

Before Beauty

This Master's Statement is respectfully submitted
to Cranbrook Academy of Art as partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts



.....
Gary S. Griffin
Head, Metalsmithing Department
Artist-in-Residence



.....
James Thurman
May 12, 2000

“It is this beauty with inner implications that is referred to as *shibui*. It is not a beauty displayed before the viewer by its creator; creation here means, rather, making a piece that will lead the viewer to draw beauty out of it for himself. In this sense, *shibui* beauty, the beauty of the Tea ceremony, is beauty that makes an artist of the viewer.”

Soetsu Yanagi



Beauty is a Relationship

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” This statement is not completely true. Beauty exists somewhere between the viewer and the object. As in any relationship, both parties are necessary for its very creation. Without the viewer, there is no response. Without the object, there is no provocation. In their union, the situation that is created could be beauty.

Obviously, beauty is not the result of every interaction. However, these are the means by which beauty is made possible. Many other conditions, beyond that of a simple encounter, are necessary as well. The numerous factors must combine in very particular ways to produce this experience. Fundamentally, the participant must be receptive and the situation must be conducive.

Beauty is much like a theatrical performance. A play is not the actors, props, scenery, or audience; it is what is created during the time of all these components interacting. Beauty is not the object, the context, the environment, or the viewer. It is the synthesis of all.

“Only by affirming the animateness of perceived things do we allow our words to emerge directly from the depths of our ongoing reciprocity with the world.”

David Abrams



The Inadequacy of Language

Beautiful objects play a role that nothing else can. Their experience is a truly personal one. The more effort that is made to convey the nuances of the event to others, the more language becomes insufficient.

Beauty is felt. Beauty is seen. Beauty is heard. Beauty is known.

The interplay is private. The maker has provided an object. People come to the object on their own terms. The maker feels their work is beautiful and presents it as such to others. Does this process result in genuine empathy?

A conscious choice has been made to manifest specific things. These objects communicate in a way unique to themselves. Objects speak. Are we always willing to listen?

“The beauty of the object derives from the quality of the work: not only workmanship but also playful vision. Outer beauty reflects inner beauty, and rediscovering aesthetic and intellectual pleasure is part of the design and craft process.”

Malcolm McCullough



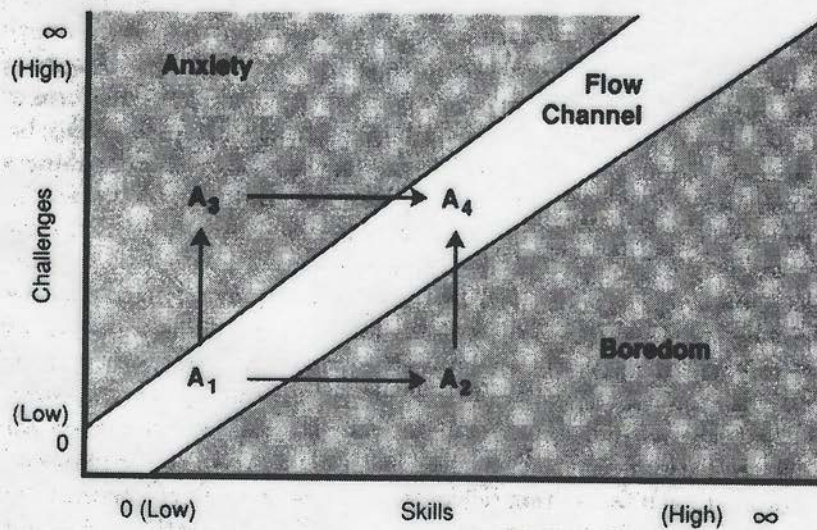
Beauty Begets Beauty

The process of creation demands constant decisions. What success criteria are these decisions based on? Every practitioner has known epiphany. When and how does that realization occur?

