

**Oval Punch Bowl and Ladle | [Dawn Kiilani Hoffmann](#)**



**Oval Punch Bowl and Ladle**

1993

sterling silver; raised and forged

27 x 38 x 31 cm (11 x 15 x 12 in.)

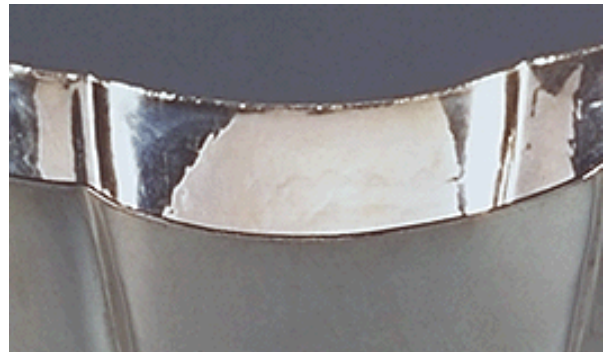
Lent by the White House

gift of the artist

Photograph by John Bigelow Taylor

The quiet and elegant simplicity of this hand-wrought oval punch bowl and its matching ladle allows one to fully appreciate silver and its reflective qualities. The forged legs have been carefully executed so as not to interrupt the sweeping lines of the fluted bowl. The ladle, made as a companion piece, echoes the design of the bowl.

[Audio](#) (367 KB)



**Oval Punch Bowl and Ladle (Detail)**

**Dawn Kiilani Hoffmann** | [Oval Punch Bowl . . .](#)



**Dawn Kiilani Hoffmann**

born 1956

Resides in Hagerstown, Maryland

Photograph by Kent B. Heimer

**Biography**   [Statement](#)   [Ask the Artist](#)   [In the Studio](#)

Dawn Kiilani [KEE-EE-lah-nee] Hoffmann has worked as a self-employed metalsmith since 1983. She works in many metals--silver, gold, copper, brass, pewter and bronze. She apprenticed for three years with a maker of French Horns, Walter Lawson, where she learned many of the basics of her craft. She belongs to the Society of North American Goldsmiths, and the Blacksmiths Association of North America. She received a BFA in music (French Horn performance) from the University of Wisconsin, Madison and has studied silversmithing and blacksmithing at the Williamsburg (Virginia) Historical Foundation.

## Statement

Quiet simplicity allows one to appreciate the metal, the line, the reflective light, and the positive and negative space that a piece of my work creates. Natural forms suggest an infinite number of designs that can be used in a functional way. Simple shapes are easiest to live with, but more difficult to execute. In metalsmithing, the flow or sweep of a line is a challenging task.

My thought in using an oval for the bowl was that it is characteristically a handwrought shape rather than machine made. The forged base needed to be sturdy and substantial but open to let the curve of the bowl be uninterrupted. The flutes on the sides and the slight flare at both ends were put there to help give a sense of movement or rhythm. The ladle, made as a companion piece, is also oval and fluted to echo the design of the bowl.

In all my work I strive to make practical, functional designs that speak with grace.

## Ask the Artist

### Where do you get the ideas for your work?

Usually, I start from what the object will be used for: what will it be? What is its purpose? When I am clear about purpose then I think about the qualities that the piece will express: grace, strength, honesty, quietness and so forth, all these are various components of beauty. I especially think about grace, because one of the Greek root words for it is "charis" or "charity" - love in its most basic form. If work is not impelled by love, it will not be able to fulfill its purpose. Then I start to explore what form or forms, outlines, mass, coloring, surface, materials and so on, best show the qualities that are to be shown forth. This takes inspiration, or to me a lifting up of spirit. When I can clearly see the qualities that are needed for a design, it is sort of like watching a flower unfold petal by petal - sometimes it takes years of watching and waiting other times it is quick, depending on how aware I am of all the elements needed.

All of this happens before any physical work starts: drawing, hammering, piecing, fire, etc. Sometimes the "making" process starts directly on or with the metal, other times it starts with paper & patterns, or clay or drawings.

Boundaries to a work are set by properties and capabilities of the materials and sometimes by other factors; time, price, tools, cultural notions of clients, etc...

As the work progresses, I try to keep the basic premises that I started with in mind, and often a better way of doing or expressing something will present itself.

I think that too often we get caught up in the ego-centered thinking that says "I am a creator" when truly there is one creator: the universe is governed by this truly creative force and that we are a part of that vast ordered creation. When we try to understand and can see this, we can be constructive channels for that force, it gives us that creative energy or motion. Creativity then is the expression of our thought and understanding of things. To me it is important not to separate it from living in my everyday activity - so it is not a thing to turn "on" or "off" when needed, it is just a way of seeing, experiencing, being, doing and learning with the "be" and "do" as "artist" and "art" or "craftsman" and "craft."

### **Do you work alone on your craft, or with others?**

I do all the designing and metalwork myself, but have incredible support from my husband Kent Heimer, who supports me in every way. I also feel that I have the support and encouragement from my parents Dee & Dave Hoffmann and friends. Also Fred Femster has given me much information and support over the years.

