



# RENWICK QUARTERLY

Sept., Oct., Nov., 1994

Published by the James Renwick Alliance, a national nonprofit organization created to support the Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

## Contemporary Crafts and the Saxe Collection

by Jeremy Adamson

The exhibition, *Contemporary Crafts and the Saxe Collection*, organized by Davira Taragin, curator of 19th and 20th Century Glass at the Toledo Museum of Art, and circulated nationally by the museum opens October 28, 1994, at the Renwick Gallery. The show, which features 124 objects by 98 artists working in glass, clay, wood, fiber and metal, is drawn from the acclaimed studio crafts collection formed in the 1980s by Dorothy and George Saxe of Menlo Park and San Francisco. In 1990, the Saxes generously donated 63 pieces to the Toledo Museum, many of which are in this show.

In conceptualizing the show, Taragin wanted to treat the Saxe collection as a "case study" of the dramatic changes that occurred both in artists' studios and in the marketplace during the 1980s. She also sought to examine the Saxes' important role as patrons. Her insights, along with overviews of developments in various craft media, are offered in scholarly essays by Taragin and other leading writers in the catalogue that accompanies the show. The catalogue is published by the Toledo Museum of Art and Hudson Hills Press.

The "case study" begins in 1980 when Dorothy and George Saxe first browsed through the catalogue for the 1979

Corning Museum of Glass exhibition, *New Glass: A Worldwide Survey*. It proved a turning point for the Saxes who had no previous involvement in the arts. George Saxe was "staggered" by the sheer sensuousness of the medium. As he later recalled: "the catalogue was very exciting. I had never seen such colors before, nor such forms, all made from such an ordinary material. . . ." The Corning catalogue and two exhibitions the couple subsequently visited, *Americans in Glass 1978* and *A Century of Ceramics in the United States, 1878—1978*, sparked a remarkable, ongoing passion for collecting studio crafts, especially works in glass.

With their children grown and married, and with successful businesses, the Saxes focused their attention on learning about glass. They visited galleries in San Francisco, met and talked with local artists, and soon became closely associated with the glass program at the California College of Arts and Crafts, then headed by Marvin Lipofsky.

As their knowledge and collecting interests expanded, the Saxes reached beyond California, joining the Glass Art Society and touring important glass galleries, collections, and art schools throughout the United States. Among crafts collectors, the Saxes were unrivalled in the amount of time they spent visiting galleries and studios. As they traveled, they gathered information and

(continued next page)



**Viola Frey; *Man Observing Series II*; 1984; whiteware, steel, and cement; 106" x 44" x 30".**  
Collection of Dorothy and George Saxe, Menlo Park, CA.

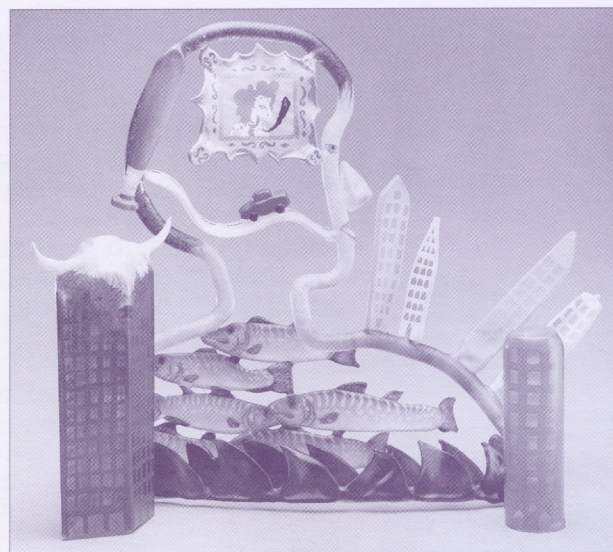


**Paul Seide;** *Radio Light*; 1985; blown glass, mercury, and argon gas; 16 1/2" x 16 3/4" x 18 1/2". The Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Dorothy and George Saxe, 1991.135.

research materials concerning the field in general. They also formed lasting relationships with an increasing number of artists.

