

american craft



Expanding the
Craft Toolbox:
Old Meets New

Many Cultures
Converge in
South Africa's
Cape Town

Michael Sherrill
Natural Narratives in
Clay, Metal and Glass

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Right:
Cristiano Bianchin
Urna (Urn), 2007,
hand-blown, ground
and polished glass,
crocheted synthetic
thread, steel, 18 x 8 in.
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Good Hope for Craft: Cape Town, South Africa

"Art in South Africa seems very personal. There are so many cultural stories and nuances that need to be expressed before they go missing in the imminent mix of culture and race."—Nic Braden

STORY BY
Fraser H. Conlon



Explore Cape Town!
Visit americancraftmag.org for even more information and photos.
Click on our Wide World of Craft interactive map and find recommended places to visit, shop, eat and play!





Left:
One of the local women
who participate in the
cultural empowerment
project Monkeybiz.

Right (top to bottom):
Monkeybiz artists
Makosi Molise
White Longhorn Bökkie;
Ncedile Ntloko
Blue Longhorn Bökkie;
Nokude Mpakati
Red and Blue Bökkie;
wire, cotton and beads,
each 12½ x 10½ x 3½ in.

Opposite:
Nicholas Hlbo
Ingubo Yesizwe, 2008,
leather, rubber, gauze,
ribbon, steel, found
ball-and-claw chair leg,
butcher's hook, chain,
8½ x 5 x 98 ft.



To visit Cape Town is to be transported to a world of great natural beauty and a complex history. Situated on the southern tip of the African continent on the shore of Table Bay, Cape Town is the second-most populous city in South Africa, the largest in land area, and one of the most multiracial and multicultural places on earth. The Cape region's indigenous peoples were joined by Europeans as long ago as 1652, when the Dutch established a settlement there, which soon drew other immigrants from Europe and (some involuntarily) from other parts of Africa and Asia, and the hub of a colony was born. The cultural diversity of Cape Town is reflected in the craft and art that can be found there, some of it unique to this part of the world.

The natural amphitheater-shaped area below Table Mountain, known as the City Bowl, has extraordinary galleries, craft markets and museums that embrace Cape Town's eclectic heritage. The Iziko South African National Gallery houses a splendid

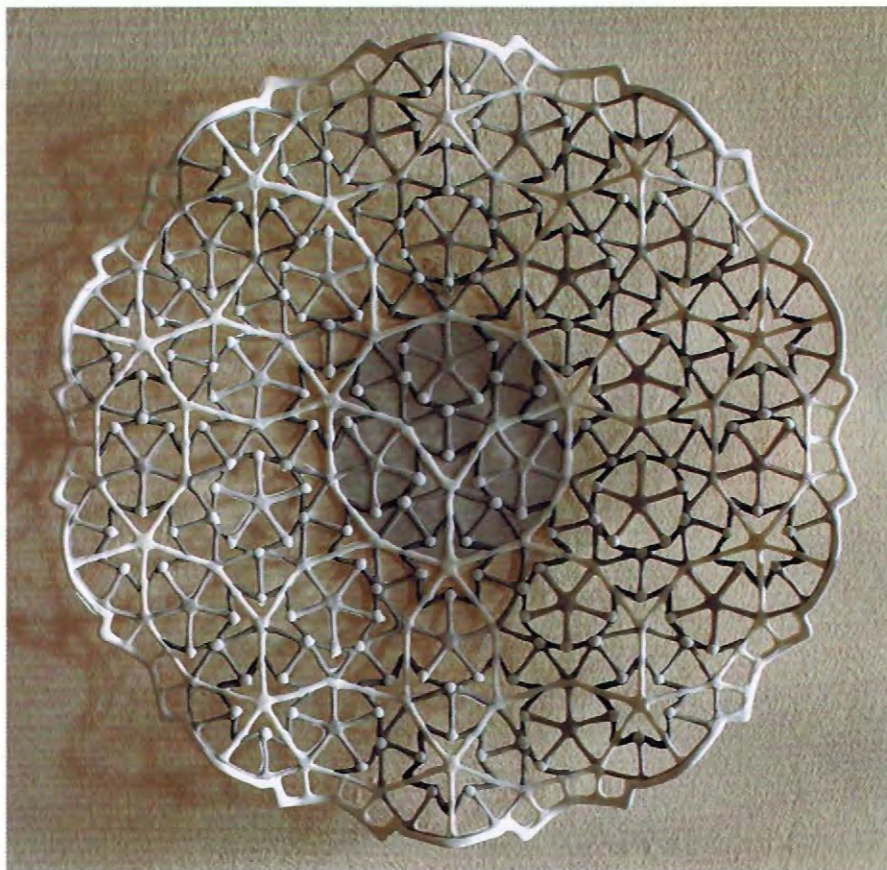
collection of South African, African, British, French, Dutch and Flemish art providing insight into the range of aesthetic production in the country over the centuries. Of particular importance is the museum's collection of South African beadwork. This craft is culturally significant since it was traditionally a form of creative expression for women predominantly from the Xhosa and Zulu tribes. Today it has blossomed into a varied and fascinating craft form.

Barbara Jackson and Shirley Fintz have found another way to embrace South Africa's eclectic heritage. In 2000 the two artists founded the cultural empowerment project Monkeybiz, with the goal to alleviate poverty in the Cape townships (areas that had grown up under apartheid) and transfer skills to uneducated and unemployed women. The women create magical sculptural animals inspired by the wildlife of southern Africa—brightly patterned elephants, antelopes and rhinoceroses that elicit smiles at the playful ingenuity of the



Above:
Streetwire collaboration
Designers: Michaela
Howse and Elias Kula,
Cow Masterpiece Looking
Left, Nguni series, 2006,
glass beads, copper wire,
11 1/8 x 23 1/8 x 6 in.