### **Do you ever teach, or take on apprentices?**

I have taught in some small "workshop" settings and demonstrated to the general public and school children, but not yet in any institutional setting. I don't really have enough tools or space to take on any apprentices.

### **What's the most exciting part of creating your works?**

Being able to keep on doing the work, and learning more about all kinds of things, seeing where it will lead me. Also becoming friends with the people who commission me to do work for them and learning from them and seeing the transformation of the metal as it is worked into a piece.

### **What's the most difficult part of creating your works?**

Having enough time to do it! And the challenge in making something, of how to best express the purpose and qualities that the piece should have.

### **What sort of technology do you use in your work? Has the technology of your craft changed dramatically over the past 100 years?**

Technology has changed in some ways for instance: from charcoal forge to bottled fuel torches, hand burnishers to motorized buffing wheels and other various motorized small tools like the flexible shaft etc... But basically the procedures have stayed the same: forging, sinking, raising, construction, piercing, soldering etc.. (the mechanization and ability of mass producing metalwork, silverplate etc... making handwrought pieces comparatively expensive are some of

the reasons metalsmiths were put out of business on a large scale--that aspect has dramatically changed --the hand processes have stayed the same.)

**Do you have any advice for somebody just starting out?**

Read everything and anything you can about your craft and also in other craft media. Find and look up people who are doing similar and related kinds of work - to see their workshops, go to shows, museums, historic places, industry and look at what they have to offer - what do they do, how do they work, what do they make or show. Take the time to build relationships with ones you feel that you can offer them something and they can offer something to you. Learn how make your own tools, learn how to use the tools you make and purchase. Apprentice to yourself!! Have high standards of work--if it isn't right, do it again and again. Start with things that you can do and when you are ready move on to better work and more complicated processes and projects. Build your collection of tools as you learn how to use them and around the kinds of work you are doing. Love what you are doing and be grateful for it, and don't give up - challenges are great opportunities! Be aware!

**Can you share a "secret of the trade" with us--something nobody else knows or that you found out only after years of experience? Put another way--what do you wish somebody had told you when you were just starting out that might have saved you hours of wasted effort?**

I don't know that what I know - nobody else knows! But I will say that as often overlooked source of relevant and helpful information on techniques and use of materials and source of supply can come from industrial supplies. They often have technical staff to help with problems or questions that customers might have, and they will tell you everything they can about what their product can and will do. Often they will even send a representative out to your shop if it fits into their schedule etc. One thing to keep in mind though: be respectful and only ask for important, needed advice and assistance; if you haven't found conventional know ways to solve a particular problem - then ask. Also industry suppliers have minimum orders - don't ask to have exceptions made for you, go in with another craftsperson if you yourself can't use the amount of material they require, or ask if there is a local industry that you might put an order in with them. The other thing that is often overlooked - find out about (and do) other craft media, often techniques or design possibilities will be opened up when translated back to your original work. Tools, techniques, even designs, can be adapted to do all kinds of things.

**What are we missing by experiencing your work through the Internet and not seeing/hearing/feeling/smelling/touching it in person?**

Mostly I would say the reflections of light off a piece and the 3-dimensional aspect, the weight and so forth. But with pictures you miss only what you aren't open to seeing - it shouldn't be a limiting experience, but an expansive experience. Look at every detail and try to imagine how things feel, sound and smell from what has been already experienced. Studying pictures will give clues that are instructive. To be able to see all the work and studios/workshops would take tremendous time and traveling that can be done on Internet instantly!! WOW!!

### **In the Studio**

"I've got a friend" Dawn Kiilani Hoffmann tells us, "who says he has an *M.A.L.* degree--that's a Master of Arts in Living. I'm working on one of those myself."

If anybody deserves an M.A.L., Hoffmann does. Her one-room, handmade home near Hagerstown, Maryland serves as a testament to simple, thoughtful living, and to the marriage of form and function. Every square inch is put to use. The entire space is a "living room" in the literal sense of the word.

Entering the house, we're greeted by a refreshing blast of cedar. There's wood everywhere, and it's all been chosen with a particular quality in mind--grain, strength, aroma, color. The handmade hinges take their direction from the shapes in the house and outside. Some seem to grow from the wood and sprout leaves.

The orderliness of Hoffmann's small shop isn't really surprising. There would hardly be any other choice. But the absolute necessity for cleanliness, and smooth, shiny surfaces on all the tools were something we hadn't expected.

We keep probing for a spiritual connection. The devotion of Hoffmann and her family to the usefulness and beauty of the objects around them seems almost otherworldly. But again and again she returns to this very down-to-earth thought:

"There is no space in the shop, or in our small house for anything extra. So why shouldn't everything we use be beautiful and complex, and reveal itself to us as we use it."

We eat lunch with handmade silverware, on pots thrown by a local potter, every morsel hand-crafted, for nourishment, with love.

"There's no need to polish the silver," Hoffmann says. "We use it every day."













