

Polymer 2.0 - October 19

Wrap-up Session including reports on Saturday Break-Out discussions

Bruce began the wrap up with a request for support--

SUPPORT RAM to support polymer

1. In order to continue to make things happen, people need to support RAM financially. Funds could go directly to the Polymer Acquisition Fund (Paypal or cash donations). Tax-deductible
2. Donate work (your own or others) to the collection. RAM will let you know what fits and where. Museum quality work or other is OK.
3. Following on 2, donate your own work to build the collection
4. Take out a membership to RAM - Enthusiast level gets you NARM (reciprocal entries, etc.)

SUMMARIES of Saturday Break-Out sessions

(Each group approached their questions slightly differently. All questions that were "assigned" to each are listed first, regardless of how much progress was made toward addressing them).

Collecting Polymer as Contemporary Craft

Moderators: **Bruce and Kathleen Dustin**

- Are artists comfortable with major museum collectors? How has the polymer community addressed the acquisition of works by large institutions? Are gifts to institutions increasing? Have the museums involved three years ago added more polymer works? Who all is collecting polymer now?
 - o The *American Craft* article focused on the polymer gifts to numerous institutions three years ago -has anything changed and if so, how?
 - o Is it possible that we are seeing polymer enter museum collections under the radar of the established polymer community when artists use the material as part of their studio practice but do not identify themselves as polymer artists.
- Is the fact that RAM and others are supporting polymer through collecting affecting artists directly?
 - o Are there positive and/or negative impacts from this kind of documentation i.e. greater public

awareness of polymer as an art making medium;
museum collecting may further stratify the artists
within the polymer field into those collected and
those not as in other art media, etc.

- Are there barriers to collecting at craft-focused museums and/or traditional fine arts museums? Are these barriers the same or are they different?
- Are artists applying different standards to the creation of their work in light of what has been collected already?
- When do you make work to sell vs. making work to exhibit?
 - Is the community able to address this as a whole or is it particular to each artist?
- Will museum collecting improve the medium or are there ways it may confuse the discussion if we are taking polymer out of its traditional context?
- Are there ways that polymer artists, materials manufacturers, and polymer organizations could help museums add to collections in order to broaden the documentation of the polymer art field?

Discussion Highlights –

- Could IPCA help in feeding collections? Individuals, museums, galleries
- Seem to be in a low tide period of gifting. Young people aren't as interested in collecting (emphasis on digital content and how that shapes need and interest). Need to look for new approaches?
- Individuals can work to connect with collectors
- Corporations - look to for display as well as funding and collecting solid quality work? Underwrite exhibitions, programs, competitions and build own collection
- Manufacturers -can they respond to artists and their needs?
- Collector Organizations - Is this model too old? Needs replacing?
 - Collectors/groups--polymer only vs. infiltrating other types of groups
- Collecting can be a food chain system where one entity feeds another-
 - Production quality work ok but also need museum quality that can be passed along
 - I.e. Artists -inform collector that you are creating museum quality work and that they should

donate it to the right institution when it is time to pass it along.

- o European system—galleries connect artists to collectors—then museums. Material is less the focus, emphasis on artist.
- o Could be useful to underscore polymer history and provenance either way

Connect to more fine craft shows to attract other collectors, increase profile

- Need public education programs to inform various audiences about what polymer is—museums significant part of this loop
- Look to younger artists—what direction are they taking?
- Artists must develop thick skin—understand rejection and how to address it
- How to increase overall recognition to increase collecting desire?
 - o The material still faces perceived barriers (i.e. material value)
 - o More opportunities for artist/museum/collector interaction
 - o Artists act as advocates for the medium and museum-quality work

The Big Picture: Polymer and the Contemporary Craft Scene

Moderators: **Lena and Perry Price**

- Polymer is treated as one of many options (similar to calling someone an artist as opposed to female artist, Latino artist, craft artist)—what does this mean for polymer practitioners?
- When polymer is viewed as “just another” medium within the context of a larger conversation, such as the exhibition, what does this mean for it?
- Beyond techniques: concept and content in polymer art, idea of activism. So much of the early days of a medium are exploring techniques. Several artists have also been developing content—how does this look today? Use RAM exhibition examples and more. Content is driven by artists—where are the leading artists going with their work?

