

# RENWICK QUARTERLY

June, July, Aug., 1990

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

## Two Winners Announced for James Renwick Fellowship in American Crafts

by Elmerina Parkman

Susan L.F. Isaacs, a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and Charles S. Talley, editor of *Surface Design Journal* and freelance journalist from San Francisco, have been awarded the third James Renwick Fellowships in American Crafts at the Renwick Gallery. These fellowships are designed to encourage scholarly study of the historical, aesthetic and intellectual aspects of the studio craft movement. They are primarily funded by the National Museum of American Art, with additional support from the James Renwick Alliance.

Ms. Isaacs is a teaching assistant at the University of Pennsylvania in the Department of Folklore and Folklife. She received her M.A. from the University of Iowa, and a B.A. from Wilmington College. Her past honors include the Benno M. Forman Fellowship, Winterthur Museum, and the Fellows of the American Folklore Society Award for the best published student paper in 1986.

During her year in Washington on behalf of the Renwick, Ms. Isaacs will conduct research on the topic, "Authenticity and Tradition: The Meaning of Hand-Made Objects in Contemporary Society." Her investigation will contribute to understanding today's major trend toward the hand-made, with its historical antecedents in the arts and crafts movement and romantic ideals dating to Rousseau. Ms. Isaacs'



Susan L.F. Isaacs

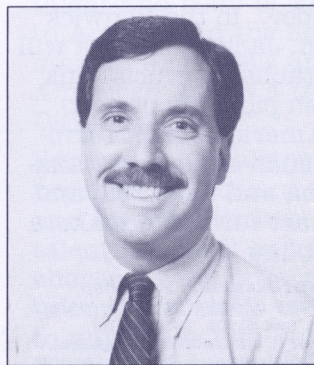
research will provide data for a book about "tradition" and "authenticity" as interpretive processes and cultural constructs, integrating ideas on craft, folk art, meaning and design.

Charles Talley received his B.A. from Oberlin College in Ohio, and is editor of *Surface Design Journal*, a full-color quarterly magazine for textile artists. He is the author of *Contemporary Textile Art: Scandinavia*, and is a contributing editor to *American Craft*, *Artweek*, *Fiberarts*, *Handwoven*, *Threads*, and other publications in Germany, South Korea, Sweden, Norway and Canada.

For his research topic, "Textile Arts in America (1900-1945): The Influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Bauhaus," Mr. Talley will explore the development of the textile arts in the United States. He will concentrate specifically on the impact of the English arts and crafts and Bauhaus movements on the activities of American artists and craftmakers, designers, educational institutions, publications and voluntary organizations associated with the textile arts.

The James Renwick Fellowship in American Crafts was established in 1987 as a major Alliance initiative. There continues to be widespread interest in the fellowship. The high quality of applications received each

year is a clear indication of the need for such a program. Announcements for next year's fellowship will be mailed early in the fall to colleges, universities, scholarly and professional journals and organizations. The deadline for applications is January 15, 1991.