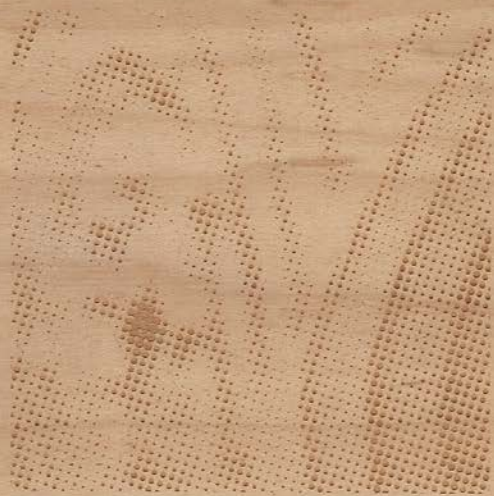
This is the primary and unique attribute of creative processes. The paradox of work, experimentation, and play often produce unpredictable and deeply satisfying results. In that space between conception and fruition exists the critical improvisational input.

The joy of making can manifest itself through material. How does this occur? Is this not a reason for making, in and of itself? The translation of experience through the objects is a unique dialect created by each viewer.

The constant striving for the sublime manifests itself as the tangible imbued with excellence, quality, and beauty. The journey creates milestones. Others can navigate the route by means of these signs.



Why the complexity of consciousness increases as a result of flow experiences



The Moment

Refinement is a prerequisite of beauty. Clear vision creates clear results. All ensuing objects are born from the point of contact of the tool. This is the distillation of all that has come before:

all work
all experience
all thought

All of these memories, both tacit and mental, exist within that moment. As soon as that moment emerges into existence, it instantly moves to join all that had come before it, thus influencing the moment immediately following.

To maintain presence in the moment is to have unity with the work. Objects that are born from this focus exist as a physical embodiment of it. This fossil may then speak of that specific experience for the future.

This is the genealogy of experience. Without diligent practice, discipline, and firm belief, the evolution of the next generation of explorations will never occur. Without focus and conviction, that intent will never resonate within the object.

**“We live in a world
where there is
more and more
information,
and less and less
meaning.”**

Jean Baudrillard



The Effect of Beauty

As the rate of information increases and the amount of meaning decreases, the need to break that cycle becomes paramount. Beauty is a means to escape that viscous cycle. It exists outside the standard modes of information exchange. By not being wholly defined within language, it is exempt from those means of classification.

Beauty is its own reason. Beauty is its own meaning. The creation of beautiful objects is a positive and transforming force. Participation in that beauty is a strong and enriching experience. Joy, respect, and appreciation enter into the world because of it.

This basic personal experience exists, not just as relief from growing social pressures, but as a subtle yet powerful means of enrichment. The unique ability of beauty to affect existence is undeniable, but often overlooked. In the cacophony of daily trivialities, that which is loudest is usually heard. The quiet but persistent voice of beauty has the power to silence the noise.

**"People bring machines into
existence and it is they, not the
machines, who negate or enhance
the conditions of existence."**

Paul Greenhalgh



Moral Priorities

The long, out-dated, moralistic discussion of the idea of the hand-made versus machine-made has even managed to permeate fundamental ideas of beauty. Upon deeper investigation, it is clear that the belief that the hand-made is more beautiful than machine-made lacks any grounding.

