

Cleveland Institute of Art  
Creativity Matters



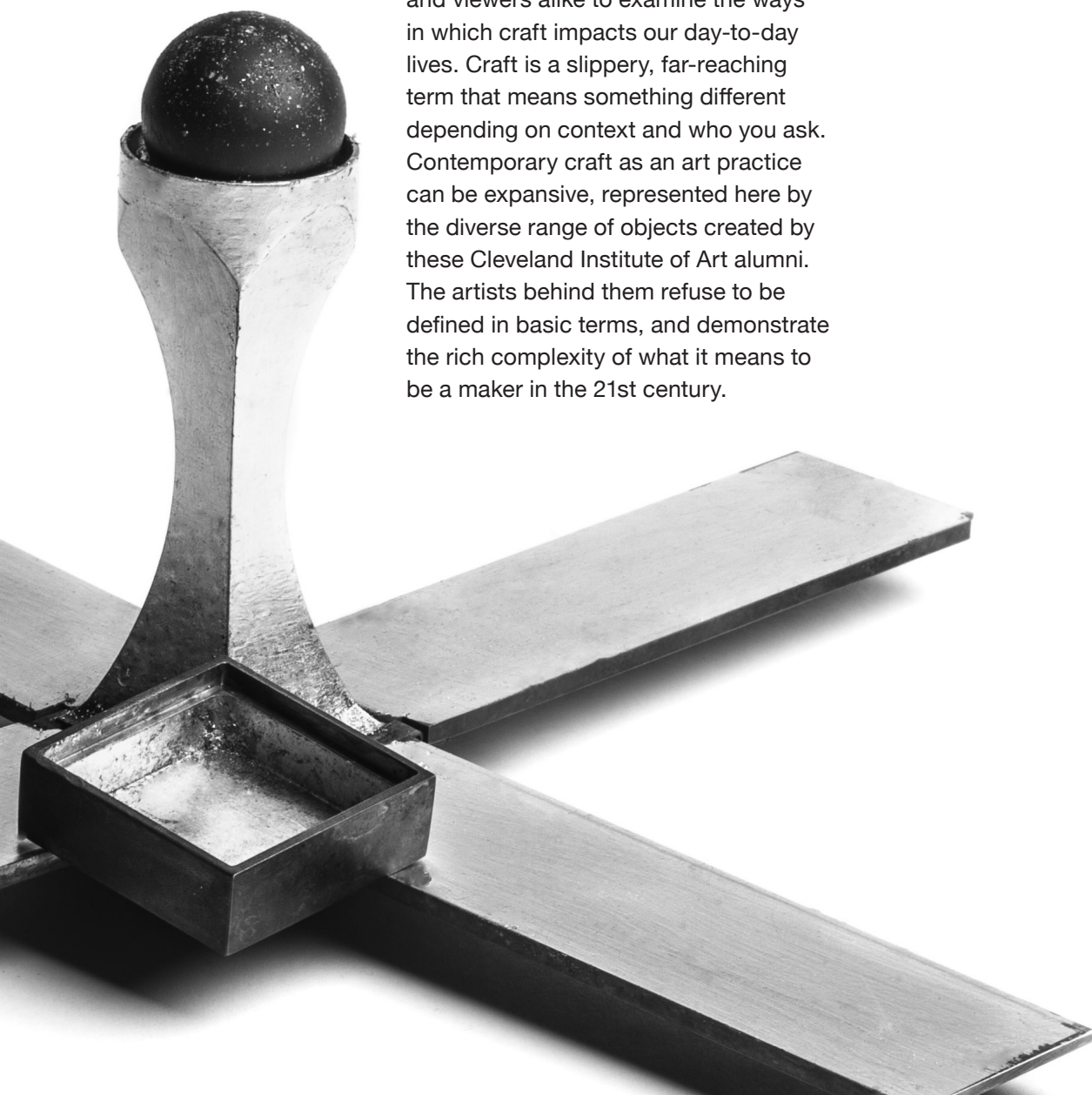
ThinkCraft Fresh Takes

CIA

# ThinkCraft Fresh Takes

November 1–December 14, 2018

To say “think craft” is to invite artists and viewers alike to examine the ways in which craft impacts our day-to-day lives. Craft is a slippery, far-reaching term that means something different depending on context and who you ask. Contemporary craft as an art practice can be expansive, represented here by the diverse range of objects created by these Cleveland Institute of Art alumni. The artists behind them refuse to be defined in basic terms, and demonstrate the rich complexity of what it means to be a maker in the 21st century.



