
RENWICK QUARTERLY

June, July, August 1994

Published by the James Renwick Alliance, a private non-profit organization created to support The Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Renwick Gallery Gala Spring Weekend Fling

by Gary Wright

The annual "Spring Weekend," co-sponsored by the Renwick Gallery and the James Renwick Alliance, was a shimmering affair with artist Dale Chihuly on hand to help showcase his magnificent operatic stage sets designed for the Seattle Opera's production of Claude Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*.

The evening's festivities got underway with gala participants enjoying dinner parties hosted by Alliance members in their homes throughout the Washington metropolitan area. Then it was on to the Renwick Gallery for "A Glass Act" which began with an unforgettable walk up the red-carpeted staircase to the Grand Salon transformed into a magical setting with special theatrical lighting to highlight spectacular selections from the Seattle Opera's stage sets. Accompanying the sets were Chihuly's drawings and glass maquettes, a videotape, and photographs documenting the construction process and of course, Chihuly himself in his paint-splattered shoes.

The Grand Salon, filled with operatic splendor, and the Chihuly stage sets, featuring the Boulders, the hanging Chandelier, and the Forest of seven trees.
Photo by Bruce Miller.

Created from various types of plastic, the monumental trees filled the room from floor to ceiling while the red chandelier suspended overhead dazzled the crowd. Renwick staffers Marguerite Hergesheimer, former staff member (whose-heart-is-still-with-the-Renwick) Anne Holman, and I wore costumes from the opera. Marguerite made a memorable *Melisande*, and Anne arrived dressed as *Genevieve*, while yours truly perspired profusely under the pretext of playing *Pelleas*. Mezzo-soprano Tara Venditti sang selections from Debussy's "Chansons des Bilitis," while the Whiteside-Seidman Duo played more Debussy while guests meandered among

some of Chihuly's stage "rocks," which resembled large luminous balls, lit from within. The swinging Alex Smith Swing Band set the dancing beat for most of the evening, as Chihuly was presented with a certificate of honorary life membership in the James Renwick Alliance. In keeping with the weekend's storytelling theme, *Cinderella's* glass slipper was there for several to try on before Maureen Venditti slipped her foot in for a perfect fit, and took to the dance floor with Chihuly. And then there was the

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grand prize winner of the sweepstakes drawing who took home a stunning original glass work by Dale Chihuly. During the evening, the Renwick's Michael Monroe and National Museum of American Art director Elizabeth Broun paid tribute and thanks to Chihuly and all other concerned parties. Kathy Magiera spoke for the Seattle Opera, and Alliance president Paul Parkman, suffering back problems, made a spirited appearance to offer his heartfelt thanks to those who contributed to the success of the weekend. Guests sipped wine from the state of Washington, and enjoyed a delectable array of desserts and coffees as they mingled and danced among the incredible stage sets for a never-to-be-forgotten evening.



Above: Left to right; Barbara Berlin, Alliance Vice President and Weekend Chair, receiving bouquet of roses from Alliance President Paul Parkman.

Left: Left to right; Louise Belcher and Harryette Cohn in the Pelleas and Melisande "boulder garden." Photos by Grace Taylor.



Their work ranged from the stained glass creations of artist Judith Schaechter to the small intricate needlework tapestries, some with borders of whimsical "good luck" bats by fiber artist D.R. Wagner to the imaginative creations of ceramic sculptor Patti Warashina.

Highlighting the morning session were two men, artist Dale Chihuly in his signature paint-spattered shoes and Robert Schaub, technical director of the Seattle Opera with his splendid beard and smile. With their help, the Renwick's Michael Monroe finally got his long-awaited opportunity to transform the Gallery's Grand Salon for the gala evening. "I always wanted to do something to that room," Monroe said.

Sitting with Monroe, Chihuly and Schaub chatted freely and informally about the months spent agonizing over the possibilities and plans for creating the twelve sets required for the Debussy opera. From the wonder of glass artist Chihuly's designs through the hands of scenic artist Margie Jervis to its completion there was much consultation "and mumbling, too," according to Chihuly.



Left to Right: Michael Monroe, Renwick Gallery's Curator-in-Charge, interviews Seattle Opera Technical Director Robert Schaub and artist Dale Chihuly. Photo by Jim Hartzler

A mid-morning break offered coffee and tea, scones and croissants and the chance to meet and talk with the artists.

