

# basketry+

NATIONAL BASKETRY ORGANIZATION



FALL 2020/WINTER 2021 | ISSUE 80  
NATIONALBASKETRY.ORG



still challenges ahead, but the lessons we are learning as we navigate these times will guide us as we work toward a better future.

*Carol Eckert*

Carol Eckert, President

I often feel a sense of hopefulness as I head into fall, probably as a result of all those years when September marked the beginning of a new school year. This year is different, of course, but I'm still finding hope as NBO moves forward—hope that NBO can become a better organization in response to these painful times. Our board is focused on creating a stronger and more diverse community, expanding our digital programming to connect with wider audiences, collaborating with other fiber organizations to share resources, and increasing opportunities for our members and all who care about basketry. There are



Welcome to our Fall/Winter issue of *Basketry+*. In spite of everything happening in the larger world, autumn is here with its welcome colors, smells, and vibrancy. Something that we could all use about now.

NBO continues to move forward in these uncharted waters. We are increasing our online programming by working on new and creative ways to engage our members and larger community. Our plan is to have some online programming monthly as we learn more and find out what interests basket weavers.

I am excited to share this issue of *Basketry+* with you. The Artist Profiles feature Antwon Ford and Dorothy McGuinness. Looking at the images of their work I am immediately engaged wanting to learn more about each of them and their process. You will also find the Unusual Materials piece, featuring Audrey Armstrong, Jan Hopkins, and Gail Tremblay who each use vastly different materials in unique and interesting ways.

I hope this issue encourages you to try something new and different. Something a little out of your comfort zone just for the excitement that experience can bring.

*Pamela Morton*

Pamela Morton, Executive Director

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**OUR MISSION:** The National Basketry Organization is an inclusive community of makers and enthusiasts whose purpose is to promote awareness, inspire creativity, and foster appreciation for the heritage and artistry of basketry.

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### Exploring the Fourth Dimension with Antwon Ford

By Cate Coulacos Prato

Sculptures made from sweetgrass that reach into the fourth dimension are the hallmark of Antwon Ford's work. With a 3,000-year-old West African tradition and a proclivity for art, design, and architecture, his work stretches toward the future. Full of movement, his pieces explore math, science, shadow, and light—even Gestalt psychology.

## 10 The Mathematical Puzzles of Dorothy McGuinness

By Beth Smith

The diagonal twill and triaxial (mad) weave have become Dorothy McGuinness's signature techniques and key tools for creating multi-dimensional sculptural forms. She challenges herself with the mathematical aspects of the shapes and patterns and the use of color. McGuinness is known as a master of her craft and her signature work has been described many ways, including sea forms, architectural sculptures, and mathematical puzzles. She is a paper sculpture artist with roots in the basketry world.

## MATERIALS FOCUS

## 18 Uncommon Denominators Gail Tremblay, Jan Hopkins, Audrey Armstrong

By Noelle Foye

Each of these artists integrates unique materials into their craft. Whether they are continuing the traditions of their ancestors or have been influenced by artists of the American Studio Craft Movement, they all remind us that the past informs the future and innovation is timeless.

## 24 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

ON THE COVER: Antwon Ford, **Human with Shield**; 2020; 32 x 12 x 9 in.

THIS PAGE TOP: Gail Tremblay; A variety of colorful baskets woven using 16 and 35 mm film.







# EXPLORING THE FOURTH DIMENSION

## ANTWON FORD

BY CATE COULACOS PRATO

**T**he sweetgrass basket tradition in America goes back to the 1700s, when West Africans—who had grown and harvested rice for 3,000 years—were brought to South Carolina and Georgia to work as enslaved people on the rice plantations. Their talent for making sweetgrass baskets came with them, but once free,





OPPOSITE PAGE &  
THIS PAGE BELOW:  
**Grass in Motion**; 2011;  
26 x 25 x 33 in.

LEFT: Antwon Ford

*"I consider my work both  
sculptures and baskets."*

many of the former enslaved people and their descendants eventually left basket making behind. In South Carolina, however, in the historical Black community enclave of Mount Pleasant—a former slave plantation—the sweetgrass basket-making tradition continues to this day, handed down from generation to generation.

One of the keepers—and innovators—of this tradition is Antwon Ford. Like many other basket makers from the Lowcountry, he learned to weave sweetgrass from his grandmother, starting at age four. As he—and his talent—grew, he regularly accompanied her to the North Highway 17 basket stand and the Charleston city market, where sweetgrass basket makers sell their wares to tourists and locals alike. He sold his first basket, a jewel box, for five dollars at age seven.

Now, at age 35, Ford forms sculptures out of sweetgrass that reach into the fourth dimension—and stretch toward the future. Full of movement, they explore math and science, shadow and light—even Gestalt psychology.

Though he majored in English in college, Ford always enjoyed art, design, and architecture, and at one point wanted to be an architect. He applied to art school, but was denied entrance. "I guess they didn't see the potential in me," Ford said amiably, "but that didn't stop me from making sweetgrass baskets."

Yet, when he returned to South Carolina in 2009 to go back to basket making, he knew he had to entwine tradition with his own style to set himself apart. "What can I do that's different?" he asked himself. Ford researched math, science, the fourth dimension, and Gestalt psychology, a school of thought that suggests humans perceive objects as part of a greater whole and as elements of more complex systems, and became inspired.







HERE: **The Carolina Sun Handle (with static contrast);** 2020; 17 x 13 x 22 in.

"I started challenging myself, asking, 'What is the fourth dimension, really?'" Ford said. As he explored, ideas about movement, how the human body interacts with the world, and the mind's ability to see patterns and fill in missing information to create cohesive shapes influenced the way he conceived his art. Out of the pliable sweetgrass and his research, he created his *Grass in Motion* series featuring swirls and angles that would make a roller coaster architect proud. He has since continued to experiment with shapes, negative space, and shadow and light.

"I consider my work both sculptures and baskets. Some of the sculptures have the basket form—you can still call them baskets and use them if you want to," he said. "Sometimes





LEFT & BELOW:  
**The Shoulder  
 Spin**; 2020;  
 30 x 18 x 26 in.

*"It's very important  
 to achieve consistency  
 [in the coiling]  
 with even stitching."*

I do make more traditional styles—I don't have to think too much when I do those."

His recent pieces have a sci-fi feel to them. "I finish and I think, 'How on earth did I make this thing that looks like it's from space in the year 2160?' But it wouldn't be fun if it weren't a challenge," he said.

And Ford's work does present challenges, beginning with acquiring his materials. Though Mount Pleasant has been the heart of the sweetgrass industry going back several decades, due to development in the region, Grade A sweetgrass—the most supple and bendable type—no longer grows freely in the Charleston area where Ford lives. He must source this type of sweetgrass from suppliers in Savannah, Georgia, or Hardeeville, South Carolina. Moreover, the price of each bundle of grass is rapidly rising as some designated growing and harvesting areas have closed. A bundle that used to cost twenty dollars now goes for fifty dollars, Ford said, adding, "It makes you want to build a barn and stock up—the grass doesn't go bad."

