



RENWICK QUARTERLY

June, July, August 1988

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

Two Winners Announced for James Renwick Fellowship in American Crafts

by Elmerina Parkman

The James Renwick Fellowship program gets underway this year with the award of research grants to two outstanding applicants, selected from among the 23 who applied to the program: Dr. Nancy A. Corwin, Assistant Professor of Art History at the Kansas City Art Institute, and Patricia Malarcher, a writer on craft and a doctoral candidate at New York University.

Dr. Corwin's research topic is "A Critical History of Fiber Art as Part of the Post World War II Crafts Revival in America," and Ms. Malarcher's, "An Investigation of Critical Approaches to Art in Craft Materials."

A major new Alliance initiative, the James Renwick Fellowship is the first program anywhere designed specifically to encourage scholarly study of the historical, aesthetic and intellectual aspects of the studio craft movement. The Smithsonian's Office of Fellowships and Grants will administer the program, with research guidance from Michael Monroe, Renwick Gallery Curator-in-Charge, and other appropriate Smithsonian staff. Research facilities will be provided by the Renwick's parent museum, the National Museum of American Art, which already hosts a number of fellows in American art history and related fields. In future years, the NMAA will provide funds for the Fellowship and the Alliance will continue to assist with publicity.

Dr. Corwin will spend her Fellowship year in Washington doing full-time research on a book she has been working on part time for the past



Nancy A. Corwin



Patricia Malarcher

three years. This work will trace and evaluate the history of fiber art since 1945, focusing on the question of *why* this new non-traditional art form has emerged as part of the craft tradition in contemporary America.

Dr. Corwin received her PhD in art history from the University of Washington. She has taught for 20 years at the university level and has written and lectured extensively on fiber art, ceramics and craft history. Her interest in crafts dates back to her early college days. Later, when she began plans to complete a doctorate in the history of ceramics, her university "did not know what to do with me!" she reports. She knows first hand academia's lack of interest in the history of crafts.

Patricia Malarcher's research will examine the critical writing generated by selected major craft exhibitions from 1969, when "Objects: USA," the first comprehensive national survey of American crafts, opened at the Smithsonian Institution, through 1987, when "Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical," opened at the American Craft Museum.

Reviews in major art and craft publications, authoritative newspapers and exhibition catalogs will be studied, and an attempt will be made to evaluate different critical approaches to art in craft materials and to suggest which most fully elicit understanding of craft works. Ms. Malarcher plans to spend nine months conducting her

research at the Renwick Gallery, other Smithsonian facilities and the Library of Congress.

Ms. Malarcher is working towards her doctorate at New York University. She is a free-lance writer and critic, contributing regularly to *The New York Times*, *Fiberarts*, *American Craft* and other publications. She is, in addition, an exhibiting fiber artist and teacher.

With the selection of two Fellows, the James Renwick Fellowship in American Crafts is now a reality. There was widespread interest in the Fellowship and the quality of applications was very high — a clear indication of the need for such a program. By assuming responsibility for funding it after this year, the National Museum of American Art has assured the future of the Fellowship, a development of utmost importance to American crafts.

We believe that the James Renwick Fellowship is the only scholarly research program initiated by a museum support organization. We are proud that the Alliance has been able to bring it to fruition, and grateful to those whose financial support has made it possible. Announcements regarding the Fellowship's second year will be distributed early next fall to schools and departments of art, craft and art history, and to scholarly and professional journals and organizations. The deadline for applications will be January 15, 1989.

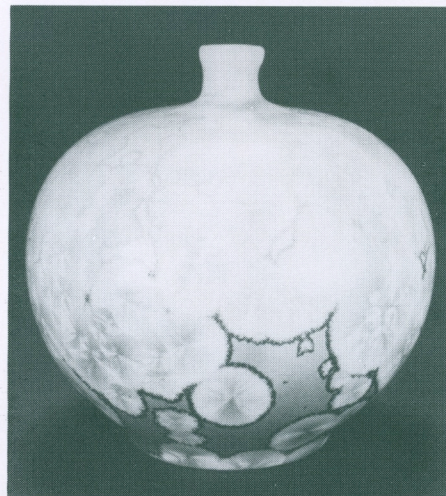
"American Art Pottery, 1880-1930, from the Cooper-Hewitt Museum" on Exhibit through October 23

The best work of American ceramists who established the Art Pottery movement in the United States is featured in "*American Art Pottery, 1880-1930, from the Cooper-Hewitt Museum.*"

Seventy-five major examples of pottery are included in the exhibition, representing the historical and aesthetic development that flourished in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, a vital period in the history of art pottery. The exhibition also includes documents and period photographs, plus explanatory texts that survey the creative activity among pioneer ceramists working in centers ranging from Cincinnati and New Orleans to Colorado Springs.

