

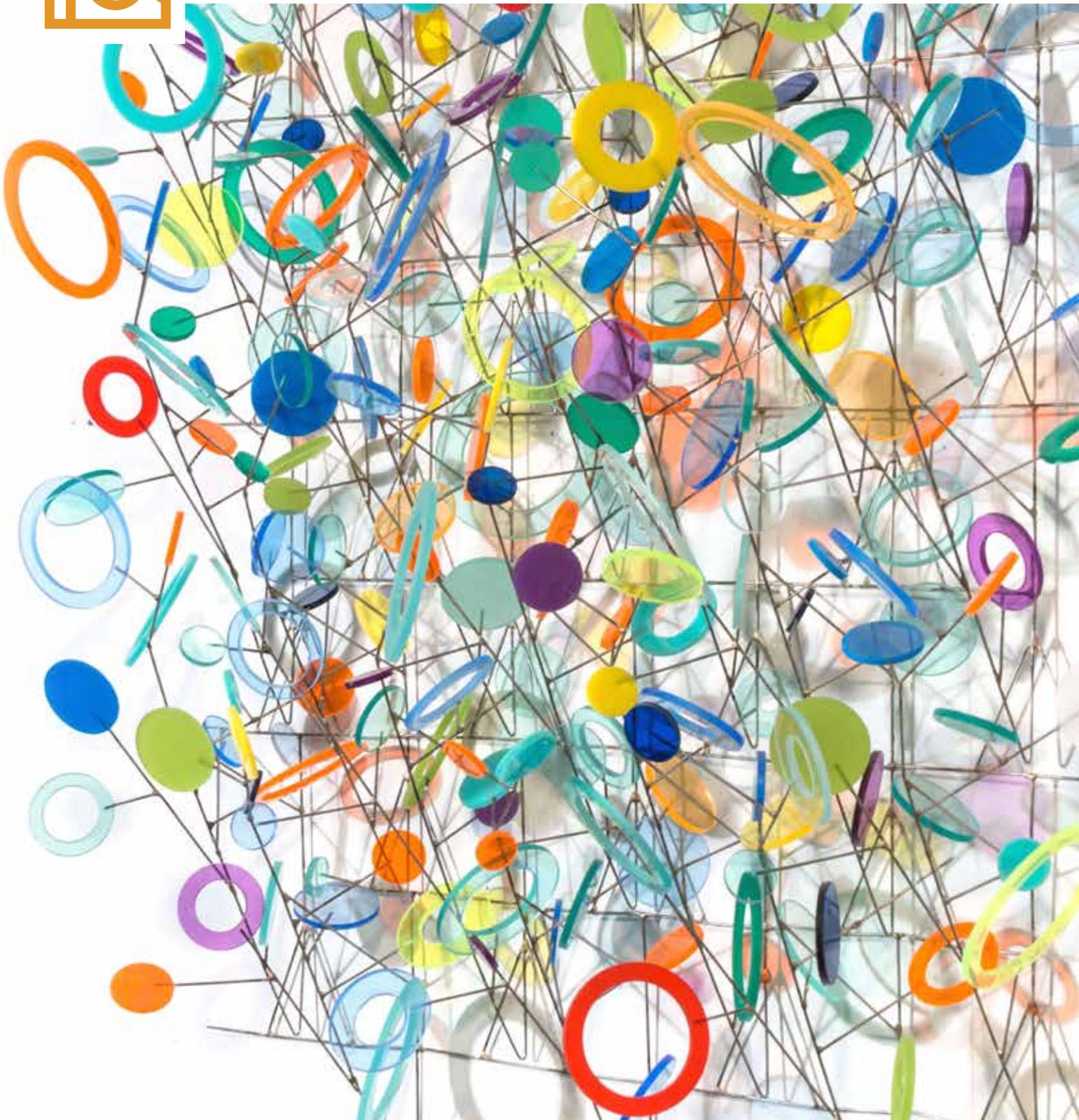
CRAFT QUARTERLY

CRAFT



James Renwick Alliance

SUMMER 2020



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DIRECTOR Jaimianne Jacobin

OFFICE MANAGER Emily Schimmel

JAMES RENWICK ALLIANCE

5335 Wisconsin Avenue #440

Washington DC 20015

The JRA Quarterly is published three times a year by the James Renwick Alliance, an independent national non-profit organization that celebrates and advances American Craft and craft artists by fostering education, connoisseurship, and public appreciation through programs, educational trips, publications, and recognition of excellence in the field. In addition, we provide support to craft artists and museums, including the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Although efforts have been made to eliminate errors of fact, spelling and grammar, the editor apologizes in advance for any such errors that may remain.

On the Cover: Warren Seelig, *Shadowfield/ Colored Light/ Square* (2018)

On the Back: Sondra Sherman, *Chicken Little* (2018)

On the Right: Syd Carpenter, *Albert and Elbert Howard* (2014)
Photo from the Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African American Art.

 **Center for Craft**

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Reflection, Resilience, Resolve

This year is not unfolding as any of us could have imagined. The celebrations and traditions of Mardi Gras, the NCAA Basketball tournament, and St. Patrick's Day in February and March and our Spring Craft Weekend in April were all impacted by the novel coronavirus' arrival and its spread.



