

RENWICK QUARTERLY

Sept., Oct., Nov., 1991

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“Improvisation in African-American Quiltmaking” September 27-January 5 at Renwick Gallery

Designs and techniques evident in the quilts of “Improvisation in African-American Quiltmaking,” have never before been presented to the public. The knowledge, attitudes and values carried across the Atlantic by enslaved Africans were transformed into a cross-continental quiltmaking tradition so powerful that it continues to preserve its identity. The quilts produced within this tradition were not often formally shown outside the African-American community. Generally, American quilts were made in the home or church for domestic use. Their recognition as serious works of art is a recent development.

The brilliance of the work in this exhibition must be credited to a tradition which encourages individual expression and provides a context in which the

talents of the individual artists can flourish. The 24 quilts and four African textiles were made by artists with no formal art training — community members who did not consider themselves artists. These quiltmakers learned their craft by watching and helping their predecessors, who, in turn, learned from previous generations.

Improvisation, a pervasive factor in black African art forms, and familiar as a basic element of jazz, is a vital force in the African-American quiltmaking that began with slaves and continues today. Using “flexible patterning,” in which designs are conceived as variations on a theme — rather than replication of a motif — and preferring approximate to precise measurement of fabric, African-American quiltmakers produce highly individual works with strong aesthetic ties to the textiles of the Congo and West Africa.

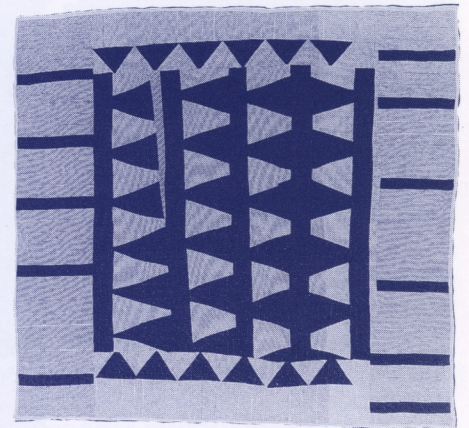
This exhibition, which runs September 27, 1991, through January 5, 1992, was organized by the Craft and Folk Art Museum in San Francisco.



“Texas Star,” quilt pieced by **Mattie Pickett**, San Francisco, California, 1986; quilted by **Willia Ette Graham**, Oakland, California, 1987. Photo by Geoffrey Johnson.



“Medallion,” quilt by **Willia Ette Graham**, Oakland, California, 1987. Photo by Geoffrey Johnson.



“Triangle Strip,” quilt pieced by **Charles Gater**, Oakland, California, 1984; quilted by **Willia Ette Graham**, Oakland, California, 1986. Photo by Geoffrey Johnson.

Three Works in Jewelry Acquired for Permanent Collection

The James Renwick Alliance Acquisitions Committee approved funding for works by three of America's most innovative jewelry artists, which have been confirmed by the Smithsonian for the Renwick's Permanent Collection. The new acquisitions are a 1973 "Pendant" by Albert Paley, Earl Pardon's 1988 "Necklace," and "Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Haruspex," a 1990 brooch by William Harper.

Albert Paley is known to American and international audiences more for his architecturally-scaled ornamental ironwork and metal sculpture than for his earlier works in jewelry. The artist's first monumental work in forged iron was "Portal Gates" (1974), a pair of massive doors commissioned by the Smithsonian for the entryway to the Renwick Gallery gift shop, and now on view in the Permanent Collection upstairs. This large-scale work was created at a moment when Paley stood at the pinnacle of a highly successful career as a goldsmith, a vocation that has been eclipsed by his present-day identity as an artist blacksmith. Paley himself contributed to this situation; he last publicly exhibited his jewelry in 1980. But between 1964 and 1977, Albert Paley produced an extraordinary body of work, exhibited and acclaimed worldwide. In both design and philosophy, it was unlike any other personal adornment ever produced.

