Rooted, Revived, Reinvented: Basketry in America

A traveling exhibition organized by the National Basketry Organization in partnership with the University of Missouri.
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Rooted, Revived, Reinvented: Basketry in America visually chronicles the history of American basketry from its origins in Native American, European, and African traditions to its contemporary presence in the fine art and craft worlds. The baskets in this exhibition convey meaning and interpret American life through the artists’ choices of materials; the techniques and forms they select; and the colors, designs, patterns, and textures they employ.

Exhibition at a glance:

- Approximately 75 objects
- Text panels and labels
- Touch panels and feedback station
- Website with interactive elements and additional content
- I-Catalog
- 250 page full color print catalog
- 2,000 - 2,500 square feet estimated
- $7,500 rental fee plus incoming shipping
- Moderate security
- Tour dates begin summer 2017

Exhibition Content:

Historical baskets were rooted in local landscapes and shaped by cultural traditions. With the increase of mass production brought about by the industrial revolution, basketmakers began to create works for new audiences and markets including tourists and collectors. Today, some contemporary artists seek to maintain and revive traditions performed for centuries. Others combine age-old techniques with nontraditional materials to generate cultural commentary. Still others challenge viewers’ expectations by experimenting with form, materials, scale, and installation.

Divided into four sections – Cultural Origins, Living Traditions, Basket as Vessel, and Beyond the Basket – this exhibition of 70 to 75 objects has two primary goals: to model how to look at, talk about, and analyze baskets aesthetically, critically and historically; and to contextualize American basketry within art and craft history specifically and American culture generally.

A print catalog published by Schiffer Publishing with ten essays and 150 images that showcases the interrelationship between and among individual artistic production, historical traditions, and the contemporary basketry movement. It does so by examining contemporary American basketry’s roots in Native America, Europe and Africa; the multiple ways historical traditions continue to evolve in the 21st century; and the ways contemporary artists employ and translate basketry origins and techniques into sculptural, textile and installation art.
1. CULTURAL ORIGINS

American Basketry has its roots in Native America, Europe, and Africa. Although some traditions emerged in isolation, their development was never static. Often, they responded to the regional availability of materials as well as to cultural exchange, trade, and tourism.

Basketmaking also played a major role in stimulating identity among many cultural groups. The Navaho, for example, created functional as well as ceremonial baskets that symbolized the individual life course as well as the history of the community. Irish, Scottish, French, and German settlers in the American Northeast and Appalachia cemented their European roots in the New World through the continued production of willow and oak baskets, while the Gullah employed basketry as a means to maintain connections to its African past.

Baskets in this section represent a variety of materials, techniques, and traditions and include: Tlingit cedar baskets; Ojibwa bark and pine needle baskets; Nantucket Light Ship baskets; Shaker woven cuffs; Gullah sweet grass baskets; and the oak and willow baskets of the Northeast and Appalachia.

2. LIVING TRADITIONS

Basketmakers from the Appalachians to the Sierra Nevadas continue the rich cultural histories of their craft while investing them with their personal styles. While some artists come from multi-generational families of basketmakers, other artists participate in and contribute to the tradition through apprenticeships or professional workshops. This section showcases artists from the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries whose baskets perpetuate and transform the historical traditions in which they work.

Responding to tourism and the growth of the art market; the loss of conventional materials caused by environmental devastation; and contemporary issues facing their communities, these artists maintain basketry as a living tradition.

Artists include: Eric Otter Bacon (Passamaquoddy); JoAnn Kelly Catsos (Shaker inspired); Mary Jackson (Gullah); Katherine Lewis (Willow); José Reyes (Nantucket Lightship); Leona Waddell (Appalachia); and Aaron Yakim and Cynthia Taylor (Appalachia).
New basketry emerged on the scene in the 1960s during an explosion of interest and investigation in all craft media. Stimulated by a confluence of factors, including the back-to-the-landers’ creation of hand-made products, the feminist movement’s celebration of traditional crafts as art, and the experimentation with architecturally-scaled textiles, basketry became its own independent movement. Ed Rossbach at the University of California at Berkeley introduced basketry to university art curricula and facilitated basketry’s introduction into contemporary art. His practice of urban foraging – adopted by his students and others – became the counterpart of traditional harvesting methods. The expansion of new materials, as well as other artists’ embrace of sculptural forms and wall work, produced a new and innovative language that engaged, critiqued, and interrogated American culture. While the baskets reference vessels and suggest utility, few are intended to function as containers. Rather, like other contemporary artists, basketmakers respond to contemporary cultural issues in sculptural form.