Many life celebrations had to be postponed, and the Class of 2020 will not be walking across stages to collect their diplomas at high schools and universities from coast to coast. The heroism and resilience of frontline health professionals, essential workers and first responders has lead the news day after day. 3D printers and sewing machines are doing overtime to create face masks and shields. Certain acronyms are now part of our daily lexicon - PPE, WHO, CDC - and almost all of us now know how to "Zoom."

Craft artists and the non-profit arts industry are directly impacted by the pandemic. Their resilience and adaptability will be tested in the months ahead. I can attest that solidarity and support for the community is strong, led by such organizations as the American Craft Council, CERF+, the Center for Craft and us. The JRA will expand our Chrysalis Award for emerging artists with new funds for the honorable mention category precisely to respond to the COVID-19 environment.

At this time of extraordinary challenge, we hope this issue of the Quarterly is a respite, spotlighting objects of beauty and skilled craftsmanship from the Michael Sherrill retrospective and Ginny Ruffner exhibition at the Renwick Gallery, educational events we hosted before the pandemic started, and an exploration of Scotland's culture of craft and the new V&A Dundee museum.

I hope that this issue will spark your resolve to stand with American Craft artists and with the JRA in ways big and small. Thank you for reading, please engage with us online, and stay safe and healthy.

Michele A. Manatt

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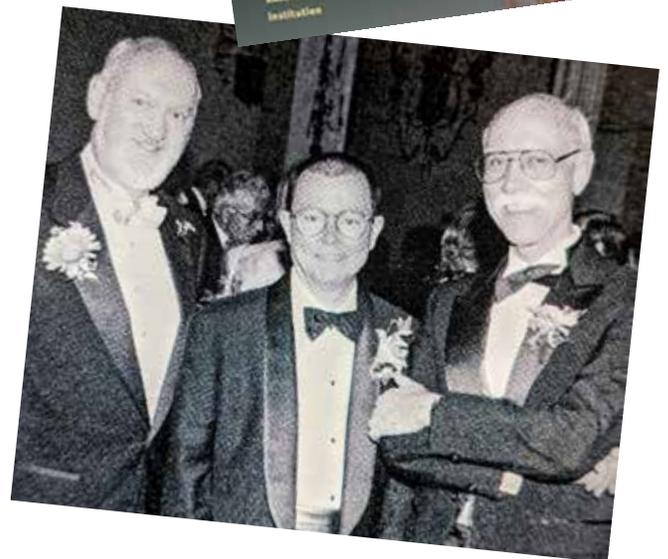
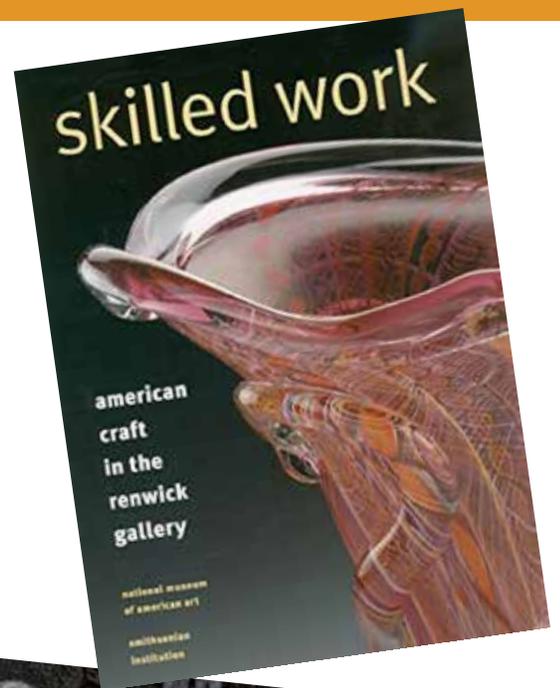
THE LEGACY OF KEN TRAPP

With great fondness we remember Kenneth R. Trapp, who served as Curator-in-Charge at the Renwick Gallery from 1995 to 2003. Ken passed away on October 30, 2019 in Arkansas where he had made his home since retiring from the Renwick and leaving Washington, DC.

During his tenure there were significant firsts for the Renwick. He co-wrote the first survey of the museum's craft collection, *Skilled Work: American Craft in the Renwick Gallery* to celebrate the 25th anniversary in 1998. In 2000, Ken organized *The Renwick Invitational: Five Women in Craft*, the first in a series of exhibitions to highlight outstanding craft artists who are deserving of wider national recognition. Ken conceived this biennial series, which will see its ninth edition *Forces of Nature: Renwick Invitational 2020* installed in September. Ken was the author of *Masters of Their Craft: Highlights from the Smithsonian American Art Museum* in 2003, a souvenir book that accompanied the traveling exhibition, and in 2010 he contributed an interview with Fleur Bresler for the exhibition catalogue *A Revolution in Wood: The Bresler Collection*.

Prior to coming to the Renwick, Ken was a curator at the Oakland Museum. While there, he organized the ground-breaking traveling exhibition *The Arts and Crafts Movement in California: Living the Good Life*, which was on view at the Renwick in the fall of 1993. Ken edited the accompanying book that brought together a team of scholars to examine the distinct regional variation of the period.

