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BASKETS HOLDING THE IDENTITY OF AN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

by Hilarie M. Sheets

Jeremy Frey is a seventh-generation basket maker from the Passamaquoddy tribe in Maine. Credit: Greta Rybus for The New York Times

Long before painters such as Winslow Homer and Andrew Wyeth arrived in Maine to capture its spectacular natural beauty on canvas, the native Wabanaki people used materials from the landscape to weave black ash and sweet grass baskets, the oldest continuously practiced art form in the state.

“It’s said that our cultural hero, Glooskap, fired an arrow into the black ash tree and our people came dancing out — it’s tied to us,” said Jeremy Frey, a 45-year-old, seventh-generation basket maker from the Passamaquoddy tribe, one of several in the Wabanaki Confederacy.

Frey’s vibrant and innovative baskets — remarkably contemporary forms woven with ancestral knowledge — have caught the attention of the art world and put him at the forefront of a wave of interest from museums, galleries and collectors in the work of Native artists. (This month, Jeffrey Gibson is the first Indigenous artist to have a solo exhibition in the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.)

“There was this hierarchy that still sometimes exists within the museum practice of what is art, what is craft, who is an artist,” said Jaime DeSimone, chief curator of the Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine. She was a co-organizer of “Jeremy Frey: Woven,” the first solo exhibition of a Wabanaki artist at a fine art museum in the United States. The show will be on view from May 24 to Sept. 15 at the Portland Museum of Art in Maine.

The show, a retrospective spanning Frey’s career of more than two decades, includes 50-plus baskets and will travel to the Art Institute of Chicago — one of several major institutions to have recently acquired Frey’s work for their permanent collections — and the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Conn.

Even 10 years ago, a fine art museum in the Northeast would not have accepted a donation of a Wabanaki basket, according to Theresa Secord, a member of the Penobscot Nation and a basket maker who founded the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance in 1993 to help recruit young people to the tradition.

She mentored Frey after he joined the alliance in 2000, when baskets sold at markets near resorts along the coast of Maine for $100 or less. Now, Frey's baskets sell at the Karma gallery in New York for $20,000 to $100,000, to museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and to contemporary collectors such as Carol Finley, a board member of the Dia Art Foundation.

"We were making our grandparents baskets when Jeremy came along," said Secord. "He started really refining the practice, crafting new shapes and styles and working differently with the materials than anyone had ever worked before — actually braiding the wood."

The Portland Museum broke new ground in the art world at its 2015 biennial, where baskets by five Wabanaki artists, including Frey and Secord, were positioned front and center in the opening gallery, "making a statement that these were the original artists here in what we know as the state of Maine," DeSimone said. "There was not this distinction of us and them — they were just artists."

Frey lives with his wife and three children just outside Bangor, about an hour and half from the Passamaquoddy Indian Township Reservation where he grew up in poverty with his mother and two of his three brothers. (He never really knew his father, who is Swiss.) Frey's grandfather, a fisherman, was renowned for his utilitarian work baskets, typically woven by Wabanaki men; more decorative "fancy baskets" as they are known, traded at markets, were done by women.

Frey's reinventions have challenged these gendered roles in basket making.

"All I've ever wanted to do is be an artist," said Frey, who made his own toys in childhood with clay and carved wood. As a teenager, he got swept up in the epidemic of drug abuse on the reservation. "I felt like my life was spiraling," said Frey, who came back to weaving in early adulthood through the guidance of his mother, looking to keep his hands busy as he was getting sober.

His aptitude for basketry quickly gave him a new direction in life. From his uncle, Frey learned how to harvest the right ash trees in the forest — picking maybe one in a 100 — and pounding and processing the logs into long silky smooth strips, which he gauged as thin as one thirty-second of an inch to make finer weave baskets than others were doing.

"I'm always trying to see what the wood can do, what I can do," said Frey, who's challenged himself with unconventional color combinations and dynamic contours, mesmerizing patterns and three-dimensional textures, weaving the exterior and interior surfaces — essentially two baskets in one — or scaling them up as tall as six feet.

"They're sculpture now," he said. In the Portland retrospective, his latest weaving, a deconstructed basket, appears to spiral into the wall like a vortex.

Brendan Dugan, the founder of Karma, said the enormous interest in Frey's work had come "almost exclusively from the contemporary art collectors." Before the gallery opened its first solo show of Frey's work last year, the Texas-based collector Marguerite Hoffman saw the baskets mounted on pedestals through the storefront window. After knocking on the locked door, she bought one on the spot.

"I'm not normally someone who collects either in the area of crafts or Indigenous culture," said Hoffman, who chose one of the smaller two-tone forms. "Something about the shape really gets to me, like the curve of a beautiful car or a late de Kooning line drawn in space."

The Baltimore Museum of Art's new acquisition "Aura," with a geometric relief of triangular red points vibrating against a turquoise weave, will go on view May 12 as part of a series of

shows called “Preoccupied: Indigenizing the Museum.” In July, the Metropolitan Museum will mount an intergenerational display of recent acquisitions by Frey and Secord together with a painting by Rabbett Strickland at the entrance to Art of Native America.

Frey’s baskets embody not just the final form but “a whole process that involves community history, ties to homelands and a knowledge of local plant life and natural environments,” said Patricia Marroquin Norby, who is Purépecha and the Metropolitan’s first curator of Native American art.

The decimation of ash trees from the Great Lakes to Maine by the invasive beetle emerald ash borer since 2018 is posing a threat to all Wabanaki basket making, something Frey is adapting to in various ways. “Losing the ash, I can’t describe it because it’s not just a material, it’s an identity,” he said.

The artist now harvests twice the trees he needs and puts the other half in storage for the future. He is keen to experiment with new mediums, including weaving with metals like copper, and has completed his first series of monoprints with inked weavings put through the press.

Frey has also made his first video, commissioned by the Portland museum and on view near the end of the retrospective. The camera follows him through the forest hauling logs and transforming them back at his studio into malleable strips and crafting them over months into a labor-intensive basket. When he sets the final form on a plinth in a pristine gallery, the object begins to smoke, then bursts into flames and collapses into smoldering ruin.

Frey wants to leave its interpretation open-ended.

“What does that mean to appear and have a presence and then disappear sort of instantly?” said DeSimone. “You can imagine feelings and realities about Indigenous people here in the United States and life and loss. How can a basket symbolize an entire population?”

