

# Art in crafts

Jersey City's 'Circa' looks beyond surveying the state's best pieces

**ART**

**Circa Craft 2005**  
**— The New Jersey Arts Annual: Craft**

**Where:** Jersey City Museum,  
 350 Montgomery St., Jersey City

**When:** Through Jan. 8, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesdays and Fridays; 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursdays; noon-5 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays

**How much:** \$4; \$2 seniors and students; free to children under 12. Call (201) 413-0303 or visit [www.jerseycitymuseum.org](http://www.jerseycitymuseum.org).

**BY DAN BISCHOFF**  
 STAR-LEDGER STAFF

"Circa Craft 2005," the annual exhibition of the finest craftspeople in the state now at the Jersey City Museum, all but gives up the thin fiction about "craft." This looks, feels, sounds and smells like fine art. In fact, several of the artists here showed in last spring's companion show, the Fine Arts Annual at the Montclair Art Museum, too.

In the show statement, co-curators Rocio Aranda-Alvarado of Jersey City and Ursula Ilse-Neuman of the Museum of Arts and Design in New York say they want to go "beyond a mere survey of the state of craft in New Jersey and question the artificial separation of high art and craft."

Traditionally, the difference is really about use. A "craft" is something that has a practical purpose, while art, of course, is gloriously pointless except as decoration, education or personal glamorization.

That's why a Gobelin tapestry, for example, even if it is based on a drawing by Raphael, is traditionally classed as a craft. It can keep out the drafts.

So in "Circa Craft" we have installations like "Stay" by Linda Rae Coughlin of Montclair, which consists of an old suitcase lined with a hooked rug that shows a dog at its owner's feet, with the words "Stay" and "Don't you move!" woven into the border. The hooked rug is a traditional textile craft, but how, exactly, would you class the recycled suitcase?

German-born Franklin Lakes artist Linda Friedman Schmidt has been showing her vividly pictorial hooked rugs

in craft annuals for some time now, producing figural compositions that depict movement and sophisticated perspectives in a form of handicraft once associated with slave workers. But who in their right mind would wipe their feet on Schmidt's "Salsa Cures Sadness No. 2: Silver Shines"?

Craftspeople have a chip on their shoulders about much of this. Back in the old days — that is, the Middle Ages — there were no such distinctions. A stained glass artist like Zachary Green of



Linda Friedman Schmidt's hooked rug, "Salsa Cures Sadness No. 2: Silver Shines," is on display at the Jersey City Museum.

Hoboken, who is showing a large, square window depicting the Pulaski "Skyway Crossing Turnpike 95" in green and gray glass, would have been part of the painter's guild. Craftspeople have suspected for some 600 years now that painters broke off from glass makers to justify higher prices



for less technically demanding work.

So there are objects here that glory in their impracticality, in confounding the utility of their forms in favor of storytelling, beauty, and sometimes just out of cussedness. Jersey City artist Stephanie Young, for example, shows five brass jewelry pieces that consist of tight-fitting brass cups for the fingertips that, when worn, would either clump two fingers together or make the whole hand unusable by means of a brass bar stretching from thumb to little finger.

Anne Oshman of Montclair is showing two of her strikingly realistic mosaics — one of them, “Beach Bum,” an image of a pot-bellied man on a Jersey beach. The Romans thought highly of their painting, but mosaics were considered their highest art form, a rich irony when you stand in front of a highly amusing Oshman.

There are 17 artists from seven counties in “Circa Craft 2005,” which is sponsored by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Maybe you can decide which crafts are art, and which are merely crafty.

**A mosaic that hardly manifests the Greco-Roman ideal is Anne Oshman’s amusing “Beach Bum,” part of “Circa Craft 2005.”**