

"A Quarterly
Published Strictly
Quarterly"

Works & Days

We Tweet for
our readers
Please enjoy our
YouTube channel

Spring 2012

Nº 2

Against Specialization

by Luke Cissell

No, this is not a fascist call to conformity. Quite the contrary. It just so happens that in today's Looking-Glass world, *specialization* itself is that great conformer – a sort of religion that everyone has been baptized into without realizing. Our world, now so crowded with highly-trained specialists, is short on breathing room for any seeking a bold new platform from which to say, "I am here."

{Cont'd}

Sierras

by Johnny Williams



Building Three:

*Strata Comma Philo
Gamma: On What is
Emergent*
by Eric Bland

Recipes:

Seasonal Ingredients,
Perennial Methods

by Ashley Suzan and Eric Wines

Teeth

by Rebecca Bersohn



"At dawn get to your fields, and one day they'll be full." - Hesiod



Tidal Basin

by Michael Hodgson



A Call to Practice

by Sarah Marriage

Ten years ago, when I began to dream of becoming a woodworker, I didn't know exactly what that would mean. I didn't know, not for certain, that I wanted to work with wood in particular. I was drawn to the scale and to the accessibility of the material and the tools it requires, but I didn't even know what working with real wood felt like, what wood smelled like, outside the formaldehyde spiked aroma of a Home Depot lumber aisle.

{Cont'd}

Cosmography

by Luke Cissell

Gears

by Prue Hyman



Prism Series

by Field Kallop



My Own Private Bayreuth

by Arturas Bumšteinas

After enquiring at the Bayreuther Festspiele box office, I was sent a letter explaining that the wait list for tickets is currently nine years long.

{J}

Chain Study

by Penelope August



Our Trespasses

Part Two of Three

by Cara Marsh Sheffler

The bar three cornfields from Downtown was called The Manger, so named because it stood where the Nativity Scene was staged during Prohibition.

The pair arrived around 10pm and confusion was instantaneous: Gabe was mistaken for his high schooldoppelganger, who had—of course—stayed local, granting the couple immediate, completely misplaced intimacy. It also allowed for the commotion that Nat's conspicuously urban presence provoked to be put to words...

{Cont'd}

Madrone Box

by Sarah Marriage



A Call to Practice

Works & Days Quarterly

by Sarah Marriage
Nº 2, Spring 2012

But skill is part practice. And practice, if it is to widen experiences, is part discipline. Knowing how to do something well can be binding, yes, if we resign ourselves to method alone. Yet more and more we modern creative individuals are admitting that if we are to express what we want to we have to be able to do it. With the right spirit, skill is the true beginning of freedom.

- James Krenov, *The Impractical Cabinetmaker*

Ten years ago, when I began to dream of becoming a woodworker, I didn't know exactly what that would mean. I didn't know, not for certain, that I wanted to work with wood in particular: I was drawn to the scale and to the accessibility of the material and the tools it requires, but I didn't even know what working with real wood felt like, what wood smelled like, outside the formaldehyde spiked aroma of a Home Depot lumber aisle. I could frame a ceiling or perform other tasks with inexpensive, pre-milled lumber. I had made things, structurally sound things, but I didn't know what it was to be a woodworker.

I now have an inkling.

Currently, I am a student at The College of the Redwoods, a school that is widely known in the woodworking community, but seldom heard of outside it. There are 18 of us first-years (with experience ranging from novice to expert), and five second-year students, stationed at workbenches learning and working eight (or more) hours a day, six days a week, for an all too short nine months.

Our learning begins with exercises: sharpen irons for hand planes, build three hand planes, cut and join a series of joints, build a small cabinet. From there we continue our education through making our own work, side by side.

What concerns me is the nature of work and learning. How does one come to know about a particular work?

For example, this publication is not specifically marketed to woodworkers, and as such I imagine there may be readers who do not know what a hand plane is, or what exactly I mean by an iron.