ATMOS
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TRIBES UNITE IN DEFENSE OF CULTURE AND FORESTS

by Yessenia Funes

Photograph by Sean Davidson

In the Northeast, tribes are coming together to save the threatened black ash tree, a cultural treasure and ecological jewel, from a ravenous beetle.

Over the past 20 years, more than 100 million ash trees have died. Actually, they were killed. The emerald ash borer, an invasive insect from Asia whose name pays homage to its stunning holographic coloring, arrived in the U.S. (likely via imported wood) with an insatiable appetite for ash trees. Since at least 2002, the pest has devoured its way through the U.S. ash tree population.

Ash trees make up the genus Fraxinus, which by some estimates includes up to 70 species: white ash, green ash, Oregon ash, pumpkin ash, and the list goes on. For northeastern Indigenous peoples and tribal nations, however, one ash species is of particular importance: black or brown ash (both names refer to the same tree).

Indigenous groups like the Wabanaki Nations of Maine and the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe of New York use the tree to weave baskets. Now, the dual threat from the emerald ash borer and the inescapable reality of climate change is pushing black ash to the brink of extinction. The metallic green beetle hasn't yet decimated black ash in the Northeast the way it has farther west—but how long until it does? By then, will forests already be sick and ablaze from rising temperatures? Indigenous leaders aren't waiting to find out.

Brown ash is more vulnerable to environmental changes than many other tree species, including other ash. The species requires specific moisture levels and nutrient-rich soils. It can grow in stagnant swamps and bogs that flood seasonally, but it thrives when flowing water can aerate the soil. These conditions give the tree its renowned flexibility, which allows basket weavers to break the wood into the thin strips they need for their work. But basket-quality wood is getting harder to come by—and for many Indigenous communities, losing brown ash is not an option.

Jeremy Frey is the sort of artist who gives simple yet bold. His outfit is all black save for a gray flag on his shirt. In place of where the stars would be on an American flag sit the words

“Made in Native America.” This confident touch translates to his work, too: Frey is a basket weaver from the Passamaquoddy Nation in Maine.

However, his pieces don’t often look like baskets at all. Some are more reminiscent of long-necked vases. Others feel more like tabletop spaceships: A pointed pattern of teal and indigo give one of his baskets the chromatic feeling of something futuristic (even though it’s rooted in a millennia-old practice).

Frey has been weaving baskets for over 20 years—and his styles have evolved throughout that time. His mother taught him during a period when she was relearning basketry herself, passing along a tradition that has lived in Frey’s family for seven generations. The 44-year-old artist is the first to display his work at contemporary art institutions. His first solo show, “Out of the Woods,” featured 14 baskets in New York City’s Karma Gallery earlier this year.

“Sometimes, I think about what [the ancestors] would’ve thought about where I am today,” Frey said.

Though Frey creates what he calls “fancy baskets” designed to be decorative, his ancestors primarily wove utility baskets used to store food or transport products. Back then, baskets were akin to what Tupperware is now, Frey explained. It wasn’t until European colonization that a market arose for decorative basketry. The baskets became objects his ancestors could trade for clothing, sugar, or spices.

Over the past 20 years, more than 100 million ash trees have died.

While his community still harvests black ash to weave baskets for fishing and hunting, Frey is focused on discovering new patterns and techniques. He’s dedicated to the creative element. That includes finding trees in the first place. He harvests black ash two to three times in the spring and fall. Only about one in every 100 ash trees he finds is suitable for basketry.

Once he identifies a tree and cuts it down, the real work begins. First, the tree’s bark must be removed. Then, the tree has to be pounded down until its growth years start to separate. That’s what basket weavers need. The tree’s wood has to be split thinner and thinner so that it can be woven tightly in a basket.

Frey isn’t sure how much longer the trees will be around for him to harvest.

“The emerald ash borer is killing the trees,” he said. “Every year, I put away a year’s worth of material because I know that there’s not going to be any more ash, not for my generation.”

Its loss would be profound. His people’s creation story stems from brown ash: After a cultural hero shot an arrow into the ash tree, the Passamaquoddy people came singing and dancing out of it. “How can you put that [impact] into words?” he said.

Frey worries that today’s black ash baskets—his or of other artists—will be some of the last. His career is just starting to take off. Where would a world without black ash leave him?

“I’ve had 15 years to think about it,” Frey said, “and I still don’t have a clue.”

Scientists believe the emerald ash borer first arrived in the U.S. back in the 1990s. It wasn’t until 2002 that they actually discovered the pest in Michigan. Since then, state and federal leaders have tried to quell the infestation by enacting quarantines and import bans on firewood, but that hasn’t stopped the insect from slowly spreading.

Emerald ash borers lay their eggs, about 40 to 70 per clutch, in the cracks of tree bark. After hatching, the larvae burrow and feed on the tissue just beneath the bark. Their monthslong

residency leaves behind serpentine scars after which they emerge through D-shaped holes as newly minted adults. While a healthy brown ash tree can live some 200 to 300 years, infestation can kill a tree in two to six.

The loss of these trees isn't devastating to only the cultures attached to them. There's an ecological hit here, too. Black ash regulates water table levels, which synchronize with invertebrate and amphibian life cycles. They also tuck away carbon from the atmosphere—quite a bit because they are so long lived. As ash trees dwindle, faster-growing species with shorter lives are likely to replace them, explained Aaron Weiskittel, director of the University of Maine's Center for Research and Sustainable Forests. These other trees may not grow as tall and wide as black ash, allowing more radiation to strike the soil. As a result, the soil might dry and lose productivity.

To make matters worse, the dead, hollowed-out trunks left behind by the beetle can also fuel wildfires. Climate change's rising temperatures and exacerbating droughts are making wildfires occur at higher and stronger rates. The Northeast is unlikely to be exempt from such impacts, especially if carbon pollution continues. As the ongoing Canadian wildfires have made clear, nowhere is safe.

"The extent and the pace at which these trees die [from emerald ash borer], you have a sudden explosion of a lot of dead trees and dry fuel," Weiskittel said. "You could easily see a fire start there. Once a fire gets started, it can quickly spread."

The loss of brown ash is objectively bad—for the forests, for Indigenous communities, and for everyone else.

Compared to other parts of the U.S., Maine feels relatively untouched by the plague the beetle has wrought. Most tribal lands in the state have not yet been ravaged by the emerald ash borer. However, tribal leaders aren't waiting until then to act. Leslie Benedict, an assistant director with the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe's environmental division, has been trying to protect black ash for the past 33 years. In his tribal territory in New York, the tree had been lost to agriculture. When he began his work, he was focused on bringing black ash back. Tribal members were traveling hundreds of miles to gather wood for the baskets.

