

# CRAFT IN AMERICA

landscape: natural connections



David Gurney, Tree of Life, Doug Hill Photograph

## Preview

For many craft artists, natural materials are essential to their work. In this section of Educator Guide: Landscape, students will learn, through the work of George Nakashima and Jan Yager, how raw materials are transformed by artists into works of art that reflect upon and respond to their relationships to nature. Students will also explore how the artists' deep connections with their natural surroundings inspire them to create beautiful, functional objects.

## Featured Artists

George Nakashima (wood/Landscape)

Jan Yager (jewelry/Landscape)

## Related Artists

David Gurney (clay/Landscape)

Kit Carson (jewelry/Landscape)

Dona Look (jewelry/Community)

## natural connections

Introduction	5
George Nakashima	6
Jan Yager	7
The Craft Connection	8
Craft in Action	9
Craft in the Classroom	10
Make	11
Worksheets	12
Additional Web Resources	37
Credits & Copyright	38

# education 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.

# education 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.

# NATURAL CONNECTIONS

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“ Not everyone can live in the woods, but people can live with wood and stay connected with nature ”

Mira Nakashima



Trees. Mountains. Rivers. Whether we live in the country, the suburbs, or city we are all connected to and part of the natural world. For some of us, all we have to do is walk out our front door to see beautiful vistas, while for others, nature is found in a small blade of grass growing through a crack in the sidewalk. Regardless of where we live, we all have some connection to nature and the landscape that surrounds us.

Our connection to the natural world is complex. Some people are deeply appreciative of the bounties nature affords us, while other take it for granted. However, most people understand the role nature plays in our lives, are concerned about the state of the environment, appreciate nature's beauty, and incorporate nature, in some way, into their daily lives. We decorate our homes with nature-inspired motifs and images, plant gardens, bring plants into our homes, and play in parks. No matter who we are or where we live, we all have at least some connection to the natural world.

For many people, including craft artists, nature is also a source of endless inspiration. Colors, shapes, patterns, and textures are ever-present in the flora and fauna that surround us. We also look to nature for materials to make a wide range of products—trees for paper and furniture, cotton for clothing, clay for dishware, gems for jewelry, etc. Nature's capacity to inspire is endless, and our connection to it is deep, rich and boundless.





George Nakashima at the Minidoka Relocation Center, 1942, National Archives photograph by Francis Stewart.

## George Nakashima

1905-1990

Born of Samurai lineage to Japanese parents in Spokane, Washington

Earned a Master's Degree in architecture from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1930

Studied with architect Antonin Raymond, Frank Lloyd Wright's collaborator on the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo.

Moved to Tokyo to work under Raymond on the Imperial Hotel project

Returned to the United States when World War II broke out

Sent to a Japanese internment camp in Minidoka, Idaho in 1942 along with wife Marion and their infant daughter, Mira

Learned traditional Japanese carpentry in the camp from another resident, working with salvaged wood

The Nakashimas' 1943 release from the camp sponsored by Antonin Raymond, who invited them to his farm in New Hope, Pennsylvania—here Nakashima established a home and studio

His immense Altar of Peace was installed at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City in 1983

In 1984, started the Nakashima Foundation of Peace to promote universal peace

Worked in his studio almost daily until his death in 1990



George Nakashima,

People need water, food, and air to live; the late master woodworker George Nakashima also needed wood. Growing up in the forests of the Olympic Peninsula, he developed a profound knowledge and understanding of trees and the environment at a young age, and throughout his life he continued to revere nature. For each handcrafted Nakashima chair, table, desk, or cabinet, he carefully considered the qualities of an individual piece of wood and made it useful by adding "human made" elements (legs, chair spindles, etc.), also crafted of wood. With each piece, Nakashima sought to reflect and reveal the natural rhythms of the tree's lines and grain. He believed that each piece of furniture he made gave the tree a second life and provided people the opportunity to live with nature, even if they could not live in nature. For Nakashima and his daughter, Mira, there is a deep spirit within each tree, that enhance peoples' lives.

As furniture designers, Nakashimas' connection to the natural world has been both profound and hands-on. They never simply waited for shipments of wood to arrive at the studio; rather, they've ventured out in search of trees, overseeing the milling process themselves and transforming the wood with their skillful, loving hands into beautiful, organic pieces of furniture. When commissioned to make a table, chair, cabinet, or desk, George would do his best to leave the tree in its organic state—focusing on the wood's growth pattern and its natural beauty without sacrificing practicality. A chair needed to not only to respect the wood and be beautiful; it also had to be comfortable and useful. If the work pleases the artist and pleases others, then the destiny of the wood has been fulfilled.