"Pendant" is one of the artist's most spectacular pieces of jewelry, "perhaps the most important of his late works," observed Michael Monroe at the Alliance's April acquisitions meeting. "It clearly demonstrates his virtuoso craftsmanship, his remarkable ability to combine effortlessly a variety of techniques and a diversity of materials, and the organic nature of his design aesthetic." Mr. Monroe pointed out that "Pendant" was

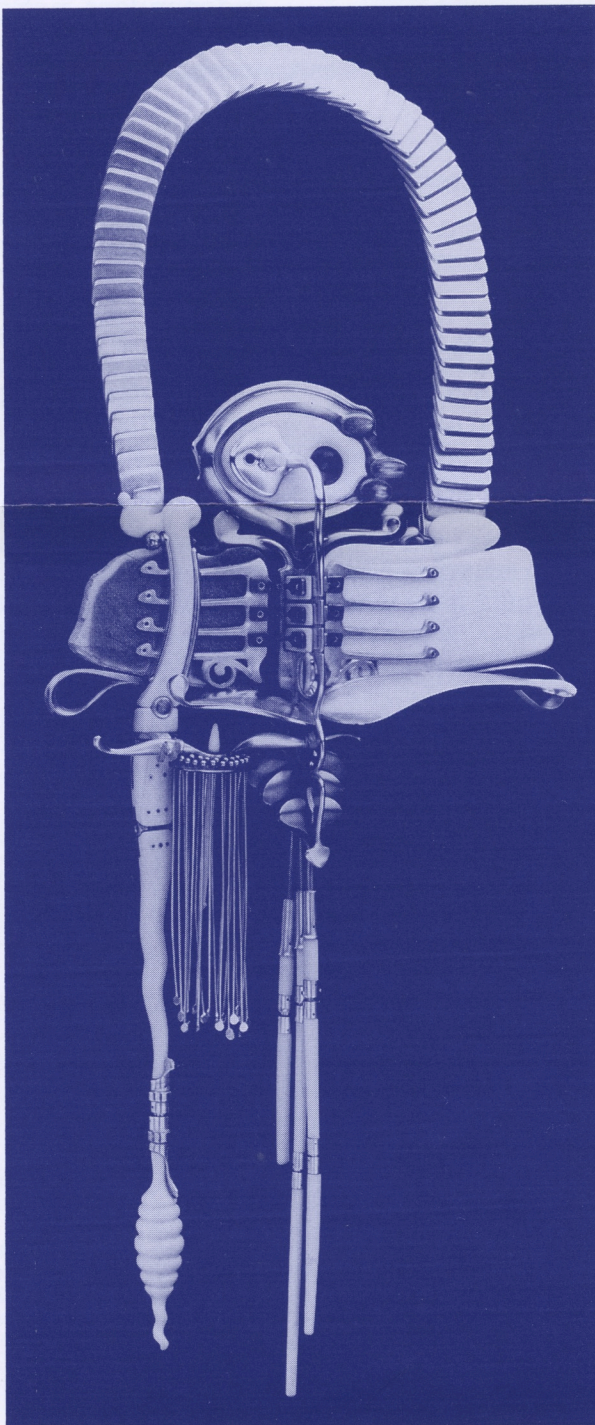
"Pendant," by Albert Paley, 1973.
Forged, fabricated, pierced and carved copper, sterling silver and 14k gold, with ivory, labradorite, moonstone, jade and glass; 1³/₄" x 8" x 22". Gift of the James Renwick Alliance and the Smithsonian Collection Acquisition Program.
Photo by Bruce Miller.

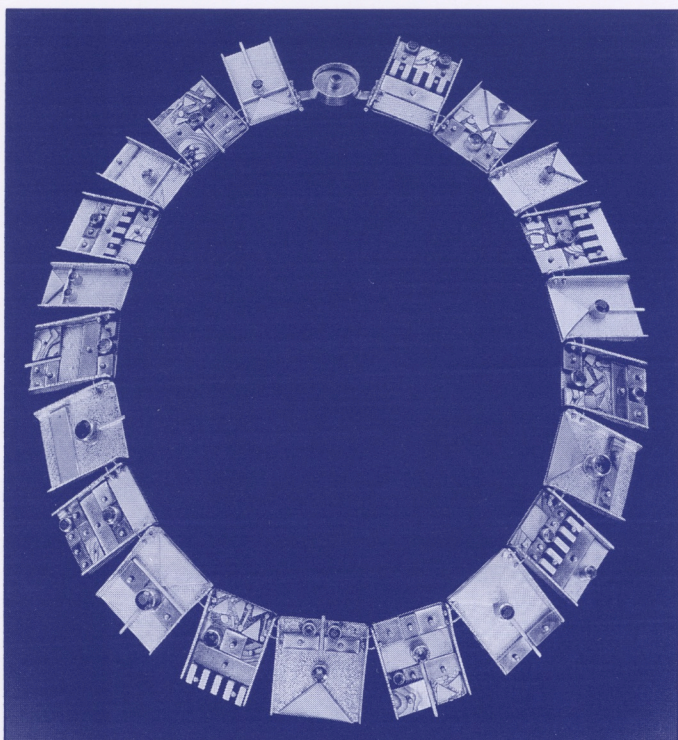
created while the artist was formulating his ideas for "Portal Gates." He went on to say, "There is a symbiotic relationship between the two works. They share many similar features and ideas. Indeed, the essential motif of 'Portal Gates' can be seen in the double set of laterally-extending, curvilinear silver ribs silhouetted against planes of labradorite and ivory at the center of the pendant.

