
RENWICK QUARTERLY

Dec. 86, Jan. Feb., 1987

Published for the Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, by the James Renwick Collectors Alliance.



Recent Gift -- Soon to be on Exhibit

Thanks to the generosity of Dr. and Mrs. Matthew M. Cohen of Tallahassee, Florida, Amuletic Beads #3, a work by William Harper, has been added to the Renwick Gallery's collection. This piece, crafted in 1976, is gold and silver cloisonné on fine silver and fine gold. It will be featured in the upcoming exhibition of works from the Renwick Gallery collection which will open in February 1987.

Amuletic Beads #3 is one of the works from the 1977 solo exhibition at the Renwick, "William Harper: Recent Works in Enamel". He noted at that time his preoccupation with the magical and mysterious, stating that "there is magic in the unknown... I attempted to make objects of the unknown."

His desire to communicate an aura of mystery necessitated a choice of an appropriate means of expression to give life and form to his ideas;

his choice was enameling, specifically, cloisonné. "I do not think of my work as enamel per se; that is, I am not primarily motivated by technique, but by an idea. The technique of cloisonné enamel happens to be one with which I feel extremely comfortable and facile and can, therefore, draw upon to express visual thoughts."

Cloisonné is derived from the French "cloisons", meaning "partitioned areas", a reference to the fact that each enamel color is enclosed in a space or cell formed with wire.

William Harper was born in Bucyrus, Ohio, in 1944. He did both undergraduate and graduate work at Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, at the same time undertaking advanced work in enameling at the Cleveland Institute of Art. His work is represented in collections of major museums in the United States and abroad. He has exhibited and won awards nationally and internationally and is currently a professor in the School of Visual Arts at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida.



The Renwick Sales Exhibition Gallery

When you pass through the double doors of the Renwick Gallery, if you walk down the right-hand hallway you soon arrive at the Renwick Museum Shop's Sales Exhibition Gallery, separated from the Museum Shop proper by the well-known Paley Gates. Since 1976 this space has served as the location for numerous special sales exhibitions.

Special sales exhibitions are mounted every two or three months, organized jointly by the Renwick and Museum Shop staffs. Subjects usually reflect a specific theme, craft medium or origin often relating to an ongoing exhibition in the Renwick's galleries or a special event in the city. Sales exhibitions occasionally are three-way collaborations either with local organizations--as was the case with "Capitol Assets: Washington Goldsmiths", a show with the Washington Goldsmiths Guild--or with crafts organizations in other states. In the past the work of craftspeople from Maine, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, and West Virginia has been featured.

The first exhibition for 1987 will be a January-March show of works by some of the people who previously have shown in the Gallery. The aim is to provide the viewer with an update on the work of these artists. In March-May, body adornment will be featured, to complement the Alliance's Spring Forum. Following in May-July will be an exhibition on American Art Deco, focusing on contemporary craftpeople who draw on art deco themes for inspiration.

The Renwick's Sales Exhibition Gallery offers changing exhibitions much as independent fine craft galleries do, but with a difference. By providing visitors with an opportunity to buy contemporary craft objects of near-museum quality, it complements the Renwick's regular exhibition program.



The Sales Exhibition Gallery featuring "Crafts for the Tabletop", in a 1979 exhibition. Albert Paley's Portal Gates are seen in the background.



Display from "Rivercane Baskets", a 1978 show in the Museum Shop's Sales Exhibition Gallery.

Master Craftsmen in the Renwick: A Lecture Series

This series of free illustrated lectures by or about artists whose work is in the museum's collection, sponsored by the James Renwick Alliance, continues through April 1987. October and November saw lectures by fiber artist Katherine Westphal and metalsmith L. Brent Kington, respectively.

The next three months will see lectures by or about fiber artist Claire Zeisler (December 7), ceramist Viktor Schreckengost (January 18), fiber artist Cynthia Schira (February 15), and ceramic sculptor Tom Rippon (March 8 -- note this corrects an error from the last Quarterly which listed the date as March 9). Details on the time and location for these lectures are provided elsewhere in this issue. A September-November 1986 Quarterly article provided information about these craftspeople and their works.