Back at the podium, Judith Schaechter once again proved that artists have a sense of humor. Having been commissioned to do a Sylvia Plath post-mortem pose for a New Yorker cover, she quoted her commissioners as saying, "let her do the corpse — that's what she's good at."

Patti Warashina wound the symposium to a close with slides of her pieces including "High Strung," "White Lightning," "Hot Head," and news of her latest work, "Mercurial Mist", an 18-foot piece complete with feathers, wings-in-a-shadow and a credit card.

After such an exhilarating session, no one was surprised to wind their way outside and find the rain clouds gone and the sun shining.

A Symposium Sampler

by Phyllis Thompson

Alliance members and their guests were in for a special treat as they entered the dome-shaped kiosk adjacent to the Smithsonian Institution Castle and descended several levels to the Dillon Ripley Center for a three-hour symposium that featured artists whose work and words explored the morning's theme: "Tell Us a Tale — The Craft Artist as Storyteller."

Sunday tours

Sunday's tours concluded the Alliance Craft Weekend events. This gorgeous spring day began with a tour of the contemporary craft collection at the American Association of Retired Persons which includes many stained glass commissions, all beautifully displayed. Other highlights were visits to the beautiful homes and collections of Caucus members Barbara and Arnold Berlin and Deena and Jerry Kaplan. Our last stop was the Maurine Littleton Gallery where glass artist Ginny Ruffner discussed her exhibition of fanciful, intellectually complicated sculptures. What a fabulous day!

First Lady Visits Renwick!

After generously lending her name as honorary chairperson for the "Glass Act" Gala event on April 16th, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton paid a surprise visit to the Renwick Gallery on Saturday, April 23. She strolled over from the White House in the company of a quartet of Secret Service agents, and toured the Chihuly opera sets and the Renwick's permanent collection galleries.

Chihuly Gift

The Alliance has succeeded! We have created a fund to support publications by the Renwick Gallery.

At the 1992 Spring Weekend, Dale Chihuly reminisced about how important his first Renwick Gallery show in 1978, *Baskets and Cylinders: Recent Glass by Dale Chihuly*, was to his career. It had been significant to him to have a small but very nicely done brochure that showed his work and discussed his art.

To support the publication of information about mid-career artists having an exhibition at the Renwick, Dale offered the Alliance the opportunity to sell two of his sculptures. The proceeds of that sale would be used to create a fund to support publications at the Renwick.

Lisa and Dudley Anderson of Wilson, North Carolina, added a beautiful Venetian to their marvelous collection of American crafts. Rebecca Klemm and Robert Creller of Washington have a fantastic Persian to show off with their outstanding craft collection in the new addition to their home.

Michael Monroe, curator-in-charge of the Renwick Gallery is keeping his eyes open for an appropriate use for the new fund.

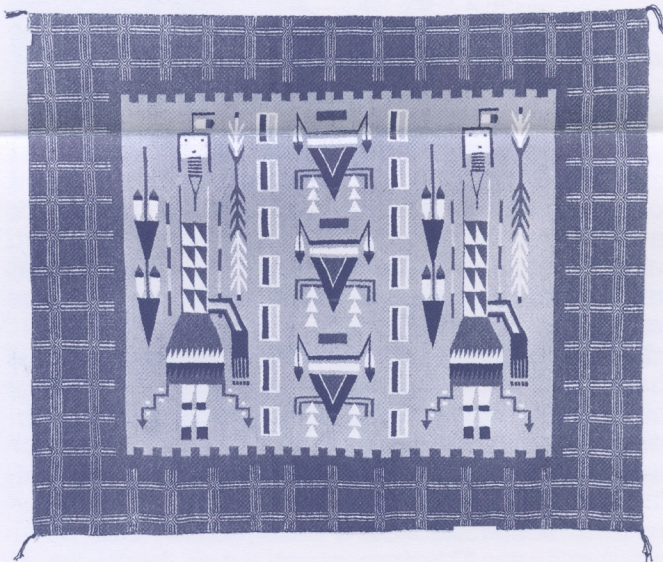
At the recent Alliance Spring Forum, the Andersons and the Klemm/Crellers were recognized for their important support of the Alliance and the Gallery. Dale was thanked for his outstanding generosity. The Alliance also is indebted to its past president, Jerry Paulson, who spent countless hours working on this project.