An early pioneer in the renaissance of American craft after World War II, Earl Pardon was instrumental in originating the contemporary studio jewelry movement in America. During the Depression and the 1940's, little handcrafted jewelry was produced. The few who did create innovative designs typically were painters, sculptors and designers, not trained goldsmiths, inspired by modern art movements. Opportunities to learn metalsmithing outside an industrial setting were rare, and most early artist-jewelers were self-taught.

Earl Pardon made his first piece of jewelry in a required crafts course as a painting student at the Memphis Academy of Art. The expressive potential of jewelrymaking immediately fascinated him; he began to pursue metalsmithing in the early 1950's. For much of his four-decade career, he was simultaneously a painter, sculptor and studio jeweler. In the mid-1950's, Mr. Pardon took a leave of absence from teaching to work as a designer for Towle Silversmiths. For the first time he worked with enamels, developing a technique for decorating the interior surface of the firm's popular Revere bowl. Enameling provided him a means of integrating his interests as a painter and metalsmith and he soon applied enamels to his own work.

"Necklace" is a superb example of the artist's late work, a demonstration of his exceptional abilities to integrate the intelligence of a fine artist with that of a jeweler. The work is complex, composed of 21 segments, each of





"Necklace," by **Earl Pardon**, 1988. Sterling silver, 14k gold, enamel, ebony, ivory, shell, rubies, garnets, rhodolites, blue topaz, amethysts; 3/8" x 7" diameter. Gift of the James Renwick Alliance and the Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program. Photo by Bruce Miller.

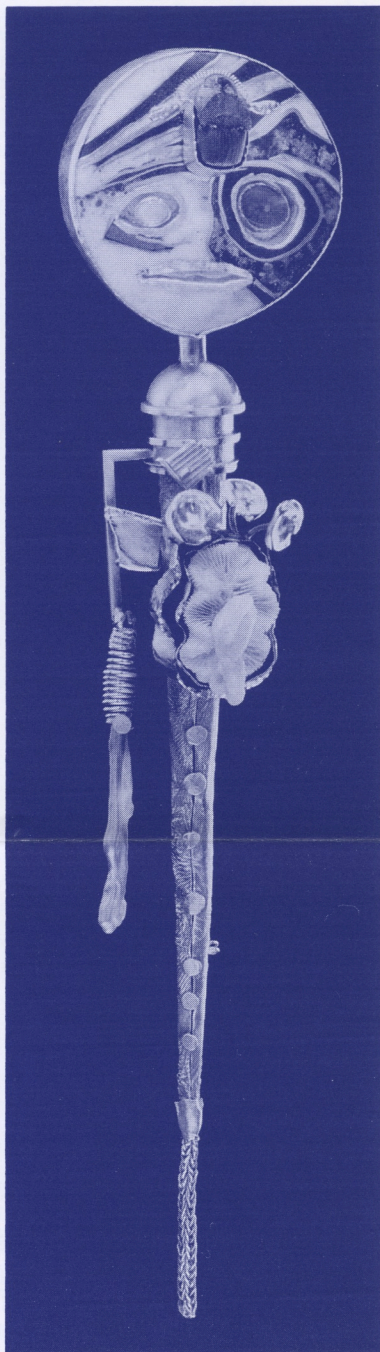
which is treated as a unique and aesthetically self-sufficient element. The individual silver casings that form the neckpiece have been treated as miniscule canvases. Flat sections of gold, colorful enamel, lustrous shell and bezel-set gems have been soldered or joined to surfaces to create orderly, intricate arrangements that reflect Pardon's abiding, conceptual interest in formal design.