Craft in America Photograph

*Jan Yager*

Born 1951, Detroit, Michigan

Artist in fine metals for more than thirty years

Earned a BFA in jewelry and metalsmithing from Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo in 1974 and an MFA from Rhode Island School of Design, Providence in 1981

Achieved post-graduation commercial success in the New York fashion industry

Eventually turned her sights to working as an independent studio artist

Brings a different approach to jewelry, which has traditionally been a vehicle for personal adornment and for the display of precious metals and stones

City Flotsam series juxtaposes the residue of her Philadelphia neighborhood, such as bullet casings, pen caps, and crack vials, with traditional jewelry forms

Work has been shown in a solo exhibition at The Victoria and Albert Museum, London and can be found in other museum and private collections



Jan Yager, Dandelion Brooch, City Flora Series, 2001. Photograph by Lloyd Solly

Jan Yager did not need to look far to find inspiration for her handcrafted jewelry; however, she did need to look carefully. Yager lives and works in a rough, inner-city environment, where buildings replace trees. Despite this austere urban landscape, Yager has made a conscious decision to work locally, very locally—within one city block. As she began to mine the area for inspiration she came across an empty lot overgrown with weeds. Since then, Yager has been using this field as her design laboratory. She now finds beauty in weeds that she once overlooked.

Walking slowly across the overgrown lot, Yager examines the overgrowth. She does not randomly pick the weeds, grasses, and small flowers. Instead, she carefully scrutinizes the visual buffet before making her selections. For Yager, even the smallest, most frequently overlooked natural materials are important and serve a purpose. She respects the landscape and learns from it. The pieces she mines from her "field" often serve as the templates for her jewelry designs. In her hands, these simple weeds, plants, and flowers become beautiful, wearable artworks layered with meaning and purpose. For Yager, these are important stories to tell, as they illustrate the delicate balance between humans and nature.



George Nakashima, Peace Alter, Mary Bloom Photograph

### The Craft Connection

Both Mira Nakashima and Jan Yager use raw materials and draw inspiration from nature to create their handcrafted furniture and jewelry. Natural materials are an essential part of many craft artists' work. Their work would not be possible without birch bark, sweetgrass, clay, wood, or natural fibers, for example. Like the Nakashimas and Yager, each artist transforms these raw materials by hand into beautiful, functional works of art that reflect their relationship to nature. This deep connection to the natural world is what inspires them, and they fully understand the vital role nature plays in realizing their creative visions.





Dona Look, Basket #2004-5, Susan Einstein Photograph

## Craft in Action

### Setup

Make one photocopy for each student of the Nature Walk worksheets (Landscape: Natural Connections Worksheet #1). On the day the class meets, gather the students and explain that they are going into the school yard to see what natural elements they can find. Have them use the worksheet to record their findings. After they have completed their worksheets, discuss their discoveries.

Note: If your school is located in a urban area or your school landscape appears to offer few natural resources, have students undertake this activity anyway—you and they may be surprised by what they find.

### Discuss

Engage students in a conversation about what they discovered on their nature walk. Possible questions include: *What did you see that you would not have noticed if you were not looking carefully? Of the things you noticed, what surprised you the most? What things did you notice that you would consider beautiful or unique? Why? What natural elements did not appeal to you? Were you surprised by how many things you found that you did not notice before, even though you've spent so much time in these areas? What was the smallest thing you noticed? How did it catch your attention?*

### View

Have students view the DVD segment on Jan Yager (jewelry/Landscape). After viewing, engage them in a conversation about Yager and her process. *What made her decide to use her neighborhood as a source of inspiration for her work? Why does she limit the area where she looks for materials and inspiration? Are you surprised by how much she has collected from that area in terms of materials and ideas? Why or why not? What does she do with the things she collects? How does nature play a role in her work? What does she make that is directly inspired by nature?*

### View

Now show students the DVD segment on George Nakashima (wood/Landscape). Ask them to consider this question while viewing the segment: *What is George Nakashima's relationship to nature? After viewing, engage students in a conversation about the work of George Nakashima and his daughter Mira. What is the Nakashimas' relationship to nature? How is it different from Jan Yager's relationship to nature? What inspires the Nakashimas? How do you know that the Nakashimas have a great respect for the materials they are using? What is it they are trying to make with these materials? What roles do beauty and function play in the making of their furniture? How do they highlight the natural beauty of the wood? Why is that important to them? Could you see their designs being made out of some material other than wood? Why or why not?*



Kit Carson, Thunderbird

## Craft in the Classroom

### Explore

View additional DVD and Web site segments on featured artists Jan Yager and George and Mira Nakashima.