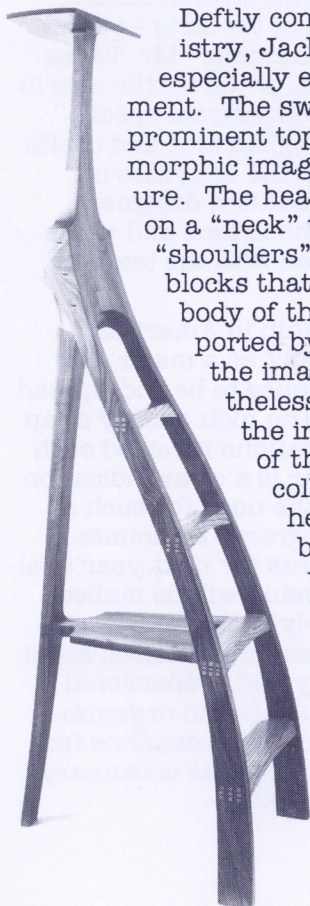
Charles Talley



## Alliance Approves Funding for Works by Four Artists for Permanent Collection

The Renwick Gallery's Grand Salon provided a splendid setting for the February 1 acquisitions meeting. Members of the Alliance Acquisitions Committee previewed five proposed acquisitions which were temporarily installed in the permanent collection galleries. Following welcoming remarks by Dr. Elizabeth Broun, Director of the National Museum of American Art, and Michael Monroe, Curator-in-Charge of the Renwick, Curator Jeremy Adamson discussed the works and provided rationale for each piece's significance to the Renwick. The committee voted to provide matching funds for four additions to the permanent collection: a *Four Step Library Ladder* by Daniel Jackson, a *Cylinder-Front Desk* by Jere Osgood, *First Vase* by Howard Ben Tre, and Ralph Bacerra's *Teapot*.

Daniel Jackson was an important craft furniture maker in the 1960's and early '70's, whose influence, both as a practicing craftsman and a teacher of design and woodworking at the Philadelphia College of Art, helped foster the current boom in art furniture production. While his own output was limited and mostly on commission, his impact was widely felt. Many of the outstanding furniture craftsmen of today remember Jackson as an inspirational instructor and consummate craftsman. He delighted in the inherent beauty of hardwoods, traditional joinery techniques and hand carving.



Deftly combining function and artistry, Jackson's library ladder is an especially elegant sculptural statement. The sweeping, upright form and prominent top shelf project an anthropomorphic image; it looks like a seated figure. The head-like shelf is surmounted on a "neck" that appears to grow out of "shoulders" carved out of laminated blocks that comprise the "chest" or body of the piece, which is itself supported by three graceful legs. While the imagery is not overt, it nonetheless helps subtly to emphasize the inherent sculptural qualities of the ladder. In the Renwick collection, Jackson's work will help establish a crucial link between pioneers of post-war American craft furniture such as George Nakashima and Tage Frid and the art furniture makers of today.

**Daniel Jackson**, "*Four Step Library Ladder*," c. 1965, walnut, with oak steps, traditional joinery, subtractive sculptural techniques, and through-tenons, 78" x 20 1/2" x 27 1/2".

Jere Osgood is best known as a fine woodworker who employs innovative, complex lamination processes of his own design. Although he was deeply influenced by studio wood masters Wharton Esherick and Tage Frid, he began developing his own methods in 1969, during the time Wendell Castle's sculptural, stacked laminated pieces were in vogue. Osgood recounts, "I was at the opposite end of the design spectrum. While woodworkers were making their furniture heavier, mine grew increasingly lighter. I placed more emphasis on pre-planning than shaping. The form comes from bending the wood into a light shell instead of chopping away lumber."



**Jere Osgood**, "*Cylinder-Front Desk*," 1989, laced-wood, rosewood, pearwood, mahogany, plywood, calfskin, 45 7/8" x 43 1/5" x 29".

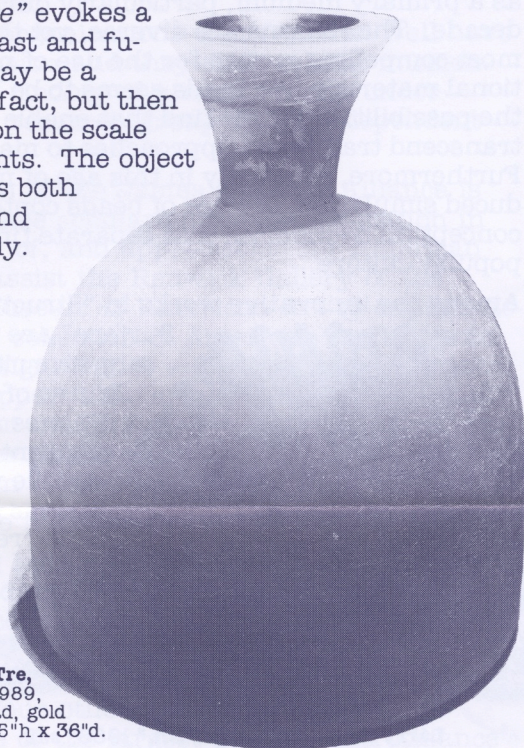
The *Cylinder-Front Desk* represents Jere Osgood, both technically and aesthetically, as an artist and mastercraftsman at the pinnacle of his career. This desk embodies Osgood's independent approach to furniture design. In making the desk, Osgood employed innovative and patiently-executed techniques honed and refined over a forty-year career of study, teaching and building fine furniture. The desk makes reference to the past, yet clearly represents a contemporary convergence of art and craft.

