

# RENWICK QUARTERLY

Dec., 1990, Jan., Feb., 1991

Published by the James Renwick Alliance, an independent, national non-profit organization.

## **"Glassworks" Installation in Progress; Exhibition on View Through February 3**

by Matthew Drutt

(The Renwick Quarterly is the beneficiary this quarter of an exceptional article on the history of studio glass and the artists in "Glassworks," written by Matthew Drutt for the Renwick Gallery. Mr. Drutt is a Teaching Fellow at Yale University. He has worked on a variety of research and exhibition projects for the National Museum of American Art, the Whitney Museum in New York, and the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia.)

"Glassworks," a landmark exhibition of works by seven contemporary glass artists, opened November 9, at the Renwick Gallery. During the week before the opening, the Renwick invited the public to watch as five artists constructed their works in the galleries. Included in this first group were Bruce Chao, head of the glass program at Rhode Island School of Design; Richard Harned, associate professor of art at The Ohio State University; Mark McDonnell, chair of the glass department at California College of Arts and Crafts; Judith Schaechter, a studio artist in Philadelphia; and Therman Statom, a studio artist in Los

**Mark McDonnell** makes a final adjustment on his exhibition for "Glassworks."



Angeles. William Morris, who teaches at Pilchuck Glass Center, and Ginny Ruffner, also an instructor at Pilchuck, will install their works on from December 15-18, completing the exhibition which will run through February 5. "Glassworks" received financial support from the James Renwick Alliance.

Glass is one of the oldest natural substances manufactured by humankind. In prehistoric times, small objects were fabricated from natural glass such as obsidian and rock crystal. While the origins of manufactured glass are unclear, the oldest known specimens come from Egypt, where a glass industry was well established by 1500 BC.

In Roman times, a variety of glass objects were in abundance, such as cameos and vases. Following the Crusades, Venice remained the glassware capitol for almost four centuries. Medieval and Gothic architecture glorified the art of stained glass, and huge glass windows pierced their clerestories filling the interiors with light. The invention of cast glass in France in the 17th Century led to the proliferation of glass manufacturing in Europe and America during the 18th Century, and the profusion of fine art glass in the 19th Century found expression through the accomplishments of many, including René Lalique, Simon Gate, Sidney Waugh, John LaFarge and Louis Comfort Tiffany.

(continued next page)

It was also in the 19th Century that architecture embraced glass as a building material, with Sir Joseph Paxton's "Crystal Palace" (1851) applauding the architectural potentials of the Industrial Revolution through a huge structure composed of manufactured iron and glass.

By the early 20th Century, the rhetoric of glass architecture assumed spiritual dimensions once again through the efforts of Bruno Taut, whose infamous "Glass Pavilion" (1914), erected for the Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne, celebrated the transcendent qualities of crystallized glass and refracted light. Le Corbusier, Mosei Ginsburg, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Victor Vesnin gave rise to International Style architecture which seized on the idea of glass-skinned buildings as paradigms of "honest" structures, "revealing" in every aspect of their construction, and epitomizing the depersonalized aesthetic of the machine-age.

Thus glass's status as a primary material in art, design and architecture is evidently wedded to advances in technology. This is undeniably how the American studio glass movement was born in the 1960's, when a formula for low temperature glass was arrived at by Dominick Labino and the ceramic kiln was adapted successfully for melting glass by Harvey Littleton, Norman Schulman and others. Their innovations enabled greater facility with the material by an individual artisan or a small team and resulted in important programs in studio glass emerging at art schools across the country.

However, many repercussions of the studio movement seem somewhat limiting for glass's potential as art, at least according to many of the artists in "Glassworks." Mainstream glass art has become equated generally with works on a small scale, often variations on the vessel or abstract plastic forms and narrative works. The aesthetic accomplishments are all too often limited to demonstrations of technical prowess. Inextricably bound to the processes conditioning its creation, principally glass-blowing and casting, glass art tends to be materially self-referential. The works are extremely precious and seductive, rejoicing in a kind of narcissistic reverie.

This has not been the case with artists outside of this framework who have used glass conceptually or as a component within large-scale sculpture. Concerns ranging from minimalist precepts of anonymity, repetition and exploitation of industrial materials to investigations of containment, spatial displacement, ethereality and ambiguity have lent themselves well to the glass medium.