At the time, Benedict had no idea a new threat was emerging. No one did.

He was asking all sorts of questions about the species. What makes it grow well for baskets? How should seeds be collected and stored? How many trees exist already in New York? What makes them healthy? Back then, brown ash wasn't as well-studied as other ash species with more industrial uses (like white ash). "We had to create a lot of information, and we had to learn more about it," he said—from academics, state experts, and other tribes. "Ever since emerald ash borer became an issue, the wealth of knowledge about ash has grown exponentially," said Benedict, who is also the black ash coordinator with the community organization Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment.

Indeed, Benedict's work set a foundation for the next generation of Indigenous scientists. One of those following in Benedict's footsteps is Tyler Everett, a Ph.D. student at the University of Maine's School of Forest Resources and citizen of Mi'kmaq Nation in Maine. His great-grandmother and great-grandfather wove baskets. So did his aunts and uncles. Much of his family would sell their baskets—the fancy types like Frey's—in Portland, Maine.

"It's a part of our story of how we've moved and been able to make ends meet," Everett said.

He's now figuring out how to save the tree his family has relied on for generations. He's worked closely with basketmakers and ash harvesters to absorb their knowledge. His research began by, first, taking inventory of the remaining trees and developing a protocol for tribal nations to take effective inventories moving forward. Now that these data exist, he's

looking at tribal-supported management: how can leaders stop the emerald ash borer before it's too late?

Everett is a scientist, so he's all about experimentation. In 2020, he released parasitoid wasps that are natural enemies of the emerald ash borer. The wasps lay their eggs inside the beetle's egg or larvae, killing them before they can tear apart the trees. Other states have seen success with the wasps, which are the size of a period on a page. "They're very minute, and they don't sting," Everett clarified. "But there's always the risk of releasing a non-native insect."

At not yet-infested sites, Everett has also cut down ash and non-ash trees alike to reduce their density. That harvesting creates gaps in the forest canopy to help recruit ash seedlings and foster the next generation of trees. Removing unhealthy ash trees may also slow the growth of emerald ash borer come bearing down in the future. Like Benedict, Everett has been collecting seeds, too. He hopes they can help with genetic research to solve the pest problem or, at the very least, aid in black ash regeneration should the time come. He's opting for a multipronged approach to saving the trees. His research will wrap up by 2025, but he won't know how effective some of these strategies may be for another 10 to 15 years.

Efforts to pull the brown ash tree back from the edge of extinction won't be easy—and they may very well fail. Frey doesn't believe he'll have access to the ash for long. Weiskittel predicts the species may be extinct in some 50 years. As for Benedict, he knows the tree won't always be as plentiful soon, but he won't accept defeat just yet.

"If we lose black ash, it's not just a tree we've lost," he said. "We've lost a cultural practice. We've lost a connection."

To nurture that connection, tribal nations across the Northeast will gather in July to share knowledge about black ash basket making for the first time in 20 years. At that first and only gathering decades ago, tribes educated their non-Indigenous partners. Back then, state agencies didn't even know how to differentiate between black ash and green ash. State partners didn't understand the Indigenous values that guided tree harvesting and basket making.

Now, they do. Now, the White House has released a first-of-its-kind resource for federal agencies on Indigenous knowledge. Now, the United Nations has identified Indigenous knowledge as a key tool against the climate crisis.

This time, tribal leaders can focus on one another. They can share lessons to keep their cultural treasures alive. They can exchange knowledge in the hopes of preserving their cherished black ash baskets. After all, their cultures have overcome much worse than an insect.

"Our Indigenous and Native American societies are resilient," Benedict said. "We're here today only because we are resilient."

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FRIEZE FORECAST: ARTISTS OPT TO EITHER PLY ANCIENT TRADITIONS OR EXPLORE THE OUTER REALMS OF THE FUTURE

by Svetlana Kitto

Jeremy Frey, *Loon* (2015), *Permanence*, (2023), and *Aura* (2023). Courtesy of the artist and Karma.

With Frieze week upon us, art amateurs and cognoscenti alike will be looking to see what styles and concepts are emanating from the New York City art scene. Historically, the fairs have been a reliable barometer; this time around, they match what's on at major Manhattan institutions—and diversity in all senses is the name of the game.

Four women artists currently have major museum shows—Wangechi Mutu at the New Museum, Sarah Sze at the Guggenheim, Georgia O'Keeffe at MoMa, and Cecily Brown at the Met—a showcase of identity, ideology, and practice that has been historically sidelined in the art world. The gloriously diverse visions of two of the four, Mutu and Sze, set a tone for the city at large, working, as they do, in surrealism, science fiction, futurism, spirituality, ritual, hapticality, and temporality. From this swath of modes, we can tease out a cluster of related themes that is presently bouncing all over the New York scene: celebration of craft and hapticality, spirituality and a return to ritual, and new mythologies and world-building. This overview of gallery shows and fair presentations articulates a picture of the New York City art scene in this moment.

Across the city, craft objects of all kinds—ceramics, textile, sculpture, assemblage—tell stories of touch and tradition, engaging in practices largely sidelined in art history. At NADA New York (May 18–21), Rebecca Camacho Presents will show delicately rendered copper-wire sculptures in the form of butterflies and chains by ektor garcia, and Maria Herwald Hermann's boldly colored, impeccably hewn ceramic sculptures that reframe our relationship to domestic objects and everyday life. "There is a tactile, mark-of-hand thread that connects all the work," Camacho says of all six artists in her presentation for NADA.

Over at Karma in the East Village, Jeremy Frey's handwoven baskets (on view in the solo "Out of the Woods" through June 17) also engage an intimate and culturally rich handiwork, drawing on indigenous traditions local to the Wabanaki of the northeastern United States. In its first presentation at Frieze New York, which bows at the Shed May 18–21, is welcoming first-time participants including, Silverlens of New York and Manila, which will showcase

work by Carlos Villa (1936—2013), a Filipino-American artist, activist, and beloved professor whose feathered coats and dynamic, swirling drawings draw on a diverse roster of non-Western ethnic traditions references such as Aboriginal feathered sandals and the patterns of Tapa cloth.