Fortunately, in addition to purchasing the Grade A grass, he's able to pick, with permission, his own Grade B sweetgrass (a sturdier type) which still grows naturally nearby, as well as the pine needles, bulrush, and palmetto fronds he uses for structure and color. For the latter, he tests a frond by slicing it with his fingernail and snapping it to gauge its strength. When he finds a strong tree, he makes sure to go back to it for harvesting.

Another challenge Ford faces is manipulating the material to achieve his vision; he admits his designs





ABOVE &  
OPPOSITE PAGE:  
**Roots**; 2020;  
17 x 14 x 22 in.

often turn out different from what he originally envisioned. He doesn't sketch out a plan beforehand, but coils and stitches as he goes keeping his design in mind. It's a time-consuming process.

"My process is very traditional. It's very important to achieve consistency [in the coiling] with even stitching. It can take months to make a basket," he said, noting that he works on several projects at a time so he's always busy.

"I've been doing this for 31 years, but the funny thing about it is, I'm still learning. Some new techniques for bending the grass just jump out at me," he said, like tricks to join ropes by





*"Basketry is so fun. I get to be an artist, I get to be creative, and I get to do workshops that get people engaged in making their own baskets."*

coiling and uncoiling the twisted grass as he attaches the segments. And he still grapples with creating angles to his satisfaction.

"Sometimes, it just ends up being a piece of contemporary art. Some pieces just design themselves," he said.

On the other hand, Ford's grandmother—who taught him basket making—now comes to him for advice. "She asks me questions and I'm teaching her," he laughed.

Ford has considered branching out to include other materials in his basketry: grasses that are more readily available or items like paper clips that would help keep elements of his designs in place. But, tradition runs deep.

"The problem in deciding whether to use other materials is, I grew up making baskets, watching my family. It's a social event—sitting on porches together making baskets. You connect with the materials, and there's always a part of me in there that goes into that process," he said. In fact, he sometimes has a hard time parting with artwork he's particularly attached to. When he sells one of those pieces, "I just make the transition quick and move on," he said.

Ford has sold his sweetgrass baskets and sculptures along Highway 17 and with his family at the marketplace, as well as through a gallery. For the last couple of years, however, he has focused on the creative process and building up his inventory, thanks to a sponsorship. Ford has a residency and show in Charleston coming up in October





ABOVE: **Modern Bread Tray**; 2015, 15 x 15 x 9 in.

2020 and another show at the Frederick Homes and Company Gallery in Seattle in early 2021.

He also enjoys teaching, passing along the tradition that reaches back to his ancestors in West Africa.

"Basketry is so fun. I get to be an artist, I get to be creative, and I get to do workshops that get people engaged in making their own baskets." His favorite part is a couple of hours into the session when the students have caught on and are working hard, taking pride in their own pieces.

"It makes me so happy," he said.

Learn more about Ford's work at [facebook.com/grassinmotion](https://facebook.com/grassinmotion) and [@grassinmotion](https://twitter.com/grassinmotion).

CATE COULACOS PRATO is a freelance writer based in central Massachusetts. She is the author of *Mixed-Media Self-Portraits* (Interweave 2008) and *Inside the Creative Studio* (Interweave 2012).



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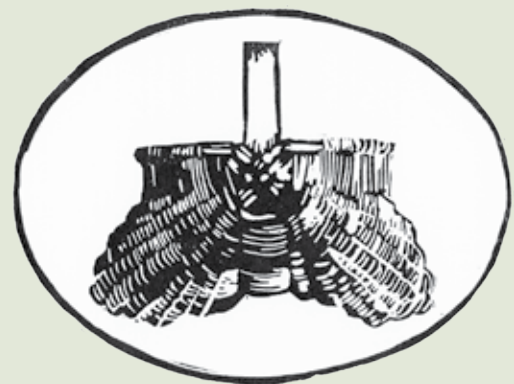
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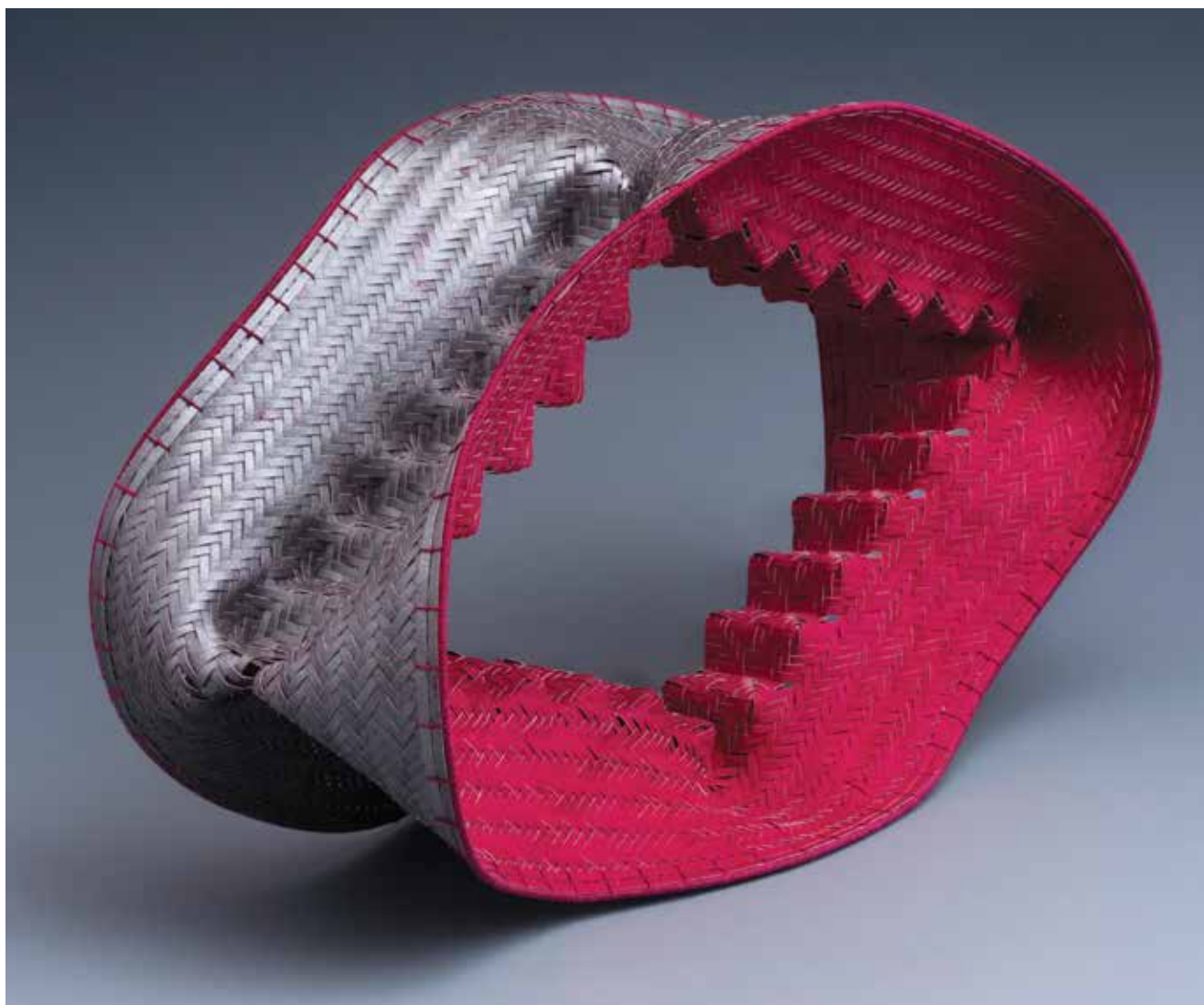




