



PRINCETON'S BUSINESS & ENTERTAINMENT NEWSPAPER

[Current Issue of U.S. 1](#)

Check out the current issue of U.S. 1 online.

[Search our Archives](#)

Compelling reading from nearly a quarter century of U.S. 1.

[Interchange](#)

Letters, opinions, and arguments from our readers.

[Survival Guide](#)

News you can use for your business or your career.

[Preview of the Arts](#)

The discerning guide to what's happening in Princeton and central NJ.

[Fast Lane](#)

Companies on the move, expanding, new in town, or just in the news.

[Check the Classifieds](#)

The online version of U.S. 1's classifieds. Click here to post your own.

[Murder at the Mall](#)

Click here for the latest installment in the 'Education of Richard K. Rein.'

[Submit Your Event](#)

Tell us about your upcoming event.

[Voice Your Opinion](#)

Click here to register your point of view, concern, or correction.

[Need Help Navigating?](#)

Click here for a user's guide, or just call us at 609-452-7000.

What's New in Princeton & Central New Jersey?

Reprinted from the January 5, 2011, issue of U.S. 1 Newspaper

Raw Beauty: The Art of Capturing the Female Spirit

by Ilene Dube

For years, book artist Miriam Schaer observed gloves on the streets of New York: lost or abandoned, left to the elements, tattered; or, in some cases, expensive gloves, or gloves that may have belonged to children.

Schaer wanted to bring them together, and so she took the hand-shaped appendages home with the idea of making them into a book. "Although there is no text, each glove tells a story about the person who once owned it," says Schaer, in a phone interview en route to her home in Brooklyn from Chicago, where she teaches in the interdisciplinary MFA program in Book and Paper at Columbia College. "In a way, the piece is about bringing them all into a community. When I was done sewing them together, they still seemed to be fighting each other and holding onto their own individual story. I coated them with gold to unify them, but they are painted in a very uneven way so the aspects of the original glove still come through."



'No Object' by Miriam Schaer

On Saturday, January 8, Schaer, who is known for her "means of containment" — girdles, bustiers, brassieres, and aprons used in multimedia work — will lead a "Wearable Books" workshop at the Arts Council of Princeton. The workshop takes place in conjunction with "Raw Beauty: An Exhibition of Sculpture," on view from Saturday, January 8, through Saturday, February 26. The show includes Schaer's glove book, "No Ornament as Precious as Their Hands."

"Raw Beauty" curator Rebecca Kelly met Schaer in 2002 when she took a workshop with her. Kelly, a storyteller, visual artist, and professor of children's literature and child and adolescent development at the College of New Jersey, was feeling despondent in the wake of 9/11, and made "The Blue Book" in Schaer's workshop. Literally a blue book with beads, it includes comments from friends, artists, writers, and others on how they react to the color blue, or the feeling of the blues. Needing to do something with her hands, Kelly found the repetitive beading soothing, and the stories remedies for the blues.

"I spent a year compiling it," says Kelly, who wears red shoes, polka dotted socks, and a fuzzy frilly scarf she made from many different sources of yarn on the day of our interview. When she sits down to talk, she places the scarf on a table, and then takes a pale green egg from her bag, fresh from the farmers' market, and sets it in the nest formed by the scarf.

"I love this egg," she says, holding it like a sacred object. "I wish I could raise chickens."

While working on "The Blue Book," she says, "I would go in the kitchen and play Odetta and sing at the top of my lungs. I would have a cup of tea and find that sacred place."

"The Blue Book" is being turned into a dance that will be performed in Philadelphia in June, 2011, through the Philadelphia Center for the Book.

"Raw Beauty," says Kelly, is about creating objects "that communicate each artist's thoughts and feelings about the primitive strengths and imperfections of the female spirit." Kelly brought in Anne Wright Wilson, who consults with churches and synagogues on interior spaces, to design the exhibit. "I wanted it to have a sacred feminine feel."

All but one of the artists are women, and traditional women's crafts, such as crocheting and sewing, incorporate new materials.

Kelly has been "collecting" artists ever since she started the Art Camp at Tohickon Valley Park in Point Pleasant, Pennsylvania, more than a decade ago. A winter camping retreat, it is "a place for women to regenerate," says Kelly. "We have artists come in and do demos. There's a lot of handwork, such as crochet." The crochet may be done with anything from plastic bags to wire. Dancers, educators, embroiderers, and quilters come to try different art forms and share in the experience.

Born in 1952 in Dearborn, Michigan, Kelly grew up in central Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C. Her father was a cardiologist, her mother a nurse. She earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education from American University in 1972, and a master's in child development from Sarah Lawrence in 1994. She has curated exhibits on found art and book arts at Bucks County Community College's Hicks Art Center Gallery, Stuart Country Day School, and Riverrun Gallery in Lambertville.

Kelly and Schaer are connected through their interest in storytelling and book arts. "My books are trying to find answers to questions that often have no answers," says Schaer. She collects stories or texts she hears, sometimes on the news or the radio, that touch her. "I am often moved by the obstacles so many people have to overcome, sometimes for nothing they themselves did or asked for. I think of myself as a narrative sculptor," she says.

