

American **Craft**

Fresh Glass

Thaddeus
Wolfe

Helen Lee

Dylan
Martinez



**Emerging
Voices
Winners**

**The House
that
Bullseye
Built**

**Drama
in the
Hot Shop**



Poster
Inside

years
75

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sarah PARRISH

Emerging Scholar *Boston*

WORKING AS A RESEARCH fellow for the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston's 2014 exhibition "Fiber: Sculpture 1960 – Present," Sarah Parrish realized something: Some of the greatest craft innovators were active during the 1960s, yet there was little critical discourse about fiber art during that time.

"I had never heard the names Sheila Hicks, Peter Voulkos, or Lenore Tawney until I began working at the ICA in 2012," says Parrish, 31. "How had I gone through four years of graduate-level art history coursework without encountering such key figures?" Parrish realized she had found her focus – and a new approach.

"By seeing how craft had fallen outside of mainstream curricula," she says, "I also learned to look beyond my own limited frame of reference in other situations to discover what parallel histories might be excluded from every exhibition, collection, or textbook I come across."

Now, after earning her PhD in contemporary art history from Boston University, Parrish is taking her work to Plymouth State University in New Hampshire as an assistant professor of art history.

"Each time I see a piece of contemporary textile work," she says, "I become more convinced that understanding the historical roots of fiber art is essential."

What are you most excited about in your work right now?

I'm beginning the process of revising my dissertation, *Anthropologies of Fiber: Claire Zeisler, Ed Rossbach, Sheila Hicks*, into a book. Books are a new format for me. It's exciting to think about the transition: How does the audience for these two genres differ? What additional research do I need to conduct? I'm hopeful that teaching at PSU will help me answer some of these questions, because I often find that my students help me acquire a fresh perspective.

What is your favorite part of researching and writing?

My favorite part of the research stage is building relationships. It's thrilling to know that every handshake holds the potential to grow into an enduring, symbiotic professional exchange. In contrast, the writing process is much more solitary. The highlights are those "Aha!" moments when I hit on a paragraph, sentence, or word that makes an entire section of text click into place.

What is an ongoing challenge you face?

My dissertation tackles a contentious topic: cultural appropriation. During the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. fiber artists drew inspiration from African, South American, and Oceanic art. In so doing, they promoted diverse cultural traditions while also taking advantage of these art forms to establish their own professional identities. The challenge is to acknowledge the profound artistic contributions of American fiber artists while refocusing attention on the suppressed cultural traditions that made their innovations possible.

What do you want to address in your work?

Far more research could be done on how developments in contemporary craft intersect with

market trends and collecting practices. Art historians are often reluctant to explore the financial dimension of creative production because it seems to detract from the romantic myth that artists are motivated solely by inner drives. However, a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between craft and finance may help illuminate why certain practices have been promoted while others have been marginalized.

Why is fluency in visual communication important?

The American school system teaches us to communicate verbally in a very systematic way, from learning our ABCs in kindergarten to writing essays in high school. However, the majority of information we absorb every day is visual and material. To be responsible citizens, it is essential that we become critical viewers.

What are your hopes for the craft field?

Contemporary craft will benefit from incorporating more diverse perspectives on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, class, and aesthetic. It is necessary to interrogate the economics of the craft industry to ensure diversity among positions of power and influence. It's encouraging that Jennifer Ling Datchuk was named this year's Emerging Voices Artist. Her approach offers a productive model for handling difficult issues such as identity and prejudice with verve, humor, and heart.

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Sarah Parrish's mission is to shed light on the revolutionary artists of the 1960s overlooked in art history, such as Sheila Hicks, whose *Escribiendo con Textura* (1960) is shown at left.



Portrait: Thomas Strand