

CRISTINA GRAJALES GALLERY

# *New York Social Diary*

## Steven and William Ladd

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Working in deep collaboration, the brothers and artists, Steven and William Ladd use textiles, beading and small cast forms to create strange and intricate evocations of their shared memories. Steven began cutting and sewing his own clothes while at school in Kansas City, not far from where they grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. William began obsessively beading while still a teenager—which, given that few teenage boys are drawn to macramé, must have taken considerable strength of character to sustain. They are charming and that must have helped, but they're also ferociously disciplined and organized—"We're good mid-western boys," is how William put it ... but they're a bit more than that. They started out by making accessories but as they found themselves increasingly absorbed by their task, they realized that their pieces, each of which required hundreds of hours of work, were turning into art. Eventually a handbag was shown at, and subsequently acquired by, the Department of Decorative Arts at the Louvre in 2005. They had their first solo exhibition at The Contemporary Museum, Hawaii in 2011 followed by a second show at the Parrish Art Museum in 2014.

Your work is so labor intensive ... I mean, do you ever go out of your mind doing things like this?!

Steven: Er ... we were crazy to start with!

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William: We were born out of our minds! So that's kind of how it started. I fell in love with beadwork when I was, like 15 years old. I always had a big bag of beads with me.

Why beads?

William: I don't know. I was making macramé, like bead hangs. I started to make this really long bead hang and I was going to put it in a doorway. Steven bought me some antique beads when he first moved to New York. That's when we really started to do these kinds of pieces.



Looking across a work table in Steven and William's tidy Chelsea studio.



A studio wall is covered with a photographic mural of students who have participated in Steven and William's project called a "Scrollathon".

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A chalkboard details the studio division of labor and tasks at hand.

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Did your friends think you were trying to be hippies?

William: Um ... they kind of did. We were kind of were hippies ... disco dancing ... it was that era.

Steven: It was our [attempt] to revive that era! [laughing]

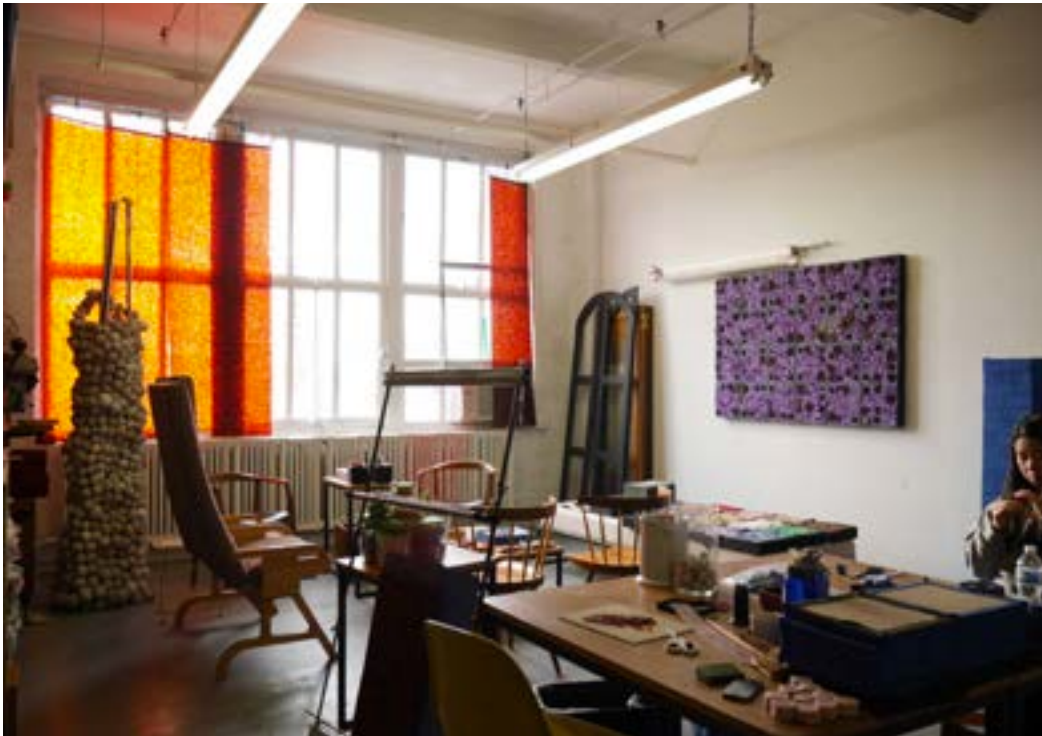
Steven, what were you doing while William was busy with macramé?

