

CRAFT SHOW FEATURED SCHOOL: PETERS VALLEY SCHOOL OF CRAFT

This year's Craft Show will spotlight the work of talented artists from the Peters Valley School of Craft. Located in Layton, New Jersey, the school has offered craft education in blacksmithing, ceramics, weaving, fine metals, woodworking, and glass since 1970. Jennifer Chrzanowski, AAM's Director of Communications and Audience Development, and Craft Show Chair Diz Hormel sat down with Peters Valley Director Kristin Muller to discuss the school's unique focus and trends in craft.



KRISTIN MULLER

Jenn: What drew you to Peters Valley?

Kristin: I had been teaching and managing the Brookfield Craft Center in Connecticut for 15 years. I purchased a studio only 10 miles away from Peters Valley, and when the opportunity arose, I thought, well, this is a big next step. We help artists as much as we help the public understand the craft process and the value in living a life with handmade objects. Our mission is to enrich

people's lives through the learning, appreciation, and practice of fine craft.

Diz: I read that you have an Anagama kiln on campus. Can you tell me how that kiln is different from others?

KM: The kiln was built by Japanese ceramicist Katsuyuki Sakazume in the 1980s when he visited campus. It's a large wood-fired kiln dating to the 14th century that can heat up to 2,500 degrees. The atmosphere from the burning wood creates special effects from fly ash that form a glaze on the pots; it actually melts on the surface of the clay and creates a beautiful, organic effect. Every year we bring a visiting artist who specializes in wood firing to fire the kiln. People come from all over to participate. We run the kiln for 5 days and then it cools for another 5 days. It's very special.

DH: That's so interesting. Tell us more about your workshops.

KM: Our workshops are taught by visiting artists. Every week a new artist comes to teach students new techniques. We always offer the basics and introductory level classes as

well as specialized classes. We know that someone who's an excellent ceramic artist may want to introduce metal or glass to their work, and they may be starting at the beginning.

JC: Do you have a fellowship program?

KM: We have fellows that come for the summer to help us manage the studios. Our artist fellows typically have a degree in the medium, have some work experience, and they are looking to get the professional management opportunity of running a studio. All of the artists that are participating in the Academy Art Museum's Craft Show have been fellows at Peters Valley.

DH: What areas of craft have you seen the most interest in recently?

KM: I would say the most popular right now (and have been for a while) are blacksmithing, woodworking, and ceramics. I think there are a lot of women interested in learning woodworking and blacksmithing, which also really appeal to teenagers. We're thrilled that they want to get their hands into materials, especially kids that are on screens all day.

DH: I was just thinking about how with technology and automation, there are generations of people who don't know the joy of creating something from raw materials. I get excited when I see people putting time into learning how to be a maker.



KM: I think about this a lot and how we expect quick results for everything. Go buy something on Amazon. It'll arrive tomorrow. It makes our brains work in this staccato-like way, as opposed to the long game, that focus, the process. We have a slogan, "It's about process, not about product." Sometimes when you come here and you're learning a process, you may not actually finish something. What about discovery and curiosity? What about getting lost in a process and really understanding a material? We had a wood carving class this weekend, and you know, every type of wood has a different grain, has a different hardness. So how do you build that material knowledge? That takes time.

DH: It's so gratifying to create something with your hands. The problem-solving that goes into those processes is really incredible.

KM: I think arts education is super important to give people the opportunity for possibility. People get so much joy from trying. We just had our "Art in the Park Day" where we have all sorts of activities for people to try, like printmaking, spoon carving, and pottery, and they just love it. I also think that's the beauty of hosting craft shows: to celebrate makers.

JC: We love supporting artists in this way and introducing people to craft. How do you see Peters Valley evolving; do you see trends in craft changing?

KM: We believe that even if you're making innovative,

expressive work, you still need mastery of basic skills. We will always teach foundational skills classes. The tools that artists have access to will change, though. We've offered 3D printing in clay, for example, and artists use computer-aided design to conceive of what they want to make before they make it. Technology and tools are what have advanced human civilization, so I think any tool that can help you expand your ideas, and your possibilities is worthy of consideration. We don't know what's coming next.

DH: We are so excited to have Peters Valley here. It feels like you are in line with our mission. At the Museum, art is for everyone, and we encourage people who are getting started in art.

JC: Like Peters Valley, the Academy Art Museum is a teaching institution.

KM: I think what's interesting is that museums, just watching how things have changed over the last 30 years, have become community centers. The way you engage audiences to come to the Museum and bring exhibitions to life is really interesting.

JC: Thanks for taking the time to speak with us. We look forward to seeing you in the fall!

KM: I'm very grateful that you're offering this opportunity to Peters Valley and our young artists. It's a wonderful thing.

