, perhaps only for me, but at least, for me (which is how one has to regard so many sensations nowadays). They were at odds with everything else in the store except maybe the tank of live lobsters with their taped claws.

Several days later when I returned to the supermarket, the baskets were mostly sold. The few remainders had been moved to somewhere else in the store. There had been so many such a short time before. They were good sellers. I thought of all those baskets scattered throughout the neighborhood, bringing their foreignness, becoming absorbed into so many alien cultures.

MORE WORKSHOP

Fine baskets are identified with careful craftsmanship. What is admired, especially in coiled baskets, is the regularity and the multiplicity of individual stitches which suggest how much time was spent and how patient was the basket maker. Coiling is a stitching technique—a sewing together of elements to create something larger. It is related to patchwork and quilting which, like coiling, are thought of as women's work, and which are admired for their technical perfection—their regular small stitches, rather than for what is achieved by such stitches. When the great anthropologist Franz Boas discussed coiling, he compared it to the work of an experienced seamstress who makes her stitches at regular intervals and with even pull, so that they lie like beads on a string. Boas finds the same regularity in the twined basketry of an expert. The regularity arises from what Boas calls "automatic control." He says, "Virtuosity, complete control of technical processes . . . means an automatic regularity of movement."⁴ But for Boas, the absolute regularity is not the end as it is for so many people who admire such handicraft, but rather the means for achieving a smooth and evenly rounded surface, with a perfectly regular pattern. They are the means for creating what the makers considered the ideal forms.

1. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, (New York: New American Library of World Literature, 1964), 17-18.

2. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, (New York: Random House, 1982), 666-667.

3. Sidney Cardoza and Masaaki Hirano, *The Art of Rosangin*, (Tokyo, Kodansha International, Ltd., 1987), 87.

4. Franz Boas, *Primitive Art*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 20.

Dorothy Gill Barnes

Dorothy Gill Barnes received her

BA and MA from the University of Iowa

"My intent is to construct a vessel or related

and also studied at Cranbrook

object using materials respectfully harvested from

Academy of Art. She teaches textile

nature. The unique properties I find in bark,

arts at Capital University in Columbus,

branches, roots, seaweed, stones, etc. suggest a

Ohio and has done workshops in New

work process to me. I want this problem-solving

Zealand; at Nova Scotia College of Art

to be evident in the finished piece. Some of these

and Design; the University of

structures are basketlike."

Washington, Seattle; the University of

Minnesota, Minneapolis; Haystack,

Dorothy Gill Barnes

Maine; Penland, North Carolina; and

Duluth, Minnesota. In 1984 and 1986

she received Ohio Arts Council

Individual Artist Fellowships.



Selected Exhibitions

1992

A Decade of Craft: Recent Acquisitions
American Craft Museum
New York, New York

Basketry, Japan '92
Tokyo, Japan

The Tactile Vessel, traveling exhibition
Erie Art Museum
Erie, Pennsylvania

1991

Show House 2, A Benefit for AIDS
New York, New York

1989-1992

Craft Today USA, European tour
United States Information Agency

1988

American Baskets: The Eighties, traveling exhibition
Chicago Cultural Center
Chicago, Illinois

Exhibition 280
Award of Excellence
Huntington Museum of Art
Huntington, West Virginia

1987

Interlacing: The Elemental Fabric
American Craft Museum
New York, New York

1986

Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical
American Craft Museum
New York, New York

Kyoto International Craft Exhibition
Kyoto, Japan

1984-1985

The New Basket: A Vessel for the Future, African tour
Brainerd Art Gallery
Potsdam, New York

1980

Fourth International Miniature Textiles Exhibition
London, England

1978

Third International Miniature Textiles Exhibition
London, England

Selected Collections

American Craft Museum
New York, New York

Christchurch Polytechnic
New Zealand

Erie Art Museum
Erie, Pennsylvania

Karl Road Library
Columbus, Ohio

Little Rock Art Gallery
Little Rock, Arkansas

Schumacher Gallery
Capital University
Columbus, Ohio

Catalog of Works

Millcreek Willow

1992
24" x 24" x 24"
corkscrew willow



Pine Holding Pine

1993
15" x 36" x 25"
pine

Cherry Bark with Yucca Lining

1992
9" x 13" x 5"
cherry bark, yucca

Pine Drawing with Stone Lid

1992
15" x 8" x 8"
pine, stone

Willow with White Window

1992
24" x 24" x 22"
corkscrew willow

Half Stone Lid Basket

1991
7" x 7" x 11"
pine, stone



Selected Exhibitions

1992

Fittings: Metaphysical Junctures of Stick Structures
The Farrell Collection
Washington, D.C.