This turn towards craft is akin to another kind of return: to ritual and spiritual modes of problem-solving. “There’s a lot of interest out there in spirituality, the occult, and astronomy—I think because we’ve just run out of solutions for the world ending,” says independent curator Ksenia M. Soboleva. Spiritual investigation and mystical play abound in “Schema: World as Diagram” at Marlborough Gallery, which opened last week in Chelsea and runs through August 15. Organized by Raphael Rubinstein and Heather Bause Rubinstein, this survey explores diagrammatic ways of thinking in visual art. Over 50 artists are sourced from a number of eras, many of whose work feels extraordinarily in line with their peers of today.

Alan Davie’s brightly hued The Studio No. 37 from (1975) borrows symbols from a multitude of religions and cultures, such as the mandala and the ankh, to conjure “mysterious and spiritual forces normally beyond our apprehension.” The collective Hilma’s Ghost work to extend Hilma af Klint’s spiritual vision into the 21st century by creating drawings, a Tarot deck, prints, and here, a geometric painting that celebrate the artist through feminist and mystical ritual. Two incredibly detailed Nineties 1990s works by Paul Laffoley mix science, Christian iconography, Buddhist mandalas, and William Blake, all recasting reality through the artist’s visionary lens.

Further downtown in Tribeca, Bortolami has unveiled a presentation of Joe Ray—one of the few Black practitioners from the Light and Space movement—explores the cosmos in his show “Inside Out” (on view through June 17). His “Nebula” paintings, an ongoing series of intergalactic landscapes that he started in the 1970s, composed of aerosol and resin, suggest a melding of inner and outer space, as well as Afrofuturist possibilities.

Futurism and new worlds and mythologies also seems to be on top of the mind fors of young artists, many of whom are working in an almost narrative mode, creating new mythologies and building new worlds. As part of Frieze New York, David Kordansky will present works relating to Lauren Halsey’s current installation on the Met Museum’s rooftop, the eastside of south central los angeles hieroglyph prototype architecture (I). The stone face of the monument, which references the museum’s Temple of Dendur and Egyptian wing, is replete with images of the Watts Towers, graffiti, protest slogans, and other signs of Black urban life and Afrofuturism. Halsey opts for a new suite of digital collages and gypsum-based engravings for Frieze.

As is evident across the city, artists are creating new universes for us to live in, says Lubov gallery owner Francisco Correo Cordeo. “There’s a lot of imagining what the future is going to look like,” he says, “as well as the different versions of the future that can happen depending on what we do right now.”

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JEREMY FREY DRAWS ON INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS TO WEAVE WONDROUS BASKETS

by Jameson Johnson

Jeremy Frey, installation view of “Out of the Woods” at Karma New York, 2023. Courtesy of Karma.

Born on the Passamaquoddy Indian Township Reservation in northeast Maine, artist Jeremy Frey has developed a basketry practice that stems from many generations of stewards, harvesters, and weavers. Though carrying on traditional Wabanaki practices and materials, Frey has always sought to innovate the form.

His intricate baskets, which take on unique and sumptuous forms resembling vases, urns, or even sea urchins, have been awarded top prizes at craft fairs across the U.S., and have been acquired by major collectors and institutions. Now, Frey is gearing up for his first solo gallery exhibition, “Out of the Woods,” which opened at New York’s Karma on April 28th and runs through June 17th. Frey is the first U.S. Indigenous artist the gallery has represented.

Though surrounded by basketry his entire life, Frey only took up the practice in his early twenties, learning weaving techniques from his mother and harvesting techniques from his uncle. “Basketry is in our DNA; we can trace the practice back seven generations, but we know it goes back even further,” Frey said, of his family’s legacy. Though members of Frey’s family have made all kinds of baskets, the artist found his calling with “fancy baskets.” These baskets, that are decorative as opposed to functional, were adapted by tribes in northern Maine to increase sales to colonial settlers and tourists in the late 1800s.

Frey’s earliest sales were made on pop-up tables in front of businesses in the reservation or at local fairs. Even then, he was determined to create baskets that no one had seen before by incorporating complex patterns and vibrant colors into bespoke shapes. Two decades later, Frey’s baskets have been on view at prestigious museums across the U.S., including the deCordova Museum’s “New England Triennial” and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2022 alone. In 2024, he will have his first solo exhibition at the Portland Museum of Art.

“While I am playing with this tradition, it’s important that my work always resembles a basket,” Frey said. Frey is as committed to his form as he is to his process: Gathering and preparing materials is a laborious yet essential part of his work. The primary material in Wabanaki basket-making is the ash tree, which Frey carefully selects, chops, splits, and pounds by hand with tools he constructs himself. The artist also incorporates foraged materials such as sweetgrass, porcupine quills, and other tree barks. “Processing my own materials allows me to get closer to the material; a tree might speak to me while I’m foraging

and I'll look at its shape, health, and grain to determine if it will work for my basket," he said.

The days of weaving with the ash tree are numbered. The species is on the brink of extinction due to the invasive emerald ash borer beetle, which has killed tens of millions of trees across North America. Frey fears he might be part of the last generation who can make traditional Wabanaki baskets, at least for now. His hope is in future generations and the power of the earth's regeneration. "My kids might not be able to use this material, but maybe their grandkids will," he speculates. "It's up to us to preserve the work we do have and to document the process."

For Frey, showing with Karma is an opportunity for his work to reach new audiences and collectors. "I'm honored to carry on this legacy while taking these baskets into new spaces," he shared.

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JEREMY FREY'S BASKETS AT KARMA

by Diana Budds

Courtesy: Jeremy Frey and Karma.

In contemporary sculpture, imperfections and makers' marks are usually a selling point — sort of a middle finger to the idea that machines can ever replace the hand of an artist. But Passamaquoddy weaver Jeremy Frey's baskets are so precise, they look like they emerged from a 3-D printer. He takes Indigenous techniques that have been passed down through generations (from foraging sweetgrass to slicing his own ash splints) and modernizes the art by borrowing the shape of Greek and Roman pottery and using acid-green and neon-red dyes. Over a dozen of his vessels are on view in "Out of the Woods" at Karma through June 17.

DOMUS
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JEREMY FREY: INTERWEAVING NATURE WITH TRADITION

by Toshiko Mori

Jeremy Frey, *Purity*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Karma.

Toshiko Mori Jeremy, you are an artist who uses a traditional material, the ash tree, and traditional techniques of the Wabanaki people to make contemporary baskets in Maine. What influences your work?

Jeremy Frey I'm not the most spiritual person. I have a lot of pride just coming from the people I come from and I've decided to take the work as far as I can, design-wise, without separating it from where it comes from, which is why I still have three-dimensional vessels. That's why I weave the way I do.

TM What attracted you to do it?

