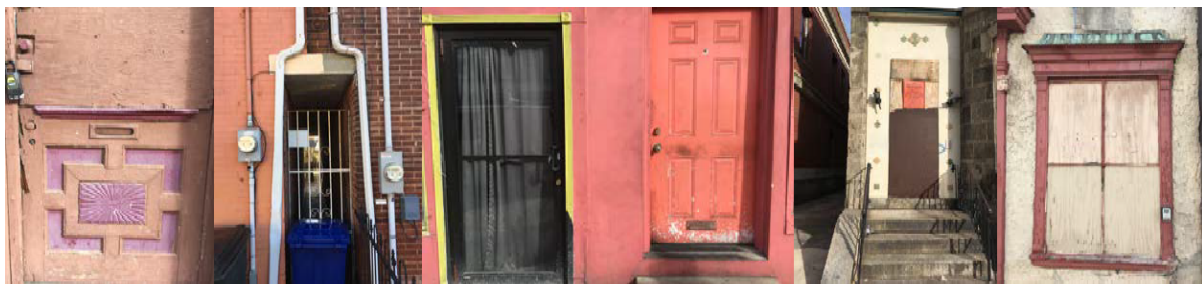


### *Crafting Time*

Philadelphia is a remarkable environment in which to contemplate and make craft. Historical spaces and artifacts permeate the present as nowhere else in the country. An awareness of the cultural past, and perhaps its influence as "prelude", is inescapable. The wealth of historical institutions caters to the popular imagination, lending to daily life temporal diversity and spatial texture.

The sensibilities and creative imaginations of craft artists, especially, are quickened in this rich environment. The city surprises with treasures of material culture at every turn. The ghosts of generations of woodworkers, metalsmiths and potters are our invisible companions as we make our work among the shops in which they labored. Craft genres themselves – unceasing and continuous cultures of making – are manifest in our day-to-day surroundings.

Germantown, a working-class neighborhood in Philly's northwest, borders the ravines of Fairmont Park. Initially settled by the Lenape tribe and, later, German Mennonite farmers, the area became a locale for the summer villas of wealthy Philadelphians and was the site of an important Revolutionary War battle. This historical identity permeates Germantown's present-day character. Eighteenth-century homes line its main artery, interspersed with the storefront churches, salons and row houses typical of working class Philadelphia. Hundreds of artists work in a wealth of affordable space. Imperfect Gallery, a neighborhood institution, thrives, not on sales of contemporary art but on the devotion and support of a diverse arts community.

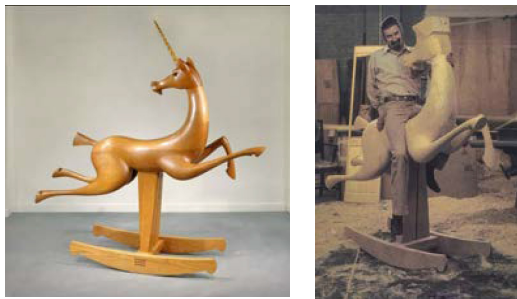


In this environment, collisions between past and present are frequent, yet always poignant and surprising. History progressing at its own unknowable slow pace can overwhelm the contemporary. The overgrown church burial grounds are crowded with epitaphs. Ruined

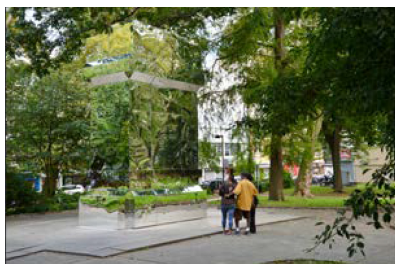
industry is slowly reclaimed by nature in the empty lots and woods. The formal rooms of villas are continually transformed by light and shadow. Time is experienced as duration, as *becoming*.

Time is an essential consideration to craft practitioners; it could even be thought of as our primary material. Craft culture is often identified by outcomes – the quality and function of objects – but inspiration, motivation and ideas are, more often, found in our involvement with social and natural histories. Craft reflects the continual evolution of work in depth in a chosen material. Even more importantly, practitioners “make” the time that we experience through that creation.

These thoughts bring to mind the work of local artists who have explored this neighborhood for the possibilities time offers as both motivation and material. I look to their work for a diverse and deep articulation and affirmation of shared values.



For many in Philadelphia, Germantown is indelibly associated with the woodworker and educator Daniel Jackson - an important yet largely unacknowledged progenitor of studio furniture movement. He helped define a genre that melds historical decorative art with contemporary sculpture. His work celebrated and built upon the carving traditions for which Germantown had long been known. Jackson lived and worked in the neighborhood during a period of social unrest that dramatically transformed its economic and cultural fabric. I can only imagine his reaction to this cataclysm: the bittersweet disappearance of a slow deep culture of making and his efforts to preserve its depth. To find solace. His spirit inhabits this neighborhood still, a kindred spirit spanning the ages, and, for me, an everyday partner in the workshop.



*The Battle Is Joined*, by the Germantown sculptor Karen Olivier, was installed in Vernon Park in 2017. The work encases a 19th Century monument to a Revolutionary War battle in mirror, literally reflecting the natural environment and, more figuratively, an expanse of time. The distant historical event, obscure and almost without context, is made manifest by

rendering it nearly invisible. Static monumental history is replaced by an image of ongoing seasonal transformation, metaphorically implying an unceasing struggle for freedom.



Bill Gerhard's work also embodies fleeting temporality. He first records the imprints of Germantown rain on wet plaster. After it dries, he uses it as a casting mold. Through this simple process, Gerhard captures the slow patterns and processes of nature - a reprieve from the distracted perceptual timeframe we've come to accept as normal. Each material has its own distinct quality: the permanence of bronze, the sense of industrial ruin that pervades aluminum and the uncanny mimesis of glass which appears to preserve the raindrops intact. These works compress the vastness of time into human scale with sensual intimacy. Looking at Gerhard's work closely, I am reminded of the words of Henri Focillon, who saw art as the secret labor of nature at the heart of human invention, "fluid and imponderable".<sup>1</sup>

In my own life and work, I've always searched the everyday past for present meaning, a sense of origin. As a child I dug for treasure, evidence of my forebears. And I made stuff. Always made stuff. My choice to study instrument making - my first craft - was sparked by a desire to imbue materials with their own life. I share this with fellow craftspeople. I believe it to be basic, essential to the need to make.

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<sup>1</sup> Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, p.33



*Elizabeth* is not a piece inspired by or based in an idea. A simple stone in a neighborhood burialground clung to my eye and gestated for months. The piece started as a replica of that stone, a simple copy that I hoped it would lead somewhere unexpected. Making a copy, if approached with humility and critical curiosity, sometimes helps to reveal the truest character of an object. Replicating the stone's basic scale and shape, a carved elliptical hollow serves as a focus for formal contemplation. As I neared carving the inscription I wondered, who was Elizabeth? How can I connect with her, "make" the distance in time into something tangible, intimate? Intuitively, I reversed the name as if viewing it backward through the solidity of material. I view the work as a concrete poem which gives form to time, memorializing a long-deceased neighbor and new friend.



Several weeks ago, I was walking up Tulpehocken Street on a trash day. A double-take backed me up. Upon a nineteenth-century carriage step was propped an iridescent purple cushion from some awful sofa. Music to my eyes! The gentility of old Germantown. The crassness of contemporary disposable consumer culture. The time and space between collapsed. Once again, I was moved, a bit bewildered but ultimately galvanized by the chasm of time that lurks beneath the surface of daily life in Germantown - an intimate reminder, an affirmation, of the perpetual renewal of craft culture.

DRM/2019