Outer Skin/Inner Space

Pro-Art
St. Louis, Missouri

1990

Baskets and Beyond
California Crafts Museum
San Francisco, California

1989

Solo Exhibition
San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum
San Francisco, California

1988

Knots and Nets, traveling exhibition
Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art
Ithaca, New York

Solo Exhibition

Cornerhouse Gallery,
Manchester, England

1986

New York Site
Artcite
Windsor, Ontario

1985

Fibres Art 85
Musée des Arts Decoratifs
Paris, France

1984-1985

The New Basket: A Vessel for the Future, African tour
Brainerd Art Gallery
Potsdam, New York

1983

Infra-Structure
Artisanspace Gallery
Fashion Institute of Technology
New York, New York

1982

Lace
Cooper-Hewitt Museum
New York, New York

1981

IV Textile Triennale
Central Museum of Textiles
Lodz, Poland

Old Traditions/New Directions

Textile Museum
Washington, D.C.

The Art Fabric: Mainstream, traveling exhibition
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
San Francisco, California

Selected Collections

Detroit Institute of Arts
Detroit, Michigan

Erie Art Museum
Erie, Pennsylvania

Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art
Ithaca, New York

Jack Lenor Larsen
New York, New York

Neutrogena Corporation
Los Angeles, California

Roberson Center for the Arts & Sciences
Binghamton, New York

United States Embassy
Warsaw, Poland

Catalog of Works

Reclining Figure

1992
21" x 60" x 32"
rattan, paint



Bundle

1992
25" x 35" x 25"
rattan, kozo, nylon, paint

Hellsgate

1992
16" x 24" x 19.5"
rattan, paint

Still Again

1992
7.5" x 11.5" x 9"
rattan, nylon, dye

Stump

1992
25.5" x 25" x 23"
rattan, paint

Parfleche

1991
14.5" x 30" x 6"
rattan, pandanus, dye, paint

Lillian Elliott lives in Berkeley,

"There's an inside and an outside to a basket. The odd thing is that most contemporary baskets allow the viewer to experience both simultaneously. The materials are permeable or the structure is open or pierced, so that the inside and outside do a constant visual exchange.

California. She holds a BA from Wayne State University in Detroit, 1952, and a MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art, 1955. A fellow of the American Craft Council, she received National

With the black linear baskets which appear from time to time in my work I mark off a space, but the air and the space, itself, move freely in and out. In drawing I enjoy the pure illusion of line marking what is on one side and what is on the other. Working with basketry materials in three-dimensions, the line stays just as magical though it's no longer pure illusion. It actually marks 'real' space and makes the viewer see or sense an enclosed form as well as the 'outside' space.

Endowment for the Arts Visual Artists Fellowships in 1976-77 and 1986-87. She is also the recipient of a California Arts Council Grant, 1977-78, and a Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant, 1964-65. As a guest artist, she worked in Canada at the Banff Centre for the Arts and at the Nova Scotia College of Art

I'm interested in the many forms baskets take. So far I have chosen not to use imagery on the surface of my baskets because I don't want anything distracting from the form. Using compelling imagery on the outside makes me see the walls more and the shape less. The painter Yves Klein was said to be so taken with the blue color he had developed that he didn't want anything 'penetrating' the blue of his canvases. I suppose I feel as strongly about the forms I'm working toward.

and Design. In 1985 she was designated a "Living Treasure" of California and in 1988 she was selected for an oral history memoir by the University of California at Berkeley.

Sometimes, my baskets assume a figurative form which interests me, though that is never my intent at the beginning. My baskets are the result of 'playing' with materials while aiming toward combining various shapes to achieve a total form."

Lillian Elliott



Selected Exhibitions

1992

Lillian Elliott: Baskets and Textiles
Lillian Elliott Collects: Folk and Tribal Impact
 San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum
 San Francisco, California

1989

The Boat Show: Fantastic Vessels, Fictional Voyages
 National Museum of American Art
 Renwick Gallery
 Washington, D.C.

1988

Frontiers in Fiber: The Americans, Asian tour
 North Dakota Museum of Art
 Grand Forks, North Dakota

Knots and Nets, traveling exhibition
 Herbert E. Johnson Museum of Art
 Ithaca, New York

1987

Interlacing: The Elemental Fabric, traveling exhibition
 American Craft Museum
 New York, New York

Charlottenborg Exhibition, 2 person exhibition
 Copenhagen, Denmark

Textilgruppen, 2 person exhibition
 Stockholm, Sweden

Vannerie, 2 person exhibition
 Philharmonie Gallery
 Liege, Belgium

1986

Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical, traveling exhibition
 American Craft Museum
 New York, New York

1985

Fibres Art 85
 Musée des Arts Decoratifs
 Paris, France

Twelfth Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie
 Lausanne, Switzerland

Living Treasures of California
 Crocker Art Museum
 Sacramento, California

1982

Fourth International Biennial of Miniature Textiles
 Savaria Museum
 Szombathely, Hungary

1981

Nouvelle Vannerie
 Musée des Arts Decoratifs
 Lausanne, Switzerland

Selected Collections

American Craft Museum
 New York, New York

Arizona State University
 Tempe, Arizona

Cranbrook Academy of Art
 Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Detroit Institute of the Arts
 Detroit, Michigan

Eastern Michigan University
 Ypsilanti, Michigan

Eric Art Museum
 Erie, Pennsylvania

National Museum of American Art
 Renwick Gallery
 Washington, D.C.

