

## TERESA AUDET

Teresa Audet's high school painting teacher, Lori Moore, created a studio classroom that was a safe haven and place of welcome. That experience made pursuing the arts not only possible but promising for a student going through hard times. In a journal from that period Audet wrote, "I can be an artist. I can bring joy to the world by making art and it makes people happy."

With this goal in mind, Audet went on to Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD) intending to pursue painting, but to her surprise she was miserable. Luckily, painting students have to build stretcher bars, and when she discovered the woodshop, she fell in love. Audet quickly changed her emphasis to furniture and hasn't looked back. Dean Wilson's program at MCAD was experimental and offered students the chance to take a deep dive into wood, metal, and alternative materials. After graduation Audet—seeking to advance her fine woodworking skills—studied and worked in woodshops from Japan to the Anderson Ranch to community shops spaces in Minneapolis, including that of kinetic sculptor Cecilia Schiller.

Nearly a decade after college, having built furniture, taught spoon carving, and helped to nourish a community woodshop for women and gender non-conforming makers, Audet decided to go back to school. She applied to the University of Wisconsin, Madison MFA and was accepted through the sculpture area instead of the adjacent wood program. Though she'd spent a decade developing her skills and a language of making in wood, Audet nonetheless thought, "Sure, what's the difference?" What she learned in the sculpture studio brought her back once again to the woodshop, illuminating her passions for craft and attention to detail. The experience also clarified her desire to work in the space between functional and non-, between furniture and sculpture. The wood program offers an expansive approach to making, and over the three years she built furniture, took performance art, learned to build and program robotic machines, and wove small baskets that speak to human care and resilience in a time of a global pandemic.

Audet will tell you that the single most important thing she articulated in school was a relationship to craft as care. It's a form of care for herself that fuels a curiosity about how wood and craft might play a part in care for others. Audet was in school during the deepest years of COVID-19; both in crisis and not, what does resilience look like?

*It's all somehow bringing me back to this first thought of like, I'm an artist. I have something that I can do and share with the world. And that somehow brings joy and happiness to other people.*

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Taking performance art at Madison expanded Audet's sense of what's possible within her practice, and how craft and care might align. In the class, she and her fellow students studied many of the defining questions within performance, site specificity and duration among them. Reflecting on the latter inspired Audet to drag her workbench into the white cube of the school gallery. With a piece of mahogany braced in the vise clamp, "I just took my handplane and I planed that piece of wood until there was nothing left." In this work titled, *I*

*Missed My Handplane*, Audet synced up the motions with her breaths. “It was like, breathe out and then take one swipe of the hand plane and breathe in and step and breathe out. And every 20 or 30 minutes I stopped and stretched and sharpened.” At the end of three to four hours of work, she had a giant pile of mahogany shavings.

*When you’re holding a tool in your hand and you are slicing through the wood grain, it’s like you can listen to that material, you can feel it, you understand it viscerally with your fingertips. You understand what that material is doing, and what it wants to do. I know this makes me sound like a purist, but it’s also the thing that drives me.*

In *Stories of Resilience*, Audet invited strangers to meet with her one-on-one at a coffee shop or a park and sit with her for about an hour. While they told Audet a story about resilience from their lives, she would weave a small basket and then give it to them. “We had just gotten the vaccines. People were coming out of a year of isolation; I wanted to gather these stories about resilience and think about its role in my own mental health journey.” Though Audet asked participants to go home and photograph the baskets in their spaces, that rarely happened; but neither does Audet want these baskets to be on view in a gallery. “It’s almost like this collection of stories just lives within me; the stories are really intimate.” The relational act of sharing the story, now materially embodied in the basket, was the work.

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*Stories of Resilience*, which operates within what’s commonly called social practice, helped Audet realize how interconnected we are, living close together in these vulnerable bodies. To her surprise, this brought her to her next project: robotics. “I’m interested in movement, I’m interested in play, I’m interested in difficult topics, but using humor to talk about those things.” While this might easily seem anathema to someone interested in human interconnection, Audet noticed that when she attached programmable motors to sculptural objects scaled to the human body, viewers had emotional and visceral responses to their characteristics and even their struggles. One animated sculpture might be characterized as a bully, while when another got stuck in the corner, viewers rescued it.

In the shop space in Philadelphia, Audet returned to her deep love of hand tools building small and finely crafted wood sculptures in the category her professor Katie Hudnall calls “furniturish,” pieces which reference the techniques and materials of furniture without having the expected—or sometimes *any*—function. Scaled to the human body, “huggable,” and intimate, they are works that invite viewers to approach, one at a time, open it up, and explore what’s inside.