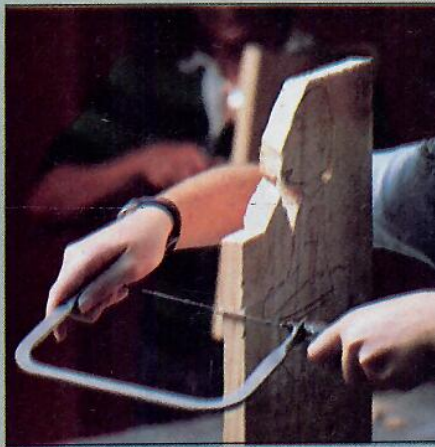


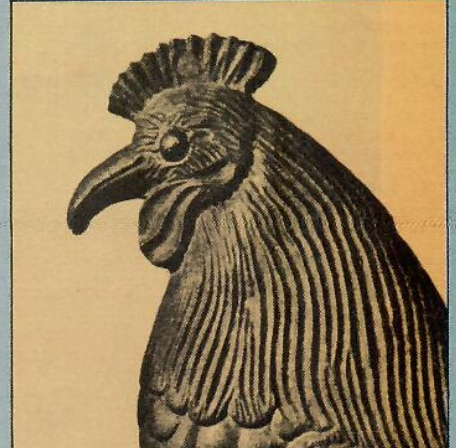
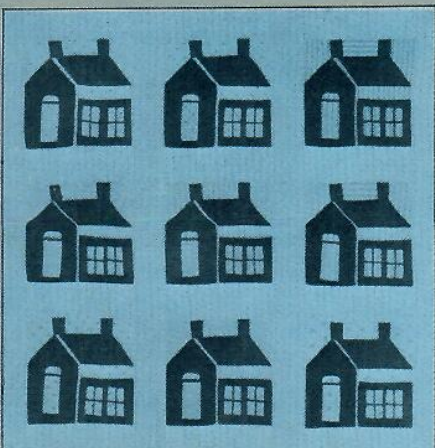
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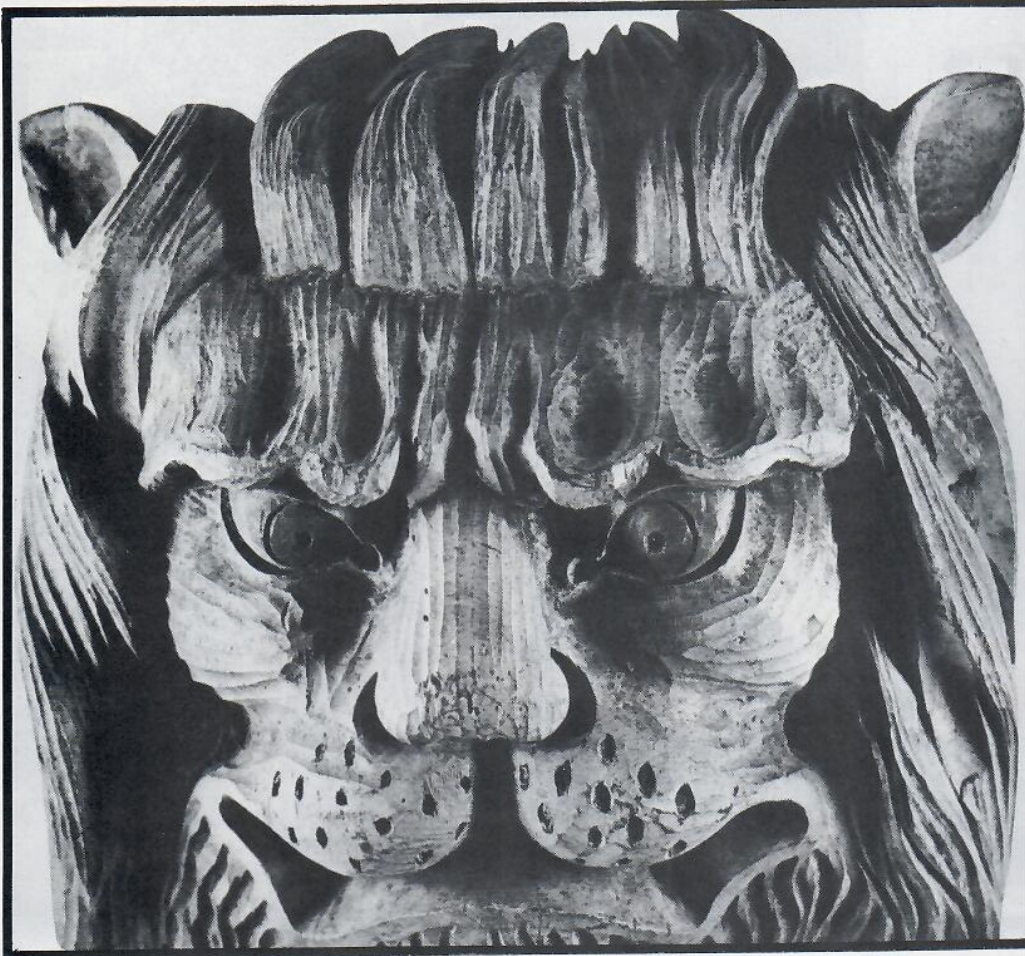
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The Art of
Folk Art
and Crafts





"Cathead," 1859. Old Sturbridge Village, MA.

Which Is the Real Piece of Folk Art?

On these pages you see two pieces of art. Both are of the same subject. One is carved, the other painted. One is new, the other old. Which is folk art?

