

# CRAFT IN AMERICA

community: continuity and change



Amy Rueffert, Log #4 (JFK), 2007, Sibila Savage Photography

## Preview

All craft artists work within a tradition. It is difficult for them to separate themselves from the deeply rooted traditions of the past or the craft artists who have come before them. However, in every generation some craft artists seek to push boundaries; change the art form in his or her own way. In this section of Educator Guide: Community, students will deepen their knowledge and understanding of continuity and change as seen through the work of Richard Notkin and Einar and Jamex de la Torre. These artists push the limits of their materials and subject matter, but do so within the longstanding traditions of craft.

## Featured Artists

Richard Notkin (clay/Community)

Einar and Jamex de la Torre (glass/Community)

## Related Artists

Pat Courtney Gold (basket maker/Memory)

Jan Yager (jewelry/Landscape)

## continuity and change

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# educator guide information

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## Craft in America, Inc.

Craft In America Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to the exploration of craft in the United States and its impact on our nation's cultural heritage. The centerpiece of the company's efforts is the production of a nationally broadcast television documentary series celebrating American craft and the artists who bring it to life. The project currently includes a three-part television documentary series supported by CRAFT IN AMERICA: Expanding Traditions, a nationally touring exhibition of exceptional craft objects, as well as a companion book, and a comprehensive Web site. Carol Sauvion is the founder and director of Craft in America.

## Craft in America Mission Statement

The mission of Craft in America is to document and advance original handcrafted work through programs in all media made accessible to all Americans.

## Craft in America: The Series

Craft in America's nationally broadcast PBS documentary series seeks to celebrate craft by honoring the artists who create it. In three episodes entitled Memory, Landscape and Community, Craft in America television viewers will travel throughout the United States visiting America's premier craft artists in their studios to witness the creation of hand-made objects, and into the homes, businesses and public spaces where functional art is employed and celebrated. The primary objective of the series is to convey to a national audience the breadth and beauty of handmade objects in our culture.

## Viewing the Series

Craft in America may be taped off the air and used for educational purposes at no cost for one year from the date of the first national broadcast—May 30, 2007. Check local PBS station listings as broadcast times may vary.



## Ordering the DVD and Companion Book

For long-term viewing and in-classroom use, the Craft in America: The series enhanced format DVD may be purchased through PBS Video, 1-800-752-9727, or [www.shoppbs.com/teachers](http://www.shoppbs.com/teachers)

To order the companion book, CRAFT IN AMERICA Celebrating Two Centuries of Artists and Objects contact 1-800-424-7963 or [www.shoppbs.com/teachers](http://www.shoppbs.com/teachers)

## Audience

Craft in America is produced for a public television audience. Companion Educator Guides written for teachers support each of the three episodes—Memory, Landscape and Community. These guides are intended primarily for use with middle and high school students; however, the content can be adapted for students of all ages and for use in other educational settings.

# educator guide information

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## Craft in America Educator Guides

Three Educator Guides have been designed to accompany Craft in America. Each guide—Memory, Landscape and Community—relate to and reflect the core ideas, artists, and art forms presented in the corresponding series episode. The themes presented in each guide allow additional entry points into the material found in the three episodes.

## How to Use the Guides

The material presented in the three Craft in America Educator Guides is organized into thematic groupings and written to support middle and high school art education curricula. Teachers are encouraged to use the content as presented or to enhance and further their established programs of study. The guides can also be adapted for use in other subject areas. The primary purpose of the guides is to deepen students' knowledge, understanding and appreciation of craft in America.

## Scope and Sequence

The three thematic Educator Guides—Memory, Landscape and Community—can be used in whatever sequence is appropriate. The guides can be used independently or sequentially. Time for each suggested activity will vary depending on the depth of inquiry.

Each theme within an Educator Guide features the following components:

### Preview

A brief overview of the theme and related activities

### Featured Artists

Each theme features two artists, one of whom is highlighted in the related episode

### Related Artists

In addition to featured artists, each theme references at least two other artists whose work illustrates the theme

### Background Information

An introduction to the theme, the featured artists, and their connection to the broader world of craft, intended for teacher use

### Craft in Action

Provides questions for the teacher to use with students prior to and following viewing of the DVDs

### Craft in the Classroom

Suggested activities for exploring and investigating key concepts and opportunities for art making and reflection

### Worksheets

Support selected activities

The Educator Guides are designed to complement the series, but there are additional resources available on the Craft in America Web site that can be used by both teachers and students. It is recommended that teachers preview materials on the DVD and Web site prior to introducing the theme to students.

# CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

“ I'm trying to make pots that have a separate cultural identity [than Yixing pots] that speak of my times, my country, my concerns. ”

Richard Notkin



Traditions are an important part of our lives. Birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, and holidays are just some of the many cultural and religious traditions we celebrate. These traditions become part of our lives at birth, and as we grow older we go from being a participant in the tradition to being responsible for carrying on the tradition. But why are traditions important to us? What meaning do they have? Why do we feel the need to continue them? Is it okay to change them?

These simple questions have complex answers deeply rooted in our personal, familial, and cultural ties and identities. More often than not, traditions are simply a way for us to stay connected to our heritage, and often are such a part of everyday life that we rarely stop to think about their importance to us. For many, what is important is that traditions continue. Few want to break with tradition. But there are those who, for whatever reason, do feel the need to break or at least modify the tradition. Is this a bad thing? Is it wrong to question a tradition? Is it wrong to change or break with a tradition to better suit your beliefs or lifestyle?

In some instances, changing a long-standing tradition (e.g., a senior class trip, homecoming, or birthday ritual) is seen as a disrespectful to one's forebears. But for others, changing the meal served at Thanksgiving or having a non-traditional wedding would be welcome or even necessary. By changing a tradition, some people feel they can better express their beliefs, who they are. Their intent is not to disrespect what has come before, but simply to question it. And whether we realize it or not, every generation, in some large or small way, changes what has come before, creating a new tradition that future generations will surely want to change.

Richard Notkin, Cube Skull Teapot (variation #23), Yixing Series, 2000, Richard Notkin Photograph

# continuity and change



Richard Notkin, 1950 in Chicago

## Richard Notkin

Born 1948, Chicago, Illinois

Lives and works in Helena, Montana

Received a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute and an MFA from the University of California

Created a series of teapots based on those found in Yixing, China, embedding them with contemporary themes and imagery—called the 20th-Century Solutions Teapot series

Teapots comprise the majority of work between 1983 and 1995

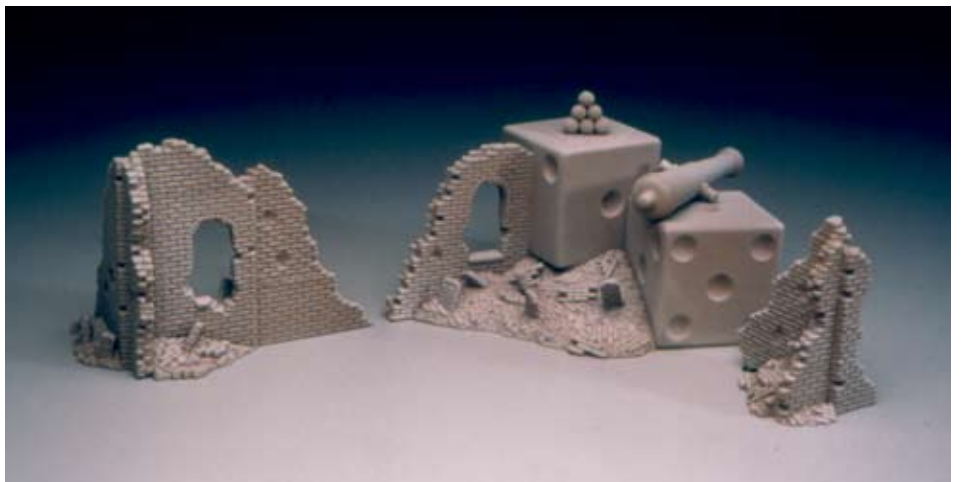
When speaking about the teapot, he calls it "the most complex of vessels, consisting of body, handle, spout, lid and knob. This allows me the widest latitude in juxtaposing the many images I use to set up my narrative pieces."

Addresses socio-political issues, including war, the Holocaust, and nuclear annihilation

The Gift, a Notkin mural made from 1106 ceramic tiles, depicts the mushroom cloud of the Bikini Atoll nuclear test in 1946, each tile serving as its own bas relief, showing images such as skulls, ears and dice



Richard Notkin, Heart Teapot for BOK



Richard Notkin, 20th Century Solutions Teapot

Traditions can be firmly rooted in our own personal, familial, and cultural beliefs, but we can also borrow from other cultures and combine aspects of them with our own traditions to express our creative vision. While ceramic artist Richard Notkin works within the long tradition of clay, that for centuries has included the making of teapots, he also borrows from other cultures. Notkin puts his own spin on teapots by completely redefining their purpose without compromising their essential form (body, spout, handle, lid, and knob) or materials (clay).