William Harper's work reveals the creative sensibilities of a painter and a sculptor, embodied in a unique style of enameling that has won him worldwide renown. His creations function both as jewelry and as works of contemporary art. Mr. Harper began his career as an abstract painter, but in the early 1960's, switched to enameling to achieve more intense and liquid colors. His study of medieval and Renaissance cloisonné enamels revealed a dynamic relationship between technique and imagery. Deeply impressed by the spiritual power of their religious depictions, Harper sought to recreate their expressive force in his own art through the study of the magical symbolism of charms, amulets, masks and power figures from tribal Africa, Asia and Catholic Europe.

The supernatural aura of primitive ritual objects fascinated him and in the early 1970's, he began to produce three-dimensional objects that evoked a similar mysterious power. Provocatively, he mixed

found objects of little or no value — teeth, bone, shards of plastic — with fine gold, silver, gemstones and enamels, deliberately questioning age-old assumptions about the preciousness of jewelry and eroding hierarchical distinctions between fine and lowly materials.

Harper's "Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Haruspex" is from a recent series of mythical and ironic self-portraits. It is clearly a brooch, but at the same time it is a symbolically expressive sculptural work. Thematically, it suggests that artistic creativity is an act of self-evisceration: a haruspex was an ancient Roman soothsayer who foretold the future from an examination of the entrails of animal sacrifices. The jeweled eyes of the power-figure-like form appear racked with pain; the gold mouth grimaces, and



"Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Haruspex," by **William Harper**, 1990. Gold cloisonné enamel on fine gold and silver, 24k gold, 14k gold, sterling silver, opal, pearl, coral, shell, carapace; 11⁹/₁₆" x 2⁹/₁₆" x 1⁷/₈". Gift of the James Renwick Alliance and the Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program. Photo by Bruce Miller.

from an opening in the body (fashioned from a fossil shell) coral "intestines" violently burst forth. The scarab beetle — an ancient Egyptian emblem of resurrection — affixed to the forehead of the mask-like face symbolizes the transcendent powers of the imagination. The artist's complex "self-portrait" thus embodies the idea that hurtful introspection as well as ecstatic revelation lies at the heart of the creative process.

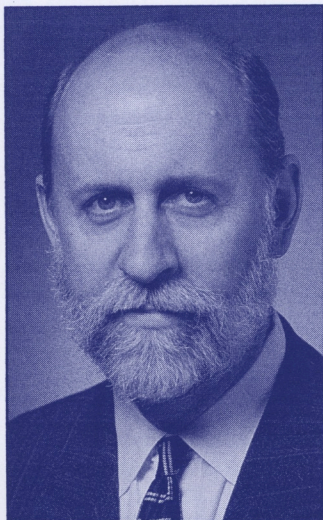
Jeremy Adamson Named Associate Curator at Renwick Gallery

Dr. Jeremy Adamson has been appointed Associate Curator at the Renwick Gallery. As guest curator in residence since February 1988, Dr. Adamson organized a number of exhibitions at the Renwick, beginning with "The Boat Show: Fantastic Vessels, Fictional Voyages." He served as exhibition coordinator for "Masterworks of Louis Comfort Tiffany," the most popular show ever presented at the Renwick viewed by nearly a quarter million visitors.

"Sculptural Adornment: The Jewelry of Albert Paley," scheduled to open November 22, is under Dr. Adamson's direction. He is also preparing a future show on American antique wicker. Aside from exhibitions, Dr. Adamson has also contributed to the Renwick's recent acquisition program, helping to select and present individual works to the James Renwick Alliance at their acquisition meetings.

"I am very pleased that Jeremy has been selected by the Smithsonian, after a lengthy national search," noted Michael Monroe, Curator-in-Charge of the Renwick Gallery. "He is a professional curator with an unusual breadth of experience and scholarship, who brings to his position a highly developed sensitivity to critical museological issues and artistic values at an important time in the Gallery's history."

Born in Canada, Jeremy Adamson received a BA in fine art and an MA in art history from the University of Toronto. A pre-doctoral fellow at the National Museum of American Art in 1978, he was awarded his PhD in art history from the University of Michigan in 1981. He has taught art history at The Johns Hopkins University and at the University of Toronto, is the author of numerous exhibition publications and has lectured widely in the United States and Canada. He is also a graduate of the Museum Management Institute.