In contrast to the studio glass artist, Howard Ben Tre has taken glass back to the factory. Rather than blowing glass in his workshop, he rents a glass factory in Brooklyn several times a year and casts his sculptures there, using industrial equipment and employing workers from the factory whom he has trained to help him. Ben Tre's contemporary cast glass sculptures breathe a sense of ritual and mystery, capable of simultaneously evoking the past and the present. Describing glass as "appealing, impactful, extrava-



gant," Ben Tre sees casting as performance, "the height of interacting with the energy of the material. I am comfortable with this period of intense manipulation...me, as magician, playing with a potentially dangerous substance. The object becomes the product."

The form and texture of his "*First Vase*" reflect in a powerful and mysterious way Ben Tre's diverse sources of reference — scientific laboratory vessels, Mayan ruins, Gothic cathedrals and contemporary western architecture. His resulting works look simultaneously like ancient archaeological finds and icy Martian products. The "*First Vase*" evokes a sense of past and future. It may be a found artifact, but then we question the scale and contents. The object engages us both visually and emotionally.



**Howard Ben Tre,**  
"*First Vase*," 1989,  
cast glass, lead, gold  
leaf, patina, 45" h x 36"d.

Ceramist Ralph Bacerra approaches his completed and fired vessel shapes with a renewed anticipation — his creative work has only begun. For Bacerra, the ceramic surface is a "field," a formal shape to be solved stylistically. It is a three-dimensional canvas on which to paint. His mastery of low-fire decoration and his painterly approach to design illuminate the potential as well as the limitations of his ceramic attitude. In his precise employment of refined glaze and design techniques driven by an individualized painterly aesthetic, Bacerra moves toward that unclassifiable area that exists in our critical imagination between craft and fine art.

Bacerra's "*Teapot*" represents the mature work of an artist with 34 years of experience focused on achieving an integration of form and decoration. With unparalleled sophisticated fluency and acumen, he juxtaposes, overlays and melds an extended vocabulary of geometric patterns, shapes and rhythmically deployed figurations.

He has conceived and built this work with authority, sinuosity and freewheeling wit, synthesizing a variety of cultural influences from Islamic to Oriental. "*Teapot*" provides visual opulence and style, and the national attention which it has received is amply justified.



**Ralph Bacerra,**  
"*Teapot*," 1989,  
earthenware,  
high and low fire  
glazes, hand built  
and thrown  
construction,  
16" x 13" x 8 1/2".

### Renwick Fellow Winifred Owens-Hart Will Lecture on June 3

by Elmerina Parkman

Winnie Owens-Hart, recipient of the second James Renwick Fellowship in American Crafts, and currently in residence at the Smithsonian, will lecture on "A Different Hand," at 3:00 PM, Sunday, June 3, in the Grand Salon.

"A Different Hand" is an illustrated lecture presenting recent research on the development and contributions of a little known or studied segment of the talent that helped shape American art — the African American ceramicist.

Before the notion of America as we know it today, Africans practiced a highly developed and rich ceramic tradition. That tradition, talent and body of knowledge was transported to America on the ships of explorers and commercial exploiters and absorbed by the soil of American art as a tradition of ceramics by "A Different Hand."

For centuries, historians have painted a Eurocentric picture of the development of America and largely attributed the positive infusions of talent and skill as hailing only from European shores. Very little credit was attributed to the talents and skills of the original inhabitants or to any other non-European group. Ms. Owens-Hart's research indicates that African Ameri-



cans have made major contributions to the development of American ceramic style and imagery.

