

A journey to the origins, artists and techniques of American craft

CRAFT IN AMERICA

CRAFT IN AMERICA: CROSSROADS / ARTISTS

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Tanya Aguiñiga

grew up in both San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico, a bi-cultural artist whose quest is to create a dialogue between two very different cultural experiences in her craft-based artistic expression. Having learned her trade from vastly different sources, from a native backstrap weaver in Chiapas, Mexico to the well-respected Rhode Island School of Design, her fiber art and furniture designs are expansive, expressive and inquisitive.

“Tanya’s work is informed by border experiences: the interconnectedness of societies, the beauty in struggle, and the celebration of culture.”* Spirited and provocative, her work challenges our assumptions by re-purposing and re-designing existing icons and experiences. As a founding member of the artist cooperative, Border Art Workshop, she helped to establish a community center at Poblado Maclovio Rojas, a commune in an impoverished area of Tijuana, established during the US/Mexico trade wars in the ‘80s. She continues to incorporate political activism into her work.

Aguiñiga creates environments that are both traditional and surprising as in her 2011 solo show at the Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles. The installation, with the complexity of a spider’s web, embraces, discomforts, and prompts unexpected emotions in the viewer.

*Aguiniga, Tanya; <http://www.aguinigadesign.com/about.html>



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Lia Cook

A ground-breaking innovative fiber artist, Lia Cook's work attempts to shatter restrictive theories about craft, art, science and technology. Her focus is on the history and meaning of textiles in all cultures and its impact on our humanness. An artist of unusual range and complexity, she explores questions at the edges of what is known. Her latest project is about the brain – Lia takes notions of imaging, memory and emotion, measures the physical human response, and incorporates all this information into her weavings.

Lia is the recipient of many prestigious awards including several NEA grants, the prestigious Masters of the Medium Award from the Smithsonian's James Renwick Alliance, and has won a California Arts Council Fellowship, to name a few. Her work is in the permanent collections of major international museums including the Museum of Modern Art (NY), the American Museum of Art & Design (NY), the Metropolitan Museum (NY), and the Galerie Nationale de la Tapisserie et d'Art Textile (FR). "Bridge 11: Lia Cook", a solo show, will travel to The Center for Craft Creativity and Design in North Carolina in August, 2012.



Mingei-sota potters

On rare and auspicious occasions, personal passions foster an international movement. Such was the case with British Bernard Leach and Japanese Shoji Hamada and their love of clay, the potter's life, and pots.

Fascinated with Asian ceramics, Bernard Leach brought the aesthetic of Japanese Mingei pottery, in the person of Shoji Hamada (a Japanese National Treasure), to his pottery in St. Ives, England in an effort to incorporate the tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement of the West, with the tradition-driven philosophy of the East. It was a time when doors were opening to new and foreign aesthetic ideas and much experimentation in the arts was afoot.

What came to be called the "Hamada-Leach tradition" found its way to the United States through adventurous apprentices such as Warren MacKenzie, Jeff Oestreich and Clary Illian, each making separate pilgrimages to St. Ives to study and work with Bernard Leach. They brought back to the St. Crox Valley, Minnesota community an amalgam of style and philosophy now known as "Mingeisota".

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Warren MacKenzie is one of America's greatest living potters and an inspiration to younger generations. Having apprenticed at the Leach Pottery in 1952, MacKenzie brought the Mingei aesthetic to the St. Croix Valley where it took root and spread. An inspired teacher, MacKenzie embodied the philosophy, impressing young potters with a dedication to the ideals of simplicity, serviceability and rough beauty. His work is collected by the world's finest museums.



Jeff Oestreich was trained to the austere simplicity of traditional Asian pottery while serving as apprentice to Bernard Leach in England in the 1960s. Driven to achieve a personal style, he overlaid this foundation with a passion for Art Deco design and a ceaseless exploration of glaze and decoration techniques. His signature "beaked pitcher" is the refinement of a personal challenge to combine form and function elegantly.

A highly regarded studio potter, Jeff has exhibited widely in museums and galleries world-wide, his work can be found in the outstanding collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum (GB), the Ichon World Ceramic Center (Korea), the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery (DC), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (CA) among others. He opens his studio to the public every year. it is a beloved tradition of the potters of the St.Croix Valley.



Clary Illian's apprenticeship at Leach Pottery in 1964 was intense and focused. Hewing to the Leach philosophy, her subsequent work concentrated on the purity of the pot's form and the potter's life – one lived with strong convictions and a pure heart. She lives today in the environs of the St. Croix Valley, Minnesota producing useful daily pottery for local customers at a reasonable price. "Clary Illian: A Potter's Potter", a retrospective at the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, will run from August, 2012 to February 2013.



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