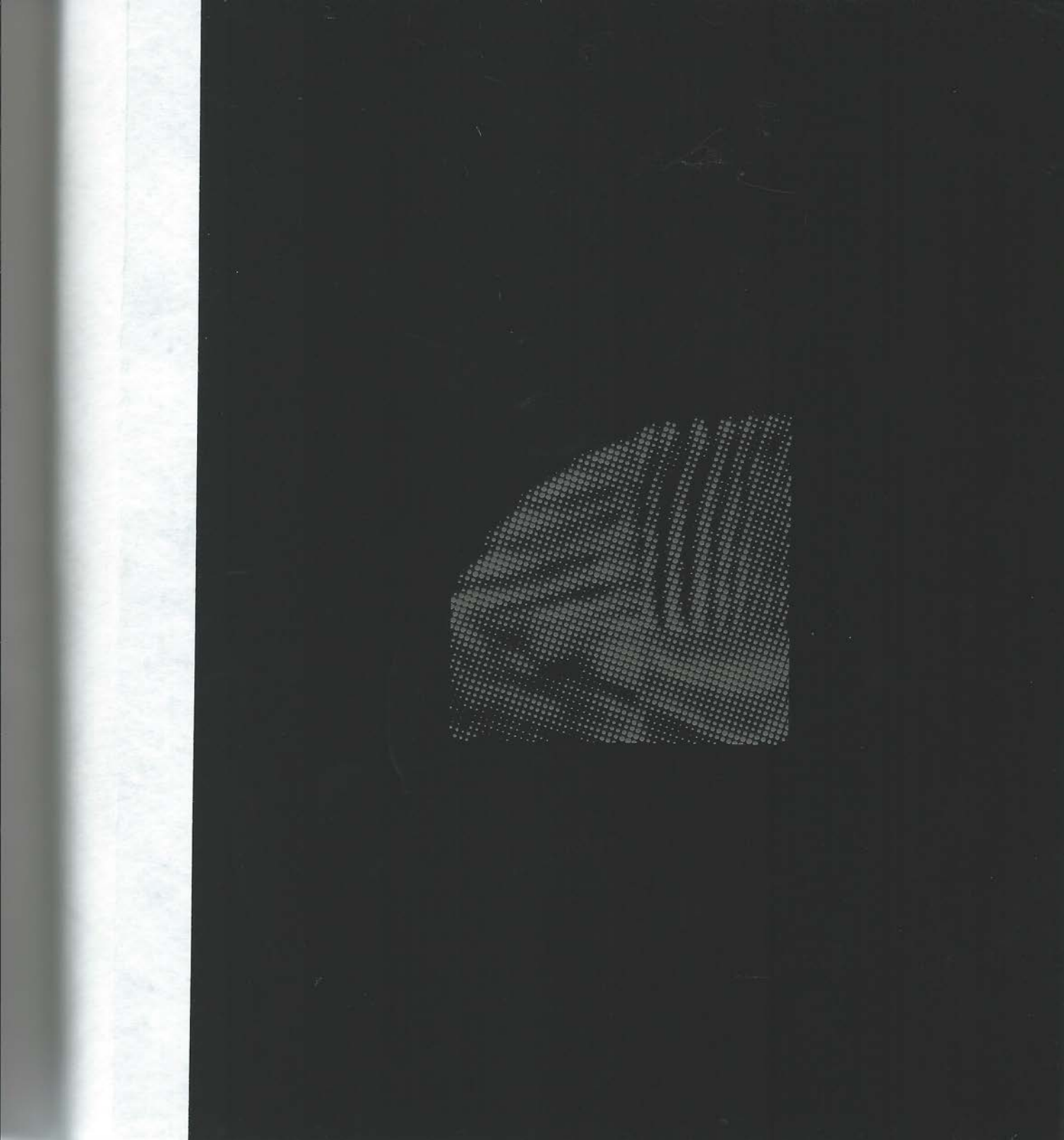
Machines are tools. Tools produce objects. Only the most basic of items would satisfy the strictest interpretation of "hand-made." Often, without conscious decision, most viewers will accept certain machine processes as "hand-made" and exclude others. This only serves as an interference to experiencing beauty in all its manifestations.

Both makers and benefactors have the responsibility to promote a broader understanding of the objects that are presented to the public. For example, a more in-depth explanation of work processes may foster a better comprehension of the role of the creator in relation to the objects.

As the concept of "hand-made" becomes irrelevant, the experience of beauty can become more direct and unencumbered by mediating baggage. Faith in the creator of the object will be restored to its appropriate place, regardless of material or process. Attainment of beauty will always demand the highest level of refinement.

“There are also moments that the circle gives one deep satisfaction, because one is able to break through the seeming limitation and unassailability; the circle reveals itself by repeatedly new transformations.”