Steven: I'm one year older and I was in school in Kansas City. I was like the only artist there. I was really kind of [studying] theater but I didn't know what I wanted to do. There really weren't any fashion design teachers there but I just started learning how to sew clothing. I kind of fell in love with hand-sewn couture clothing. I've been making my own clothing for 20 years.

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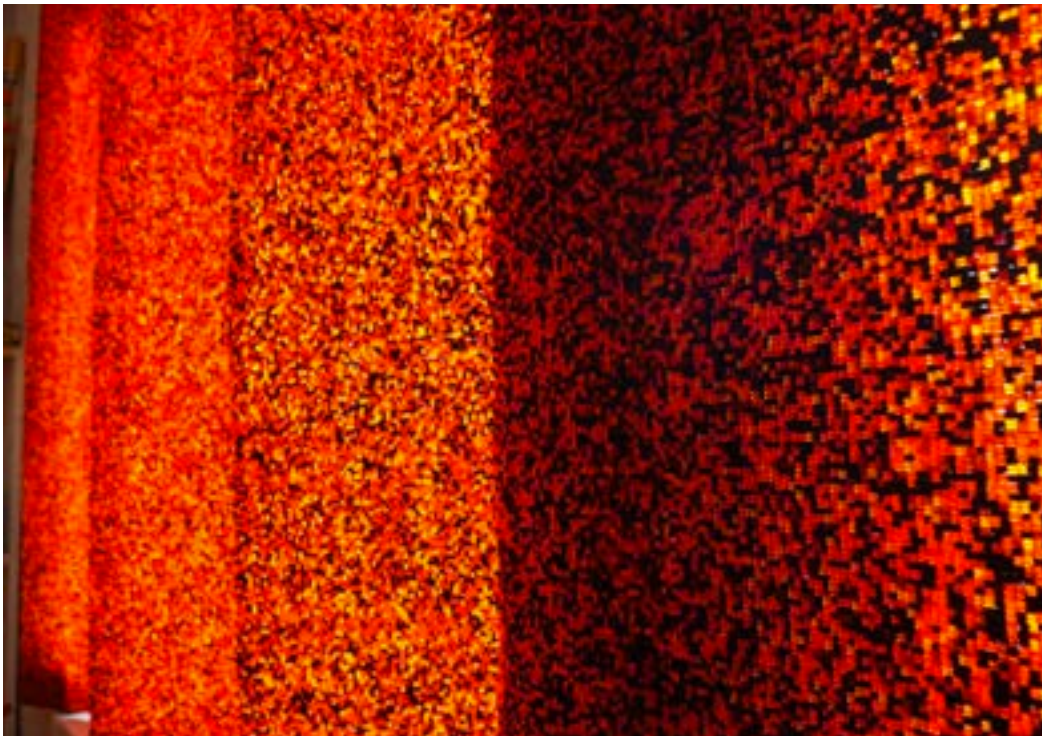
Views of the studio. A pair of armchairs is covered in the same woven trimmings used in Steven and William's landscape boxes.



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Hand loomed glass beads in black, orange and yellow create “stained glass-like” sliding window panels.



Looking downtown from the studio windows.

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Closed and stacked hand-sewn cloth boxes resemble sculptural towers.

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A landscape box "Blue Wound Maquette" was created out of cast paper and straight pins.

So you were both into this craft-y stuff ...

Steven: Very much. I was really getting into tailoring at the time while William was modeling and traveling the world.

Were you a model? Yes, I can see that ... the square jaw. You're very good looking!

[They both start laughing a lot]