JF I've always done art. For me, it was the idea of doing something very traditional in a contemporary way and succeeding at it. I just thought that was such a cool thing to take such an ancient tradition and use it in a modern way. I really tried to stay as close to the tradition as possible. So it's not like I've bastardised the idea. There's something about the fact that 100 years ago, I could have made these exact same baskets. They're so close to tradition, yet they're so far away at the same time.

TM Did somebody teach you to weave?

JF My mother taught me how to weave, but I grew up drawing and sculpting and painting. Those were my toys when I was a kid. We were fairly poor; my mother could afford art supplies but that was roughly it. So for the first eight or ten years of my life, all I did was art. As soon as I became an adult and just had to make a living, I went right back to what I knew, which was art. So it's just been in me since I was a little kid.

TM Are you from a family of basket weavers?

JF Yes, generations.

TM Your baskets are contemporary and modern, but one can recognise certain patterns or details that relate to traditional ones in Maine. What is that tradition that's important to you? And is it specific to Wabanaki baskets?

JF I think it's universal. It's interesting, you know, there's no glue. The baskets are literally pressure- fit together and there's no way for them to come apart. Each piece supports the next piece. I try not to include materials that I don't harvest myself. That's a major thing. If I'm going to put a new material in my basket, I'll go out, find it, learn how to use it, learn how to process it, learn how to prepare it. And then I put it in in a way that was always done. Like if I work with cedar bark, I'll turn it into a braided rope the way that we do with sweetgrass, and then I'll weave in patterns that we would have woven with sweetgrass. It's a contemporary approach but done in a completely traditional way. Even though no one has ever done it, you can instantly identify the patterns and the designs, you just don't know what the material is. And it's local; it's not like I've got it from some other place.

TM What is the impact of the emerald ash borer infestation on ash trees in Maine?

JF We're getting hammered. But we still have a few years of harvest left before it's completely invaded the state. There's nothing you can do. Our trees are just, I don't even know, they're just super edible. I guess that's the best way to put it. When a bug gets in there, there's nothing that can be done. It's not even hard for them to chew. There's nothing to stop them; they just keep eating. Whereas where the beetle is originally from, the tree has its own built-in defences. In fact, before they were here, there was no study on the emerald ash borer at all. They knew it existed, they knew there was a beetle, but that was it. Most of the studies done on it have been done since it came to the US.

TM There's a sense of crisis. Is hybridisation an option?

JF There are a few trees that have some resistance to the bug, even now. Those descendants will come back. But as far as weaving traditions and cultures, I can't say I know what will happen. That's probably 50, 80, 100 years from now – I won't be here. I don't know what the state of humanity will be. Are people going to want to weave? It's hard even now for me to find a student who wants to spend that kind of time and disconnect from what we've become as a society. It's amazing that I even did, I think.

TM Brown ash seems to be remarkably pliable. Is this a special property of this species?

JF It is. If you take white ash, which grows here, or even green ash, and you prepare it the exact same way you prepare brown ash, when you go to bend the material, it'll just snap. Whereas the brown ash, it's like rubber.

TM Are the shapes of functional baskets of interest to you?

JF Originally, baskets were made to carry things, so their shape was dictated by their function. Mine are the opposite. The shape is dictated strictly aesthetically. Sometimes I'll make covers that don't make any sense. They're too small for the vessel but it looks good. Aesthetically, I think fancy baskets in general kind of went that route: taking a design that is thousands of years old and refining it into an art form. It became less of a tool and more of like a handbag.

TM But it still remains a vessel. It doesn't deviate from the original, it may not function for containing stuff, but it remains a vessel that has a void for use.

JF I put as much attention to the inside as the outside. The covers come off; they're fully functional. The whole idea is about just exploring the design, exploring what you can do with design, and again, without going away from what it originally was. For years, I didn't really have a philosophy to it. A lot of the work I do is very subtle. A lot of times I don't expect

anyone to notice it until they've had the piece for a year, or who knows if they'll notice some of the stuff I do at all. It's done to make the piece "more" of what it is. A piece can visually be one thing, and then it can become something completely different just by taking the cover off of it, or by changing your viewing angle. I wanted to show people something different, to give people a different perspective on the work.

TM How do you process ash after harvesting?

JF You take the tree and you cut it up until the first branch usually. I try and get about a three-metre piece. The longer the tree is, the longer the materials you can weave with. I prefer to have longer sections to weave with because it means fewer restarts and makes a stronger basket. You bring the tree home, you take the bark off, lay it down, and you pound the outside of it with an axe. Then you turn it and you pound it again; you turn it, you pound it again. Like you're eating corn on the cob. This is collapsing the fibre between each growth ring. You know the little channels that carry the water up? These collapse and crush and then that releases the growth year. If you hit it enough times, you can get down 10, 12 years and then you pull those years off. It follows the
grain of the trees. You're pulling the grain down so there are no crosscuts, no weak spots, no in-between grain. With ash baskets, wherever you're weaving, the grain goes with it. It's really strong this way. Even the tiny little stuff I work with is very strong for how thick it is.

TM Going back to the broader topic of "forest", your work is one of the more authentic and direct relationships between forest resources and artwork, because there's no distance between you and a tree. Typically, there are thousands of people and a lot of distance between where wood is harvested and the point where it becomes an object. I think there's something amazing about the way you work directly with the forest.

JF Well, I've been lucky too. Most ash weavers here don't harvest their own trees. There are very few who do. It's physically demanding to pound a tree apart. Pounding the tree is an art form in itself. Harvesting the right tree and processing it down to usable material is a lot of work. And it takes quite a bit of knowledge and a lot of practice. It's really abusive on the body. So you have to be healthy, strong and knowledgeable and willing to learn. You have to break a lot of axe handles before you actually learn how to swing an axe. Eventually, the emerald ash borer is going to infest all of our trees. What will the baskets become? I've written a really cool story with my work. And the timing is perfect because the trees are going to go, and I still have a chance to really continue to write my story. I still have a chance to create this collection of works that hopefully will last a very long time. It feels like there's that much more responsibility to use this material to tell the story of the ash in a different light.

MAINE PUBLIC
AUGUST 24, 2021

WABANAKI BASKET MAKER JEREMY FREY TAKES TOP HONORS AT PRESTIGIOUS NATIVE ART SHOW

by Emily Burnham

University Of Maine/Via BDN. Jeremy Frey (right) makes baskets with his brother, Gabriel, at the annual University of Maine Wabanaki art show.