Former JRA President Clemmer Montague observed "Ken was a generous person and a brilliant curator whose knowledge and contact with artists across the country - whether the form and makers were sculptural, functional, hobbyist or professional - was phenomenal." Sue Bralove, also a former



JRA president, recalled "Ken had a great curatorial eye and was responsible for introducing the JRA to work that was tough and realistic, not necessarily beautiful or pleasing in the sense that we had been accustomed to seeing."

The evidence of his contributions to the Renwick Gallery and the Smithsonian American Art Museum over the eight years he was Curator-in-Charge is visible in what he left behind in the collection - an important legacy.

Trapp, Kenneth; Risatti, Howard (1998). *Skilled Work: American Craft in the Renwick Gallery*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Kenneth R. Trapp pictured center between former Renwick Gallery curators Michael Monroe (left) and Lloyd Herman (right). Photo from the JRA archives



NOW AND THEN:

V&A Dundee

CRAFT IN SCOTLAND

In Scotland, farming and fishing exist alongside a historic textile industry that still produces the world's finest cashmere and Tartan cloth. For over 30 years in the 1700s, wearing a kilt was a crime enforced to strip the country of its cultural identity. Today, the prevalent plaid patterns of Tartan, once used to designate regional clans, can be found in every gift shop and kilts are considered Scotland's national dress, worn by men for ceilidhs (parties), weddings, and festivals.

Textile skills have played a considerable role in the Scottish economy and identity over the centuries.



Anna Gordon
Twig on Enamel
Brooch (2013)

Early tartans identified regional patterns or Highland clans. Spinning, dyeing, and weaving were done by hand until the industrial revolution, which led to the creation of textile mills in many of the border towns. Glasgow would become known as one of the greatest centers of heavy engineering and shipbuilding, transporting linen textiles around the world.

This propelled Glasgow to become Scotland's largest city and brought cultural influences and inspiring new Arts & Craft aesthetics to inform one of Scotland's most famous designers, Charles Rennie Mackintosh. He is known as the designer of House for an Art Lover and the Glasgow School of Art, which opened in 1899 and continues as one of the world's top art schools. During this time Phoebe Anna Traquair would become Scotland's first significant female artist to achieve professional recognition. Her works included large-scale murals still on display in many historic buildings and enamel jewelry that would continue Scotland's legacy of adornment. The lineage from traditional Celtic kilt pins, continues to Traquair's pendants, and to the modernist works of Anna Gordon, chair of the Glasgow School of Art of Jewelry Department.

In the southeast of Scotland sits Edinburgh, the country's capital and one of the UK's top cultural and creative cities. It was here that a dozen members of the James Renwick Alliance Craft Leaders Caucus met Irene Kernan, the Executive Director of Craft Scotland, in October. The organization



One afternoon was dedicated to a lunch meeting and tour with Philip Long, the Director of V&A Dundee. Scotland's first design museum, the V&A Dundee opened in September 2018 in a building designed by Japanese architect Kengo Kuma. It is part of a revitalization plan for the waterfront in that city. Long shared the history of the development of the museum and the positive anticipated impact on tourism and economic growth. In its first year, the V&A had 830,000 visitors, far exceeding projections.

is known globally for its robust work supporting the education, appreciation and economy of craft in Scotland. Kernan extended outstanding hospitality to the group and made sure they experienced local food specialties including lamb, salmon, haggis, and of course, whisky.

Edinburgh is divided into the medieval Old Town and the neoclassical New Town, which together were designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1995. Just like the city, its artists vary in medium and styles but together create a dynamic landscape. During the JRA's visit, the group sampled a broad cross-section. They saw the colorful patterned tiles and vessels of Frances Priest; Andrea Walsh's modernist box-like forms and vessels; the sterling silver characters of Bryony Knox; and the wearable metal lines of Susan Cross. In the Northern part of the city, the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop opened a newly constructed building in 2012 as an example of modern architecture. They host gallery exhibitions, residencies, school programs, and studios with a wide variety of artists. It is here that ceramic artist Jessica Harrison has a studio for her "Vandalized Sculptures," "Found Figurines" and "Counterfeits".



The concept is quite similar to Bilbao, Spain where construction of the Guggenheim Bilbao adjacent to the gritty industrial riverfront served as a catalyst for major urban renewal.

Historically Scottish craft may be known for woven tartans and Celtic jewelry, but the diversity and breadth of modern craft weaves a new story. Where textile mills closed, art studios have opened. With Craft Scotland founded in 2008 and V&A Dundee in 2018, one can only look forward to 2028 and what is to come for craft in Scotland.



Top left: JRA Caucus members with Irene Kernan, the Executive Director of Craft Scotland, on left. | Left: Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop

JRA CRAFT WEEKEND

JRA CRAFT WEEKEND

SAVE THE DATE:
OCTOBER 23 - 25, 2020

We are moving the celebration online to gather our phenomenal line-up of Distinguished Educators and the vibrant craft community. You won't want to miss it. Check our website for updated schedule of events and how you can join us.