### Explore

Examine DVD or Web site segments for other artists and art forms that explore the theme Natural Connections. *What role does nature play in their artwork? What is their relationship to nature?* Compare and contrast David Gurney (clay/Landscape), Kit Carson (jewelry/Landscape) and/or Dona Look (jewelry/Community) with Jan Yager and George and Mira Nakashima.

### Investigate

In small groups, have students investigate the virtual exhibition on the Craft in America Web site: [www.craftinamerica.org](http://www.craftinamerica.org). Assign each group one medium to explore (clay, wood, metal, glass, or fiber). Use the Expanding Traditions worksheet (Landscape: Natural Connections Worksheet #2) to guide their investigation. Questions for students to consider include: *From this grouping, who are some of the other artists who use nature as inspiration for their artworks? Select one artist. Where does the artist live? Describe the artwork. How does your artist incorporate nature into his/her work? Can you tell by looking at the artwork whether the artist is inspired by the landscape and/or natural environment where they live?* When the groups have completed their investigations, have them share what they discovered. Then ask: *Are you surprised by the fact that there are so many craft artists who draw on nature or the natural environment for inspiration? Why or why not?*

### Investigate

Project an image of Jan Yager's Tiara of Useful Knowledge (2006). Use the artwork to begin a general discussion about tiaras. *What is this? Who typically wears a tiara (monarchs, brides, celebrities, young girls, etc.) and why? With what are tiaras and crowns typically associated (royalty, romance, wealth, and high style, etc.)? From what are they usually made (gold and silver metals, gems)?* Using Landscape: Natural Connections Worksheet #3, have students focus on Yager's tiara.

As students begin to answer the questions on the worksheet, prompt the discussion with information about Yager, the tiara, and its meaning. When they have completed the worksheet, ask: *What makes Yager's tiara unique or different from others? Do you think she intends for someone to wear it? Why or why not? What surprised you the most about this artwork?*

## Make

Using Precious Metal Clay (PMC), have students make a tiara or other piece of jewelry inspired by items from nature. Students could press natural objects into the clay to make textured jewelry.

Before students make their objects, have them spend some time researching various plants and flowers. This will allow them, like Jan Yager, to make informed decisions and ensure that their designs are based on real plant life. They should spend time sketching their ideas before deciding on a final design.

PMC is a modeling-type clay that is embedded with microscopic particles of silver and has the feel and working properties of clay. PMC is air-dried and fired in a kiln to turn it into a metal object. It can then be polished or soldered like other silver objects. PMC can be found in most craft or art stores. For more information, visit the Precious Metal Guild's Web site at <http://www.pmcguild.com>.

As an alternative to PMC, students can use tooling foil to create a tiara. Use a pencil to incise nature-inspired designs into the foil or create impressions in the foil by laying it on top of a sturdy natural object and rubbing the foil. When working with the foil, have students place a piece of felt or folded newspapers underneath it so it has some "give" when "drawing" on it. Students can cut out their images and shape them into a tiara or some other wearable item.

## Make

Basketmaker Dona Look, like Jan Yager, is inspired by nature: her birchbark vessels are made entirely of natural materials. Students can make their own stitched vessels out of handmade paper embedded with objects from nature like seeds, grasses, and small leaves. You will need a few deckles (wooden frames attached to a wire screen) and a blender to turn recycled paper into paper pulp. When you have blended some torn-up paper with water to make a slurry, scoop out the material and spread it thinly on the deckle. Then have students embed the natural materials into the wet paper and let it dry. When the paper is dry, students can cut it into shapes for the sides of their vessels and stitch them together with raffia, leather, or another natural string.

## Make

Weaving is yet another art form that lends itself to working with materials from nature. Students can create simple weavings on cardboard looms or wooden frames and use natural objects like raffia, twigs, long grasses, grapevine, willow branches and/or raw wool to make the weft (the threads that run horizontally on a weaving). These can also be woven with yarn interspersed with natural items to create a simple weaving inspired by and made from natural materials.

## Reflect

Write the two quotes below on the chalkboard. Have students, through group discussion, interpret and reflect on the meaning of each. Use their responses and insights to gauge their understanding of the important role nature plays in the world of craft.

“ Some people consider these weeds, the worst weeds in the world, but I think they're beautiful. ”  
Jan Yaeger

“ A tree is our most intimate contact with nature. ”  
George Nakashima

## Craft in Your World

*Have you ever noticed how many things in our world, our daily life, are made from natural materials?*

Have students spend five minutes looking around a room in their home to count the things inspired by natural materials—patterns, furniture, design, clothing, baskets, jewelry, wallpaper, etc.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Landscape: Natural Connections Worksheet #1– Nature Walk

Slowly walk around the school yard looking for natural elements such as twigs, flowers, grasses, weeds, shrubs, etc. Look carefully and closely to find items you might normally overlook. As you find things, record your discoveries in the chart below. Add more sheets if necessary.