James Renwick Fellowships in American Crafts

The Smithsonian Institution and the Renwick Gallery announce the fifth annual fellowship program for scholarly research in the modern American craft movement. The James Renwick Fellowships in American Crafts, a major Alliance initiative in

1987, are funded primarily by the Renwick's parent museum, the National Museum of American Art, with additional support from the Alliance.

Research proposals are sought from candidates knowledgeable in the history of Twentieth Century American art, craft or design. Proposals concentrating on post-1930 craft developments or their historical antecedents are especially encouraged. Fellowships are available for up to 12 months in residence at the Renwick Gallery and NMAA. The deadline for applications is January 15, 1992.

For more information and application forms, write: Renwick Gallery, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560, or call (202) 287-3271.

Alliance Will Visit Boston for Craft Study Tour

The James Renwick Alliance is planning a trip to the Boston area, December 6-8. Among the events scheduled is a visit to the DeCordova and Dana Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts, to view "Art that Works: The Decorative Arts of the Eighties: Crafted in America." Lloyd Herman, founding Director of the Renwick Gallery, curated the exhibition. A more detailed description of the tour, including other stops and hotel accommodations, will be sent to Alliance members this fall. For further information, please call Shelley Gollust at (301) 229-2148, or Andrea Uravitch at (703) 538-3497.



Dale Chihuly (left foreground with back to camera) and Lino Tagliapietra (center, facing camera) with members of their glass team during the Glass Weekend at the Creative Glass Center of America at Wheaton Village, Millville, New Jersey. Participants in the James Renwick Alliance Craft Study Tour in May visited the Center and several other studios and galleries in the area. Photo by Paul Parkman.

Alliance Introduces One-Stop Craft Study Visits

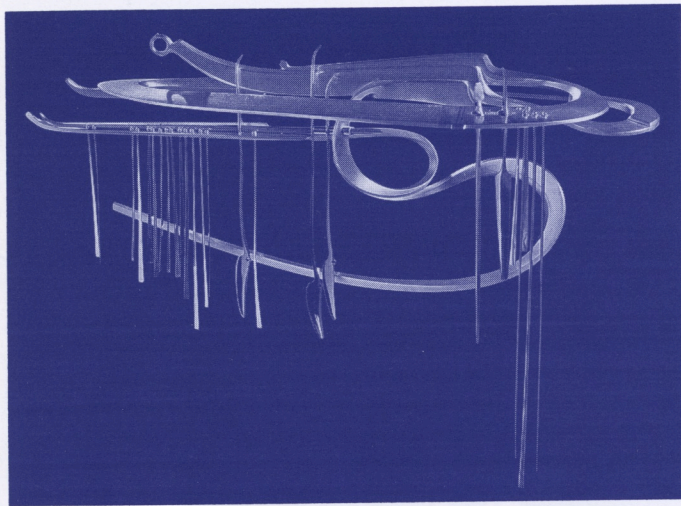
This fall, the James Renwick Alliance will begin a new series of Saturday afternoon visits to the homes and studios of collectors and artists.

The inaugural visit will be at the home and studio of jewelers Belle and Roger Kuhn in Bethesda, Maryland, on October 12. The Kuhns will discuss the history of enamel jewelry and demonstrate their jewelry making process. On November 2, Elmerina and Paul Parkman, of Kensington, Maryland, will host a group in their home. The Parkmans' collection of studio glass, which they started in 1971, represents a museum-quality historic survey of the modern art glass movement.

Conducted on Saturday afternoons, these gatherings will be limited to 25 participants, on a first-come, first-served basis. Light refreshments will be served at each event. Registration is \$15.00 per person, or \$25.00 per couple (no sex bias). For further information, please call Shelley Gollust at (301) 229-2148.