A Wabanaki artist and basket maker received his fourth overall Best in Class prize at last weekend's Santa Fe Indian Market in New Mexico, the largest and most prestigious Indigenous art show in North America.

Jeremy Frey, a Passamaquoddy basket maker, received the honor in the basketry category, for his double wall ash basket, "Malsom" ("Wolf," in Passamaquoddy).

Frey, who previously won Best in Class at the market in 2011, 2015 and 2019, is a nationally acclaimed artist whose work is held in the collections of the Smithsonian and the Museum of Art and Design in New York. He specializes in ash fancy baskets, a traditional form of Wabanaki weaving.

Frey was joined at the market by his wife, Penobscot basket maker Ganessa Frey. Frey's work, along with many other Wabanaki artists' work, is available to purchase through the Home and Away Gallery in Kennebunkport.

Last year's in-person market was canceled due to the pandemic. This year's market was a few days shorter than usual to allow for crowd management, and had fewer artists exhibiting.

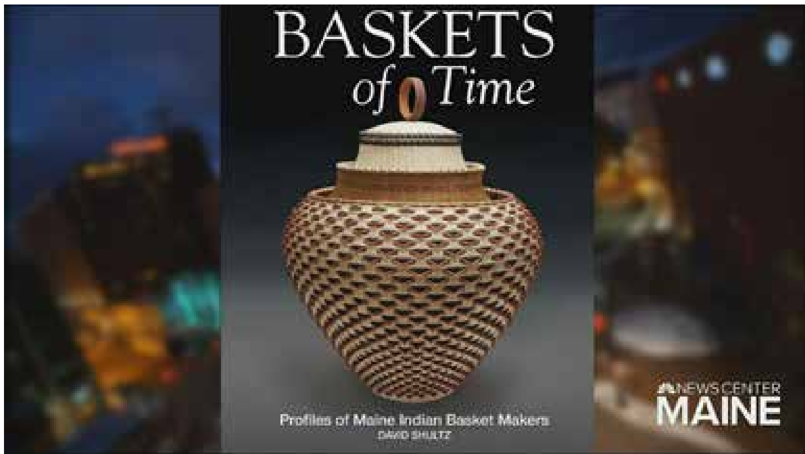
Several other Wabanaki artists exhibited at this year's market, including Frey's fellow Passamaquoddy basket makers Frances Soctomah and Geo Neptune. Neptune appeared in the market's annual fashion show as a model, wearing works by acclaimed Native designer Jamie Okuma.

Opening the fashion show was a performance from Firefly, the musical alter ego of Bangor-based Penobscot jewelry designer Jason Brown, who with his wife, Donna Decontie Brown, owns Decontie & Brown, a jewelry and clothing design label.

NEWS CENTER MAINE
JANUARY 1, 2018

BASKETS OF TIME, A BOOK ABOUT MAINE INDIAN BASKET MAKERS

by Nate Eldridge



Many parents would love to be able to pass down an activity or continuing tradition to their children. many American boys are taught to fish by their grandfather. Maine harbors are full of some generations of lobster fisherman.

Jeremy Frey believes that he is an 8th generation basket maker. That travels back in time over 200 years. He is a Passamaquoddy native and doesn't remember weaving baskets as a child, but his grandfathers house was full of baskets. His mother taught him how to weave and he has created a national name for himself, collected by foundations and museums. He's won awards all over the country.

David Schultz features Jeremy Frey in his book Baskets of Time. He features nearly two dozen Maine Indian basket makers. The book is full of beautiful imagery of the baskets and of course, the basket makers. You can find it at the Maine Historical Society, as well as on the website.

MAINE BOATS
BOATSHOW 2015

BASKETS WITH SPIRIT: JEREMY FREY BRINGS NEW LIFE TO AN OLD TRADITION

by Billy Ray Sims

Frey pulls the rough strips from the log in two, which yields the final splits used for weaving. Photo by Billy Ray Sims

"When the son of the Creator, Koliskap, came to this area there were no people here. So he pulled an arrow from his quiver and fired it at a brown ash tree. The tree split in half, and from the split in the ash tree stepped the first Wabanaki man and the first Wabanaki woman, side by side. So when we weave baskets, we are using that same tree from which we were born."
-George Neptune, member of the Passamaquoddy Tribe

The rhythmic sound of an axe head pounding a felled brown ash tree trunk can be heard blocks away from the Indian Island, Maine, home of Passamaquoddy basket maker Jeremy Frey.

After removing the bark, he pounds the tree to loosen its inner sections in a tradition that links him to his ancestors who followed the same process to prepare material for basket weaving. Their baskets served universal functions of those the world over-to carry and store food, to catch game and fish, and to hold possessions both mundane and of supreme importance.

Frey holds the end of the trunk, grasps several growth ring layers that have been loosened by the pounding, and peels them into a strip that runs the length of the log. He will split and scrape this strip, then cut it into splints as small as 1/32" that will be woven into an urchin basket, one of his most popular designs. Based on sea urchins found along Maine shores, it is an old Passamaquoddy style that he has revived with vibrant color and form.

Since taking up basket making 13 years ago using traditional techniques, materials and tools, Frey has evolved into a sought-after artist on the national stage. He received an unrestricted $50,000 grant from the United States Artists foundation in 2010. The following year, he won best of show awards at both the annual Heard Museum of Native Cultures and Art show in Phoenix and the Santa Fe Indian Art Market, which are among the largest

indigenous peoples art shows in the world. This year, he won best of show again at the Heard. His work has also been chosen for the 2015 Portland (Maine) Museum of Art's Biennial, a curated show featuring work by some of the state's best contemporary artists.

Frey's career as an artist began with personal setbacks. "I had been out into the world and joined the workforce young," he said. "There was crisis in my life, and things weren't going the way I wanted them to. So I returned home to live with my mother.

"I knew where the road for my life was, but I just couldn't get through the mud to get on the road. Coming home allowed me to hit the reset button."

His mother, Gal Frey Tomah, had begun to learn from another respected Passamaquoddy elder, Sylvan Gabriel, how to weave "fancy" baskets, the highly-refined, non-utilitarian baskets made for shows and collectors. She encouraged Jeremy to try the craft, which had been in his family for many generations. His uncle taught him how to harvest and process brown ash trees.

"I picked her hardest design," Frey said. "The materials were horrible quality, but I made every part of it and started putting it together. I threw it across the floor two or three times in frustration along the way, but I finished it." Eventually the basket sold for $75.

"I thought that basket was pretty amazing," he said. "Looking back on it now, I think it was pretty horrible. But from that day I never went back to work for anyone. I chose my path."