Convinced that a strong gallery system was vital to establish credibility for this emerging field, George and Dorothy Saxe insisted on purchasing works from dealers and gallery exhibitions, not from artists. Two years after starting their collection, they had assembled more than 150 pieces of glass art by over 70 artists.

Initially, the Saxes restricted themselves to vessel forms, but soon began to acquire non-functional, sculptural pieces. Unlike other glass



**Ginny Ruffner;** *City of Broad Shoulders*; 1989; lamp-worked glass and applied pigments; 19 5/8" x 22 1/4" x 9 1/4". The Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Dorothy and George Saxe, 1991.102.

collectors of the early 1980s who concentrated on American works, the Saxes bought important pieces by leading contemporary artists in Europe, especially those from Czechoslovakia whose studios they visited during a 1984 trip abroad.

While building their collection of glass art, the Saxes were also attracted to works in other craft media. In clay, the couple acquired pieces by ceramicists who lived or exhibited in California—artists such as Peter Voulkos, Robert Arneson, and Beatrice Wood. In wood, George Saxe admired the work of Bay Area turner Bob Stocksdale and in the early 1980s built an outstanding collection of more than 20 pieces that explored the properties of different woods.

More recently, the Saxes have purchased works by other turners, as well as examples of contemporary studio furniture. Fiber and paper also attracted the Saxes' interest in the 1980s, as did wearable jewelry, especially

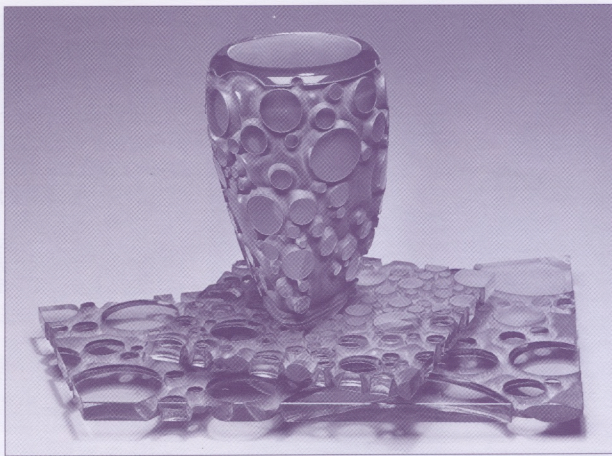


**Robert Turner;** *Ashanti*; 1987; stoneware with glaze and slip; 13 5/8" x 11 1/2" x 11 5/8". Collection of Dorothy and George Saxe, Menlo Park, CA (promised gift to The Toledo Museum of Art).

pieces by William Harper. The range of their acquisitions in the 1980s notwithstanding, glass and ceramics dominate the more than 600 pieces displayed in their Menlo Park and San Francisco residences.

Since 1986, several significant changes have occurred in the Saxes' approach to collecting. Today, they target fewer emerging artists, preferring instead to document in greater depth the careers of those artists whose objects they already have acquired. In their homes, they often juxtapose early pieces with more recent ones to provide some historical context for individual artists' work. They also have established their own library and archive on craft art.

Like many others, the Saxes believe that studio crafts will gain full acceptance in the world of mainstream art only when museums recognize their importance by organizing exhibitions, building collections, and publishing catalogues. As a result, they have approached institutions with strong holdings in 20th century fine arts to see whether

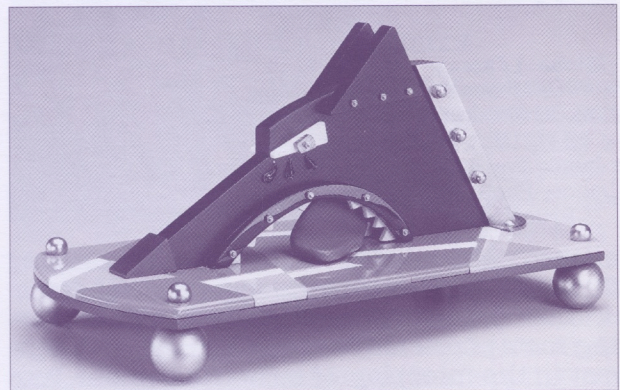


a meaningful donation from their own collection would stimulate greater programming and thus lead to increased public interest and support.

