

Art and Life Department

Penland School has been happy to work with Lark Books on a series which includes *The Penland Book of Ceramics*, *The Penland Book of Handmade Books*, and *the Penland Book of Jewelry*; *The Penland Book of Furniture* will be published in 2006. These books combine intermediate-level technical information with beautiful selections of work and essays that give the artists a chance to say something about themselves and to talk about the methods they use. Here are three excerpts we thought would be of general interest.

JOHN COGSWELL

Metalsmith John Cogswell teaches at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Working mostly with silver, he makes elegant jewelry along with stunning flatware and other table items. His chapter in our jewelry book tells this story about his father.

When I was about four years old, I remember finding my father at our kitchen table using my crayons to draw a birthday card for my grandmother. I still recall my sense of wonder as I watched this act of creation in progress. I couldn't wait to see my grandmother's face upon receipt of this card, knowing she would be thrilled beyond words, touched by the intimate nature of his offering. He had created this for her, and for her alone.

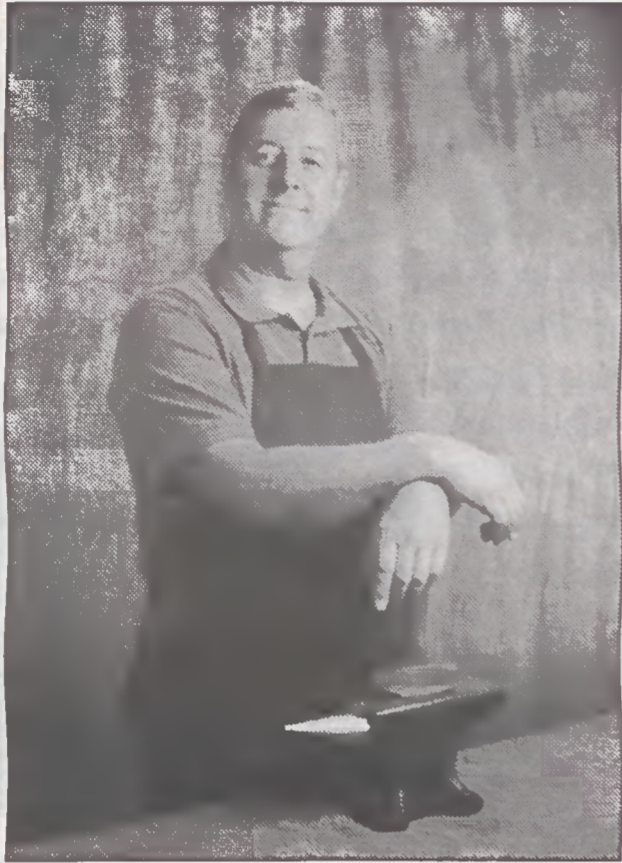
The whole time I was growing up, I watched my father design and build all manner of inventive things. He approached every project with his head, his heart, and his hands. However, to this day he denies any suggestion of special talent or artistic ability, attributing any perceived prowess to common sense and practicality. My father worked as a welder and sheet-metal worker, building truck cabs. That was all I ever knew about his job. Work was work, home was home, and he never mixed the two.

Some years back, a terrible windstorm struck a small airport near my parents' home, causing extensive cosmetic damage to the exteriors of a dozen or two small aircraft. An airport employee asked my father, then retired, if he could help repair some of the damage. He agreed to the task as a spare-time venture, and spent the better part of a year working on the planes. My wife and I visited about the same time my father was completing the last of the

repairs, and we went to the airport to check out his handiwork.

Someone there had photographs that documented the damage to the planes. They showed considerable twisting, denting, and distortion, yet each plane now miraculously appeared almost flawless, looking as if it had

Duane Stevens



John Cogswell

just rolled off an assembly line. When we returned to my father's home workshop, I saw that the hammers, stakes, and forming tools he used were almost identical to those in my own silver-smithing studio, and I realized that he was an accomplished metal-smith in his

own right. We simply worked with different metals: he with steel and I with silver. We had been doing virtually the same thing all those years, and I never knew it. I cannot say whether or not talent is inherited, but I do believe that, whether by example or via heredity, I came to art though my father.

HEDI KYLE

Hedi Kyle is admired for her inventive and innovative book structures. She is a book conservator and recently retired as the head conservator for the American Philosophical Society. Her essay in our book on handmade books

begins with this colorful description of her work with old books.

As a conservator, I look at books in a different way than I do as an artist. First of all, they are objects in need of care. I have seen books in deplorable condition, sometimes nothing more than decrepit relics. They have been damaged by fire and water, attacked by insects, exposed to dust and dirt, and subjected to unbearable tempera-

tures. Left to self-destruct because of their inherent acidity, millions of books slowly burn to death, fall apart, crumble to dust.

With preservation options ranging from repair and rebinding to stabilizing and housing in archival enclosures, I am responsible for preserving all physical evidence. Taking the future use of the book into account, its value and its place in time, I have to decide when to interfere, if at all, with its structural integrity. I've come to believe that certain books should never be restored. Like ancient ruins they are infused with an awesome beauty reflecting a lost craft and a distant culture.

In the process of examining books to make the right treatment decisions, I often stumble upon unexpected discoveries. These might be little-known binding techniques, strange materials, fantastic end sheets, unusual typography, notations or marginalia—not to mention anything trapped between the pages. From insects to pressed plants, hair, feathers, or scraps of ephemera, something precious meant to remain hidden is now revealed. As you can see, the definition of the book as a medium of information goes beyond conventional interpretation.

When the decision is made to take certain books apart, I feel like a doctor carefully separating layers with the scalpel, softening and peeling linings from the spine. Since it was common practice among binders in older times to recycle manuscripts and printed materials for spine and board linings, I know another surprise awaits me. Sometimes during the repair process, fragments of text and images appear. As I release them from their time capsule, I invade a secret place and occasionally find a real treasure. I conceive the book as a repository, holding clues that reach far beyond the original intent.

KITTY COUCH

The late Kitty Couch lived near Burnsville, just a few miles from Penland. She spent the last few decades of her life making large, thin-walled, coil-built, earthenware vessels. Her chapter in our

ceramics book concludes with these observations.

As I grow older, I increasingly see my work as a metaphor for my life. When I

Ann Hawthorne



The late Kitty Couch

moved to Burnsville about twenty years ago at the time of my husband's death, I started making larger, simpler forms—I had found my center when I moved here alone to live on the side of the mountain. And as I simplified the way I worked—terra cotta instead of porcelain, little surface decoration, and one firing instead of multiple ones, I found I was letting go, just as I was letting go of parts of my life. It is all about what I can get along without and still keep the energy high. Another way of saying this is that I became more discriminating and made conscious choices.

Now my work in life and clay is about patience and contemplation. Also I see a great correlation between the balancing of my round bottom pots with the balancing of my conflicting energies. Writing this piece caused me to directly contemplate my relationship to my work in order to communicate it in words. I see once again how our life-spirit is mirrored in our work: I understand that my attempt to create joy and lightness in my pieces is a means of assuring myself that life is good, worth living, and also that I am capable of great openness.

But to return to coiling...I think if people realized the power they have to work simply and purposefully with whatever material attracts them, they can get real joy from the experience. But if they spend their time being constrained by the technique and rules, they will be missing out on life. Even something as simple as a coil pot can be worth giving your life for if you bring yourself honestly to it.

Paul Warchol



Hedi Kyle