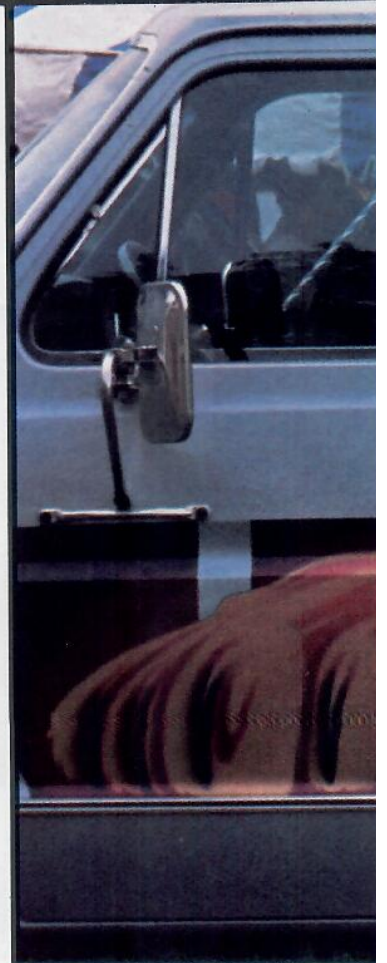


Photo by Gordon Barr, Black Star

First of all, what is folk art? It's almost easier to say what it isn't. It's not done by famous artists. It's not studied in art school. It's not done in cities very often. It's connected to crafts, but not all crafts are folk art.

Folk art is very personal. Folk artists don't usually have any art training. Their art is honest and it says something about their lives. And, often, the piece or the object decorated has a practical use.

Look at the two pieces again. Now can you tell which one is folk art? Or could they both be?

If you decided the sculpture (*left*) is folk art, you're right. But what is it? Furniture decoration? The top of a cane? Nineteenth-century sailors would recognize it immediately because they saw it every day. It's a "cathead," a very important part of an old sailing ship. The rope that holds

the anchor (the "cat") was wrapped around this "cathead." Can you tell why the artist chose a lion's head?

About the same time as the great sailing ships, folk art was at its height all across the United States. There were no machines yet to make furniture, dishes, blankets, weather vanes, kitchen tools and other household items. They all had to be handmade. And if the quiltmakers, the potters, the metalsmiths were creative, they would put something of their own lives into their handiwork. Flowers, birds, or even a tiny village might decorate a quilt. Weather vanes were made in the shape of farm animals, birds, ships, or fish.

But what about the other lion's head painted on the van below? Can it also be folk art? Are the people who paint vans usually famous artists? Do the paintings you have seen on

vans seem to say something about the times we live in? Is it a personal, decorative kind of art?

Today, even though we *can* buy everything machine-made, we don't. Crafts of all types are making a comeback and when those crafts go beyond technique and say something personal to a great number of people in a simple, forceful way, they become folk art. And so we have the new folk art on vans, and the folk art of decorated jeans and jackets.

In this issue we'll explore both folk art and crafts. You'll learn about Grandma Moses, a traditional folk artist of recent times. You'll visit the Minnesota State Fair where teenagers are learning and living crafts. You'll meet a young potter in upstate New York. And the workshop will show you how to create your own "folk" sculpture out of wood.



Teenagers at Work in the Arts

ARTS-IN:

A Week-long Art Experience



The state fair is only two weeks away. There's so much to do—how do you get it all done? Have an Arts-In!



Arts-In teenagers learn the craft of macrame as they create a pair of enormous plant-holders.

They had all paid \$40 for a week's food and lodging on the Minnesota State Fairgrounds in St. Paul. And they arrived with paintbrushes, musical instruments, sewing machines, and other creative "tools." The sleeping bags tucked under their arms were stowed in two gigantic dormitory rooms filled with wall-to-wall bunk beds.

They were excited! Many of these teenagers, ages 16-19, had never been to a big city before. Sharing the living space were some 150 unfamiliar people their own age from all parts of the state, and a few from faraway places like Sweden and Switzerland. What they had in common was 4-H (the national youth organization). They had all applied to the state 4-H office to take part in Arts-In, a week-long experience of work and fun. Their task: to dress up the massive 4-H building for the Minnesota State Fair. Forty of them would transform two large open floors into attractive exhibi-

tion areas. Others would stitch costumes and build scenery for those performing in musicals. They had a lot to do and only a week to put it all together. It was mid-August and the state fair was only two weeks away.

As you probably know, state fairs are huge shows. Livestock are inspected, home-grown vegetables are judged, and crafts of all types are displayed. Many of these activities go on at the 4-H building, and the Arts-In teenagers, under the guidance of professional artists, were determined to create a fantastic stage for all of them. These teenagers had never decorated a hall as big as a football field before, or performed for thousands of people, but that didn't stop them. In the end they accomplished things they had never dreamed of doing.

Take Dean Hardel, for example. He helped to construct six 15-foot papier mâché birds (*top*). These birds were planned as symbols of the 1978 Arts-In