Their generous gift to the Toledo Museum of Art in 1990 was a significant first step in this direction. The result is the remarkable exhibition, *Contemporary Crafts and the Saxe Collection*, and its attractive catalogue which adds new depth to our understanding of the forces that have shaped the field since mid-century. The exhibition and its national tour are supported by Philip Morris Companies Inc.



**Richard Shaw;** *Boy with Blue Glove*; 1985; porcelain with decal overglaze; 26 1/2" x 19 1/2" x 11 5/8". Collection of Dorothy and George Saxe, Menlo Park, CA.



**Above left: Michael Glancy;** *Sovereign Cloister-Beyond War*; 1986; blown glass, plate glass, and copper; 13 1/8" x 20 7/8" x 13 3/4". The Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Dorothy and George Saxe, 1993.4.

**Above right: Dan Dailey;** *Sick as a Dog*; 1984; vitrolite, aluminum, and nickel-plated brass; 18" x 11 1/2" x 10 3/4". The Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Dorothy and George Saxe, 1991.92.

## Ten Works Acquired for the Renwick Gallery's Permanent Collection

by Gary Wright

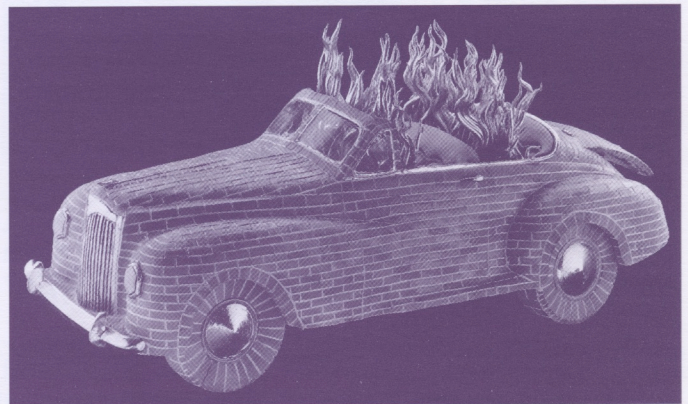
The James Renwick Alliance Acquisitions Committee approved funds for works by eleven of America's leading craft artists. Presented at the December 13, 1993, meeting were five pieces by Graham Marks, Pat Flynn, Tina Fung Holder, Robert Sperry and Harold O'Connor.

At the Spring Craft Weekend's acquisition meeting held on April 14, 1994, the Alliance voted on and approved five outstanding examples by Viola Frey, Patti Warashina, Michael James, Michael and Maureen Banner and Dan Dailey.

Works by these eleven artists had not previously been represented in the museum's permanent collection and the Alliance takes great pride in making these acquisitions possible.

Patti Warashina's work also presents a response to contemporary life. With sources and inspirations ranging from surrealism to the surreal realism often found on television, she creates objects which are realistic in depiction, yet utterly fantastic in subject, usually bordering on the irreverent. Stretching the commonly accepted

confines of her chosen medium, she eschews functionality and heads for pure sculpture. *Convertible Car Kiln* represents her commentary not only on the ceramic process, but also her chal-



**Patti Warashina:** *Convertible Car Kiln*; 1971; Hand-built, low-fired whiteware, lustres and glazes; 13 1/2" x 29" x 9 1/2". Gift of the James Renwick Alliance. Photo by Bruce Miller.

lence to the typically male realm of the automotive world.

