

# CRAFT IN AMERICA

UBALDO VITALI & PAUL REVERE EDUCATION GUIDE

## UBALDO VITALI AND PAUL REVERE: SILVERSMITHS CONNECTING ACROSS TIME

Learn how the contemporary silversmith, Ubaldo Vitali, works within a tradition that spans thousands of years. View the artist at work, demonstrating processes and sharing insights about the materials and tools that are central to his craft. Ubaldo also shares his long-standing admiration for a fellow artist, the patriot Paul Revere, and the most famous of Revere's works, the Sons of Liberty bowl. Often called upon to restore historically significant metal works, Ubaldo has restored at least twelve pieces crafted by this 18th century craftsman. Working in and responding to the world today, Ubaldo has deep commitment to the importance of knowing history—history of art, but especially history of any artist whose pieces he is asked to restore.

Grade Level: 7–12

Craft In America Theme/Episode: EAST

### Background Information

Ubaldo Vitali is a distinguished American silversmith and conservator, hailing from a four-generation Italian lineage of metalworkers. Having honed his craft from childhood in family workshops and through formal studies at prestigious Italian art academies, Vitali established his own workshop in Maplewood, New Jersey, in 1967. He is celebrated for his masterful blend of traditional silversmithing techniques with innovative design. Vitali creates original pieces and serves as a highly sought-after conservator for historical silver, restoring invaluable artifacts for institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Ubaldo was even commissioned to restore a teapot that was made by Paul Revere. His unparalleled skill and dedication to the art form were recognized with a MacArthur Fellowship in 2011, cementing his legacy as a leading figure in contemporary metalwork.



### Essential question

- How can artists connect us to our history?

### Supporting questions

- In what ways might artworks tell us about the time in which they were made?
- In what ways might artists be influenced by people and events of the past?
- How do artists continue and break with tradition?

### National Standards for Visual Arts Education

This lesson addresses the following standards. The performance standards listed here are directly related to the lesson's goals.

#### Visual Arts:

- Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding (Visual Arts Anchor Standard 11)
- Through observation, infer information about time, place, and culture in which a work of art was created. (VA:Cn11.1.4a)

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- Identify how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society. (VA:Cn11.1.5a )
- Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses. (VA:Cn11.1.6a )

### Historical Thinking Skills:

- Interpreting cause and effect
- Understanding diversity of historical experience

### Objectives:

#### Students will be able to:

- Explain how artworks provide information about the time in which they were made.
- Identify ways in which artists might be influenced by people and events from the past.
- Provide examples of artworks that follow and break with tradition.

### Resources

- Craft in America EAST episode, [craftinamerica.org/episode/east](http://craftinamerica.org/episode/east), Ubaldo Vitali's segment, and Craft in America's website, [craftinamerica.org/artist/ubaldo-vitali](http://craftinamerica.org/artist/ubaldo-vitali)
- Smithsonian Magazine, [smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/on-view-at-the-renwick-artist-ubaldo-vitali-has-silver-in-the-blood-8148048](http://smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/on-view-at-the-renwick-artist-ubaldo-vitali-has-silver-in-the-blood-8148048)
- Smithsonian American Art Museum, [americanart.si.edu/artwork/tureen-risotto-alla-pescatore-80950](http://americanart.si.edu/artwork/tureen-risotto-alla-pescatore-80950)
- Paul Revere House, [paulreverehouse.org/biography](http://paulreverehouse.org/biography)
- Paul Revere's portrait at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, [collections.mfa.org/objects/32401](http://collections.mfa.org/objects/32401)
- Paul Revere's engraving, The Bloody Massacre, 1770, [collections.mfa.org/objects/167683](http://collections.mfa.org/objects/167683)
- Paul Revere's Sons of Liberty Bowl at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, [collections.mfa.org/objects/39072/sons-of-liberty-bowl](http://collections.mfa.org/objects/39072/sons-of-liberty-bowl)
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art, [metmuseum.org/essays/paul-revere-jr-1734-1818](http://metmuseum.org/essays/paul-revere-jr-1734-1818)
- Paul Revere House on The Freedom Trail, [thefreedomtrail.org/trail-sites/paul-revere-house](http://thefreedomtrail.org/trail-sites/paul-revere-house)
- Paul Revere's Midnight Ride, [battlefields.org/learn/videos/paul-reveres-ride](http://battlefields.org/learn/videos/paul-reveres-ride)

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

#### Before viewing

Tell students that in the video they are about to watch, they will meet Ubaldo Vitali, a contemporary silversmith, working from his studio in New Jersey. They will see several of his artworks and hear him talk about the beauty of silver as he demonstrates some ways he works with it. The artist also will share how he became interested in the work of Paul Revere, another silversmith working in the 18th century. Most people know of Paul Revere and his famous midnight ride, immortalized in the 1860 poem, "Paul Revere's Ride," by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Invite students to read a short synopsis of Paul Revere's life, paying special attention to his membership in the Sons of Liberty. [nps.gov/people/paul-revere.htm](http://nps.gov/people/paul-revere.htm)

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Invite students to visit the following website and read at least the first paragraph describing Revere's most famous artwork, the Sons of Liberty bowl.

[collections.mfa.org/objects/39072/sons-of-liberty-bowl](https://collections.mfa.org/objects/39072/sons-of-liberty-bowl)

Based on prior knowledge and the above reading, have students discuss the following with a partner or as a class:

- Why did Paul Revere become a silversmith?
- How was he involved in the American Revolution?
- What was the purpose of the Sons of Liberty bowl?