Ms. Owens-Hart received a B.F.A. from the Philadelphia College of Art, and an M.F.A. from Howard University. She is a ceramicist who has worked and taught in Africa, exhibited nationally and internationally for over a decade, conducted workshops, lectured and written extensively.

### Alliance Initiates Craft Leaders Caucus

Craft art enthusiasts from across the United States recently joined together to form the Craft Leaders Caucus, a new component of the James Renwick Alliance. The Caucus will assist in building the nation's preeminent collection of American crafts at the Renwick Gallery, provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, and form a national network of craft supporters to stimulate appreciation and broaden understanding of this rapidly evolving area of the visual arts.

Caucus members will meet twice a year, once in Washington, DC, and again in a different locale that is significant to American crafts. The first meeting took place on April 20, in conjunction with the Alliance's craft weekend in Washington. Caucus Leaders met with members of the Congressional Arts Caucus on Capitol Hill and with Renwick and other Smithsonian officials. They visited "backstage" at the Renwick Gallery for a private viewing of the permanent collection and an opportunity to discuss the Renwick philosophy in developing its permanent collection.

They also participated in an Alliance acquisitions committee meeting, voting on matching funds for new additions to the collection.

The second Caucus meeting for 1990 will be scheduled in the fall in a different region of the United States. Discussion topics will encompass local, regional and national craft art developments and issues. Caucus leaders will also be invited to visit the host city's special craft art attractions.

Membership in the Craft Leaders Caucus is limited, and the yearly contribution is a minimum of \$1,000. Steering committee members for the Caucus are Lee and Mel Eagle, Sherley Koteen, Elmerina and Paul Parkman and Rebecca Stevens. For further information on the Craft Leaders Caucus, please write to:

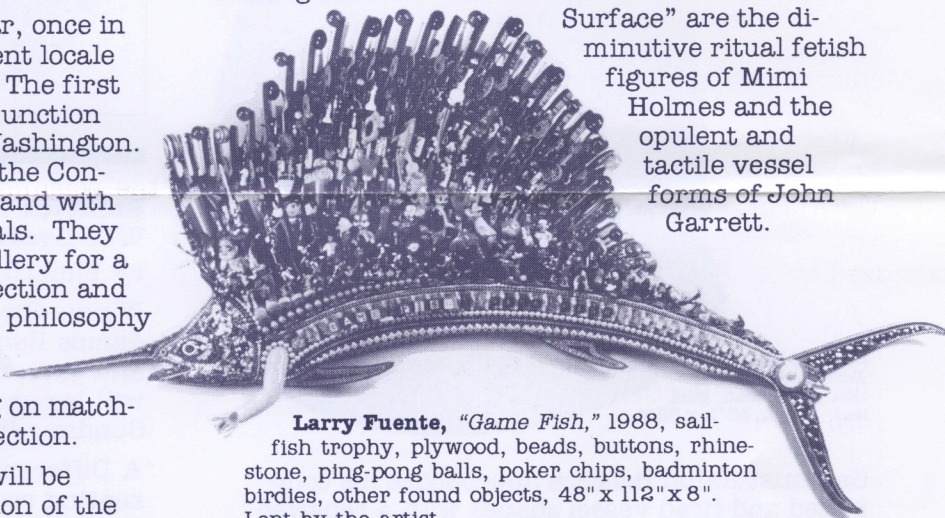
James Renwick Alliance  
Craft Leaders Caucus  
6801 Winterberry Lane  
Bethesda, Maryland 20817  
(301) 229-2148

### "Structure and Surface: Beads in Contemporary American Art" to Open July 27

Beads have not traditionally been considered a fine art material, despite their long history of use as decoration and adornment. In the new exhibition "Structure and Surface: Beads in Contemporary American Art," booked for the Renwick Gallery July 27, 1990 through January 13, 1991, artists challenge the definitions of aesthetic boundaries using beads as the primary material in their works.