The Oakland Museum
 Oakland, California

Pierre Pauli Foundation
 Lausanne, Switzerland

Rhode Island School of Design
 Providence, Rhode Island

Savaria Museum
 Szombathely, Hungary

Wadsworth Atheneum
 Hartford, Connecticut

Catalog of Works

Refractions

1992
16" x 24" x 25"
cedar bark, hickory, linen



Bound

1992
22" x 10" x 9"
birch bark, cedar roots
Collection of Mary Dusenbury

Cistern Column

1992
29" x 32" x 28"
hickory and ash splint, rattan, pandanus, linen, acrylic paint
Collection of Joanne Segal Brandford, Sandra Harner and Pat Hickman

Converging Lines

1992
24" x 48" x 27"
split cane, nylon cord, paint

Embroidered Rattan

1992
18.5" x 28" x 18"
salugan bark, rattan, linen
Collection of Daphne Farago

Sunsets

1992
20" x 8" x 7"
18.5" x 5" x 5"
coconut palm bark, linen, acrylic paint
Collection of Susan Sternlieb

John Garrett received a

BA, 1972, from Claremont

"Since moving to central New Mexico from

College in Claremont, California

Los Angeles in mid-1990, I have shifted the use of

and a MA, 1976, from the

materials and imagery in my art work, especially

University of California at Los

as it pertains to my basket constructions. I now

Angeles. He taught at both of

predominately use metals: copper, aluminum and

his alma maters. In 1983 he

galvanized steel. The metals' various surfaces and

received a National Endowment

colors reflect the landscapes, earth and the

for the Arts Visual Artists

indigenous adobe buildings with their tin roofs

Fellowship. Raised in New

that surround and inspire me. Structurally, the

Mexico, Garrett came to

majority of pieces are rectilinear elements

understand and appreciate

interlaced into flat planes which I then manipulate

Native American basketry and

into three-dimensional forms and secure by the use

pottery traditions. The impact of

of fittings or additional elements. I continue to use

his move to metropolitan Los

materials salvaged from both the domestic and

Angeles, however, has become

industrial domains, transforming them by the use

evident in his work. He currently

of poetic imagination. The forms I create relate to

lives and works in Belen,

images derived from, or associated with, human

New Mexico.

activities as varied as eating, traveling or playing

games. The basket remains for me a viable form

for exploration, more because of its past

associations with primary human activities than

because of any formal structural properties."

John G. Garrett

weekend at my parents'
fiftieth wedding anniversary
ninety three year old grand
a year old niece was present.

Selected Exhibitions

1991

John Garrett: New Works
Suzanne Brown Gallery
Scottsdale, Arizona

1990

Explorations: The Aesthetic of Excess
American Craft Museum
New York, New York

Meeting Ground: Basketry Traditions and Sculptural Forms,
traveling exhibition
The Forum
St. Louis, Missouri

1989-1992

Craft Today USA, European tour
United States Information Agency

1989

The Vessel: Studies in Form and Media
Craft and Folk Art Museum
Los Angeles, California

1988

Avant-Garde Approaches to Basketry
Craft Alliance Gallery
St. Louis, Missouri

Frontiers in Fiber: The Americans, Asian tour
North Dakota Museum of Art
Grand Forks, North Dakota

1987

The Eloquent Object, traveling exhibition
Philbrook Museum of Art
Tulsa, Oklahoma

1986-1987

Fiber REvolution, traveling exhibition
Milwaukee Art Museum and University Art Museum
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

1984-1985

The New Basket: A Vessel for the Future, African tour
Brainerd Art Gallery
Potsdam, New York

1984

Vehta Biennale
Romaanse Kerk
Brussels, Belgium

1982

Art And/Or Craft: USA and Japan
Kanazawa, Japan

Basketry: Tradition in New Form, traveling exhibition
Institute of Contemporary Art
Boston, Massachusetts