The exhibition collection was recently donated to the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt Museum in

New York City by noted collectors Marcia and William Goodman. David McFadden, Curator of Decorative Arts at the Cooper-Hewitt, organized the exhibit, which will tour the United States through the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES).



Vase, decorated by Taxile Doat at University City Pottery, University City, Missouri, 1913, bulbous crystalline vase, 4¾" high.



NEWS from the Alliance

Roger Kuhn
President

The Alliance's most exciting news this summer is the launching of the James Renwick Fellowship in American Crafts at the Smithsonian. We are especially pleased that, thanks to the generosity of several Alliance members, we have been able to begin the program with *two* awards to support *two* exceptionally important research projects — Professor Nancy Corwin's work on a book examining the development of American art fiber since World War II, and an evaluation of critical writing on craft since 1969 by writer and critic Patricia Malarcher. More details about these awards appear in the lead article of this issue of *The Renwick Quarterly*.

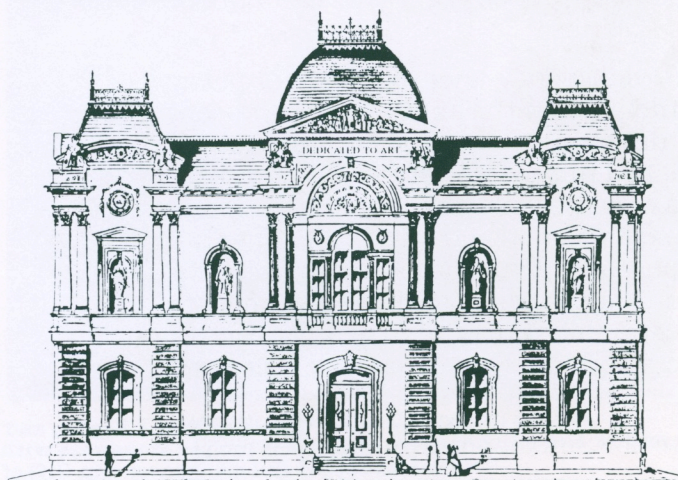
As our readers know, the Renwick Fellowship's future is now assured: Future funding will be provided principally by the National Museum of American Art, the Renwick Gallery's parent museum. The Alliance, however, will work closely with the Museum and will take responsibility for assuring maximum publicity to this unique Fellowship opportunity. If you wish to receive information about applying for next year's Fellowship, please write to the Alliance.

Another important development, reported elsewhere in this issue, is the establishment of the Renwick Committee, a national advisory body created by the Commissioners of the NMAA to help the Renwick Gallery expand its activities. Creation of such a group was one of the recommendations of the Smithsonian's Visiting Committee on Craft, which convened two years ago to advise the Smithsonian's leadership on the future of the Renwick Gallery. We are especially pleased that three present or former Alliance Board members have been appointed to the Committee for its first year: Ronald Abramson, Roger Kuhn and Elmerina Parkman. The other Committee members are all nationally recognized leaders in American craft: Thomas Buechner, Chairman, along with Wendell Castle, R. Philip Hanes, Jr. and Paul Smith.

Meanwhile, the Alliance continues its active role in the Renwick Gallery's public education

program. An article about the very successful Spring Forum on "Clay: An Ancient Art in Its Modern Aesthetic," appears elsewhere in this issue. Our other major program was the three-part series of lectures, panels and demonstrations on "Craft in the Black Art Experience," which for the first time drew a large participation by Washington's thriving black art community. The spring also saw a revival of the Alliance's popular Craft Study Tours, with a May 22 visit to the Maryland countryside south of Washington, where an astonishing number of craft artists, both traditional and contemporary, have their homes and studios. All of these educational activities are being supported once again by a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities. Starting with the Clay Forum, the Alliance is now tape-recording all of its lectures for the Renwick Gallery's archives.