"Contemporary Navajo Weaving - The Gloria F. Ross Collection of the Denver Art Museum"

by Ann Hedlund

A Navajo rug is the unique product of many people, ideas, materials, and processes. In northern Arizona and New Mexico today, literally thousands of weavers sit at their looms creating rugs of long-lasting beauty. These weavers share a centuries-old heritage rooted in their own Athabaskan Indian beliefs and in tools and practices borrowed long ago from neighboring Pueblo Indians. Navajo weavers' diverse resources and their ability to absorb influences while retaining a strong native core give weaving its enduring yet innovative character today.

Weaving is practiced for many different reasons. Many women weave because their mothers and grandmothers wove before them. Weaving is an integral part of traditional women's roles. It supports families and shapes their entire way of life. Income contributes to household expenses while other tasks continue—watching children, herding sheep, doing household chores, planning ceremonies, visiting neighbors.



Audrey Spenser Wilson, *Yei Two-Faced Rug*, processed and handspun wool yarn, natural aniline and vegetal colors. 61" x 50 1/2". The Gloria Ross Collection of the Denver Museum.

Other Navajo women think of weaving as an appealing alternative to jobs away from home. They keep their personal freedom while earning a living. Weaving is a means of creative expression. Increased commitments to high quality and successful marketing indicate a growing professionalism. Moving away from Navajo custom, which avoids singling out individuals, many weavers are known by name. And a few men are joining women at the looms.

Some weavers make rugs and tapestries without economic incentives, placing personal expression and cultural revival above financial return.



Larry Yazzie
Teec Nos Pos
Raised Outline
 Rug, wool yarn
 and pre-dye
 and natural
 aniline colors
 The Gloria Ross
 Collection of the
 Denver Museum

Some emphasize weaving as a special marker of their Indian identity. A few save their handwoven rugs as heirlooms for their families. Others treat weaving as a hobby, a recreational activity that is rewarding in and of itself.

Not all weavers work consistently throughout their lives. Some give up weaving when they marry and begin a family or when they find a job. Others start weaving later in life, perhaps after losing a job or when their children start school. They may be motivated by income or by more esoteric concerns and a fascination with their own heritage. The important issue, however, is that they know how to weave, and with that understanding, they remain part of the larger community of Navajo artists.

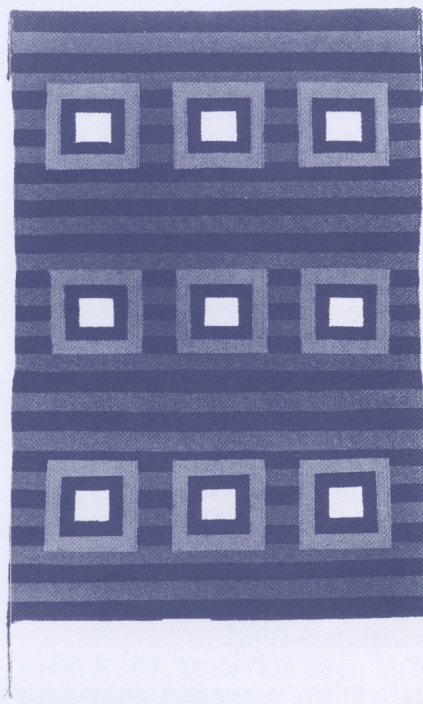
Weaving is hard work and involves many skills that must be controlled with care. Today, weavers continue to work at the same upright loom that was adopted by the Navajos from Pueblo Indians in the 17th century. Their relatively simple frame loom and hand-made tools have not changed significantly over the past three-and-a-half centuries.

Influenced but not determined by local traders and distant buyers, the weavers' own decisions chart the course for current trends and future changes. Beyond the basic tools and processes weavers select from raw materials, designs, and

marketplaces. They mix and match natural and synthetic dyes, handspun and commercial wool yarns, traditional and idiosyncratic designs. The rugs and tapestries shown here, all woven between 1980 and 1992, celebrate the artists' eclectic approaches.

This exhibition results from the long-term collaboration of more than 30 Navajo artists, collector Gloria F. Ross, and anthropologist Ann Lane Hedlund. It grows out of Mrs. Ross's professional interests as a successful tapestry editeur. She first consulted Ann Hedlund in 1979 when she decided to commission Navajo weavers to make tapestries based on Kenneth Noland designs. By then, Mrs. Ross had been working with leading American artists for over twenty years, translating their designs into tapestries in her own New York workshop and in well-known weaving centers abroad. As Dr. Hedlund introduced Mrs. Ross to Navajo weavers and their world, the vitality of modern Navajo weaving compelled the two women to share the weavers' own artworks with a broader audience.

