

AMERICAN
Craft
CONNECTS

Conference & Awards 2026

September 4-6, 2026
Minneapolis, MN



RECAP



Dear friends and colleagues,

In the weeks leading up to American Craft Connects, I thought a lot about ACC's nearly 70-year history of producing national conferences, and the conversations I've had with people whose lives and careers were shaped by them. I hoped this conference would honor that legacy by fostering the connections, resolve, and new ways of thinking we need today.

Given the state of our field, country, and world, it felt urgent to gather. To tend old relationships and forge new ones; to learn from each other across organizations, disciplines, generations, and roles; and to find the joy in our shared work to advance American craft.

In early September 2026, we did all that and more. Over three days in Minneapolis, more than 200 makers, appreciators, educators, and advocates came together for ACC's first national conference since 2019. Again and again, attendees sought me out to tell me how much it meant to be together—and how inspired they were by the ideas, people, and conversations they encountered here.

The following pages capture some of what we heard and learned from each other. Think of this recap not as a set of conference proceedings, but rather, as a sketch. For those who attended, we hope it evokes the sense of community and creative exchange of ideas you experienced. For those who were not able to join us this year, we hope it inspires you to attend the next ACC national conference, now on the drawing board for 2028.

On behalf of our dedicated ACC Board of Trustees and staff, thank you to everyone who made American Craft Connects possible and everyone who showed up ready to contribute, listen, and learn. We left the weekend with renewed conviction that when we pull together as the vibrant, expansive field we are, we can and will build a world where objects matter, makers thrive, and craft connects.

In solidarity and gratitude,



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andrea Specht". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Andrea Specht
Executive Director

American Craft Connects

Conference & Awards 2026

American Craft Connects Conference & Awards 2026 has come to a close—and what a weekend it was! From September 4–6, more than 200 makers, artists, collectors, educators, and other professionals from across the craft field gathered for three days of thought-provoking conversations, new connections, and a shared celebration of the artful work of the human hand.

ACC's first conference since 2019 offered a long-awaited opportunity to come together, exchange ideas, and consider where craft is headed next.

By the numbers:

- **3 days**
- **26 panels & presentations**
- **74 speakers**
- **200+ attendees**
- **20+ mentorship pairings**



"We rarely have a chance to gather as a group of craft professionals (particularly cross-sector) ...[T]his is the opportunity to do that."
—Conference attendee

Themes that defined the 2026 Conference

Across conversations and gatherings, participants explored the forces shaping the field today—from questions of access, sustainability, and cultural responsibility to the evolving roles of artists, institutions, collectors, and communities—and considered how craft might help us imagine a more life-affirming future. Among the many sessions at this year's conference, a few key themes rose to prominence:

- **Craft as civic action.** Building community, craft as a form of resistance, strengthening community relationships, addressing public needs, and participating in civic life.
- **Identity, memory, justice, and belonging.** The many ways that craft connects to cultural memory and personal or cultural identities.
- **Education and the transmission of knowledge.** How education ensures that craft knowledge survives and thrives across generations.
- **Artist livelihoods, support systems, and field resilience.** The structures surrounding artists and makers—from funding systems to emergency relief, and more.
- **Museums, collections, and the making of craft history.** The roles of museums and collectors in preserving, interpreting, and 'legitimizing' craft.
- **How the field talks, writes, and thinks about itself.** How the field can grow through criticism, interpretation, research, and storytelling.

See the appendix at the end of this report for a list of all panels, speakers, and available conversation notes.

"Being involved made me feel like I have a 'place' in the field."
—Conference attendee

For the field, more broadly than ever.

The conference welcomed a broad range of craft field professionals.

Nearly 60% of attendees said they work in the creative or nonprofit sector and engage with craft professionally, while 56% described themselves as having been involved in the craft community for years as an artist, collector, or advocate.

These numbers reflect ACC's goal to build connections across the craft field and bring established professionals, longtime community members, and emerging artists into conversation around shared interests and values--from tradition and innovation to technique, material, and the many ways craft shapes our lives.

Mentorship and the Future of the Field

The two largest age groups in attendance were 35–44 (30%), followed by 45–54 (26%). ACC partnered individuals within its Early Career Artist Program with longstanding artists and leaders in the craft field. Through informal meetings and ongoing conversations, the Conference helped to support intergenerational knowledge sharing and the preservation of craft as an art form.



