



Larry Metcalf, 2013  
Photo: Lois Harbaugh

## Lifetime Achievement Award

As we mark our 60th Anniversary, the NWDC Board felt it imperative to acknowledge in a significant way our artist/member Larry Metcalf, whose service to the NWDC community is beyond compare. Whether in a board position or behind the scenes, for over four decades Larry Metcalf has brought the marvelous to NWDC through his leadership, his connections, his extraordinary talent in exhibition design, his sense of hospitality, his own artwork, and his compassion.

With Larry as the gold standard, the Board invented the Lifetime Achievement Award. The requirements are simply stated, their completion more elusive: multiple decades of membership, sustained and extraordinary contribution to the organization, and service on the Board.

Larry Metcalf is our first Lifetime Achievement Award recipient.

We honor Larry during our 60th Anniversary because we want to celebrate with him our joy in this amazing organization and his contribution to it. We have included an interview with Larry in this catalogue as an enduring tribute to him and in the hope of capturing some of his magic and know-how.

Thank you, Larry Metcalf!

Lois Harbaugh



## An Interview with Larry Metcalf

We share with you some of Larry Metcalf's experiences through an interview by longtime NWDC member Lynn Di Nino. It was conducted in the comfortable and beautiful home of Jill Nordfors Clark during the fall of 2013.

Lynn Di Nino: Larry, as a forty-year member of NWDC, you have an unparalleled perspective. What are your observations of our shared history and which issues have consistently brought challenges to the group?

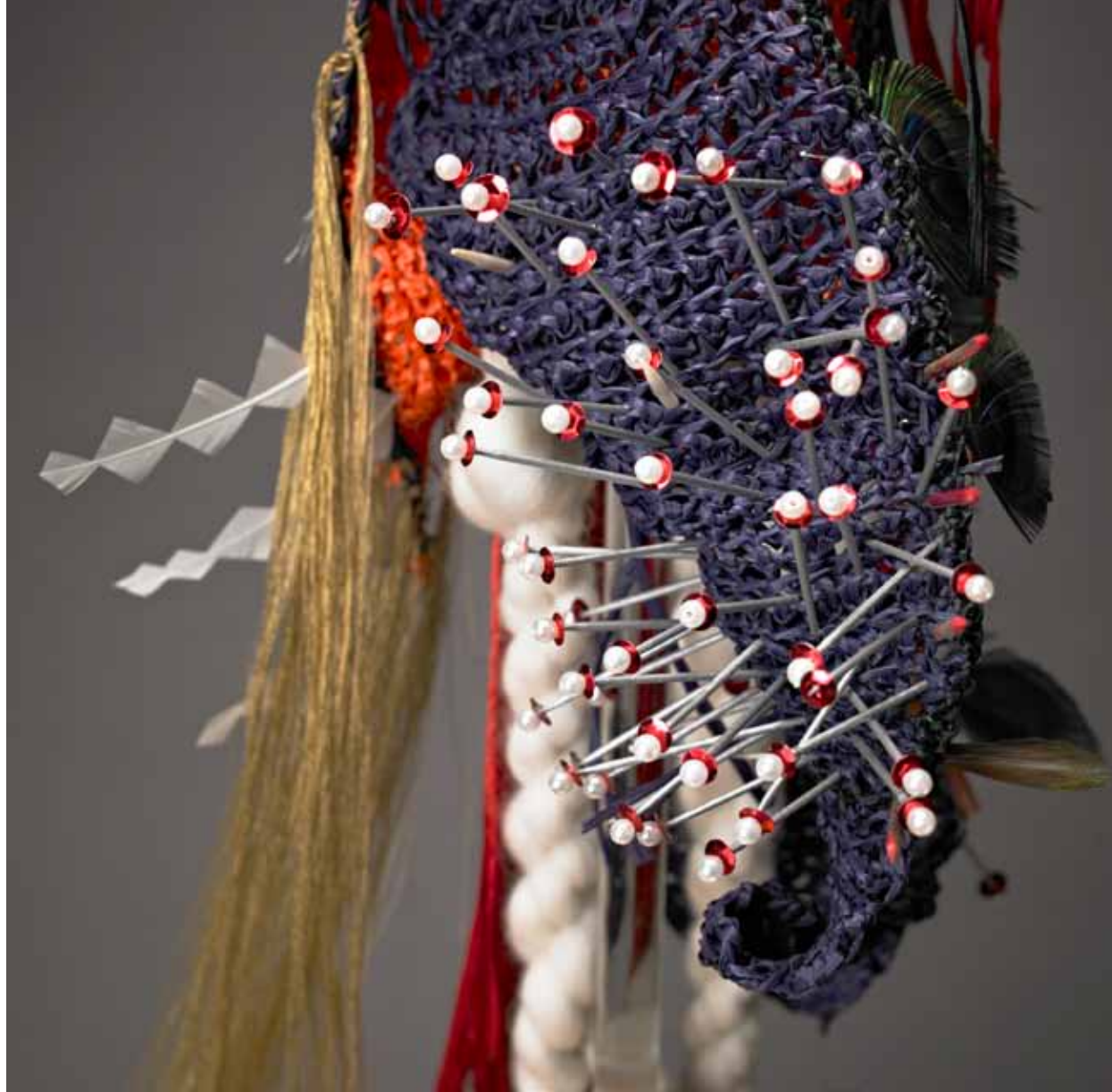
Larry Metcalf: You can't just live off the present and the past. *You've got to add to the present so it leads to the future.* This is the challenge to any group of membership. An organization is dead unless you get new members and you've got to get energetic people who understand the mission of the organization—they're willing not only to give their artistic skills and artistic visions, but are also willing to give their time as part of the mission statement and the ongoing of the organization. I've always felt that the more you give the more you're going to get, and grooming the membership for that is important.