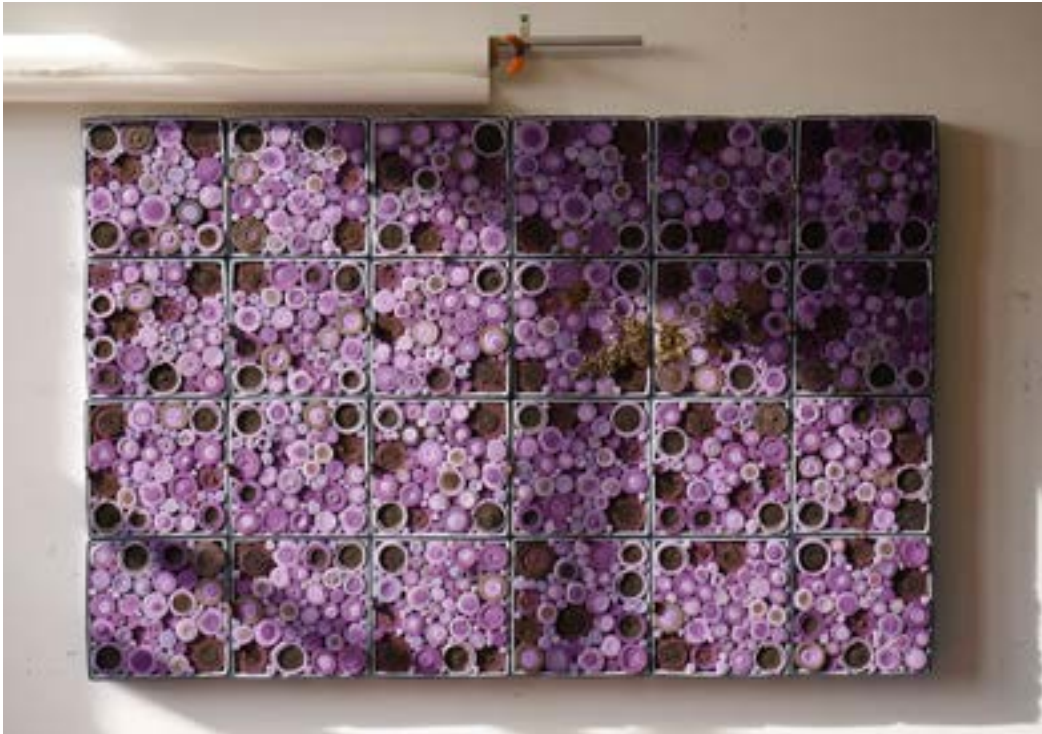
William: Thank you!

So did you enjoy modeling?

William: Yeah. It was amazing. I moved to Chicago and within a month they were like, "Oh, you're going to Europe." I mean, it was easy and for the first couple of years you're really into it. I would be in casting line and I would be sitting there doing beadwork. But after two years you're kind of like over it.



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"1960s TV Dinner" is made up of scrolls created by students during Scrollathons at the Parrish Art Museum.



A close up of "1960s TV Dinner." Intricate bead patterns are layered upon tightly rolled cloth trimmings in varying heights and patterns.

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A studio table displays a series of maquettes for an upcoming exhibition at the Saint Louis Art Museum.



Meticulous planning goes into the creation of each hand-sewn box. Cloth scrolls and other elements are numbered and laid out for a future project.



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Hand-beaded trees create a forest atop a scroll surface.

We need to talk about your relationship and how you collaborate. Have you always been close?

William: Very close. We were always a very close family and always have been.  
My brother, Matt and my dad and all of my uncles also work together as electricians.

So how do you two collaborate?

William: Well I was always doing beadwork and Steven was making his clothes and at a certain point I started making accessories that would go with the outfits.

Steven: One day, it was like, “Let’s open a handbag accessory company.”



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William works on a loom to create more beaded window panels.