Many contemporary artists have turned to beads as a primary medium, particularly during this decade. The reasons are diverse, yet the single most compelling motive for the use of nontraditional materials like beads seems to be linked to the possibilities artists find that enable them to transcend traditional approaches to making art. Furthermore, especially in this age of mass-produced simulation, the use of beads contests the conceptual boundaries that separate fine art and popular culture.

Among the innovative works in "Structure and Surface" are the diminutive ritual fetish figures of Mimi Holmes and the opulent and tactile vessel forms of John Garrett.

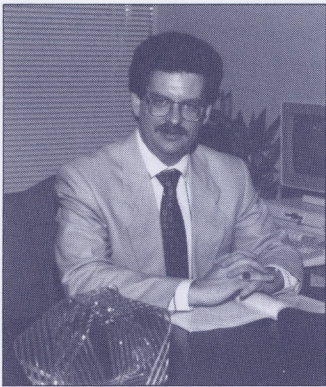


Larry Fuente, "Game Fish," 1988, sailfish trophy, plywood, beads, buttons, rhinestone, ping-pong balls, poker chips, badminton birdies, other found objects, 48" x 112" x 8". Lent by the artist.

Artist Joyce Scott sews brightly colored beads, news clips and photographs together to create bold, colorful neckpieces that explore contemporary street life, black music and feminist issues. Larry Fuente creates ornate decorative patterns on the surfaces of his sculptures by covering them with a spectacular range of beads, bangles, plastic flowers and found objects. This range of works demonstrates that beads are indeed a potent and versatile material.

"Structure and Surface: Beads in Contemporary American Art" was organized by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and was funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.





## News from the Alliance

Voluntary organizations that function well have a clear mission and they stick to that mission. That is the finding of a recent study undertaken by a research group called Independent Sector.

The mission of the James Renwick Alliance is to: **1.** advance scholarship about, education in the history of, and appreciation for American crafts; **2.** assist the Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art to expand its permanent collection of American craft objects of artistic significance and superior craftsmanship; **3.** support scholarly research in the field of American crafts since 1900; and **4.** organize and sponsor public educational activities related to American crafts.

The Alliance is fulfilling each part of its mission.

The Spring Forum and Craft Weekend, organized by Andrea Uravitch and Nancy Carter, was a great success. Edward Cooke of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, discussed the fascinating "New American Furniture" exhibit which he curated. Four other wonderful speakers informed one of the largest audiences in Alliance history about the status and the future of crafts in the United States. Participants also had the opportunity to visit several private collections. A tour of the exhibition of the work of Ed Rossbach at the Textile Museum capped the weekend. The tour was led by the curator of the exhibit, Alliance board member Rebecca Stevens.

On April 20, the Alliance inaugurated the new Craft Leaders Caucus. The Caucus met with Congressmen Sid Yates and Les AuCoin, and learned about the current crisis in federal funding of the arts. They received further details on that topic from John Fronhmayer, Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. Shirley Koteen, Rebecca Stevens, Elmerina and Paul Parkman, and Lee and Mel Eagle organized this new element of the Alliance which will increase the scale of our activities.

April 20 also saw another Acquisitions Committee meeting chaired by Lee Eagle. Michael

Monroe offered the Alliance the opportunity to participate in the purchase of new objects for the permanent collection. You are providing partial support for the purchase of two objects from the "New American Furniture" show. This is in addition to the Jere Osgood desk which was added to the permanent collection in February. The new objects are a desk by Gary Knox Bennett and a rocking lounge chair by Steven Horowitz. The other objects that you are helping to acquire are three pins by Arline Fisch and a tapestry by Lia Cook.

One of the most important scholarly activities which you support is the James Renwick Fellowship Program. Recently Matthew Kangas and Nancy Corwin presented public lectures at the Renwick. Research conducted during their fellowships formed the basis for each of their talks.

Vicki Halper was a Curatorial Fellow in residence at the Gallery several months ago. The research that she performed is leading to the calligraphy show which opened at the Renwick on May 4, and will be on view through October 28.

