

# Peer Perfection

Meet the 32 finalists who challenged one another for the prime cover position

By Stephanie Finnegan

When *The Crafts Report* put out the call for a cover-image contest, creative men and women responded worldwide. After careful consideration and in-depth discussions, the magazine's team of experts assembled 32 finalists. These professionals were selected to potentially achieve that glossy-placement honor.

With photos and artist attributions placed on Facebook, laypeople were invited to review and vote. Launched on June 10, rounds and rounds of voting occurred, until the top two vote-getters were revealed on July 4. Independence Day had an extra special significance to second-place finalist, Pamela Mattei, and first-place recipient, Bonnie Gibson.

The folks who participated in this very public and very hands-on opportunity embodied the message that the Fourth of July holds for many Americans. When all was said and done, the cover image for October's issue was selected by the interested people who took the time to participate and vote. It's the ultimate salute to the power of the people.

Here, then, are the top two finalists, along with the other 30 contenders, who are listed in alphabetical order.



**Bonnie Gibson**  
Arizona Gourds

<http://ArizonaGourds.com>

When Bonnie Gibson learned that her submitted piece, "Beetle Garden," snagged the most votes, she was pleased, proud, and pragmatic.

The Arizona artisan (Gibson prefers that term over "artist") had a very Zen-like approach to her victory: "While I am thrilled to have won, I would have not been upset to lose to the other 31 finalists. There were a lot of beautiful pieces, and all were winners in my opinion. I am all too aware that voting in this manner makes it probable that the person with the widest Internet presence wins. I'd like to think people were voting because they liked my work. However, I'm realistic enough to know that many voting for me did so because they know me or follow my Facebook page!"

The voting tally between her work and runner-up Pamela Mattei's submission was neck-and-neck for the longest time. Gibson watched the back-and-forth progression from the sidelines with enthusiasm and respect: "I have to admit it was pretty exciting, especially during the final days, because the voting was very close. The nicest thing was that either photo would make a wonderful cover."

In the crafts community, Gibson is well-known and revered. She has carved out a solid reputation for herself in the world of



**Above:** "Beetle Garden" was made from a gourd that has been carved and pierced. The piece has inlaid silver wire, turquoise (a donut and some strung heishi beads), a ceramic scarab beetle bead, and a glass beetle.

gourd artistry. Her name is recognizable from her go-to book, a definitive look at the craftsmanship and skills needed to work in this area. "My book on gourd crafting was originally published by Sterling, but now it's in paperback from Lark Publishing. Its success pushed me into the teaching/supplies side of things once my name became familiar."

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**—Bonnie Gibson**

These days, Gibson has assumed the role of mentor and educator. She travels all across the country leading workshops and teaching gourd classes. Her website keeps her very busy, where she sells tools and supplies to other craftspeople. Still, she finds time to create, and her work is for sale mainly through a local gallery.

Many years ago, Gibson explains, people viewed gourds simply as birdhouses and Santa figures, but then a renaissance occurred in the 1990s. Gibson was there at the forefront: "Fine artists suddenly realized there were countless ways to use and manipulate gourds. They have woodlike characteristics and are often confused with ceramics. There is a lot of crossover between artists of multiple media."

Prior to her immersion in this field, Gibson was a talented woodcarver. When she began working with gourds, she "instantly became hooked." She credits her conversion to the mal-



leability and allure of the gourd itself: "It's their inherent organic nature. Gourds grow in many different shapes and sizes, lending themselves to a myriad of techniques. You can carve them, paint them, weave, sculpt, make them into musical instruments and other functional items—think banjos, water fountains, and food containers. You can add clay and other embellishments, and so much more!"

## **Pamela Mattei** **DyeSigns By Pamela, Inc.** [www.DyeSignsByPamela.com](http://www.DyeSignsByPamela.com)

For talented fiber artist Pamela Mattei, the cover contest was indeed a horse race—one of epic proportions that required marathon determination. The Louisville, Ken., native had the right frame of mind, as well as sheer grit and nerve, to know her sprint to the finish was going to be the run of her life: "I knew I might be seen as the long shot, but growing up in Louisville—horse-racing capital of the world, and home to the Kentucky Derby—I believed in the long shot. The longer the long shot, the bigger the pay-off. I believed I could win and I was determined to succeed."

Taking a calculated assessment, Mattei figured early on that the final leg of the race would be between her and Bonnie Gibson (the eventual victor). According to Mattei, she played the odds: "Based on the first round, and that Bonnie was the only other contestant to receive more first-round votes than me, I knew who my incredibly talented opponent would be. I soon discovered that Bonnie is the Picasso of gourds."

Drawing upon her passion, her persistence, her patience, and her perseverance, Mattei did all she could to motivate herself and her "Team Pamela" forward. Her supportive parents canvassed the neighborhood and the world at large; Pamela Tweeted and e-mailed and conjured up press releases. She sent out invitations to vote for her work to friends, associates, and even "famous Louisville folks and Kentuckians like Diane Sawyer, Tom Cruise, and the members of My Morning Jacket."

Though she eventually fell short and became the runner-up, Mattei raised her profile, gained fans and followers, and increased her presence in social media. Her journey was chronicled by the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, and Mayor Greg Fischer has deemed October 2013 to be "DyeSigns By Pamela, Inc. Month."

The savvy self-starter has used this gutsy, go-for-it approach throughout her life and her burgeoning career. A graduate of Ohio's Xavier University, she excelled in their fibers program and became captivated by dyeing fabrics. That talent would define her as an artist and as a businesswoman. It would become her signature strength, which she bolstered with her business minor concentration.

These days, with her artwork in over 150 galleries, in over 30 states, Mattei is a juried member of the Kentucky Art Council's Kentucky Crafted program. Currently her business is primarily focused on wholesaling her artwork to galleries, museum gift shops, boutiques, and specialty shops across the nation. With so much to juggle, she still finds time to envision more accomplishments and achievements: "Never stop dreaming. Never stop believing. And you will never stop succeeding."



**Above:** "DyeSignEr Wall of Scarves" features over seventy-five squares of color. Each square is a different color scarf created by Pamela Mattei. Every row is a family of tones that "blend together in a harmonious rainbow." *Photo by Pamela Mattei, DyeSigns By Pamela, Inc.*

**Right:** Pamela Mattei. *Photo by Paula Blackwood/PBlackwood Gallery LLC.*

