

First Person

Knot This Way by Norman Sherfield

My first basketry class in the 1980s changed my life in more ways than one. At the same time that I was taking that class, I was intrigued by the work of Jane Sauer and Leah Danberg.

I asked the teacher, Rosalie Friis-Ross, to give me a quick lesson in knot tying. During this same period of time, I met my wife who was also enrolled in the same basketry class. We were married in 1989 and I was hooked on both of them! My first knotted piece was completed on our honeymoon in Germany.

I've been knotting since then. One of my main creative inspirations lies in a knotters group that has been meeting for many years now.



LEFT: Norman Sherfield *Lighthouse* Knotted Waxed Linen with Stones, 11"x3.5"x3.5", 1993.

Sticks and Stones Knotted Waxed Linen, Stones, Twigs and Found Objects, 13"x4"x5", 1993.

Contemplation Knotted Waxed Linen and Stone, 8"x3"x3", 1995.



We have become an extended family, sharing many life experiences, exploring knotting and learning from each other.

Rosalie Friis-Ross, Leah Danberg, Merrill Morrison and Gerri-Johnson McMillin are a few the better known members of the Los Angeles Knotters. Each of us developed our own special type of knotted sculptures. We still keep in contact and have worked as a group on a number of knotted waxed linen collaborative works which have been shown by the Zimmer Museum in Los Angeles and were sold to fund their Children's Museum program.

I have always collected objects and rocks. I can't visit the beach or river without picking up a few rocks – sometimes more than a few. I had used them in my jewelry and sometimes in paper sculpture, but the paper was not really able to support these objects.

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Jane Sauer taught me to knot around Styrofoam. I tried knotting around a rusty nail at one point, and when that worked, it set me off to try other things. I no longer use Styrofoam but work entirely around found objects and stones.

I don't draw pictures or make plans of what my objects will be. They evolve while I work on them. They begin as a small circle of string and things get added as I knot. The finished works may bring to mind the human form or other creatures that seem vaguely familiar yet are like nothing you have ever actually seen.



ABOVE: Norman Sherfield *Blue Plastic Fungi* Knotted Waxed Linen and nylon cord sculpture with found objects, 6" x 3" x 2.5", 2010.

FACING PAGE: Norman Sherfield *Orange Bell*, part of a collaborative project, 2007.

I often work over large rocks which are later removed from the work, leaving the pieces very light. Other times I will leave the rock in the finished work, especially the smaller pieces, to give them more substance.

There are often hidden openings or objects inside that rattle. I like to surprise people when they pick up my work. These works are not made to sit on a pedestal and be seen but beg to be picked up and explored.

One of the major joys of knotting for me is the ability to work anywhere. I only need waxed linen, scissors and something to knot around. I have worked on an airplane, in the car, on the couch, and maybe even in my sleep.

In 2006, I relocated to Northern California, where, for the first time, all of my works were shown together at the First Street Gallery in Eureka, California.

It was a wonderful exhibition that gave me a whole new perspective on my work. About 70 of my knotted sculptures were arranged on a large 10 foot by 8 foot table. It was amazing to see them all together interacting with each other, a literal "landscape" of my life's work.

My work is in several private collections as well as the Racine Art Museum in the US and the des MUSEES d'ANGERS, Musée des Beaux-Arts; Angers, France. It has been shown in Japan, England and France and various invitational exhibits including *Celebrating Nature* at the Craft & Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles. I'm also fortunate to have work published in *Contemporary International Basket making* by Mary Butcher and *Baskets: A Book for Makers and Collectors* by Billie Ruth Sudduth.

~See more of Norman Sherfield's work at <https://sites.google.com/site/84rooms2>

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