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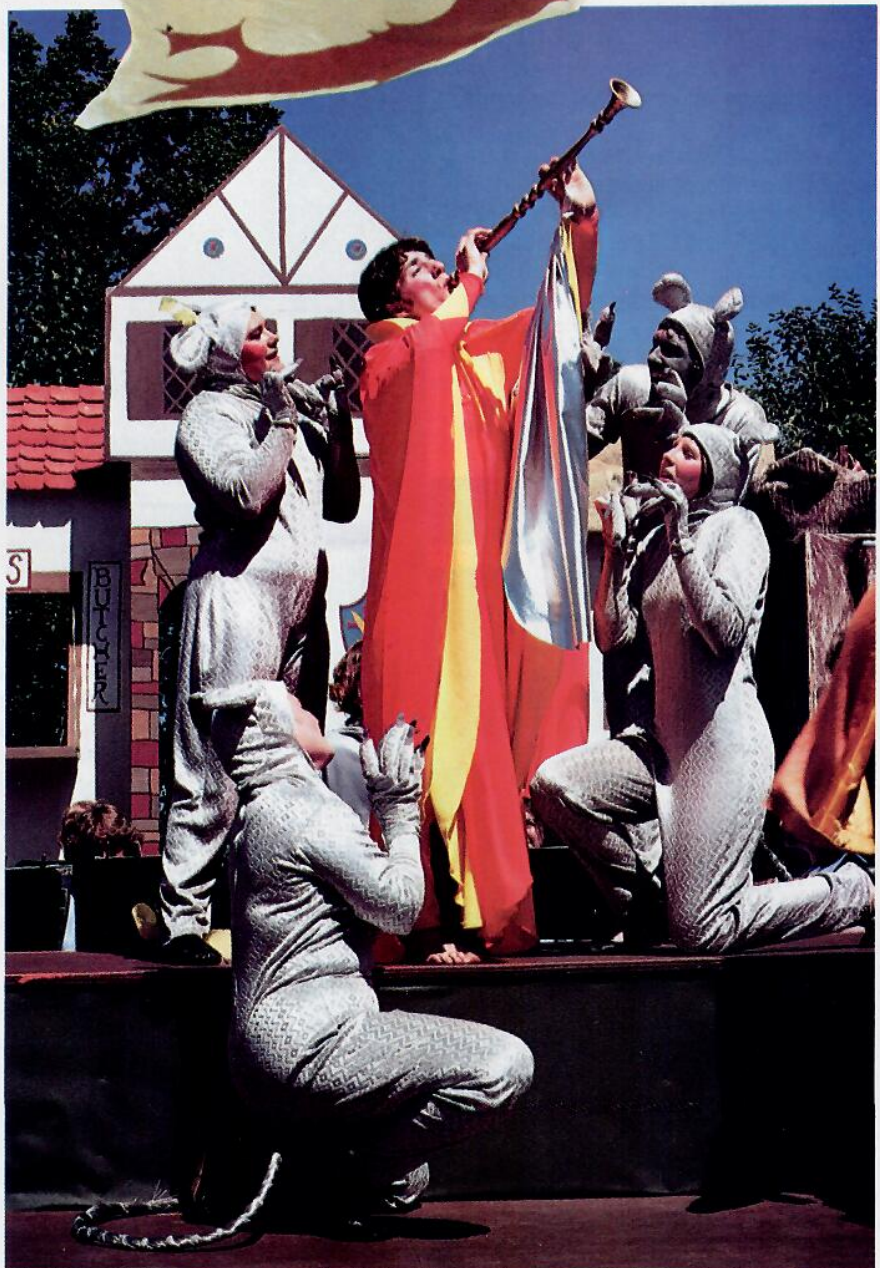
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Photos by Janet Soderberg



16-year-old Chris Kraai applies make-up for his role as a rat in the 4-H production of "The Magical Pied Piper."

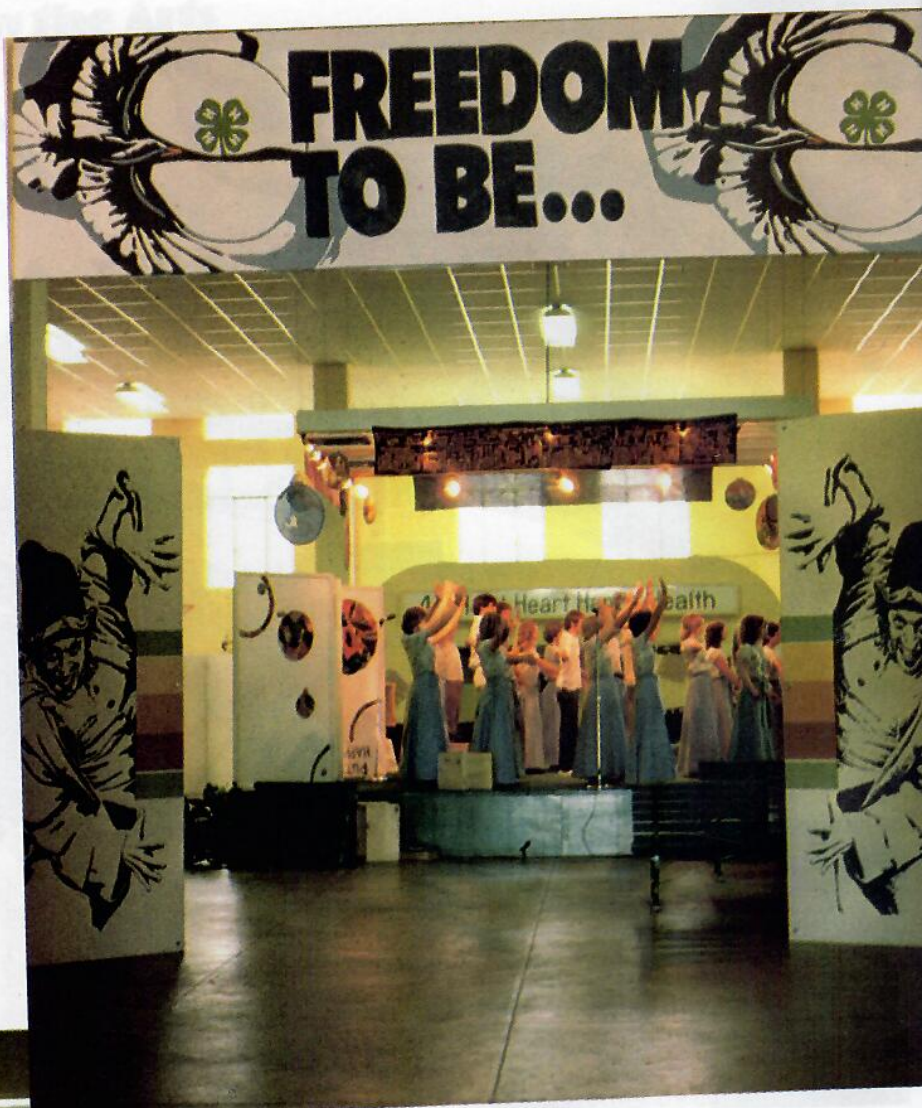


Teenagers at Work ARTS-IN

theme, "Freedom to Be." Dean likes to paint and draw, but creating on a scale this large was a first. He had his share of problems: "I didn't know what I was getting into. Trying to shape the birds—you couldn't see up close. We had to stand on ladders to get the whole picture."

