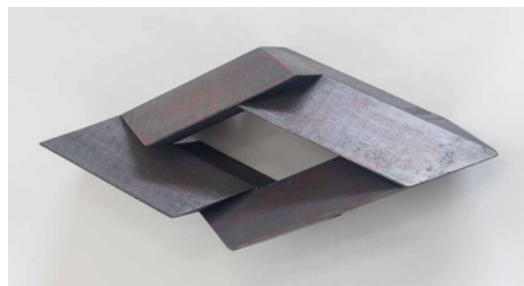


# MoNA

Museum of Northwest Art

## ***Peter Millett: Built Forms***



Guest Curated by Greg Bell

**October 12, 2024 - January 12, 2025**

Top Left: Peter Millett, *Double Diamond*, 2022. Ink on paper.  
Top Right: Peter Millett, *Copper Woman*, 2016. Copper leaf on wood, steel.  
Bottom: Peter Millett, *Black Diamond*, 2024. Painted wood.

# Peter Millett: An Introduction

Peter Millett was born in Chicago, IL and raised in an artistic household: his father was an architect and his mother taught voice. Their home, which was designed and built by Millett's father, was infused with the arts. This creative atmosphere led Millett to take painting and drawing classes after school at a young age. He later went on to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) to earn his BFA.

In 1973 Millett settled in Seattle where he started by creating large supergraphics for a building design company. He took more coursework in sculpture and painting at the University of Washington and taught figure drawing at Cornish College of the Arts, while also traveling and exploring his own artistic style. In 1976, the artist became a courtroom sketch artist and continues today.



Peter Millett, *Early Self Portrait*, age 16, 1965, Acrylic on canvas, 28 × 22 in.

Millett's visual language holds a collection of patterns formed across time during his upbringing, education, vocation and travels. Numerous combinations of these patterns flow into his work, whether they are created with paper, paint, ink, wood, steel, window screen, angle iron, or long grasses. The process of exploration, spontaneity, and discovery are at the heart of his creations.

*"The abstract quality of the work is more barn-door modernism than slick New York minimalism. There is the act of remembering intertwined with the art of making. The artwork does not refer directly to anything other than the pieces, or the process, itself."*

—Greg Bell, Guest Curator



Photo Credit: Sherry Markovitz, *Portrait of Peter Millett in Studio*

Peter currently lives in Seattle with his wife, fellow artist Sherry Markovitz. All of his work is made at his home studio.

# Influences

Throughout the 1970s, after receiving his BFA, Millett began traveling globally and at times for extended periods. His visual and cultural experiences during these travels made a lasting imprint upon the nature of his work. In 1971, the artist traveled to England, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Morocco. Millett spent a longer stay, with his parents, in Iran in 1975 and later went to Ecuador and Peru in 1979, as well as visiting other places such as Malaysia and Mexico

*“The geometric intricacies in [Millett’s] sculpture and drawings talk about the intense patterning found in ancient tile work in Iranian sacred architecture. The repeated but irregular lines have a memory of textiles made on simple looms by Andean weavers, passed on from forebears. The construction-grade dimensional wood used in the sculpture, painted a monochrome hue, hints at the timber of the Northwest.”*

—Greg Bell, Guest Curator



Photo credit: Peter Millett, *Iran journey* images, Mosque, Isfahan, Iran, 1975

Seattle was experiencing a period of rapid growth during the 1970's. Many timber-frame buildings were being destroyed to make way for new developments. Millett noticed the large-scale lumber that was being brought down and saw it as a source of cheap material and geometric inspiration for his work.

As you walk through the galleries, notice how Millett's works—whether faceted together from wood and painted a single color, or forged of steel into an intricate stair-stepping set of shapes, or painted on folded paper with intersecting lines—evoke his formative global experiences.



Peter Millett, *Steps*, 2015. Steel, 60 × 17 × 60 in. Collection of Barbara Billings & Ernie Vogel

### Questions for Connection: Discuss Your Responses

Where is a place you have gone where you felt impacted by the visual experience of that place?

Take a close look at the exhibition: can you find works that connect visually to Iranian tile? How about woven Andean basketry?

What architecture, patterns, or color combinations inspire you?

What makes you feel spontaneous? Is it a time of day, place, person, material or something else that inspires your spontaneity?

# Process & Materials

Peter Millett's exploration of geometric shapes began with his arrival in the Northwest. His art forms may appear simple, but within them lies a complexity of intersecting lines and overlapping planes. The triangle shape is at the foundation of his work. Triangles are then joined together to create and investigate other geometric shapes. The artist does not make sketches, models, or conduct any preparatory work for his pieces.

Starting with raw elements Millett makes cuts and fits pieces together at differing angles, as he feels led to in the moment of making. If working with paper, he may begin drawing lines or making folds to see where it goes. When working with steel, Millett does his own welding and casting.

*"He took [metal working] up again in the 1990s when he was introduced to the new wire-feed MIG welders. These compact units allowed the operator to almost draw with molten metals...This led Millett to explore his vocabulary of shapes not only on a larger scale but with more complex geometry involved. No longer held to a four-sided timber, the polyhedrons grew to five-, six-, and more-sided volumes."*

—Greg Bell, Guest Curator

Millett intentionally begins with an empty slate. He seeks to "be led rather than to lead" when creating art. Indeed his only aim is to see what comes out, step by step, rather than directing the process. It is a spontaneous unfolding—a surprising discovery as it's being made. His artwork titles imply a narrative, but he only names a work after it is finished.



# Try This

The artist is led by the idea of exploration and discovery, rather than having a plan and being in control of the outcome. Millett seeks to take materials and transform them until they become multifaceted, angular, and even flowing. His artistic style is especially inspired by patterns in Iranian architecture, Navajo weavings, and Andean basketry.

**Unleash your  
Creativity!**

**Paper Sculptures:** Start by folding a blank piece of paper and see how many geometric shapes can occur. Add detailed folds as you go. Add color or pattern if you feel so inspired.

**Geometric Drawings:** Begin by drawing a rectangle or triangle. Add squares and diamonds inside to arrange different shapes together. Attempt to do this without planning ahead. Consider adding triangles, stair steps, stripes, stars or crosshatched/intersecting lines.



Peter Millett, *Roof*, 2023. Ink on paper, 22 × 24.5 in.

*"I like sticking things together and waiting for some kind of surprise."*  
—Peter Millett, Artist

*This exhibition is made possible in part by:*

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## Upcoming Events & Workshops

### NOVEMBER

- 02 *Pacific Northwest Landscapes Drawing Workshop w/ Kristin Frost*
- 02 *This Machine is Made for Earth: The Madrona Project at MoNA*
- 09 *Free Public Tour*
- 09 *Humanities Washington: Resisting Erasure through Storytelling w/ Putsata Reang*
- 16 *Weathering Steel Sculptures of the Northwest Lecture*
- 16 *Built Forms: A Walkthrough with the Artist*
- 16 *Sip & Shop*

### DECEMBER

- 07 *My Adult & Me: A Winter Holiday Card-Making Craftaganza w/ Kayla Williams*
- 14 *Free Public Tour*
- 14 *Holiday Origami Ornaments w/ Mike Berry*

### JANUARY

- 11 *Luminary Globe Decorating Workshop*
- 11 *Free Public Tour*
- 11 *Open Mic: At the Seam*

### Join us for our Free Youth Programming!

Teen Art Club: Fridays 3:00-5:00

Early Enrichment: Wednesdays 10:30 - 11:15

*View October 2024 - January 2025  
dates and RSVP on our website!*



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