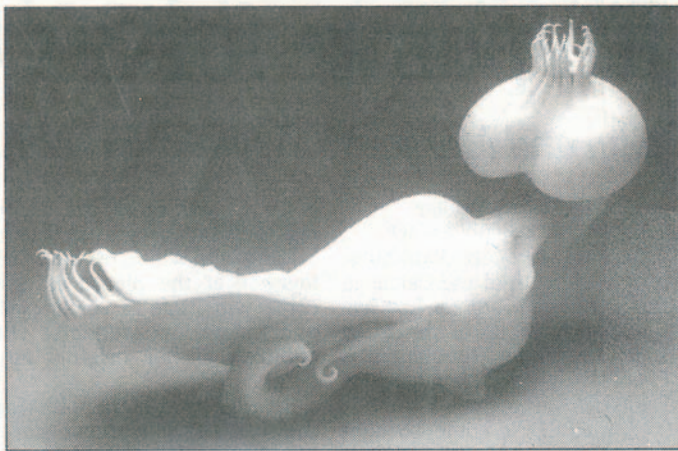


Neighbors Montgomery County

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"Hybrid Series, No. 1," a prizewinning piece by Lindsay Feuer of Blue Bell, moves from the world of realism to a new realm of personal fantasy. Craftforms is at the Wayne Art Center.

From near and far, crafts help define fresh artistic vision

By Victoria Donohoe
INQUIRER ART CRITIC

Now in its 10th year, Craftforms is a show that has become indispensable for South-eastern Pennsylvania.

If anything, the Wayne Art Center's current national display is better than last year's exceptionally fine offering. It releases enough fresh oxygen to quicken the pulse of anyone concerned with craft art, or its major resurgence in this country in recent decades. And the flair and vibrancy of the event could attract the curious as well.

A strong winnowing process determines who participates in Craftforms, with one blue-ribbon judge deciding things. That individual chooses the show from slides sent in, then picks prize-winners after the works arrive from far and near.

This year, Melissa G. Post, curator of craft and design at the Mint Museums in Charlotte, N.C., did the honors. She screened the largest number of entries ever received in this series of shows: 789 items submitted by 404 artists from 26 states and the District of Columbia.

From this horde of predominantly ceramics, fiber and metal, Post chose an 87-item display by 74 artists. She describes the works as a wide array, from "minimalist to new baroque," a field that includes functional, decorative, sculptural and whimsical work.

The viewer's first impression upon entering the show is the richness of the many large, fiber wall-hangings ranged around the room. It's a kind of wake-up call, too. That's because for many of us, the notion of wall hangings had become shop-worn, perhaps from our lack of close attention to developments in this field.

But here, the artists — Barbara W. Watler of Florida, Pauline Verbeek-Cowart of Kansas, Robin L. Haller of Ohio, and Cathy Bolding of California — breathe new life into their age-old medium in a wide variety of impressive ways.

Thus, they show they are in command of the use of colored pencils on fabrics and oil paint on fabric (both in surprisingly effective ways), or with woven silk or jacquard, as each of these artists makes a delicate tightrope balance between the abstract and the representational.

Craftforms also does much to stimulate a new interest in ceramics, its largest category, with 29 objects.

One prize-winning piece among these is *Hybrid Series, No. 1* by Lindsay Feuer of Blue Bell. This matte-finish, off-white sculpture of hand-built porcelain leads us with startling directness from the world of realism to a new realm of personal fantasy.

Strange psychological undercurrents murmur throughout this work with its

sensual surface, and also through a smaller related piece by the same artist.

By contrast, the visual gratification to be had from New York resident Colleen Carlson's *Holly-wood Slippers* suggests that this porcelain piece of nostalgia might be Craftforms' most popular item.

The very appealing quality of this object is its preciousness, achieved by an obviously laborious technique covering every inch of these slippers fit for a star.

There are many artists here who have the instinct for the age in which we live. What comes across in their work is the responsibility they feel as artists to convey something about the burden of knowledge and experience that people today carry that's often quite heavy.

That's what gives their art bite and substance and makes it searching. In this category, I would include metalsmiths Frankie Flood of Illinois and Renee Zettle-Sterling of Michigan; woodturner Michael Werner of Washington; glass artist JoAnn Baumann of Illinois; and jewelry makers Jill Baker of Arizona and Geoffrey D. Giles of North Carolina.

It's a fascinating show, nothing short of wonderful because it makes us all think and see differently.

Wayne Art Center, 413 Maplewood Ave., Wayne. To Jan. 20. Mondays-Saturdays 10-5. Closed Dec. 23-Jan. 2. 610-688-3553.

Montgomery County Community College. Three suburban artists, buddies since their Norristown Art League days, are exhibiting at the college.

Susannah Hart Thomer of Plymouth Meeting, a traditional watercolorist of some tact and ability who needs to break out of tight strictures, does so occasionally here, especially in *Garden Entrance, Struttin' and Wash Day*.

Clemmie King, formerly of Ambler and now of North Carolina, puts her love of nature and animals on display. Her image of a thrush, *Carolina Friend*, and nuzzling puppies, *Friends for Life*, are her best works, along with an occasional very promising charcoal piece.

Thomas W. Benfield of Boyertown shows free-standing sculptures made from metal rods. Having mostly cleansed his abstraction of representational tags and decorative impulses, Benfield continues to look for a shape to replace the discarded human figure. His current work, therefore, appears a cursory project and easy exercise.

Montgomery County Community College's College Hall, off Morris Road, Blue Bell. To Jan. 16. Mondays-Thursday 9 a.m.-9:30 p.m., Fridays 9-5, Saturdays 10-4, Sundays 1-5. 215-641-6505.

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