No wonder Dean and his friends were up until two or three in the morning. But no one seemed to mind. "Once you get on the track," said Dean, "it's better to keep going." So they pasted and painted, and when the six brightly painted birds finally took shape, everyone was relieved and proud.

Painting posters to decorate the completed 4-H exhibition hall (right).



At week's end, the empty, drab 4-H building was no longer recognizable. Large batik hangings brightened platforms. Huge birds and tall macramé plant-holders hung from the ceiling, and bright, contemporary poster-panels decorated aisles and walls.

Changes were taking place inside *people* too—inside these teenagers. Art now meant something different. One girl summed up her feelings this way: "Art seems a lot more free. I thought art had to be perfect to be any good. But I'm not an artist and people liked what I did. Art is your own thing, whatever you want it to be." For all the *Arts-In* participants, art had, somehow, become more real.

Arts-In Focus

Instant Batik

Robin, Lisa, and Susie have just finished creating this wall-piece for *Arts-In*. They used *batik*, a way to make designs on cloth. Here, they'll show you how to do "instant batik."

To decorate demonstration platforms and stages, one crew of Arts-In teenagers created batik hangings. Very few had done batik before—they learned by doing. Batik involves painting, waxing, "scrunching," and dyeing cloth. The result is a cracked-effect like the cracks and lines in nature. On the next page you'll see just how they created the piece below.

Materials

white unbleached muslin
wax crayons
an iron

plain white paraffin
muffin tin
dye

electric frypan
newspapers

Robin Simons,
Lisa Grabow,
Susie Grabow



Instant Batik



3



4



6



7



8



9

- 1 Sketch out your design on paper. ★
- 2 Transfer the design to a piece of muslin. ★
- 3 Place a muffin tin in an electric frypan half-filled with water. Melt down wax crayons (the colors you want in your design) in the muffin tin sections. Add a third to a half a stick of plain white paraffin to your colors and heat almost to the boiling stage.
- 4 Place newspapers under your cloth (to absorb excess wax) and then paint on your wax colors. Use short brushstrokes and paint a small section at a time. It's important that the wax be hot enough to sink into the cloth. If it produces a whitish look on the cloth, it is too cold. (Scrape it off and start again!)
- 5 Mix a dark-colored dye that will complement your other colors, and let it cool. (Hot dye will *destroy* your batik.) ★
- 6 When the wax has cooled and hardened on your cloth, scrunch up your work.
- 7 Submerge the cloth in the dye for about five minutes.
- 8 Hang the cloth up to dry.
- 9 When the cloth is completely dry, place newspapers on top and underneath and begin ironing small sections at a time. This will take out the wax and leave the cloth soft (if you plan to hang your batik, leave some of the wax in to give it body). Don't leave the iron on too long or the colors will run. Keep changing the newspapers.

You can vary this process to produce different effects. Perhaps you'd like part of your batik to be without cracks. Instead of painting this section with wax, leave it white so it will take the dye as a flat color.

Susie Grabow, who helped make this batik hanging, offers a final word of advice: "Don't worry if you see your work changing so much with each step. That's what makes it exciting. You may think you've ruined it, but you haven't. Most of the things that go wrong you can fix. And some mistakes, like drips in the wrong places, look nice!"



Artist of the Month

Randy Williamson: Potter

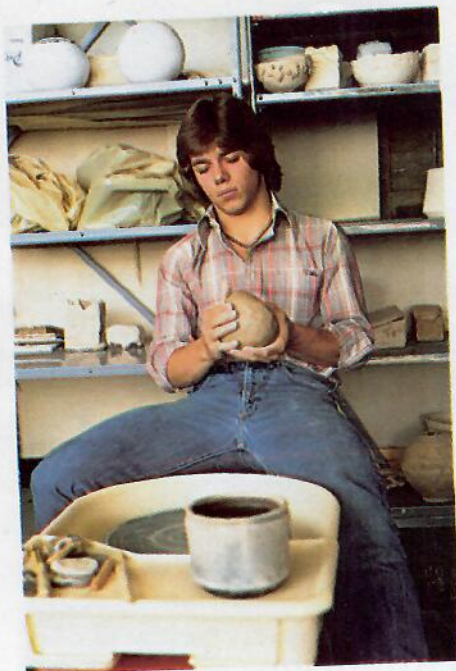
Slowly, with great concentration and control, a mound of clay is transformed. It becomes a pot. Randy Williamson, 16, will tell you how it's done.

When he was in the eighth grade, Randy Williamson saw a pottery demonstration in art class. He was intrigued by the way the potter formed the clay into a pot on the spinning potter's wheel. That demonstration opened up a whole new world for him. He wanted to learn how to do it himself. So every other day he came back to the art room after school and practiced "throwing" pots. ("Throwing" refers to making a pot on a potter's wheel.)

Randy's a junior now, and he's thrown close to 500 pots. Ordinary pots don't interest him so much anymore. He'd rather make a piece like the one you see on the next page. He calls it "My Little Mushroom House." We visited him at his home in Fairport, New York, to talk about pottery.

How did the very first pot you made turn out?

It was a disaster. I thought I would be able to throw a beautiful pot the first time I sat down at the wheel. But I was moving the wheel too fast and I wasn't using enough water. My hands got stuck on the clay and the pot came right off the wheel.



