

CRAFT IN AMERICA

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INSPIRATION

PREMIERES ON PBS

Featuring Artists who Impact and Influence

November 2022 (Digital Release)

December 16, 2022, 9pm (PBS Broadcast Premiere)

(check local listings)



INSPIRATION reveals the magic and influence of craft as an episode in the newest season of Craft in America
Pictured: Hmong artist Suzanne Thao. Photo: Denise Kang

[Los Angeles] - **INSPIRATION** streams on the digital platforms of PBS and Craft in America starting November 2022 and premieres on PBS December 16, 9pm (check local listings). **INSPIRATION** is an episode in the newest season of [Craft in America](#), the Peabody Award-winning and Emmy-nominated documentary series discovering the beauty, significance, and relevance of handmade objects and the artists who make them. “We release the episode during the holiday season when inspiration and human authenticity are at the fore. Fittingly, **INSPIRATION** visits communities and distinguished artists of varied disciplines impacting new generations of makers through their work,” shares Carol Sauvion, Executive Director of Craft in America. Says Executive Producer and Director Patricia Bischetti, “The episode **INSPIRATION** explores how the featured artists not only influence us today, but how they will continue to impact and inspire the next generation, other artists, and viewers at home.”

[Download press images.](#) [View the trailer.](#)

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FEATURED ARTISTS

[Diedrick Brackens](#)
Los Angeles, CA

[Ayumi Horie](#)
Portland, ME

[Simon Rodia](#)
Los Angeles, CA

Hmong artists
St. Paul, MN

- [Suzanne Thao](#)
- [Tousue Vang](#)
- [Chef Yia Vang](#)
- [Mandora Young](#)

[Maddy Inez Leeser](#)
Los Angeles, CA

[Alison Saar](#)
Los Angeles, CA

[Mary Little](#)
Los Angeles, CA

[Betye Saar](#)
Los Angeles, CA

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**“Craft in America...[has a] knack for telling big stories...
about the formation of culture, the purpose of creativity, the idea that the pursuits of beauty and utility
are foundational to humanity.”**

- *New York Times*

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EPISODE HIGHLIGHTS



Pictured above: Diedrick Brackens, a deep and abiding dance. Courtesy: Craft Contemporary.
Photo: Josh Schaedel

- [Simon Rodia](#) and [Watts Towers](#) (Los Angeles, CA)

The episode opens with the iconic Watts Towers—a monumental structure designed by Italian immigrant, Simon Rodia. We visit the Watts Towers Arts Center Campus, a vibrant community hub

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that anchors the neighborhood of Watts in South Central Los Angeles with its extensive programming, classes, and education outreach.

- [Alison Saar](#), [Betye Saar](#), [Maddy Inez Leeser](#) (Los Angeles, CA)

We spend time with Alison Saar and three generations of the Saar family—Betye, Alison, and Alison’s daughter, Maddy Inez Leeser—who inspire each other as a close-knit family of artists. In the episode, Alison Saar shares her many influences, including her mother Betye Saar, one of the most impactful artists of the last half century.

- [Ayumi Horie](#) (Portland, ME)

On the other side of the country, in Portland, ME, ceramic artist Ayumi Horie exemplifies the way the internet has impacted contemporary craft—creating practical, usable ceramics combined with unapologetic activism.

- Hmong Community - [Suzanne Thao](#), [Tousue Vang](#), [Chef Yia Vang](#), and [Mandora Young](#) (St. Paul, MN)

The episode turns its attention to the significant impact of immigrants on American creative culture, focusing in particular on the Hmong community of St. Paul, Minnesota. Guided by artists and craftspeople including Suzanne Thao, Mandora Young, Tousue Vang, and Chef Yia Vang, viewers learn how the ancient practice of *paj ntaub* embroidery is an artistic and economic foundation for the Hmong, and how Hmong culture continues to thrive and evolve.

- [Mary Little](#) (Los Angeles, CA)

The hour visits Mary Little in her studio in downtown Los Angeles. She creates evocative, sculptural wall hangings inspired by the landscapes of her Northern Ireland childhood.