On a sad note, we are about to suffer the departure from the Board of several of its founding members, under Alliance by-laws limiting Board members to six years of consecutive service. We are losing our founding president Charles Gailis, and his successor Elmerina Parkman, along with Anne Abramson, Edward Lenkin, Lois Lunin and Paul Parkman. Although off the Board, Mrs. Parkman will continue to take responsibility for the Alliance's participation in the James Renwick Fellowship program, and Mr. Gailis will continue to handle the design and production of *The Renwick Quarterly*. Indeed, we will continue to draw on the energy, knowledge and wisdom of all of our founders, without whom the Alliance could not have contributed so much to the Renwick Gallery and to the cause of American craft in these first six years.



Michael Monroe Hosts Discussion of New Works in Permanent Collection

by Shelley Gollust

As the finale to the Renwick Alliance's gala craft weekend, Renwick Curator-in-Charge Michael Monroe met with Alliance members for a discussion of the Gallery's acquisitions program and a viewing of five recently acquired ceramic pieces.

Of the 250 pieces now in the Renwick's collection, most were created in the last 20 years. Fifty of these works are currently displayed on the second floor of the Gallery. Mr. Monroe said that the Renwick's policy is to collect pieces that make a strong aesthetic statement and to have significant works by each major American craft artist.

Mr. Monroe led the group into the Gallery's Palm Court, where five recently-acquired ceramic pieces are on exhibit. He spoke about each work in turn, elucidating the reasons why each piece was especially noteworthy and why it belonged in the Renwick collection. The pieces are:

- Rudolf Staffel's "Light Gatherer," 1985, hand-built translucent procelain. Gift from the Renwick Alliance.
- Rudy Autio's "Listening to the East Wind," 1986, stoneware with low-fire glaze. Purchase of this piece was made possible by the Alliance and museum acquisition funds.



Turban Heron Vessel, by Frank Boyden and Tom Coleman, 1986, incised stoneware with lustered copper and manganese slip. Gift of the Women's Committee of the Smithsonian Associates.



Trapezoidal Open Disk, by Otto Natzler, 1985, olive and sang reduction glaze with iridescence and melt fissures, 11" high, 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " deep. Gift of an anonymous donor.

- Frank Boyden's and Tom Coleman's "Turban Heron Vessel," 1986, incised stoneware with lustered copper and manganese slip. Gift of the Women's Committee of the Smithsonian Associates.
- Neil Tetkowski's "Orange Swirl," 1983, red earthenware. Gift of Sharon Lawrence and Kara Lawrence.
- Otto Natzler's "Trapezoidal Open Disk," 1985, stoneware; olive and sang reduction glaze with melt fissures and iridescence. Gift of an anonymous donor.

Spring Forum on Clay Draws Audience from Across Country

by Shelley Gollust

Clay enthusiasts from New York to California gathered in Washington, D.C., April 23, for the Renwick Alliance's Spring Forum, "Clay: An Ancient Art in Its Modern Aesthetic."

After morning coffee in the Renwick Gallery's Grand Salon and a preview of two ceramic exhibitions, "Clay Revisions: Plate, Cup, Vase," and "American Art Pottery, 1880-1930," more than 125

Renwick Gallery Public Programs June, July, August 1988

June 5: Illustrated lecture: Barbara Mayer, syndicated writer and author of *Contemporary American Craft Art: A Collector's Guide*, will discuss her book. Ms. Mayer's book is a practical illustrated guide for collectors and anyone else interested in contemporary American ceramics, glass, fiber arts, metal and wood. Further details of her talk are elsewhere in this issue. This lecture is co-sponsored by Gibbs M. Smith, Inc. At 3:00 PM. Free.

June 9: Creative Screen: Outrageous clay animated figures are featured in a full-length film, "Festival of Claymation," by Academy Award winner Will Vinton. Claymation is a painstaking technique in which clay-sculpted figures are changed 24 times for each second of finished film. A fascinating look at the process is included in the film. This film is shown in conjunction with the exhibits, "American Art Pottery, 1880-1930," and "Clay Revisions: Plate, Cup, Vase." At 11:00 AM and 12:30 PM. Free.