# THE MATHEMATICAL PUZZLES OF DOROTHY McGUINNESS

BY BETH SMITH

**D**orothy McGuinness has been making baskets for more than 30 years. "I had to start work full time in 1987 and, since I had the income, I decided to take a class at the University of Washington Experimental College. I wanted to see how people made baskets, so I took Creative Basket Making, and it opened up a new world for me. I was hooked," said McGuinness. She still has



her day job in the clinical research lab at the University of Washington, but weaving baskets and woven paper sculpture absorb much of her time.

McGuinness spent several years in workshops at the Basketry School in the Fremont area of Seattle and moved to workshops at the Fishsticks Basketry School in Marysville, north of Seattle, when the Basketry School in Fremont closed.

A native of the Pacific Northwest, McGuinness spent most of her adulthood in Seattle before moving to Everett, Washington, in search of a home with studio space. Now settled in Everett, her detached garage has morphed into a studio where she spends evenings and weekends creating new work.

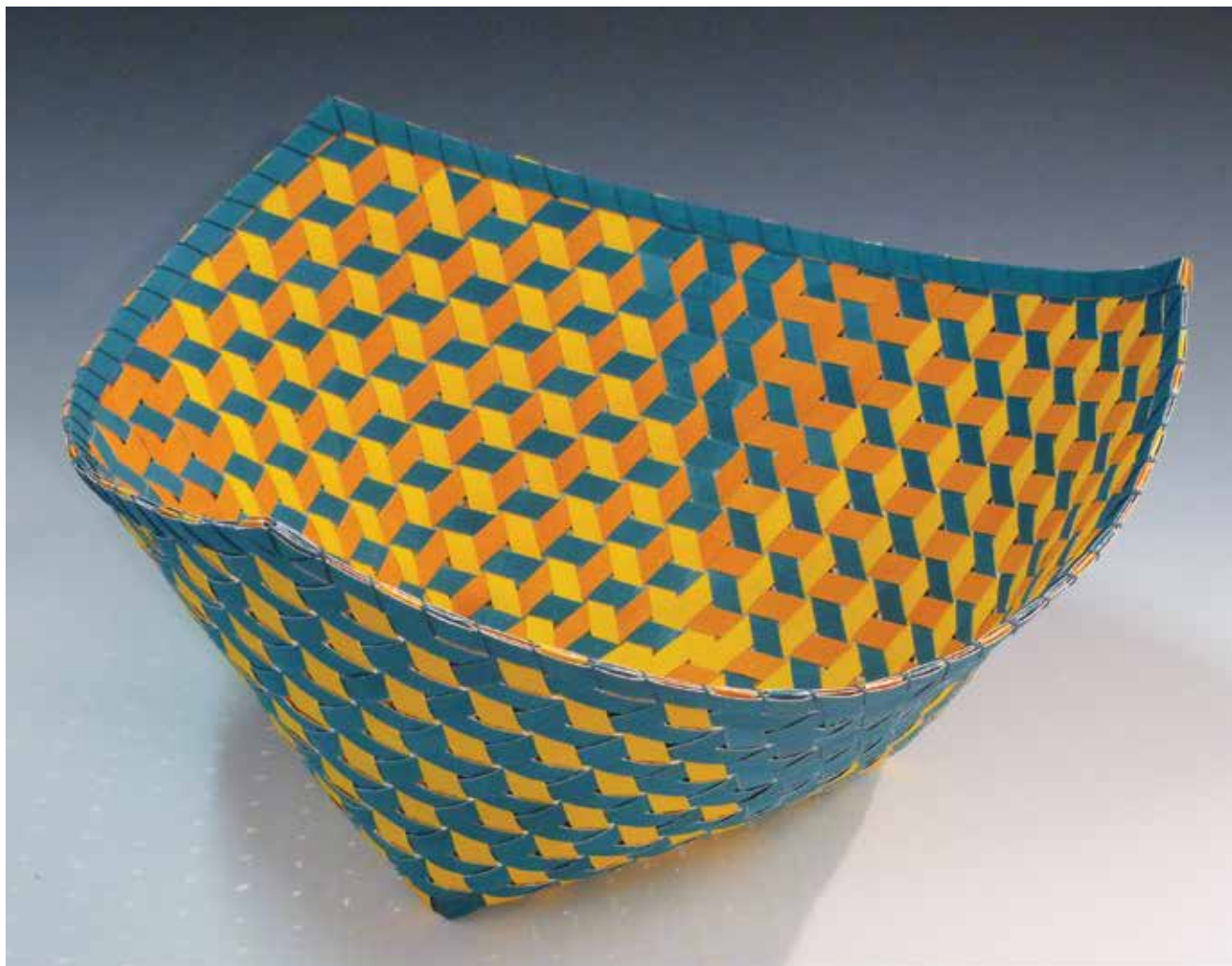
"I've taken more than 200 basketry workshops over the years and many of them have influenced my work," said McGuinness. "While trying my hand at coiling, twining, plaiting, mad weave, and rib-style baskets, I found that working with diagonal twills is what I enjoy best. I have worked with willow, ash, cedar bark, white oak, birch,



OPPOSITE PAGE: **Flower**; 2017; watercolor paper, acrylic paint, polyester thread, ribbon; diagonal twill; 11 x 15 x 12 in.

THIS PAGE TOP: **Threshold**; 2014; watercolor paper, acrylic paint, waxed linen thread; diagonal twill; 10 x 16 x 6 in. ABOVE: Dorothy McGuinness





KEN ROWE

and many other materials and now use watercolor paper, either 140-lb. rough Arches or Fabriano as my preferred material.

"I took more than 30 workshops with Jiro Yonezawa, first at the Basketry School and then at Fishsticks," McGuinness recalled. "While I knew I wasn't interested in the time it would take to develop the meticulous skill to properly process the bamboo for weaving fine baskets, I learned different techniques from Yonezawa with each workshop," she added.

"I discovered using watercolor paper for weaving baskets in a class with Jackie Abrams, and I never looked back," said McGuinness. "I have since combined traditional bamboo techniques with the paper techniques. What I like best about paper and paint is that I can play with color and pattern which offers endless possibilities."