- [Diedrick Brackens](#) (Los Angeles, CA)

Also working in downtown L.A. is textile artist Diedrick Brackens explores identity and race, among other narratives, drawing from the past to retell profound histories in his weavings.

ARTIST BIOS

[Diedrick Brackens](#) (Los Angeles, CA)

Diedrick Brackens is a textile artist drawing from many influences, including techniques from around the globe, his upbringing in a small Texas town, and poetry. He received his BFA from University of North Texas, Denton, TX in 2011 and his MFA from California College of the Arts, San Francisco, CA in 2015. Brackens has exhibited in solo and group shows throughout the country including the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, CA), the New Museum (New York, NY), Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (Cambridge, MA), and NOMA (New Orleans, LA). His work can be found in various museum collections, including the Brooklyn Museum (New York, NY), Crystal Bridges Museum for

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American Art (Bentonville, AK), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY).

Hmong Community - [Suzanne Thao](#), [Tousue Vang](#), [Chef Yia Vang](#), and [Mandora Young](#) (St. Paul, MN)

In the mid-1970s, thousands of Hmong refugees from Laos came to the United States after the US withdrew from Vietnam. Despite the many obstacles they faced, they managed to create vibrant, thriving communities in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, among other places. Craft is an artistic and economic foundation of Hmong communities, and the Hmong people, known for their intricate, colorful textile traditions, have also made significant contributions in the areas of art, food, history, and culture. St. Paul, Minnesota has the largest Hmong population in the United States.

- [Suzanne Thao](#) is a master maker and instructor in the tradition of *paj ntaub* (“flower cloth”), a needlework technique practiced by Hmong women. Thao began learning the technique at age 7 from her grandmother, mother, and aunts. She has now been practicing and teaching this technique for over 50 years. Deeply committed to preserving Hmong art, Thao has shared the technique with her daughter, Chuayi Yang, and is the inaugural instructor of Project Paj Ntaub, the free monthly *paj ntaub* workshop offered through the Hmong Museum in St. Paul, MN.
- [Tousue Vang](#) is a Hmong American, storyteller, and image maker who has worked in the field for over ten years. Growing up, Vang was surrounded by traditional Hmong story quilts, and is continually inspired by the art and tales of his heritage. Vang’s practice combines traditional narrative with new visual language to tell unique stories.
- [Chef Yia Vang](#) was born in a Thai refugee camp and lived there until his family was able to resettle in Wisconsin. He is a renowned chef and founder of the Union Hmong Kitchen, an award-winning restaurant in Minneapolis that brings Hmong cuisine and food traditions to the local community. Chef Yia is a James Beard Award finalist and has been featured in *Bon Appétit* magazine, CNN, and *National Geographic*, among other recognition.
- [Mandora Young](#) is an artist and educator specializing in traditional *paj ntaub* textiles. She teaches classes and workshops for all ages at libraries and schools, welcoming both Hmong and non-Hmong community members. Young is committed to passing down the *paj ntaub* cloth embroidery techniques as well as conveying the significance and history of the art form.

[Ayumi Horie](#) (Portland, ME)

Ceramic artist Ayumi Horie believes that handmade objects hold power, and together with the stories that accompany them, can drive change. Horie has taught and lectured nationally and abroad, including at the International Ceramics Research Center (Denmark), the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts (Deer Isle, ME), and the Archie Bray Foundation (Helena, MT). She was awarded the 2015 “Distinguished Fellow in Craft” by United States Artists and an Honorary Membership at NCECA in 2020 for her outstanding contributions to the field. Her work is in museum collections, including the

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Museum of Art and Design (New York, NY). Horie holds a BA from Mount Holyoke College, a BFA in ceramics from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, and a MFA in ceramics from the University of Washington in Seattle.

[Mary Little](#) (Los Angeles, CA)

Mary Little is an Irish-born artist whose career began after graduating from the Royal College of Art in London as an avant-garde furniture maker creating one-of-a-kind pieces. She is now producing three-dimensional wall artworks using unbleached canvas inspired by her childhood memories of Ireland. Her work has been exhibited at Craft Contemporary, L.A., the Textile Museum, Washington D.C. and the Übersee-Museum, Bremen, Germany. Her pieces are in the permanent collections of the Vitra Design Museum in Basel; Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; Victoria & Albert Museum, London and have been reviewed in *Fabrik*, *New York Times*, *Luxe* magazine and *Architectural Digest*.