Gloria Ross founded the permanent Collection of Contemporary Navajo Weaving at the Denver Art Museum in 1980, beginning with the gift of several rugs acquired during her Navajo travels. Dr. Hedlund, now an Arizona State University professor, selected and documented additions to the collection and curated this exhibition. Together they continue to visit the Navajo Nation and to be inspired by the creativity of Navajo weavers today.



Gloria Begay,
Moki Stripe
 Rug, processed
 wool yarn and
 commercial dyes,
 92 x 62cm.
 The Gloria Ross
 Collection of the
 Denver Museum.

This exhibition was organized by the Denver Art Museum and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Denver Metropolitan Scientific and Cultural Facilities District.

This exhibition of work by 38 contemporary Navajo weavers is accompanied by a full-color catalogue, and will be on view at the Renwick Gallery through August 21st.

Gerry Craig Selected as Senior Renwick Fellow for 1994-95

by Jeremy Adamson

Gerry Craig, a fiber artist who is Executive Director of the Detroit Artists' Market, has been selected as the 1994-95 James Renwick Fellow in American Crafts. Craig received B.F.A. degrees in both textile design and art history from the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. During her junior year, she attended the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. In 1989, she was awarded her M.F.A. degree in fiber arts by the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.



Since June, 1990, Craig has been the director of the Detroit Artists' Market, a non-profit, alternative gallery which exhibits exclusively the work of contemporary artists living in Michigan. She is responsible for overseeing the development of nine to twelve shows annually, and for coordinating and administering all related publications and education programs. She is the author of several exhibition catalogs, and has contributed articles to *Fiberarts* and *Threads Magazine*. Before directing the activities of the Artists' Market, Craig worked as a registrar at the Detroit Institute of Arts and as a textile conservator at the Cranbrook Academy Museum of Art.

A noted fiber artist, she is a part-time instructor at the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit, and has participated in a number of contemporary fiber exhibitions. Since 1985, these shows have included *Young Americans*, organized by the American Craft Museum in 1988; *Needle Expressions '90*, held at the Littman Gallery of the Portland State University, Oregon; *From Here to There: Vehicles for New Forms/New Functions* and *Signs of Support: Furniture Forms in Contemporary Art* organized respectively in 1990 by the Arrowmount School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tenn., and the John Michael Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan, Wis. The most recent exhibition to feature her work is *Celebrating the Stitch: Contemporary Embroidery of North America*. The show, which opened in 1992 at the Society for

Arts and Crafts/Newton Art Center, Boston, will tour through 1995 internationally.

Gerry Craig's research topic as Senior Fellow—"Sensation and Spirit: Pre-Verbal Philosophies"—is based on the premise that sensation is a part of aesthetic experience which is not culturally acquired, and therefore is directly connected to pre-verbal, visceral responses. These physical reactions, she argues, are unconnected to symbol or intellectual theory. As a result, the neglect of a discourse which acknowledges the importance of the role of sensation in aesthetic perception is a hindrance to understanding craft in the art mainstream.

Through her research, she intends to show that the moral function of textiles in art is to be found not in subject matter, but in the very nature of the work as a second skin—a pre-verbal repository for the memory of sensation. Craig believes that memory based on touch serves as the greatest resource for the human imagination, and for several years she has sought to locate the place within the body which gives birth to the artistic impulse. During her six-month residency, she will locate and study textiles in Smithsonian Institution collections which substantiate her philosophic construct.

Lloyd E. Herman Fund for American Craft Established for Renwick Gallery

Elizabeth Broun, director of the National Museum of American Art, announced the establishment of the Lloyd E. Herman Fund for American Craft at the museum's Renwick Gallery. Herman, who was director of the Renwick Gallery from 1971 to 1986, has created a charitable trust to underwrite future acquisitions and programs of the Renwick.

"The endowment is the first of its kind in the history of the Renwick Gallery, and we are grateful to Lloyd Herman for his generosity," said Broun.

"During the 15 years I directed the Renwick I found great pleasure in seeing American craft beginning to receive the recognition it deserves in our nation's visual arts. I want the trust I am establishing to add an important building block to the Renwick's foundation of collections, publications, and public programs," Herman said.

The Renwick Gallery honored Herman for his career contributions to the recognition of American crafts and the establishment of his endowment trust during the James Renwick Alliance's annual spring craft weekend in Washington. The Renwick Alliance is the support group of the gallery initiated by Herman in 1982. Its current national membership includes more than 600 patrons of American craft.

