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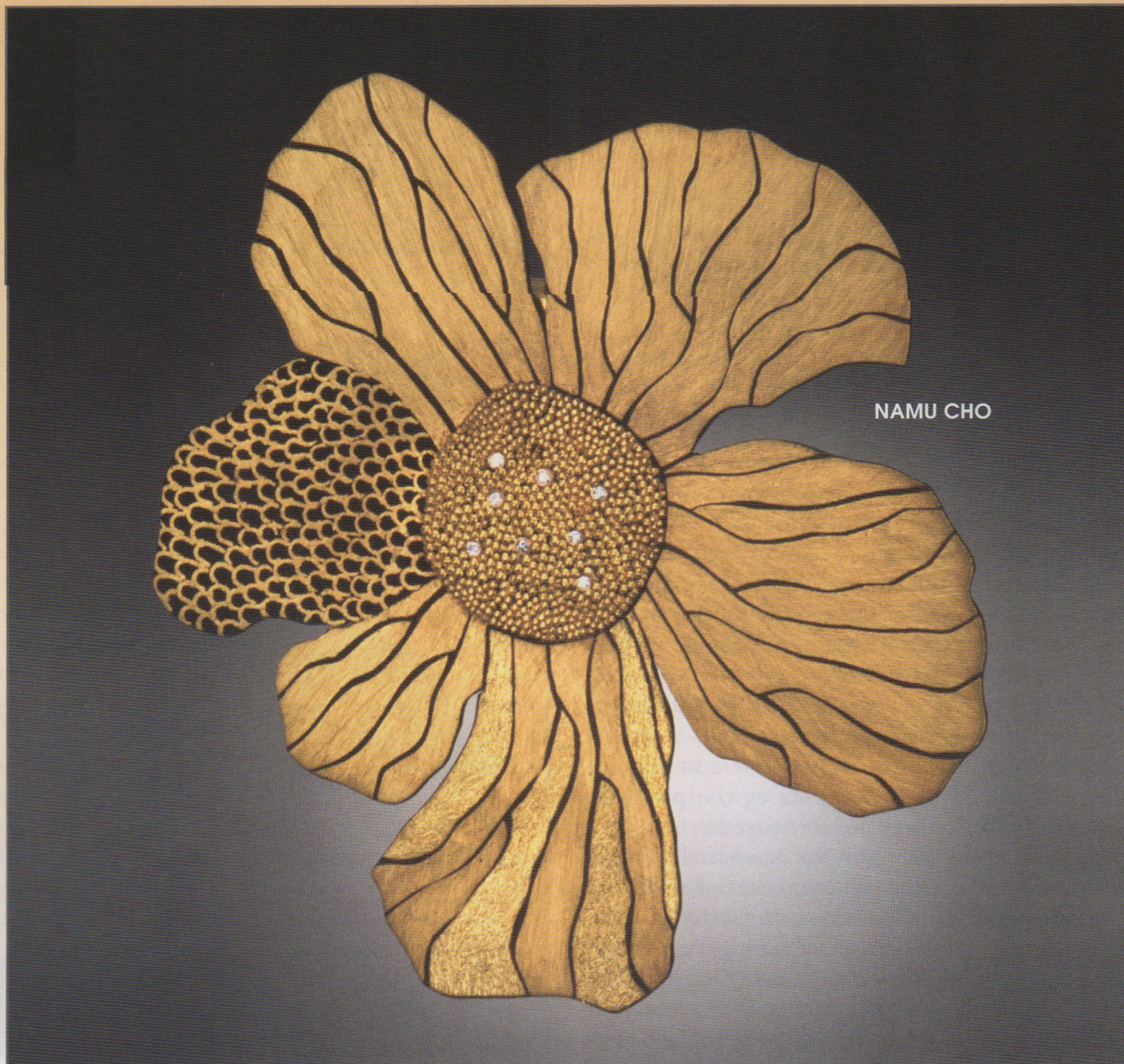
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PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART CRAFT SHOW 2016

David Updike

Each November, Philadelphia becomes the epicenter of the nation's craft world for four exhilarating days known as the Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show, as hundreds of artists and thousands of enthusiastic and discerning viewers flock to the city to immerse themselves in the best that American craft has to offer.

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the PMA Craft Show, and it promises to be a landmark exhibit. From more than a thousand applicants, the five jurors have selected one hundred ninety-five artists from thirty-four states. On display will be work representing every major craft medium, including baskets, jewelry (precious and semiprecious), metal, glass, fiber (wearable and decorative), leather, wood, furniture, paper, ceramics, and mixed-media creations. A separate category for "Emerging Artists" helps relative newcomers bring their work to a wider audience. Similarly, the special "Craft-U" section allows students and recent alumni from Temple University's Tyler School of Art, the Moore College of Art and Design, Kutztown University, and Savannah College of Art and Design to display and sell their work at one of the country's premier venues for fine crafts.



BENNETT BEAN



based in Geneva, Illinois, a western suburb of Chicago, Vali was trained as a sculptor and ceramicist in Russia and exhibited widely in her native country and abroad. After moving to the United States, she

shifted her focus to metalsmithing and jewelry. “My work with clay has definitely affected my current works,” she said. “For me, metal provides a unique opportunity to create unusual, stylish pieces with fine details and very sharp and clear lines and shapes, something I was unable to do in ceramics.”

Vali’s training as a sculptor is evident in the Calendar from Atlantis/Bells series. These conical constructions of oxidized silver, each about four inches high, feature pitted and grooved surfaces to which the artist adds rune-like symbols and other motifs in electroplated twenty-four karat gold. As the title implies, the overall effect is one of an exquisitely preserved archaeological artifact recovered from an ancient civilization. (Vali notes that although each “bell” contains a clapper and is thus technically functional, they are not necessarily designed to produce a pleasing sound.) Her fascination with the material culture of the past also drives the Measures of Value collection, sleekly modern pendants whose designs incorporate antique elements, including Chinese coins, watchmakers’ tools and mini-calipers, in a clever play on the overlapping objective and subjective meanings that accrue to “value.”

Other “Emerging Artists” this year include ceramicist Melodie Grace of Nashville, Tennessee, who, according to the artist’s statement, combines “wheel-thrown, handcarved and etched elements with both traditional and naked raku” to create pots whose textures often evoke natural materials such as pine cones. The surfaces of many of her vessels feature sharply defined images of



ALEKSANDRA VALI

you can see the influence of digital technology here and there, not so much in the techniques used (which remain mainly traditional) but in the style of imagery.”

Fellow juror Laura Mays, an Irish-born furniture designer and maker now living in California where she

directs the Fine Woodworking program at the College of the Redwoods in Fort Bragg, also noted the (perhaps ironic) influence of digital technologies on the aesthetics of handcrafted art. She sees “a move away from polychromatic patternmaking and exuberant surface, towards a clean-lined, materials-driven, neutral palette, very similar to a design-led approach. Maybe it’s the Apple influence—small radius corners, materials left unadorned though polished, visually tidy.” While acknowledging that “the entrants wish to be selected to show their work for sale,” she adds: “It really struck home that human beings are very driven towards the manipulation of material and to learn and exhibit manual and mental skill... I had a very palpable sense that the energy and commitment that the craftspeople put in is not commercially driven.”

Among the ten “Emerging Artists” selected for this year’s show is jeweler Aleksandra Vali. Now