- How do we address the "comfort level" of the community? Stratification within all fields—what is the effect of calling people out?
- Are there things artists could do to push their perspective/agenda beyond that they are doing already?
- Is "this" significant for Craft or polymer? Or both? Technique advancement is important but at some time, a shift or step beyond also has to take precedence. The "this" refers to an individual work or overall shift in an interest of polymer-dedicated artists.
- As needed, address work by artists not in the "community" of polymer but using the material

Discussion Highlights--

- Does polymer describe the material or the artist you are?
- When Polymer first came on the scene, needed a name and label to identify itself, and the polymer artists needed a name and label to identify themselves.
 - Circled back down/around to not needing that label as identification. As polymer artists are jewelers, they are sculptors, etc...not just strictly polymer.
 - RAM Terra Nova Polymer book: when titling and writing Terra Nova, RAM had to make the decision how to categorize the artwork and decided to drop the term clay from the title and from the wording.
 - Elise- dropped clay out of her description of work because of assumptions made
 - Jeffery Lloyd Dever-- works within different groups, he shows with fiber artists, jewelry etc. March to your own drum and make it about the work.
 - Fimo and Rachel Carren call it modeling compound
- Less emphasis on material and more on what is produced?
- Sometimes, historically, something is referenced not because of its actual quality but because of its significance --in change or directing movements, discussion, etc. Artists should be focusing on the quality of their work and letting it speak for itself.
- Institutions help create and shape the voice- help make the decisions and define the label/trend. RAM/Museums play a big part in what we call or how we define artists and art groups.

- Are artists who use polymer in bits polymer artists? Should they be considered in polymer group? Comment made about RAM's (*in*)*Organic* exhibition--as to how some of the work used little or no polymer. The artists in this exhibit were not strictly polymer artists and were paired in this exhibit with a variety of artists and materials. Discussion on how and when you should be categorized as a polymer artist or be considered for a polymer artist exhibit--if polymer is not the main material used. And does it matter?
- How do you reframe your label to sell? If you have branded yourself a polymer jewelry artist, how do you redefine yourself to keep your clients and your brand? And should you?
- Organic brand vs. delineated brand? How does the audience perceive what the artist is doing? Does that affect the artist's work, decision, brand?
- Can diversity of polymer be captured in a brand?

What Issues Does Polymer Face Today?

Moderators: **Lindly Haunani and Sarah Shriver**

- Entry level success w/ material pretty quick. How is this a + and a - ?
- Issues of originality/ imitation: When so much in polymer has been technique driven for its early history, how to apply techniques and still create w/ unique voice? Imitation is flattery, but generally not great art.
- American vs. European, national vs. international. Are there trends that are geography-based? Projects and symposia have connected artists internationally--how is that valuable? How could national and international conferences advance the professional agenda of the medium?
- What is the impact of artists who respond to polymer as another available resource? Who are not as "hung up" on labels or histories?
- How could the existing support mechanisms in polymer help it rise as a serious medium?

Discussion Highlights--

- Education and communication is important
 - Educating the public about polymer clay
 - Explain differences and processes

- o Elevate the level of work
 - It will increase the perceived value
 - o Enter shows in variety of categories, work is viewed with other media
 - o Talk with artists in other media
 - o Not "precious" like some jewelry, but that's okay
 - o Displayed in stores as separate, not inclusive with other media
 - Aimed towards hobbyists
- How artists use the word polymer and what that means
 - o Bugged down with the name of the material
 - 50 years later still looking for a suitable "name"
 - Does the word "clay" create confusion - it is recognizable
 - Other words like "plastic" sound fake
 - Term "figurative sculpture" is more accepted even though viewer doesn't know the media
 - Will answer itself in the long-run--Doesn't need to be resolved - can be universal based on user
 - o Art vs. craft has same issues
 - o How it is marketed -
- Technique driven workshops - fastest way to fail is color wheel-push and go beyond
 - o Opportunity as teachers to incorporate principles of design and composition (such as Diane did with college course)
 - o Sage wants to offer more of this in the Polymer Daily
 - o Move forward "out of the box"
 - o Develop techniques and approaches to teaching
- Medium is fluid - consistency is a difficult problem
 - o More dialog between manufacturers - they are here and listening
 - Consistency and quality
 - Try to understand the challenges of the manufacturers
 - Staedtler - know the artist wants reliability but it's difficult legally (Europe/Asia/US)-- Manufacturing has to answer to rules and regulations of each country where they distribute (Sunday)

- Iris - they don't make all of the ingredients of the clay and they have challenges with "other" manufacturers that contribute to the clay (state by state)
 - Environment, storage, how artist uses can change often
- Demographics of polymer artists
 - Aging - need to acknowledge and embrace upcoming artists
 - They are developing and incorporating technology