Michael James's works combine his love of fabric and sewing with his interest in expressing movement and metaphor through the use of color. He seeks to interject spontaneity into the labor-intensive quilting process, resisting formal preparations in favor of an expressive, direct technique. He uses strip patterns



**Michael James:**

*Rehoboth Meander:* 1993: Cotton, silk; 53" x 53 1/2". Gift of the James Renwick Alliance. Photo by Bruce Miller.

in *Rehoboth Meander* to define his wide-ranging and fluid palette. Though seemingly strictly structured, this patterned quilt is actually a free-flowing metaphorical meander through James's interest in the interplay of color, movement, and allusion.

Michael and Maureen Banner are representative of the second generation of contemporary American silversmiths. As their work suggests, they personify a return in ideals to the original creative values that ignited the first generation of the contemporary studio movement: the artisan working in a small self-supporting studio, as opposed to the mass migration of metalsmiths in the 1950s and 1960s towards industrial design

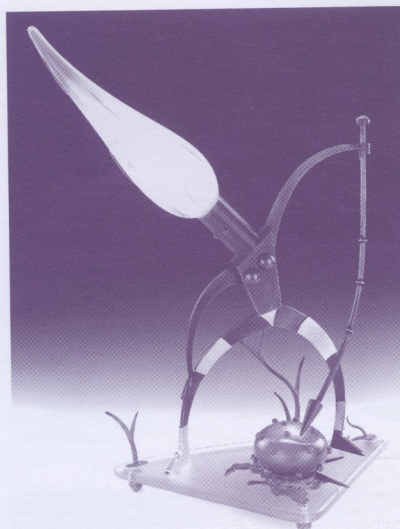
**Michael Banner & Maureen Banner:**

*Tea Service:* 1990: Sterling silver, rosewood, and cloisonne enamel teapot w/lid; 11 3/4" x 6 1/2" x 3 3/4"; cream pitcher w/lid; 6" x 3 3/4" x 2 1/2"; sugar bowl w/lid; 2 1/2" x 3 1/2" x 2 3/4". Gift of the James Renwick Alliance. Photo by Bruce Miller.



and aesthetic. Their *Tea Set* exemplifies their search for aesthetic and sculptural truth, with a greater emphasis on artistic potential rather than necessarily looking for design purity defined by functionality.

Dan Dailey's commentaries on the contemporary American scene offer wry and whimsical insight into the everyday incongruities of daily life. Lacing his artwork with humor, he projects lighthearted honesty with a vigorous dose of gentle fun, instead of ridicule or criticism. His humorous sculptural furnishings, such as *The*



**Dan Dailey:** *The Huntress:* 1993: Fabricated bronze, patinated and gold-plated, cut and polished vitrolite base with blown glass shades; 33 1/2" x 25" x 9 3/8". Gift of the James Renwick Alliance. Photo by Bruce Miller.

*Huntress*, accentuate not only technical mastery but also a wry eye for the frivolity of the contemporary American character.

His figures, though cartoonish in character, are instantly recognizable in their actions.

Graham Marks's *Untitled #2* appears either to have come from the primordial ooze of earth's prehistory, or to be a remnant of some fragmentary splinter of a celestial falling body. Far from being foreboding or forbidding, the tactile earthiness is inviting to the viewer, and bespeaks an enveloping warmth and incongruous softness.



**Graham Marks:**

*Untitled #2:* 1985: Earthenware; 31" x 31" x 28". Gift of the James Renwick Alliance. Photo by Bruce Miller.

Though often noted for including such items as rusty nails and barbed wire in his jewelry, Pat Flynn's *Four Beakers* demonstrate his mastery of pure simplicity in hollow ware. Though created from traditional metalsmithing materials, his forms maintain a highly original finish and



**Pat Flynn:** *Four Drinking Beakers:* 1985: Pewter, 18k gold, 24k gold, and sterling silver; 4" x 2 1/2" x 2 1/2". Gift of the James Renwick Alliance. Photo by Bruce Miller

appearance. A strikingly simple statement in pewter, gold, and sterling silver, the beakers underscore his ability to turn traditional materials into distinctive personal statements. His work is deceptively simple in construction, yet unsurpassed in its quiet elegance and grace.

