



Fiber Art Now

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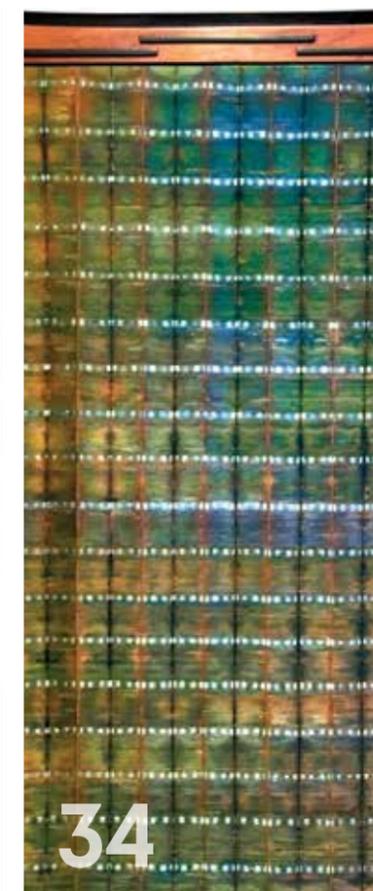
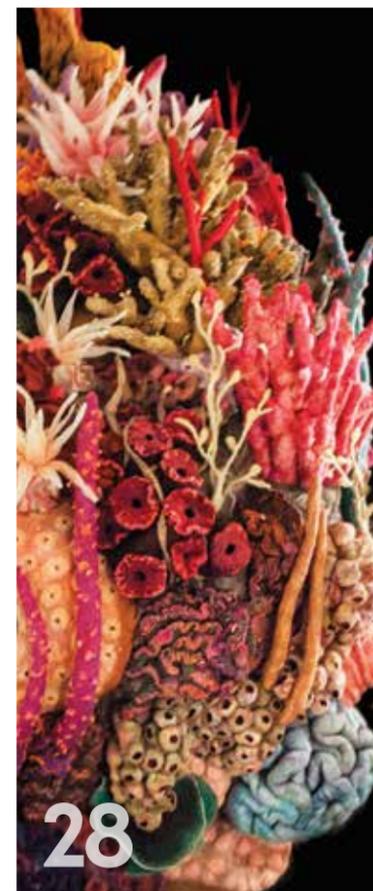
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TOURS & TRAVEL & CALLS FOR ENTRY
COMPILED BY CATE PRATO



ON THE COVER: Libby Williamson, **Burn Cycles**; 2019; silk, cotton, burlap, cheesecloth, zipper, measuring tape, sheers, tulle, felt, upholstery fabric, hemp rope, embroidery threads, repurposed scarves, yarn; free motion machine stitching, appliqué, hand painting and dyeing, hand stitching; 100 x 40 in.

THIS PAGE: Helen Wilde, **Bawa**, (detail); 2019; organza, embroidery silk, hand dyed yarn, bamboo cotton yarn, porcelain mix ceramic; stumpwork, French knots, bullion and running stitches; 21 x 21 x 2 in. See full image on page 13.



16 THE TAPESTRIES OF JON ERIC RIIS AN UNFOLDING PATH BY PATRICIA MALARCHER

Jon Eric Riis's simple over-under gestures of construction have shown in museums and galleries throughout the world. His lustrous materials and meticulous execution of patterns and imagery produce sumptuous surfaces that combine provocation and visual splendor. Over several years, Riis has created a series of continuing tapestries punctuated with exploratory departures. He is currently using silk and metallic threads with Swarovski crystal beads for embellishment.

22 PHILADELPHIA STORIES THREE ARTISTS INFLUENCED BY THE CITY BY BRUCE HOFFMAN

Philadelphia is a city of heated sports fans, the cheese steak, and the Rocky statue proudly standing on the front grounds of one of the world's finest art museums. It also has a long history with commercial textile production due to the mills that lined the rivers in the early 19th century. Artists Adela Akers, Yvonne Bobrowicz, and Nancy Koenigsberg each have strong connections to Philadelphia.

28 NETHERLANDS FELT ARTISTS BY TRUDI VAN DYKE

New methods and subject matter exploration are the driving forces behind the traction that felt is receiving in the fine craft world. We visited the Netherlands to explore the work of felt artists Ellen Bakker, Zsófia Marx, and Saar Snoek, each of whom have insights and inspirations to share. These three artists have mastered innovative techniques for transforming this ancient fiber into contemporary works of art.

