

american
craft

**New Section:
Handcrafted Lives**

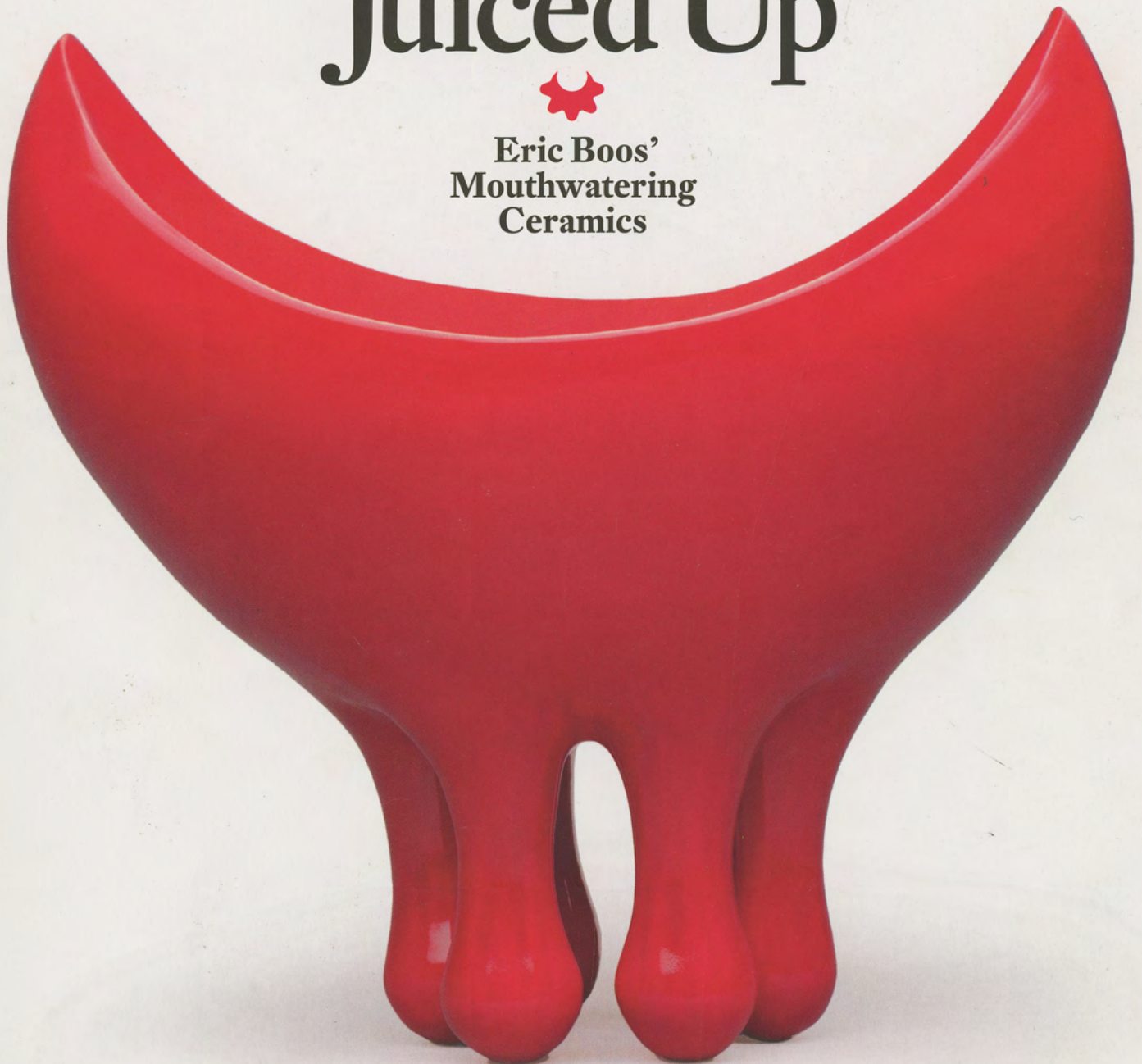
**Crayons in
the Digital Age**

**Indomitable Enamelist
June Schwarcz**

Juiced Up



**Eric Boos'
Mouthwatering
Ceramics**



Grand and Mysterious

INTERVIEW BY

Monica Moses

WITH

Margaux Kent

PHOTOGRAPHY BY

Chris Crisman

Tell us a bit about your house. Who lives there? My husband, Walter; Søren, Silas, Bjørn (our kitty), me, and often Sam, one of Walter's 11 siblings, who helps with our business. Our house is a strange concoction. It seems to have been built between 1850 and 1870. At some point it belonged to a bootlegger – a barrel can be seen from the basement ceiling, and there is a hole for a tap that we uncovered recently. It's had a variety of inhabitants, been split into apartments, and then converted back to single-family. We took over in 2007. We have cleaned it up, stripped it down, and are constantly rearranging. Walter built a backyard workshop from reclaimed wood; it's so lovely that I would almost prefer moving the family into it and making the house the workshop!

Describe your approach to collecting items for your living space. I have always been a hunter-gatherer. I've gathered many things from abandoned houses – for example, tintypes, letters, a leather leg brace with a shoe attached, and midcentury Halloween photographs. We also have objects that came

Above: Small book necklaces made out of reclaimed leather, silver, and copper by Margaux Kent.