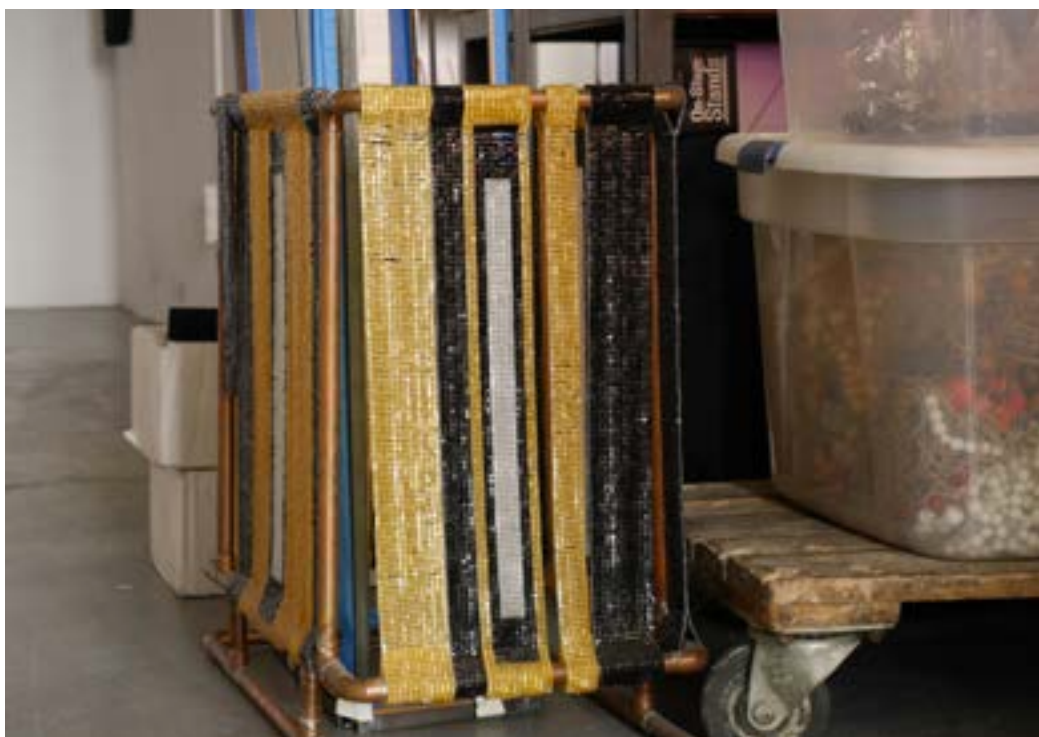


Sian closely examining a hand-beaded rosary.

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Supplies are neatly organized on studio shelves.



The early stages of a chandelier, built of hand-beaded glass strips.

Do you quarrel?

Steven: Well we are both very opinionated but it's more a question of trying to solve a problem than arguing.

And how did you transition from making accessories to making art pieces?

Steven: Well after spending three hundred hours on a handbag, we were like, "Okay, this is more than just a



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bag.” And then we started making these hand-sewn handmade boxes to contain the objects. Then we started creating these worlds inside them. All of a sudden it started becoming whole worlds ... it would be a box with maybe some glass beaded trees and a little handbag ... and it would be, “Oh, that’s grandma and this is a piece about a trailer park where we went on vacation with our family.”



Cloth trimmings from *The Invisible Dog*, an art center housed in an old belt and buckle factory, are stored by color atop studio shelves.



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A board displaying "Ant pins" was made for a collaboration with Kyle DeWoody's Grey Area.



Thread, pliers, scissors and other supplies are grouped on studio shelves.

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Beads are stored by color and size. William began collecting beads when he was 15. Some of those beads are seen here and will be used for their show at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

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When did you first start getting attention for this kind of work?

Steven: The first museum interest was in 2005 when we went to Paris. The Decorative Arts Museum at the Louvre was doing a retrospective on the handbag—and our piece was chosen for the final piece in that exhibition. And they acquired that for the museum. We also collaborated with Christian Lacroix for a couple of seasons, making accessories. At that point we were like, “This is amazing but we have our own ideas about what we want to make.” The last three years we have been so busy. We’ve had like, 620 works in museums this year.

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Can you describe the ideas that you're trying to express?

Steven: For the show at the Parrish Art Museum, we wanted to explore all of our grade school memories. That was the show called "Mary Queen of the Universe", which is the name of the grade school that we went to.

That was really the name of your grade school?!

William: Yes! And our dad and all his brothers and sister went to Mary Queen of the Universe.



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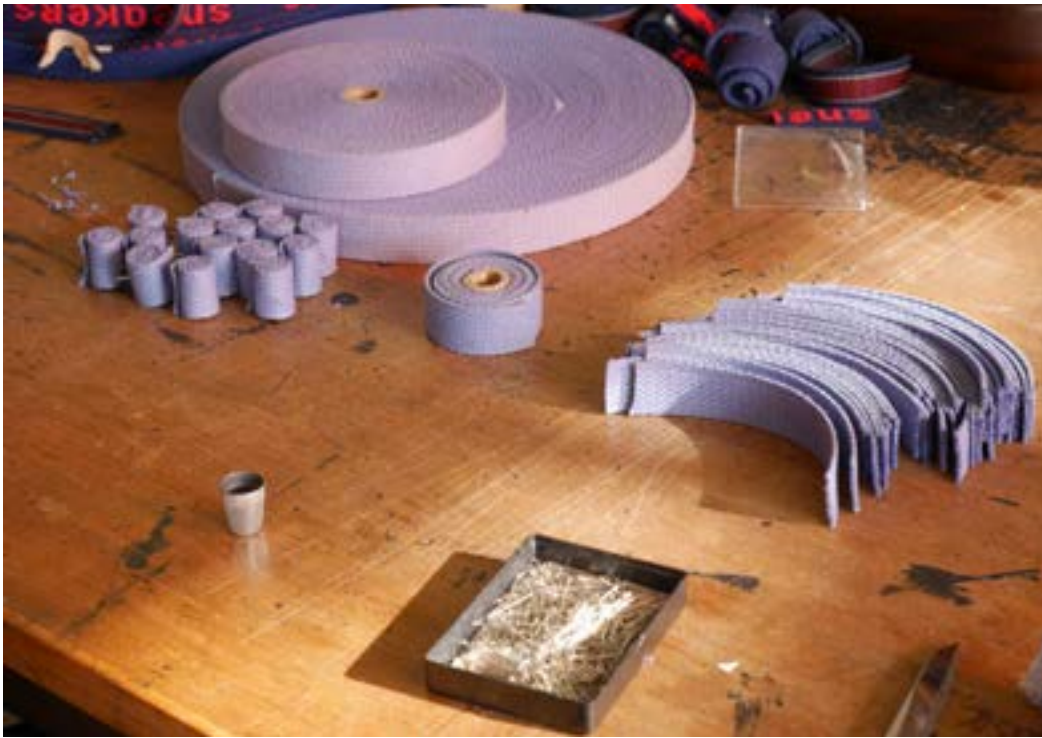