Ten years earlier, the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance had been formed to save the basketry traditions among the Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot tribes through outreach and education, as well as through expanding the market for baskets. Each July, in collaboration with the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor, the Alliance holds a basket makers' market at College of the Atlantic. The market has grown into one of the most significant Native American arts sales venues in the eastern United States.

In his early years as a basket maker, Frey would walk the aisles of the show studying every family style, material choices, and the quality of each piece. "I thought carefully about what makes a salable basket and how I could do something different that no one had ever seen before," he said.

Each year, Frey sold out of baskets. "The first show, maybe I made $1,000. Wow! The next year maybe $3,000, and I thought, 'How can I beat this?'" Each year his sales improved and his baskets attracted more attention from collectors.

Frey's baskets are noted for their strength and integrity, and the refinement he puts into the processing and preparation of materials. His designs have an ethereal quality.

"I don't think of them as merely vessels, but as pure art. Our tribal basketry styles include such a wide palette of designs, textures, shapes, and colors," he said.

Some baskets are made entirely with unenhanced natural materials such as brown ash, sweetgrass, spruce root, cedar bark, and porcupine quills. Frey challenges himself to find new ways to work these materials. Several of his baskets, for example, are woven with braided ash splints just 1/16" thick.
Frey also recently created a series of vase-like shapes with mesmerizing patterns of dyed ash splint and elegant lines. The "Loon," which won best of show at the Heard this year, stands 20" high by 11" wide, was woven on a wooden mold, employs looping strands of woven ash, and has a loon depicted in porcupine quills.

"It has an energy," said Frey. "If you look at it long enough, it appears to change. There appear to be X-patterns that spiral up the basket, but then they disappear. It looks black from

one direction and brown from another. It almost seems to be alive."

Frey describes his work in terms of aesthetics, design, and craft. George Neptune, educator at the Abbe Museum and a Passamaquoddy basket maker, says the process is spiritual, as well. "Making a basket in and of itself is a sacred art. Because you, as did Koliskap who brought forth the Wabanaki people, are doing the sacred act of creation. Taking something from nature and turning it into something altogether new from nature."

According to Wabanaki belief, when you make a basket, "you take a small portion of your spirit and give it to the basket to give it life. So each basket is a part of you," Neptune explained. The process also links the presence to the past, he added, "because we most often learn to weave from someone in our family where you have so many generations of basket makers before you who used the same materials, techniques, and tools."

Once Frey strips the growth ring layers of brown ash from a log, he splits each into ribbons by hand, using a cutting gauge to create different widths for weaving. He carves and shapes many structural parts with a knife, and often weaves over a wooden mold to ensure a uniform shape.

Basket weaving begins with the creation of a base. Frey employs particular care and diligence in this part of the process. "Even though many basket makers emphasize the sides and parts you can see," he said, "I want every aspect of the basket to be precise, and the level of detail allows me to describe the process to a prospective buyer and tell the story of the effort involved to create each basket."

In the bright afternoon light streaming through the windows of his living room, Frey weaves a mass of strands of ash, over and under one another, until they are tamed and begin to take shape as an urchin basket.

He makes 50-70 baskets annually. Of those, up to four will become major works that require several months or more to complete. These baskets often originate from a series of sketches or evolve from previous works.

Through his incessant effort to improve and innovate, Frey has shifted the attention of collectors, galleries, and museums from the works of Native Americans in the Southwest, the Plains, and the Northwest to the art and culture of Maine's tribes. "That national spotlight," said Neptune, "is showing on our community and will have a ripple effect on the area."

As Frey lashes the rim of the basket with a long ash splint, he says he believes in the traditional notion, "Every basket I make has a home already. I just have to wait for that person to come and get it."

NORTHERN WOODLANDS
DECEMBER 5, 2014

RISING FROM THE ASHES: MAINE'S NATIVE AMERICAN BASKET-MAKERS HAVE BROUGHT A TRADITION BACK TO LIFE.

by Joe Rankin

Jeremy Frey's basketmaking style emphasizes small, tight weaves. His baskets are among the most highly prized by modern collectors. Photo by Mary Rankin.

For Jeremy Frey, of Maine's Passamaquoddy Indian tribe, weaving ash baskets is a family tradition. He learned to create baskets from his mother when he was 22. His grandmother also wove baskets. Other family members did, as well.

Frey tells people this when they stop at his booth at Native American arts fairs. He loves to share the details of how he collects ash logs, pounds them to separate the fibers, splits the ash splints. How he turns wooden molds for his baskets. How he comes up with designs, spends hours upon hours hand-weaving to get a particular look, incorporating porcupine quills, perhaps, or sweetgrass.

“When you teach people, they're more likely to appreciate it,” said Frey. You're not just selling a work of art then, you're selling a tradition, a story. “You're selling the purity of it. It gives more credence to what you're doing.”

Today, Frey's baskets are avidly sought by collectors. They're displayed in museums, including the Smithsonian, and in galleries and collections around the country. In 2011, he won best-of-show at both the Santa Fe Indian Market, the largest Native American arts festival in the world, and the Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair and Market in Phoenix. This past August, he won best-of-show in the basketry division at Santa Fe. His creations routinely fetch thousands of dollars.

A Heritage Restored

The black ash tree occupies a unique spot in the culture of Maine's Indian tribes. Tradition holds that the Wabanaki – the People of the Dawn – are the progeny of the tree. It is said that Glooscap, hero of the tribes' creation stories, shot an arrow at a black ash and from the wound in the tree's bark people flowed out like a river to populate the world.

Stories aside, there's no doubt that the black ash (or brown ash, as it's commonly known in Maine) has helped sustain the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Micmac tribes for generations. The tree has a unique property: once its bark is removed, the tree can be pounded along its length until the growth rings separate, producing perfect ash splints that can then be planed and split and resplit, producing pliable yet durable weaving material as wide as a man's belt or as fine as dental floss.

Exactly how far back ash basketry goes is hard to determine. Ash baskets don't fare as well in terms of archaeological preservation as, say, pottery. But there's no doubt that the eastern woodland Indians took advantage of natural materials found in the woods – ash splints, sweetgrass, birch bark, spruce roots, or cedar bark – to make strong and beautiful baskets. And it's been done for a long time, said Julia Clark, the curator of collections at the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor, which is devoted to the Wabanaki.