Schaer was born in Buffalo, N.Y., and took classes at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, where she was introduced to the work of Eva Hesse, Louise Nevelson, Marisol, and Frida Kahlo. She earned a bachelor's degree from Philadelphia College of Art in 1978, where she worked in weaving, fiber, and collage. Only one course in book arts was available at the time, but when Schaer moved into a cramped New York City apartment, she found making books was just the right size for that space.

She continued her studies at the Center for Book Arts and the School of Visual Arts and has taught book arts at Rutgers Center for Innovative Paper and Print, Sarah Lawrence College, and Pratt Institute. In addition to exhibits all over the world, Schaer's work has been shown at the Arts Council of Princeton; in a two-person show along with Debra Weir at the Marguerite & James Hutchins Gallery in the Gruss Center for the Visual Arts at the Lawrenceville School; and a solo show at the Douglass Library in the Mary H. Dana Women's Series.

"I am not a typical book artist, because I don't stay in the confines of traditional book making materials," says Schaer. "I really love working with different materials. I think we all have stories to tell, and we often hold those stories in various parts of the body. I use mostly women's clothing because it provides a place to hold the elements and relates to the ideas I am exploring."

There is often text hidden within the garment: it may be the words of Emily Dickinson, nursery rhymes, Schaer's own poems, and even altered text.

"I found a book in a collection from my father when he died, 'Atlas of Surgical Operations.' Altering that book turned into a series of five pieces that all helped me explore my father's mysterious work," says Schaer. "A number of years ago, I stumbled on the Bible I received when I became Bat Mitzvah. As my relation to formal, organized religion has changed so much since I was a child, I used that book to create two pieces: 'Word of God' and 'Slip Thru My Hands.'"

Clothing and sculpture are happily married here. Kathryn Sclavi, another "Raw Beauty" artist, led a workshop at Grounds For Sculpture last summer called "The Garment as Sculpture: A Fiber Arts Adventure." Her hand embellished and dyed silk on polyester and cotton "Bad Boyfriends: 8 Women Told Me About an Ex" documents a discussion with a friend about a failed relationship.

"I am very interested in communal female gatherings to create handwork, such as quilting bees or embroidery circles," writes Sclavi in an artist statement. "I have found when I get together with groups of women, we often open up in discussions about men in our (lives) who have proven to disappoint. By sharing our stories through advice, laughter, and consolation, we have the ability to create a shared healing community. Meant to elicit laughter and camaraderie, 'Bad Boyfriends' serves as a garish burn book for the heartbroken teenage girl in us all."

It isn't all women who are artists in "Raw Beauty." Leo Sewell, a found object artist and one of the Philadelphia Dumpster Divers, has created "Venus de Junko," a torso fragment made of welded brass parts that is a nod to the famous "Venus de Milo" sculpture.

Wings, fins, knives, doorknobs, keys, and Victorian hardware make up this female form. Although it shines like gold, Sewell says he hasn't added a patina because he likes the individual components to stand out as what they are, revealing a previous life.

Sewell scours his home city of Philadelphia to find these parts, and in his West Philadelphia studio, a Victorian carriage house, he has hundreds of cabinets to "file" his spare parts: drawers have divisions for fingers, toes, foot parts, or human forms arranged by size; a box for brass, another for aluminum, stainless steel, or mahjong tiles; and thousands for fasteners such as screws, bolts, and nails.

Born in 1945, Sewell grew up in Annapolis, Maryland, in the shadow of the U.S. Naval Dump.

He would hike through the woods and bring home spare parts. "The military throws away a lot of stuff, and it was a thrill to me to find it and take it apart and reassemble it," he says. "My parents were not about art, they grew up during the Depression. My father, who taught language at the Naval Academy, had a shop and taught me to use tools. He made use of the things we found to solve the problem at hand." Sewell's mother, a homemaker, spent a lot of time helping out at hospital and church rummage sales.

At the University of Delaware, Sewell studied economics as an undergraduate, then completed a master's degree in art history there in 1970. "They are two useless degrees, but they've helped me in my career," he says. "I'm a businessman, and I can talk about art. I've managed to live a middle class life as an artist." Sewell's work is collected by Sylvester Stallone, among others.

His work is so popular, it's even been stolen. "Someone broke the front window of a gallery in Nantucket and reached across someone else's work to get mine," he says. "There was another incident where a home was broken into to steal my artwork. People just want it. It's not about establishing a collection or prestige, they just want it."

Raw Beauty: An Exhibition of Sculpture, Arts Council of Princeton's Paul Robeson Center for the Arts, 102 Witherspoon Street, on view Saturday, January 8, to Saturday, February 26. Gallery talk Thursday, January 20, 5 to 6:30 p.m. 609-924-8777 or www.artscouncilofprinceton.org.

Also, "Wearable Books," Saturday, January 8, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. In this intensive one-day workshop, students will look at historical and contemporary images of the book as personal totem, in addition to images of text in relationship to the body. Using paper decoration and simple book as well as jewelry techniques, students will make their own wearable book. Participants should bring found objects, broken jewelry or text to incorporate into books. Fee: \$100.



Become a sponsor! Reach the viewers of PrincetonInfo.com and the readers of U.S. 1.