The artists participating in "Glassworks" fit somewhere in between these two (though by no means exclusive) directions in glass. All of the artists selected were trained at some point in conventional hot glass techniques. Five of them studied at the

Rhode Island School of Design, including Bruce Chao, Richard Harned, Mark McDonnell, Judith Schaechter and Therman Statom. Several returned to teach there. William Morris and Therman Statom studied at Pilchuck Glass Center in Stanwood, Washington. Ginny Ruffner studied glass at the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina, after completing degrees in drawing and painting. Most have abandoned their training in favor of methods that allow them greater conceptual freedom in their work. They use glass in ways that confound its axioms of fragility and preciousity. Their projects are large in scale, sometimes imposing, exceeding the typical limits respected by glass art, boundaries imposed more by a particular market for glass objects than by any specific technical dilemmas. In some cases, glass has been demoted or absorbed here within a combination of other media to such an extent that one has to ask whether the artists should even be labeled as "glass artists" as opposed to simply regarding them as artists who use glass. While in many instances it has been their material of choice, their use of glass is located in a broader artistic enterprise.

For the past several years, Bruce Chao has been interested specifically in the surface of glass, in its "peculiar connection to the primieval imagery of water, ice and air." Rather than beginning with the raw material and transforming it through blowing or casting, he has preferred to work with pre-fabricated elements — such as large plate glass or window sashes, which he then modifies to his satisfaction. He has explored what can happen with "this invisible barrier of glass" through installations of plate glass that distort space and create ambiguous relationships between the viewer and the object.

More recently, his sculptures explore his interest in glass architecture — such as "Crystal Palace" and railway station canopies — through steel and glass objects that are evocative of the experience of such structures without being literal interpretations of them.

**Bruce Chao**  
prepares  
segments of  
his exhibition  
for "Glassworks."





**Judith Schaechter,**  
*"A Little Torch,"*  
 1990, stained and  
 leaded glass,  
 21" x 30".

Richard Harned is by far the most unusual artist in "Glassworks" when it comes to defining his relationship to the material. He is interested in metaphysical issues surrounding glass and light as they relate to everyday experience. Employing neon, television monitors, cameras and mechanized geometric metal structures, his works explore the interactions between light, motion and time. He is interested in the image of glass's structure, which derives from his years as a student when he became fascinated by the "information" contained in the metamorphosis of hot glass: a solid that becomes liquified and solid again, an opaque, glowing density that eventually becomes transparent. Structurally, glass is hexagonal and perfectly symmetrical, and this molecular symmetry informs his constructions.

Mark McDonnell draws on his interests in geometry and the works of Bruno Taut's *Glaserne Kette*, building architectural structures such as labyrinths made entirely from commercially available glass blocks. His work also demonstrates that glass is not necessarily a fragile or temporary material; in the Renwick installation five tons of glass are used. An outdoor structure, "Monument for a Diva," which he built in Newport, Rhode Island, survived freezing temperatures and Hurricane Gloria. His interest in constructions dates to his years growing up in Brazil, where he became fascinated with the architecture of the 1960's and 1970's. He says of his approach to glass, "I like the idea that light changes and casts shadows, always making the work act in flux. I am interested in the fact that light and shade define architecture."

Judith Schaechter makes stained glass windows whose style emulates that of Northern medieval art but whose macabre content deals with contemporary social issues. "I am attracted to repellent things, like people who like to drive slowly past a car wreck. I'm not doing it gratuitously. Why deal with a topic that people can deal with already? It doesn't educate." She began working with stained glass in art school, not out of any direct experience with the craft, but because she found painting to be "profoundly dissatisfying. There just wasn't enough process for me." The most common criticism in her drawing classes was, "Get rid of those

big black lines". "So I didn't", she says. Her work in glass clearly allows her to exploit all of her creative inclinations. It is painterly and richly textured; her use of the sacrifice lines (the lead outlines of the glass) transcends their traditional role as mere outlines for shapes, becoming as much a part of the design as the painted image.

Therman Statom's use of glass is sometimes hard to define since it is often covered by layers of paint or hidden amongst a frenzied assemblage of materials. Where several other artists in "Glassworks" are exploring the immateriality of glass, Statom is more interested in making it physically present. "Glass is like a canvas for me, except it's got more sensibility." His sculptures are based on dreams and objects with symbolic associations for him: chairs, houses, coffins and animals. Using cast and blown elements, Statom often recycles these motifs for his installations, but not in such a way



so as to be repetitive. This is nearly guaranteed by his way of working. He is like a modern day Dada performer, provoking his viewers with an overwhelming cacophony of elements.