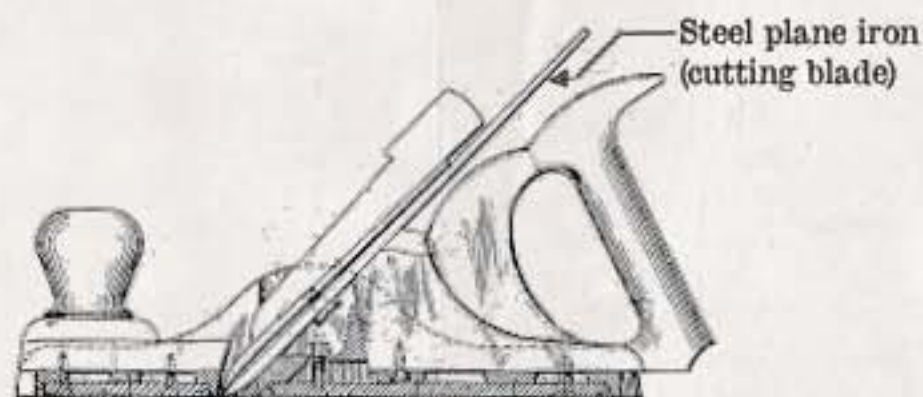


A Call to Practice

Works & Days Quarterly

by Sarah Marriage
Nº 2, Spring 2012

It's easy enough for me to explain in writing that a hand plane is a tool that allows a woodworker to shave an ever-so-thin slice from the surface of a piece of wood. The word iron in this context refers to the blade in the tool. I can include a picture of an example of the tool:



Longitudinal section of metal hand plane

And I can embed video of the tool (here a wooden hand plane) in action:



A Call to Practice

Works & Days Quarterly

by Sarah Marriage
Nº 2, Spring 2012

But with all the communication tools of an information age at my fingertips, and all the romantic language of sight and sound I can muster, I can not give you the feeling and knowledge that comes from pushing a finely tuned hand plane, with an iron so razor sharp your forearm has become a smooth monument to its effectiveness, along a finely grained hardwood, or softwood, or porous or curly or quilted wood, along interlocking grain or end grain, across the grain or against it. Nor is there an app for that, and a Wii hand planing simulator just wouldn't cut it.

One can't learn these things without doing them; one can't learn without working.

As you work, "the moves", as folks at my school call them, become easier and more refined. Your body learns more than your intellect is keeping track of. Your tools begin to become an extension of your nervous system. You can feel through them.

If I had been enamored of the idea of this work before, it was with the practice and doing that I found myself in love.

In 1877, William Morris described his age as a time "when the best school, the school of successful practice going on around you, is at such a low ebb". One hundred thirty-five years later, we can claim no better, and indeed, in the craft of woodworking, must claim worse. I don't write this to indict the woodworking world; it is home to many wonderful, hardworking, thoughtful craftsmen. Most of their work is purchased by wealthy patrons. Society as a whole is simply many generations past a time when successful practice of good woodworking going on around us was a part of the general, popular experience.

So how is a person to learn about craftsmanship? Is it by reading John Ruskin, William Morris, David Pye, Soetsu Yanagi, Lewis Mumford, or James Krenov? Going to museums and visiting workshops? Yes, definitely, yes. But I believe one must also do the work.

I know I'm not saying anything that hasn't been said before, but it needs to be said over and over, to be shouted from the bell towers that remain, painted onto the empty billboards of this recession, and hacked into the lights of Las Vegas. Hacking, I'm sure, has its great craftsmen.

One of the first exercises at my school was called The Perfect Board. We had to take a piece of rough lumber and turn it into a board with all sides perfectly flat, perfectly smooth, perfectly parallel to their opposites and perfectly orthogonal to their adjacents; and then we were to cut the board in half and rejoin it (glue it back together), perfectly undetectably. The task is impossible. Even if one were to perfectly complete it momentarily, the board will change shape over

A Call to Practice

Works & Days Quarterly

by Sarah Marriage
Nº 2, Spring 2012

time. Wood is an organic material. It has cells and was alive. Those cells, like our own, change with moisture. Or as Jim Budlong, a fine woodworker and instructor, once put it, "It's wood...boy...it's alive till it burns...foom!"

