

## SECOND ROUND OF INNOVATION GRANTS RECOGNIZES CRAFT ARTISTS SEEKING TO IMPACT COMMUNITIES

**Massachusetts artists Laura Petrovich-Cheney and Sarah Madeleine T. Guerin receive grants aimed at encouraging new directions and innovation in craft.**

BOSTON – July 19, 2023 – The Society of Arts + Crafts (the Society) announced today a second round of awards in its Craft Innovation Jumpstarter Grant program to two artists: **Laura Petrovich-Cheney** from Marblehead, Mass., whose work with salvaged wood aims to encourage playfulness in craft; and **Sarah Madeleine T. Guerin** from Wakefield Mass., who practices and reimagines the art of leather bootmaking. The mini-grants, made possible by the Maxwell/Hanrahan Foundation, support artists looking to pursue new directions and ideas, and are part of the Society’s larger efforts to meet the needs of modern craft artists.

The Society received more than 100 applications for the grants according to Trustee **Katina Leodas**, who served as one of four jurors alongside former Trustee and fiber artist **Lois Russell**, mixed-media artist **Jessica Calderwood**, and furniture maker **Michael Puryear**.

A wood and fiber artist who is also a part-time elementary school art teacher, Laura Petrovich-Cheney’s process includes using salvaged wood collected after natural disasters to create wall sculptures inspired by traditional women’s textiles, crafts, and American patchwork scrap quilts. She is currently the artist-in-residence at the Boston Children’s Museum which is hosting her latest exhibition, *Weathered Shapes, Wooden Quilts*, on display through September 4, 2023. She also is running a program that highlights connections between play and creativity. Her Craft Innovation Jumpstarter Grant funds this two-part project that brings together artists around the topic and supports development of the exhibition. In June, Petrovich-Cheney convened working sculptors and fiber artists, and an artist/engineer from MIT Media Lab, to discuss play through the lens of materials experimentation.



“Craft and play are essential in promoting creativity, problem-solving and self-expression, as well as providing a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment,” Petrovich-Cheney says. “The core of play for me is experimentation, imagination, and freedom, which allow me to step outside my comfort zone and explore new possibilities without fear of failure or judgment. Adopting a playful mindset allows me to work with new motifs, such as houses and stars, and create innovative work full of energy and vitality.”

Sarah Madeleine T. Guerin uses traditional boot-making techniques to create artistic and functional footwear, and to bring awareness to the environmental and social impact of footwear manufacturing in New England and around the world. One of a small group of women who handcraft boots, Guerin is

deeply rooted in research around footwear history and has collaborated with numerous museums to identify traditional leather and sewing tools in their collections. Her grant will fund establishment of a long-term collaboration with the Buttonwoods Museum in Haverhill, Mass., a one-time shoemaking hub. With a goal of creating a lending library of tools, this innovative partnership is working to develop the next generation of bootmakers.



“Boot-making tools are rare and difficult to find, but I am unearthing a trove of them in many museums’ storage collections,” Guerin says. “With this funding, I’ll begin the daunting task of sorting through Buttonwood’s collection with the intention of reconnecting these objects to the purpose for which they were created and supporting our community with access to specialized tools no longer made.”

Leodas says jurors felt the winning artists were highly accomplished, demonstrating advanced levels of skill and creativity. “Collectively, Sarah and Laura have a strong sense of belonging to a craft community, and their projects are designed to help and strengthen those communities,” she says. “Both work with other organizations and make craft a part of more lives. They are both uniquely positioned at the crossroads of heritage skills and innovative fine craft and have focused plans that are working toward specific goals. We think they’ll make great use of the grants and we congratulate them as they move further on their projects.”

Russell said the overwhelming application response demonstrates how important even modest grants are to craft artists in New England. “The applications showed many artists need support to move their work forward,” Russell says. “The proposals also painted a picture of how artists are looking to be supported. Through financial means of course, but also in the need to rejoin communities after the pandemic, and find ongoing training and mentorship.”

### **ABOUT THE SOCIETY OF ARTS + CRAFTS**

For more than 125 years, the Society of Arts + Crafts has connected artists with the communities that sustain them. The organization has been at the forefront of the American craft movement, fostering the development, sales, recognition and education of fine craft. Its mission is to support and celebrate craft makers and their creativity; its vision is to build and sustain a vibrant and diverse community and to shape the future of craft. See the full mission [here](#).

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