

# Kim Cridler My Wisconsin Home

For her installation entitled *My Wisconsin Home* in RAM's Windows on Fifth Gallery, artist Kim Cridler links object making to an examination of place. As she states, "this project and the investigative process at its heart is testimony to my love for and interest in Wisconsin, its sheer physical grandeur and its rich history, its settlements and displacements. I hope this attempt to understand my surroundings through study and research will provide me, a more recent settler, to find a place for myself in the order of things."

Over the past two decades, metalsmith and UW-Madison Department of Art Assistant Professor Kim Cridler, has engaged in a critical exploration of objects and their meaning. Using steel and bronze, as well as organic materials such as beeswax, bone, eggshells, hair and mother-of-pearl, Cridler creates vessel forms that connect her interests in history, craft, ornament and function with an investigation of material and metaphor. Early years spent among treasured and respected objects has imbued Cridler with a desire to understand how and why we give objects meaning—and, not insignificantly, how these meanings change over time. Skeletal vases and urns—built with a systematic grid as a frame and augmented with stylized flora and fauna—evoke historical shapes while denying the uses commonly associated with the objects. The grid itself contributes to the ornamentation of the vessel and Cridler's addition of flowers, bees, fish, birds, mice and plants further enhances a juxtaposition of shape and form while simultaneously offering content.

When she uses flora and fauna, Cridler references historical decorative traditions as well as her own connection to the present natural world. With this installation, Cridler presents a collection of patterned and ornamented vessels on shelving structures that echo the storage areas of some cultural institutions. The shelves establish a literal and metaphorical framework, allowing for a certain kind of study and examination, as well as a means of collecting and cataloguing. Cridler's careful observation of the environment and natural life around her Wisconsin home provide inspiration for materials, patterns and motifs. As Cridler notes, the ornamentation is "based on sketches and studies made during [a] daily practice of collecting plant material and insect life from the gardens, fields and prairies."



Kim Cridler

Field Study #2, 2010

Steel, sterling silver, copper, and 22k gold

12 x 18 inches

Photo: Jim Escalante



## Biography

Trained as a metalsmith, Kim Cridler creates works that utilize the history, making and meaning of craft and ornamentation. After completing a BA at the University of Michigan, Cridler earned an MFA in Metals from the State University of New York at New Paltz, and studied at Skowhegan School of Sculpture and Painting. She has taught in art programs across the country including those at the University of Michigan, San Diego State University, Arizona State University, and Penland School of Crafts. Recontextualizing her inheritance from craft and applying it outside her discipline, Cridler has also worked on major

Kim Cridler

Field Study #2 (detail), 2010

Steel, sterling silver, copper, and 22k gold

12 x 18 inches

Photo: Jim Escalante

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public art projects with community groups, architects, administrators and engineers to achieve meaning, function and sense of place. *Grovers Pedestrian Bridge*, 2003 (Phoenix, AZ) began with a year of research and community collaboration culminating in a structure that reconnected a community severed by the Priestewa Freeway. *Halo*, 2008 employs a conical ring of interwoven agave leaves framed by a grid-like structure, transforming local flora into an iconic marker and focal point for the entrance of the new Phoenix Convention Center. A current public art project that echoes these themes is *Alma Arbor* a \$130,000 project for the first new academic building built at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh in almost four decades. The work includes a large bronze vessel situated at the center of a courtyard planted with a beech tree intended to grow into the vessel, fusing with the structure. The bronze thresholds leading into the courtyard, as well as the patterns echoed in the tree grates and the cardinal marks embedded in the surface, will allow for a layered experience when using the space.

**Kim Cridler**  
*My Wisconsin Home*, 2011  
 Steel, bronze, sterling silver;  
 22k-gold, glass, marble, and wax  
 10 x 91 feet  
 Photo: Jon Bolton

Cridler's work is included in a variety of public collections, including: Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, AZ; California State University Long Beach Art Museum, Long Beach, CA; Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, WI; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston, TX; Nordstrom Collection, Scottsdale, AZ; Scottsdale Museum of Art, Scottsdale, AZ; and the University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

#### Artist statement

*I love objects. As a child growing up in rural Michigan, I learned my family history through utilitarian and decorative objects rather than photographs. I came to know those who crafted, repaired and used these objects through the pieces themselves. It is no coincidence that I chose to study craft, an area whose ties to labor, the sensual, the utilitarian, and the real and everyday actions of life have not been entirely severed.*

*Urn and vase forms, fundamental in my work, serve as icons of continuity and as a reminder of the world of making and using. Vessels have been used throughout our history as containers for grain, for wine, for the bodies of our dead. They symbolize collection, preservation and ceremony, connoting containment and possession as well as bounty and abundance. I believe that the forms, processes and materials that give flesh to objects of utility and ornament are rich with content and consider this to be the subject of my work.*

*In my work, the grid-like forms represent a way of understanding—stable and enduring but without lived experience. Materials with rich associations, such as woven hair, cast soap made from lye and fat, cast and carved beeswax and the use of stretched and stitched gut or silk, are ways of casting different values and histories against the skeletal armatures. The materials I introduce and the patterns, and ornamentation I render, complete these structures with the kind of emotional and sensual meaning that knowledge and language cannot adequately account for.*

*My Wisconsin Home* links consideration of form and ornament with an investigation of my physical environment, through a collection of patterned vessels on shelving units, referencing open storage areas in museums that facilitate the formal and cultural study of objects and their histories.



**Kim Cridler**  
*Field Study #1*, 2009, Steel, 22k gold, and silver  
 12.5 x 13.5 inches  
 Photo: Jim Escalante