Selected Collections

Albuquerque Museum
Albuquerque, New Mexico

American Craft Museum
New York, New York

Craft and Folk Art Museum
Los Angeles, California

Erie Art Museum
Erie, Pennsylvania

The Oakland Museum
Oakland, California

Catalog of Works

Midway/Wheel of Fortune

1992

23" x 17" x 17"

copper, aluminum, steel, circuit board, rivets, hardware



Big Beverage Bark Basket

1992

21" x 21" x 21"

aluminum cans, rivets

Copper Puzzle Basket No. 2

1992

11" x 20.5" x 20.5"

copper, copper clad circuit board, rivets

Endgame

1992

10" x 20" x 20"

aluminum cans, rivets

Patched Copper Cut and Fold Basket

1992

18.5" x 22" x 22"

copper, rivets

The Cartographer's Basket

1991

15" x 37" x 10"

copper, copper clad circuit board, rivets

Linda Kelly

I want that form to stand tall
 to be a mass on one hand
 "I grew up on a small farm in Nebraska. The images left in me from
 those years are ^{just a blob} imprinted on my mind. They are a strong part of my make-up,
 and on the other
 of my being. Mr. Siefert, Mr. and Mrs. Tejral, the Shanderas—Bill and
 to unexpectedly touch on qualities of humanness
 Stephie—just being, no intellectualizing, just being. Their humanity, so
 especially
 palpable you could reach out and touch it, just going through the routine of
 depth
 living. Watching calves being born, pigs, chickens, rabbits, snakes, birds, ants,
 humans,—and dying. The seasons, the complements: dead of winter, ^{aloneness} birth of
 Kansas. She received a
 spring, growth of summer, slowing down of fall, of shriveling and drying, the
 inaccessibility
 BA in sociology and
 beginning of preparation for new growth, new life. The rhythm, the flow, the
 I see it as
 philosophy, 1965, from
 sound and power of life. All reflect the experience of being human. The
 tall
 Nebraska Wesleyan
 tenuous ^{erect} balance of routine and wonderment, simplicity and mystery, life and
 death, flesh and spirit, body and soul.
 ordinary
 University and a MFA in
 everyday
 textile design, 1989, from
 the University of Kansas.
 expected
 These sensitivities toward life, toward our humanness, developed so
 yet hidden within
 Haystack Mountain School
 many years ago, still serve as the filter through which I see the world, merging
 a power
 of Crafts awarded her a
 in my mind into clear, strong shapes: upright, elliptical, organic forms with
 a presence
 Monitor Grant in 1991. In
 various postures and attitudes to which are attached qualities of our
 a mystery
 1989/90 she was an artist-
 humanness. The shapes, the resulting forms that I make, become my means of
 A silent figure
 in-residence with Partners
 speaking about the delicate balance of common with enigmatic, of expected
 standing alone
 of the Americas in
 with elusive, embodied in all of us.
 plain
 Asuncion, Paraguay. It was
 there that she learned
 simple
 The actual forms have their beginnings in baskets, which to me ^{embody}
 direct
 indigenous techniques of
 so much of what we are: soft, flexible, impermanent, fibrous structures.
 that in just being
 harvesting, preparing, and
 A balance of tension and compression; felt to exist since the beginning of time,
 in not asking to be noticed
 weaving bamboo.
 terribly common, universally familiar, encountered in mass yet a uniquely
 reveals
 individual presence, power, and mystery; made of disparate elements brought
 a subtle
 together into a complete often compellingly magical form; hollow yet with a
 a quiet
 memory for what they have held, the thin outer skin both revealing and
 depth
 concealing an unknown interior. These represent the balance of complements
 aloneness
 that I feel are so strongly a part of us all.
 inaccessibility

If you are willing to listen
 Thus, for me, both the slow, direct, rhythmical process of the forms
 it becomes
 coming into being and the resulting forms themselves are metaphors
 extraordinary
 for us as humans."
 unexpected

Linda Kelly



Selected Exhibitions

1992

Third Annual Basketry Invitational
Sybaris Gallery
Royal Oak, Michigan

1991

Basketry: From All Directions
Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts
Gatlinburg, Tennessee

The Fabric of Life: Contemporary American Works in Fabric
The Society of Arts and Crafts
Boston, Massachusetts

1990

Fabrications - Fiber Artist Invitational
Kansas City Artists Coalition
Kansas City, Missouri

1989

The Wichita National '89
Best of Show Award
The Wichita Art Association
Wichita, Kansas

Four Women Fiber Exhibition
Union Gallery
Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas

Kansas Fiber Directions '89
Wichita Art Museum
Wichita, Kansas

1988

Waste Cocoons and New Beginnings, 2 person exhibition
The Salina Art Center
Salina, Kansas

Kansas Fiber Directions '88
Wichita Art Museum
Wichita, Kansas

1982

Kansas Fiber Directions '82
Wichita Art Museum
Wichita, Kansas

Catalog of Works

Untitled Form November '92
1992
84" x 23" x 16"
dyed flat reed



Untitled
1993
80" x 23" x 17"
dyed flat reed

Untitled
1992-1993
82" x 22" x 18"
dyed flat reed

Untitled
1992-1993
76" x 21" x 17"
dyed flat reed

Form 4
1989
84" x 30" x 24"
dyed flat reed

Form 6
1989
60" x 24" x 20"
dyed flat reed

John McQueen

John McQueen lives and

works in Trumansburg, New York.