The seventh lecture in the series will take place on April 5, and will be given by James Prestini, Professor Emeritus of Design at the University of California at Berkeley. Prestini is a designer, research engineer, mathematician, and artist. He will talk about the turned wood bowls he made from 1933 to 1953 and the philosophy of design that led him to make those bowls. Although he no longer works in wood, the elegant, thin-walled bowls and plates he produced during the twenty years he actively pursued woodturning, are pioneering objects which pointed the way for the wood craftsmen who have followed.

Prestini's work is represented in the museum's permanent collection, and was last seen at the Renwick in The Art of Turned Wood Bowls.

December 7: Claire Zeisler: Fiber as Sculpture will be the subject of a lecture by Patterson Sims, Associate Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In his introductory statement to the checklist which accompanied Zeisler's one

person show at the Whitney, Sims describes her as "a major force in the art of fiber in America" from 1963 onwards. He credits her with adapting a "function-based material to artistic abstraction...[making] it stand as sculpture." Zeisler is represented in the Renwick collection by Coil Series III - A Celebration.

January 18: Viktor Schreckengost is one of a group of potters who brought a new aesthetic to American ceramics in the period between World War I and World War II. He abandoned the vessel form and instead used clay to model bold, witty and informal sculptures. He is best known for championing "truth to materials," eschewing the then current vogue for disguising clay as wood, marble or bronze. The Renwick owns four of Schreckengost's works, including Apocalypse, '42.

February 15: Cynthia Schira is a fiber artist whose four-panel hanging, Reflections, was purchased for the collection in 1985 with support from the Alliance. Reflections is the culmination of Schira's decade-long development of illusive, serene, landscape images created by her innovative use of subtly colored wefts that float intermittently on the surface of her pieces. Since Reflections was completed in 1982, Schira has explored computer patterning to create her landscapes. She has subsequently produced a new body of work which is deeper in color with more precise abstract images than she used in earlier hangings.

March 8: Tom Rippon is a ceramic sculptor whose work is representative of a generation of younger, post-Voulkos clay artists. His pieces, like Sculpture Stand in the collection, have no apparent link to the centuries old vessel tradition. Instead he hand-builds and assembles a number of separate elements to form surreal

tableaux in which the porcelain is the convenient medium and not the message. The scenes he sets are miniature stages on which the objects and figures are precariously balanced, waiting to spring into some unknown action.



Sculpture Stand by Tom Rippon, 67" x 35" x 32", a hand-built and assembled porcelain sculpture with lusters and lacquer finish, will go on view with other works from the permanent collection in early February. Rippon will lecture on his work on March 8 at the Renwick.

The Alliance Pennsylvania Tour

by Andrea V. Uravitch

The Renwick Alliance and friends took a delightful and informative trip to see Wharton Esherick's home, studio and, now, museum, and to see the Pfannebecker Collection of contemporary crafts. The mid-September day was bright and sunny as the bus made its way through the Pennsylvania countryside to the Esherick Museum. It is located twenty miles outside of Philadelphia, in Chester County.

Esherick, known as the "Dean of American Woodworking", started renovating his house in the 1920's. He continued working on it and refining it by making additions for nearly forty years. The setting for the house/studio is on a wooded hillside, and his reverence for wood is strongly felt. Every detail of the house and studio merited his attention and skillful carpentry. His approach for designing furniture was a sculptural one, concerned with organic, rounded forms.

The tour of his home and studio was led by some of his personal friends. Their respect for him was evident and they took delight in showing the inner workings of his pieces. It was a special treat to see such famous works as the hammer-handled chair and the spiral three-step ladder in the setting where they were created.

After the guided tour we enjoyed a delicious picnic box lunch on the bus as we made our way to the Pfannebecker Collection.