[Alison Saar](#), [Maddy Inez Leeser](#), and [Betye Saar](#) (Los Angeles, CA)

Three generations of the Saar family—Betye, Alison, and her daughter Maddy Leeser—inspire each other as a close-knit family of artists.

- [Alison Saar](#) is a multi-disciplinary artist working in sculpture, installation, and mixed media. Through her practice, Saar explores a multitude of themes, including gender, race, and spirituality from personal, societal, and historical perspectives. Influenced by her mother, artist Betye Saar, and her father, ceramicist and restorer Richard Saar, Saar demonstrates a deep understanding of materiality and craft, and her work is often rooted in folk art traditions. Saar received her BA in art history and studio art from Scripps College in 1978, and her MFA from Otis College of Art and Design in 1981. She is the recipient of numerous awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship and multiple National Endowment for the Arts Artist Fellowships. She has exhibited in solo and group shows, including Galerie Lelong (Paris, France), the National Museum for Women in the Arts (Washington, D.C.), and her work can be found in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, MN), and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, among many others.
- In addition to [Maddy Inez Leeser](#)'s ceramics practice, she self-identifies as an educator, animal caretaker, committed family member, faith keeper, investigator, magical practitioner, witness, and friend. In 2016, she received her BFA from Pacific Northwest College of the Arts in Portland, OR. Her work has been exhibited in solo and group shows, including *Damp Earth at Harawik* (Los Angeles, CA) and *Possibility Made Real: Drawing & Clay at Gallery 12.26* (Dallas, TX). She has attended residencies at Conduit (Portland, OR) and the Vermont Studio Center.
- With a career spanning 60 years, [Betye Saar](#) (b. 1926, Los Angeles, CA) has made an indelible impact on our nation's artistic and broader cultural landscape through her prints, collages, assemblages, and installations. Saar's signature themes are African American identity, spirituality, mysticism, and American social and political context. Her

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assemblages powerfully address racist histories and propel us into a future of reclamation and change. Saar's work has been exhibited and collected by countless museums and arts institutions, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Museum of Modern Art, the Walker Art Center, and the National Gallery of Art.

[Simon Rodia](#) and [Watts Towers](#) (Los Angeles, CA)

The Watts Towers are the world's largest single construction created by one individual—artist and Italian immigrant Simon Rodia. Rodia built the towers by hand over 25 years, completing them in 1948. The Watts Towers Arts Center Campus grew out of a call from local residents to create a meaningful relationship between the L.A. neighborhood of Watts, and the towers themselves. The realization of this community hub was led by Noah Purifoy, John Outterbridge, and Mark Steven Greenfield, as well as the continuing leadership of Rosie Lee Hooks. The arts center provides multidisciplinary classes, including visual and performing arts, gardening, and other multi-media arts. Their tours, lectures, and exhibits attract visitors from around the world.

The **Early Digital Release** is available on all station-branded PBS platforms including [PBS.org](#) and the [PBS Video App](#), available on iOS, Android, Roku, Apple TV, Android TV, Amazon Fire TV, Samsung Smart TV, Chromecast, and Craft in America's [website](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

ABOUT CRAFT IN AMERICA

Craft in America is the Peabody Award-winning series on PBS exploring America's creative spirit through the language and traditions of the handmade. With 14 seasons produced since 2007, the series 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. Craft in America's organizational efforts include educator guides that adhere to national standards, and the Craft in America Center in Los Angeles, California. Craft in America is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Learn more at [craftinamerica.org](#)

OUR MISSION

To promote and advance original handcrafted work through programs in all media

OUR GOALS

To document the importance of handmade objects and the artists who make them

To provide a gateway to discover, explore and experience craft

To celebrate our nation's cultures through craft





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More information and artist bios

craftinamerica.org/episode/inspiration

Press images

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/828uadnl0lk7m4x7qvxs2/h?dl=0&rkey=cyar39ij2sf4q4t2tdvwmsbqy>

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