"As it turns out

He holds a BA, 1971, from the

what worries me most

University of South Florida in

are systems turning up.

Tampa and a MFA, 1975, from

Trees as religion

Tyler School of Art, Temple

words making objects

University in Philadelphia.

have a way of hardening

McQueen received the Louis

into handles.

Comfort Tiffany Award in 1991, a

So I often wait,

New York Foundation for the Arts

wanting it to be about

Artist's Fellowship in 1988, a

the real around me,

United States/Japan Friendship

but it is always about

Commission Fellowship in 1980,

the almost organized,

and National Endowment for the

some irregular intention —

Arts Visual Artists Fellowships in

the nature of worth

1977, 1979, 1986, and 1992.

I find unreadable,

but worth no more

than word of mouth

words never written down

like bollix and orneriness."

John McQueen



Selected Exhibitions

1992

The Language of Containment, solo exhibition
National Museum of American Art
Renwick Gallery
Washington, D.C.

International Contemporary Fiber Art, Now
Sonje Museum of Contemporary Art
Kyongju, Korea

1991

Projects Environment
Ness Gardens
Neston, Cheshire, England

1990

Fibers: USA-Columbia, traveling exhibition
Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida

Meeting Ground: Basketry Traditions and Sculptural Forms,
traveling exhibition
The Forum
St. Louis, Missouri

1988

Frontiers in Fiber: The Americans, Asian tour
North Dakota Museum of Art
Grand Forks, North Dakota

Neo Tradisjon
Nordenfjedske Kunstinstrimuseum
Trondheim, Norway

American Baskets: The Eighties, traveling exhibition
Chicago Cultural Center
Chicago, Illinois

Knots and Nets, traveling exhibition
Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art
Ithaca, New York

The Tactile Vessel: New Basket Forms, traveling exhibition
Eric Art Museum
Erie, Pennsylvania

1987

Interlacing: The Elemental Fabric, traveling exhibition
American Craft Museum
New York, New York

1986-1987

Fiber REvolution, traveling exhibition
Milwaukee Art Museum and University Art Museum
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

1986

Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical, traveling exhibition
American Craft Museum
New York, New York

Selected Collections

Albuquerque Art Museum
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Cooper-Hewitt Museum
New York, New York

Detroit Institute of Art
Detroit, Michigan

Erie Art Museum
Erie, Pennsylvania

Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art
Ithaca, New York

Minneapolis Institute of Art
Minneapolis, Minnesota

National Museum of American Art
Renwick Gallery
Washington, D.C.

Nordenfjedske Kunstinstrimuseum
Trondheim, Norway

Philadelphia Museum of Art
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Seattle Art Museum
Seattle, Washington

Wadsworth Atheneum
Hartford, Connecticut

Catalog of Works

Untitled

1991
19" x 18" x 14"
bark
Collection of Joseph and Rhoda Sherman



Untitled

1993
12" x 14" x 12"
Pinus radiata

Drawing Water

1992
44" x 24" x 10"
Norway maple bark

A Saw

1992
20" x 80" x 9"
red osier sticks

Unreceptable Receptacle

1992
14" x 31" x 9"
elm bark
Courtesy of Okun Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Untitled

1991
13" x 60" x 20"
spruce bark

Norma Minkowitz

Norma Minkowitz graduated

from Cooper Union School of Art in

"Containment means, to have within, to enclose, to confine,

New York City in 1958. Currently

to be able to hold and restrict.

her artist's studio is in Westport,

Connecticut. Her works have

My sculptures enclose and confine, but they also expose.

received numerous awards in

While the sculpture cannot be entered, the interior is visible

national exhibitions including a

through the exterior, which is a meshed cage.

Connecticut Commission on the

Arts Purchase Award in 1992. In

The element of light plays an important role in viewing my

1986 Minkowitz received a

work. As the light changes, so does the dominance of the outer

National Endowment for the Arts

and inner forms. They exchange places.

Visual Artists Fellowship.

At this time, my focus is the manipulation of linear

elements into personal and psychological statements, and both to

enclose and expose a mysteriousness that invites contemplation."