Robert Sperry's *Untitled #753* evokes a very real sense of the tactility of the medium of clay, with heavy impasto glaze piled onto an oversized plate form. This piece suggests an overwhelming bigness, from the overwrought glazing to the weighty size of the thrown clay. Taking a form usually associated with function and domesticity and moving it beyond the dinner table and into the world of sculptural bas-relief, Sperry gives the viewer a real sense of the excitement of creation.



**Robert Sperry:**

*Untitled #753:*  
1987; White slip over black glazed stoneware; 27 1/2" x 4 1/2". Gift of the James Renwick Alliance. Photo by Bruce Miller.

The Renwick Gallery has long been interested in the towering figures created by Viola Frey. With a powerful monumentality reminiscent of the classical statuary of antiquity, her work commands instant respect and attention. While figurative sculpture of the past often depicted the human ideal, Frey's "people" instead focus on what may perhaps be called the "norm" of the human condition. Her subjects are people from everyday life, the unsung heroes whose daily deeds consist simply of living day-to-day. The size of her figures represents the sometimes overwhelming nature of contemporary life. For example, the bright, discordant coloring, as seen on *Lady in Blue and Yellow Dress*, presents us with the same visual cacophony that each of us sees every day.

The ancient technique of granulation is the predominant feature of the exquisitely crafted brooch by Harold O'Connor. Granulation is an embellishment method in which scores of minute metal beads are fused to a metal surface in an effort to produce an ornate surface pattern. The focus of this circular brooch is a bezel set colorful piece of spectrolite.

Tina Fung Holder's *Neckpiece* is highly unusual yet thoroughly familiar in her choice of using everyday items such as safety pins, in place of traditional metalsmithing media. She renders the mundane into the beautiful and cherished, bringing fine art and craft together with daily domesticity, showing the beauty and purity of form found in objects designed originally for pure

function. Her methods show a highly creative mind, and an aesthetic that looks beyond what is traditionally dismissed and taken for granted. Her work shows the ability of daily functional objects to transcend the mundane and banal.

Some of these objects already are on view in the permanent collection galleries on the second floor of the Renwick Gallery, as part of the continuously rotating exhibition "American Crafts: The Nation's Collection." Others will be rotated into the installation in the future.

## Upcoming Craft Study Tours

The first weekend in November, Alliance Members will meet in Connecticut for a tour of galleries and craft artists' studios. The highlights of the tour, based mostly in Fairfield County, will focus on an opening exhibit at the *Brown-Grotta Gallery*. We will visit the following artists in their studios: Kari Lonning, Helena Hernmarck, Robert Natkin, Norma Minkowitz, and Walter Einsel. Visits to a private home and meals in historic inns will add a special flavor to the weekend. And there will, of course, be some time for shopping in one of the charming New England towns.

In mid-May of 1995, we are planning a trip to Pennsylvania. One of the highlights of the trip will be the opportunity to view Bob Pfannebecker's stellar collection. Bob has been collecting American crafts in all media over the last 30 years and has demonstrated a keen eye and the ability to "pick winners" before they become famous! The tour will also include a visit to the studios of former Washington area craftpersons Cliff and Holly Lee, and other opportunities still in the planning stages.

## Save the Dates!

The James Renwick Alliance's Spring Craft Weekend, including a gala auction, our annual symposium, and a craft study tour will be held on Saturday, April 29 and Sunday, April 30, 1995.

Our events, as usual, will coincide with the Smithsonian Craft Show which is scheduled for April 27-30, 1995. The Show, sponsored annually by the Smithsonian's Women's Committee, will feature fine crafts in basketry, ceramics, fiber, glass, jewelry, leather, metal, paper, wood, and mixed media.

Please make a note on your calendars; you won't want to miss these important events!