But the exercise and the metaphor are powerful teachers. I suppose that can be said of most pursuits of perfection.

What I liked about the idea of the perfect board exercise is that there is no pretense of possibility. There is no romantic notion of some sort of actual attainment of perfection, just the romance of accepting the impossibility.

Some people find the exercise *extremely* frustrating, particularly in school where it might be a hurdle before doing your own work. But I think if you let it, the exercise allows you to revel in a game that is always a part of anyone's work: how finely to work and when to stop.

In Krenov's words:

It is satisfying now to look at that surface... somewhere on it- oh, one can find it if one looks closely enough, but for the sake of vanity let me say 'somewhere'- there is a joint.

Of course, he wrote that not about an exercise, but about a door he made for a cabinet.

And so in working we are exercising, we are ever learning to make decisions about our work, which has the direct result of producing an object that is the sum of our actions and decisions, mind and body necessarily working and learning together. At our best, Krenov might say we are developing a sensitivity; Yanagi might call it learning to see as well as to know.

I have joined these ranks considerably later in life than those who've worked in wood since entering the workforce, or growing up in a parent's shop, but I am learning to do this work, and more importantly to me, as has been important also to our craft philosophers, I am finding joy in this work, and the intricacies I have thus far glimpsed.



Editorial Staff

Luke Cissell (*Against Specialization; Cosmography*) is a musician and composer who lives in Lower Manhattan. Born in Louisville, Kentucky, he was a fiddling champion at the age of eight and went on to train as a classical violinist. Cissell's recent work includes a collection of chamber music, a full-length album, and a suite for solo violin written as a companion piece to Cara Marsh Sheffler's *Guide*. He is currently at work on his second studio album and an opera based on Henry James's *The Ambassadors*. Play with his jukebox at <http://www.lukecissell.com>.

Sarah Marriage (*Madrone Box; A Call to Practice; Spring Fauna*) is a woodworking student at the College of the Redwoods Fine Woodworking program in Fort Bragg, California. Conceived in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, raised in Anchorage, Alaska, Sarah studied architecture at Princeton University and has at turns worked in the fields of architecture, structural engineering, occupational health and safety, dog-walking, data management, physics, youth empowerment, and construction supply. Recent projects include the rehabilitation of a nineteenth-century townhouse in Baltimore, Maryland. She also serves as Art Director, Designer, Programmer, and Calligrapher for *Works & Days*.

Cara Marsh Sheffler (*Our Trespasses*) is a writer who lives on Manhattan's Lower East Side. In her past life as an actress, she was featured in Woody Allen's *Celebrity* and in The Looking Glass Theatre's Off-Broadway production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. A recipient of the Eagles Prize, she has most recently been working on *Our Trespasses* and another novel about the guidebook used by the Donner Party, *Guide*. She performed an excerpt of *Guide* in tandem with Luke Cissell's (*The Myth of*) *Infinite Progress* at the Brick Theater last year. Sheffler is also providing the libretto for Cissell's adaptation of *The Ambassadors*. She likes road trips.

contact@works-and-days.com

Contributors

Penelope August (*Chain Study*) designs interiors and furniture for an architecture firm by day. At night she makes things with her hands. She often works in mediums that require a transformation by fire or sun, where the end result is not entirely in her control. She has been working with clay for 22 years. She has 84 houseplants. She lives in Williamsburg, Brooklyn with her husband.

Born in Los Angeles, **Rebecca Bersohn** (*Teeth*) is a New York based artist. She received her BFA at New York University. Her work has been exhibited at Monster Island, Charlie Horse Gallery, the Market Hotel in Brooklyn, BWAC and The Commons Gallery at NYU. Her Awards in the Arts include Bank of America Art Award 2004, an Artist's Distinction Award (2003) for an ink/water color piece at the California Art Education Association Los Angeles County Exhibit and the Governor's Art Scholar Award 2002-2003.