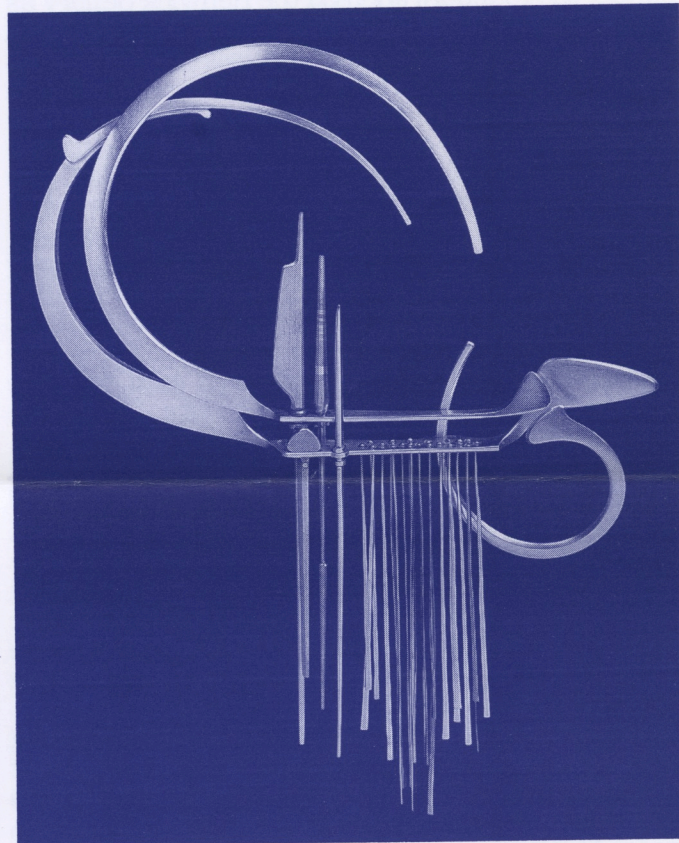
"Albert Paley: Sculptural Adornment" Opens November 22

Albert Paley, whose 1973 "Pendant" was recently added to the Renwick Gallery's Permanent Collection, is one of America's pre-eminent artist-craftsmen. The exhibition "Albert Paley: Sculptural Adornment," coming November 22 to the Renwick, focuses on the artist's award-winning, unconventional jewelry.



"Brooch," by Albert Paley, 1975. Forged and riveted sterling silver and 14k gold with copper and gold inlay; 6" x 9". Courtesy of the Charles Rand Penney Collection. Photo by Bruce Miller.

Better known today for his designs in architectural ironwork, Mr. Paley made his earlier reputation as an art jeweler, an innovative creator of "wearable sculpture." Working directly with precious metals and other materials, typically without preparatory drawings, he allowed his objects to take their final form during the actual process of fabrication. Often one component of a design might serve several different functions and literally change from one metal or material into another. A single twisting form might be continuously a pin stem, spring, holder, a support for set stones, and a latching mechanism, and it might alter from gold to silver to ivory to copper as it was elaborated.



"Brooch," by Albert Paley, 1977. Forged and riveted sterling silver, 14k gold and copper; 6 1/2" x 8" x 3/4". Courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Photo by Bruce Miller.

In Albert Paley's view, personal adornment is not limited to visual punctuation, not restricted to a lapel, finger, wrist or neckline. Instead, it is an essential part of a total body orchestration, balancing and complementing the costume, make-up and physiology of the wearer.

The exhibition, which includes fifty works in jewelry, will continue through March 22, 1992.

Inquiries about the James Renwick Alliance should be sent to:
James Renwick Alliance
6801 Winterberry Lane, Bethesda, Maryland 20817

News from the Alliance

by Mel Eagle President

Beginning a term as president of any organization grants a unique chance to wax eloquent, reflecting on historic perspectives, challenges, opportunities and goals. Taking advantage of this privilege is an irresistible lure.

The Renwick Alliance began nine years ago with sights set on the advancement of the craft arts in America. Building the national museum's holdings of significant craft objects and providing support to educational programs on the crafts in America have always been focal points. During our formative period, the founders adopted the Renwick Gallery as the beneficiary of most of the money raised and efforts expended. Unfortunately, less than five years later, the viability of the Gallery was threatened. The Alliance played a significant role in convincing the Smithsonian that the Renwick Gallery should be strengthened in fulfilling its mission and, in 1986, the concept of a national craft museum functioning within the Smithsonian was endorsed publicly. Since then, we have blossomed as an organization, growing substantially in size and impact. We have made excellent progress in moving closer to our goals.

Now, we face new challenges as a result of financial hard times within the Smithsonian and, for that matter, everywhere else in the country. One of the most positive events of the past five years has been the creation of the acquisition funds for use in direct acquisition and for matching of contributions to the Renwick Gallery. Recently, the balance of this fund was withdrawn and is no longer available. Availability of Smithsonian trust funds has been sharply curtailed which, in and of itself, does not directly affect Renwick Gallery operations. However, this will probably cause the NMAA to reconsider its priorities since it uses Trust funds for certain aspects of its operations.