Points that DEVELOPED OUT OF summaries ON SUNDAY

- The advantage of critiques -
 - Critique group made of people in other media - meet informally and have show together
 - Perception of yourself may change via others perception
 - "slide wars" -Furniture society--Well-lubricated (beer/wine) event, send image of one work, rapid fire, you have 30 seconds to talk about the piece, community has 3 min to respond
 - Recommended book for crit setup/guidance-- "The Critique Handbook"
 - Polymer Art Archive will have tab with numbers of examples of different ways to approach self-critique
 - Critviz.com - online criticism, peer-to-peer
- Placement for the field
 - Enter broad (not just polymer) call for entries competitions (J Dever) this will help find your place--It helps with averages and sometimes smaller groups (large number of jewelry overall)
 - Maggie will provide list of competitions
- Are there appraisers for vintage, quality polymer? (based on sales in the field like all other media)
- Picking up from Perry's talk--What would the polymer group do if the ACC created a polymer category for juried shows?
 - Does it go backwards? Does it make it easier for the polymer artist to get in, less competition in other categories?
 - Creates competition within polymer community? Good or bad.

VISION AND ACTION

- What is your vision for polymer at this stage of medium?
 - Public awareness of what it is
 - Infiltration into other markets/medium
 - Acceptance independent of labels
 - Celebrating where we are—uniqueness, newness
 - Art school curriculum (Diane is continuing with courses at Carthage)
- Where should your/our energy be directed?-manageable
 - Curriculum development
 - Consider a system to make curriculum available on internet
 - Try to teach in grade schools (to develop young artists) or target teens as they might hang on to interests (think woodshop and ceramics)—also, Home schoolers (have ability to include in curriculum)
 - Take Diane's model and offer to teachers how to integrate into class-- Already teaching color theory and use polymer
 - National organization could create fund for supporting classroom programs
 - Consider mentoring a young person through a community program—good on resume and instills comfort with materials, handworking
 - Open up own studio for education and "play" for the public
 - Offer wholesale buyer a trunk show, reception to introduce yourself
 - Infiltrate at any level possible
 - Keep ACC (and other organizations) apprised of what the artist is doing
 - Is anyone doing this within the polymer artist group (need a liaison) - can a committee that can take this on? Electronic meetings.
 - IPCA is valuable, not sure it's equipped to do this level of work. Maybe a separate org that works on raising the bar with different skill sets?
 - Come up with action steps and gather a couple of people to do it
 - Can the archive website facilitate this - show options, critiquing, verbiage? Should

only have one site and PAA is established, centralized, simple.

- Desire for interaction, Facebook page as meeting place where artists can find each other to interact regarding needs?
- Rachel Gourley- IPCA reorganization needs volunteers (what are the needs and how do they let the community know)?
- Names of people to help - Cynthia T., Maggie, Rachel, Judy, Katrina, Lindley, Loretta, Laura Tabakman, Melanie.
 - How does the European community get brought into the fold? Rachel has been working on this.
- Do your homework - vetting and educating yourself, some degree of understanding who you are dealing with and the people you are approaching
 - When you do deliver, follow up and continue to represent yourself
 - Inform the dealer, what you do and who you are
- Go to local festivals as public education, do a little hands-on project
 - Overall, be proactive in educating youth
 - Often the parents are drawn in with the children (they may not have had any formal art experiences)
- Educate collectors of the value in material
- Elise - challenges you to take one step, be a participant and not just an enthusiast, don't just talk about it, DO SOMETHING!
- Without putting too much pressure on the ACC - how can they further poly agenda?
 - Craft mag doing articles on collectors of polymer
 - Strategize around conference or exhibition, topic that is tied in with exhibits or collectors (critical mass), a "hook"
 - Polymer artists are increasing at shows
 - Rosen group is talking about doing special show for polymer
 - Realistically adding polymer to the ACC category list?
 - ACC has programs for shows whereby an organization suggests 10 different artists to exhibit, the group is highlighted and artists are responsible for costs.

- o Who could Perry/ACC contact to get all of the appropriate information?

MAJOR ACTIONS

- Setup virtual critique system
- Follow through on ACC opportunity
- Infiltrate Art Jewelry Forum for more exposure
- Work on professional development as artists—great photography, PR

We may get together in 3 more years to discuss where/what has been done.

- o We did meet goals from last symposium—
 - RAM has integrated polymer into 4 collections exhibitions and compared/contrasted polymer in exh.
 - Carthage College has offered a class

PS—Several people inquired about Racine's famous kringle. Here is the place to go to get some for yourself no matter where you live ☺
<http://www.ohdanishbakery.com/home>