Maria van Kesteren



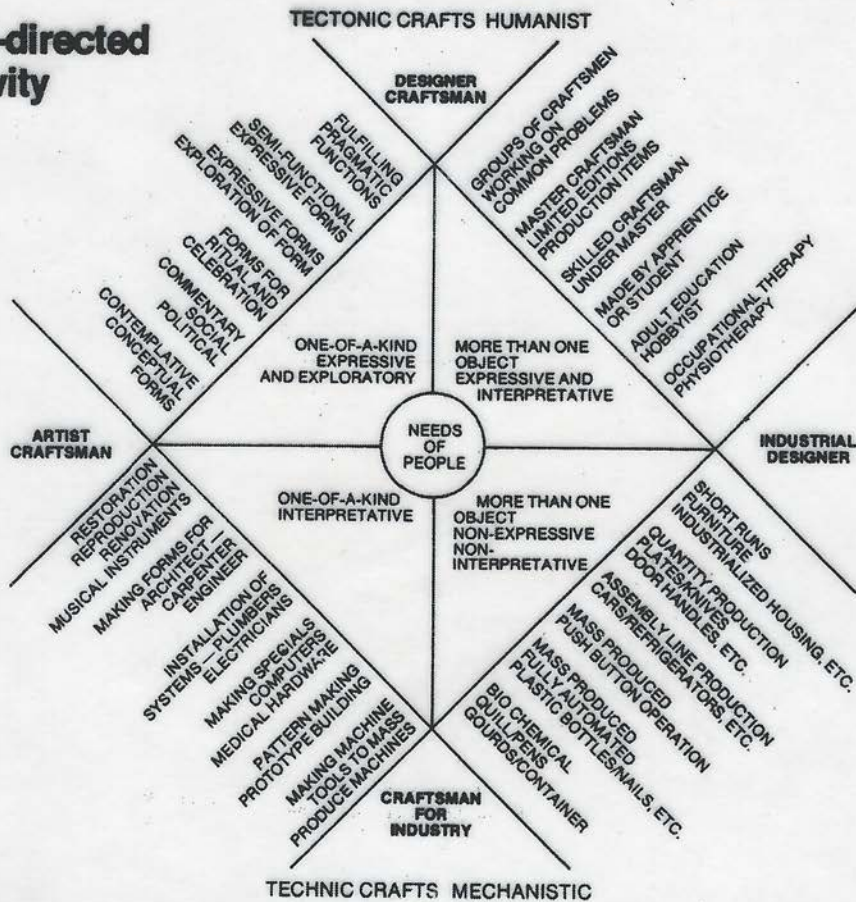
The Center

Rotational processes and its resultant forms are hypnotic in their movement and symmetry. There exists something fundamentally enticing and beautiful in them. Much as the experience of beauty defies linguistic explanation, so does the attraction to rotation.

There is a wonderful relationship between the process and the result. When using a rotational approach, whether it be a potter's wheel or a lathe, the process itself becomes meditative. That same seduction carries into the relationship of the viewer with the object.

The clear indication of process and material gives an entry point into the object. This initial rapport is conducive to further investigation and, possibly, transcendence to a level of rapture and contemplation. Only then, can beauty accurately evidence itself.