Mission is important, but mission cannot be accomplished without membership participation. You can become more active in the Alliance and be personally involved in the planning and execution of the kind of activities listed here. You can be involved even if you do not live in the Washington area. Contact me, and I will help you get involved.

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## September Craft Study Tour to Chicago New Art Forms Exhibition in Planning Stage

Alliance board members are planning a Craft Study Tour to Chicago, around September 12-14, highlighted by the International New Art Forms Exhibition at the Navy Pier — considered by authorities a premier exhibition of the best contemporary craft art. Participants will have ample time to view the exhibits, visit private collections, galleries and studios, relax in one of Chicago's most comfortable hotels and sample the city's finest cuisine.

A special invitation to join this tour will be mailed to Alliance members within the next few weeks. For further information, contact:

Chicago Craft Study Tour  
6801 Winterberry Lane  
Bethesda, Maryland 20817  
(301) 229-2148

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## Recent Contributions to the Alliance

The Alliance welcomes the gifts of the following contributing members, received between October 15, 1989 and April 15, 1990:

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## Renwick Gallery Public Programs June, July, August, 1990

### June 2:

New American Furniture: A Symposium. Three furniture designers — Michael Hurwitz, Tom Hucker and Rick Wrigley — will discuss their work in the "New American Furniture" exhibition. They will show how their interest in the history of furniture design and construction and their study of cabinet-makers of the past influenced the works they made for the exhibition. As a "second generation" of contemporary furniture makers, these artists have demonstrated a greater interest in new technical possibilities and the combination of wood with other materials. Co-sponsored by the James Renwick Alliance. Free. From 3 to 5 PM.

### June 3:

Illustrated Lecture: Winifred Owens-Hart, James Renwick Fellow and Professor of Ceramics, College of Fine Arts, Howard University, will talk about African-American clayworks and their impact on American culture. Her studies have traced ceramics from traditional African cultures through contemporary 20th Century America. She has explored aesthetic approaches as well as the nature and significance of production methods. Sponsored by the James Renwick Alliance. Free. At 3:00 PM.

### June 7:

Creative Screen: "Behind the Fence — Albert Paley, Metalsmith." Albert Paley, internationally known artist who works in forged metal, discusses his ornamental gates commissioned for the Renwick Gallery, and his earlier designs in jewelry. The film also depicts Paley's construction of an 80-

foot fence for the Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee. (30 minutes). "The Music Rack." Wendell Castle, well-known for his elegant hand-made furniture, is shown in this film creating a complex laminated music rack. (30 minutes). Works by Paley and Castle are part of the Renwick Gallery's permanent collection. Examples are currently on view. Free. At 11 AM, 12:15 PM and 1:30 PM.

### June 9 & 10:

Craft Demonstrations: Four master calligraphers, working with English, Chinese, Arabic and Hebrew scripts, will show the stylistic differences between the written form of these languages. They will also explain the various implements used to produce the characters. Co-sponsored by the James Renwick Alliance. Free. From noon to 3 PM on Saturday; noon to 2 PM on Sunday.

### June 10:

Illustrated Lectures: Rose Folsom, calligrapher and historian of this art form, will give an overview of how calligraphy has developed over the ages. Four specialists in Hebrew, Arabic, Chinese and English calligraphy will discuss their work, techniques, materials and influences. Co-sponsored by the James Renwick Alliance. Free. From 3 to 5 PM.

### June 21:

Creative Screen: Repeat of June 7. Free. At 11 AM, 12:15 PM and 1:30 PM.

### June 22:

Illustrated Lecture: Victorian manners and costume will be discussed by Allen Bassing, the Renwick Gallery's Public Programs Coordinator. Using 19th

Century garments as illustrations, Dr. Bassing will show how clothing was a factor for identifying people by their social/economic level, and how very important were the tight rules of etiquette and decorum. Free. At noon.

### July 12:

Creative Screen: Calligraphy is the theme for three films. "Chinese Brush Strokes" features Mr. Fay Chong, prominent West Coast artist, tracing the history of Chinese writing and the use of calligraphy in modern art. (17 minutes).