June 23: Creative Screen: Repeat of June 9.

July 14: Creative Screen: In Robin Lough's documentary "A Good Time to be West," clay artists Robert Arneson, Jud Fine, Michael Todd and Peter Voulkos describe the advantages of working in California and the area's implications for their techniques and motifs. This film is shown in conjunction with the exhibits, "American Art Pottery, 1880-1930," and "Clay Revisions: Plate, Cup, Vase." An example of Peter Voulkos's work is on view in the Renwick's permanent collection. At 11:00 AM, noon and 1:00 PM. Free.

July 28: Creative Screen: Repeat of July 14.

August 11: Creative Screen (two films): Maria Martinez, world famous Indian potter, is featured in "Indian Pottery of San Ildefonso." Mrs. Martinez came out of retirement to make this film showing the process of fabricating her black pottery. Beginning with the ceremony of

spreading sacred corn before the clay is collected, to the outdoor firing, to the final polishing, the entire sequence of pottery-making is shown and explained. In "The Ceramic Art of the Natzlers," the aesthetic and philosophical framework of this couple's creativity is explained. The sensitive handling of clay by Gertrud Natzler and the skillful glazing by Otto Natzler create perfection in form and color. Together they create "a bit of nature you can hold in your hands — a small universe." These films are shown in conjunction with the exhibition, "American Art Pottery, 1880-1930." Examples of the work of Maria Martinez and Otto Natzler are on view in the Renwick's permanent collection. At 11:00 AM, noon and 1:00 PM. Free.

August 25: Creative Screen: Repeat of August 11.



Faith Ringgold, multi-media artist, lectured at the Renwick Gallery on March 6, as part of the "Craft in the Black Art Experience" series. Ms. Ringgold's work incorporates life-sized figures, masks and story quilts, which reflect racial upheaval and the problems faced by black families and women. Photo by Andrea V. Uravitch.

The national tour of "Clay Revisions" is sponsored by the American Federation of Arts. Financial support for the exhibition has come from the National Endowment for the Arts and PONCHO, with additional funding for the catalog provided by the American Federation of Arts, the Contemporary Art Council and the Pacific Northwest Arts Council of the Seattle Art Museum.



Untitled Plate #401,
by Jun Kaneko, glaze and slip
on stoneware, 25" x 21" x 2 1/2".
Courtesy of Klein Gallery, Chicago.

Barbara Mayer Will Lecture on Collecting American Craft

"Craft art has heretofore not been so noisy as other art forms. But the depth of its roots and the breadth of interest in making and looking at it have created a strong plant that has flourished regardless of critical attention, or lack of it."

With this statement, Barbara Mayer introduces the theme of her recently published book *Contemporary American Craft Art: A Collector's Guide*. On Sunday, June 5, at 3:00 PM, Ms. Mayer will present an overview of her book in an illustrated lecture in the Grand Salon of the Renwick.

The book, with a forward by former Renwick Director Lloyd Herman, traces the growth of American craft, exploring its origins in the American cultural experience, beginning with the first settlers who combined a need for functional crafts with love of beauty. Ms. Mayer offers guidance to collectors on a variety of topics, including how to recognize and evaluate aesthetic and technical quality, how to build and improve a collection, how to pay for, insure, conserve, light and display craft art in the home. Her suggestions are augmented by frequent advice from collectors, gallery owners and craft artists.

Barbara Mayer has written about decorative arts and design for more than twenty years. She is the national home furnishings writer for the Associated Press.

Renwick Advisory Committee Established by NMAA Commission

The Renwick Committee, a group of museum professionals, collectors, artists and others committed to American craft, has been established as an advisory arm of the Renwick Gallery by its parent museum, the National Museum of American Art. Creation of such a body was recommended by the Visiting Committee on Craft, convened two years ago to advise the Smithsonian on the Renwick's future.

Committee members are chartered to advise and assist the Renwick's professional staff in expanding opportunities for the Gallery and identifying programs which will most advance the field of fine craft. The group held its first meeting on May 2, with Michael Monroe, Curator-in-Charge of the Renwick.

