

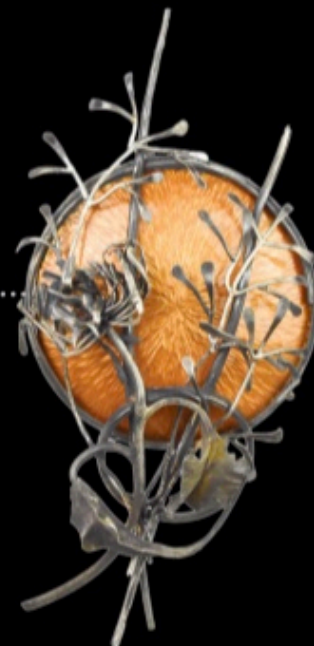
TECH

NEXT GENERATION

Warren Wilson College's
New MA in Critical and
Historical Craft Studies

TECH TOOLKIT

The Rolling Mill:
A Jewelry Studio's
"Forever Tool"



STUDIO VIEWS

Bench Tricks
for Jewelers

4 FOREWORD

8 HOW WE BUILT THIS
AIDA in Action
Davira S. Taragin

TECH EVENTS

33
Forging on the River
Abe Pardee

34
**Looking Forward:
 Contemporary
 Blacksmithing
 and Metal Design
 Symposium**
Nicholas Ireys

Cover:
 • **Curtis H. Arima**, *Heartfelt:
 Bleeding Heart* (see p.20)
 • **Charles Lewton-Brain**,
 homemade ergonomic pusher
 handle (see p.29)

NEXT GENERATION

**11 Warren Wilson College's New MA
 in Critical and Historical Craft Studies**
 Director Namita G. Wiggers and students discuss
 the ups and downs of academia for those interested
 in jewelry and metalworking.

TECH TOOLKIT

18 The Rolling Mill: A Jewelry Studio's "Forever Tool"
 There is much to consider when selecting the right
 rolling mill. Jeff Georgantes shares insights on use
 and maintenance for this metals studio staple.

STUDIO VIEWS

26 Bench Tricks for Jewelers
 Charles Lewton-Brain shares hacks designed to save
 time and money and change the way we think.



Forging on the River. Sorting parts, left to right: Elizabeth Belz,
 Lewis Meyer, Karine Maynard. Photo: Kim Ward



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Editor
 Adriane Dalton,
adalton@snagmetalsmith.org

Contributing Editor
 Kate Fogarty

Graphic Design
 Heather White,
 Pixel37 Design

Advertising
 John Garbett,
jpgarbett@snagmetalsmith.org

SNAG Executive Director
 Gwynne Rukenbrod Smith

SNAG Board of Directors
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 Kee-ho Yuen

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FOREWORD



There is more to a creative practice than completing a work and sending it out into the world. In this issue, we touch on ideas that might seem peripheral to making yet are integral: a support network, a grounding in history, maintaining and treasuring the tools of the trade, and pushing the boundaries of how we approach and solve the problems that inevitably arise during the making process.

In her report on the Association of Israel's Decorative Arts (AIDA), Davira S. Taragin touches on how the organization provides key support for Israeli jewelry and metals artists, and connects them with audiences around the world. A roundtable discussion among students with jewelry and metals backgrounds enrolled in the new MA in Critical and Historical Craft Studies at Warren Wilson College highlights the dearth of metalsmithing and jewelry histories in the curricula of most art programs, and the need for their inclusion.

The importance of proper tool care and maintenance is front and center in Jeff Georgantes's *The Rolling Mill: A Jewelry Studio's "Forever Tool."* Through personal anecdotes and research into current market offerings, Georgantes provides the information necessary to select a new rolling mill or maintain the one you have. He entices readers to use them creatively, featuring images and insights from artists whose rolling mills are essential to their work. Finally, Charles Lewton-Brain inspires and challenges us to keep an open, inquisitive, inventive mind about the tools we use and the processes by which we create our work.

Tech Event is a new section featuring first-hand coverage of regional happenings relevant to the field. Whether it's a one-off symposium or an annual gathering, if there is an upcoming event in your part of the world that merits coverage, please keep us in the loop: editor@snagmetalsmith.org.