Right: Walter and Margaux Kent with their children Silas (left) and Søren in the family's Civil War-era Philadelphia home.

Necklace photos: Mark LaFavor



from my family, including an old sewing machine that my grandmother fondly remembers her grandmother using to construct her bras, and dolls, which my mom called “kin” but others may consider creepy.

From traveling, I’ve got a monkey skull from an Ecuadoran rain forest, seashells, sea glass, rocks, and other bits of natural history gathered from adventures in Israel, New England, California, and Europe. We’ve got cannonball bits from Turkey and an antique pistol from Greece. We’ve got some amazing treasures from artist friends, acquired mostly through trade. I love the tiny “shelf cities” made by Chrisi Brown.

How does your crafted life accommodate your two little ones? Our house is loaded with history and goodies. Plastic toys are mostly passed over for more exciting playthings such as skulls, reclaimed leather, and an ever-changing, ever-growing pile of wood blocks. Søren, 4, has always enjoyed “working” with us, which means sorting, painting, and oiling. By age 2, he was pretty comfortable hammering letters into leather and learned the alphabet as a result. Silas, 20 months old, can often be seen with sandpaper and a block, sanding away. The boys love to paint and draw and often use

Right: A growing collection of skulls, including monkey, rodent, cat, and human specimens.

Below: A self-portrait Walter painted and gave to Margaux when she was pregnant. The faint face and hand in the dark background were inspired by an ultrasound image of the couple’s first son.



Right: A waxed canvas tote with reclaimed World War II gun slings for handles and straps.

Far right: Darla Jackson’s *Try Your Luck* hangs in Margaux’s work space. The artists often trade objects and tips for living a non-traditional family life.



blank pages from books that we cut up for decoupage as their canvases. When we travel, they gather their own collections of rocks and seashells, which they glue into their journals or arrange in test tubes or beakers. I think this living suits them – at least for now.

You and Walter do business as Peg and Awl. What do you make? We make objects from old bits and pieces, remains from lives long gone. We use old wood from houses from the time of the Civil War, the world wars, and so on – buildings that absorbed countless tales. We use old Victorian leather from shoes dug from privies from the 1800s, as well as vintage cowboy chaps, bags, gun holsters, gun slings, and furniture. We use fabric that transported feed and grain to farmers during the Depression and fabric that was homespun and used for curtains and dresses, bringing life again to materials that seemed to have been exhausted.

Peg and Awl began as The Black Spot Books. I started with making journals, covering them in reclaimed leather. Then I met Walter [in 2007]. I asked him to make me a tub caddy. But he was whooshed away to Iraq with the National Guard. When he returned, he made the caddy. It was beautiful. I thought, if I like this,

other people will too. And so rose Peg and Awl.

What are you working on now? We are working hard toward the launch of our new venture, Peg and Awl Edible Backyards. The idea is to re-create the spaces and lifestyle of 19th-century homesteaders who came to Philadelphia. We want to share our style of life – of self-sufficiency and slowing down. We will design and install backyard spaces that nourish people’s bodies and souls. In our promotion, we urge people to transform their yards into “an urban homestead that incorporates not just traditional annual vegetable gardening, but food forestry.”

What of your work do you most like to display in your home? Walter’s paintings and my photographs and journals. Also, an ever-changing exhibit of Søren’s drawings and paintings, hung sensibly with masking tape.

Tell us about your favorite pieces. Why are they meaningful to you? One of my favorite paintings of Walter’s is a self-portrait. Nearly blending in the dark background, you can see he is holding a child’s hand. At that point Søren was in my tummy; we didn’t know who he was – the grandest mystery of our lives! The other objects I would be sorry to lose are my



Left: A pile of Margaux’s journals, packed with musings and mementos, made from antique leather collected on her travels.

Right: Walter in the backyard woodshop he built with the help of family and friends. Margaux says it’s so beautiful that she toyed with the idea of moving in the whole family.



Above: Margaux’s father gave her the workbench, and Walter made the table next to it from reclaimed chestnut.

Left: A Peg and Awl desk caddy, made from reclaimed wood from a 19th-century Philadelphia home.

journals. I have been filling them with bits and pieces of my life; this is where I do the most collecting.

Darla Jackson’s *Try Your Luck* wall piece is a focal point of your studio space. What drew you to it? I am smitten with nearly everything Darla makes. We met through a postcard. We saw each other at art openings, and our friendship has slowly grown since 2006. Recently we made good on a promise to trade artwork, and since the first we have not stopped. Someone always owes someone something. This particular piece was in a show of carnival games involving baby bunnies, which represented the baby bun in her tummy. Another grand mystery! Figuring out how to have babies and make art and continue to live life in a non-ordinary way is often on our minds, so having this constant reminder about the curiousness and randomness of life is rather wonderful. It reminds us that life without plans is always open to mystery. I wouldn’t want to exist any other way.

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Know someone living a thoughtfully crafted life in a unique living space? Email your Crafted Lives suggestions to letters@craftcouncil.org. Monica Moses is American Craft’s editor in chief.