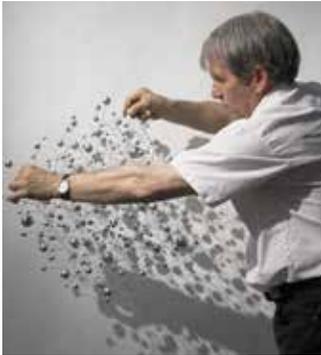
CRAFT IN AMERICA

CRAFT IN AMERICA is an educational platform established in 2004. Its premier project is the Peabody Award-winning "Craft in America" documentary series that is carried on the PBS broadcast and digital platforms. With 23 episodes produced since 2007, the filmed journey captures the history, artists, and techniques of America's rich craft culture, with a particular focus on the contribution craft makes to our national cultural heritage. Its thematic episodes include "Borders," "Identity," "Process," "Service" and "Visionaries." From its Los Angeles home base, the Craft in America Center deploys its resources through a vast video library, exhibitions, artist talks and workshops hosted at its West Third Street location. Carol Sauvion is the founder of Craft in America and is the executive producer of the series.



SYD CARPENTER is Professor of Studio Art at Swarthmore College. She earned her BFA and MFA from Temple University's Tyler School of Art. Her work can be found in numerous public and private collections. Her sculptural work engages the cultivation of the land, whether by referencing natural growth and productivity in its subject matter, drawing on family histories of farming, or by being formed from the earth itself in its clay medium. Motifs of beans or seeds – round, full, and brimming with new life – feature prominently in her work, as do baskets, canning jars, and other implements of harvest. The clothespin, a gently curving abstracted representation of the female form, appears large and strong, as nurturer and protectress over the homestead, the earth, and the family.

JRA CRAFT WEEKEND



WARREN SEELIG is a sculptor who lives and works in Rockland, Maine. He is a Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Craft and Material Studies program at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia where he teaches, curates and writes on various subjects related to art and material thinking. He received a BS from the Philadelphia College of Textiles & Science and an MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art. His work has been included in more than 30 major museum exhibitions in the United States, Europe, Japan, Russia and Korea with many solo and group shows worldwide. He has lectured extensively

including programs at the Korea National University of the Arts, The Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam and the Royal College of Art in London. Warren was elected a Fellow of the American Crafts Council and served as a member of its board. He also served on the board of Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine. In 2018 Seelig was awarded a United States Artist Fellowship.



SONDRA SHERMAN is Head of the Jewelry and Metalwork Program at San Diego State University, CA. She received the Diploma Degree (MFA) from the Academy of Fine Art in Munich, Germany, where she resided for ten years. Sherman's work explores the distinctive voice of jewelry and the psychological and social contexts of the body/wearer. Her diverse series of work uses the social codes and private/public locations of jewelry as a platform to invite a broad audience to a conversation grounded in empathy. Sherman has been the recipient of many awards including the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Emerging Artists Fellowship, the Mid-Atlantic Regional National Endowment for the Arts, as well as a Fulbright Scholarship for study abroad. Exhibited and published in Europe and the US, her work can be found in significant public and private collections including the The Museum of Art and Design, NY, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.



JOIN US: LEARN MORE AT JRA.ORG

8 Images top to bottom, starting pg 7: Carol Sauvion, Executive Producer and Director of Craft in America holding the Peabody Award. (2018) | Craft in America logo | Syd Carpenter, *Heart of the Yam* | Syd Carpenter, photo by Matthew Bender | Warren Seelig, courtesy the artist. | Warren Seelig, *Shadowfield/ Colored Light/ Cluster #3*. Photo by Dowling Walsh Gallery | Sondra Sherman, courtesy the artist. | Sondra Sherman, *Upside Down in Paradise: WesternInnSanMarino (Brooch)*.