Notkin's teapots clearly express his own creative vision while paying homage to the small-scale, delicate teapots of the Chinese Yixing tradition that, like Notkin's work, express a narrative element. But Notkin's teapots push the idea of functional pottery to the edge. He uses his work to express his social and political views about past and contemporary civilization. He transforms a simple vessel rooted in tradition into a sculptural form that redefines our understanding of what a teapot can and should be. Notkin's teapots are truly about continuity and change, reaching back thousands of years to an ancient tradition and, with respect and understanding, changing the tradition to express his contemporary views. All the while he remains true to the handcrafted form and materials of the teapot.

# continuity and change



Rob Whitworth Photograph

## *Einar de la Torre*

Born 1963, Guadalajara, Mexico

## *Jamex de la Torre*

Born 1960, Guadalajara, Mexico

Brothers born in Mexico, but moved to California in 1972

Both attended California State University at Long Beach, where they learned how to work in glass and where Einar earned a BFA in sculpture

Entered the glass arts through ceramics

Artistic nomads, they prefer to travel around the world, taking up residence in glass shops, art centers and schools to create their art and teach glassblowing rather than maintaining their own elaborate glass studios

Served as guest artists at Pilchuck School of Glass; Penland School of Crafts; The Glass Furnace, Istanbul; and many art schools and universities

Reside and work in both Ensenada, Mexico and San Diego, California and consider themselves Mexican-American bicultural artists

What happens when you take Mexican traditions, mix in a little American pop culture, add social commentary and stir in a pinch of humor? The result is the glass sculptures and installations created by Einar and Jamex de la Torre. Living in both California and Mexico facilitates the brothers' ability to juxtapose their ancestry with American popular culture. Their work reaches far into the past, referencing Aztec gods and Mexican folk art while addressing contemporary political and economic issues. They struggle to make sense of the world around them and the culture into which they were born. Every day they question traditions, theirs and those of others, through the subject matter of their work.

But where is the continuity? While they work within the tradition of glass blowing, they have chosen to chart their own course in terms of how they use the medium, to express their creative visions. They push the limits of glassblowing as others who came before them did; however, despite their forays into uncharted territory, they remain committed to the continuity of the medium through their processes and techniques. While the results may not be traditional in either subject matter or form, their methods date back thousands of years. Like other craft artists, they have a deep respect for the long tradition of glassblowing. For the de la Torre brothers, continuity and change is what allows them to experiment, to work outside the traditional limits of glass.



Einar and Jamex de la Torre, Pineapple Baby, 2004



Richard Notkin, Nuclear Nuts Teapot

## The Craft Connection

All craft artists work within a tradition. It is sometimes difficult for them to separate themselves entirely from deeply rooted traditions of the past or the craft artists who have come before them. It is through tradition that the knowledge and understanding of materials, processes, and techniques are passed down from generation to generation, artist to artist. But change is also important. In every generation of craft there are artists who push the boundaries and seek to change its art form. Richard Notkin and Einar and Jamex de la Torre push the limits of their materials and subject matter. These artists do what they do because their creative visions are important to them. To realize these visions, they must redefine traditions, but they do so with respect and understanding. Changes are by no means made simply for the sake of change.



Richard Notkin, Legacy, Detail

## Craft in Action View

Have students view the DVD segment featuring Richard Notkin (clay/Community). After viewing, engage the students in a conversation about his work focusing on the teapots: What are some of the things he makes? Are the teapots really teapots? When speaking about the teapot, Notkin calls it "the most complex of vessels, consisting of body, handle, spout, lid and knob." Do you agree that those are the basic parts of every teapot? Do all of his teapots have these basic parts? In what way are the materials traditional and in what way are they not? Help students understand that Notkin works with traditional materials. What is the primary function of Notkin's teapots? In what ways does Notkin break away from the tradition of teapots? Help students understand that, due to complexity of design, Notkin's teapots are not used for serving tea, but rather, he uses them to make a socio-political statements about the state of our world.

## View

Now have students view the DVD segment on Einar and Jamex de la Torre (glass/Community). Before viewing, ask students: What comes to mind when you think about objects made of glass? Have them consider the following question while viewing the segment: How does their work break away from traditional uses of glass?