The Smithsonian is not alone in feeling the funding squeeze. As money becomes harder to find, museums will be casting their fund-raising nets more broadly to support acquisitions, exhibits and other operations. In order to continue to move in an upward trend, we must diligently focus on the efforts in support of the crafts in America. We must increase and broaden our support group to reinforce stability and continuity within our organization.

We are embarking on a test of our ability to attract contributors from a wider geographic area than ever before. To expand the support that we receive from around the country, we will be reaching out to acquaint more people with the Alliance. Your help will be essential. This fall we are planning receptions in Chicago and San Francisco. Whatever you can do to help will be valued.

Next year the Alliance celebrates its tenth anniversary and the Renwick

Gallery its twentieth. We will be announcing events to celebrate both milestones. We hope that many of you will be able to join in the festivities of these occasions. Plans are being developed with Michael Monroe for a more extensive schedule of educational events that will focus on the work and ideas of important craftspeople. Our regular Spring Symposium and Craft Weekend will have special activities to mark the Alliance's anniversary.

The Alliance exists by and for the accumulation of human and financial resources, with the goal of enhancing the status of craft art and functional craft objects, and the artists and artisans that fuel their creation. Of course, money contributions to the Alliance are important — a lifeblood without which our goals cannot be reached. But, more significantly, the money will merely earn interest if our Alliance does not come together as a social organization, to exchange ideas and information, educate one another and the rest of the community of present and potential appreciators, and to endorse works that deserve to be included in the nation's craft collection. We do have a torch to bear and to pass.

"Vanity Fair" in the Museum Shop

by Gary Wright

Venture out on a visit to the Museum Shop, which has on view a vast variety of versicolored and variform craft virtuosity, a show that is a vision of vernacular vim and vigor, a visual treat for all visitors. Vying to catch the eye of a craft collector are silk scarves, in a variety of vivid colors and featuring unusually trimmed edges and decorative ventage. Variegated handmade neckties of cotton, silk and rayon will enliven any wardrobe. Silk pillows, Matisse-inspired upholstered chairs, jointed wooden hands, and lamps with paper and metal shades — none should be overlooked. Dazzling antique-style purses and soft sculpture handbags featuring big boudoir roses are highlighted, plus shimmering silk kimonos.

But not everything is soft and silky: sparkling fountain pens encased in glass that swirl with ribbons of color are perfect for writing upon handmade paper. There are ceramic dresser jars shaped like scrumptuous fruit and an assortment of glass bowls, perfume bottles and various vases. Rounding out the vast selection of values are wooden trompe l'oeil boxes topped with removable brooches. All verbiage aside...hurry down to the Renwick for "Vanity Fair," on view and on sale until it vanishes October 28!



Rosalyn Mina, at work on her painted silk kimonos, is one of the artists featured in "Vanity Fair" in the Museum Shop.

Renwick Gallery Public Programs

September, October, November 1991

September 5:

Creative Screen: In "Powers of Ten," split screen animation and narration are used to illustrate size, distance and time comparisons of objects in the universe. Produced by Charles and Ray Eames (10 minutes). "Time Is" demonstrates unusual film techniques to explore the concept that time is an invention of man, who has the ability to change it according to different situations (30 minutes). In George Lucas's "Electronic Labyrinth," the novel "1984" and the film "2001" are explored in a dream-like world where science seeks to dominate man (17 minutes). Free. At 11:00 AM and 12:15 PM.

September 15:

Illustrated Lecture: Susan and Steven Kemenyffy are ceramic artists who collaborate in making free-standing sculpture and dimensional wall panels. They will discuss their raku-fired work and show how the brilliant lustrous colors are achieved. Co-sponsored by The Farrell Collection. Free. At 2:00 PM.

September 19:

Creative Screen: Repeat of September 5. Free. At 11:00 AM and 12:15 PM.

September 29:

Illustrated Lectures: Three Seattle, Washington-based artists — Cappy Thompson, Charles Parriott and Dick Weiss — will discuss their work in glass painting. The technique involves firing enamel paint on blown glass. Co-sponsored by The Glass Gallery. Free. At 3:00 PM.