MICHAEL SHERRILL RETROSPECTIVE AT THE RENWICK GALLERY: AN ARTIST'S LIFE IN MANY SEASONS

By Diane Charnov

Arts Writer, Founder of A(rt)SPIRE, Artist, and JRA Board Member

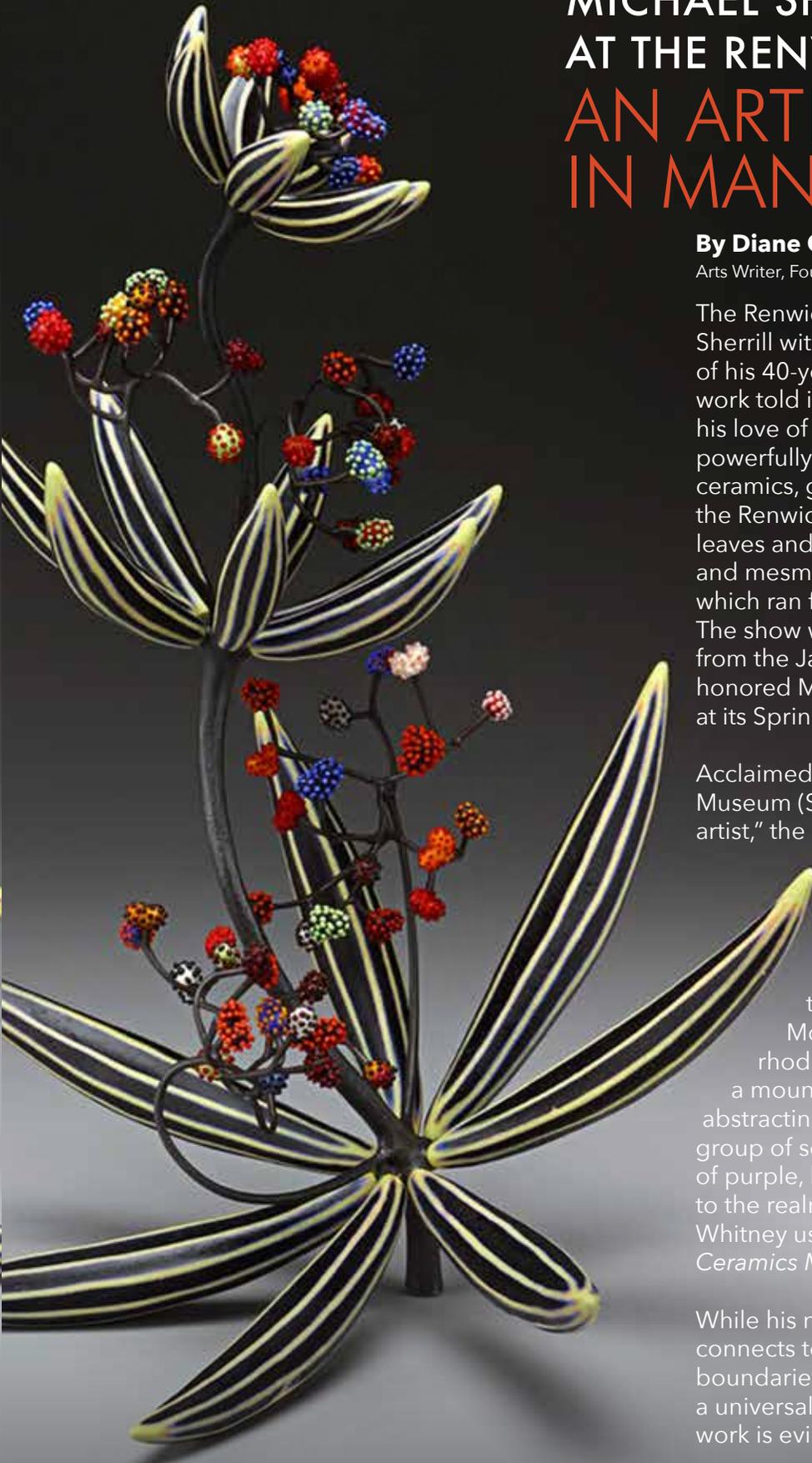
The Renwick Gallery celebrated artist Michael Sherrill with a retrospective that traced the evolution of his 40-year career in a stunning display of his work told in over 70 creations. Deeply inspired by his love of nature, Sherrill's "natural narratives" were powerfully rendered in a mixed media display of ceramics, glass and metal. His vibrant work filled the Renwick with color, cast shadows of ceramic leaves and metal branches on the gallery's walls, and mesmerized viewers throughout the exhibition which ran from June 2019 through January 2020. The show was made possible in part with support from the James Renwick Alliance (JRA). The JRA also honored Michael Sherrill as a Master of the Medium at its Spring Craft Weekend in April, 2019.

Acclaimed by the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) as a "Southern quintessential artist," the exhibition honored a maker with deep

roots in North Carolina. Partially inspired by native Appalachian plants, Sherrill creates forms reminiscent of nature's palette.

Yellowstone Rhododendron, a gift to SAAM by Clemmer and David Montague, sensitively depicts a budding rhododendron as if it were revealed on a mountain walk. Sherrill is equally adept at abstracting nature in a piece like *Turning Leaves*, a group of sculptural leaves glazed in fantastical hues of purple, blue and orange; the work owes more to the realm of "fictional botany," a term that Kay Whitney used to describe Sherrill's work in a recent *Ceramics Monthly* article.

While his native roots are evident, Sherrill's work connects to viewers beyond the geographic boundaries of his inspiration and "speaks" a universal language. Recognition of his work is evident in the numerous national





and international awards he has received, from his selection as a Windgate Fellow to a Kohler Arts Center residency, to one-person shows at Blue Spiral 1 in Asheville, NC and at Ferrin Contemporary Gallery in North Adams, MA to an award at the World Ceramic Exposition Foundation in Icheon, Korea. It was the selection of his Incandescent Bottle series by then Renwick Gallery curator-in-charge, Michael Monroe, for the White House Collection of American Crafts in 1993 that proved to be a major launching point for his career nationally.

Largely self-taught, Sherrill is quick to credit the Penland School of Craft with playing a significant role in his artistic and personal life. At Penland he connected with renowned potter and North Carolina's national living treasure, Cynthia Bringle (whom he calls his "second 'craft' mother") and met his wife Marjory, his partner in his life and art. Tracing his evolution farther back, Sherrill also reveals how dyslexia affected his academic performance and played a role in his taking refuge in artistic expression. His inventiveness goes well beyond his art-making and extends into his founding a successful clay tool company, Mudtools, which has won praise from potters throughout the United States and as far away as Australia and New Zealand.



His family also played a prominent role in his growth as an artist, from his father, a "machinist- inventor, motorcycle maker" to his "warrior-princess mother" to time spent as a teenager with his grandfather, who instilled within him a love of the Southern tradition of heirlooms worn by time. This quality of a well-worn patina is magically replicated in his ceramic piece, *Red Lacquer Teapot*, which suggests that admiring gazes have created the worn surface of this larger-than- life-sized teapot.