Eric Bland's (*Building Three*) latest play, *All the Indifferent Children of the Earth*, was described as "death-obsessed" and "awesomely eloquent." He studied Writing for Performance at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and poetry and playwriting at Princeton.

A native of Vilnius, Lithuania, **Arturas Bumšteinas** (*My Own Private Bayreuth #1 and #2*) is a composer/performer of acoustic and electronic music. After graduating from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theater, he founded three musical ensembles: *Quartet Twentytwentyone*, *Zarasai*, and *Works and Days*. His various projects have been presented in dozens of exhibitions around Europe. Festival participation includes: The Holland Festival, Sensoralia/Romaeuropa, Angelica, Jauna Muzika, Sonic Circuits, Cut & Splice, Skanumezs, Wundergrund, KODY, and Full Pull. Collaborators include: Anton Lukoszevieve, Laura Garbštie, Jesse Glass, Piotr Kurek, Alina Orlova, Lina Lapelyte, Jeff Surak, Borut Savski, Pure, Vladimir Tarasov, Dominykas Vyšniauskas, Liudas Mockunas, and Max Reinhardt. His music has been published by the following labels: Belt, Zeromoon, Con-v, NUUN, Sangoplasmo, Cronica Electronica, Semplice Records, and Nexsound. From 2006-2011, he was represented by Galerie Antje Wachs in Berlin; today, he lives and works in Riga, Latvia. His work may be found at <http://arturasbumsteinas.tumblr.com/>.

Michael Hodgson (*Tidal Basin*) hails from the wilds of New Hampshire by way of Princeton, NJ and now resides in the Hudson River Valley. He is a photographer who still uses film. He mourns the pending bankruptcy of Kodak and is stockpiling his photapocalypse kit accordingly.

Prue Hyman (*Gears*) enjoys observing unexpected details and using historic photographic processes. She spent extensive time in the late aughts on the road, photographing musicians. A native New Yorker, she currently lives in Chinatown. Her work can be viewed at www.pruehyman.com and is available for sale via direct contact. She is a connoisseur of jokes pertaining to her surname.

Field Kallop (*Prism Series*) was born and raised in New York, NY. After working at El Museo de la Nación in Lima Perú, and at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, Field shifted her focus from curatorial projects to making art. She became an assistant to the artist Chuck Close and established a studio practice, allowing her to devote more of her time to her own painting. Kallop recently received an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, where her work underwent a significant transformation. After giving up oil paint, she began exploring new materials and experimenting with various processes. While her interests remained consistent—she continues to be inspired by mathematical principles and scientific phenomena—her work started to take on a range of new forms. Kallop is now back in NYC, and lately she has been working with indigo and bleach on fabric. To view more of her work, visit www.fieldkallop.com.

Willow Jane Sainsbury (*Spring Fauna*) is an artist and illustrator, who currently lives in Vicenza, Italy. She has lived in Melbourne, Australia; Auckland, New Zealand; and Oxford, United Kingdom in the past three years where she continues to teach, learn and work as an artist. She most recently returned to education, learning printmaking at the Australian Print Workshop. She is currently working on her own illustration project and a study of landscapes. She is not on Facebook.

California-grown and a New Yorker at heart, **Ashley Suzan** (*Recipes*) is a graduate of the Gallatin School at New York University. The youngest of four, Ashley was raised in the kitchen. An avid yogi and spinning enthusiast, her creative passions include drawing, food, and beverage. Follow her on Twitter @AshleySuzan.

Johnny Williams (*Sierras*) is an aspiring furniture maker gone missing in the headlands of Northern California. He was last seen building two children's chairs at the College of the Redwoods Fine Furniture program, one in madrone, another in bay laurel. If you see him, tell him to sober up and head home to New York: his boyfriend and mother miss him dearly.

Eric Wines (*Recipes*) enjoys trolling flea markets for treasures, playing with plants, and distance running. He is co-owner of Tre restaurant in Manhattan and a member of The Skylight Group. He hosts candlelight suppers and classy cocktail parties. Wines was raised in Detroit, MI and lives in New York City. Follow him on Twitter @EricWines.