October 4:

Illustrated Lecture: Allen Bassing, Renwick Gallery Public Programs Coordinator, will survey traditional crafts of Latin America and the southwestern United States. Celebratory and religious objects came from a blending of European and indigenous sources. The results were folk art and craft forms that reflected technology of the Old World, but incorporate regional styles and materials of the Americas. This lecture is presented in conjunction with Hispanic Heritage Month. Free. At noon.

October 6:

Illustrated Lecture: Dr. Roslyn Walker, National Museum of African Art Curator, will discuss African influences on African-American quilts. She will show how design concepts from central Africa continue to inspire the motifs of African-American work in this country. Free. At 3:00 PM.

October 10:

Creative Screen: "Hearts and Hands: A

Social History of Nineteenth Century Women and Their Quilts." This film by Pat Ferrero shows how women, who used a sewing needle to find their own "voices," made quilts whose beauty far outshone their utilitarian function (58 minutes). Free. At 11:00 AM and 12:15 PM.

October 12 & 13:

Quilt-making demonstrations: Members of the Daughters of Dorcas, the Washington, DC-based chapter of the National Quilting Association, will begin a series of demonstrations that explain many of the processes of quilting. Their series will continue through December. Free. From 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

October 20:

Quilt identification and preservation workshop: The public is encouraged to bring quilts for evaluation by the Virginia Consortium of Quilters. The Consortium will discuss the age, patterns, materials and sewing techniques of the quilts. They will also make suggestions on how best to preserve, store, clean and display quilts. (The Renwick Gallery cannot assume any liability for loss or damage to quilts brought in by individuals, and can take no responsibility for opinions rendered. Quilts should not be brought before the workshop and must be removed by the end of the workshop). Free. From 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

October 20:

Illustrated Lecture: Ceramic artist Bennett Bean will discuss his work in which ancient techniques of pit-firing are combined with Twentieth Century abstract painted surface decoration. Mr. Bean also works in painting and sculpture, and makes no distinctions or value judgments about blending various media. He considers all his work to be an evolving process. Co-sponsored by The Farrell Collection. Free. At 3:30 PM.

October 24:

Creative Screen: Repeat of October 10. Free. At 11:00 AM and 12:15 PM.

October 27:

Jazz concert: The Calvin Jones Quartet

will play improvisational jazz, led by Calvin Jones, Professor of Music, University of the District of Columbia. Quartet members include Mr. Jones on piano; James King, bass; Charlie Young, alto sax; and Nassar Abadey, drums. Free. At 3:00 PM.

November 3:

Quilt identification and preservation workshop: Repeat of October 20. Free. From 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

November 7:

Creative Screen: In "Quilts in Women's Lives," seven traditional quiltmakers, among them a California Mennonite, a black Mississippian, and a Bulgarian immigrant, discuss their art and the joy of the creative process (28 minutes). "Made in Mississippi" is a survey of black folk arts of rural Mississippi hosted by a builder, and featuring painters, a quilter and a sculptor (20 minutes). Free. At 11:00 AM and 12:15 PM.

November 8:

Illustrated Lecture: Allen Bassing, Renwick Gallery Public Programs Coordinator, will survey the ancient artifacts of American Woodland Indians from about 3000 BC to 1500 AD. These objects, found on sites in mid-western and southwestern North America, were for utilitarian and ceremonial use. A wide variety of materials were used, including shell, stone, metal, wood and clay. This lecture is presented in conjunction with National American Indian Heritage Month. Free. At noon.

November 9 & 10:

Craft demonstrations: The Daughters of Dorcas will demonstrate and discuss different styles of quilting, such as pieced work, applique and patchwork. Free. From 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

November 21:

Creative Screen: Repeat of November 7. Free. At 11:00 AM and 12:15 PM.

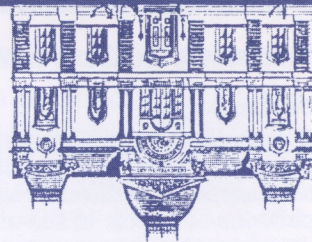
November 23 & 24:

Craft demonstrations: The Daughters of Dorcas will demonstrate and discuss the design and construction of a wide variety of quilt types. Free. From 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

November 30:

Illustrated Lecture: John Vlach, Professor of American Studies and Director of the Folklife Program at The George Washington University, will discuss improvisation in African-American quilting. He will explore the concept of spontaneity, the breaking up of pattern and color-clashing. Free. At 3:00 PM.





James Renwick Alliance
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