Much of his work conveys a fascination with local and global ceramic influences, from Seagrove, North Carolina pottery to Asian-inspired influences in raku firings, Oribe-like ware and celadon glazes. His recent work reveals a more personal expression of postures and poses, tall, confident forms, and futuristic-inspired sculptural work in black and white. His ever-present ode to nature echoes throughout his vast body of work. In a recent piece, *A Beautiful Death*, he incorporates porcelain, silica bronze and Moretti glass in a haunting union of materials that highlights beauty in decay.



On his website, Sherrill observes, "I am compelled by the sensation of seeing things fresh; as if for the first time...." This sentiment also expresses the reaction of many visitors to his exhibition at the Renwick Gallery. Whether lingering over a newly discovered piece or returning to rediscover an old favorite, an informal survey revealed that visitors felt there was always more to absorb. Even the more recent, large-scale, abstracted work created an intimate feeling that was also evident from the outset in his earlier, small-scale, functional work. The show, organized by the Mint Museum, is currently on display at the Arizona State University Art Museum in Tempe through June 27, 2020.

Pg 9: Michael Sherrill, *Alma's Weed* (2003)
 Top left: Installation of *Vessels* from *Michael Sherrill Retrospective* at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.
 Left: Michael Sherrill in his studio. Photo courtesy the artist.
 Above: Installation of *Red Lacquer Teapot* (1997)



REGROWTH WITH GINNY RUFFNER

This past Fall, as visitors entered the first room in the Renwick Gallery, they were met by otherworldly glassworks by artist Ginny Ruffner. Colorful digital blooms rose from glass stumps with a little imagination and technology. The exhibition titled *Reforestation of the Imagination* included six life-size vignettes of stumps, stones and branches void of color and drawings by Ruffner that came to life in three-dimensional digital renderings that were seen with an iPad or smartphone app. This is the second consecutive exhibition the Renwick Gallery has hosted using technology as a significant component of the show.

The first was *No Spectators: The Art of Burning Man*. This exhibition included a Virtual Reality (VR) booth that invited viewers to put on a headset to experience the Burning Man festival in the Black Rock Desert playa. *Reforestation of the Imagination* uses Augmented Reality (AR) to create a digital form in real life with the assistance of a smart device. In this case, viewers could download a free app or use pads provided in the gallery to point at a hidden code to show the floral creations on their screen.

For this part of the project, Ruffner partnered with Grant Kirkpatrick, a Seattle-based animator, and media artist. She first would draw a hypothetical flower, giving it a name, description, and then she would give it a story. For example, the *Ventus ingenero*, is Latin for “wind generate” and is

“indigenous to the windswept, barren plains of more arid latitudes.” Kirkpatrick, would then take this drawing, translate it into a computer-based program, and render it three-dimensionally to be seen by the viewers. The landmasses were carved from foam, before finishing with fiberglass and hand-painting each one. The stump sculptures were formed during a residency at the Museum of Glass in Tacoma from colorless glass to represent the lifeless environment.

In some ways, the exhibition could be a metaphor for the artist’s journey after a life-altering, physically debilitating car accident in 1991 that was documented in an award-winning feature-length documentary, “A Not So Still Life.” After being in a coma for five weeks, the artist woke with few memories of her life prior to the crash and a prognosis that she most likely would never walk again. Through a long rehabilitation, she regained many of her abilities and willed herself back to work. She began drawing again, starting with simple forms like fruit and flowers.

To date, Ruffner has had 88 solo shows, several hundred group shows, and her work is in 55 permanent museum and public collections around the world. With support from the James Renwick Alliance, an exhibition catalog was produced, with details about the show and the opportunity to see several of the digital floral works. Installation view of *Reforestation of the Imagination* at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

HISTORY OF STUDIO FURNITURE WITH OSCAR FITZGERALD



By Emily Schimmel

JRA Staff

On September 8, 2019, leading American furniture expert, Oscar Fitzgerald, met with JRA Caucus members to discuss Studio

Furniture through a presentation of works from the collection of the Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum. This Caucus Afternoon of Learning was hosted by board member Elizabeth Doyle.

Oscar P. Fitzgerald is a nationally known historian, author, lecturer, and consultant on American furniture from colonial times to the present. He holds a bachelor of arts degree in history from Vanderbilt University (cum laude) and master's and doctorate degrees from Georgetown University. He retired as the director of the Navy Museum in Washington, DC and curator of Tingey House to pursue his first love full time, which is the history of furniture from antique to modern. One of his many publications, *Studio Furniture of the Renwick Gallery: Smithsonian American Art Museum*, was published, in part, through a research fellowship awarded to him by the James Renwick Alliance in 2004.

The talk was opened with an introduction by President Michele Manatt. She detailed Oscar's extensive background and achievements. Working in chronological order, Fitzgerald gave a broad overview of the 84 pieces of studio furniture that are in the collection of the Renwick Gallery. While many of the Caucus members may have been familiar with the pieces in the Renwick collection, his talk was special since Fitzgerald was able to form relationships with so many of the artists while working on his catalog and he was able to share details about their thought and work process that may have been omitted from his publication.

One example is *Music Stand* by Wendell Castle (pictured right). Castle created this piece for inclusion in the *Craft*

12 *Multiples* exhibition at the Renwick Gallery in 1975. This piece is an example of Castle's

belief that the base of a piece is as important as what it supports. It almost seems to defy gravity. Fitzgerald explained that *Music Stand* is an example of Castle's efforts to create furniture that was accepted on the same level as other art forms.