Bob Pfannebecker and his wife, Jean, are voracious collectors of contemporary crafts. Their collection includes over 1,000 pieces of fiber, jewelry, glass and a most extensive collection of ceramics. Bob greeted us at the edge of his wooded property with his dog, and walked us up to his house.

As with the Esherick Museum, the Pfannebecker dwelling fits the hilly, wooded Pennsylvania countryside. Over the past twenty years, the Pfannebeckers have worked with Don Wright, the jeweler, sculptor, artist who designed and built the house and, later, the two additional out-buildings. Every space available in these three buildings is filled with wonderful pieces of art.

Bob is known for scouting the art schools in the spring in pursuit of new talent. It was fascinating to see the early work of some now very established artists. Bob seeks to know the artists whose work he collects, and continues collecting their work as it progresses. It was interesting to see the evolution of these works, from the artists' beginnings to their current accomplishments.

The collection contains a "Who's Who" of contemporary American crafts including the works



Tour Members and friends of Mr. Esherick discussing the Wharton Esherick Museum in Paoli, Pennsylvania.



Bob Pfannebecker greets members of the Alliance tour outside his exhibition spaces.



Jack Earle's *The man, from his youth, now he is old....*, 12" x 10", is a modeled porcelain sculpture with china paint and transparent glazes that will be included in the permanent collection installation at the Renwick.

of Dale Chihuly, Patti Warashina, David Gilhooly, Mark Burns, Helen Bitar, Warren Seelig, Dominic DiMare, Bruce Metcalf, Fred Woell, Ferne Jacobs, Jack Earle, and Dan Dailey. The Pfannebeckers were gracious hosts and we thoroughly enjoyed seeing their collection.

After many enjoyable hours of viewing, we headed for home, tired, but pleased with what we had seen and learned. Many thanks to Charlie Gailis, Roger and Belle Kuhn for their good planning. We all look forward to our next tour, a trip to New York City in the spring of 1987.

New Assistant Curator Sought

The Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art is seeking a new Assistant Curator in the area of 20th Century crafts and decorative arts. Among the duties to be performed will be: development of and participation in research projects, including the publication of research findings in scholarly publications; identification, conservation and storage of the Renwick Collection; participation in the development of exhibitions; and work with the public, including lectures to professional and public groups and other organizations. Specific selective and quality ranking factors that will be considered when reviewing applications include:

1. A Ph.D. in American art history, crafts, decorative arts or a related field or equivalent professional experience.
2. Knowledge of 20th Century American art history, including crafts and decorative arts, at the scholarly professional level.
3. Knowledge of and experience in professional museum standards and practices.
4. A scholarly publishing record in the field of American art, crafts, or decorative arts.
5. Knowledge of techniques and processes associated with such craft materials as clay, glass, fiber, wood and metal.
6. Experience in organizing art exhibitions involving significant issues and topics.

Applicants should submit a Personal Qualifications Statement (Federal Standard Form - 171) and a supplemental sheet giving specific examples of experience and training that relate to the factors listed above. Applicants should refer to Announcement Number 86-499-F, Museum Curator (Art), GS-1015-11. Applications should be sent to: Smithsonian Institution, Office of Personnel Administration, Arts and Industries Building, Room 1410, 900 Jefferson Drive, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20560



NEWS from the Alliance

It's settled: Craft will remain at the Renwick Gallery. Eighteen months of uncertainty, which began when the National Museum of American History proposed to take over the Renwick building, have ended. Moreover, according to Tom Freudenheim, the Smithsonian Institution's Assistant Secretary for Museums, the Renwick's programs will be strengthened and broadened. We don't yet know what that will mean in terms of budget, staffing, and curatorial arrangements within the National Museum of American Art, of which the Renwick Gallery remains a part. But the basic decision has been made.

The Alliance owes thanks to the scores of craft leaders and craft lovers who wrote letters of support for the Renwick in response to our appeal of last June. Letters came from museum curators and craft artists; from gallery owners and craft collectors; and from leaders of craft organizations of all kinds, both regional and national. The Trustees of the American Craft Council adopted a resolution of support; and expressions of concern appeared in leading publications such as The Crafts Report, American Craft, New Art Examiner, Metalsmith, and other media journals. Together, the response demonstrated a broad consensus that the Smithsonian Institution, as the national museum complex, must continue to maintain its highly visible and successful gallery for craft.

