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Craving for Craft

Even with hip Pottery Barn and Gap designs, people still long for something handmade



WOVEN WITH CARE: This model is wearing a garment by Larkspur weaver Ariane Wohl, who is a first-time exhibitor at the American Craft Council show this year.



ONE OF A KIND: San Anselmo artist Andrea Tucker-Hody, whose "Globe via on the Moonlight" is shown, has been showing her work at the American Craft Council for more than a decade.

By Candace Murphy
Golden Gate Times

THERE'S A STRANGE dichotomy in design these days.

On the one hand, there are the ever-expanding empires of Pottery Barn, Pier One, Target and the Gap. Then, on the other, there's the insistent presence of handcrafted goods.

It's mass production versus artisanship. And while it would be easy to conclude that mass production is winning — based on the number of Pottery Barn catalogs that arrive in the average household's mailbox — the American Craft Council would beg to differ.

The buzz around the council's San Francisco show this weekend at Fort Mason indicates that good old-fashioned craft may be finally chipping away at those Pottery Barn apothecary tables and Pier One rattan wicker trunks that everyone either has, or at one time had.

Hey, there's a reason "Friends" did a whole episode on the Pottery Barn apothecary table some seven years ago. "Everything at Pottery Barn is generic," says Larkspur weaver Ariane Wohl, a first-time exhibitor at the craft show. "It all looks the same, and I think people will get tired of that."

"You can buy a glass-beaded lamp shade now at Kmart — but the difference is that the level of design, the quality of work and the handmade-ness of my work is really apparent," says basket weaver and former glass-bead lamp shade maker Lester Cantor of Walnut Creek, another exhibitor.

"When I was in college I would have given my eyetooth to have those Pottery Barn glass-beaded shades. And don't get me wrong, someone is making those, just not like us, artisans, do. And the people that appreciate it are the people that come to the American Craft Council shows," Cantor says.

Andrea Tucker-Hody, a San Anselmo paper maker for 16 years, has been showing at the American Craft Council show for 13 years. She said she thinks it's one of the two best juried craft shows in the West, with high standards and cutting-edge work. She said she believes people want handcrafted items, "because there are giants like Pottery Barn. We're getting further and further from the hand of the maker — there's a longing to get back to aesthetic basics. As we become more

IF YOU GO

What: American Craft Council show
Where: Fort Mason, Laguna Street at Marina Boulevard, San Francisco
Cost: \$12-\$18 for a two-day pass. Children 12 and under are free.
Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.
Tickets: At the door or online at www.craftcouncil.org.
Information: 800-836-3470

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ORIGINALITY: Above, Andrea Tucker-Hody's "Blue Heron Over the Moon" is shown. At right are Ariane Wohl's woven creations. "It requires education for people to rediscover handmade art," Wohl says.



Photo by George Paul

CRAFT: San Francisco exhibition to highlight handmade works

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savvy and electronically sophisticated, I think people crave that tactile experience of the senses. "I hope we've educated our children well when it comes to setting up their own homes, that they will go off in that direction," Wohl agrees. "It requires education for people to rediscover handmade art."

And the one-on-one support between artist and customer is critical, she believes. "The artist has to be there for people to get how important good art is."

"The numbers that do 'get it' seem to be increasing, at least anecdotally, according to the American Craft Council.

"Does society like to craft, or does craft reflect society? Either way, we're seeing another resurgence right now," says American Craft Council president Mary Fichter. "I think it's that people have just grown tired of the aesthetic that's mass produced at stores."

The craft council's San Francisco show, celebrating its 12th year, is the oldest in America. While the council's largest show in terms of the number of exhibitors with booths is in Baltimore in February, the San Francisco one is perennially popular. Fichter attributes it to that special Bay Area dynamic.

"The first show was in 1975. Not only San Franciscans, but the nation as a whole was turning away from mass-produced objects and embracing natural materials, like clay and wood, out



HANDWORK: San Anselmo artist Andrea Tucker-Hody's "Fate And His Twin."

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Past forward 32 years and things haven't changed much here in Fish-by-the-Bay. Concern for the environment is an understatement around the Bay Area, and if you're not doing something to green your life and reduce your carbon footprint, something's wrong with you. "The whole green phenomenon is something that's made craft very appealing," says Fichter. "We'll have lots of green artists at the show."

The craft council, always looking to promote artists and their work, isn't just tapping into the green movement. At this year's show is another new installation, called "Crafts 4 Kids." It's not a demonstration where kids make macaroni neckties; instead it's a category of crafting in which the products are designed espe-

this night light could go in a kid's room," says Drower. "No! You've got to put business in it! It doesn't have to be sappy. But some designs work for kids, and some don't. Like with my waxes — classic work for kids. But orchids? No."

"The American Craft Council is trying to get the younger generation interested in handmade work," says Wohl. "My generation, in the '60s, appreciated it more. This generation of young parents doesn't seem as interested in handmade art for themselves — they buy it mostly for their children. People want their children to have something special — something no one else has."

Still, whether the crafts are designs for kids or for their elders, the common denominator is hand-craftsmanship. That means higher prices for a wooden fire engine or a handmade vest — compared to a Habitat Transformation figure or a Baby Gap sweater — but artists like Drower say there's no comparison. "People that go to the craft shows want a different product," Drower says. "They're looking for something unique and distinctive. It's individually made and it reflects the craftsman."

"To buy original work," says Tucker-Hody, "something somebody has put time and energy into — there has to be that connection with the heart."

By reporter Katie Watts and MJ staff
Rebecca Hardesty contributed to this