"I gained an understanding of resources available to me as a maker, many of which I did not know before. These things, as well as connecting with other attendees and making plans for future work together, has rekindled much of my creative energy and is most welcome."

—ACC Early Career Artist

A gathering of community

This year's conference placed community at the center, a focus that was reflected in what attendees valued most.

Among the attendees who responded to post-event surveys, informal conversations with colleagues ranked as the most valuable part of the experience, selected by 72% of respondents. Attendees appreciated being able to have meaningful exchanges around ideas, questions, and insights with people working across our diverse field. One respondent specifically noted that hearing from people in both craft and craft-adjacent fields created opportunities for meaningful personal connections.



“It really felt like an overdue reunion of institutional leaders in the craft field. [B]eing together talking about ideas and beginning to address some of the challenges our field is experiencing felt like a necessary first step toward preserving and building the field.”

—Conference attendee

Honoring the field and the 2026 ACC Award Recipients

ACC Awards Celebration

The biennial ACC Awards are one of our country's longest-standing, most prestigious honors in the field of craft. Since 1975, ACC has celebrated over 350 artists, scholars, teachers, and advocates whose legacy, commitment, and contributions to craft are exceptional.

The 2026 American Craft Council Awards were celebrated at the Weisman Art Museum, at an after-hours event that brought together artists, educators, mentors, curators, scholars, and advocates who have made significant contributions to the field of craft.

Visit craftcouncil.org/about-awards to learn more about each honoree.



*"The Friday Awards left
me with chills."*
—Conference attendee



Fieldwide Survey of Craft Nonprofits

Early survey results and next steps.

ACC launched a nationwide survey of craft nonprofits last summer, reaching out to organizational leaders to help illuminate the current state—and future—of the American craft ecosystem. Findings from this survey, many of which were discussed at American Craft Connects, point to areas that would benefit from deeper, formalized research going forward.

What the data so far suggest

Early survey results from respondents point toward a field that wants to move from individual organizational survival toward greater collective strength. Feedback falls into two main categories and includes:

Strengthening the craft ecosystem

Focus: economic sustainability, markets, and collective capacity.

- **Strengthen the economic foundation of craft.** Increase funding for artists and organizations, build stronger reserves and endowments, support living wages, and create more sustainable career pathways for makers.
- **Build stronger markets for handmade work.** Increase opportunities for people to discover, value, purchase, and live with craft while helping artists develop the skills and connections necessary to reach those audiences.
- **Act collectively as a field.** Increase alignment among craft organizations to support advocacy, audience development, and other shared priorities, and potentially, shared infrastructure.



“I’m reflecting constantly since the event on what design can do to foster and protect resiliency in our social fabrics by more effectively embedding craft within design education.”

—Conference attendee

Expanding craft's reach and relevance

Focus: audiences, visibility, everyday engagement, and public voice.

- **Grow and diversify audiences for craft.** Reach beyond existing craft audiences, cultivate younger collectors and participants, increase national visibility, and make a stronger public case for why craft matters.
- **Make craft part of everyday life.** Expand the presence of craft in education, communities, workplaces, public life, and the broader marketplace rather than treating it as a specialized or insular field.
- **Develop a stronger national voice for craft.** Coordinate messaging, advocacy, research, and storytelling so that the field can communicate its economic, cultural, educational, and social value more effectively.

What's next?

In an increasingly digital and automated world, the mind-hand connection and the human capacity to make are taking on new relevance and even urgency. As ACC looks to the future, we are listening to our community and hearing the need for greater connection, coordination, visibility, and access – toward the promise of collective action.

"I believe this: The value of human making was never simply that machines couldn't do it. The value was always the human being inside the thing. The story, the voice. A handmade object doesn't merely tell us what was made. It tells us: Someone was here, Someone cared enough to make this. And I don't think our hunger for that is disappearing."

— Carla Canales, closing speaker



"The world has enough noise. What it needs is meaning and beauty. It needs your hand and your imagination. It needs this community. It needs this community, the one right here in this room; the ecosystem of art includes makers, but also collectors, gallerists, museum professionals, and appreciators."