Item

Location Found

Sketch and Describe

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Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Landscape: Natural Connections Worksheet #2-Expanding Traditions

Art Form Assigned (circle):    Wood    Clay    Glass    Fibers    Metals

Name some related artists who use nature as inspiration for their artworks.

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Select one artist from the group.

Artist's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Where does the artist live? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe an artwork by this artist, including form, materials, purpose, etc.

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How does this artist incorporate nature (materials, designs, etc.) into his/her work?

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Can you tell by looking at the artwork if the artist is inspired by the landscape and/or natural environment where he/she lives?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Landscape: Natural Connections Worksheet #3—Investigating Jan Yager's Tiara of Useful Knowledge (2006)

1. Describe what you see
2. What materials were used to make the tiara?
3. What does each plant depicted represent?
4. What inspired the artist to make the tiara?
5. What message is the artist trying to convey?
6. Why did Yager choose a tiara as the vehicle for expressing her creative vision?
7. How does the tiara compare to ones you have seen elsewhere?



THE TIARA OF USEFUL KNOWLEDGE. is the result of studying the history and uses of common, readily available plants. It is inspired by the American Philosophical Society's mission to "promote useful knowledge," and the Academy of Natural Sciences goal to "connect people to nature."

Designing and making a tiara is the jewelers' equivalent of writing a novel, it is a compilation of ideas or chapters if you will, that together render a full story. Following in the tradition of what are called "transformers" this tiara is composed of many removable pieces of jewelry that can be displayed or worn as a tiara or worn separately.

The centerpiece is what I call the French Fry Leaf. It refers to the importance of biodiversity. It is modeled after a sprouted Potato my 13 year old daughter found in the refrigerator that is now vigorously growing in a bucket in the backyard. Most of us know what a French fry looks like but few of us have seen the plant it grows from.

The Indians of the Americas were cultivating nearly three thousand varieties of potatoes at the time of the Spanish conquest. A few varieties were brought back to Europe, eventually spawning the Irish potato famine because of a lack of biodiversity. Although there are thousands of edible plants, we currently rely upon 20 for the majority of food eaten. Today corporate monoculture is once again returning to just a few varieties, and they talk of "patenting" - even some of those.

There will be a Switch Grass brooch to remind us that - hidden in plain sight - in the North American prairies grows a renewable source of fuel for our cars. And, a sprig of Lamb's Quarters termed the "World's Worst Weed" because of its legendary resistant to chemical herbicides. One plant is reported to yield up to 72,000 seeds capable of remaining dormant for 40 years. Because it grows so easily in disturbed soil, and is more nutritious than standard crops it is also called a "Plant for a Future." More than one Hurricane Katrina survivor found it the only useful thing standing where their houses once were.

A Chicory blossom represents the engaging notion of "The Edible Lawn?" According to the National Wildlife Federation, Americans spend 27 billion dollars a year on lawn care, (not including school yards and golf courses saturated with fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides).

A Tobacco blossom acknowledges the powerfully addictive qualities of some plants, and a flower spear of a Plantain reminds us that natural medicinals are at our feet. A sprig of Clover is food for both animals and the soil.

Many adjectives are applied to plants. Some are described as native, noxious, invasive, or resistant. Others are considered rare, extinct, endangered, or threatened by some and nuisance to others. For this newest work I have chosen to focus on those that are useful.

© Jan Yager

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# 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

Kit Carson  
<http://www.kitcarsonjewelry.com/>  
[http://freehand.com/artists/story\\_117.php](http://freehand.com/artists/story_117.php)

David Gurney  
<http://handsgallery.com/artists/show/20>  
<http://www.ceramicmonthly.org/expandedcontent/2007-03/upfront/default.asp>

George Nakashima  
<http://www.nakashimawoodworker.com/>  
<http://www.nakashimafoundation.org/>

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>

Denise Wallace and Samuel Wallace  
<http://www.denisewallace.com/>  
[http://www.iaiancad.org/apressrelease\\_121.php](http://www.iaiancad.org/apressrelease_121.php)

Jan Yager  
[http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion/object\\_stories/tiara/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion/object_stories/tiara/index.html)  
<http://www.pewarts.org/2003/yager/main.html>  
<http://art.wmich.edu/alumni/academy/yager/>

# 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

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

### 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

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

### 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

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