

# american craft

Forgotten  
Craft of  
The Japanese-  
American  
Internment  
Camps

Anatomically  
Correct—  
And Built  
From  
Typewriter  
Parts

**There's Something  
About the Neck**  
5 Jewelry Designers  
Boldly Go Forth







Photo Mark LaFavor

Right:  
**Sonya Clark**  
*Madam C.J. Walker*  
(large), 2008,  
plastic combs,  
132 x 96 x 8 in.

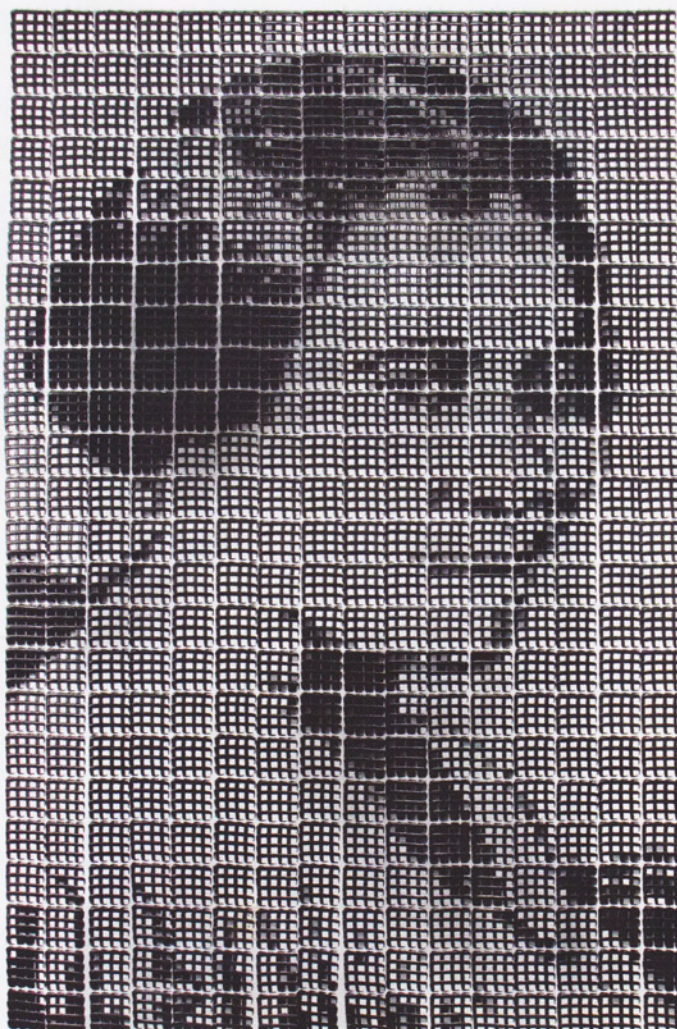


Photo Taylor Dahney

# Data Processing

**The New Materiality**  
Digital Dialogues at the  
Boundaries of Contemporary Craft

**Fuller Craft Museum**  
Brockton, MA  
May 29, 2010 – Feb. 6, 2011  
[fullercraft.org](http://fullercraft.org)

By Christy DeSmith

*MADAM C.J. WALKER (LARGE)*, a wall sculpture by textile artist Sonya Clark, is constructed entirely out of hair combs—those skinny plastic ones that barbers collect in Barbicide jars. When viewed from afar, the 2008 tapestry looks exactly as it should: a portrait of a beauty mogul, the first African-American millionaire.

Up close, though, the homage is upstaged by Clark's brilliant construction. Here, you're hit with how meticulously she has removed certain of each comb's teeth to create the picture, something she accomplished with the help of digital imaging and pixilation.

*Madam C.J. Walker* is one of the more delightful encounters

you'll have at "The New Materiality," the Fuller Craft Museum's bold exploration of craft, art, design and the dissolving boundaries in between. A small collection of tapestry, installation and sculpture prompts viewers to reconsider their notions of craft, though the most provocative fodder is within the exhibition's very title: Curator Fo Wilson, a writer, furniture maker and assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, means to suggest that artists now use digital technology just as they would any other material, like wood or clay.

In practice, the exhibition's most beautiful objects don't come with an Ethernet cable;





Photo Bryan Alberstat

Above:  
**Donald Fortescue,  
Lawrence LaBianca**  
*Sounding*, 2008, steel,  
rocks, dried aquatic  
flora and fauna, polycar-  
bonate, zipties, sound,  
120 x 48 x 96 in.

Right:  
**Nathalie Miebach**  
*Warm Winter*, 2007,  
reed, wood, data,  
72 x 60 x 72 in.

Nathalie Miebach trans-  
lates computer weather  
maps' binary code into  
the binary warp and  
weft of basket-weaving.