Artists include: Dorothy Gill Barnes, Lillian Elliot, Joe Feddersen, Mary Merkel Hess, Pat Hickman, Lissa Hunter, Christine Joy, Ed Rossbach, Lois Russell, Karyl Sisson, Polly Adams Sutton, Peggy Wiedemann, and others.

4. BEYOND THE BASKET

Current artists bridge the gap between the craft origins of basketmaking and the medium’s new place within sculpture, textile, and installation art. By incorporating traditional and nontraditional techniques and materials and by exploring scale and dynamic form, these artists interrogate a wide variety of ideas and issues, including the visualization of scientific data, postmodern appropriation, and cultural and environmental politics. In addition, they address the nature of art itself: how form and materials can be the subject of art as well as its meaning; and how art navigates between and among utility, commodity, and the aestheticized object in the fine art world. Their art confirms basketry’s status as a significant force in contemporary art.

Artists include: Kate Anderson, Michael Davis, Carol Eckert, Bryant Holsenbeck, Aaron Kramer, John McQueen, Nathalie Miebach, Ann Coddington, Amanda Salm, Jane Sauer, Josh Simpson,Lisa Telford and others.
CURATORIAL BIOGRAPHIES

Jo Stealey, PhD., is Professor of Art, head of the Fiber program and the Middlebush Chair for Arts & Humanities at the University of Missouri. She has lectured on the contemporary basket movement at national and international conferences as well as curated many textile and basketry exhibitions. She is recognized nationally for her own sculptural basket work and her work is included in many private and public collections including the Smithsonian. She currently serves as a board member for the National Basketry Organization (NBO) and regularly contributes articles on American basketry for the NBO Quarterly Review Magazine.

Kristin Schwain is Associate Professor of American Art at the University of Missouri. She was awarded a B.A. in Art History and Humanities from Valparaiso University and a joint PhD. in Art History and Humanities from Stanford University. Her first book, Signs of Grace: Religion and American Art in the Gilded Age (Cornell University Press, 2008), examined how late-nineteenth-century American artists drew on religious beliefs and practices to explore new relationships between viewers and objects, and how beholders looked to art in order to experience transcendence and save their souls. Her recent research seeks to complicate the story of American modernism by examining the roles played by religion, race, region, and consumption in the production, display, and reception of American visual and material cultures.
EXHIBITION SUPPORT:
As a Rooted, Revived, Reinvented: Basketry in America host you will receive the following:

- Complete curatorial and registrarial information
- Complete shipping, handling, and installation instructions
- Wall-to-wall fine art's insurance coverage under the NBO policy
- Educational and programming resources
- Access to the NBO sponsored website
- Funds to support an NBO sponsored program during exhibition

REGISTRARIAL REQUIREMENTS:

- Venues must have a limited-access gallery with ample area and wall space for the exhibit.
- Smoking, eating, and drinking are prohibited in the exhibition gallery, staging, and storage spaces.
- All handling, installation, and de-installation of objects must be performed by trained gallery/museum personnel.

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS:

Contents: Approximately 75 objects ranging from examples of nineteenth century Native American baskets to traditional vessels and contemporary sculptural pieces; includes pedestal, wall, and suspended works

Participation Fee: $7,500 for a 12-week booking period plus incoming shipping

Size: 2,000 - 2,500 square feet estimated

Security: Moderate

Shipping: NBO will make arrangements with the host paying for incoming shipping

Tour: June 2017 - December 2020

Curators: Jo Stealey, Ph.D., NBO Board Member, Professor of Art at University of Missouri-Columbia and Kristin Schwain, Associate Professor of American Art at the University of Missouri-Columbia

National Basketry Organization, Inc. | P.O. Box 1524, Gloucester, MA, 01930-1524