Norma Minkowitz



Catalog of Works

I Am the Land

1991
12.5" x 50.5" x 16.5"
fiber, paint



Home Body

1992
8.5" x 11" x 8"
fiber, gut, ink

Invasion

1992
29" x 18" x 11"
fiber, paint

Silent Effort

1990
14" x 10" x 10"
fiber, paint

Dream Series

1989
5" x 14" x 14"
fiber, paint, found object

Like the Tree, She Grows Again

1989
21.5" x 8" x 9"
fiber, plastic, wood

"From the beginning my baskets have had an element of play. I began making baskets to content myself, and I have continued to do so.

To a large extent the play in my baskets is in incorporating and combining elements without previous plan. Something lying around on the table is handy. I use it. It does unpredictable things. It is a surprise. I always wonder afterward how I happened to think of doing that. I don't take all the credit. I acknowledge the elements of chance and convenience.

As I grow older I like, more and more, a relative quickness of the basketmaking process. I try to have the finished basket express a spontaneity and a certain speed—not slapdashness, but not a sense of an arduous, labored-over project. Many baskets that I admire, historical and contemporary, look labor intensive. That is part of their wonder. But I want my own works to look easy. It seems important to mention (I'm not sure why) that often my baskets that look most spontaneous and inconsequential have taken days to make. I get so far, and then have to put them aside. Next morning, maybe, I'll be able to go on with pleasure and assurance. Time seems a most important element, not the time at work on the basket, but time doing other things, thinking about other things, not thinking about baskets at all."

Ed Rossbach received a BA in painting and design from the University of Washington at Seattle in 1940, a MA in art education from Columbia University in 1941, and, after serving in the Signal Corps of the U.S. Army in the Aleutian Islands during World War II, a MFA in ceramics and weaving from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1947. He accepted a position at the University of California at Berkeley in 1950 and retired in 1979 with the rank of Professor Emeritus. Aside from the pre-eminence of his personal work, Rossbach's reputation is also founded on his writing about the nature and history of basketmaking. In 1985 Rossbach was accorded the distinction of being named a "Living Treasure of California." He lives and works in Berkeley.

Ed Rossbach



Selected Exhibitions

1990

Ed Rossbach: 40 Years of Exploration and Innovation in Fiber Art
The Textile Museum
Washington, D.C.

1988

The Tactile Vessel: New Basket Forms, traveling exhibition
Erie Art Museum
Erie, Pennsylvania

Knots and Nets, traveling exhibition
Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art
Ithaca, New York

1987

The Modern Basket: A Redefinition
Pittsburgh Center for the Arts
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

1986-1987

Fiber R/Evolution
Milwaukee Art Museum and University Art Museum
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

1986

Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical, traveling exhibition
American Craft Museum
New York, New York

1985

Living Treasures of California
Crocker Museum
Sacramento, California

1985

High Styles: 20th Century American Design
Whitney Museum of American Art
New York, New York

1981

Nouvelle Vannerie
Musée des Artes Decoratifs
Lausanne, Switzerland

1977

Fiberworks: The Americas and Japan
National Museum of Modern Art
Kyoto, Japan

Wall Hangings: The New Classicism
Museum of Modern Art
New York, New York

Structur in Textiel
Stedelijk Museum
Amsterdam, Netherlands

1964

13th Triennale de Milano
Palazzo dell'Arte al Parco
Milan, Italy

1958

Brussels World's Fair U.S. Pavilion
Brussels, Belgium

Selected Collections

American Craft Museum
New York, New York

Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona

Art Institute of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

The Brooklyn Museum
Brooklyn, New York

Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Detroit Institute of Arts
Detroit, Michigan

Erie Art Museum
Erie, Pennsylvania

The Oakland Museum
Oakland, California

Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, New York

Musée des Artes Decoratifs de Montréal
Montréal, Canada

Museum of Modern Art
New York, New York

Stedelijk Museum
Amsterdam, Netherlands

Trondheim Museum
Trondheim, Norway

Wadsworth Atheneum
Hartford, Connecticut

Catalog of Works

Greek Soap

1992

12" x 7.5" x 9.5"

tulip poplar, paper with color transfer, lacquer



Blue Knight

1992

16.5" x 5" x 5"

tulip poplar, paper with color transfer, lacquer

Structural Image

1992

6.75" x 6.25" x 6.25"

tulip poplar

Inscription

1991

13" x 3" x 3"

tulip poplar, paper with color transfer, lacquer

Upright Column

1991

20.5" x 5" x 5"

tulip poplar, paper with color transfer, lacquer

White Buffalos

1991

9" x 9" x 9"

tulip poplar, paper with color transfer

Born in Japan, Hisako

"Through making baskets, I realize that a form reveals richer aspects when viewed not only in terms of real materials, such as sticks or bark, but also in terms of holes which lack in real materials. I entangle or interlace sticks or bark in order to see the quality of holes unique to the material or primary to the structure. From this process, a form unknown to me emerges. The part which the materials fill has an equal value to that where they do not exist, as in the relation of a positive and a negative.