—Adriane Dalton, Editor

The mission of *Metalsmith Tech* is to focus on techniques, processes, educational philosophies and ideas, professional development topics, and new technology in the field of jewelry and metalsmithing. The magazine will include both contemporary and historical references, highlighting a diverse range of approaches to jewelry design and metalwork, including professional practices, creative influences, and new trends.



Kat St. Aubin,
July 2018 Residency.
Photo: Reggie Tidwell

NEXT GENERATION

Warren Wilson College's New MA in Critical and Historical Craft Studies

Director Namita G. Wiggers and students discuss the ups and downs of academia for those interested in jewelry and metalworking

In the fall of 2018, Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, North Carolina, launched a new low-residency program focused on developing a field of craft studies, the first of its kind. Conversations with former *Metalsmith* Editor Emily Zilber highlighted the number of students enrolled in the program with metals training: five of the ten students in the first semester, three of whom hold MFA degrees.

We began to wonder: Why would students in this area of craft media be particularly interested in pursuing an MA in Critical and Historical Craft Studies? What can a program like this offer to makers, and what can makers reveal about opportunities for change in how we teach in academic art programs in the US?

Of the five students engaged in the following discussion with program director Namita Gupta Wiggers, one student, Kelly

Malec-Kosak, could not continue with the program, as she received a promotion to Chair of the MFA program at Columbus College of Art and Design. The remaining students—Pheonix Booth, Matt Haugh, Matt Lambert, and Kat St. Aubin—will complete their master's degrees in July 2020.

Our conversation covered a number of issues, from the lack of metalsmithing histories in art history coursework, to reasons for studying theory and craft-specific histories, to connecting making to writing and voice, to the material limitations of jewelry itself if confined to specific materials, forms, and conceptual questions that reveal academia's disconnect with what students need, want, and are creating.

The conversation is condensed here; the full version is available online at *Metalsmith Extra*.

NAMITA WIGGERS: Our conversation is taking place after you've completed your first semester in the program. How might the program connect to your future work?

KAT ST. AUBIN: I've definitely gained valuable research skills and have learned different ways of applying research to broader questions—especially the importance of asking questions.

MATT LAMBERT: The program is supplying the tools to be critical. I think we lack a lot of actual criticism within metalsmithing; we're one of the fields within craft that doesn't produce really harsh criticism. We need to have some tough conversations. I think we need more people that are confident in their writing and their speaking abilities to have healthy discussions that are critical. We need to

be critical of what has happened, but also what is happening now.

KELLY MALEC-KOSAK: I'm interested in looking at things in a broader way than I had before. I feel like my metalsmithing background is really insular. I was trained by people who were trained by people who were...you know, it's kind of this whole sort of incestuous family [group laughter].

I'm part of some weird, dysfunctional family that I want to look at a little bit closer now. Who is included and who is not included, and how we've decided as a field, has become interesting to me as a maker and a writer and thinker.

MATT L.: Interesting or problematic: the canonization of our field?

NAMITA: Say a little bit more about that, both of you.

MATT L.: I feel like, looking through the American lens, we have missed a lot of very important figures that the European context has held onto: Jan Yager, Marjorie Schick, or Winifred Mason—all women. Or they exist in an "art world" context, but for some

Marily Zapf, Object Collection Workshop, January 2019, Center for Craft, Asheville, North Carolina. Photo: Namita G. Wiggers

reason they've been pushed to the side.

I guess I'm being critical of the historical, of why we have shaped our canon the way we have. We've had so many successful makers "make it" outside of the insular craft world, but we don't celebrate them in a way that I think is appropriate. I think we do them a disservice.

KELLY: There is a link between capitalism and our field that has left some people out. We're so invested in making a living through selling our work that our structure doesn't support risk; a lot of times it has to exist within a certain way. You don't see that in places where there's more support and more interest in breaking rules or challenging norms. It is problematic.

MATT L.: Heck, yeah! We have not celebrated conceptual makers, and so we've narrowed our field down to the sellable object—but we also don't want to be in a relationship with fashion. We want to be in this weird bubble that doesn't exist.

PHEONIX BOOTH: As a conceptual maker, I will say that I don't know a lot about the broader metalsmithing field because I've never felt like my work fit into it. In my undergraduate program we were pushed into making in a conceptual way, but there wasn't a lot of research we could do

on other people, or there was a lack of a canon of people that were making in that way. There are people working in that way; I've just never heard of them for whatever reason.

