

basketry+

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INTRODUCING

MEDICINE BASKETS

BY AMY DiPLACIDO



In a Chicago studio, infused with the earthy scent of harvested branches, artist Phera Singh weaves more than just European style willow baskets—each creation is a tapestry of craft, place, and intention. As a willow work artist who makes both stake and strand and frame baskets, Singh honors the legacy of handmade tradition with every cutting of willow they harvest and mold into form. The journey began with primitive skills workshops and craft classes, and unfurled through fellow Instagram connections, international studies with several experts in Denmark and Norway, and countless hours of trial and error.

The term “Medicine Baskets” refers to not only the artist’s business name, it also encapsulates Singh’s fusion of basketry with their deep-rooted interest in medicinal plants. The connection became apparent when they were harvesting plants and placing each clipping into their handmade basket. To the artist, their creations aren’t just units of storage; they are healing vessels, a tactile metaphor bridging humans with the Earth. Creating vessels by hand and, in turn, giving away or selling the baskets for everyday use, instills the belief that natural materials can withstand the test of



HERE:
Bassinet #8;
 2023; willow;
 randing (base),
 English randing,
 three and four
 rod waling,
 zigzag randing,
 cranked
 handles,
 foot border;
 32 x 19 x 20 in.

OPPOSITE
 TOP:
**Various
 gathering
 baskets;**
 2021–2023;
 willow; stake
 and strand
 weaves
 including three
 and four rod
 waling, French
 randing,
 zigzag randing,
 frame basketry;
 dimensions
 variable

BOTTOM:
 Singh with
 baskets on
 Phulkari in
 front of their
 three-year-old
 willow coppice;
 2021–2023

time and rekindle our relationships with our spiritual foundation. Each basket created is a quiet, yet potent act of rebellion against industrial systems flooding our lives with disposable materials.

Singh’s artistic endeavors are labor-intensive and meditative, a delicate balancing act that takes up more hours than one can count. From growing to selecting willow shoots for straightness and uniformity to bundling, drying, and finally soaking the willow for days, Singh employs a near-sacred meticulousness. About half their day goes into the physical weaving, while the rest is a whirl of customer engagement and shipping logistics, as they are able to create baskets as their full-time work. The physicality of the craft—working on either a large workbench or the floor for the necessary eye-level attentiveness—is far from easy. It’s not just about weaving willow strands; it’s about remembering the stories of the material—the rain, sun, labor, and time of growth.

Singh, whose name can be translated to “sacred circle” from their paternal Punjabi language, sees each basket and each woven revolution as a cyclical

entity, destined to return to the Earth just as life does. Singh’s artistic vision and practice is further influenced by their mixed heritage as someone of Punjabi Sikh and European descent. Throughout their journey with basketry, each woven creation becomes a dialogue of reclamation and reciprocity, as well as an introspective dialogue of understanding place, ancestral legacy, and familial connection.

In a time when there are essential and non-essential divisions of labor, Singh’s baskets stand as testimony to the timeless value of handcrafted art. These vessels are homages to centuries-old skills and stories, humble yet defiant against a world perpetuating throwaway culture. In the sanctity of the artist’s studio, where willow rods meet human hands, Singh weaves—not just baskets, but a complex web, acknowledging ancient practice in a modern world.

medicine-baskets.com | [@medicinebaskets](https://www.instagram.com/medicinebaskets)

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