Once he has assembled the glass components of his exhibition for "Glassworks," Therman Statom applies paint to highlight one wall section.

William Morris combines blown and sculpted glass elements to create figurative works he calls "artifacts." Derived from his interests in Indian burial grounds, hunting, myth and the natural environment, his sculpture conveys an archaeologist's fascination with human death and decay. Where is the line drawn between concept and material? Morris' concept is with the material itself: "Glass lends itself to the idea of artifact because it's an ageless material; it has that timeless aspect. The fragility of the material is a paradox because there is a hardness, a diamond-like quality to glass, as with artifacts like fossils." The production of Morris' work is very much a part of traditional glass studio practices: he works with a team of assistants, employing hot glass techniques such as blowing and casting. Engaging these processes is important to his sense of being a craftsman, which for him means both an intimate relationship with the material and being part of a group effort.

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Ginny Ruffner works in glass as much as she works in other materials that she needs to give form to an idea. "Working with glass all the time would be like only reading spy novels." Painting is a pleasurable experience for her, "a technical cinch," as opposed to her sculpture which demands that she take into account such practical matters as gravity and balance. In her smaller sculptures and lamps which comprise the bulk of her work in glass, Ruffner has explored issues of beauty, morality and representation through language and symbols that perpetuate stereotypes in modern culture, investing an otherwise conceptually neutral and materially narcissistic medium with intellectual content.

## January 15 is Deadline for Renwick Fellowship Applications

by Elmerina Parkman

The Smithsonian Institution and the Renwick Gallery announce a fellowship program for scholarly research in the modern American craft movement. Supported by the National Museum of American Art and the Alliance, the James Renwick Fellowships in American Crafts are available for a period of three to twelve months to study at the Smithsonian Institution.

Research proposals are sought from candidates knowledgeable in the history of 20th Century American art, craft or design. Proposals concentrating on post-1930 craft developments or their historical antecedents are especially encouraged. Preference will also be given to those proposals dependent upon Smithsonian resources. January 15, 1991, is the deadline to apply for appointments beginning on or after June 1, 1991.

For more information and application forms, write or call the Office of Fellowships and Grants, Smithsonian Institution, Suite 7300 L'Enfant Plaza, Washington, DC 20560, (202) 287-3271.

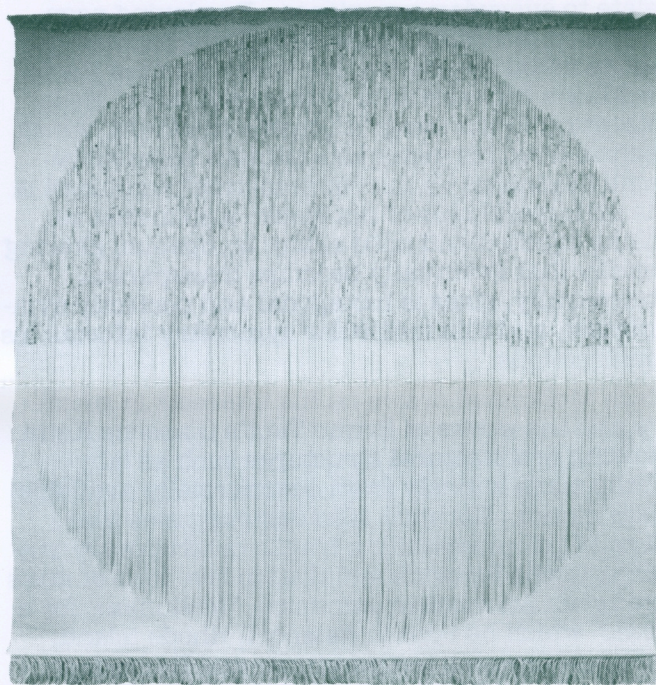
## Lenore Tawney Retrospective Will Open April 12

Lenore Tawney, who has graced decades of American fibre art with her weavings, assemblages and collages, will take center stage at the Renwick Gallery in a retrospective exhibition, April 12 through July 21.

Ms. Tawney has long been acknowledged as a pioneer in the transformation of contemporary fibre art. Her ground-breaking contributions of the 1950's and 1960's - which merged extraordinary craft techniques with monumental scale and applied an ancient medium to radically new formats - led the way for the revolution in fibre that was to come. Tawney's weavings broke

away from the rectangle and the wall, hung freely in space and assumed sculptural dimensions. Ultimately achieving architectural scale and monumental impact, her works in fibre are always characterized by passionate attention to detail and consummate craftsmanship.

