

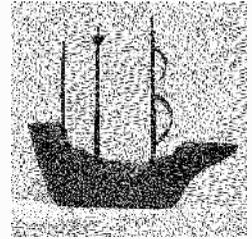
BRITISH ART STUDIES

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*Another Crossing: Artists Revisit the Mayflower
Voyage*

In the Artist's Words by **Glenn Adamson**

WORD COUNT:807



Introduction

How can the past be reshaped in the hands of contemporary artists? This feature highlights and archives the work of participants in the exhibition, *Another Crossing: Artists Revisit the Mayflower Voyage*, presenting an introduction to the exhibition written by its guest curator Glenn Adamson, and the recordings of two virtual events (the second forthcoming in spring 2022) in which the artists reflect on their contributions*.¹ The crossing of the *Mayflower* in 1620 has been enshrined as a founding myth of American history, one that is eloquently questioned through the revival of seventeenth-century British and Indigenous artisanal practices by a range of contemporary artists. Weaving, firing, and carving are used to reshape the triumphalist language that has typically been used to talk about this historical moment of encounter. In other ways, the artistic techniques shown here raise questions about the tensions between craft and the decorative arts. As the transatlantic context explored in *Another Crossing* makes clear, the British decorative arts were shaped in untold ways by Indigenous practices and a history of colonization and appropriation, but also by the possibilities of bartering, exchange, and mutuality.



Figure 1

Installation view showing works by Allison Smith, Katie Schwab, and Jonathan James-Perry (Aquinnah Wampanoag), *Another Crossing: Artists Revisit the Mayflower Voyage*, Fuller Craft Museum, 2 May–20 September 2020. Digital image courtesy of the artists and Fuller Craft Museum.



Figure 2

Installation view showing works by Michelle Erickson, Katie Schwab, Annette Bellamy, and Jasleen Kaur, *Another Crossing: Artists Revisit the Mayflower Voyage*, Fuller Craft Museum, 2 May–20 September 2020. Digital image courtesy of the artists and Fuller Craft Museum.



Figure 3

Annette Bellamy, Lena Amason-Berns, Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Tommy Joseph, Da-Ka-Xeen Mehner, Rebecca Lyon, and Heidi Senungetuk, *Wood, Water, and Distance*, 2020, various materials, various dimensions. Digital image courtesy of the artists and Fuller Craft Museum.



Figure 4

Jasleen Kaur, *Re-rites*, 2020, charred oak wood and electronics, various dimensions, fabricated in collaboration with Eleanor Lakelin. Digital image courtesy of the artist and Fuller Craft Museum.



Figure 5

Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Choctaw-Cherokee), *Masks 1, 2, and 3*, from *The Past As Future Artifact*, various materials, various dimensions. Digital image courtesy of the artist and Fuller Craft Museum.

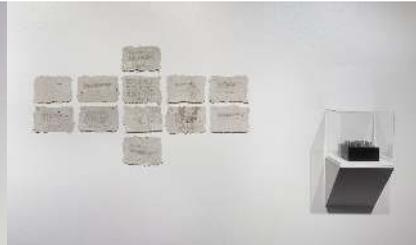


Figure 6

Sonya Clark, *Power Tools: press / text / land / language (detail)*, 2020, hot metal type, linen paper, earth from Plymouth, MA, various dimensions, fabricated in collaboration with Ed Rayher of Swamp Press, Mary Hark of HARK! Handmade Paper, and Bo Peng. Digital image courtesy of the artist and Fuller Craft Museum.

Another Crossing

On 6 September 1620, the *Mayflower* embarked from Plymouth, England, with a crew and 102 passengers. Many were English non-conformists, leaving their homelands for fear that their

separatist religious communities would otherwise perish. These self-described “saints” sighted land some two months later. They established a settlement, naming it after the last place they had seen in Europe. Within a year, half were dead. The survivors were among the first to build a permanent home in what seemed to them a “new world”.

But of course, this site was already long inhabited. The Wampanoag people lived in the region, which to them was Patuxet. Many stories have been handed down about this population and its interactions with European settlers—some about mutual reliance, some about conflict. The long-term consequences, however, are not in debate: for the settlers, increasing political dominance; for the Indigenous population, widespread disease, death, and displacement.

The implications of the *Mayflower* crossing are so far-reaching that they are difficult to comprehend in retrospect. From one point of view, by far the dominant one in American culture, the voyage is a national origin story. For Indigenous peoples, it is just one event within a long and tragic history, its anniversary an occasion for mourning. There is common ground here in the very act of remembrance. But, in 2020, four hundred years after the *Mayflower* set sail, the distance between those two perspectives could feel vast indeed, more difficult to navigate than an ocean in a wooden boat.

Another Crossing charts a course through this abyss nonetheless. The project is itself a transatlantic collaboration—organized by the Plymouth College of Art and The Box in Plymouth, England, and Fuller Craft Museum, which is in Plymouth County, Massachusetts. During the exhibition’s development, the artists traveled to both sites to better understand the historical context by visiting key locations, and meeting historians, academics, and museum curators. The premise of the show is this: each participating artist has created work in response to the *Mayflower*’s anniversary, utilizing only technology that existed in 1620. Every work was realized with tools, materials, and processes that were available in the early seventeenth century.