## "James Renwick in Washington" Exhibition in Palm Court

An exhibition detailing architect James Renwick, Jr.'s achievements in the nation's capital is



## President's Column

by Paul Parkman

In Washington, during these summer days of "hazy, hot, and humid, with a chance of afternoon thundershowers," when this is being written, it is pleasant to daydream of crisp, clear fall weather and of all the interesting programs in store on the Alliance agenda. Many of these events are highlighted in this issue of the Quarterly.

Among the items we have been working on during this summer hiatus is our new brochure which you will receive shortly. Our thanks to Dalene Barry who is responsible for its content. Feel free to pass the new brochure along to a friend who might be interested in the Alliance. Let us know if you need additional copies.

While I'm on the subject of publicizing the Alliance's activities, I'd like to thank our Publicity Committee co-chairs, Jean Lawlor Cohen and Joan Wessel. They teamed up in 1993, combining their writing and public relations ability to get the word out to the media about the Alliance. They quickly established a smoothly functioning working relationship with the National Museum of American Art's public relations officer, Katie Ziglar. Their collaboration has resulted in unprecedented publicity for our organization, including pieces in the *Washington Post*, *American Craft* magazine and other publications.

Among the most popular events sponsored by the Alliance are our craft study tours. We have been trying to focus on providing more tours during the coming year. Anyone who has been involved with them knows that they involve a good deal of effort. I feel particularly gratified that several members of the Board have committed to arrange and lead trips.

In late August, John Kotelly and Mary Hartzler led an outing to New Jersey where the group visited the collections of Sandy and Lou Grotta and Dr. Jerry and Bobbi Raphael, and toured the ret-

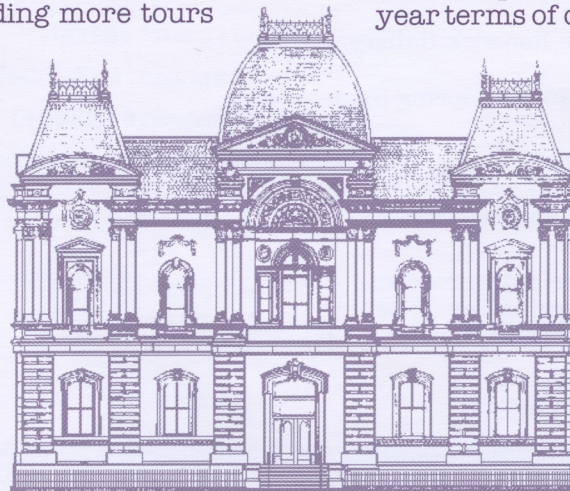
spective exhibition "The Clay Art of Adrian Saxe" at the Newark Museum. On November 5-6, Susan Agger is planning a study tour to Connecticut to visit galleries, an exciting collection, and artists' studios. Next spring, Anne Mehringer will arrange a trip to Pennsylvania to view Bob Pfannebecker's collection. Bob has been collecting American crafts in all media over the last 30 years. The tour will also include visits to artists' studios. We hope that many of you can participate in these outings! We all owe thanks to John and Mary, Susan, and Anne for making these trips a reality.

In June, the Alliance's Planning and Nominating Committee proposed nine new members for the Board who were duly elected. We welcomed back Dalene Barry, and eight new members, including Arnold Berlin (who now will no longer have to be in the back row at the many meetings that Barbara is involved in), wood turner Phil Brown, fiber artist Sue Pierce, Veena Singh, owner and proprietor of the contemporary craft gallery *Sansar*, and Toni Gordon, Shirley Jacobs, Sandy Mitchell, and Sandra Oken, crafts enthusiasts and past Alliance volunteers. I am grateful for all of the work that outgoing Board member Cynthia Boyer and her committee did in compiling and persuading this excellent group to serve the Alliance.