With this exhibition, the first comprehensive retrospective of Ms. Tawney's entire range of work, the Renwick acknowledges the significance of this artist's contribution, not only to the craft continuum, but to the history of late 20th Century art. Through the illustrations of her work, entries from her personal journals and four thoughtful and cogent essays, the catalogue establishes a chronology of Tawney's life, considers its impact and conveys the remarkable spirit of this American pioneer.



Installation photograph from "Lenore Tawney: A Retrospective." Photo courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago

## Craft Leaders Caucus Visits Winston-Salem

by Wendy Kirst

During the weekend of November 1-4, forty members of the Renwick Craft Leaders Caucus traveled to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, for the fall craft tour and meeting. The four days were filled with visits to artists' studios, local potteries, private homes and collections, and museums.

The first event, on Thursday evening, was the VIP opening of the 27th annual Piedmont Craft Fair. Exhibitors were 118 members of the Piedmont Craftsmen, a regional group admitting craftsmen only upon acceptance by a jury. The work represented the best of Southeastern crafts. An exqui-

site dim sum dinner followed at the home of Linda and Larry Dekle. Mrs. Dekle is president of the Piedmont Craftsmen. Larry Dekle prepared the dinner, complete with handcarved vegetable garnishes and green tea ice cream.

Friday morning was spent in the historic district of Old Salem, originally founded in 1766 by Moravians. A visit to the restored home of Lee and Mignon Dunn was followed by a docent-lead tour of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), the only museum dedicated to exhibiting and researching the regional decorative arts of the early South. The collection features period rooms from Southern homes between 1600 and 1820.

The group was later welcomed by Tom Gray at his home, an exact reconstruction of the original house built in 1787, with a garden design based on a 1734 print of gardens in Savannah. Mr. Gray's collection of antique furniture and tobacco memorabilia were unique; his camel collection and items made from Camel cigarette wrappers were especially delightful.

Lunch at the nearby Old Salem Tavern was followed by visits to artists' studios and more private collections. Jon Kuhn, glass artist, spoke about his work and gave us a guided tour through the wood shop, glue room, hot shop and grinding rooms comprising his studio. Ron Probst, after showing us his ceramic tables, tile stoves, bird houses and other sculptural pieces, led us through his new building, which will soon be filled with works from various other artists.

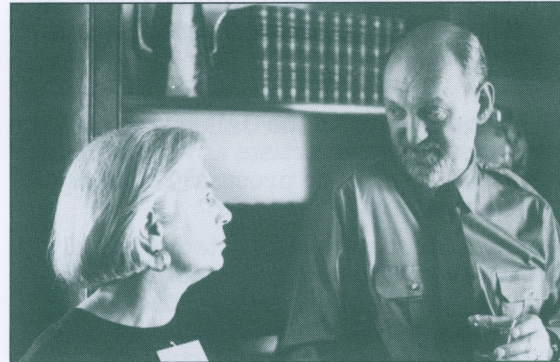
Phil and Charlotte Hanes, members of the Craft Leaders Caucus and pillars of the Winston-Salem business and arts communities, graciously received the group at their home Friday afternoon. Mr. Hanes walked everyone through their home, identifying all the various paintings and craft works. Perry and Thorns Craven greeted the group next, and talked enthusiastically about their collection of crafts made by local Piedmont artisans. The evening was spent at the home of Redge and Jane Hanes, viewing their collection, and then adjourning to an outdoor tent for a barbecue.

All day Saturday we toured Seagrove, the home of Jugtown, Seagrove, Westmoore, Phil Morgan and other potteries, many of which are run by fourth and fifth generation potters. The group was led that day by Leonidas Betts, professor of English and Folk Lore at North Carolina State University. Highlights included Jugtown's Chinese blue glaze, Ben Owen's lily jar, Phil Morgan's crystalline glaze and Dorothy Auman's tales of hand-dug local clay and simple tools while turning her pots.

After an early evening meeting discussing Renwick fellowships, the NEA reauthorization campaign, plans for the spring weekend, the public education program, and upcoming exhibitions, the group adjourned for dinner at a lovely French restaurant, La Chaudiere.

