

Kentucky Craft Luminaries: Sharing the Stories



Tradition, Innovation and Economic Development

In Kentucky, creative arts are a vibrant part of everyday life. Musicians and storytellers, quilters and boat builders, master cooks and gardeners, all the people who take pride in handmade and home-grown, make up our heritage and play a significant role in our economy. Early settlers made what they needed for their own household, work, and entertainment, and traded with their neighbors. Weavers, woodworkers, potters, glassblowers, metalsmiths, and basketmakers realized that others valued their artistry and would barter or buy

their wares. Today the craftspeople of Kentucky continue to work in both traditional and innovative craft forms, influenced by their predecessors.



This exhibit affirms that the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association is committed to documenting Kentucky's craft history, bringing the stories to life and sharing them with the public in an educational format. You will see masterworks by Kentucky's "craft luminaries," artists whose dedication to excellence in craftsmanship and leadership in the crafts community are inspirational.

Both traditional artists and contemporary craftsmen in Kentucky have benefitted from private and public support for the arts. As early as 1890, Berea College was encouraging the traditional crafts of Appalachian Kentucky by

marketing their work through the Homespun Fair, the Log House gallery, and a network of national contacts. Today their Student Crafts program engages young people in creating contemporary expressions using traditional materials, designs, and processes.

Since the early 1960's, folklorists in Kentucky have been documenting traditions of folk groups across the state and focusing public attention on the masters of traditional art forms. The Kentucky Folklife Program elevated the status of traditional artists by coordinating a statewide Folklife Festival. Folklorists in the Kentucky Folklife Program and the Kentucky Arts Council continue to build appreciation for traditional artists by creating educational materials and coordinating venues for exhibit and sales of traditional crafts.



At about the same time that folklorists began documenting the Mammoth Cave basketmakers, a group of contemporary craftsmen organized the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen with the same goals of building appreciation and promoting the economic development of individual crafts entrepreneurs and crafts cooperatives. The Guild began on two train cars that crisscrossed Kentucky, providing a rolling gallery and demonstrations. Now headquartered in Berea, the Guild organizes fairs and maintains a gallery and hosts workshops in their facility.



In 1960, Governor Combs created a division of Craft Development in the Department of Commerce, a program that supported the creation of the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen. In 1981, First Lady Phyllis George championed state support for crafts through the creation of a Craft Marketing Program. In 1982, the Kentucky Crafts Market made its debut, and has since expanded as Kentucky Crafted: The Market, the signature event of the Kentucky Arts Council, showcasing and marketing over 200 of the state's finest artists, craftsmen, performers, writers, and specialty food producers. In Louisville, the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft, also created during the Brown administration, houses permanent collections and changing exhibits in a museum setting.



In 2003, building on the success of past craft development programs, the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea opened as a tourism development initiative. The Artisan Center represents products from hundreds of Kentucky artisans in a state-supported facility open to the public seven days a week.



The artists whose work you see in this exhibit are a sampling of the many who have been supported by these institutions and agencies and have also helped to shape them. The purpose of this exhibit is to honor the contribution of these "crafts luminaries" as well as to showcase their extraordinary art.

The Kentucky Craft History and Education Association gathers, conserves and presents the history and on-going impact of crafts in Kentucky.

