

Andrea and John Gill named 2018 James Renwick Distinguished Educators

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Andrea and John Gill in their home studio on Main Street in Alfred.

ALFRED, NY John Gill, professor of ceramic art at Alfred University, and Andrea Gill, retired professor of ceramic art, will be honored next spring as recipients of 2018 James Renwick Alliance Distinguished Craft Educator Awards.

The husband and wife, whose teaching careers at Alfred began more than three decades ago, will be honored during the James Renwick Alliance Spring Craft Weekend, April 27-29 in Washington, D.C. The Gills are among five recipients of the 2018 Distinguished Craft Educator Awards.

The Renwick Alliance is an independent national non-profit organization that celebrates the achievements of America's craft artists and fosters scholarship, education, connoisseurship and public appreciation of craft art. Founded in 1982, the Alliance fulfills its mission through public programs, educational trips, publications, recognition of craft artists, and financial support of museums and other non-profit organizations, including the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Distinguished Craft Educators Awards are based on the recipient's reputation for excellence and innovation in education, influence on future artists in an education program, significant contributions to American education in the craft field.

"We're happy to get (the award) because we're part of Alfred University," John Gill said. "It's as much a testament to the school, and the people we work with, as it is to us."

"We were given the opportunity to teach at such a prestigious school, surrounded by some amazing colleagues like Wayne Higby (professor of ceramic art, director of the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum), who helped us become distinguished teachers," added Andrea Gill, giving a nod to professors like the late Val Cushing and Ted Randall, who taught the Gills during their graduate studies at Alfred University, and Ken Ferguson (MFA, Alfred University, 1958), who taught John Gill when he was an undergraduate student at Kansas City Art Institute. "We are being recognized because we were taught by the very best."

The Gills began teaching at the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University in 1984; John taught for eight years at Rhode Island School of Design, Kent State University and Colorado State University prior to coming to Alfred. Andrea Gill retired after the 2016-17 academic year.

Andrea Gill earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from Alfred University in 1976 and prior to that earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Rhode Island School of Design (1971).

A recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Tiffany Foundation, her work is in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institute and many other public and private collections. She is a past recipient of The Peter Voulkos Fellowship from Archie Bray Foundation (2012) and is a fellow of the American Craft Council.

John Gill earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from Alfred University in 1975 and also has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Kansas City Art Institute (1973).

A member of the International Academy of Ceramics, John Gill has presented lectures and workshops in the United States and internationally for over 30 years. He presented the keynote address at the Seventh International Ceramic Biennale in Korea in 2013. His work is held in the permanent collections including the Brooklyn Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. He was elected as a Fellow of the American Crafts Council in 2014.

The Gills have been active in summer instructional programs and at workshops around the country throughout their teaching careers. They taught every other summer for 36 years at the Anderson Ranch Art Center in Colorado. In 2014, Andrea Gill started the Alfred Ceramic Summer Workshops, held in conjunction with the Alfred University-hosted MostArts Festival.

The Renwick Alliance names Distinguished Craft Educators every two years and the Gills are the latest in a line of art educators affiliated with Alfred University to receive the award. Previous honorees with ties to Alfred include Ferguson (awarded in 2000); Higby (2002); William Carlson (MFA, 1976, awarded in 2004); and Don Reitz (MFA, 1963, awarded in 2006).

The five 2018 Distinguished Craft Educator Award honorees will lead a symposium April 28 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, held as part of the Renwick Alliance&s Spring Craft Weekend. In addition to the Gills, the award-winners include Helen Drutt English, an expert in contemporary applied art, gallery owner and collector who over the years has exhibited and promoted the work of numerous ceramic artists affiliated with Alfred University. They include Higby, whose work has been shown at more than 20 exhibitions at Drutt English&s galleries in Philadelphia and New York City.

“Helen Drutt is a major figure in the world of ceramic art, as a promoter and dealer,” Higby said. “She has been connected with Alfred for many years and has been able to feature the work of ceramic artists from Alfred whenever possible.”

Higby said Drutt English is currently working with the National Museum of Art in Sweden on an exhibition that will include the work of several ceramic artists connected to Alfred, including Higby, John and Andrea Gill, the late Robert Turner (former professor, for whom an endowed chair in ceramic art is named), Cushing, and Linda Sikora, professor of ceramic art and Robert C. Turner Chair. Higby said Drutt English organized an exhibition in 2014, “Gifts from America,” created for the 250th anniversary celebration of the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. Several Alfred-affiliated artists had their work displayed in the exhibition, which is still on view today.