Another challenge is in bringing in new members so we can have a balance of different media people because we don't want it to become solely a fiber organization, or a ceramic or woodworkers group because we are an all-encompassing fine-crafts media organization. In this area we already have the Washington Clay Association, the Seattle Metals Guild, and so on. We have to be careful that we have a good proportion of all of the craft media within our group. Right now we could use more glass artists, and wood, to maintain a balance.

Over the years, another constant question has been: What is craft? What is art? And, well, coming from the University of Washington where I went to school, craft was art. There was no difference between painting, drawing, sculpture, fine woodworking, fiber work, metalsmithing, and such. It was all art in its end product. It all had to be good. It all had to have some kind of vision and be somewhat original.

One more big challenge, and this I think is a big one for Northwest Designer Craftsmen, is that the group includes Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. Where is our actual membership from? Basically it's Washington, the Seattle area. We have a few members in Montana who are loyal. We have a few in Alaska and some in Oregon. I don't think we have any in Idaho right now, which is too bad. How is Northwest Designer Craftsmen going

Larry Metcalf  
*Talisman Fetish—Sensual  
Dance*, 2010  
Plastic raffia ribbon, wool,  
metallic thread, wood,  
beads, feathers  
28 x 9 x 9 in.  
Photo: Roger Schreiber



to face the challenge of our membership in outlying areas? Should we have satellite groups? Do we need to encourage the members who are outside the Seattle area to organize their own meetings?

LD: Tell us about Northwest Designer Craftsmen and your early involvement in it.

LM: In my twenties when I was working at Bank and Office Interiors, northwest crafts were not always used by architects and designers. Some craftsmen got together, called themselves Northwest Craftsmen, and published this little book. There must have been sixty, seventy artists/craftsmen involved. And I looked through it. The purpose was to educate designers and architects and inform them that these craftspeople were available and that their work could be used in interiors and for architectural projects. That book impressed me. It was sort of a fairly thick book that was on prongs, and you'd add a page to it, or you'd take a page out. At that time, the World's Fair grounds at Seattle Center were developed, and there was a show of Northwest Designer Craftsmen at the Fair by the fountain. The artists designed the installation, made the pedestals and room dividers, and had a really beautiful show. It was early on, 1962, and NWDC was started in 1954 I believe, and I remember that exhibition—



and of course my teacher Bob Sperry was in it. There were also several other people I knew who were in that show. It related a lot to interior design, and to household goods. Good pottery, dishware, and such. I was very, very impressed. I was not a member.

I knew Ramona Solberg, who was in the group, and Ngaire Hixon, who I brought in to Seattle Pacific University to teach part-time in ceramics since I'd just set up that program.

I entered and got into one of the NWDC craft shows at the Henry Gallery with my textiles and tapestries. And, you know, what was I? Twenty-seven? I just thought, oh, it would be nice to be part of that group, but just sort of let it go. During that time I won a few prizes in the local shows with my fiber work and won one of the main prizes at the Bellevue Arts Fair. NWDC member Jean Wilson invited me to be included in one of her books on weaving. She said, "You know, you should be in Northwest Designer Craftsmen. I'm going to sponsor you." It was sponsors that brought you in.

It was a small organization and I was just sort of led into becoming a worker, and then a leader. We refined our mission statement and created an exhibition plan and an education



Larry Metcalf  
*Talisman Fetish—Flourish*,  
2010  
Plastic raffia ribbon, wool,  
metallic paper and thread,  
cotton thread, beads,  
feathers  
29 x 9 x 9 in.  
Photo: Roger Schreiber



program too, because we weren't doing as many public speaking things at that time. Bringing in craftsmen to speak from out of the area seemed like a good idea, and that became a part that we needed to develop. We were criticized for becoming just a social organization and I sort of just thrust myself into leadership because I felt it was an important organization. It had good artists/craftsmen who started the organization and it was now our responsibility to keep it going.