Self-directed activity





Responsibilities

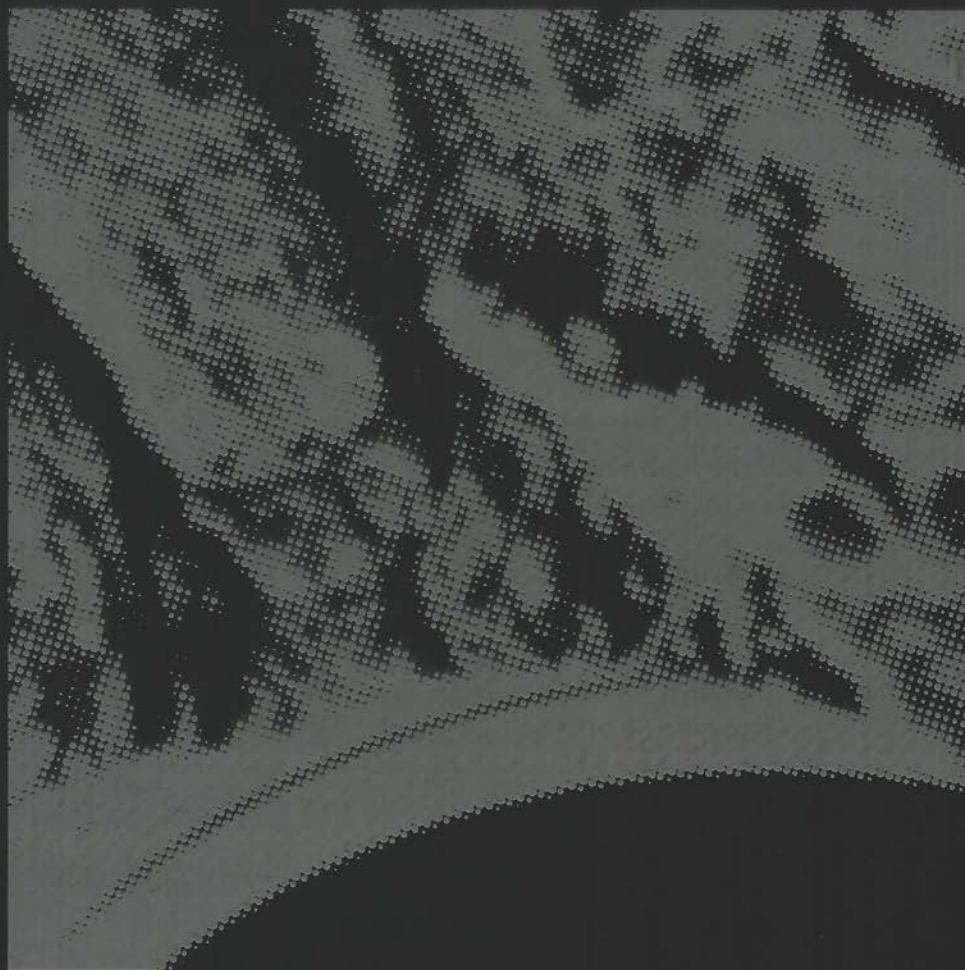
As beauty exists to enrich and inspire, so should the end products of object makers. In a world saturated with things, should not those objects that surround us have a positive effect on our daily lives? Beyond a well-defined utility, their function should encompass the betterment of our existence.

It is the responsibility of the people who generate objects to imbue them with this potential. The cumulative result of beauty as a critical priority would be extraordinary.

The generation of beautiful objects is like any manufacturing process; the product can be no better than the quality of its basic ingredients and procedures. If the maker has no love or joy during the development and realization of the product, how can any love or joy be derived from interacting with the object? Creating beauty requires this dedication.

**“The crafts in
their future role
may yet fill the
vacuum
but only if
craftsmen
achieve some
consciousness of
what they are
for, only if
they will set
themselves the
very highest
standards in
workmanship,
and only then if
they attract the
voluntary
services of the
best designers.
Workmanship and
design are
extensions
of each other.”**

David Pye



Future

As the virtual and mediated experience becomes more accepted as a substitute for the material world, it is increasingly critical that makers define their role within society. It must be clear that this role is a vital and irreplaceable one. This necessitates active participation in the evolution of cultural priorities.

Properly positioned, the more fundamental experiences associated with traditional means of production could gain emphasis in a more technologically dominated society. For example, the increasing scarcity of objects made of natural materials could elevate their status to consumers. The seductive nature of rapidly advancing technologies demands the active involvement of those from traditionally based practices.

There is no other way to communicate the subtleties of unique experiences, like beauty, without a tacit and deep understanding of material relationships. Without this understanding, what is accepted as beauty may radically shift based on the new material cultures of the exponentially evolving technological societies.

Will beauty always be beautiful?

Endnotes

Quotation 1

Soetsu Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsman (New York: Kodansha International, 1989), p.124.

Image 1

detail of Union

Quotation 2

David Abrams, The Spell of the Sensuous (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p.56.