Sunday brunch was followed by a tour of the Reynolda House Museum of American Art. Originally the home of the Reynolds family, the building now contains a learning center and museum of art exhibiting important 19th and 20th Century paintings and prints by major American artists. The current display is a selection entitled, "An Impressionist Legacy," from the collection of the Sara Lee Corporation.

The only difficulty encountered by the group was arranging to get all the new acquisitions home. This was a problem easily surmounted, however — a small price to pay for the weekend's superb educational and aesthetic experience.



Craft Leaders Caucus member Barbara Manning from Chicago chats with Renwick Curator-in-Charge Michael Monroe on the Caucus's recent trip to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Photo by Paul Parkman.

## 1991 Craft Weekend in Washington

by Nancy Trimble Carter

The Renwick Alliance's 1991 Craft Weekend in Washington will be held on Saturday, April 20 and Sunday April 21. Our weekend will open Saturday morning with the annual Spring Forum lecture series, "Uncommon Attitudes: Flexing Media Boundaries." The subject of this year's program is mixed media works. The speakers include John Perrault, Chief Curator of the American Craft Museum, and four mixed media artists: Gary Knox Bennett, Gaza Bowen, Mark Burns and Susan Stinsmullen-Amend. The speakers will be discussing the use of mixed media in their work as well as the movement of many artists toward mixed media work, and the subsequent effects of this trend. Saturday afternoon will allow free time to visit the Washington Craft Show. Saturday evening's event include a cocktail reception and gala dinner at the Renwick Gallery. Sunday we have scheduled tours of private collections, artists' studios and special gallery tours. Mark your calendars now and plan to join us this April. For more information, call the Renwick Alliance at (301) 229-2148.



## News from the Alliance

by Jerome Paulson  
President

The James Renwick Alliance has another first! We are providing partial funding for the glass exhibition now at the Gallery.

The construction of these site-specific pieces is open to the public. I have been to the Gallery twice in the last several days to see the artists at work. It has been very exciting to see this process. The exhibit will be a fascinating one!

In the past, the Alliance has supported primarily acquisitions and educational programs. The Gallery has been able to fund exhibitions internally. This was not possible this time, and the Gallery turned to the Alliance for help. I am very pleased and very proud that the Alliance could respond and provide the resources to allow this project to go forward.

I hope that each Alliance member will come to the Gallery to see these sculptures. In December, there will be another opportunity to watch the artists at work during the construction of the second phase of the exhibit.

All the good that the Alliance can do is the result of the contributions which each and every one of you make. Some provide financial support and some couple that with many hours of hard work.

The Craft Leaders Caucus just completed a very successful trip to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I want to recognize several people who put forth a great deal of effort to create several wonderful and highly educational days. Lee Eagle and Phil Hanes, with the help of Ford Singletary and Lisa Anderson, created a magnificent program. I want to thank them all for their hard work and devotion to the Alliance.

The Alliance needs to grow. One of the best ways that we can grow is for YOU to provide us with the names of prospective members. You know the good feelings that come from supporting the Renwick Gallery. You know the joy that comes from learning more about crafts. You know other people who would enjoy the same activities that you enjoy.

Drop us a letter or a post card and give us the name of one or two or three or more others who would like to know about the Alliance. I will write to each of them. If each current member recruits just one new member, we will double in size and increase what we can do for the Renwick and the nation!

## Featured Object

*"Storage Jar (Columnar Series),"* 1985, by **Val Cushing**, glazed stoneware, 30" high. This is the Featured Object at the Renwick Gallery for fall and winter. Cushing is a functional potter, adhering to the wheel-thrown utilitarian vessel. Unlike many of his peers, he has not rejected function in favor of more purely sculptural concerns. He has deliberately chosen to work within the limitations imposed by such conventional formats as bowls, pitchers, casseroles and storage jars. Respecting function and the traditional materials and processes of ceramic art, he has created a body of work that is artistically fresh and adventurous — in invigorating infusion of the visual and the tactile.

*"Storage Jar (Columnar Series)"* is part of a suite of tall, lidded vessels made in the 1980's whose varied shapes originated in ideas about architectural columns. Cushing is fascinated by the differing designs of columns as they appear throughout history — from the austere and functional to the whimsical and essentially decorative. The literal format of the storage jar is column-like, rising from a base and surmounted by a capital-like, detachable top.

In this series, Cushing playfully explores the formal dynamics inherent within this stacked assemblage, combining and contrasting different forms, textures, colors and proportions.