Glass beads for the glass bead panels are laid out in preparation for weaving.



Scrolls and a pile of fabric-covered squares ... and William's iPhone.

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Cloth tape is cut into specified lengths to create the nearby scrolls.



Studio assistant Cindy at work.



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A box of old locket cases is waiting to be incorporated into a future project.



A collection of paper objects with pins serve as studies for future projects. A small religious medallion Steven found at the accountant that morning rests with other metal objects as inspiration.



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More supplies, including jewelry clasps and broken ceramic pieces.



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Wire ants (crawling on JH) leftover from a 2011 show at The Contemporary Museum, Hawaii.



Why are there so many [cast metal] insects crawling all over the work?

Steven: We had an ant infestation in our house. Each of these scroll landscapes explore these memories of our shared grade school experiences, like our mother was the lunch lady so there is this one large white scroll landscape and that's called "The Lunch Lady." Or we would be sitting in church on Sundays and as kids were coming in, our mom would be like, "White ... chocolate ... chocolate"—She knew the milk preference of every single child in the school.

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What do you love about doing this kind of labor intensive work?

William: Just the connection to it ... to our shared memories. [At the moment] I'm working on a [piece] called "Scouts and Sports ..."

Steven: "Scouts or Sports"

William: It was a decision we had to make when we were in fifth grade. There were four of us, so there wasn't enough time to do both. Our parents said we had to choose.



Near the front entrance hangs a wall sculpture made out of deconstructed phone books by Bushwick artist Sarah Zapata.



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Steven designed and built daybeds out of canvas fabric found in the garage of a friend's home in St. Louis. The pillow fabric comes from a shopping trip with his mother in St. Louis

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“Ants” prints from Steven and William’s 2011 show at The Contemporary Museum in Honolulu hang above the living room day beds.



Hanging above the kitchen table is a work by Hawaii based artist, Deborah Nehmad. Steven traded a landscape box for her work.



A movable dancing magnet was a gift from Jonah's mother.

What did you choose?

William: We all chose sports.

You're so systematic and meticulous—where do you find the time to do all of this.

William: We're good mid-western boys. And we have a lot of interns.

So did you guys, when you were in school, just do like the best dioramas? Nobody would be able to compete with you!

William: I've never made a diorama actually!



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Looking across Steven's bed covered with a quilt made by Steven out of cashmere squares sewn together.

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A wall hanging bought in Tunisia hangs next to a work by Kansas City artist Anne Pearce.

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A wall mirror is draped with fabric that was given to Steven by a former teacher who first taught Steven sewing at Rockhurst University in Kansas City some twenty years ago. An installation done for NADA in Hudson is reflected in the mirror.

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More reflections across Steven's bed.

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A bookcase was inherited from Steven and William's friend and systems manager, Lindsay Grindstaff. Arranged atop the bookcase are a group of Landscapes.



An installation done for NADA in Hudson hangs opposite Steven and Jonah's bed.

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"The Perfect Storm" by Sally French was a trade for one of Steven and William's Landscape boxes.



A vintage iron from Prague also serves as a doorstop.



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Steven is in the middle of cutting a pair of custom pants for himself.



Looking across Steven's sewing room. The ironing board belonged to his grandmother Frances Hill.

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A wall of the sewing room is filled with a mix of work by Steven and William and other artists including Anne Pearce, Angela Veninga, Sue Dothage and Steven's sister Bee. The knit throw belonged to Steven's grandmother.



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But some of these pieces kind of look like dioramas!

Steven: So we've made a thousand dioramas!

When I go to my son's school for those diorama exhibitions, the solar system or whatever, it's obvious that the parents have made them. And they all hover over them, adjusting them and fussing. Imagine the advantage your kid is going to have!

[Laughing] William: He will have the best!

What do your Christmas trees look like?

William: Just Christmas trees.

Steven: Last years I put scrolls on it. But this year it's the naked tree.