After viewing, engage students in a conversation about the de la Torre brothers' work. How do they work within the tradition of glassblowing? How do they push the boundaries of the tradition in terms of form, scale, function, and subject matter? What is the primary function of the de la Torre brothers' glass work? In what ways does it break away from the tradition of glass?



## Make

### Altered States

In this activity students will experience first hand the process of breaking with tradition. Begin by finding examples of various chairs on the Craft in America Web site. Possible artists to include are Jon Brooks, John Cederquist, Michael Cooper, Tom Ekert, Wendy Maruyama, Alphonse Mattia, Tommy Simpson, Rosanne Somerson, Therman Statom, etc. Show the images to students online, or print them. Engage them in a discussion about similarities and differences in form, materials, and function. How does each artist's chair break with tradition?

Give each student a photocopy of a traditional basic chair. Have them use tracing paper to experiment with ways to alter the chair. Provide prompts: Beyond being a place to sit, what other function could this chair provide? Based on its new function, what would the form be like? What materials do you need to alter the chair? They should try several variations before arriving at a final design. Once they have a plan, they should make their chairs. This can be done using foam core or cardboard as a base to make a small maquette, or they can use real chairs and alter them. When their artworks are complete, have them title and display them. Discuss the experience of breaking away from tradition.

### From Scratch: Weaving

Find images of traditional weavings on the Craft in America Web site or on other Web sites. Print out or project the images, and engage students in a discussion about these artworks. What makes these weavings traditional? Discuss the form, materials, and function. Then ask students: How could you push the boundaries? What needs to be kept the same in order for it to still be considered a weaving? What could you change—scale, materials, form (2D or 3D), etc.? What would happen if you gave it an unusual form and altered the materials?

Begin by having students make a traditional weaving using yarn and fabric strips on a simple cardboard or frame with nails loom. Have students make a second weaving that pushes the boundaries in terms of materials and form. Gather unusual materials for students to use to make their non-traditional weaving. Allow them opportunities to experiment and play with different ways to push the boundaries of their weaving. Once they have completed their weavings, have them title and display them. Discuss the experience of breaking away from tradition.

### Clay

Select a traditional object made out of clay (e.g., a cup, bowl, platter, teapot, vase, etc.). Discuss the object focusing on its form, materials, and function. Then ask students: How could you push the boundaries? What needs to be kept the same in order for it to still be considered a cup, bowl, teapot, etc.? What could you change—scale, materials, form, etc.? What would happen if you gave it an unusual form?

Have students explore various ways that they could alter the object's form. Allow them time to sketch their ideas. Once they have developed their ideas, have them make their altered objects through hand-building and/or wheel throwing. Once they have completed their artworks, have them give title and display them. Discuss the experience of breaking away from tradition.

### Reflect

Give each student a copy of the reflection sheet Pushing Boundaries (Community: Continuity and Change Worksheet #1). Ask students to reflect on the artwork they made using the worksheet to guide their thinking.

### Craft in Your World

Tea, teapots, and tea cups come in many different flavors and styles. Have students find out more about the world of tea and handcrafted teapots and tea cups. What traditions are still maintained today? How have they changed over time?

Tea rituals are important in cultures throughout the world (high tea in England, tea ceremonies in Japan, etc.) and even play a prominent role in literature (Alice in Wonderland). Are hand crafted teapots and tea cups a part of these traditions? Have students find out more.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Community: Continuity and Change Worksheet #1–Pushing Boundaries

What did you make?

What inspired your design?

In what way is your finished artwork within traditional boundaries? Think about form, materials, and function.

In what ways does your artwork push the boundaries of the traditional object? Think about form, materials, and function.

Are you pleased with what you created? Explain why or why not.

If you were to do the same project again, what changes would you make?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Community: Continuity and Change Worksheet #1–Pushing Boundaries

Please circle the responses that best fit your artistic working process (1= no fit and 5=perfect fit):

- a. Tried to see the whole art task and not just the details of it  
1      2      3      4      5
  
- b. Rushed into solving the problem, going with my first solution  
1      2      3      4      5
  
- c. Ran into problems  
1      2      3      4      5
  
- d. Created sketches or models to help solve problems as they arose  
1      2      3      4      5
  
- e. Had to redo parts  
1      2      3      4      5
  
- f. Changed ideas or directions  
1      2      3      4      5
  
- g. Had to stop and figure what to do next  
1      2      3      4      5
  
- h. Felt frustrated or discouraged  
1      2      3      4      5
  
- i. Talked through my problem and kept asking myself about it until a solution presented itself  
1      2      3      4      5

In the space below, share what you have learned about traditions, continuity, and change.