Right:
Christina Bryer
Mandala, 2009,
porcelain,
dia. 4 3/4 in.



work. "Monkeybiz has improved the quality of life for these women," says Joan Krupp, who manages the Monkeybiz retail store. "They have food on their tables and are able to send their children to school." The project has been enormously successful, with a global reach and distribution supporting over 450 women living in the impoverished townships of the region. "The art of beadwork had died due to apartheid," says Krupp. "Monkeybiz revived this form in a contemporary, quirky medium." In addition to keeping alive the ancient traditions of beading, Monkeybiz also has an active AIDS and HIV Awareness program designed to educate and assist with medical care and preventive measures, along with providing the artists with access to necessary medications.

Nestled on the quirky lanes of the Cape Quarter is Streetwires, another successful venture that has used cultural skills of wirework and beading to produce limited-edition sculptures. Sculptures of Nguni,

a favored breed of African cattle, are highly sought after and represent some of the most successful pieces from this studio. "These pieces are extremely special, as they were the first high-end, larger-scale, realistic fully beaded rendition of an animal revered in South African culture," says Cathy Ronasan, Streetwires' export manager. "They changed bead and wire craft into art."

A visit to the Cape Quarter would not be complete without spending time in Africa Nova, a lovely gallery housing an eclectic collection of fine jewelry, artworks, ceramics, textiles and crafts, all effectively curated within the split-level space.

Woodstock, the oldest suburb in the City Bowl, was recently designated one of the city's improvement projects, and as a result is an emerging and creative hub with several new prestigious galleries, a host of cafés and restaurants and an extremely popular Saturday farmers market. The most notable galleries to visit are Michael Stevenson, considered the leading

contemporary art gallery in the country, and, next door, Linda Goodman Gallery, another venerable space representing established South African artists such as William Kentridge, David Goldblatt and Sam Nhlengethwa. To discover a new generation, one should look into Whatiftheworld Gallery, selected by *Contemporary Magazine* (London) as one of the "Top 50 Emerging Galleries from Around the World" in 2007. "We are committed to nurturing our artists and working closely with them on a curatorial level," says director Justin Rhodes, on why the gallery has been a success. "Even though we work with younger artists, we place a strong focus on presenting the works with a very high production level."

In among the fine arts venues of Woodstock is a vibrant and active craft community. The ceramics studio of Andile Dyalvane, a rising young talent, is located in one of the neighborhood's most exciting commercial spaces, the Old Biscuit Mill. Dyalvane's work, a skillful mingling of ancient

Right:
Katherine Glenday
Africa Burns, 2009,
 porcelain, dimensions
 variable.

Bottom:
Katherine Glenday
Cape Point Vessel, 2009,
 porcelain, 13¾ x 11½ in;
Vessel, 2009, 4¾ x 4¾ in.



traditional codes and modern expressions, has been acknowledged through various national awards. Born into a pastoral Xhosa family, he has actively challenged himself to bridge his different worlds—the rural, traditional value system that is an important part of his heritage, and the urban city life he experiences on a daily basis. The results, soulful and expressive, are beautifully proportioned ceramic vessels, often marked with a razor blade or found tools, tattooed symbols of primordial culture and tribal scarification.

To fully experience the inspired craft of the Cape, a drive should be planned to the fishing village Kalk Bay, about an hour's drive from the city center, where a remarkable group of South Africa's ceramic artists reside. Katherine Glenday, an influential artist, began as a painter but then decided on porcelain as her medium. For 23 years she has devoted herself to the vessel as a form of sublime and articulate communication. Fascinated by light and inspired ▶

Fascinated by light and inspired by the splendid landscape..., Katherine Glenday captures moments that resonate, glow and calm.





Above:
Chris Bladen
Yellowfin Duo, 2004,
edition of 15, bronze,
wood and granite base,
14 x 9½ x 15 in.

Right
Nic Bladen
New collection, 2009,
bronze, silver, tallest
25½ in.

Below:
Nic Bladen
Protea caffra, 2009,
bronze, 16½ x 12¾ in.



by the splendid landscape surrounding her studio and The Forge, a space for music recitals, exhibitions and happenings, she captures moments that resonate, glow and calm.

Neighbors of Glenday are the brothers Chris (with whom she's worked in the past) and Nic Bladen, both silversmiths and metal workers. Chris focuses on larger sculptures of fish soaring into the air, dancing above the waves, while Nic's intricate and delicate pieces are fashioned from the indigenous plant life of the Cape, home to some 20 percent of Africa's flora. Nic casts the entire plant, including the root system, in delicate sculptures of various precious metals. "To me, art in South Africa seems very personal," says Nic. "There are so many cultural stories and nuances that need to be expressed before they go missing in the imminent mix of culture and race."

Another Kalk Bay local who contributes to the ceramics world is Christina Bryer. Her captivating porcelain mandalas offer the viewer a space for reprieve—a moment

in which to rest within the perfect geometry from the noise of the world.

It should be no surprise that Cape Town is home to extraordinary art, craft, design and architecture. Varied and original, these manifestations are part of the fabric that makes South Africa and its peoples unique. With the blight of apartheid (the government policy of racial separation that was in force for 46 years) now 16 years in the past, this society is forging new creative territory, inspired by rich traditions, a spectacular physical environment and a desire to have the nation succeed through the sharing of ideas and skills, recognition of differences, and respect for ethnicity and ancient arts. "Craft in Cape Town is vibrant, colorful, chaotic and inspiring," says Cathy Ronasan. "It is beautiful in its rawness and has a soul that projects the energy of the country we live in." +

Fraser H. Conlon is a partner in Amaridian, a Manhattan-based gallery specializing in contemporary art from Sub-Saharan Africa.