Val Cushing was born in Rochester, New York, and received his B.F.A. and M.F.A. from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. He has taught pottery at Alfred since 1957, and was a founding member of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts in 1962. His work has been exhibited widely in the United States. He has received both a Fulbright grant and a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship.



## Recent Contributions to the Alliance

The Alliance welcomes the gifts of the following contributing members:

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In addition, the Alliance is most grateful for the following recent contributions to the James Renwick Fellowship in American Crafts:

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## Renwick Gallery Public Programs

### December 2:

Illustrated Lecture: Rose Folsom, practicing calligrapher and author of "The Calligrapher's Dictionary," will discuss the history of Western calligraphy. Ms. Folsom designs many types of certificates and logos and is responsible for the design of the Presidential Medal of Art awards. Free. At 3:00 PM.

### December 6:

Creative Screen: "Christmas Carol" (black and white) was the first musical version of the Dicken's classic made for television. For its time - 1952 - it was considered to be a unique production with such outstanding actors as Frederick March and Basil Rathbone. Maxwell Anderson wrote the lyrics and adapted the story. (54 minutes). Free. At 11:00 AM, noon and 1:00 PM.

### December 13:

Creative Screen: Repeat of December 6. Free. At 11:00 AM, noon and 1:00 PM.

### December 14:

Illustrated Lecture: Allen Bassing,

Renwick Gallery Public Programs Coordinator, will discuss American toys and dolls of the 19th Century. Originally, toys in this country were made at home. But by 1750, artisans who specialized in making toys were established in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and other cities. From the 1830's, commercial mass production of toys was a flourishing industry in the United States. A wide variety of materials were used in making children's playthings - cast iron, wood, tin, steel and paper. Popular items were animals of all sorts, horse-drawn wagons, carts and carriages, fire equipment, carousels and ferris wheels, streetcars, trains, boats and ships, and clockwork toys. Free. At noon.

### January 11:

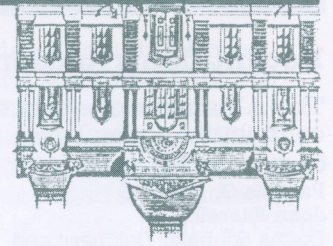
Illustrated Lecture: Allen Bassing will survey the crafts made of clay, wood and metal in 18th and 19th Century America. Pottery making was among the earliest of American crafts. Everything needed for its production was available - clay, abundant wood for firing kilns and

capable craftsmen. Woodcarving was another very early craft and a sampling of various types will be shown - ship carvings, shop figures and trade signs, circus and carousel carvings, weathervanes, whirligigs, dolls and birds. Metalwork came in many materials - iron, tin, copper, brass, pewter and silver. Works range from simple forms associated with folk tradition to the more sophisticated styles of fine craft. Free. At noon.

### February 8:

Illustrated Lecture: Allen Bassing will discuss American folk art of the 18th and 19th Centuries. Folk art is usually modest in intention and often reflects the traditions of a particular region. European influences were present in the work found in areas where there were strong German or Spanish communities. Folk art can cover the widest range of materials, concepts and functions. Among the objects to be surveyed are religious works, furniture, pottery, glass, figureheads and coverlets. Free. At noon.

## December 1990, January February 1991



James Renwick Alliance  
6801 Winterberry Lane  
Bethesda, MD 20817

## "Special Delivery: Craft America" in Museum Sales Shop

by Gary Wright

Wares of over forty craft artists are now gathered in the Renwick Gallery museum shop. In time for Christmas, there is a vast offering of exquisite glass ornaments: iridescent fruit, spheres and hearts, as well as a variety of art glass vases, bowls, paperweights and perfume bottles. Gifts made in metal include distinctive candlesticks and a wide variety of jewelry in seemingly every shape and form. A large number of functional ceramics are showcased: sturdy casseroles, ladles and delicate porcelain teapots. Covered



dishes harken back to turn-of-the-century art potteries. There are many varieties of plates and platters. For those wishing to wear their art, there are woven rayon chenille scarves and tie-dyed silk scarves and handkerchiefs. For the kitchen, there are wooden chopping boards and utensils. Woodencased bottle openers are available, just in time to toast the new year. This exhibition, a veritable craft cornucopia overflowing with fantastic gifts, runs through February 17.

"Village Cats," by **V.L. Smith** and **J.M. Cohen**, slips over terra cotta, 16" diameter.