Herman's achievements as founding director of

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the Renwick included directing 113 Renwick exhibitions and personally curating several that traveled nationally and internationally.

"Lloyd Herman's groundbreaking exhibitions, including *Woodenworks*, *Good as Gold Alternative Materials in American Jewelry*, and *The Woven and Graphic Art of Anni Albers* raised the level of connoisseurship for the American craft movement," Michael W. Monroe, curator-in-charge of the Renwick said.

Since his departure and his being named director emeritus of the Renwick, Herman has maintained a strong focus on crafts, working as an independent curator, consultant, and author on American craft and design topics. His recent publications include *Art That Works: The Decorative Arts of the Eighties* and *Tales and Traditions: Storytelling in Twentieth-Century American Art*. He is an honorary fellow of the American Craft Council, and served as advisor to the Secretariat of the World Craft Council, 1986-1990.

Renwick Gallery Public Programs - June, July, August 1994

June 3

Lecture: Renwick Gallery Public Programs Coordinator Allen Bassing will discuss "General and Specific Characteristics of 19th Century American Domestic Architecture." This event is re-scheduled from February 11th. In the Grand Salon at noon.

June 16

Films: Navajo (21 minutes): history, customs, and life of Navajo peoples; and Navajo (29 minutes): modern Navajo medical practices and religious rituals. Shown in conjunction with current exhibition "Contemporary Navajo Weaving." In the

Grand Salon at 11:00 AM and noon.

July 17

Illustrated Lecture: Margaret Carney Xie, Director of the Museum of Ceramic Art at Alfred University in Alfred, New York, and a former Renwick Fellow, will discuss "Charles Fergus Binns: The Father of American Studio Ceramics." Co-sponsored by the Renwick Gallery and the James Renwick Alliance. In the Grand Salon at 3 p.m.

July 22

Gallery Talk: Renwick Gallery Public Programs Coordinator Allen Bassing will discuss "Differences Between 19th and 20th Century Museums," using the Renwick's exhibitions as examples. Meet in the foyer at noon.

August 19

Lecture: Renwick Gallery Public Programs Coordinator Allen Bassing will discuss "Architecture of the 17th and 18th Centuries." In the Grand Salon at noon.

Contemporary Crafts and the Saxe Collection Coming This Fall

Coming to the Renwick Gallery on October 28 is the exhibition *Contemporary Crafts and the Saxe Collection*, which features 123 works by 98 artists, selected from the collection of Dorothy and George Saxe. This comprehensive exhibition offers a tour-de-force in all five of the craft media. As the works on display are from up-and-coming artists as well as by recognized masters, the exhibit offers a study of one private collection that is a reflective representation of art patronage as a whole during the 1980s. Organized and toured by the Toledo Museum of Art, and accompanied by a handsomely illustrated catalogue, this exhibition will remain on view through February 5, 1995.



President's Column

by Paul Parkman

Our spring Craft Weekend events were very close to perfection! Every one of the events set new attendance records. Saturday evening's Gala benefit, "A Glass Act," featuring a selection of the Seattle Opera's sets which Dale Chihuly designed

for Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande*, created enormous enthusiasm which was reflected in increased attendance, a color cover story in *The Washington Post Home Section* on April 14 and an article in *The Washington Times* on April 19. Saturday morning's Symposium by artists whose work employed narrative and the Sunday tour were very well received. Also a big hit were the Craft Leaders Caucus events, including Thursday's acquisitions evening and the Baltimore trip to collections and artists' studios.

What makes such an event "click"? One common denominator is lots of hard work. But on some lucky occasions it seems to happen almost magically. The "Glass Act" is a good example of fate shining kindly upon the Alliance. Margie Jervis, the primary scenic artist for the Seattle Opera, was earlier in life a glass artist, collaborating with Susie Krasnican and working in McLean, Va., just outside Washington.

The idea for a theme for the Gala arose when Margie, on a visit to her parents in the spring of 1993, stopped to see us. She brought along her slides and a sheaf of laser prints that showed the processes involved in constructing the Pelleas and Melisande sets. The opera sets were amazing! Enormous Chihulys populating the opera stage. From that visit to our home sprang the idea that the sets might be a centerpiece for the Alliance's spring Gala, and Michael Monroe enthusiastically agreed.