McGuinness prepares her paper by first painting it with acrylic paints in a variety of colors. She prefers acrylic paints to watercolors or dyes because she doesn't have to varnish or seal the paper to retain its painted surface. She now works in diagonal twills cutting narrow 3-mm wide strips of paper with a pasta maker. "I discover new shapes and weaving possibilities, challenging myself with the mathematical aspects of the shapes and patterns and the use of color," said McGuinness. "I am process driven. I ask myself, 'What will happen if I try this?'"



OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: **Triality 4**; 2018; watercolor paper, acrylic paint, waxed linen thread; 9 x 16 x 16 in. BOTTOM: **Sentinels**; 2011; watercolor paper, acrylic paint, waxed linen thread; diagonal twill; 31 x 24 x 7 in. THIS PAGE TOP: **Byzantine**; 2019; watercolor paper, acrylic paint, polyester thread; mad weave; 9 x 20 x 14 in. BOTTOM: **Out Burst**; 2010; Yupo paper, acrylic paint, waxed linen thread; diagonal twill; 13 x 11 x 11 in.

"The forms I create are not usually found in the basketry world. They are not made for function but are more sculptural," McGuinness said. "Paper doesn't have the strength of natural materials. Paper lends itself to diagonal twills. Materials from nature, although they have more strength, require more work—harvesting, gathering, soaking, seasoning, and prepping for weaving. The art of diagonal twill and triaxial (mad) weave have become my signature technique."

Occasionally, McGuinness experiments with Yupo, a recyclable, waterproof, tree-free, synthetic paper with the strength that holds shape well when twisted and folded. "It takes the paint differently," stated McGuinness. "And it needs to be sealed since the paint doesn't stick." In her piece *Out Burst*, the woven Yupo strips are left loosely exposed, extending beyond the vessel in a burst of color and motion as if exploding from the form.

Both Yupo and copper are on McGuinness's list of materials to explore more intently. *Copper 1* is woven with bezel strips that have a patina she created using salt and vinegar. The form exudes strength and a formidable presence.



KEN ROWE





THIS PAGE TOP: **Oasis**; 2019; watercolor paper, acrylic paint, waxed linen thread; mad weave; 6 x 12 x 9 in.  
 BOTTOM: **Nearly Twelve**; 2017; watercolor paper, acrylic paint, waxed linen thread; diagonal twill; 9 x 8 x 48 in.

*Oasis* and *Tetrahedron* depart from the vessel form, undulating in twists and folds that invite the viewer to peer through the form and witness the layers of weave and color.

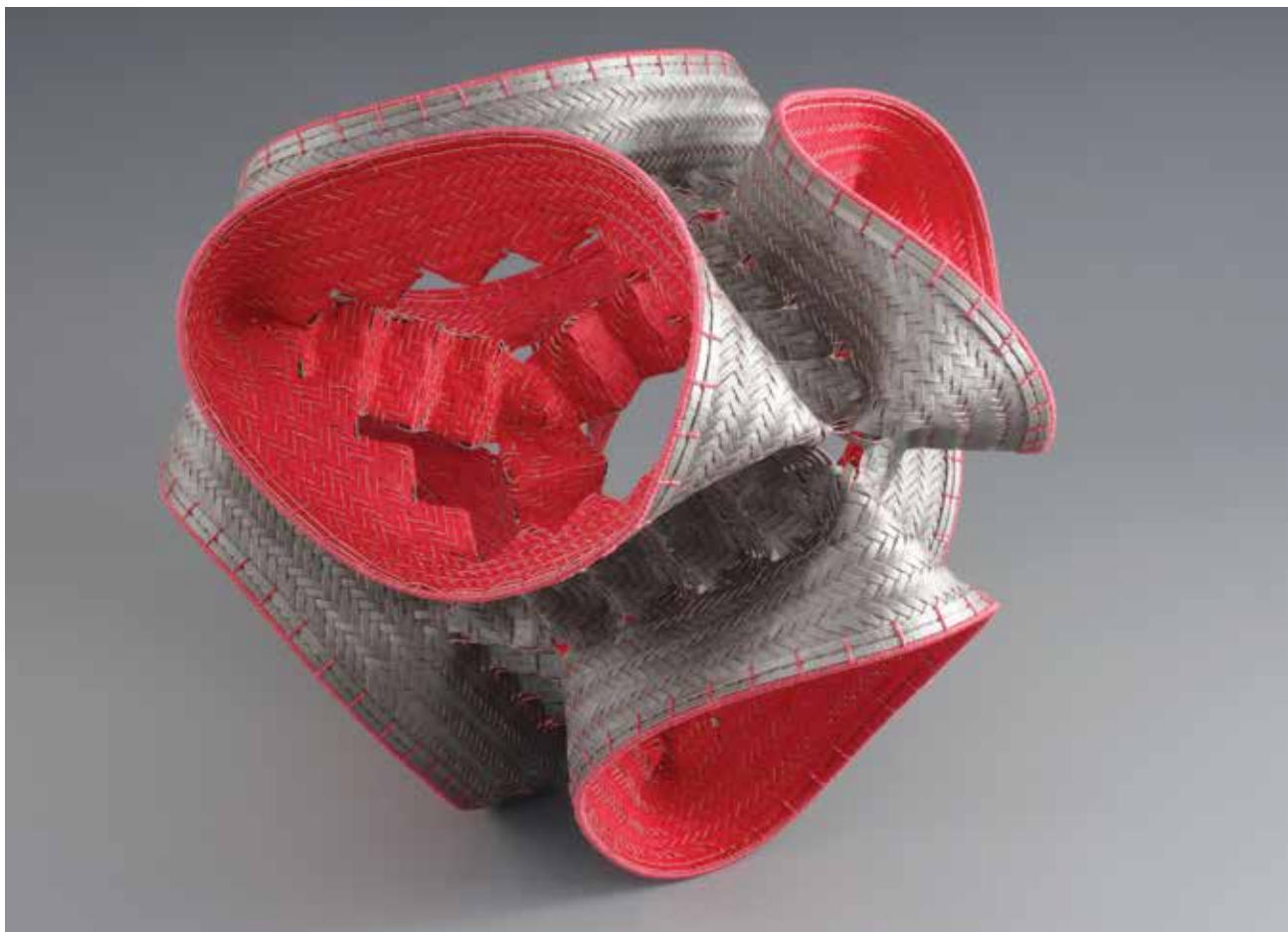
While McGuinness does not usually begin a work with the intent to create a series, sometimes a series develops as she explores how to divert from the original form. Such is the instance with *Nearly Twelve*, a series of 11 small baskets gradually increasing in circumference while using the same color scheme with different design patterns.

OPPOSITE PAGE  
 TOP: **Tetrahedron 3**; 2014; watercolor paper, acrylic paint, polyester thread; diagonal twill; 13 x 13 x 13 in.  
 BOTTOM: **Copper 1**; 2015; 36G copper, ammonia and salt patina; diagonal twill; 4 x 2 x 2 in.

