

OBJECTS: USA

In 1969, the Smithsonian American Art Museum launched *OBJECTS: USA*, one of the most influential craft exhibitions ever staged. Bringing American studio craft to unprecedented public attention across the United States and internationally, the exhibition gathered more than 300 artists and designers who challenged the hierarchies of their time and found in craft a space for freedom, experimentation, and cultural imagination.

More than fifty years later, *OBJECTS: USA* returns in reimagined form, bringing historic and contemporary works by leading artists and designers into conversation. It offers an opportunity to reflect on what has changed over the past half-century and what continues to resonate, from new tools, technologies, and

materials to broader ideas about who and what shaped American craft.

Much like the late 1960s, our current moment is marked by visible contests over power, taste, and belonging. Against this backdrop, *OBJECTS: USA* frames craft as a dynamic language for invention and cultural imagination, carried forward by the creative vitality of individual makers. Objects are vessels for meaning, desire, bodies, belief, power, and even soul. They invite us to consider what we choose to value, and what those choices reveal about the culture we are building.

Organized in partnership with R & Company, a globally recognized design gallery based in New York.

The exhibition is part of *Handwork: Celebrating American Craft 2026*, presented by Craft in

America.

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EXTENDED OBJECT LABELS

MARGUERITE WILDENHAIN

Untitled, 1940-42

Stoneware

Collection of Forrest Merrill



Born in Lyon, France, to a British mother and a German

Jewish father, Marguerite Wildenhain trained at the Bauhaus, where she studied ceramics under sculptor Gerhard Marcks. After the Nazis came to power in 1933, she fled to the Netherlands before escaping to the United States in 1940. She taught briefly at California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland before settling in Guerneville in 1942. At Pond Farm, Wildenhain helped

establish a Bauhaus-inspired artists' colony and summer school dedicated to craftsmanship and the creative process. Although the collaborative workshops lasted only from 1949 to 1952, she continued teaching pottery there until 1979, influencing generations of ceramic artists. After her death in 1985, Pond Farm was preserved as part of California State Parks and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2023.

PETER VOULKOS

Large Stack Pot, 1961

Stoneware

Born in Bozeman, Montana, Peter Voulkos came to California to earn his MFA from California College of Arts and Crafts in 1953. The following year, he was recruited to establish the ceramics department at Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, where he became part of the city's vibrant avant-

garde and embraced the influence of Abstract Expressionism. Bringing its emphasis on spontaneity, gesture, and physical engagement into ceramics, Voulkos transformed clay into a bold sculptural medium. His monumental works, often cut, gouged, punctured, and reassembled, retain the visible marks of their making. In 1959, Voulkos joined the faculty at UC Berkeley, where he founded the graduate ceramics program and taught until 1985, shaping generations of artists and redefining the possibilities of contemporary ceramics.

RICHARD MARQUIS

American Acid Capsule with cloth case, 1969

Glass and fabric

R & Company Collection

Hexagonal Stars and Stripes Bottle, 1969-70

Glass

R & Company Collection

Bottle, 1969

Glass

Collection of the Artist, Courtesy
of R & Company

Bottle, 1969

Glass

R & Company Collection



Richard Marquis entered UC Berkeley in 1963 intending to study architecture. He then shifted his focus after Marvin Lipofsky established the university's pioneering hot glass program the following year. After earning his B.A. in 1969, Marquis received a Fulbright Fellowship to study with master glassmakers in Murano, Italy, becoming one of the first Americans to train in the renowned Venetian tradition. There he mastered cane and murrine techniques, which became hallmarks of his distinctive work. Returning to Berkeley, he earned his M.A. while developing a

studio practice and commuting to teach at UCLA. Marquis later moved his studio to Whidbey Island in Washington's Puget Sound, where he continued to create technically sophisticated glass that blends Venetian craftsmanship with American wit and irreverence.

ARLINE FISCH

Feather Plus Pectoral, 1973

Sterling silver, fire gilt, feathers,
leather, cameo and pearls

Twitcher Headpiece, 1968

Sterling silver

Woven Bread Box, 1976

Aluminum

Estate of the Artist, Courtesy of R & Company



Arline Fisch transformed contemporary jewelry by adapting textile techniques—including knitting, crochet, weaving, and plaiting—to metal. Working

primarily in silver, she creates intricate forms that blur the boundaries between fiber arts and metalsmithing, combining technical precision with remarkable flexibility and movement. After earning a BFA from Skidmore College and an MFA from the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, Fisch received a Fulbright Fellowship to study silversmithing in Copenhagen, Denmark. In 1961, she joined the faculty at San Diego State University, where she founded the Jewelry and Metalsmithing program and taught for four decades. Through both her innovative studio practice and her teaching, Fisch helped redefine American contemporary art jewelry.