You see, there are a lot of things you have to control—the speed of the wheel, your fingers. You have to be able to keep your fingers perfectly still, without flexing them. If you move your hand and push it against the clay, it will throw the pot off center. You can't make a pot that way. You might as well crush up the clay and start all over again.

Were you ever tempted to give up?

Oh, yes. It really was discouraging. I'd sit there after school, and I'd throw and throw, and I couldn't get what I wanted. After a couple of months, I'd throw a good pot every now and then. It would take a half hour or so. By the end of the year I could throw a good pot in five or ten minutes.

What are the main steps in throwing a pot?

First there's "wedging," to get the air bubbles out of the clay. (The clay is sliced into handsized chunks and thrown forcefully on a board; this is repeated several times.) Then you have to learn how to center a ball of clay on the wheel. (It is thrown onto the center of the wheel.) Next you "open" the clay (create an opening in the top of the mound of clay) and start bringing it up into a cylinder. At the end you put a rim on.

And you kept practicing these steps for almost a year, right?

Yes, I'd throw one or two pots a day. Not every day. Throwing can get very boring if you ask me. There aren't very many different things you can do on a wheel. That's why I started experimenting with "hand-building" techniques. The next year, that's primarily what I did.

Could you describe some of these techniques?

Putting handles on is one thing. Or I'd join two pots to make a double pot. Sometimes I'd even take scraps and little cuttings of clay and throw them at the pot when it was moving around on the wheel. By the end of the year I was getting into the *design* of the pots and working on glazes. (A pot is painted with glaze and then fired in a kiln, or oven, to produce a hard, shiny surface.)

Is firing very difficult?

Yes, you have to take the pot out of the kiln when it's red hot and place it in this barrel filled with sawdust. (This is the difficult "raku" method which produces interesting colors and textures.) You have to have a fan to get rid of all the smoke. Sometimes you still fill up the whole room with smoke. One time we couldn't see from one end to the other.

Anything can happen. You can open up the barrel and find your pots in little pieces. Only about 50 percent of your pots come out in one piece. You've just got to accept that. It's not easy. Sometimes I'll throw a tantrum. One day, I got so mad I threw a couple of pots against the wall. My teacher came running over: "What's going on back here?" It's a good thing we're friends.

Do you do all of your work at school?

Most of it. I have a girl friend who has a wheel down in her basement and I'll go down to throw for the fun of it. Sometimes we just throw the clay at each other. The work that I'm really serious about I do in school.

How do you get ideas for pieces?

I look through pottery books or I get tips from my teacher. Last year I went to "Super Mud," this potters' conference. Potters from all over the country were there. They pointed out something really important. Your best ideas and designs come right from nature—the swerves in trees, the way branches move, the little landscapes that you see.

Could you tell us how you made your mushroom house?

Well, I've always liked mushroom rooms, so I put together this little landscape of mushrooms. I got more into it and it started becoming like a fantasy landscape. I kept adding to it and I was thinking, "Gosh, this is really getting on pretty well. I wonder what it would look like on a pedestal." So I threw a pedestal. I was so enthusiastic about it that my art teacher left me with the keys to the classroom, and I stayed there alone after class. But I had to throw with the lights out, because no one



could know I was in there. I couldn't see what I was doing half the time. But when I joined the landscape to the pedestal, I just fell in love with it.

I started adding more. To cover up the place where the mushrooms were joined to the pedestal, I placed little clumps of grass. Then, I added flowing lines and more grass to lead your eye up the pedestal to the mushrooms.

How did the firing go?

I was thinking there was no way it would make it because there were so many delicate parts. But when you take it out of the kiln, you have to be quick because of the heat (close to 1900°) in there. The piece is so hot you have to get it into the barrel fast. Well, I grabbed it in the wrong place and crushed some of the mushrooms. They broke and jumped right up to the top. And they stuck there—the glaze just glued them on. I was so lucky it wasn't wrecked.

When I took it out of the barrel, it was almost black from the smoke. I let it cool down and then I had to scrub it to get the film off. It took a good two or three hours to get down to the real colors.

And the real colors—were they the colors you wanted?

Yes. I couldn't believe it. Everything turned out just the way I wanted.



Making a Folk Art Sculpture

The wood sculpture on the right is called a "whirligig." It was made about a century ago as a toy or an ornament. The arms are attached to a rod and whirl when the wind blows. Many of these kinds of toys were made, but only a few are works of art.

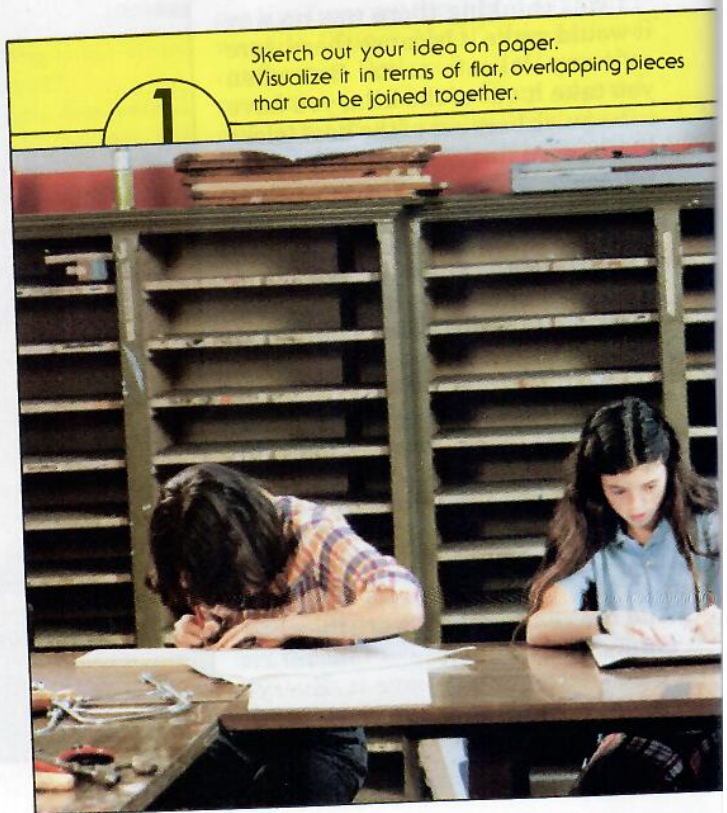
Does this figure look like a real person? Look at the long, simplified forms, the curves that somehow "work" with each other, and the contrasting patterns made by the bright colors. What would happen if any of these elements were changed in any way?