—Carla Canales, closing speaker

Panels and Presentations

A Fieldwide Look at Craft Nonprofits

Beyond Our Walls: Building Community Through Accessible Arts Programming

Beyond the Collection: Journey From the Studio

Between Friends: A Conversation on Queer Craft, Justice, and Resistance

Blurred Lines: Illuminating Craft at the College of Design

Connecting Through Craft: Deepening our Relationship to Communities

Craft Education: Why It Matters and How to Protect It

Craft For a Greater Good: Making a Difference Through Collaboration and Community

Curating in the Craftspace: How Craft Museums Make History

Five Lessons from 50 Years with Bruce Pepich

Making a Living: Handwork and Workforce Development in the Digital Age

Making Change: Artists, Resistance, and Community

Meet the CAT: The First Four Years of the Cafesjian Art Trust Museum

Pecha/Kucha presentations

Rising Voices in Craft: Maxwell/Hanrahan Awardees

So You Want to Write a Craft Book?

State Fairs: Growing American Craft

Teaching Artists as Time Benders

The Language of Fiber: To Speak of Memory, Justice, and Belonging

Turning Inward: Toward a Framework for Craft Criticism

What Supports Craft Artists? Readiness, Relief, and Community Response

Speakers*

Quynh Akers, Adjunct Professor, Product Design, University of Minnesota

Jill Ahlberg Yohe, PhD, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Cafesjian Art Trust Museum

Diana Baird N'Diaye, PhD, Multidisciplinary Artist, Folklife Researcher, and Curator

Aaron Beale, Associate Vice President of Student Craft, Berea College

Astrid Hilger Bennett, Surface Design Association Board Co-Chair

Daniela Bianchini, Public Artist

Bryana Bibbs, Textile Artist & Educator

Josh Blanc, Co-Owner of Flux Arts Building and Board Chair, Northeast Minneapolis Arts District;

Laura Brown, Partnership Coordinator and Resident Instructor, Minnesota Center for Book Arts

Carla Canales, singer, cultural leader, former Senior Advisor and Envoy for Cultural Exchange

Adriane Dalton, Editor-in-Chief, *Metalsmith* magazine

Christopharaaron Deanes, Artist, Educator, and Community Connector

Raúl de Lara, 2024 Maxwell/Hanrahan Award in Craft recipient, Wood Sculptor

Wendy Downs, Senior Manager in US Manufacturing, Chrome Industries, and designer

Dorothy Dunn, Special Trustee, The Sara Little Turnbull Foundation

Kagen Dunn, Interim Executive Director / Education and Partnerships Manager,

Foci Minnesota Center for Glass Art

Rebekah Frank, Program Officer, Maxwell/Hanrahan Foundation
Michelle Millar Fisher, Chief Curator, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum
Jacob Frey, Mayor, City of Minneapolis
Namita Gupta Wiggers, Writer, Educator, and Artist
Kendra Greendeer, Ph.D., Ihlenfeld Curator of Collaborative and Community Exhibitions,
Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota
Tess Haratonik, Program Director, Initiatives, United States Artists
Ursula Hargens, Artist and Educator
Karen Hampton, Fiber Artist and Chair, ACC Awards Committee
Monica Hampton, Executive Director, The Furniture Society
Nicole Havekost, Artist and Educator
Astrid Hilger Bennett, Surface Design Association Board Co-Chair
Jaimianne Jacobin, Director of Development, American Craft Council
Elnaz Javani, Artist and Educator
Samuel Johnson, Professor of Art, College of St. Benedict and St. John's University
David King, Artist and Educator
Tracy Krumm, Director for Artistic Advancement, Textile Center of Minnesota
Jennifer Komar Olivarez, Head of Exhibition Planning and Strategy; Interim Curator of the
Purcell-Cutts House, Minneapolis Institute of Art
Zeke Leonard, Professor of Design, Syracuse University, and Furniture Society Board Member
Christine Lee, 2022 Maxwell/Hanrahan Award in Craft recipient, Multidisciplinary
Robert L. Lynch, ACC Board Chair and Founding President and CEO (Retired),
Americans for the Arts
Sarah Mason, Volunteer and Community Outreach Coordinator, A Tiny Home for Good
Michael Manes, Co-Founder & Co-Executive Director, Cohab Space
Bill Moran, Teaching Specialist, Graphic Design, University of Minnesota
Kristin Müller, Executive Director, Peters Valley School of Craft
Taliesin Nyala, Woodworker and Writer
Aidan O'Connor, Director, Goldstein Museum of Design, University of Minnesota
Libby O'Bryan, Owner, Sew Co.
Ashley Page, Studio and Programs Manager, Indigo Arts Alliance
Elliott Payne, City Council President, City of Minneapolis
Bruce W. Pepich, Founding Director Emeritus, Racine Art Museum
Joey Quiñones, Head of Fiber & Artist-in-Residence, Cranbrook Academy of Art
Emmett Winship Ramstad, Artist and Educator
Ingrid Restemayer, Secretary, Northeast Minneapolis Arts District
Michael Sylvan Robinson, Fiber Artist and Activist with Gays Against Guns
Julia Rodman, Community Engagement Manager, Northern Clay Center
Tamara and Michael Root, Collectors of Studio Ceramics
Jessica Rossi-Mastracci, Assistant Professor, Landscape Architecture,
University of Minnesota
Mary Savig, Fleur and Charles Bresler Curator-in-Charge, Renwick Gallery,
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Kaylee Schofield, Schiffer Publishing, Imprint Lead for Schiffer Craft