NAMITA: This is an interesting question, then, about how what you learned in your metals programs set you up for the kinds of things you're thinking about now. For example, Matt Lambert, Kelly, and Matt Haugh all hold MFA degrees; they've done deep, focused study in metalsmithing and jewelrymaking specifically, in different ways. Kat and Pheonix have undergraduate degrees and were taught by jewelers who are three of the most prominent women in international contemporary jewelry right now: Kerianne Quick, Sondra Sherman, and Anya Kivarkis, all of whom are recognized for material and critical jewelry works.... I'm curious about what you recall learning. You are all saying something similar, that there is a deep dive into conceptual making but not necessarily jewelry and craft history. What craft histories were you exposed to in your academic education?

MATT L.: Gardner's *Art Through the Ages*. Where are we in art history? I think we have the Gates of Ishtar, and I think



we have the one pin in Ireland, and no one knows how it was made! We have one piece of jewelry and one piece of blacksmithing.

I think that the people we studied under have done the best that they can to provide us with contexts, but the systems that they work within don't support craft as part of art history. We cannot rely on our studio courses to also feed us conceptual and historical knowledge as well. This is a critique of the Academy and not the people we study under. The people, predominantly women in craft, have done the best that they can.

We're not in the art history canon, we're not being taught our own history in the Academy, but we still have to exist within the Academy, which somehow makes us lesser. And that's where the problem is. I think that is where this degree can fill that void.

PHEONIX: There is no craft theory class where I studied, only art history. You do the making, and then the only thing that you learn about critically is the broader art world. If it's not built into the curriculum, there is this huge disconnect.

KAT: Sondra Sherman and Kerianne Quick, my instructors, did incorporate research into the making process. Kerianne encouraged me to look into this program because I was really into intersectional feminist theory, classism, and racism and asking, "Where do those things come into craft and making?" Because those things affect people. People are the ones who are doing the making.

I don't know if it's because I went to a state school, but we had a checklist of courses you needed to fulfill your degree. Applied design isn't even its own degree; it's a subsection of art. To get your art degree you have to take art history, which is painting and sculpture, and craft is maybe a tiny little paragraph in some period where it fits. You can only learn so much about craft from those classes, and then, because we're all in technical programs, we're learning technical skills.

NAMITA: Matt Haugh, what about from a blacksmithing perspective? What does this MA in Critical and Historical Craft Studies reveal about your training in the field and the way the field is structured?

MATT HAUGH: I recognized pretty early in the course of my MFA (Southern Illinois University) that the theoretical component



Student Pecha Kucha, January 2019. From left to right: Mike Hatch, Nick Falduto, Samantha Rastetter, Matt Lambert, Kat St. Aubin, Sarah Kelly. Photo: Lydia See

was missing. There was actually a craft theory class offered as an elective that was, I think, trying to fill that void. I will say that there was not much interest in it. So there was just a difference in terms of what you were looking for out of the MFA experience. I was really interested in the theoretical concerns and an academic approach to material and making that would support my work going forward.

Blacksmithing is a much smaller field; a sub-field of metalsmithing. The Metals Museum is three hours away from SIU, and exhibits and presents blacksmithing on an academic level in a way, and with some regularity, but we weren't really doing that in our metals coursework. As a field, its practitioners have not applied critical discourse to the material.

ABANA (Artist Blacksmith's Association of North America), which is the primary organization, has thousands of members and their own publications, such as the quarterly publication *The Anvil's Ring* and the *Hammer's Blow*, which are both largely technical in focus. The work of Daniel Miller is an exception. He has really set an example for critically engaged practitioners and for smiths who make work and also write about their work. It just doesn't exist otherwise. Either the makers write about it in critical ways, or it doesn't get written about.

KAT: If I were to go into education, I would want to be able to teach a craft history course, not necessarily focused on metalsmithing, but craft in general. San

Diego State University, for some reason, cut fiber arts because they felt there wasn't a demand, even though there is, and there are plenty of students who are fiber artists who had to work in other mediums.