McGuinness usually enters 20 to 30 juried museum and art center exhibitions each year, but with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in the closure of almost all venues, her art practice has slowed down this year. "Certainly, a deadline will push me to finish a work in progress if it fits the parameters of an exhibition," said McGuinness, "However, I rarely create a work specially to enter a show." Set themes do not always appeal to her, and with about 300 finished baskets and woven forms in her inventory, she rarely needs to create something new to enter an exhibition. "I work for the work itself," she said.



SUSIE HOWELL



McGuinness is recognized as a master and has won several awards throughout the US and internationally, providing the opportunity for her to travel in the US and abroad. Rather than concentrating on selling her work, McGuinness finds that entering juried exhibitions is more vital to her art practice.

Carie Collver, gallery director and chief curator at the Schack Art Center in Everett, Washington, where McGuinness has exhibited several times, said of the artist, "We are always excited here at the Schack to see what she will bring us—anything from sea forms and architectural sculptures to mathematical puzzles. She is constantly coming up with new shapes and color combos. Just when you think she couldn't possibly come up with any more, she does something amazing and surprises us all! And by working with painted watercolor paper, she can use all the colors of the rainbow as her palette to entice us and draw us in again and again.

"The Schack Art Center is an art educational facility, and on more than one occasion Dorothy has happily demonstrated her special twilling technique to adults and kids alike, with great appreciation by all. We call her our mathematical genius, because she makes it look so simple and yet so beautiful. As a gallery director, I think that there is nothing I enjoy more than seeing the artistic expression of an artist blossom, and Dorothy has certainly done that. I look forward to many more years of working with her, and I am excited to see what she comes up with next!"





RIGHT: **Red Eyed Devil**;  
2012; watercolor  
paper, acrylic paint,  
waxed linen thread;  
diagonal twill;  
12 x 12 x 6 in.

BELOW: **Zig Zag 5**;  
2017; watercolor  
paper, acrylic paint,  
waxed linen thread;  
diagonal twill;  
11 x 13 x 12 in.



KEN ROWE



KEN SMITH

McGuinness has recently been working on a series using black and white painted papers, twisting and bending the forms. *Red Eyed Devil* is one of seven works by the artist that was selected for "Fiber 2020" at the Bainbridge Island Museum of Art, in Bainbridge Island, Washington, through September 27, 2020. Another black and white work, *Zig Zag 5*, can be seen in the new book *The Language of Making, Visual Voices from the Textile Study Group of New York* available on Bookbaby and Amazon.

When not in her studio, McGuinness enjoys time with family, cooking, and the meditative motion of knitting and crocheting. [dorothymcguinnessbasket.com](http://dorothymcguinnessbasket.com)

BETH SMITH is the managing editor and exhibition director of *Fiber Art Now*. She is the founding director emerita of Visions Art Museum: Contemporary Quilts + Textiles and has curated over 20 exhibitions of fiber and textiles in galleries and museums in San Diego, California, where she resides. She can be reached at [bethsmith@fiberartnow.net](mailto:bethsmith@fiberartnow.net).





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# UNCOMMON DENOMINATORS

GAIL TREMBLAY, JAN HOPKINS,  
AUDREY ARMSTRONG

BY NOELLE FOYE

**A**s contemporary basketry began to come into its own with the American Studio Craft Movement, the idea took root that the materials an artist chose could contribute to the significance and meaning of a work. Baskets did not have to be made as they had been for generations using only the materials tradition dictated. Artists such as



OPPOSITE PAGE: Gail Tremblay; **When Will the Red Leader Overshadow Images of the 19th Century Noble Savage in Hollywood Films that Some Think are Sympathetic to American Indians**, 2018; 35mm film, red and white leader (film), silver braid; woven from the 1981 *Western Windwalker*; 15.5 x 14 x 14 in., 39.4 x 35.6 x 35.6 cm.

THIS PAGE  
ABOVE LEFT: Gail Tremblay; **As the Arctic Sea Ice Melts, Water Will Flood the Land**, 2018; 16mm film, blue and white leader (film), silver and black braid; woven with 16mm film from *At the Autumn River Camp, Part 2* (1967); 16.5 x 9 x 9 in., 41.9 x 22.9 x 22.9 cm.

ABOVE RIGHT:  
Gail Tremblay



Ed Rossbach, Pat Hickman, John McQueen, and John Garrett began to consider a variety of non-traditional materials for baskets, sometimes using traditional basket making techniques, sometimes exploring new sculptural basket forms. The choice of materials could add meaning, help convey a concept, or contribute to the artist's narrative. Whether opting for new and unusual materials or

choosing a culturally traditional material for a basket, the artist's choice might now read as a statement about the work.

Three contemporary artists working in basketry have each chosen different uncommon materials for their baskets. Gail Tremblay's weaving material, 16 and 35mm film, makes her baskets deeply personal statements. Jan Hopkins's materials, among them citrus and pomegranate skins, allows her to continually explore and refine her process for making. Audrey Armstrong has reached deep into the traditions of her Athabascan ancestors to revive both the traditional methods of constructing vessels and the use of fish skins as a traditional material. These uncommon materials, and the artists who chose them, bring together an interesting mix of traditional and contemporary techniques and materials.

## GAIL TREMBLAY

Artist Gail Tremblay is of the Onondaga and Mi'kmaq people. Born in Buffalo, New York, Gail grew up in New England learning the traditional basket weaving techniques of the Eastern Woodlands tribes from her grandfather's sister, of the Onondaga and Mohawk people, and from her grandmother who was Mi'kmaq. She learned to weave using traditional birch bark and ash splint from plants native to the Eastern Woodlands peoples. Gail made both utilitarian baskets and fancy baskets, which incorporated intricate designs and embellishments.

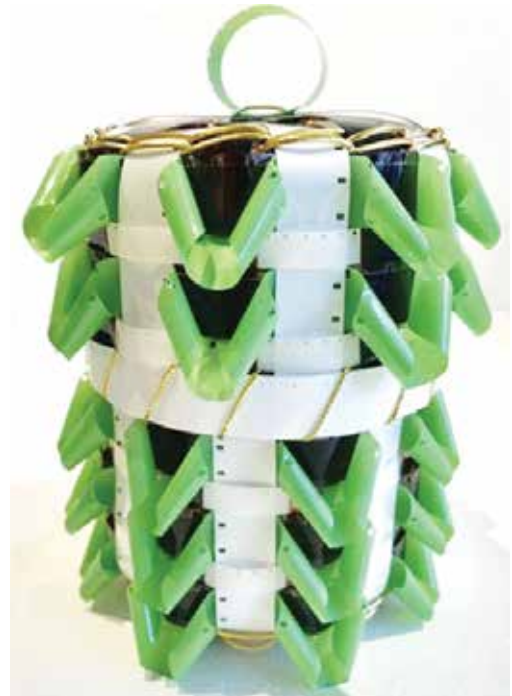
In 1985, Gail was co-teaching a course on developing countries and feminist film theory and practice with Marge Brown at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. While Gail taught about the theory of film making, the students were producing actual films. Marge suggested Gail should try doing something with the film left over from the student outtakes. Gail tried weaving





ABOVE LEFT: Gail Tremblay; **When the Ethnographic Present Ceases to Exist, Does the Red Leader Get Very Thin?**, 2018; 16mm film, red leader (film), silver braid; woven with 16mm film from *At the Winter Sea Ice Camp, Part 2* (1967); 9.5 x 7 x 7 in. 24.1 x 17.8 x 17.8 cm.