With the renewal of the Renwick's mandate, the Alliance is laying plans for a major expansion of its membership and activities. We will be offering new benefits to contributors, including discounted tickets to Alliance events, admission to special lectures by exhibition curators, and even an opportunity to serve on the committee of the Alliance which votes on allocation of our funds to underwrite proposed Renwick Gallery acquisitions.

Helping to build the Renwick's permanent collection will be our first priority in the immediate future. As the Smithsonian Institution's collection of contemporary American craft, it must become worthy of the astonishing creativity

of the nation's craft artists. The Renwick will soon redesign several gallery rooms for the display of selected objects from the collection on a rotating basis. When these rooms are opened, visitors from around the world will be able to view the best of American craft just one block from the White House.

The Alliance's 1987 Spring Forum will take place on Saturday, April 25, timed once again to coincide with the Washington Craft Fair. As described elsewhere in this issue, the program will explore the fascinating terrain of body adornment—jewelry and wearable art—drawing on the experience and inspiration of leading men and women who approach the subject from diverse points of view. The Forum will be followed this time by an evening event which promises to include some surprises. Put April 25 on your 1987 schedule now.

Finally, the Alliance would like to salute the Renwick's sister institution, the American Craft Museum, which has just reopened in its spacious new quarters in New York City. This event, along with the renewal of the Renwick Gallery's mandate, constitutes a welcome reaffirmation of the vigor of the contemporary craft movement in America.

Roger Kuhn
President

Spring Forum on Wearable Art Scheduled for April 25, 1987

The forum committee co-chaired by Sherley Koteen and Rebecca Stevens is busy putting together an exciting program for the 1987 Spring Seminar to be held on Saturday, April 25. The seminar will focus on wearable art and include discussions of both contemporary jewelry and clothing by John Perrault, Julie Schaffer Dale, Arline Fisch, Ivy Ross, and Mary McFadden. For the first time, the seminar will be followed in the evening by a buffet supper with entertainment at the Renwick. All guests will be encouraged to come to the evening event dressed in...what else?...wearable art. Mark your calendar now and plan to attend!

If you would like to assist the committee, please leave your name with Maria Ballantyne at the Renwick, (202) 357-2531.

Public Programs and Exhibition Openings

Dec. 7: Lecture: Patterson Sims, Associate Curator, Permanent Collection, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City will discuss the work of fiber artist Claire Zeisler in a talk entitled, "Fiber as Sculpture". An example of Zeisler's natural hemp and wool work, "Coil Series III - A Celebration", is in the Renwick's permanent collection. This lecture is co-sponsored by the James Renwick Alliance. Free. At 3 p.m.

Dec. 11: Creative Screen: Cities: Peter Ustinov's Leningrad. A witty presentation of the history and architecture of the former Russian capital, with tours of the Palace of Peter the Great, the St. Peter and St. Paul Cathedrals, the Kirov Opera Theatre, and the Hermitage Museum. Ustinov discusses prominent people in 19th century Russian literature and art. (51 minutes). Free. At 11 a.m., 12:15 p.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Dec. 14: Concert: The Choral Arts Society of Washington, D.C., directed by Norman Scribner, will perform works by Tchaikovsky, Gratchaninoff, Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky in conjunction with the exhibition, "Russia, the Land, the People: Russian Painting 1850-1910". At 7 p.m. For ticket information call the Resident Associate Program, 357-4156.

Dec. 18: Creative Screen: repeat of December 11.

Jan. 8: Creative Screen: Behind the Fence: Albert Paley, Metalsmith, Albert Paley, internationally known artist working in forged metal, discusses his ornamental gates, commissioned for the Renwick Gallery, and his jewelry designs. The film also depicts the construction of his 80 foot iron fence executed for the Hunter Museum of Art in Chattanooga, Tennessee. (30 min.)