In this issue we've been looking at "folk art," and discovering that art doesn't always have to be done by people like Rembrandt, Monet and Leonardo da Vinci who knew every artistic technique of their time. These artists are part of the Western "fine arts tradition." This kind of "fine art" is usually thought of in terms of the masterpieces we see in museums. It is an artistic heritage practiced by people who call themselves artists, and who have learned their craft from the artists who came before them.

This month, Art & Man looks at a very different aspect of our artistic tradition. It is just as old as the "fine arts," just as important, and has been practiced, seen, and enjoyed by at least as many people. This is the part of our artistic heritage we call FOLK ART—an art of the "everyday." A tradesman's sign, a child's toy, a farmer's weather vane are functional and decorative objects made by people who may not consider themselves artists. These objects, like Grandma Moses' paintings, do not follow the "requirements" of the "fine arts" (things we have studied like perspective, proportion, and "technique"). The artist follows whatever course he or she feels will lead to the desired result. Often, the solution will be the most direct, simple, and visually pleasing one. This is why so many folk art pieces are so expressive. So as you make your "folk art" sculpture, try to forget your art "technique," and concentrate instead on creating the most direct and expressive object that you can!

STARTING OUT: Take a look at the art featured in this issue. Think about the way folk art so often expresses the everyday, and portrays the "time" during which it was made. Think that your grandchildren might see the object you will make, and that, from it, they will understand some aspect of the time (1978) in which you made it. Try to visualize the most direct way to portray some commonplace activity, event, or object (perhaps you are making a sign for a local store?). As you are planning your sculpture, consider whether it will have parts that move, like the whirligig on the right. Once you have visualized the "theme" of your sculpture, you are ready to begin.

Sketch out your idea on paper. Visualize it in terms of flat, overlapping pieces that can be joined together.



Does this look like a sculpture you'd find in a museum? Does it look like a great work of art? If you said yes, you'd be right. But if you said no, you'd also be right. Read the next few pages to find out more about this work, and how you can become a "folk artist."

MATERIALS

Pine Boards (1" × 10" or 1/2" × 6", depending on the size of your sculpture)

1/4" wooden dowels

Coping saws

hand drill with 1/4" bit

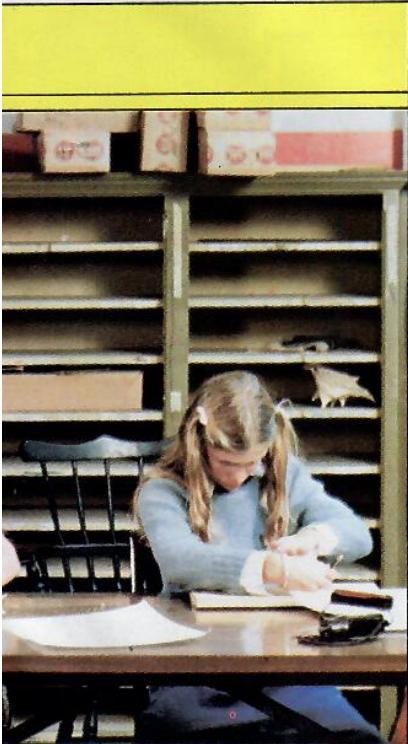
wood files, or rasps

sand paper

paint or stain and brushes

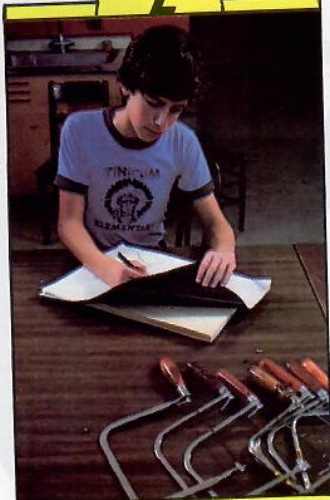
drawing paper, carbon paper, and pencils

In addition, you will need a place to work that has a vise.



Whirligig, painted pine.
Pennsylvania German, 19th
century, the Index of American
Design, National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D C.

2



Trace your drawing onto the wood (using carbon paper).

3



Cut with the coping saw.

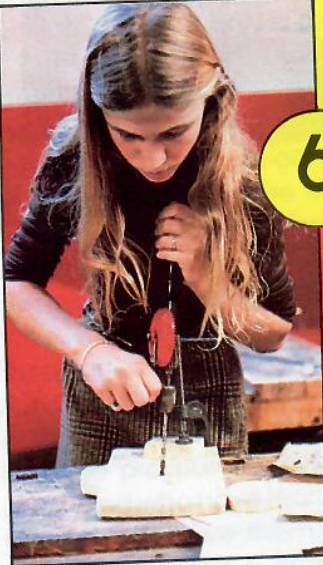


Cut carefully around the outside. Simplify the forms.