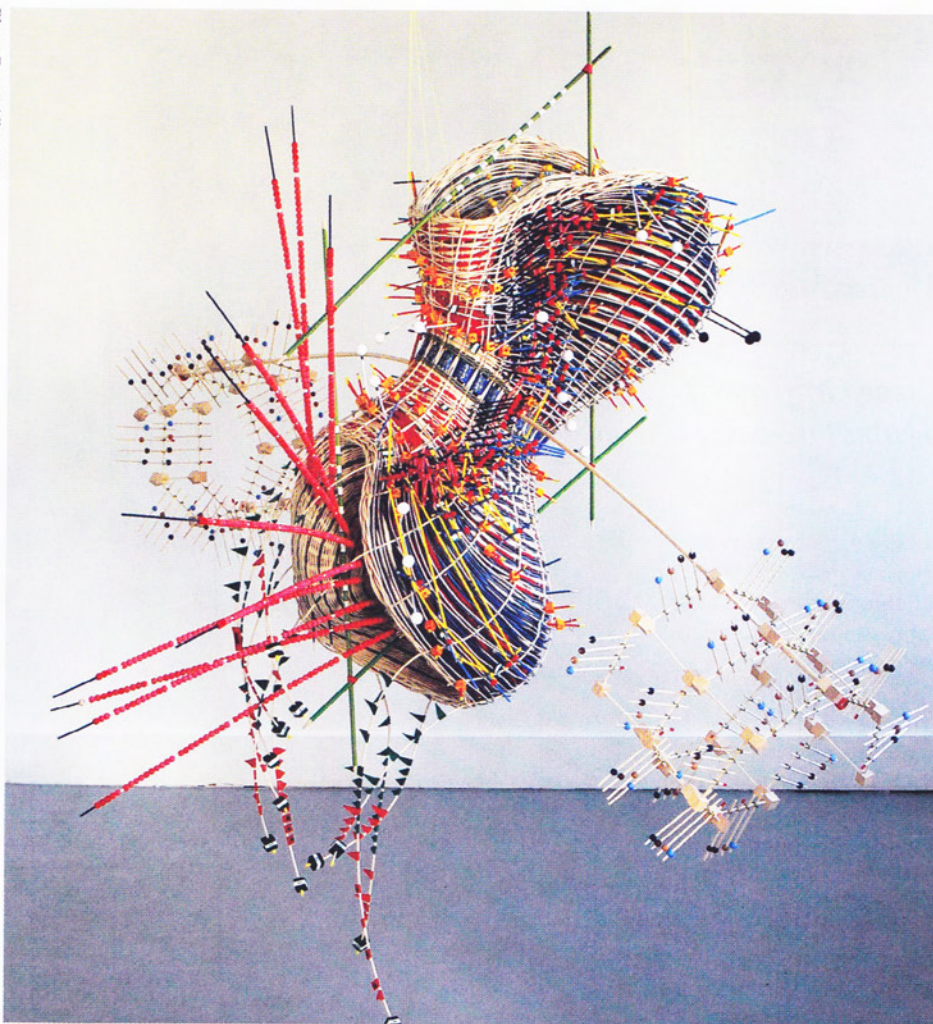


Photo Nathalie Miebach

they do, however, invite data to inspire the creative process. Sculptor Nathalie Miebach, for instance, uses basket-weaving techniques to chart weather statistics for her bulbous (and deceptively sensual) *Warm Winter*, 2007. In this case and many others, there seems a happy marriage of craft and computer. After all, as Wilson points out in her essay for the show's catalogue, weavers and computers both rely on binary code. It's only natural, then, to transfer digital images to the loom's warp and weft, just as weaver Lia Cook does with her mysterious Face Maze series, 2006, an assortment of cotton tapestries that magnify digital photographs. Christy Matson,

another textile artist, makes a more artistic association: Her *Soundw(e)ave*, 2004, visually maps the whirrings made by three looms—the first is hand-operated, the second computer-assisted, the third fully automated. As the viewer moves through the series, the patterns grow progressively denser, or noisier.

It's messy going with live technology, but the exhibition can claim two unqualified successes among its fully wired selections. Susan Working and E.G. Crichton give woodwork an extra flourish—they embedded a table with two monitors that loop footage of its birthplace, a lovely alpine forest. Just as appealing, Donald Fortescue

and Lawrence LaBianca's *Sounding*, 2008, is a *Moby Dick*-themed installation with a steel table as the centerpiece. They filled the table with beach rocks and lowered it for two months into San Francisco Bay, where it was coated with aquatic flora and fauna. Best of all, *Sounding* is attached to an enormous, overhead horn—it looks like a giant phonograph—that broadcasts the swishing, womb-like noises recorded in those waters.

On the flipside, two plugged-in pieces drip with disdain for new media. Sculptor Tim Tate pairs video with blown and cast glass for *Burned But Not Forgotten*, 2008, an overly earnest eulogy to books. Furniture maker Shaun Bullens combines a finely

crafted birdcage with footage of a perched parakeet for his literalist meditation on freedom and flight. Neither artist bothers with an artful presentation of electronics—rouge wires are left exposed and look as though they're writhing against the gallery's smooth surfaces.

Pieces like these make you think: Perhaps the new materiality is still in its adolescence. Many of these artists, especially the weavers, with their nuanced projects, use digital technology in smart, sophisticated ways. For others, meanwhile, it comes off crude; it hasn't outgrown the awkward phase.

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