34 CALIFORNIA FIBERS 50 YEARS STRONG BY JANET MENDELSON

At a time when some deem membership organizations of any nature passé, California Fibers is going strong. The acclaimed contemporary artists in this group are too busy creating and exhibiting to give much thought to celebrating its 50th year. Their goal is to exhibit and promote their work. Members' practices involve weaving, basketry, sculpture, quilting, embroidery, felting, surface design, knitting, crochet, wearables, and mixed media.

CALIFORNIA FIBERS

BY JANET MENDELSON

HERE: Doshi, **Kakemono – Thirst Drove Me Down to the Water Where I Drank the Stars Reflection**; 2016; silk dupioni, acid dye; itajime shibori; 31 x 66 in.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: Lydia Tjioe Hall, **One a Day 2014** (detail); 2015; steel wire, copper wire, found natural objects, capiz shells; knotless netting; 46 x 264 x 3 in. (installation)
BOTTOM: Gail Fraser, **Ripple Effect**; 2016; handmade paper, collection of natural found objects; handmade paper using kozo, natural materials, and shredded upholstery materials, applied on a sculptural form built from palm pods by forming the new pods from paper bags, gesso, and acrylic paint, then covering it with the handmade paper and filling the interior form with natural found, collected objects and hog casings; 86 x 34 x 4.5 in.

50 YEARS STRONG

California Fibers isn't taking time to celebrate its 50th year. The acclaimed contemporary artists in this group are too busy creating and exhibiting to give it much thought. But when *Fiber Art Now* asked members to explain the group's impressive longevity, they gave remarkably similar, no-nonsense answers.

In the words of Polly Giacchina, who joined 30 years ago, "The group is limited to 25 artists who are juried in—and we're a tough crowd. Once accepted, everyone has a job. We share the load to make things happen. And mainly what we do is exhibitions."

Michael Rohde, whose tapestries and rugs hang in US embassies and museums here and abroad, is one of numerous prominent fiber artists the group has nurtured.

"I don't feel any sense of competition in a group of this size, as one might expect," said Rohde, who responded from his latest adventure in India. "We all have the same goal of exhibitions and promoting our work. The exhibitions are selected by outside jurors, so the work must stand on its own merits. I think we all appreciate that jurors have different views, and don't take rejection as a major loss. Most jurying winds up with at least one piece per artist which I'd like to think is because the standards to be a member are rather rigorous."



CARRIE BURCKLE

At a time when some deem membership organizations of any nature passé, California Fibers is going strong.

"As a curator in Southern California, [I can say] our community has certainly benefited from California Fibers member artists' commitment to contemporary craft," said Christine Knoke Hietbrink, deputy director, chief curator and director of exhibitions, Mingei International Museum, San Diego. "They hold themselves to high technical standards and their work is always interesting and engaging to me, offering fresh perspectives on fiber art. A membership-based arts collective surviving and thriving for 50 years is quite an achievement!"

Emily Zaiden, Director, Craft in America Center, Los Angeles, said, "California Fibers is a league apart. The work of their members is among the most exceptional, more contemporary work in Southern California. They are high-caliber artists [with] high standards in terms of technical process and artistic innovation." Over the past decade, she has featured several of the artists at the Craft in America Center gallery. "Visitors are always engaged and find the work to be informative. It's evident there is mastery of technique in their work."

"There's a strong tradition of fiber art in this state. California Fibers brings attention to that," continued Zaiden. "Curators are constantly looking for artists doing important work, sifting through who is who, and the California Fibers website is a resource, a helpful tool, to find artists making significant fiber art." She added that many members do workshops, engaging other artists in the community, bringing them into the scene. They're respected as individual artists, not just for the group's history.

In 1970, the founders all lived and worked near San Diego. They met monthly for many years. As their reputation grew, increasingly Los Angeles-based artists sought to join. Not wanting the formidable distance to be a deterrent,





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THIS PAGE TOP: Carrie Burckle, **Memento Mori-Blue Cuffs**; 2018; shirt cuffs, iron nails, wire; salvaging, deconstructing, indigo dyeing; 12 x 12 x 3 in. ABOVE: Linda Anderson, **Consuelo**; 2019; cottons, bamboo batting, embroidery thread, polyester thread; all hand painted raw edge applique pieces, hand embroidery, free motion machine stitched and quilted; 47 x 54 in.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: Peggy Wiedemann, **Let Your Imagination Soar**; 2018; pine needles, India rag cordage, Irish waxed linen, toy wheels, found objects; basketry coiling; 17 x 31 x 10 in. BOTTOM: Polly Jacobs Giacchina, **Re-Sized**; 2017; date palm, painted canvas, vintage shoe form and buttons; twining; 24 x 18 x 2 in.

the group switched to quarterly meetings on Sundays which makes the three-hour trip to San Diego acceptable to LA-based artists like Rohde.