# additional web resources

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American Craft Council  
<http://www.craftcouncil.org/>

Smithsonian Archives for American Art  
<http://archivesofamericanart.si.edu/exhibits/pastexhibits/craft/craft.htm>

Museum of Arts and Design, NYC (formerly the American Craft Museum)  
<http://www.madmuseum.org>

Museum of Craft and Folk Art, San Francisco  
<http://www.mocfa.org/>

Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles  
<http://www.cafam.org/current.html>

## Featured and Related Artists

Einar and Jamex de la Torre  
<http://www.delatorrebros.com/>  
<http://artscenecal.com/ArticlesFile/Archive/Articles2005/Articles1105/EJdelaTorreA.html>

Mary Jackson  
<http://www.southernaccents.com/accents/artandantiques/art/article/0,14743,344632,00.html>  
<http://www.craftsreport.com/november01/mary.html>  
<http://www.scafricanamericanhistory.com/currenthonoree.asp?month=1&year=1995>

Mississippi Cultural Crossroads  
<http://www.ms-culturalcrossroads.org/>  
<http://www.win.net/~kudzu/crossroa.html>

Richard Notkin  
<http://www.ceramicstoday.com/potw/notkin.htm>  
<http://www.plasm.com/cana/CBCeramics/Ceramics/Friends/Notkin/Notkin.html>  
<http://www.archiebray.org/residents/notkin/index.html>

Penland School of Crafts  
<http://www.penland.org/>  
[www.mintmuseum.org/penland/](http://www.mintmuseum.org/penland/)

Pilchuck School of Glass  
<http://www.pilchuck.com/default.htm>  
<http://www.artistcommunities.org/pilchuck.html>

# additional web resources

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## Art Forms

### Book Arts

Book Arts Web  
The Center for Book Arts  
Book Arts Guild  
Projet Mobilivre/Bookmobile Project

<http://www.philobiblon.com/>  
<http://www.centerforbookarts.org/>  
<http://bookartsguild.org/>  
<http://www.mobilivre.org/>

### Ceramics

American Ceramic Society  
Ceramics Today  
National Council on Education  
for the Ceramic Arts

<http://www.ceramics.org/>  
<http://www.ceramicstoday.com/>  
<http://www.nceca.net/>

### Fibers

All Fiber Arts  
Handweavers Guild of America  
National Basketry Organization  
PBS's The Art of Quilting Series

<http://www.allfiberarts.com/>  
<http://www.weavespindye.org/>  
<http://www.nationalbasketry.org/>  
<http://www.pbs.org/americaquilts/>

### Glass

Glass Art Society  
Contemporary Glass Society (UK)  
Stained Glass Association of America

<http://www.glassart.org/>  
<http://www.cgs.org.uk>  
<http://www.stainedglass.org/>

### Metals

Anvil Fire  
Lapidary Journal  
Art Metal  
Metal Arts Guild of San Francisco  
Society of American Silversmiths  
Society of North American Goldsmiths

<http://www.anvilfire.com/>  
<http://www.lapidaryjournal.com/>  
<http://www.artmetal.com/>  
<http://www.metalartsguildsf.org/>  
<http://www.silversmithing.com/>  
<http://snagmetalsmith.org/>

### Paper

Hand Papermaking  
International Association of  
Hand Papermakers and Paper Artists

<http://www.handpapermaking.org/>  
<http://www.iapma.info/>

### Wood

Woodworkers Website Association  
Fine Woodworking  
Wood Magazine

<http://www.woodworking.org/>  
<http://www.taunton.com/finewoodworking/>  
<http://www.woodmagazine.com/>

## National Visual Art Standards

ArtsEdge, Kennedy Center

<http://www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards.cfm>

## Credits & Copyright

Craft in America: Educator Guides written by Marilyn Stewart, PhD, Professor of Art Education, Kutztown University, Kutztown, PA; Lise Dubé-Scherr M.A., Director of Education, Atlentown Art Museum, PA; and Kathleen Walck, Art Educator and Fiber Artist, Kutztown, PA for Craft in America, Inc., design by jonki (<http://www.jonki.net>)

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