But looking at the way that academic institutions place value on what courses are able to be taught, I think that'll be a big challenge for me to find a school and say, "Hey, this is an important course. You have craft courses that are technical. How can I get a craft history course into the curriculum so that these students can get history that's relevant to their making instead of having to learn just about painting and sculpture and conceptual art?" It's valid to learn those things but...what use does a metalsmith have for learning two whole semesters of painting?

MATT L.: I think that raises another conundrum that we're facing right now: the intersectional use of material, and crafts being defined through singular material. Can I call myself a metalsmith? My graduating master's work is in leather, which doesn't even exist in the Academy. Where does leather fall? I can't go teach textiles with that knowledge.

Jewelry sits on this weird cusp, like Matt Haugh was saying. It's a format, it's not a material. Ceramics is jewelry, and wood is jewelry, and fiber is jewelry.

Although, Matt [Haugh], you say blacksmithing is small, but it has a very stabilized community that has its own publications, its own production of shared knowledge, its own conferences.

RECOMMENDED READING

PHEONIX BOOTH:

Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. Routledge, 2013.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Galen A. Johnson, and Michael B. Smith, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993.

MATT HAUGH:

Ezra Shales, *The Shape of Craft*. London: Reaktion Books, 2017.

MATT LAMBERT:

Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Pekka Harni, *Object Categories: Typography of Tools*. Aalto University, School of Art and Design, 2010.

Maureen Mercury, *Pagan Fleshworks: The Alchemy of Body Modification*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

Diana Sorensen, *Territories and Trajectories: Cultures in Circulation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.

KELLY MALEC-KOSAK:

Judith K. Brown, "A Note on the Division of Labor by Sex," *American Anthropologist, New Series*, vol. 72, no. 5 (Oct. 1970), pp. 1073-1078.

KAT ST. AUBIN:

bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.

Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*. Chicago: L. Hill, 1987.

Jewelers participate in SNAG, but that organization also incorporates every form of metalsmithing. But jewelry...it's a little bit homeless. It's a little bit nomadic because it's not materially defined.

NAMITA: Not only are we seeing craft-based media subsumed into sculpture in a broad way, but we also, at the same time, have people talking about textiles as a discipline, or metals or jewelry as a discipline. I'm having some issues with both of those things.

This incorporation [of craft media] into sculpture in academic training impacts aspects of how learning is structured, which Kat brought up. She expressed concern that a student may only have one or two classes in a particular area, and then seems considered qualified to go out with a degree. When craft gets subsumed into sculpture, this may become even fewer in terms of media literacy and focused training. At the same time, I would argue that a lot of contemporary jewelry is sculpture. It's not necessarily adornment and jewelry in that same way, and it crosses some boundaries that can expand sculpture.

PHEONIX: Wasn't it Marjorie Schick who called her work "body objects?" I've adopted that for my work.

MATT L.: Marjorie also had wearable paintings and wearable sculpture. But I feel like in the field that's been treated as, "Oh, you're just trying to be part of the art crew or the sculpture crew and disassociate from craft."

But my question, back to Namita: The borrowing of craft techniques, does that become appropriation? Does it become assimilation?

NAMITA: I think we have to be very cautious about using those terms. There are certain ways in which humanity has transformed materials in some way, shape, or form. The appropriation would come, I think, in taking from one culture and bringing that into a practice, or into the studio and into the making, in a way that doesn't recognize [the source]. When working with metal, for example, is it appropriation to take a blacksmithing technique from Nigeria and apply it? It's appropriation if you take the forms or the culturally signified object that has been produced and bring that into

your practice without recognizing that finished product. That, I think, is appropriating. But is it fair to take that to the level of the fabrication itself?

MATT L.: I think that gets back to a good conversation we had in a class meeting about authorship and recognizing how things are being produced. We're being taught keum-boo, shibuichi, and mokume gane...and I don't think it's a problem if you understand the historical context. Look at Dorothea Prühl's work. If you look at her work out of context, they are pieces of wood. If you look at why and when she made them, and where they come out of, that's what makes them part of the discussion. And so, that's where I'm going to differ with you, Namita. I think we have to understand the context, or it is very problematic that you're taking those techniques.