The presence of the sets at the Renwick would celebrate the transference of the work by craft artist Dale Chihuly to a production by a major opera company, a signal honor and a milestone for contemporary American craft. The idea grew to involve not only the Alliance, the Renwick and the Seattle Opera, but also the Renwick's parent Museum, the National Museum of American Art and Dale Chihuly and his staff at Chihuly Studio in Seattle. This was the first time that an Alliance benefit evening has incorporated so many different players.

The Seattle Opera generously loaned the use of their sets without charge. In due course they were trucked from Seattle and installed in the Grand Salon by the Opera's Technical Director, Robert Schaub and Master Scenic Artist, Margie Jervis. Dale Chihuly and his lighting expert, Parks Anderson, were involved in installing the Opera maquettes and Kerri Tucker, also of Chihuly Studio, efficiently attended to a thousand details involved in success of the evening. She and others on Chihuly's staff served as a vital link between the peripatetic Dale and our needs. Charles Robertson, Deputy Director and Betsy Broun, Director of the National Museum of American Art, in addition to being generally supportive throughout the entire process were instrumental in obtaining the necessary clearances for the "Sweepstakes," one of the evening's major events.

Despite our organizations' varying backgrounds and missions, the degree of cooperation was marvelous. We could not have asked for a more pleasant relationship from everyone involved. Michael Monroe, curator-in-charge of the Renwick Gallery, invested a huge amount of effort in the evening. His creativity in exhibition design, and his ability to inspire his own staff to come up with ingenious solutions resulted in a masterpiece exhibit. One specific example of his talent was the imaginative use of the niches in the upstairs hall which, in my memory, have never served as more than architectural elements.

On this magical Saturday evening, they glowed with Chihuly's framed 60 inch by 40 inch Opera Drawings (actually paintings on paper) each mounted above a glass maquette for one of the Opera's scenes.

I have some more thanks to give! First, I would like to give a special note of appreciation to the

Dinner Host Patrons who subsidized the wonderful dinner parties which started the evening and to all of the Chihuly, Pelleas and Debussy Patrons, whose contributions more than underwrote the costs involved in bringing these sets, along with Dale's opera drawings and glass models from Seattle to the Renwick for everyone to enjoy. I say "everyone" because the exhibition of these works remained on public view at the Renwick through May 15. In addition, tours of the installations were given: Margie Jervis led a group from the Summer Opera Guild; Michael Monroe led two tours for Alliance members; and, every day throughout the four weeks that the sets were on view, the Renwick docent volunteers were available for either scheduled or "walk-in" tours.

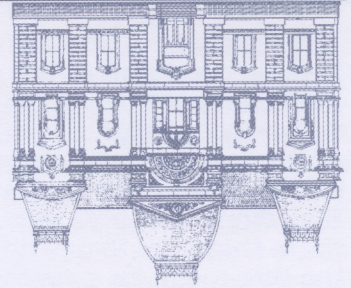
Next, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Benefit Committee, including Sue Bralove, Lenel Srochi-Meyerhoff, Andrea Uravitch, John Kotelly and Mary Hartzler; the Benefit Evening Committee Chairs; and the Committee members and numerous volunteers, all of whom played important roles in the overwhelming successful weekend.

Finally, let me acknowledge the efforts of Marilyn Barrett, who was in charge of the Gala evening program, and Barbara Berlin, who was responsible for the overall direction of the entire weekend. Both of them toiled for eight months leading up to the gala, attending to every detail with an eye to achieving perfection. The evidence is now in, and everyone agrees that Barbara and Marilyn reached that enviable goal.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who attended the weekend events. Your participation made the events a great deal of fun as only sensational and enthusiastically attended events can be. Almost 200 attended the Symposium, more than 350 came to the Gala and Sunday's tour was filled to capacity. As we go to press the attendance at the Renwick Gallery to see the Pelleas and Melisande sets and Chihuly drawings, maquettes and video, is the second highest (the Tiffany exhibition was the highest) in the 22 years since the Renwick opened. This superb attendance also made the Gala Benefit a fund raising success. The faithful moral and financial support evidenced by this participation makes the Alliance and Renwick Gallery programs possible.

Museum Shop Update

There is really no new news to report from the Museum Shop. At press time it seems that for the summer either the current "Crafts America" sales exhibit will be extended, or there will be a sales show relating to the "Contemporary Navajo Weaving" exhibition. Stay tuned for more details!



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RENWICK QUARTERLY

June, July, August 1994

The Renwick Quarterly is published four times a year for members of the James Renwick Alliance.

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