The Music Rack, Wendell Castle, internationally known for his elegant hand-made furniture, is shown creating a complex laminated music rack. (30 min.) Free. At 11 a.m., 12:15 p.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Jan. 18: Lecture: Viktor Schreckengost, clay artist, will discuss his work in ceramics. An example of his modeled earthenware, Apocalypse '42, is in the Renwick's permanent collection. This lecture is co-sponsored by the James Renwick Alliance. Free. At 3 p.m.

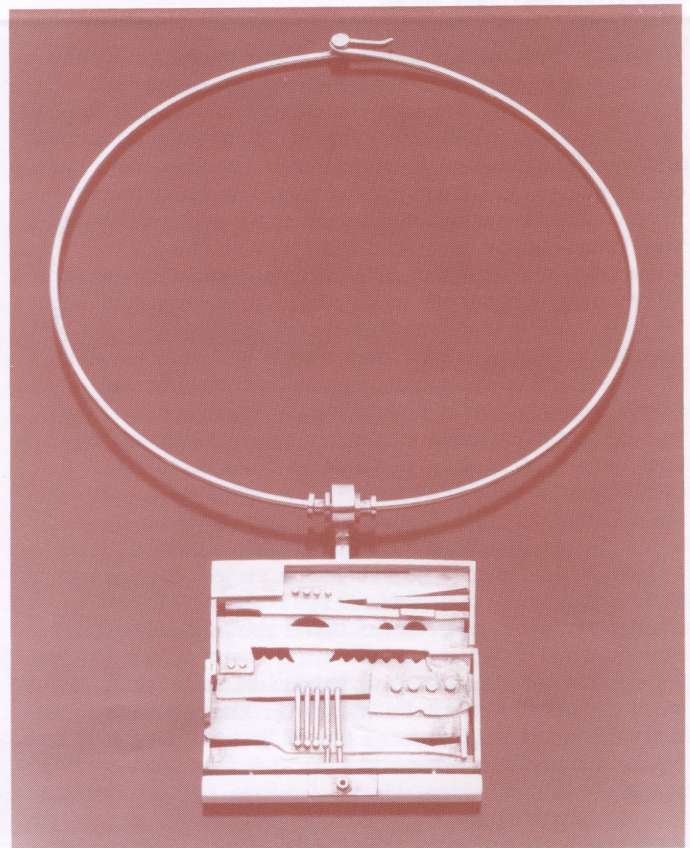
Jan. 22: Creative Screen: repeat of January 8.

Feb. 5: Creative Screen: With These Hands. By examining the WHY as well as the HOW, eight distinctive contemporary artist-craftsmen express their thoughts, ideas, and motivation about their work and lifestyles. Perceptive insights into the creative process of J.B. Blunk - wooden sculpture; James Turner - ceramics and glass; Dorian Zachai - tapestries; Paul Soldner - pottery; Clayton Bailey - fantasy figures; Peter Voukos - pottery; Harry Nohr - wooden bowls and Toshiko Takaezu. Free. At 11 a.m., 12:15 p.m., and 1:30 p.m.

Feb. 15: Lecture: Fiber artist, Cynthia Schira, will discuss her work in textiles. An example of her fiber structures, Reflections, is in the Renwick's permanent collection. This lecture is co-sponsored by the James Renwick Alliance. Free. At 3 p.m.

Feb. 19: Creative Screen: repeat of February 5.

Mar. 8: Lecture: Ceramic sculptor, Tom Rippon will discuss his work. An example of his work, Sculpture Stand, is in the the Renwick's permanent collection. This lecture is co-sponsored by the James Renwick Alliance. Free. At 3 p.m.



Pin Pendant, 2" x 2 3/8", constructed gold-plated sterling silver with ivory by Olaf Skoogfors, was a gift of Helen Drutt Gallery and Falcon Press in memory of the artist. It will go on view with other works from the permanent collection in early February.

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