"I look forward to the meetings because it is the right mix of business and interaction with each other," he said. "We're not afraid to joke with each other and do what we can to support each other and the group."

But who are these fiber artists? At what stage are they in their careers?

Carrie Burckle has taught fiber art at California State University Long Beach for 16 years. Being an educator gives her insight into younger artists' perspectives and a view of where the field is moving; as an established artist, she sees great value in belonging to such a high-caliber group. The Los Angeles artist joined California Fibers close to 20 years ago and now serves as membership chair.

"Membership is an investment in yourself and your exhibition record," Burckle said. "People want to jury into our group because of our professional quality work and because we exhibit regularly. We know how the art world and galleries work, always looking two years ahead." Because California Fibers has no gallery space of its own, all the members have responsibility to look for exhibit spaces, "but Polly Giacchina and Charlotte Bird do the most because they're good at it," Burckle said. The group's diversity is part of what she enjoys.

In that, she echoed Giacchina, who said, "Maybe our diversity is our strength. All our members are process-oriented. Most [of us] are known for the materials we use."

Members' practices involving weaving, basketry, sculpture, quilting, embroidery, felting, surface design, knitting, crochet, wearables, and mixed



media. Giacchina, a sculptor, hand weaves natural and man-made materials using ancient techniques. Lydia Tjoie Hall works with fiber and metals to create art inspired by patterns in cell structure. Bird, known for mixed-media narrative art quilts, is moving toward 3-D installations. Ben Cuevas's knit sculpture and wall hangings defy conventional descriptions.

"As long as it's fiber-based, we're good with it," said Bird. "Time and again, she has found being a member gives an artist credibility. Plus, as a group, there is hardly a dumb question. If you ask about marketing or social media, somebody has experience and will help you."

In frequent juried exhibitions, the artists' work is seen throughout Southern California and beyond: in Colorado, Michigan, Florida, and Oregon in the US, and as far away as the United Kingdom and Budapest, Hungary.

The application process, conducted once per year, requires prospects to submit a portfolio, preferably have a website, and bring three to five pieces to a jury session with current members who each get one anonymous vote.

"Personally, I look for work that's outside the box, that we might not have, and their willingness to jump in where needed," Bird said. "If a venue wants additional programming, we almost always offer panel discussions, gallery talks, walk-throughs, short-term workshops taught by individual artists."

The 22 current members range in age from mid-twenties on up. The majority are in their sixties and have been with the organization for 20 years or more. But artists still early in their career are injecting new perspectives. "All textiles increasingly tell some kind of story and we're seeing that more in younger artists," said Burckle.

Among them is Aneesa Shami who received a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute in 2015 and juried into California Fibers in 2019. In her





CALIFORNIA FIBERS MEMBERS

LINDA ANDERSON laartquilts.com
 OLIVIA BATCHELDER oliviabatchelder.com
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LA studio, she creates work “connecting the collective unconscious through drawing, collage, weaving, crochet, and knitting.”

Shami sees many young artists organizing their own professional collectives, rather than joining existing ones. “This might be due to a lack of information or knowledge that such groups already exist, [but] I think it has more to do with convenience,” she said. “Folks know each other from attending the same academic programs, or they share studio spaces, or frequent the same exhibition receptions. There’s already camaraderie.”

Yet after just one year, the relationships she has formed with other CF members have influenced her practice in exciting ways, Shami said. “I work with re-purposing and recycling textile materials and I’ve received many donations from members. My work changes depending on the material I receive, and so my practice moves in cycles of primarily utilizing yarn for a while, then fabric, then garments, etc.” She already appreciates that members understand each other because all are at least somewhat familiar with each fiber technique, and the group’s intimate size allows everyone to watch each member’s practice evolve more closely.

Longtime members celebrate something else. Chari Myers, the current president, cites strong friendships among reasons she says, “California Fibers is who I am.”

Or as Charlotte Bird put it: “California Fibers—these are my peeps.”

ABOVE: Charlotte Bird, **Migration**; 2018; commercial polyester organza, aluminum mesh, fish line, paper, clear plexiglass shelves, clear stick on dots; hand cut and constructed clouds hung with fish line on clear plexiglass shelves, paper birds hung with fish line, paper birds hung on wall with stick on dots; 72 x 126 x 8 in. (dimensions variable depending on installation requirements)

JANET MENDELSON, a freelance writer and author of *Maine’s Museums: Art, Oddities & Artifacts* (Countryman Press), especially enjoys writing about travel and the arts. She welcomes readers’ story ideas. janetmendelsohn.com



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