## A Conversation on Craft

By Nikki Woods, Director of Reinberger Gallery

*ThinkCraft: Fresh Takes* is part of the Cleveland Institute of Art's thematic focus for 2018-2019. The artists in the exhibition are CIA alumni living and working across the United States who were invited based on input from former and current CIA faculty. One of the goals of this exhibition is to examine CIA's influence on the diverse landscape that is “craft”—the word as it refers to the genre, term, and practice.

I caught up with Benjamin Johnson, newly appointed chair of Glass at CIA, to hear his perspective on some of the themes addressed in ThinkCraft. Our conversation touched on a range of topics, from his personal approach to making to the importance of community and the balancing act required of makers inside and outside the studio.

Johnson has been chair of the Glass department at the Indianapolis Art Center, and has studied at Pilchuck in Washington, Haystack in Maine, Ox-Bow in Michigan, Penland in North Carolina, and Murano in Italy. His ever-evolving artwork is shown in venues across the United States. In 2013, he was recognized as a Rising Star in contemporary glass by the Museum of American Glass in Milville, New Jersey.

**Nikki Woods:** You're from Indiana originally. Do you think where you come from has any influence on your practice?

**Ben Johnson:** Not in the beginning, but retrospectively, yes. I told my family, when I was rather young, that I was going to move to Italy and blow glass. And this was before I had even tried glass. I don't remember saying that. I do remember saying, if I can't go to Italy, I would move to Seattle. Now Seattle is like the mecca of glass for the world. There are more glass studios in Seattle than there are in Murano.

Christopher  
Gentner (left)  
*Truffle box*, 2012,  
steel and gold leaf

**NW:** Your work is divided into two different categories—vessels and sculptures. Can you talk about the differences between these bodies of work?

**BJ:** I make spatial installations as well. But I also have done a production line. That's how I would have made my living at the residency in North Carolina, creating functional wares and decorative wares. And I traveled all over the country to do the craft shows. The way that I've been able to maintain and grow as an artist is hitting all these different facets and areas, so whether it's making functional work, Christmas ornaments, bowls, cups, that type of thing, or making the decorative work, the vessels that you refer to, which is much more time intensive than just making something, and then the contemporary sculptures. And then, in graduate school, I really expanded into spatial installations.

**NW:** And do those only exist in the moment of the exhibition and then they come down? It's ephemeral, and that's it?

**BJ:** Pretty much. Most of them are site specific. Not that they couldn't be shifted around to new places. They could exist again, but just in a different format. It has to be appropriate to whatever the context is.

**NW:** A lot of craft makers have this professional design practice, where they go to craft fairs, they make their living off of that. And then they have the studio work, which is a little bit more of a labor of love, but not easily as marketable. Do you find that that's common as well?

**BJ:** I tell the students that if you're not selling at the craft shows, then maybe you're selling the work at the gallery. And if you're not selling at the craft shows and the gallery, maybe somebody is recognizing your installations. Through any one of those three things, you're probably somewhere getting money to make the next thing, to pay bills, all of that. If you have a diversified practice, in that way, there's always somebody that's going to be interested in what you're doing in one of those facets to propel you forward, hopefully.

**NW:** This is your first semester teaching at CIA. How do you approach teaching glass?

**BJ:** I try to make it fun. And I try to develop a community. If they're not having fun, and they're not working well with one another, then it's much more challenging, because the material



**Lisa Clague**  
*Visionary Dreamer*,  
2017, clay, metal,  
luster, encaustic,  
resin

of glass is just challenging itself. Normally, we start in the hot shop. And it's intimidating. It's hot. It's 2000-degree material that we're working with. Everybody's intimidated. First and foremost is to get them confident and comfortable in the studio so that they can, eventually, be creative. I would say that the glass, as a material,

is probably one of the hardest materials to learn. It's constantly breaking, cracking, chipping, all these different things. It's hot. It's cold. You have to endure those extremes. And then you have to also learn machines that also have a lot of force involved with them to dictate the material.

It's a long road in glass, so I just want to create a good community of people that are having fun through the material, so that then once they're comfortable, then they can start to be creative with it. So yeah, just try to get them not to be frustrated.

**NW:** Glass is team oriented because a lot of times you might need help from a peer. What is "community" when it comes to making?

**BJ:** One thing I always talk about with students is that we ooh and ah over the images that we see in magazines. For glass, I say, look at Lino Tagliapietra, one of the best-known glassblowers in the world. He's got nine people helping him make that one piece that you see in the magazine. Of course, it's his idea, concept, his tradition, everything. But he could not make that alone.

**NW:** What does craft mean to you?

**BJ:** Wow. What's craft mean to me? That's a hard question, isn't it? In general, making is important. It doesn't matter your skill or age or anything. All of us, as humans, innately want to make stuff, whether it's food, or your bed, or your house, or just the way that you live. We're constantly pushing around things in different ways to create environments or objects that we want to live with or inhabit.