The event was one of note for everyone. The opportunity to learn more about the incredible Renwick Gallery collection, surrounded by the beautiful, purposefully chosen art in the host's home, made it an afternoon to remember.



Wendell Castle, *Music Stand* (1975)
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase, 1975.168

RICHARD W. JAMES

RECEIVES THE 2019 JRA CHRYSALIS AWARD

By Nikki O'Neill

Glass Artist and Chair of the Chrysalis Committee

Texas-based artist Richard W. James was selected as the 2019 Chrysalis Award recipient in Mixed Media. James is known for large scale surreal figures meticulously crafted out of earthenware and found objects. Growing up in rural Tennessee in an economically challenged environment, his work is informed by the craft skills he learned from his parents and grandparents. Mending, carving and welding were all required skills in the James household.

He creates images of imaginary people, that are meant to convey both fun and often very complex messages.

In his submission, reviewed by jurors Janet Wittenberg, Rhoda Baer and Pati Young, Richard observed "I use found objects that I associate with my rural culture to represent the various bits of influence and information that have shaped my outlook. The characters in my work often fail to



understand the intended purpose of the objects with which they interact. I find this misuse analogous to how past information can be misinterpreted based on present need, a type of cognitive dissonance from which we all suffer."

The award was presented to James by donor, juror, and former JRA board member Pati Young, at the American University Museum, Katzen Arts Center on November 17, 2019 in conjunction with a lecture by JRA Distinguished Artist Rebecca Hutchinson. In James's acceptance, he offered insightful comments about his work and career as the assistant professor of Sculpture and Ceramics at Texas A&M, Corpus Christi, Texas.

About the Chrysalis Award:

The James Renwick Alliance sponsors the annual Chrysalis Award to an emerging artist whose work shows merit, skill, and innovation. The awardee receives a \$5000 grant, membership in the JRA for one year, and opportunities to present their work and participate in JRA events. The 2016 JRA Chrysalis Award was generously underwritten by JRA member Darcy Walker, and was awarded to fiber artist Shea Wilkinson from Omaha, Nebraska. The 2018 Chrysalis award recipient working in glass was Dean Allison, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Both Shea and Allison have commented that the award had a measurable impact on their careers. In 2020, the JRA Chrysalis Award will be focused on ceramics and will be sponsored by long-time craft devotee, artist and JRA board member Rebecca Ravenal.

Artwork by Richard W. James. Pg. 13 *Milgram's Call* (2018)
Top Photo (left to right): JRA President Michele Manatt, Chrysalis Award donor Pati Young, artist Richard W. James, Chrysalis Award chair Nikki O'Neill, DAS Artist Rebecca Hutchinson, and DAS chair Rebecca Ravenal.
Right center: *Prelapsarian and Antediluian* (2019)
Right bottom: *Folleree and Folleroo* (2017)



APPLY ONLINE

2020 APPLICATION IS OPEN FOCUS: CERAMICS

The JRA seeks applications from emerging ceramic artists for our 2020 Chrysalis Award.
Application deadline: September 8, 2020

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ACC AWARD OF INNOVATION KATE EICKELBERG

By Rebecca Ravenal

Chair of the Distinguished Artist Series and ACC Award



The 2020 James Renwick Award of Excellence for Innovation in Craft was given in February to jeweler Kate Eickelberg. The JRA partners with the American Craft Council to present this annual award which highlights artists at the ACC Baltimore show who are using innovative techniques or materials. The award features a \$500 prize and guaranteed entry into the next ACC show.

Artists Tamara Laird, Michael Enn Sirvet, and Rebecca Ravenal and collector John Meyerhoff reviewed the work of over 600 craft artists to find the one who best embodied the award's focus. They chose Kate for her ability to see the value in seemingly-worthless cast-offs and make them the star of the show.

Kate is intrigued by "exploring the idea of preciousness; the things we've collectively agreed have value and those that are special just to a few of us." A visit to her website reveals photos of rusty nails, ball bearings, and blobs of steel "splatters" which are remnants from another metal process. Rather than sparkling gems, these are the materials that hold value for her and excite her creativity. Drawing on her extensive training, she pairs traditional goldsmithing techniques with these decidedly downscale materials, making work which elevates and shows them in a new perspective.

Perspective is key. Kate describes receiving a bulging package of antique nails dripping with rust as like unwrapping a present on Christmas morning. On city walks, she often looks for bits of metal detritus on the sidewalk, imagining the prior life of those downtrodden object and the new lustre she can give them. She credits one of her jeweler mentors with showing her the "value of saying yes. This yes is about trusting your skills, learning on the job, rising to the occasion, and allowing for happy accidents and unexpected discoveries."

With this positive perspective, Kate embraces the aesthetic of upcycling and one-ups it to create sleek design from slag and a polished body of work from materials that show their rust and rawness. This boundless reframing of overlooked materials and the stylish and impeccably crafted work that results embodies her innovative approach to material and design.