NAMITA: I'm not disagreeing with you on understanding those techniques and giving the context. I don't think it's wrong to engage techniques from multiple cultures. I really strongly object to this idea that only people in a certain area have a right to use certain techniques. It's a very complex, complicated global history that we all sit in. We're not in nice, neat categories.

I agree with you that you need to have that process, and that's why I think it's going to be problematic as processes get subsumed into broader sculptural practices. At the same time, I think that we should be looking to multiple cultural processes with that context.

This is where I would hope that the program opens up a space for all of you to start writing that language and getting that documentation out there. This ties into a question of Emily Zilber's: What does a maker bring to this kind of program?

MATT L.: There has been a lack of art historians dedicated to craft. And I know that has been changing in the last ten or fifteen years, but it makes sense to me that we would become a part of a group of makers but also craft historians.

NAMITA: It's a dialogue. There's reciprocity in what you bring into the program is as much as what we're sharing with you...and you bring an ability to manipulate materials into this program. What do you bring in that somebody else might not?

PHEONIX: There's a foundational understanding—maybe everybody can help me expand on that—of what it is to make. Not just the concept of making, but the physicality of it, an understanding of material. And, like Matt Lambert said, you can't just organize craft by material, because we all use materials and processes from other areas. It's convoluted...it's not able to be neatly categorized in an art-historical and canonical kind of way. And so, because we understand that, we understand that there needs to be a new way of looking.

MATT L.: I think all of us have unique studies or training beyond being makers. I think we all bring in an understanding of making and certain areas of theory that haven't overlapped craft yet. And I think craft will gain from participating in dialogues with psychology, with cultural studies, with gender studies, because there's so many amazing parallels that it's a mutual relationship that can grow, that craft needs.

PHEONIX: To piggy-back on what Matt Lambert is saying, I have noticed that each of us, in our craft degrees, had a minor in something that was theoretical. Matt [Lambert] had psychology, I had a

philosophy minor, and Kat's was gender studies.

KELLY: I think we bring an intimate knowledge of what is missing, and that is probably what drove us all to this program.

NAMITA: *Kelly, I think makes me think back to the '60s. We started to have more artists writing about the shifts they were making in art... in order to make sure people could understand the moves that they were making and the way they were shifting art. They had to turn to writing. They had to turn to other ways of communicating.*

MATT L.: I hope that's what we take on... the way things are applied, they're all defined in these very narrow constructs that don't even imply that there is space for conceptuality or material experimentation or scale size...especially with jewelry shows. It must fit in a case that is X by X size. And if it doesn't, then you can't submit it.

PHEONIX: Except for the exhibition that you helped to make. Right?

MATT L.: I did not make it. I lovingly co-chair the "Exhibition in Motion" for SNAG

because it is trying to attempt to make space for alternative conceptual work, larger work. It's a way of paying back.

PHEONIX: So, exhibitions like the one that Matt Lambert's talking about become seminal in the way that new makers think about what is possible. Right? By the time I came to metalsmithing in academia, "Exhibition in Motion" was already a thing. And so, because it was already a thing, I was able to look back at those catalogs and say, "I can make big work."

MATT L.: But there wasn't a central archive for that. This is the fourth year we're doing this specific project that you're talking about, to create an archive and also to dig up, source, and properly discuss the history. Which is a practical application of this [MA] degree: to learn how to do so.

We have a huge history. You look back and see work by Don Friedlich and Susie Ganch; there is a brilliant photo of Susie wearing a headpiece in the very first "Exhibition in Motion." We have all the original photos. These are people that have entered the canons of craft. But the thing is with those images, unless we dig them up, where are they going to show up in a book?

NAMITA: *Excellent. Thank you all. Is there anything that you feel we didn't cover that you wanted to mention about the program or why you're here, and how it connects to metals work or anything that we didn't touch on?*

KAT: Be ready for the revolution.

NOTE: For the full transcript of this conversation, which contains additional details and context for the recommended readings, please visit *Metalsmith EXTRA!*



Student Matt Haugh and Core Faculty Linda Sandino, July 2018, research trip to Western North Carolina Archives. Photo: Namita G. Wiggers



Further Resources:

For additional information on the MA in Critical and Historical Craft Studies, visit <https://www.warren-wilson.edu/programs/ma-in-craft/> and follow on Instagram @macraftstudieswv