Image 2

detail of Boolean I

Quotation 3

Malcolm McCullough, The Practiced Digital Hand (Cambridge, MA,: The MIT Press, 1998), p.234.

Image 3

detail of Strata

Quotation 4

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), p. 74.

Image 4

detail of Erosion

Quotation 5

Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p.79.

Image 5

detail of Boolean II

Quotation 6

Peter Greenhalgh, "The Progress of Captain Ludd," in The Culture of Craft, ed. Peter Dormer (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.111.

Image 6

detail of Synthesis

Quotation 7

Maria van Kesteren, "Fascination for the Circle," in Curators' Focus: Turning in Context, dir. Albert LeCoff, (Philadelphia, PA: The Wood Turning Center, 1997), p. 28.

Image 7

detail of BooleanIb

Quotation 8

Stephen Hogbin, The Purpose of the Object, (New York: Abrams, 1995), p. 5.

Image 8

detail of Laminated Vessel

Quotation 9

David Pye, The Nature and Art of Workmanship, (Bethel, CT: Cambium Press, 1968), p.139.

Image 9

detail of Passage

Bibliography

- Abrams, David. The Spell of the Sensuous. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.
- Baudrillard, Jean. Simulacra and Simulation. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990.
- Dorner, Peter, editor. The Culture of Craft. New York: Manchester University Press, 1997.
- Hogbin, Stephen. The Purpose of the Object. New York: Abrams, 1995.
- LeCoff, Albert, director. Curators' Focus: Turning in Context. Philadelphia, PA: The Wood Turning Center, 1997.
- McCullough, Malcolm. The Practiced Digital Hand. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998.
- Pye, David. The Nature and Aesthetics of Design. Bethel, CT: Cambium Press, 1978.
- Pye, David. The Nature and Art of Workmanship. Bethel, CT: Cambium Press, 1968.
- Yanagi, Soetsu. The Unknown Craftsman. New York: Kodansha International, 1989.



JAMES THURMAN

15616 WOODLAND DRIVE DEARBORN, MI 48120 313.982.1906 THURMANJA@AOL.COM

EDUCATION

CRANBROOK ACADEMY OF ART, BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI Masters of Fine Arts Degree candidate, Metalsmithing Department Electives: 3D Design, Ceramics	9.98 to 5.00
MACHINE SHOP TECHNOLOGIES INSTITUTE, PITTSBURGH, PA Machinist Certificate	1.95 to 11.96
CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY, PITTSBURGH, PA Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree Major: Sculpture Minor: Graphic Design	9.89 to 5.93

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

FOURNIER ENTERPRISES, INC. Specialty Parts Fabricator	9.98 to present
CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY Adjunct Assistant Professor: Metal Sculpture Wrote curriculum of basic steel fabrication and lost-wax casting for the Pre-College Art Program.	9.95 to 7.98
Artist Assistant: Joseph Mannino Woodshop/Metal Sculpture/Ceramic Studio Monitor	1.93 to 7.98 9.90 to 5.93
PITTSBURGH CHILDREN'S MUSEUM Exhibitions Designer and Fabricator Designed hands-on exhibitions, repaired current exhibitions, purchased required materials, and maintained the woodshop and maintenance office.	2.97 to 7.98
PITTSBURGH CENTER FOR THE ARTS Adult Education Instructor: Jewelry-Making Outreach Program Instructor: Metalsmithing	7.96 to 5.98 2.96 to 5.98
SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY CRAFTS Artist-in-Residence: Community Outreach Project	7.97
SWEETWATER ART CENTER Visiting Instructor: Metalsmithing for Teens	8.97
TOUCHSTONE CENTER FOR CRAFTS Visiting Instructor: Precious Metal Clay workshop Assistant Instructor: Introduction to Jewelry-Making Hydraulic Die Forming	9.97 6.95
THURMAN UNLIMITED President/Owner Specializes in fabrication, transportation, and on-site installation of decorative metalwork for corporate as well as private clients.	1.94 to present