

At Fuller, designing outside the box



Woodworkers will present creative takes on the box, such as Steven Kennard's "Hat in a Box," at Fuller Craft Museum. (Steven Kennard)

By [Robert Knox](#)

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A new exhibition coming to the Fuller Craft Museum shows off the skill and creativity that contemporary craft artists can achieve, even when restricted to a single form in a single medium.

“Boxes and Their Makers” Fuller Craft Museum, 55 Oak St., Brockton

Aug. 21 through Oct. 27

\$8 adults, \$5 seniors and students, free for children 12 and under

www.fullercraft.org or call 508-588-6000

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In “Boxes and Their Makers,” 32 contemporary woodworkers turned their talents on a universal form, the simple multipurpose box, to create imaginatively expressive and beautifully crafted pieces for a show originally developed by the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship in Maine. The show is now on the road and the Fuller is its first stop.

While they all have interiors and are all made of wood, these are probably not the boxes to hold your bills, your pills, your pearls, or your party mints, the exhibition’s curators said.

“The makers of these boxes didn’t go into their workshops because there was a shortage of containers in the world. Rather, they went into their workshops on voyages of creative exploration — to transform raw materials into expressive objects,” said Peter Korn, executive director for the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship.

Some of the exhibition’s pieces resemble the notion of a functional box. But others look like birds, beetles, vases, irons, lunch boxes, Chinese temples, or minarets.

“What’s fun about these boxes is they represent a really large range of craftsmen, from wood turners up to furniture makers,” said Perry Price, Fuller’s assistant curator. “The scale is really from boxes that fit in the palm of your hand to boxes that you can put on your table top.”

Price singled out “some amazing pill boxes” such as Louise Hibbert’s “Coleoptera Pill Box,” a work about 5 inches long, made of English sycamore, African black wood, stainless steel, copper, and pine. The box is designed in the shape of a fanciful, brightly painted beetle, with a long pointy proboscis like a hummingbird’s beak.

Jenna Goldberg of Providence contributed a series of three narrow boxes (in red, blue, and green), made of painted and carved basswood, with Xerox transfers. They have carved patterns on their brightly painted exteriors and deliberately clashing interiors based on antique matchbox graphics.

Tom Loeser of Wisconsin, originally from Boston, produced two 10-inch-long boxes of mahogany and paint, whimsically titled “Cyrano and Roxanne.” Their bases are shaped like rockers, and they have cubby hole interiors and beautifully faceted, painted surfaces. The long thin stripes on “Cyrano” may suggest the literary character’s long nose.

Bonnie Bishoff and J.M. Syron of Rockport, a husband-and-wife team known for making credenzas that take advantage of Bishoff’s development of cutting-edge techniques for the application of polymer clay veneers, contributed “Inner Eye Box,” a densely detailed container made of birdseye maple and hand-carved basswood, plus the couple’s signature veneer. The polymer clay can be fired at low temperatures to create vivid, interesting colors, Price said.

“Making boxes fulfills our desire to make accessible objects of meaning for others,” the artists wrote in their statement for the show.

Emi Ozawa of Fall River, known for playful conceptual pieces, produced “Red Bridge,” a box designed in the shape of a three-dimensional ring made of apple plywood and acrylic paint.

Andy Buck’s “Mr. Red” resembles a banana-beaked swan, its long neck curving gracefully over the “box” of its lower body.

New Englanders have a “long tradition of woodworking in all its various forms,” Price said. “It can be engaged in on the most basic levels, like cutting a board to make a shelf for your house. It’s remarkably accessible.”

But while we can all grab a saw and cut a board, we can only marvel at the skill brought to the medium by the craft artists, he said. “When you handle this work, you see how tight the joinery is, how facile they are with the materials.”

The show opens on Aug. 21 at Fuller, which is also exhibiting ongoing shows of furniture from its permanent collection, glass art by Josh Simpson (“A Visionary Journey in Glass”), and digital art (“The New Materiality: Digital Dialogues at the Boundaries of Contemporary Craft”), among others.

Furniture historian Oscar Fitzgerald, author of the show’s catalog, “New Masters of the Wooden Box,” will speak at the museum on Oct. 24.

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