Linnea Seidling, Assistant Curator of Glass, Cafesjian Art Trust Museum
 Zenas Seiji Ikeda, Associate Professor of Graphic Design, University of Minnesota
 Juliane Shibata, Artist and Educator
 Heather Shirey, Professor of Art History and Visual Culture, University of St. Thomas
 Heather Sona Lasair, Founder and Artistic Director, Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center
 Andrea Specht, Executive Director, American Craft Council
 Tim Tate, ACC Trustee, Glass Artist, Co-Director of the Washington Glass Studio
 Leo Tecosky, 2023 Maxwell/Hanrahan Award in Craft recipient, Glass Blower
 Dr. Anton Treuer, Professor of Ojibwe, Bemidji State University
 Angela Two-Star, Sisseton Wahpeton, Dakota, Multidisciplinary Artist and Curator
 Wone Vang, Economic Opportunity Director, Springboard for the Arts
 Kimberly Winkle, Director, School of Art, Craft and Design and the Appalachian
 Center for Craft, Tennessee Tech University

** Not listed individually: PechaKucha presenters and speakers.*

Partner Organizations

Thank you to the following organizations who made this conference possible.

Appalachian Center for Craft	Maxwell/Hanrahan Foundation
Berea College	Minneapolis Institute of Art
Cafesjian Art Trust Museum	Minnesota Center for Book Arts
Center for Craft	Northern Clay Center
Clay Squared to Infinity	Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian
Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum	American Art Museum
The Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF+)	Schiffer Craft Publishing
The Furniture Society	Springboard for the Arts
Goldstein Museum of Design	Textile Center of Minnesota
Handwork 2026, an initiative of Craft in America	

Thank you, Conference sponsors and donors



Maxwell | Hanrahan
FOUNDATION

Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts

KNOCK inc.



— Walter C. Rasmussen —
NORTHEAST BANK
FOUNDATION

Foundational Donors

Bob Lynch and Dianne Brace
 Lynn Pollard
 Gary J. Smith and Jamienne Studley

Local Sponsors

Chuck Duddingston
 Kay Savik and Joe Tashjian
 John and Ruth Huss

APPENDIX

Meet the 2026 ACC Awards recipients

Consuelo
Jimenez Underwood



Donald Friedlich



Mildred Howard



Susan
Stinsmuehlen-Amend



Sonya Clark



DY Begay



Namita Gupta Wiggers



Vivian Beer



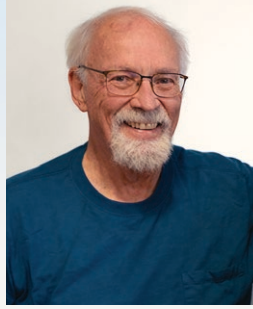
Clifton Monteith



Jean McLaughlin



Silas Kopf



Winnie Owens-Hart



Cristina Córdova



Visit
craftcouncil.org/about-awards
to learn more about each honoree.

Gary Smith and
Jamienne Studley