### While Viewing

Have students watch and listen carefully for key points in the video that help answer the following questions. Students may wish to take notes as they watch, and they may wish to view the video more than once.

- How does Ubaldo describe himself?
- According to Ubaldo, why is silver the most beautiful metal?
- How does Ubaldo work? What tools are important? How does he use them?
- Why is history important to Ubaldo?
- When did Ubaldo become familiar with the work of Paul Revere? Why was he drawn to Revere's work?
- How did Ubaldo continue his connection with Paul Revere throughout his career as a silversmith?
- What does Ubaldo say he thinks about when he is restoring historical silver pieces?

### After viewing

Discuss student responses to the While Viewing questions above, checking for understanding. Make certain that students recall Ubaldo's description of the process of restoring historical objects made by silversmiths from the past. Ubaldo says, "You want to transpose yourself into the person who created it. It's almost like the artist that made it is telling me, 'That's what I meant; make sure you respect me.'" Invite students to discuss the following:

- What do Ubaldo Vitali and Paul Revere have in common?
- How would you describe the connection between Ubaldo and Paul Revere? Why might this be a unique kind of connection?
- Given what you've seen, how does a silversmith work?
- What is the repoussé method? What are the steps to follow when using the method?
- How similar do you think Ubaldo's process of working is to the working process of Paul Revere?
- How does knowledge of Ubaldo's process impact our understanding of Paul Revere?
- What are the chances that Paul Revere had a favorite hammer? Why do you think this? Do you think Paul Revere thought silver was the most beautiful of metals?
- How would you describe the relationship between Ubaldo and Paul Revere?
- We often speak of how knowledge of the past helps us understand the present. Can it work in reverse? How does knowledge of Ubaldo, working in the present, help us understand Paul Revere, working in the past?
- Compare some silver pieces created by Paul Revere with some created by Ubaldo. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has several Revere works in its collection, [metmuseum.org/essays/paul-revere-jr-1734-1818](https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/paul-revere-jr-1734-1818). Images of Ubaldo's work can be found on the Craft In America's website, [craftinamerica.org/artist/ubaldo-vitali](https://craftinamerica.org/artist/ubaldo-vitali) and by completing a Google Image search. Discuss the following questions:

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- How are the objects similar? Different?
- For what purposes have the objects been created?
- Do you see any evidence of the repoussé method?
- In what ways do the objects reflect the time in which they were made?

### Taking it Further

Investigate the repoussé method

Use a sheet of aluminum foil. Push from the back to create a raised surface and then push down on the front to create a recessed surface.

Materials: foil, paper towel or other soft surface, pencils, ballpoint pen, scissors, tape, cardboard (for final backing), markers (optional)

Watch a short video demonstration of the repoussé method used by Ubaldo:

[youtube.com/watch?v=JMrd539y4aU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMrd539y4aU)

Sketch a design on paper.

Tape the paper design onto the foil and transfer the design to the foil.

Outline the design by placing a soft surface under the foil. Use a pencil or other stylus to gently trace the design. Use pressure to create an indentation on one side and a raised line on the other.

Turn the foil to the other side. Push out to create raised areas and work from behind to bring the design forward.

Create sunken areas by pushing in to “chase” the areas you want to be recessed.

Add details and texture using various tools.

Add color with markers or other materials if desired.

How does the finished artwork reflect the light?

The Paul Revere engraving, *The Bloody Massacre, 1770*, has been referred to as an important piece of propaganda—biased information used to shape public opinion, promoting a particular cause or point of view. Investigate the artwork to determine what the artist did to promote a point of view and shape the way the public understood the event. You may see the engraving on the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, [collections.mfa.org/objects/167683](https://collections.mfa.org/objects/167683). Look at the engraving carefully, considering the following:

- What is depicted in this image? What story is being told?
- Who are the two groups of people depicted?
- Look carefully at the position, the clothing, and the faces of the members of each group. How would you describe each?
- Who are the aggressors in this image? How do you know?
- Which group consists of innocent members? What about the image allows you to say this?
- Given what you know about the event depicted, how accurate is the portrayal of the event? What allows you to say this?
- Besides the two groups, what else do you see? For everything you mention, ask how it contributes to the story being told.
- Is anyone shown to be having fun? How does this contribute to the message?
- Based on your observation of the engraving, along with what you know about the event being depicted, do you agree or disagree that the engraving is a piece of propaganda? Take a position and provide reasons for it.

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Review the following to support student understanding of the video.

- American Revolution (1765-1783) was a political and military struggle where 13 British North American colonies fought for and won independence from Great Britain, forming the United States of America.
- An apprentice is a person learning a trade or a profession through on-the-job training.
- Boston Tea Party was a political protest on December 16, 1773, where American colonists dumped 342 chests of tea into Boston harbor to protest the British Tea Act.
- An engraver is a person who cuts or carves text or designs on the surface of hard objects.
- Goldsmith is a person/artisan who specializes in working with gold, silver and other precious metals.
- The Liberty Bowl honored 92 members of the Massachusetts House of Representatives who refused to rescind a letter sent throughout the colonies protesting the Townshend Acts (1767), which taxed tea, paper, glass, and other commodities imported from England.
- Propaganda is biased information used to shape public opinion, promoting a particular cause or point of view.
- Repoussé is a metalworking technique in which a malleable metal is shaped by hammering from the reverse side to create a design in low relief.
- A silversmith is a person/artisan who crafts and repairs silver and other precious metals.
- The Sons of Liberty were a secretive, radical political organization that formed in 1765 to protest British policies like the Stamp Act.

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