Works from Kate Eickelberg's One of a Kind & Limited edition series

DISTINGUISHED ARTIST SERIES



TOM LOESER

FUNCTIONAL AND DYSFUNCTIONAL



An upside down, right side up, ladder rocking chair. A drawer inside a drawer, in a chest of drawers. These may sound like pieces of furniture from *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll, where one could "believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast." Artist

Tom Loeser makes the impossible a reality in his colorful, conceptual furniture as guests learned during his Distinguished Artist Series visit to DC, September 21-22.

Loeser's functional, mathematical and technical brilliance were obvious as he described his 30-plus year career working in wood, and shared his experiences as a dedicated educator and his extensive knowledge of wood, design and techniques. Loeser received his bachelor degree from Haverford College and a second degree at

16 Boston University's Program in Artistry, where he began his woodworking career.

He landing a teaching position at University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1991, he continued his studies and received an MFA from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, where he used the same shop equipment that once resided at Boston College.

Loeser often uses the history of design and object-making as a starting point for developing new form and meaning. Most famously, this can be seen in one of his earliest works, *Folding Chair*, which displays his expertise in design as a colorful wall artwork and as a functional folding chair. This was inspired by the Shaker tradition of hanging chairs on a wall for easy cleaning and storage.

Today, Loeser's work is featured in over a dozen of the country's most significant museums, including the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Mint Museum, Fuller Craft Museum, Museum of Art and Design, Racine Art Museum, and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum to name a few. At the Renwick Gallery, Loeser's piece titled *Four by Four* resides as an example of his chest of drawer series.

Each chest of drawers focuses on variations of



color, size and/or shape. In a personal favorite titled *Concentration*, Loeser uses all three variables within a traditional dresser format with mathematical accuracy. This piece exponentially decreases the drawer sizes to the smallest, which at best can only hold a pencil. The knobs are painted in stripes alternating the color and adding an additional spherical shape to the dresser. The vertical drawer stripes shrink in correspondence with the drawer size and exemplify Loeser's milk paint and

carving techniques. This may be considered both "functional and dysfunctional," a phrase the artist uses often. You may never need a drawer small enough for a single pencil, but that is not to say that it is not functional.

In addition to the formal elements in Loeser's work, the concept of interaction plays an important role. All of his pieces, whether a chair, chest of drawers or a commission, encourages viewers to rethink their relationship both with furniture and one another. Interaction with the artwork can happen when sliding, pulling and opening hidden drawers, or folding the chairs to place them back on the wall. Relationships between people are defined when guests sit back-to-back in a two-person rocking chair or they sit together in conversation on one of his stools. Another interaction that takes place is the dialog that viewers have in visually exploring and enjoying his pieces. At the Distinguished Artist Series weekend this was made obvious when guests crowded around, asked questions and spoke with excitement, joy and wonder for Tom Loeser's work.



REBECCA HUTCHINSON

HUMBLE MATERIALS, EXQUISITE SCULPTURAL FORMS

By Rebecca Ravenal

Chair of the Distinguished Artist Series and ACC Award

Rebecca Hutchinson spoke on November 16 and 17, 2019, as part of the JRA's Distinguished Artist Series. Her long history as an educator (currently, she's a professor at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth), was evident in her fluid and informative presentation style. In a Saturday workshop and a Sunday lecture, she revealed her techniques and reviewed her long and distinguished career.

Hutchinson's complex paper clay pieces evoke the natural world by creating patterns and repetitions often found there. Walking into one of her installations is like walking into a fairy tale, as if you've been slipped a magic potion and shrunk to the size of a dormouse. You're enveloped by a giant field of strange botanical shapes suspended from the ceiling or growing up the walls, by elongated pods, or dangling hives, or colossal cocoons creating a delirious, disorienting environment.

With these objects, Hutchinson does not strive to replicate nature, but to celebrate the "complexity of engineering" and the inexorable force for survival in the natural world.

Using materials such as fired and unfired porcelain, old clothing, branches, and industrial surplus, she combines her solid skills in papermaking and ceramics to create things that exceed the limitations of one medium alone, especially in the large scale that's possible in her work. For each site-specific installation, she forms thousands of small parts which can be combined and





attached to an underlying structure to make the overgrown organic forms such as dense floral fields or intricate twisting vines strung throughout the room.

Because paperclay is an adaptable, malleable material, Hutchinson is able to use a wide array of techniques from the fiber and clay world, experimenting freely by cutting, dipping, pouring, molding, and modeling to create any form she imagines. She becomes like the busy bee or industrious bird, collecting bits and pieces to weave into wondrous shapes, "up-cycling humble materials into exquisite sculptural forms." Hutchinson's hybrid works, part paper/part clay, immerse us in her intensely imaginative world, prompting viewers to ask questions about environment, structure, sustainability, and beauty.

Distinguished Artist Series photos

Pg 16: Tom Loeser, *The Stoop Project* (2013), Madison Museum of Contemporary Art. Tom Loeser demonstrating at the Distinguished Artist Series workshop.

Pg 17 Top: Tom Loeser, *Folding Chairs* (1989)

Pg 17 Bottom: Tom Loeser, *Concentration* (1994)

Pg 18: Rebecca Hutchinson, *Night Bloom* (2012), Racine Museum Installation.

Pg 19: Rebecca Hutchinson Distinguished Artist Series demonstration at District Clay.

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- 10/14 - 10/21 New Mexico Treasures
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