There were several reasons behind this rather demanding parameter. First, it highlights the sophisticated practices that were in use in 1620, like beadwork, joinery, metalsmithing, leatherwork, and pottery. In some ways, people then possessed a greater material intelligence than we tend to today. This is particularly true of Wampanoag and other Native peoples, who possessed complex arrays of artisanal knowledge and artistic *métiers*. The colonists, too, embarked on their voyage with an extensive range of skills in hand, among them textile crafts and printing.

There is also a more metaphorical intention behind the exhibition’s craft-based time travel: another kind of crossing. Each work in the exhibition simultaneously inhabits two moments—1620 and 2020—or at any rate, vibrates resonantly across that period of four centuries. One cannot fully inhabit a prior moment in time, any more than one can assume another person’s perspective. Each artist had to make their own separate peace with this fact, deciding where and how to draw the boundaries around their project’s period-specificity.

In the exhibition, visitors encounter ten artists, joined together in a collective journey of discovery. The works that they have created are by turns introspective, outraged, sad, funny, surprising, and humane. Each offers its own complex commentary, a bit of wisdom that may help us traverse this anniversary year.

It has been four hundred years since the *Mayflower* sailed across the Atlantic, to an uncertain future; four hundred years since the Wampanoag witnessed strangers arriving on shore. We are just beginning to understand what happened next. Hopefully, this project makes a modest contribution in that direction.

Artists Revisit the Mayflower Voyage

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Figure 7

Virtual tour, *Another Crossing: Artists Revisit the Mayflower Voyage*, Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, MA, from 2 May to 20 September 2020. Courtesy of Dave Clough Photography.

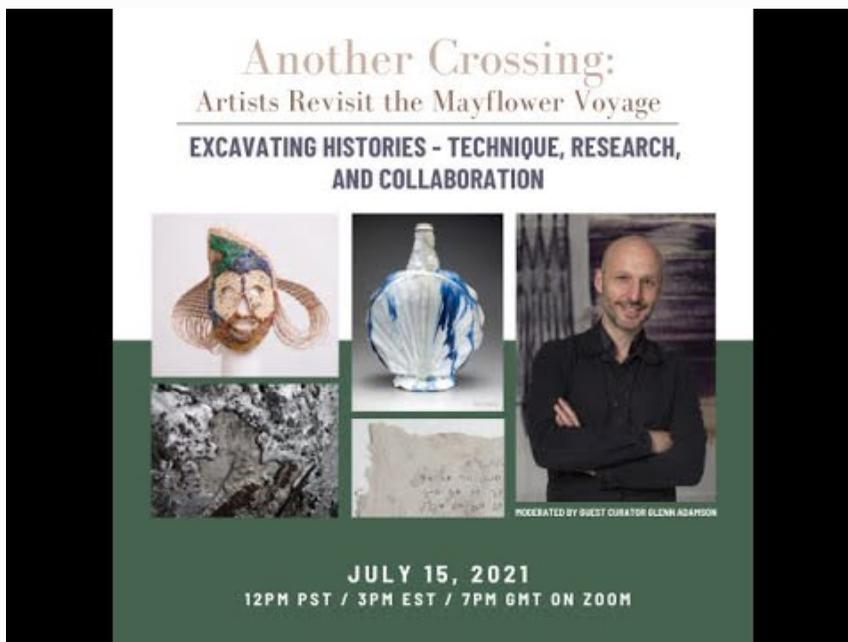


Figure 8

Sonya Clark, Jeffrey Gibson, Elizabeth James-Perry, Jasleen Kaur, Christien Meindertsma, and Allison Smith, *Another Crossing: Artists Revisit the Mayflower Voyage. Excavating Histories—Technique, Research, and Collaboration*, Fuller Craft Museum, premièred on 15 July 2021, live event recording, 1:43:01. Digital image courtesy of the artist and Fuller Craft Museum (all rights reserved).

About the author

Glenn Adamson is a curator, writer, and historian based in New York. He has previously been Director of the Museum of Arts and Design; Head of Research at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and Curator at the Chipstone Foundation in Milwaukee. Adamson's publications include *Thinking Through Craft* (2007); *The Craft Reader* (2010); *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion* (2011), accompanying the exhibition of that title at the V&A, co-curated with Jane Pavitt; *The Invention of Craft* (2013); *Art in the Making* (2016), co-authored with Julia Bryan-Wilson; and

Fewer Better Things: The Hidden Wisdom of Objects (2018). His newest book is *Craft: An American History*, published by Bloomsbury.

Footnotes

1. *Another Crossing: Artists Revisit the Mayflower Voyage* was exhibited at Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, MA, from 2 May to 20 September 2020. The show will be exhibited in Plymouth, England in spring 2022.

Imprint

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