Once I stepped down as president, after two times, I went right into the exhibition leadership, and that was mainly my involvement for many, many years. After pressure from the members I went back into the presidency. So my involvement has always been there in one way or another. Why? I believe in the organization, I believe in the way the members are selected, and I believe it is important that we are a community of artists/craftsmen, and we are with

one another. You know, all too often we think of artists as isolated, they live in their studios, but they can greatly benefit from this sense of community.

We have a category of art educators since many of the artists are also teachers. And then we have the honorary members, people like art activist Anne Hauberg, and then we had Hazel Koenig who was an excellent exhibition designer. We also have lifetime members. Those are members who have been in the organization for eighty years [laughing], and we appreciate them a lot. They may not be producing at eighty but they are an important part of our history, and we want to make sure that they are a part of our present not just our past.

LD: You've been called the heart and soul of NWDC in part because of your flair and influence by reminding members to apply aesthetics to daily life, not just their work. What distinguishes our social events?

LM: Well, after the industrial revolution the Bauhaus came out and said that everything in your life should be beautiful, be it a textile, be it a pot and pan, be it your utensils used at the table, be it the fabric that's on your chair. Everything should have a certain kind of aesthetic quality in terms of design and craftsmanship. That was an important part of my education, too, coming out of the university. Design and quality should not be something that's outside of daily life, but should be brought into daily life. Because if we're designer/craftsmen we should not be just preaching it, but we should be doing it, and we are.

LD: Tell us a little about where you grew up, and your history.

LM: I was born in Seattle and grew up in West Seattle, where I still live. So, you know, for seventy-four years I've been in Seattle. I have a brother who's about nineteen months younger, and a sister twelve years younger. My father was a butcher. My mother eventually went to work at Sears. I was always the artistic one in the family. My brother was more athletic and he also became a butcher. My father didn't really encourage me in the arts but he didn't say not to, other than to say he didn't think education was going to make any money, that is, being a teacher.

The Metcalf side is more the agrarian side of the family and is English. My father was one of eight children, and we always knew that family was very important. On my mother's side it's Norwegian—the side that was much more artistic than on the English side. I would stay with my grandmother—live with her, you know—for a week or two at a time when at all possible. And she's the one who inspired me for the art side, because she was always doing crochet work, stitchery work—all of the artistic things that came out of Norwegian cultural folk art and life. And although she didn't really show me stitchery and crochet, she did buy me watercolors and paper. She had a very beautiful garden—she was a wonderful gardener, especially with flowers, a few vegetables, and the trees. Her garden was really an oasis within the neighborhood and she would sit me down in the sunroom looking out at the garden, and say, “draw and paint.” And that was an exciting time. How old was I? Four, five, six, seven?

I think my grandmother was the one that understood me the most and had empathy with me. She was really there for me.

In my early education teachers were important to me. I remember my second-grade teacher, who introduced me to the color purple, and I still remember that experience to this day. She guided me, didn't tell me to put red and blue together. She put lilacs up front and only gave me two watercolors, and said make purple. I discovered it through mixing, not because she told me. All through junior high I took every art class that was required and that's when I decided I was going to be an art teacher. I went to my teacher, and said, you know, I'm going to be an art teacher—but what if I'm not a good artist? And he said you could be a good teacher. Go for it, and I did. Both my art teachers at West Seattle High School became mentors and were always there for me even after I entered the University.

LD: Larry, you've said yes to nurturing every arts organization in sight over the years: Allied Arts, the Bellevue Arts Museum, The Factory of Visual Art, Seattle Pacific University, the Henry Gallery, Friends of the Crafts, Washington Art Education Association, local museums, galleries, various crafts guilds, and served as arts commissioner for King County. Is making your own art as important to you? What has been gratifying?

LM: If someone asks I will gladly step up because I'm flattered they think I have something to contribute. Motivation has come to me by saying yes, and everyone knows I just can't resist helping out. These organizations have been my teachers.

Did I want to be a famous artist? No. Did I want to be a famous teacher? No. I think I just wanted to be a good artist, a good teacher. And, eventually, a good activist for the arts. That's what motivated me. I look back on it now and say yes, I was a good teacher, or I am a good teacher. I am a good activist. And, you know, now is the time I get to produce more of my own artwork. And I have big ideas for that.

LD: [laughing] Larry, would you take on the next NWDC presidency? After Lois?

LM: Gosh, I may be eighty.

LD: [laughing] That's all right.

LM: I'm not going to say yes, but I'm not going to say no.

Interview with Larry Metcalf by Lynn Di Nino, 2013