The majority of the Renwick Committee participants are sitting members of the NMAA Commission. Thomas Buechner, founding Director of the Corning Museum of Glass and former Chairman of Steuben Glass, has been appointed Chairman of the 1988 Committee. Three present or former Renwick Alliance Board members will serve during the first year: Ronald Abramson, Roger Kuhn and Elmerina Parkman. Other committee members are Wendell Castle, R. Philip Hanes, Jr. and Paul Smith.

Renwick Alliance Craft Tours Are Back on Track: Save September 30 for Richmond

Make no mistake. You haven't been there before, even if you joined the initial craft tour in October 1985, visiting the home of Sydney and Frances Lewis and the Virginia Museum. The Lewises have graciously invited Renwick Alliance members back for a private tour of their home, completely refurbished with contemporary hand-made furniture and crafts.

Lunch in the Members Suite of the Virginia Museum is planned before a viewing of the Lewis collection of decorative arts, in their custom-designed setting in the Museum's new wing. Also on view will be "Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical," the massive show organized by the American Craft Museum.

The Richmond tour is scheduled for Friday, September 30. Save the date.

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Recent Contributions

The Alliance welcomes the gifts of the following Contributing Members for the year 1988 (through April 15):

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Anne and Ronald Abramson
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Edward Lenkin

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Samuel and Eleanor Rosenfeld

Donors

Douglas and Michael Heller
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Jane Korman

Inquiries about the James Renwick Alliance should be sent to:

James Renwick Alliance
5240 Nebraska Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20015

The Alliance gratefully acknowledges partial grant support for programs and this issue of the Renwick Quarterly from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, DC, a Federal Agency, and the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

“Stephen De Staebler: The Figure” Coming in October

“Contemplative.” “Haunting.” “Provoking.” These are the verbal building blocks that have been used to describe the clay and bronze works of Stephen De Staebler. Thirty-two of his life-size figures will be on view at the Renwick October 21, 1988 through February 12, 1989.

“So many of the forms of our times, industrial forms like automobiles, appliances and what-not, have that brutal feeling of having come from nowhere,” Mr. De Staebler commented recently. “I’m extremely anxious to give some greater context to the human condition that we find ourselves in now.”

Indeed he has done so. In his complex and evocative structures which are devoid of sentimentality, Mr. De Staebler places the human body at the center of his imagery. His male and female figures, as well as torsos and fragments of figures, reveal the artist’s extraordinary power to create compelling visual metaphors of contemporary human experiences. These figures evolve from an interplay between order and randomness.

Further information about this exhibit will appear in the next issue of *The Renwick Quarterly*.



Compressed Stele Rising, Phoenix Stele, Standing Woman with Twisting Torso (left to right), by Stephen De Staebler. All about nine feet tall. Photo by Scott McCue.

To Join the Alliance

The James Renwick Alliance welcomes the support of all who share in its admiration for the creative vision of artists working today in the craft media. Members’ contributions enable the Alliance to sponsor educational programs in contemporary crafts, to support the activities of the Smithsonian Institution’s museum of 20th Century American craft, the Renwick Gallery, and to enlarge the national collection of American craft at the Renwick.

Membership in the Alliance, renewable annually, provides the following benefits:

- All members receive the Alliance’s publication, *The Renwick Quarterly*.
- Donors (\$100+) receive *The Renwick Quarterly* plus — invitations to special receptions for artists, and exhibition tours conducted by artists or curators; a complimentary catalog of a major Renwick Gallery exhibition, and discounts on the Alliance’s Spring Forum and all Craft Study Tours.
- Sponsors (\$250+) receive the above benefits plus — one complimentary ticket to the Spring Forum held each year to coincide with the Washington Craft Show; and the opportunity to attend training lectures and exhibition tours conducted for Renwick docents.

- Patrons (\$500+) receive the above benefits plus — an additional complimentary ticket to the Spring Forum; and two complimentary tickets to an Alliance Craft Study Tour.
- Benefactors (\$1,000+) receive the above benefits plus — membership in the Alliance’s Acquisitions Committee, which allocates Alliance funds for the purchase of objects proposed for acquisition by the Curator of the Renwick Gallery.

To join the Alliance, please complete the form below and mail it with your check to the James Renwick Alliance, 5240 Nebraska Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20015. Contributions are tax deductible.

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