

CRAFT IN AMERICA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 7, 2016

CONTACT: Beverly Feldman
beverly@craftinamerica.org

CRAFT IN AMERICA: TEACHERS

Premieres on PBS Thursday, September 15 at 8:00pm*



[Los Angeles] - *Craft in America*, the Peabody Award-winning series, begins its eighth season on PBS with an unique hour that celebrates *TEACHERS* -- renowned individuals who are not only committed to their own artistic visions, but are equally committed to passing on their skills and passion for craft to new generations of students and artists of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds. As part of PBS' Education week programming, *Craft in America: TEACHERS* airs on Thursday, September 15th at 8pm primetime*.

These artist/teachers are a special breed. By day they can often be found in classrooms or workshops, giving up time that could be spent creating their own art to assure that their hard earned wisdom and practical skills do not end with them. Across the country these craft artists are committed to education – inspiring, evaluating, criticizing and confirming their students' achievements.

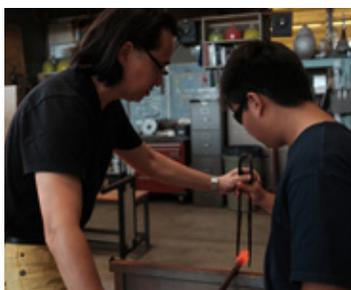
Craft in America: TEACHERS takes an inclusive approach to education and craft, emphasizing that it is never too early – or too late – to acquire a facility and appreciation for craft. The education covered in this episode starts with kindergarten exploration and discovery; goes through high school and university where the curriculum becomes simultaneously more liberating and challenging and turns quite serious as individual artists develop and mature.



Our hour begins with the artistry of **Barbara Teller Ornelas** and her sister **Lynda Teller Pete**, both of whom learned the craft of weaving the time-honored way – through family. Often this method of teaching begins with observation; skills are absorbed rather than acquired. This legacy of learning is essential to Navajo weavers.

The Teller sisters spent summers with their grandparents in Canyon de Chelly, NM, ancestral home of the Navajo people, in an environment where weaving “is a way of life.”

In early childhood they were introduced to weaving by their mother, Ruth Teller, who instilled the belief that beauty and harmony should be woven into every rug. As they teach outdoors amidst the extraordinary natural beauty of the Canyon, they recount the story of Spider Woman who, as ancient legend has it, taught the Navajos to weave. Our cameras move with them to the Idyllwild Arts Academy Native American Arts Summer Program, where in the summers, they teach the practice of Navajo weaving atop a mountain overlooking Palm Springs, California.



We travel to Honolulu, Hawaii where artist **Mark Mitsuda** introduces professional glass forming practices to his teenage students at Punahou School. In 1972, his mentor Hugh Jenkins started the first curriculum high school glass program in the nation and in 1979 President Barack Obama graduated. Mitsuda says that what he learned from Jenkins, he now passes on to his own students, underscoring the inter-generational mission of teaching. “We teach critical thinking,” says Mitsuda. “We teach students how to teach themselves... They have to work it out. It’s very hands-on.”



We next travel to Omaha, Nebraska, where **Therman Statom**, a major figure of the late 20th century Studio Glass Movement, decided to start programs for underserved inner city students and at-risk youth. His commissioned chandeliers comprise the centerpiece of the Los Angeles Public Library’s Main Branch and his work appears in numerous exhibitions annually. “I feel that art is a tool for empowerment and education. It’s also a viable tool to investigate positive change and engage a culture through the use of exploration.” Our cameras capture the organized activities and excitement of Therman’s class at the Hot Shops Art Center, witnessing how art and glass blowing is taught to youth. This segment proves that the power of art to inspire highlights the importance of hands-on arts instruction in the education of every American child.



We next take our cameras to Alfred, New York, home to Alfred University School of Art and Design where Mark Mitsuda and so many other artists have honed their craft and earned the degrees that allow them to become teachers at accredited schools. The School of Ceramics includes a graduate program where conceptual thinking elevates the approach to clay. Professor **Linda Sikora** describes the program: “We teach many disciplines alongside what might be more strictly categorized as craft. This is deliberate and allows our students to become broad thinking in terms of visual and material culture regardless of how they specialize. It is also, I believe, what keeps our program vital and contemporary.”

Hillary Clinton’s quote on the occasion of the 1993 Year of American Craft celebration sums up the importance of a life in the crafts. “Crafts inspire us and give us a sense of human possibility. They unite us in our appreciation of our rich cultural heritage and they remind us of our human powers to imagine and create.” The teachers and artists profiled in this 2016 episode of *Craft in America* do just that.

CRAFT IN AMERICA is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing original handcrafted work through the Peabody Award-winning documentary series on PBS nationwide and the free-to-the-public Craft in America Center located in Los Angeles, which offers artist talks, exhibitions, workshops and a library. With fifteen episodes produced since 2007, *CRAFT IN AMERICA* takes viewers on a journey to the artists, origins and techniques of American craft. Each episode contains stories from diverse regions and cultures, blending history with living practice and exploring issues of identity, ritual, philosophy and creative expression. Ancillary projects include extensive websites providing hours of online videos and interactive learning materials, as well as museum exhibitions, and the Random House book *Craft in America: Celebrating Two Centuries of Artists and Objects*.

For more about Craft in America:



craftinamerica.org



pbs.org/craftinamerica



facebook.com/craftinamerica



youtube.com/craftinamerica



instagram.com/craftinamerica



twitter.com/CraftinAmerica

*check local listings

Photos courtesy of Mark Markley & Denise Kang

Please contact for art and interviews:

Carol Sauvion, Executive Producer: carolsauvion@craftinamerica.org or Beverly Feldman, Press: beverly@craftinamerica.org

Additional images of all the artists’ work are available on Dropbox (52 MB): <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/21500868/TEACHERSpres.zip>