"The Hebrew Script" shows the development of writing ancient scripts. Illustrated manuscripts from the Middle Ages show the scribe and artist. (24 minutes). The art of writing as developed by cloistered monks, and the artwork illuminations that accompanied medieval calligraphy are demonstrated in "Calligraphy: The Craft of Beautiful Writing." (15 minutes).

These films are shown in conjunction with the current exhibit "Four Contemporary Calligraphers." Free. At 11 AM, 12:15 PM and 1:30 PM.

### July 13:

Illustrated Lecture: Allen Bassing, Renwick Public Programs Coordinator, will discuss clothing designed between 1750 and 1880. As a craft form, costume fabrication during most of this period depended upon European styles. Changing fashions came slowly and modestly; over the long span from the late-18th to mid-19th Centuries, there was a gradual decrease in elaboration and ornamentation. Free. At noon.

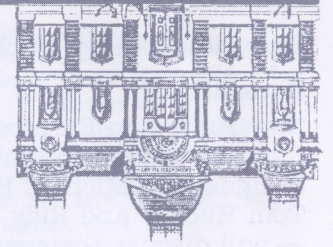
### July 26:

Creative Screen: Repeat of July 12. At 11 AM, 12:15 PM and 1:30 PM.

Inquiries about the James Renwick Alliance should be sent to:

James Renwick Alliance  
6801 Winterberry Lane, Bethesda, Maryland 20817





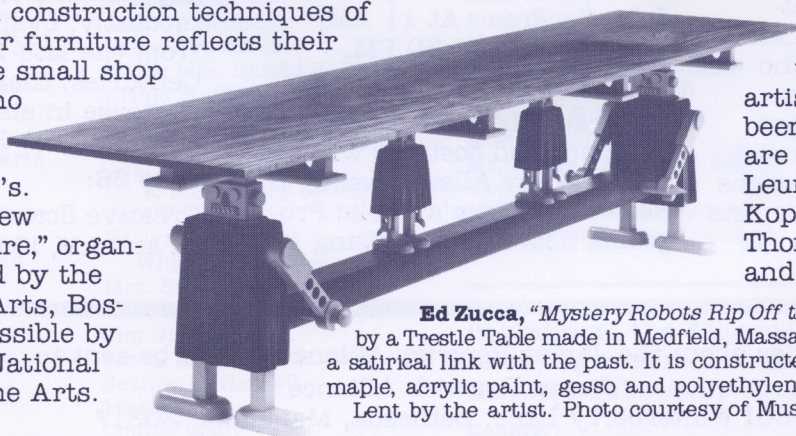
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### "New American Furniture" Continues Through September 3

Drawing inspiration from historical furniture in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 26 American studio craftsmen designed and built new works that convey elegance, wit, whimsy or satire. These leading furniture makers reinterpret and combine forms, decorative elements and construction techniques of the past, and their furniture reflects their connections to the small shop cabinetmakers who first used the term "art furniture" in the 1870's. The exhibition "New American Furniture," organized and produced by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts.

### "Tree to Treen: Woodenworks" on Exhibit in Museum Sales Shop

Complementing the "New American Furniture" exhibition, the Renwick Gallery museum shop has organized a sales exhibition featuring wood objects. Included are several pieces of turned wood as well as constructed boxes, rolling pins, jewelry cases, small clocks, vases, tops for spinning, salad bowls, cutting boards and whirlygigs. Among the artists whose works have been selected for this show are Craig Nutt, Robert Leung, Jim Winecoff, Robert Kopec, Ron Bower, Ford Thomas, William Livingston and Grant Ward.



**Ed Zucca**, "Mystery Robots Rip Off the Rain Forest," 1989, inspired by a Trestle Table made in Medfield, Massachusetts, 1680-1700, represents a satirical link with the past. It is constructed of mahogany, yellow poplar, maple, acrylic paint, gesso and polyethylene ink. 31" h., 30 1/2" d., 132" w. Lent by the artist. Photo courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.