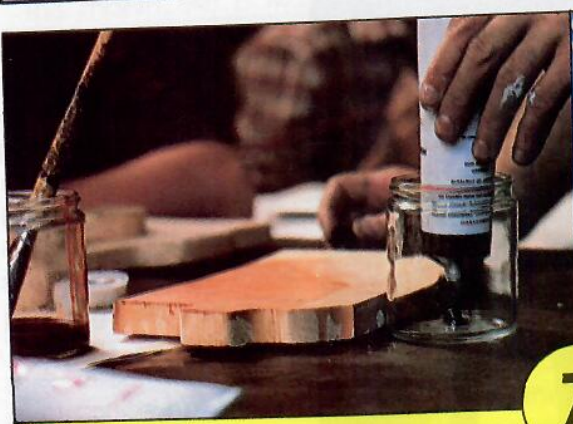
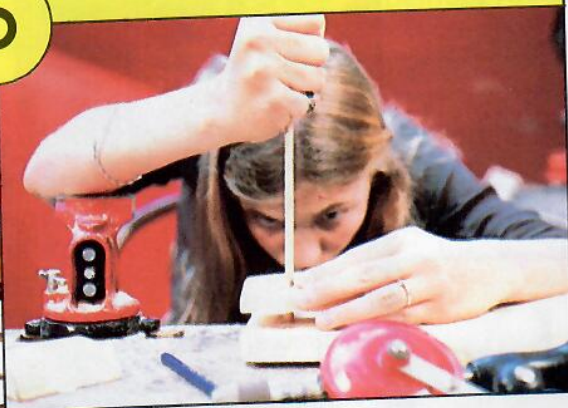
For "inside" pieces, drill a hole and put the blade through it.

6



Which part do you want to move?
Drill a hole.

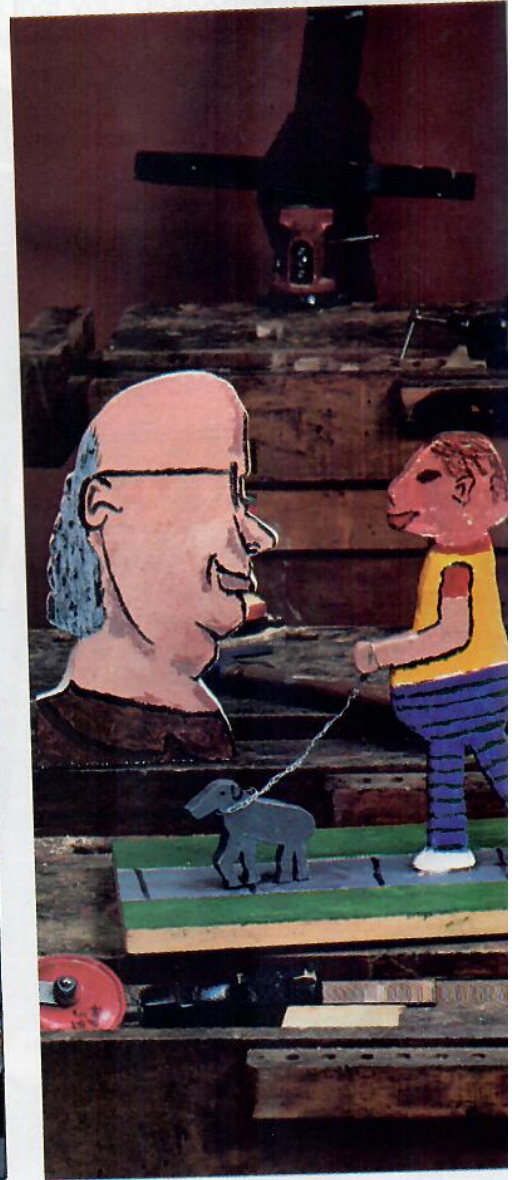
Put in a dowel. Glue in one end of the dowel.



Do you want to stain or paint your piece?
To mix a stain, put a little oil point (raw sienna and/or burnt umber) in a lot of turpentine.

Before painting your piece, cover it with gesso.

7



4



File edges. Clamp sculpture between two pieces of wood. Use round rasp for curves.

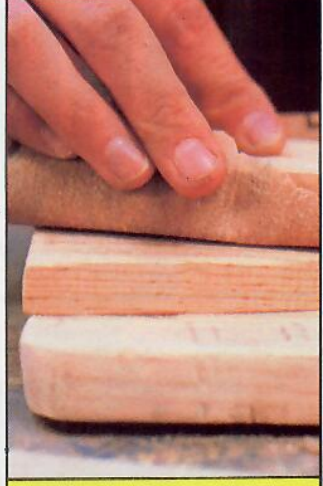


Use straight rasp for flat areas.



Use triangular rasp for corners.

5



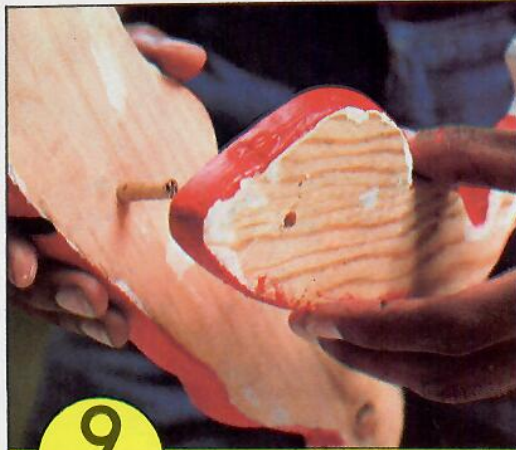
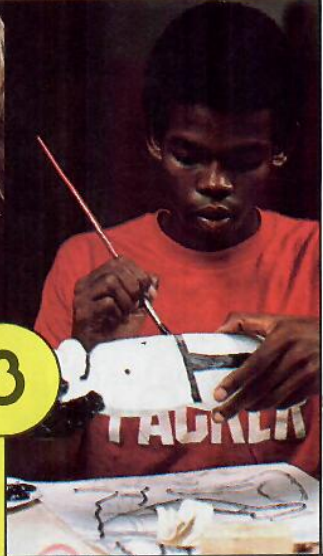
Sand.