At first, utilitarian baskets likely held sway, but as Maine's cachet as a tourist destination began developing in the mid-1800s, fancy baskets – purely ornamental works – became important, said Clark. "Fancy baskets fed into a Victorian-era fascination with 'exotic' peoples, and the basketmakers were pretty savvy. They saw what wealthy collectors wanted and tried to incorporate those style elements into their work. A lot of baskets would have matched the stuff in a Victorian home."

Basketmaking became an essential part of the economy in some native communities. "They weren't making a killing by any means," said Clark, "because they weren't selling them for very much. But for some families it was a critical source of income. They would work all winter to harvest and process the ash and sweetgrass and make baskets."

Jennifer Neptune, a Penobscot basketmaker and the executive director of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, said the tribes have a "special relationship" to the black ash. "It has sustained our communities. Ash baskets paid for people to go to school, paid for clothes, paid for food. Some people went to college with basket money," Neptune said. "It fed us when there weren't animals to hunt and the rivers were dammed up and we couldn't fish for salmon anymore. It was basketry that fed our people."

But in the late twentieth century, the popularity of Wabanaki ash basketry waned. By the early 1990s, there were only about 30 active Indian basketmakers in Maine, and their average age was 63. Elders weren't passing on their skills. The craft was in danger of being lost.

Concerned about that trend, basketmakers from the four Maine tribes formed the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance in 1993. The group began putting on workshops for kids and created an apprenticeship program that paid master basketmakers to mentor younger generations. The Alliance began arranging shows and exhibits and helping basketmakers with marketing.

Now there are some 150 active basketmakers from the four tribes, and the average age has dropped to 40. Meanwhile, prices have gone up, with basketmakers getting hundreds and sometimes thousands of dollars for their works.

This year, five tribal basketmakers from Maine competed in the juried show at Santa Fe. In addition to Frey's best-of-show in basketry, former MIBA Executive Director Theresa Secord,

a Penobscot, won first place and Sarah Sockbeson, also Penobscot, an honorable mention.

Traditions and Innovations

The revitalized basketry tradition has spawned a burst of creativity. Today, basketmakers are experimenting with new forms, finishes, and materials; they're looking to other arts for inspiration, as well as back into the tribes' basketry tradition to incorporate older techniques.

"I've always tried to develop my own style based on innovation," said Frey. As part of that, "I've kind of made everything smaller. I tighten everything up, bringing the standards closer together and making the weaving tight. I often use silhouettes as my inspiration. Not flat areas, but curves. They harken back to the feminine form, with a graceful sway and angles."

Frey said he works with different embellishments, including porcupine quills, a traditional material. This year he turned a wooden handle out of a burl and incorporated it into the top for a tall basket to take to the Native American Fair in Bar Harbor. That is not traditional. But the basket sold for $20,000 – before the sale even officially opened.

At her booth at July's Bar Harbor show, Sarah Sockbeson snapped photos of her works with her camera phone before gently wrapping the sold items to send off with customers. Many of her baskets feature deer antler handles. She slices the antlers into cross-sections, then carves and polishes each one, drilling a hole through the center. "Each handle is kind of unique for the basket," Sockbeson said. Sockbeson gives careful attention to color combinations and uses a fiber-reactive dye developed for dyeing textiles. "I like the vibrant colors and I like the modern look on something that's really traditional and natural."

George Neptune, a Passamaquoddy basketmaker and the museum educator at the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor, said he's turning his baskets into sculptures. One piece incorporated a raw piece of log with woven flowers on the basket and hummingbirds woven from ash appearing to sip from them.

"They're all slight adaptations on traditional methods I've been taught," Neptune said. "I'm kind of taking traditions and putting my own spin on them. I guess I get inspired from what I see around me and what I see in nature."

Neptune admits his works draw mixed reactions. "Some collectors really, really like it. Others think it's kind of crazy."

While black ash splints and sweetgrass are staple materials, more artisans are experimenting with others, including birch bark and the soft inner bark of the eastern white-cedar, both of which were once primary weaving materials. Sockbeson paints scenes on birchbark that she incorporates into the tops of some of her baskets.

"It's fun to play around with new things," Sockbeson said. "Some of them never make it out of the workroom. If I'm experimenting, I'll usually do one and see what kind of reaction it gets. I think natives, in general, have always used what they had available for materials. This is just the evolution of that."

Neptune said much of the experimentation today is by younger weavers, though traditionally, Indian basketmakers have been an innovative lot. It sometimes happens that a basketmaker will try something "and feel like they're being super innovative" only to later come on an antique basket that incorporates the same technique or material, she said. "They were pushing it back then, too, in terms of creativity, with new styles and ideas."

But Clark said the more avant garde basketry is drawing in new collectors who wouldn't have been there based on the previous styles.

JoAnne Fuerst, of Mount Desert Island, has been collecting Wabanaki basketry for decades. At the Bar Harbor show, she was thrilled to walk away from Jeremy Frey's booth with a miniature point vase. "I have pieces by many, many basketmakers," she said. "But this is my first Jeremy Frey."

The small vase is tightly woven in black and white. Fuerst mused that it has something of an oriental aspect to it, acknowledging that it "pushes the bounds of my collection, which is about half traditional nineteenth century and half modern. For many years, I resisted the more modern basketry because I was into the 'authentic' tradition. But I came to realize that it's an evolving art. The work that the really good people are doing at this point is so good that I really wanted to be part of it."

Ash Under Assault

While part of the evolution in basketmaking is attributable to borrowing ideas from other art forms and cultures, including other tribes in North America, another part is more practical: the black ash's days may be numbered.

The emerald ash borer has now been found in two dozen states, including New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and two Canadian provinces. The borer is in the back of every Maine Indian basketmaker's mind, evidenced by the educational posters at the Bar Harbor show.

"The irony is that we've kind of broken into the art market scene nationally, and now we're threatened with emerald ash borer that could destroy our resource," said Neptune.

The Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance is working with the Maine Forest Service and the University of Maine to find ways to slow the spread of the bug and to make contingency plans for when it does arrive. Under the auspices of the University of Maine's Senator George Mitchell Center, the partners are mapping black ash stands, looking at whether long-term preservation of harvested ash trees is possible, and saving ash seed. They're also making videos that show "basket tree" selection, processing, and weaving techniques – a recorded legacy that could be used to bring the art back generations hence if the ash is wiped out and subsequently restored.

"We have a deep, profound, and spiritual relationship with this tree, and we feel we have a responsibility to do what we can to save it," said Neptune. Because black ash exists in pockets rather than scattered throughout the landscape, "some people are hopeful emerald ash borer may not spread as fast in Maine. Right now all we have is hope."