I think craft, for me, is really a lifestyle more than anything. It has made me stop and reconsider everything that's around me all the time and how that affects me.

## Exhibition Checklist

### Pamela Argentieri

*Dissonance I*, 2018, Laser cut leather, sterling silver cast from SLA 3D print, cloisonné enamel, copper

*Dissonance II*, 2018, Laser cut leather, sterling silver cast from SLA 3D print, cloisonné enamel

*Distraction*, 2018, Laser cut leather, sterling silver cast from SLA 3D print, cloisonné enamel

*Disorder*, 2018, Laser cut leather, sterling silver cast from SLA 3D print, cloisonné enamel

*Jumble I*, 2018, Laser cut leather, sterling silver cast from SLA 3D print

*Jumble II*, 2018, Laser cut leather, sterling silver cast from SLA 3D print

*Jumble III*, 2018, Laser cut leather, sterling silver cast from SLA 3D print

### Jessica Calderwood

*Propagate*, 2018, vitreous china, wool felt, polymer, stainless steel, headpins, milk paint

*Violet*, 2017, porcelain, vitreous china, copper, enamel, headpins, stainless steel

*Protrusion*, 2016, polymer clay, earthenware, coated steel wire, milk paint

*Tousle*, 2018, porcelain, copper, enamel, underglaze, ceramic decals, milk paint, stainless steel

### Lisa Clague

*Visionary Dreamer*, 2017, clay, metal, luster, encaustic, resin

*Bee Queen*, 2017, clay, oxides, metal, luster, resin, encaustic

### N2 Clay

(Neal Barman and Nicci Winrock)

*Untitled*, 2018, steel, powder coated finish, plywood, cement board, ceramic tile, glaze, urethane grout

### Valence Lighting

(Nate Cotterman and Uri Daviller)

*Aquila Sconce*, 2018, glass, metal

### Christopher Gentner

*A stool with brass and tubes*, 2018, brass and silicone rubber

*Peanut butter cup cutter*, 2016, brass

*Textured box with polished ring*, 2012, brass, pewter and stainless steel

*Checkered box with plastic ring*, 2016, brass and plastic

*Truffle box*, 2012, steel and gold leaf

*Intricate boxes*, 2010–2015, Video

### Kirk Lang

*Constellation 9 (Pictor Minor)*, 2016, titanium, aluminum, brass, meteorite, diamond, found object, handmade clock parts and custom electronics

*Constellation 8 (Pictor Major)*, 2016, titanium, aluminum, brass, meteorite, onyx, found object, handmade clock parts and custom electronics

### Leana Quade

*Release*, 2016, video performance, tempered glass, ratchet strap

### Kari Russell-Pool

*Grace*, 2017–2018, flame-worked glass

### Kevin Snipes

*Entangle*, 2018, porcelain, glaze, underglaze, oxide wash

*Attachment*, 2018, porcelain, glaze, underglaze, oxide wash

*Cradle*, 2018, porcelain, glaze, underglaze, oxide wash

### Demitra Thomloudis

*Site Report #4*, 2018, mixed media, jewelry and objects

### Thaddeus Wolfe

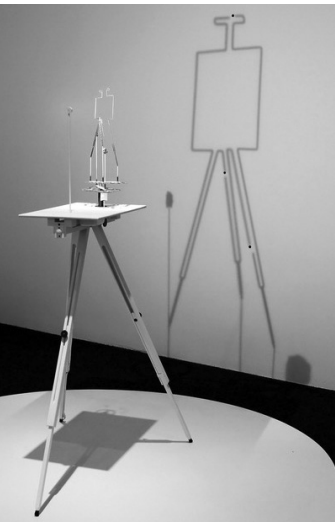
*Assemblage*, 2013, glass

*Assemblage vessel*, 2016, glass

*Untitled*, 2017, glass

*Assemblage vessel*, 2017, glass, bronze

*Assemblage vessel*, 2018, glass



Kirk Lang

*Constellation 8 (Pictor Major)*, 2016, titanium, aluminum, brass, meteorite, onyx, found object, handmade clock parts and custom electronics

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[cia.edu/exhibitions](http://cia.edu/exhibitions)  
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Gallery Hours  
Mon–Thu 10am–5pm  
Fri 10am–9pm  
Sat–Sun 12–5pm



Front and back cover:  
**Demitra Thomloudis**  
*Site Report #4*, 2018, mixed  
media, jewelry and objects



Reinberger Gallery programming is supported in part by the residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture.



**Cleveland Institute of Art**

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