Paint or stain your sculpture.

8

Paint details.



9

Put moveable pieces together (don't glue).

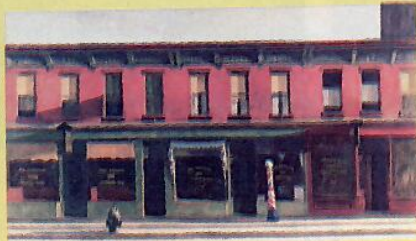


10

Mount your finished Folk Sculpture.

ARTS ALIVE

Edward Hopper (1882-1967). *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930. Whitney Museum, NY.



ART IN AMERICA

What does this painting make you think of? Have you ever been on a trip across the country and traveled through small towns at dawn before anyone else was up? This well-known picture is called *Early Sunday Morning* and it's by the realist painter, Edward Hopper.

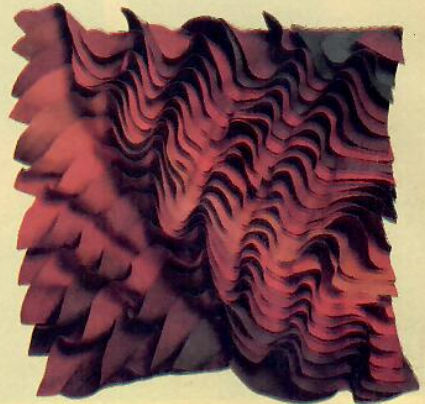
This is only one of the famous works that you will see at the Whitney Museum if you visit it during the next year. Seventy-five of the most famous American art works created during this century will be on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, until the end of September, 1979.

TODAY'S FOLK ARTISTS

As you have seen in this issue, young people are very much involved with all sorts of different crafts. These pictures you see here are good examples of current "folk art." The one on the bottom is the back of a mirror done in plastic, and the other is a highly textured wall-hanging.

You'll be able to see these and some fantastic quilts, unusual jewelry, basketry and much more at the Young Americans: Fiber/Wood/Plastics/Leather Exhibit.

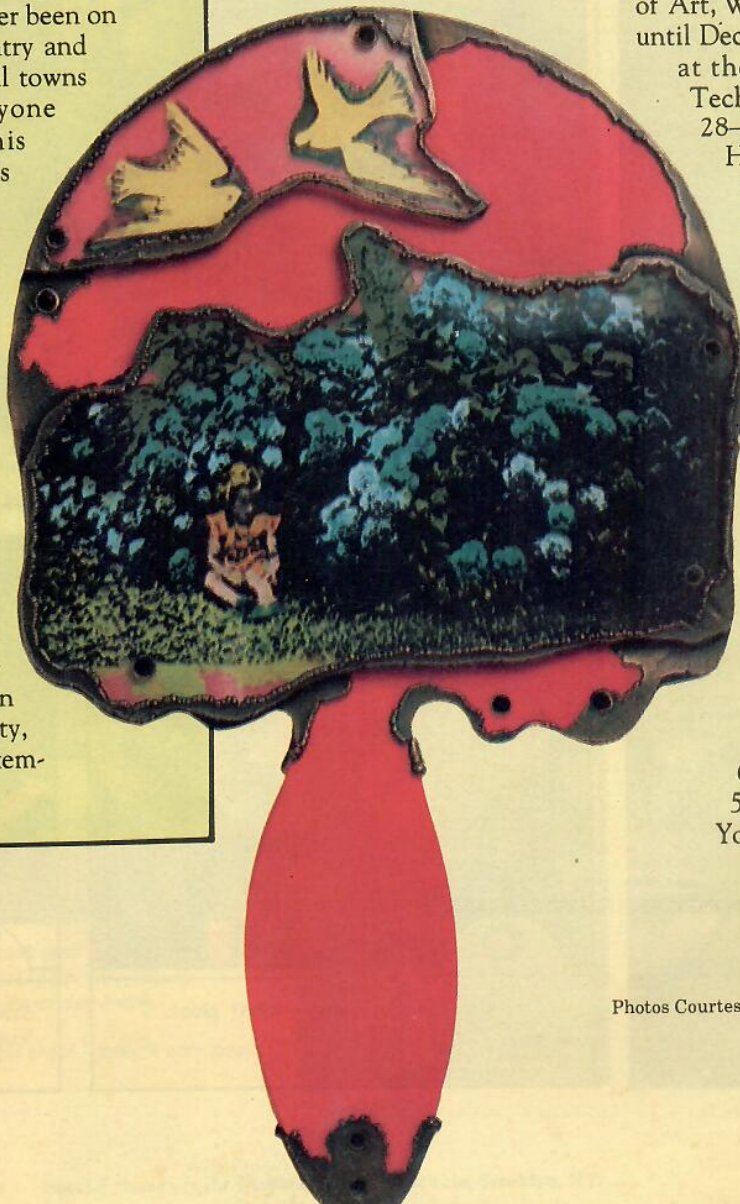
There are 120 works done by 95 craftspeople, all under the age



of 30. These artists were selected in a national competition organized by the American Crafts Council.

Currently, you can see the show in the Norton Gallery and School of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida, until Dec. 31. Then it can be seen at the Rochester Institute of Technology (NY) from Jan. 28- March 11, 1979; Botanic Hall & Contemporary Arts Center, Nashville, Tennessee, April 8-May 20; Brunnier Gallery, Iowa State Center, Ames, Iowa, June 17-July 29; and the Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee, Aug. 26 - Oct. 7.

If you have a chance to see the exhibit, don't miss it. For further information about this show and future competitions in the contemporary crafts, contact the American Crafts Council, 44 West 53rd St., New York, New York 10019.



Photos Courtesy of the American Crafts Council.