Sekijima presently lives in Orleans, France. In 1966 she received a BA in English Literature from Tsuda College in Tokyo. While living in the United States from 1975 to 1979 this maker of traditional Japanese baskets discovered and was

At the beginning, this extended my visual concerns, but gradually it affected my way of thinking: I thought more of "negative" factors, because one seems to have multiple meanings, which are revealed when I become conscious of a problem. I apply this when looking at properties of materials and physical rules of basket structure. When the bark is too weak or thin to be plaited, I realize the same property of the material shows both impossibilities and possibilities. I utilize the tightly fixed nature of the structural formula of basketry by this "negative thinking." Thus, a recognition of limitation leads me to a new phase of understanding.

influenced by the "personal expression" of contemporary American basketmaking and by her study of the baskets of Native Americans. She is the author of several books on basketmaking and has presented workshops and lectures throughout the United States and Japan.

So, a basket is physical evidence that shows what I have or have not thought, what I now know, and what I will know. My concerns have extended from a basket form as an interplay of material and structural method, to a basket that could express a subtle gap in cognition: how a negative factor is turned to contribute to a specific form in a new reality. The phenomenon that interests me relates to all possibilities of distortion that enhance characteristics of three-dimensional textiles that contain hollow space: hanging by own weight, shrinking, absorbing water, cutting, stitching, adjusting, molding, folding, and twisting."

Hisako Sekijima



Selected Exhibitions

1992

Third Annual Basketry Invitational
Sybaris Gallery
Royal Oaks, Michigan

Fittings: Metaphysical Junctures of Stick Structures
Farrell Collection Gallery
Washington, D.C.

1991

Solo exhibition
Masuda Studio Gallery
Tokyo, Japan

Good Earth
Good Earth Gallery
Tokyo, Japan

Vessels for Desire
Gallery Isogaya
Tokyo, Japan

1990

On the Earth
Axis Gallery
Tokyo, Japan

1989

Solo exhibition
Showa Women's University
Tokyo, Japan

1988

The Tactile Vessel: New Basket Forms, traveling exhibition
Erie Art Museum
Erie, Pennsylvania

Basket Makers, Japan and America
Bellas Artes Gallery
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Solo exhibition
Sembikiya Gallery
Tokyo, Japan

1986

Shinseisaku-ten
Tokyo Metropolitan Museum
Tokyo, Japan

1984

Solo exhibition
Wave Hill House Gallery
Riverdale, New York

1981

Greenwood Gallery
Washington, D.C.

1980

The Elements Gallery
New York, New York

Selected Collections

Erie Art Museum
Erie, Pennsylvania

Jack Lenor Larsen
New York, New York

Victoria and Albert Museum
London, England

Catalog of Works

Untitled

1992
4.25" x 12.75" x 12.75"
mulberry bark



Untitled

1992
8" x 10.25" x 10.25"
willow

Untitled

1990
9" x 11.5" x 11.5"
cedar bark

Untitled

1990
0.75" x 22" x 14.5"
kudzu vine

Untitled

1990
2.5" x 19" x 19"
split maple, zerkoua bark

Untitled

1988
6.25" x 10.5" x 10.5"
mulberry bark

Claudia Stafinski

Claudia Stafinski is a mixed

media artist who lives in Oakland,

"I construct baskets that challenge traditional shapes. My forms do

California. She creates life-size

not evolve slowly or cautiously from the old, but traditional baskets are

sculptural basket forms made

always there, exerting their influence. I select paper as my material

from plaited paper and acrylic

because of its emotive and visual qualities instead of its utilitarian

paint. She has a BS, 1966, in art

function, and then modify weaving techniques.

education from Bradley University

in Peoria, Illinois, a MA, 1969, in

The content of my pieces is focused on organic forms. The baskets

drawing and painting from

are anthropomorphic forms moving through space. In a narrower context

California State University at

they allude to human legs. With the application of paint an active visual

Long Beach, and a MFA, 1986,

dimension emerges. The color sometimes emphasizes the grid-like

from John F. Kennedy University,

structure of the weaving and at other times visually destroys it. The

Fiberworks Center for the Textile

color calls attention to the structural movement and visually guides the

Arts, in Berkeley.

viewer in and out of the basket surface.

I do not regard myself as a basket maker in any traditional sense.

The baskets are approached with the freedom of a painter/sculptor. The

results are forms that challenge the familiar or traditional basket shapes."