ABOVE RIGHT: Gail Tremblay; **Inside the Igloo**, 2017; 16mm film, green and white leader (film), 8mm white leader (film), gold braid; woven with 16mm film from *How the West was Won* and *Honor Lost* (1971); 7.25 x 5.5 x 5.5 in. 18.4 x 14 x 14 cm.



a basket with the film and thought "this is fun!" At the time, a lot of institutions were deaccessioning films, so Gail began seeking out film to collect as material for baskets. (Ironically, as the emerald ash borer has currently come to threaten ash trees in the United States, a traditional source of basket material, Gail has been able to rely on film as an alternate material for her baskets.)

The art Gail expresses through her baskets is very conceptual. The strands of film Gail uses in a basket are carefully chosen not just for color, although color can be significant, but as a means of contributing a layer of deep and consequential meaning to the piece itself. Gail seeks out and uses film that relates to Indigenous peoples. She has collected ethnographic films, documentaries on Native Americans and even film from the American genre of Westerns.

The topics and titles of the film Gail uses in a basket are often reflected in the title of the piece. Although sometimes lengthy, the titles of her works are a very significant aspect of it. She uses language, by means of the words in the title, to help her define meaning for the viewer. The specific film she chooses as a weaving material supports and helps define the personal message of her pieces. Tremblay combines the visual images of the film and the words of the title with her traditional weaving techniques to deconstruct and reconstruct her narrative about issues that are very personal and important to her. At the same time, she addresses the stereotyping of Native people and contemporary environmental issues that are consequential for them.

Titles such as *The Ultimate 1976 Myth of a Nineteenth Century 'Adopted' White English 'Sioux' Wannabe* offer insight into her thinking. The basket is woven from 16mm film from the trailer for the 1976 release of *The Return of a Man Called Horse*, a movie that presents an Englishman who was captured and adopted by Native Americans, later returning to be the

BELOW LEFT: Jan Hopkins; *Skin Deep* (Marilyn Monroe), 2006; yellow cedar bark, grapefruit peels, waxed linen; stitched; 17 x 15 x 9 in.

BELOW RIGHT: Jan Hopkins

"savior" of a Native American tribe that has been vanquished and lost its way. *When Will the Red Leader Overshadow Images of the 19th Century Noble Savage In Hollywood Films That Some Think Are Sympathetic To American Indians* uses strips of 35mm film from the 1981 Western movie *Windwalker*.

Environmental concerns are also important to Tremblay. Many issues such as global warming have a direct and perhaps disproportionate impact on Native Americans. Several of her recent pieces explore these issues. *If the Ice Melts and The Grass Grows On Small Islands In The Sea, Will Images Of The Inuit World Become Fragments Lost In History*, woven with 16mm film from *At the Winter Sea Ice Camp, Part 2* from 1967, in addition to smaller 8mm film, considers how global warming affects the Inuit. *Will the Hunger To Make Money From Oil Melt the Sea Ice and Flood the Coastal Cities Of The World?*, again woven with film from *At the Winter Sea Ice Camp, Part 2*, considers a different impact of global warming.

Tremblay said, "Artists find ways of addressing all kinds of subjects about life in the world as a Native person." She believes the beauty of the weaving and the craftsmanship and artistry of the basket form have the power to attract people. Her work often addresses the stereotyping of Indigenous peoples and environmental issues that have a direct impact on Native Americans.

The basket draws them in to read her statement and to hear the message she is sharing.

Learn more about Gail Tremblay's work at [froelickgallery.com](http://froelickgallery.com).

## JAN HOPKINS

Jan Hopkins loves the adventure and challenge of seeking out unusual materials to use in her work. Trying new and uncommon materials demands experimentation and ongoing exploration of how best to work with a new material, which feeds Hopkins's creativity.

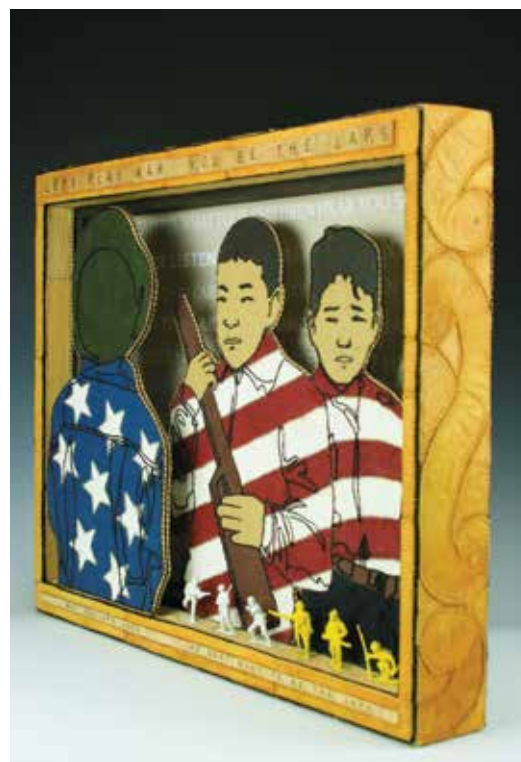
Hopkins's interest in basketry was first piqued when she visited the Heard Museum during a visit to Arizona for her sister's wedding. She was struck by the incredible Native American







ABOVE LEFT: Jan Hopkins; **Emerging from Darkness**, 2019; halibut fish skin, yellow cedar bark, weathered hydrangea petals, waxed linen thread; stitched; 20 x 12.5 x 4 in. Part of the WWII Japanese-American Internment Series.



ABOVE RIGHT: Jan Hopkins; **Out of the Mouths of Babes**, 2015; cantaloupe peel and grapefruit peel, cedar bark, waxed linen, acrylic paint, paper, found objects, mounted on wood panels and frame; painted, stitched, assembled; 19 x 24 in.

baskets she saw there and determined to try to learn to make baskets. It wasn't until she moved to Edmonds, Washington, however, that her interest and the opportunity to learn basket making came together. The Basketry School had just opened nearby in Seattle, and a friend invited Hopkins to take a class with her. Learning from artists such as Marilyn Moore and Jiro Yonezawa helped her build a strong foundation of technical skills and techniques. She was also

introduced to the Northwest Basket Weaver Vi Phillips Guild which sponsored classes by John Garrett, John McQueen, and Holly Churchill.

