

# AlbuquerqueJournal

## Albuquerque artist to bring his passion for basket weaving to online exhibition

BY ADRIAN GOMEZ / JOURNAL ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR  
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The “Balance Interrupted” basket is made of waxed linen thread with a metal counterweight. (Courtesy of Cael Chappell)

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Basketry is a medium that Cael Chappell believes is important.

The intricacy is often overlooked and he’d like to change the narrative.

While the Albuquerque-based artist has only been creating baskets for four years, he’s been collaborating with basket makers for nearly two decades.

“Basketry is one of the least appreciate mediums,” he says. “Baskets are one of the first handcrafts ever done. It’s universal to human kind. Cultures have woven baskets at one point and in other cultures, it’s been lost. I want to keep the medium as a discussion topic.”



Albuquerque artist Cael Chappell created Baskets of Africa in 2002 to support weavers and their families in rural Africa. He makes yearly trips to Africa and brings back goods to sell in Albuquerque. (Courtesy of Cael Chappell)

Chappell is also the only Albuquerque artist featured in the online exhibit, “CraftBoston: Fiber Stories,” which opens on July 16 and runs through Aug. 29. The exhibit is created and curated by the Society of Arts + Crafts.

According to organizers, the exhibit spotlights almost 50 of the best fiber artists from across the country, showcasing their work and emphasizing the compelling stories behind the art form.

The show highlights the full spectrum of fiber crafts, spanning traditional and avant-garde materials and techniques related to the fiber arts and including knitting, weaving, basketry, felting and quilting.

“I’ve never been in a show for me,” he says. “The exhibit has seven of my pieces in it and it’s the biggest selection that I’ve ever had in one place.”

Chappell created Baskets of Africa in 2002 to support weavers and their families in rural Africa, and he has been working in basketry and related arts for most of his life.

His preferred material is waxed flax linen thread, and his style is uniquely irreverent, whimsical, and yet respectful of the art form and its originators.

“The designs appear in my head and I figure out a way to make them come to life,” he says. “I’ve had people ask me to make a similar one and it’s impossible.”



“Suessesque Cat’s Hat” basket is made of waxed linen thread. (Courtesy of Cael Chappell)



Chappell creates miniature baskets as small as a thimble.  
(Courtesy of Cael Chappell)

With Baskets of Africa, he travels to villages in Africa and helps sell their baskets here in the United States.

He sells the African pieces from his store, Baskets of Africa, on Eubank and Indian School NE, where there are 15,000 pieces from 22 different communities.

Chappell usually makes a trip every year, but didn't go last year due to the pandemic.

He credits the African artists for pushing him to design his own work.

“The translators would tell me that the artists wanted me to sit down and make some baskets,” he says. “I would tell them, ‘I don't know how to weave baskets.’ After saying that for 15 years to them, I took time to sit down and learn how to weave baskets.”

Some time later, he took a five-day course with Lois Russell, who has pioneered some techniques.

“The first day in class, I was twining baskets from wax linen thread,” he says. “Lois came over and asked me why I was doing it backwards. She taught me how to go forward and then I started experimenting with shape and design.”

Chappell says his basket weaving has become more seasonal as he also enjoys gardening during spring and summer.

He used his time wisely during the pandemic and let his imagination run wild within his creative process.

One of his creations, “Balance Interrupted,” was directly inspired by the pandemic. While the basket is vertical, it bends to the right making it look like it will fall over.

“It represents how our lives got upended with the pandemic,” he says. “The designs in it came to me and I think it came out beautiful. It’s something that I’ve never seen before.”

The range in size of each piece also varies.

Chappell is able to create baskets that are as small as a thimble.

“There’s so much time placed in each piece because I don’t repeat designs,” he says. “I’m so glad to be able to be recognized as someone who is keeping the art form alive while evolving it.”



Albuquerque artist Cael Chappell (Courtesy of Cael Chappell)

### **Online**

[societyofcrafts.org/fiber-stories-coming-soon](https://societyofcrafts.org/fiber-stories-coming-soon)