Claudia Stafinski



Selected Exhibitions

1990

Connected Through Fiber

Santa Rosa Junior College
Santa Rosa, California

1988

Mixed Media: The Decorative Approach

San Francisco State University
San Francisco, California

1985

Textile Expressions: Baskets

Fiberworks
Berkeley, California

Fiber Structure National

Downey Museum of Art
Downey, California

1984

Vessels

California Craft Museum
San Francisco, California

Emerging Containers

Rutgers University
New York, New York

Selected Collections

Mark Marshall
Chicago, Illinois

Rosanne Raab
New York, New York

Mr. & Mrs. Saltsman
Santa Monica, California

Catalog of Works

Wild Ginger

1992

63" x 16" x 16"

paper, acrylic paint



Scarlet Charm

1992

72" x 20" x 14"

paper, acrylic paint

Ice Storm

1990

66" x 13" x 13"

paper, acrylic paint

Voodoo Lily

1990

53" x 20" x 30"

paper, acrylic paint

The Basket in Striped Pants

1989

60" x 20" x 20"

paper, acrylic paint

Sinister Alien

1987-1988

55" x 16" x 13"

paper, acrylic paint

A Basket Is Not Always for Bread

“My house is a basket—a place of baskets, of basketry. Every cupboard, every closet is filled with baskets. It was not always that way. I can remember in 1956 when my husband and I were in Rome for five months, the apartment was spare in kitchen things. We needed a container for bread. At the local pasta and rice shop there were baskets all piled on top of each other—baskets for serving bread. We spread them out to make a choice, as no two were alike. They were functional baskets but also decorative. Some were lacy grids and stars of raffia woven on a delicate metal frame. Others were heavier in construction, bundles of natural raffia woven on a reed frame. Some were circular, others oval; some had plain edges, others had edges of points—little points of raffia lace. One was selected; next day, we returned and bought another. We repeated this process until we had four or five baskets, each one individual. The storekeeper thought we were mad. We had very little knowledge of Italian, he little English; it was impossible to explain the need for so many bread baskets. We had begun a passion for collecting baskets that has grown to fill a house with baskets from all over the world from A to Z, Alaskan to Zulu, and in-between.

Katherine Westphal

received a BA, 1941, and a MA, 1943, from the University of California at Berkeley. She taught at the University of California at Davis from 1966 to 1979 and holds the distinction of Professor Emeritus. She was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artists Fellowship in 1977/78. In 1979 she was elected a Fellow of the American Craft Council. She developed the program for Wearable Art at the 1980 World Craft Conference in Vienna, Austria. She is the author of *Dragons and Other Creatures*, and lives in Berkeley.

This has led to making baskets, hundreds of baskets, decorative not utilitarian. It is a process of basketry; not a repeated form, not a multiple, but each basket an individual. Each basket has a name, an identity that defines it as a living thing. The baskets have grown out of a desire to continue a process and a desire to communicate a message.”

Katherine Westphal



Selected Exhibitions

1992

The New Narrative, traveling exhibition
North Carolina Museum of Art
Raleigh, North Carolina

1991

Solo exhibition
San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum
San Francisco, California

1988

Frontiers in Fiber: The Americans, Asian tour
North Dakota Museum of Art
Grand Forks, North Dakota

1986

Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical, traveling exhibition
American Craft Museum
New York, New York

1984

The Alternate Image
John Michael Kohler Arts Center
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

1983-1985

Art to Wear, Asian tour
American Craft Museum
New York, New York

1981-1984

Good as Gold: Alternative Materials in American Jewelry,
Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service
Washington, D.C.

1981

Beyond Tradition
American Craft Museum
New York, New York

Nouvelle Vannerie

Musée des Arts Decoratifs
Lausanne, Switzerland

1978

American Crafts in the Vatican
Rome, Italy

Surface Design: New Directions

National Museum of American Art
Renwick Gallery
Washington, D.C.

1968

Solo exhibition
Museum of Contemporary Crafts
New York, New York

Selected Collections

American Craft Museum
New York, New York

Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona

Hauberg Collection
Seattle, Washington

National Museum of American Art
Renwick Gallery
Washington, D.C.

Nordenfjedske Kunstindustrimuseum
Trondheim, Norway

Rhode Island School of Design
Providence, Rhode Island

University of Nebraska
Lincoln, Nebraska

Catalog of Works

Baroque Palace for Pink Dinosaurs

1991

12" x 10" x 10"

synthetic and natural raffia, plastic toys



Beejewelled

1990

9" x 8" x 8"

synthetic raffia, plastic toys

Aaron's Fish

1988-1990

10" x 8" x 8"

synthetic raffia, plastic

Famille Rose

1988

19" x 8" x 8"

synthetic raffia, paper

Heavenly Fish

1988

11" x 7" x 7"

synthetic raffia, mylar

Wesing at Guilin

1988

19" x 8" x 8"

synthetic raffia



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