Hopkins found herself drawn to natural materials. Wanting to delve into them more deeply, she turned to Churchill, who strongly influenced her career. Churchill, a traditional Haida basket maker, taught a discipline of traditional Haida gathering, processing, and weaving with cedar bark. Hopkins fell in love with it but often found as a non-Native these materials were not always readily available to her, so she began to consider what alternative "skins" she might employ. A tiny orange-peel folk art pill container triggered the idea of trying citrus skins. And melons. And pomegranates! Hopkins also delved into using fish skins, knowing that, historically, many Indigenous artists along with Chinese and Japanese makers used these. Her ideas for materials kept expanding and figuring out how to preserve them became part of the challenge. The details of processing cedar bark that she had learned from Churchill enabled her to figure out how to continually expand her knowledge of working with these new materials and to develop her own unique methods. Experimentation with materials took over her conceptual artwork. Hopkins has continued to experiment and says her process never gets boring because it keeps changing and evolving. She is always learning something new.

BELOW: Jan Hopkins;  
**Homage to the  
 Circle of Life**, 2018;  
 cantaloupe peel,  
 Meyer lemon, yellow  
 cedar bark, waxed  
 linen; stitched;  
 6.5 x 12 x 12 in. Fuller  
 Craft Museum; funded  
 by Marcia Doctor/  
 Queenie Enterprises.

McQueen particularly inspired her to grow. Hopkins said, "He suggested that I break through the importance of traditional rules and create and adapt new innovative ways of creating."

Working in series provides artists the opportunity to explore different facets of an idea or theme. Hopkins chose the torso form for several series that delve into different themes. *Skin Deep*, one of her Women Icons series, is a tribute to Marilyn Monroe. The torso, created using grapefruit peels and yellow cedar, expresses Hopkins's view of the different public and private personas of the star. Quotes from Marilyn are stitched into the torso. The outside features words she spoke in her Hollywood star voice. On the inner surface, the private words of the woman underneath the glitter.

Storytelling is a big part of Hopkins's work. Initially, although her intent was simply to make things with meaning, she did not see her work as being driven by concepts. Setting out to make something in homage to the grandfather she never met, who had immigrated to the US from Japan when he was 18, Hopkins focused on symbols. The vertical basket form of *Emerging from Darkness* is worked in halibut fish skin, yellow cedar, and weathered hydrangea petals. Fish skin is a material that has been used in Japanese and Chinese cultures, along with the cultures of many Indigenous peoples. Hopkins centered a hinomaru (the Japanese circle of the sun) on the dark front panel. On the reverse side, the hinomaru rests half on dark skin and half on light. Her grandfather had lived through the Great Depression and then was interned in one of the camps for Japanese-Americans during World War II. He died not long after the war ended. Hopkins found the concept of the work captured in the title, *Emerging from Darkness*. Hopkins and her husband, Chris,







THIS PAGE  
ABOVE: Audrey  
Armstrong; **Chief's  
Wife**, 2017; king  
salmon fish skins,  
deer skin, traditional  
tanned moose skin with  
pearl hearts, abalone  
shells, dentalia shells,  
fish vertebrae; stitched  
and dyed; 12 x 6 in.

OPPOSITE PAGE  
TOP: Audrey  
Armstrong  
BOTTOM: Audrey  
Armstrong; **Montana  
Creek**, 2011; belly and  
back of halibut fish  
skins; dentalia shells,  
faceted beads;  
stitched; 12 x 6 in.

have made a number of other works (for ongoing traveling exhibitions) drawing on the experiences of her family members before, during, and after the mass incarceration of the Japanese-American Internment.

Learn more about Jan Hopkins's work at [janhopkinsart.blogspot.com](http://janhopkinsart.blogspot.com) or [@janhopkinsart](https://www.instagram.com/janhopkinsart).

## AUDREY ARMSTRONG

Audrey Armstrong, a native Koyukon Athabascan, is from the village of Huslia on the Koyukuk River, within the Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge. Growing up, Armstrong's summers were spent along the Yukon. Families lived at their fish camps during the summer months. Traditional nets and fish wheels were used to catch the fish that would sustain them through the winters. Eventually Armstrong's husband taught her to use a rod and reel. It was the experience of reeling in a salmon one day that set her on the path of making baskets from fish skins, a traditional skill of her people that was rapidly disappearing from contemporary Native culture.

In 2008, Armstrong was camping along a creek flowing between mountains clad in glaciers. It was a place where the silver salmon come up the river. Fishing alone that day, she landed a gorgeous salmon as the sun was breaking through the clouds. She realized this experience was just as it would have been for her ancestors hundreds of years ago. Holding the salmon, the light shimmered as it caught the colors of its scales and Armstrong thought, "I could make something of this." She knew the Indigenous people of Alaska had used fish skins to make clothing and household objects but knew little about the actual process.

Armstrong set out to research how fish skins had been prepared and used. Originally, the skins were made into utilitarian objects such as baskets, containers, boots, and raincoats. Treated with bear grease, they became impervious to water. Different threads



BETHANY GOODRICH FOR SALMON LIFE



and different types of stitching were employed depending on the different uses. Moose skin and caribou bone might be incorporated. Dentalium shells, traded from the tribes of the Pacific Northwest and used for embellishment, were considered highly valuable and worn only by chiefs and their wives.

As Armstrong pursued learning more about fish skins, she encountered a woman teaching how to work with fish skins as a textile material. Fran Reed was to become Armstrong's mentor and good friend. Although not a native Alaskan, Reed had spent years studying and creating work using the traditional methods of working with fish skins and was recognized as an expert in the material. Armstrong was fortunate to take the final class Reed taught before she died from cancer, and learned from her firsthand how to process the skins and work with them. The two quickly became friends. When Reed died, Armstrong believed the obligation to teach and share the knowledge she had gained passed to her. Consequently, Armstrong teaches others whenever she can and is always willing to teach anyone who wants to learn.

Cleaning and processing the skins is a long, careful process that must be completed before the actual designing and creating of an object can begin. Once cleaned, the skins are stitched together using sinew. The stitched vessel is then





ABOVE LEFT: Audrey Armstrong; **Come Together**, 2020; steelhead trout fish skins, red-dyed Icelandic fish skins, abalone shells, fish vertebrae, dentalia shells, faceted beads; stitched, dyed; 10 x 12 in.

ABOVE RIGHT: Audrey Armstrong; **Clear Creek**, 2010; king salmon fish skins, deer skin, dentalia shells, faceted beads; stitched; 11 x 13 in.  
Resides in the Washington, DC, office of Alaska senator Lisa Murkowski.



placed over a mold to dry. At this point, Armstrong may add fur, bone, shells, or beads to embellish a piece. Using her own designs, Armstrong creates baskets, garments, and jewelry. She has

recently branched out from local salmon skins to steelhead trout. Although she uses traditional materials, her work has a contemporary feel.

