

## THE SEASONAL ROUND

# Circle Craft: It's 'such a Vancouver thing'

With 275 stalls, the annual fair is a must-visit for the holiday shopper in search of the original and arresting



LUCY HYSLOP



Christmas has come early for this year's Circle Craft market — not that organizers always knew it would turn out that way.

Despite bursting at the seams in their original home over the past couple of decades, they had been banking on hosting the 37th year of their well-known annual Christmas market in its regular space: Canada Place.

When federal stimulus funds were given to repair the venue's famous five-sails roof earlier this year, however, Circle Craft suddenly had to look for a new home. Luckily, it landed a prime spot — with 50 per cent more space, to boot — at the new Vancouver Convention Centre, which it was already aiming to move in to in 2011.

"We had been maxed out with no place to grow in the old space for the past eight or so years," says Paul Yard, the show's producer and Circle Craft's general manager, in advance of the event, to be held Nov. 17 to 21. "But we were definitely very worried at first when we had this curve thrown at us."

Now he's excited by the potential increase in opportunity for the market, which features makers of just about everything original — from jewelry, wool-felt art, and home products to glassware, vegan belts and leather iPad sleeves.

There is more room for the jury-selected 275 stalls (up 10 from last year) mainly from North America, and stages for workshops and demonstrations (blacksmithing, wood-turning, glass-blowing), and showcases from Capilano and Emily Carr universities, and the Craft Council of British Columbia, among others. "It's wonderful," he says.

Among the 70 newcomers to the show is artist June Hunter, who admits to being a little daunted by the 40,000 or so visitors expected to pass through. "I'm really excited, but at the same time, I'm like, 'What have I done?'" she laughs, adding that she is glad to have backup in the shape of her 20-year-old daughter, Lily, who helps with some of her designs. "It's mind-boggling how it has grown."

While she creates expansive pieces for galleries in her studio (or "shed," as she dubs it), Hunter also likes to transform her photographs into something people can wear (images transferred onto silver, with added resin to make them look transparent), hang on their walls or put beneath something (her pictures on marble-tile coasters, for example). For Circle Craft, she is also busy creating wooden panels on which her images are transferred, some with crackled glaze.

June Hunter uses photos of crows in her artwork. 'They make me look up, so now I take a lot of pictures of the sky,' she says.



Vancouver Island wood-turner Jason Marlow uses a lathe and salvaged timber that would 'otherwise be burnt or discarded' to create his wares.

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Flowers feature heavily in her work, since she's extensively photographed her East Vancouver garden over the years. So, too, do the murder of crows that head out of downtown to the outlying woods every evening.

"They make me look up, so now I take a lot of pictures of the sky. The crows are like a tide, just something you can bank on."

Over on Vancouver Island, veteran woodturner Jason Marlow's lathe is working overtime for the show. He uses sustainable, local wood that would "otherwise be burnt or discarded," and employs a technique known as studio wood-turning, using wet or green wood. "It's much more organic — you have to really read the wood," Marlow says.

He views his craft — which he has been honing for three decades — as trying to convey a message, tell a story.

"Most of us can't use words very well, so we're communicating through our medium," he continues. "We're just channels, in a way."

If he were to picture his ideal customer, it would definitely be someone who wants to get up close and personal with his work. "There are wooden bowls, and then there are wooden bowls people really want to pick up and feel," he explains from his Qualicum Bay studio. "You want them to have an emotional reaction to it. It's a balance with your eyes and then there's a weight and texture."

Away from bowls, wooden

helmets are Marlow's signature pieces. "These are not copies or replicas of styles; they have evolved over time," he says, adding that he is related to the archeologist who found the Desborough mirror, the famed decorative Celtic piece now in the British Museum. "It's really about how things can inspire future generations," he adds.

Hunter believes there is a strong resurgence of crafts in the city, in part helped by the rise of such websites as Etsy, the online store for handmade creations throughout some 150 countries. "I think it has increased the hunger for craft markets, and it whets the appetite, too," she explains, "because there is one thing to see cool stuff on Etsy, but it's

also nice to meet the person who made it, rather than just sending away for stuff."

She describes the Christmas market, which she has attended for decades as a shopper, as "such a Vancouver thing."

Circle Craft Christmas Market is at the Vancouver Convention Centre West, 1055 Canada Place, from Nov. 17 to 21. Tickets are available online at circlecraft.net or at the Circle Craft shop and gallery, 1-1666 Johnston St., Net Loft, Granville Island. To contact June Hunter, visit [junehunter.ca](http://junehunter.ca); to reach Jason Marlow, call 250-757-8041.

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