WENDELL CASTLE

Tongue, 1969

Plastic and fiberglass

Courtesy of R & Company

Often called the “father of the art furniture movement,” Wendell Castle transformed furniture into a sculptural art form. His pioneering stack-laminated wood constructions and experiments with molded plastic combined biomorphic, flowing forms with everyday function, challenging the boundaries between fine art and design. Castle earned a BFA in Industrial Design in 1958 and an MFA in Sculpture in 1961 from the University of Kansas. In the early 1980s, he established a school and workshop dedicated to fine woodworking and furniture design, reflecting his commitment to mentorship and craftsmanship. Throughout his career, including his years teaching at Rochester Institute of Technology, Castle influenced generations of artists and designers while helping redefine studio furniture as a major field of contemporary art.



KAY SEKIMACHI

Untitled, c.1960

Collection of Forrest Merrill

Born in San Francisco in 1926, Kay Sekimachi was incarcerated with her family at Utah's Topaz War Relocation Center following Executive Order 9066 during World War II. After returning to California, she studied at California College of Arts and Crafts from 1946 to 1949. A 1954 lecture at Pond Farm by Bauhaus-trained weaver Trude Guermonprez inspired Sekimachi to return to CCAC to study weaving. The artist recalls: "Trude opened my eyes that weavings don't have to be utilitarian." Blending traditional weaving techniques with a sculptural sensibility, Sekimachi became one of the leading figures in contemporary fiber



art. Beginning in 1975, she taught in the Textile Arts Department at CCAC and also taught in the Adult Division of City College of San Francisco. Her teaching has left a significant legacy in the Bay Area, while her work has made a global impact.

ASHWINI BHAT

Assembling California: Estero Trail, 2019

Assembling California: Hoo-Koo-E-Koo Trail, 2021

Clay, underglaze, glaze and paint

Collection of the Artist, Courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery

Ashwini Bhat spent much of her life in southern India before relocating to Northern California. Her work is partly inspired by her background in dance, translated in clay through gestural lines that recall



fluid motions of the body. The works on view, titled *Assembling California* after a book by the writer John McPhee, represent specific hiking trails in Marin County. In some instances, Bhat directly influences the texture of the clay with impressions of natural materials gathered along the trails, including gumball seed pods. She is a certified California Naturalist and volunteers at the Fairfield Osborn Preserve in Penngrove, where close observation of the landscape informs her practice..

AMBER COWAN

Ecco to the Bridesmaid: I Know Not What Has Happened To Your Pod, 2022

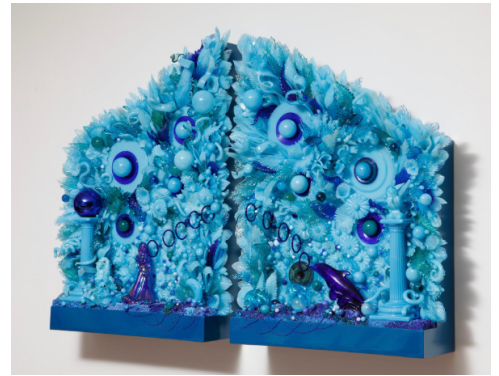
Flameworked, blown, and antique glass

Collection of the Artist

Amber Cowan lives and works in Philadelphia, where she earned an MFA in Ceramics/Glass from Tyler School of Art and Architecture at Temple

University and now teaches.

Her sculptural glasswork begins with reclaimed pressed milk glass sourced from flea markets, antique stores, and industrial cullet (waste glass). Using flameworking, hot sculpting, and glassblowing techniques, Cowan transforms these discarded materials into elaborate sculptural compositions. She often preserves the figurines and animals from the collected glass intact, honoring the history of glassmaking in the United States.



WOODY DE OTHELLO

Untitled, 2026

Clay

Woody De Othello was born in Miami and moved to Oakland to attend California College of the Arts. Working primarily in clay, he transforms

everyday objects to take on precarious, expressive, and uncanny qualities. His work draws on the California Funk movement while engaging histories of African diasporic art and spirituality. Othello references the Central African concept of nkisi—objects believed to embody spiritual power—as well as face jugs created by enslaved African artisans in the nineteenth-century American South. Othello riffs on the face jug with reverence and innovation, constructing both the vessel and its supporting furniture from clay.

NIK GELORMINO

Flat Car (no.2), 2023

Fir Wood

Courtesy of the Artist

Nik Gelormino was born in San Francisco, earned a BFA at Cooper Union in New York, and



lives and works in Los Angeles. His Californian roots are reflected in his use of naturally felled trees, which he carves by hand with chisels, knives, and hand-planes. The forms are blocky—comically reinventing the wheel into hulking wood cylinders—but his mark-making provides captivating detail. Hollow grooves are carved along the smooth wood surface in cresting waves that call attention to the wood grain. By honoring the inherent character of the wood, the artist connects the relationship between human invention and the natural world.

Photo by Irvin Rivera.