The *Chief's Wife's Bowl* is an example of what Armstrong can create from salmon skin. The silver fish skin glimmers, the scales reflecting light. Each carefully cut and shaped panel is fit together and stitched by hand. Small decorations of beads, dentalia (the tusk shaped seashells), and pieces of abalone shell add delicate notes of color. In her *Montana Creek* vessel, the diagonal piecing of alternating light and dark skins gives a sense of movement to the tall, vertical piece. Light passes through the skins and illuminates the piece from within, creating a soft glow.

One of Armstrong's latest pieces was made in April 2020. Armstrong said, "It is made from steelhead trout fish skins and trimmed with red-dyed fish skin from Iceland, abalone shells, and dentalia shells. These represent the status of our Athabascan chiefs—one shell was worth three beavers' skins in the old days. There are fish vertebrae hanging from tassels of fish skin and trimmed with faceted beads. I called this piece *Come Together*—red symbolizing that all our blood is red; dentalia representing the



ABOVE LEFT: Audrey Armstrong; **Arctic Steelhead Trout**; 2019; high basket made from Arctic steelhead trout with white halibut fish skin trimming the top, trimmed with abalone shells and dentalia shells; 8 x 5 in.



TOP RIGHT: Audrey Armstrong; **Fall Beauty**; 2017; dyed king salmon skins trimmed on top with traditional tanned moose skin, caribou bone in center, trimmed with dentalia shells; 10 x 12 in.



BOTTOM RIGHT: Audrey Armstrong; **Berry Bucket**; 2015; king salmon skins trimmed with faceted beads, dentalia shells, fish vertebrae, and deerskin; 15 x 12 in.

richness of our culture helping one another during this pandemic time; vertebrae representing our first responders and leaders who we look to as the backbone of our people.”

Each of these three artists honors the traditions and materials of past generations while adding new and contemporary interpretations to their work. Creating a vessel, whether of film, fish skin, or citrus peel, is an action that follows the creative pathways of those who came before. Preparing materials, choosing a design, and watching the form evolve as they weave or stitch, is something that reaches back across generations of artists. While the materials Tremblay, Hopkins, and Armstrong choose may be uncommon, the beauty and narrative their skilled hands create is universal.

NOELLE FOYE is Executive Director Emeritus of New Bedford Art Museum and past Education Director of Fuller Craft Museum. A maker and explorer of all things fiber, she also has worked as Exhibitions and Membership Manager for the *Fiber Art Network*.



## CONFERENCES & RETREATS

### January 21–24, 2021

A Decade of Weaving Together  
Texas Basket Weavers Association  
Round Rock TX  
[texasbasketweavers.com](http://texasbasketweavers.com)

### February 1–4, 2021

Weaving in the Sunshine State  
Crown Plaza at Bell Tower  
Fort Meyers FL  
[brightexpectationsbaskets.com](http://brightexpectationsbaskets.com)

### February 5–7, 2021

Georgia Basketry Association  
Hilton Marietta Atlanta  
Conference Center  
Marietta GA  
[proformaprana.wixsite.com/ga-basketry](http://proformaprana.wixsite.com/ga-basketry)

### May 19–23, 2021

Weaving in Winter/Spring  
Northwest Basket Weavers  
Seabeck WA  
[nwbasketweavers.org](http://nwbasketweavers.org)

## EXHIBITS

### Ongoing

Woven Through Time: American Treasures of Native Basketry and Fiber Art  
Arizona State Museum  
Tucson AZ  
[statemuseum.arizona.edu/exhibits/woven-through-time](http://statemuseum.arizona.edu/exhibits/woven-through-time)

### Ongoing–December 31, 2020

Here, Now and Always  
Museum of Indian Arts and Culture  
Santa Fe NM  
[miaclab.org/current?&eventID=40](http://miaclab.org/current?&eventID=40)

### Ongoing–October 25, 2020

15<sup>th</sup> Annual In the Spirit  
Online  
Washington State Historical Society  
[washingtonhistory.org/exhibit/15th-annual-in-the-spirit-contemporary-native-arts-virtual-exhibition](http://washingtonhistory.org/exhibit/15th-annual-in-the-spirit-contemporary-native-arts-virtual-exhibition)

### Ongoing–October 27, 2020

Future Tense 2020  
Appalachian Center for Craft  
Smithville TN  
[tnitech.edu/fine-arts/craftcenter](http://tnitech.edu/fine-arts/craftcenter)

### Ongoing–October 31, 2020

Wolankeyutomon: Take Care of Everything  
Abbe Museum  
Bar Harbor ME  
[abbemuseum.org/currentexhibits](http://abbemuseum.org/currentexhibits)

### Ongoing–May 3, 2021

Beyond the Loom: Fiber as Sculpture/  
Subversive Threads  
Museum of Fine Arts  
Boston MA  
[mfa.org/exhibition/women-take-the-floor](http://mfa.org/exhibition/women-take-the-floor)

## WORKSHOPS

### October 12, 2020

Sweetgrass Sculpture  
Polly Sutton  
Bainbridge Island Resource Network  
Bainbridge Island WA  
[bainbridgebarn.org](http://bainbridgebarn.org)

### October 24, 2020

Willow Basketry, Stake and Strand  
Sandra Kehoe  
Roots School  
Bradford VT  
[rootsvt.com](http://rootsvt.com)

### November 7–8, 2020

Birch Bark Sawtooth Table Basket  
North House Folk School  
Grand Marais MN  
[northhouse.org](http://northhouse.org)

### January 3–9, 2021

Striking Antler Baskets  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### January 10–16, 2021

Pine Needle Basket Weaving  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### February 7–13, 2021

Miniature Black Ash Baskets  
JoAnn Kelly Catsos  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### February 14–19, 2021

The Wonders of Willow Bark  
Judy Zuggish  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### February 19–21, 2021

Bias Weave Basketry with Copper and Willow Barks  
Judy Zuggish  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### March 14–20, 2021

Cherokee Split Oak Purse  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### March 14–20, 2021

Marbling and Ikkanbari Baskets  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### April 25–30, 2021

Charleston Sweetgrass Baskets  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### April 30–May 2, 2021

Decorative Basket Weaving on River Stones  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### May 16–21, 2021

Pine Needle Coiling on a Mold  
Jean Poythress Koon  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### May 21–23, 2021

Weave a Tall Market Basket  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### May 23–29, 2021

Skeined Willow Basket  
Bill Roeder  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### June 6–11, 2021

Gourd Art Works  
Fonda Haddad  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### June 11–13, 2021

Traditional Bark Basketry  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

### June 13–19, 2021

Using Color in Your Baskets  
Peggy Adelman  
John C. Campbell Folk School  
Brasstown NC  
[folkschool.org](http://folkschool.org)

## CALL FOR ENTRIES

### Ongoing–December 31, 2020

Exhibition Proposals  
Textile Center  
Minneapolis MN  
[textilecentermn.org](http://textilecentermn.org)



Little Red Hen by Jan Hopkins



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