Alliance Board member Jane Mason has become co-vice chairman of the Smithsonian Craft Show for 1995 and co-chair in 1996. Because of the time that these duties and her computer consulting business will require, she asked to be relieved of her duties as Secretary. We are sorry to lose her services, but are happy to have Jane play such an important role with this group, with which we have had a long and enjoyable cooperative relationship. We are delighted that Jane has agreed to continue to contribute to our Board's activities. I was particularly pleased that Gary Stevens, who served as Secretary in the past, has agreed to take up his former role.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the outgoing Board members who have completed their three consecutive two-year terms of office. They include Ron Abramson, Cynthia Boyer, John Meyerhoff, Eleanor Rosenfeld, Sam Rosenfeld, Lenel Srochi-Meyerhoff and Grace Taylor. Each of them played important roles on the Board: Grace as Treasurer, Cynthia and Lenel as Committee chairs, and Ron, John, Eleanor and Sam for their sage advice and loyal assistance in many projects.

As always, I look forward to seeing you at this fall's upcoming events!



## Renwick Programs—September, October, November 1994

### September 9

Lecture: Renwick Gallery Public Programs Coordinator Allen Bassing will give an overview of how the Renwick building came to be constructed by William Wilson Corcoran and James Renwick, and its uses to the present day. At noon.

### September 15 and 29

Video Program: *Washington, D.C.: Our Nation's Capital* (58 minutes): a view of the city from the air and from the ground that captures its sense of history and grandeur. From 11:00 AM to 3 PM.

### October 9

Lecture: Rachelle Thiewes will discuss her art jewelry designs and fabrication. Partial support for this program comes from the James Renwick Alliance. At 3 PM.

### October 13 and 27

Video Program: *Mama of Dada* (60 minutes): a documentary about the life of ceramic artist Beatrice Wood. From 11 AM to 3 PM.

### October 14

Lecture: Renwick Gallery Public Programs Coordinator Allen Bassing will talk about how to

protect objects on exhibit, be it in a museum or a home setting. At noon.

### October 15 and 16

Demonstration: Yvonne Arritt will show the tools and techniques used in developing her flatware and hollow ware pieces. Support for this program comes from the Pearl Rappaport Kaplan Fund. From 11 AM to 3 PM.

### October 16

Lecture: Ronnie Puckett will talk about the techniques, materials, and finishes used for making his furniture. Partial support for this program comes from the James Renwick Alliance. At 3 PM.

### October 29

Lecture: Patricia Malarcher, editor of the *Surface Design Journal* and a former James Renwick Fellow, will discuss textiles as they relate to historical and contemporary directions in art. Support for this program comes from Friends of Fiber Art International and the James Renwick Alliance. At 10:30 AM.

### October 30

Conversation: Major studio craft collectors Dorothy and George

Saxe of Menlo Park, California, will converse with Renwick Gallery Curator-in-Charge Michael Monroe about patronage, collecting, and the contemporary crafts movement. At 3 PM.

### November 6

Lecture: Glass artists Dick Weiss and Walt Lieberman will discuss their designs and fabrication of art glass. Partial support for this program comes from the James Renwick Alliance. At 3 PM.

### November 10 and 17

Video Program: *Dale Chihuly: Glass Master* (60 minutes): a documentary with Chihuly and his team of glass blowers. From 11 AM to 3 PM.

### November 13

Lecture: Craftsman Don Reitz will discuss his clay work designs and technique. Partial support for this program comes from the James Renwick Alliance. At 3 PM.

### November 18

Lecture: Renwick Gallery Public Programs Coordinator Allen Bassing will survey contemporary Native American crafts, in conjunction with American Indian Heritage Month. At noon.

## James Renwick Alliance Donation Levels

**Donors\*** (\$100 or more) receive

- the Renwick Quarterly, containing articles of general interest about Renwick exhibits and acquisitions, as well as information about programs and events.
- invitations to special receptions for artists and to exhibition tours conducted by artists or curators.
- discounts on the Alliance's Spring Weekend and Craft Study Tours.

**Sponsors#** (\$250 or more) receive

- above benefits.
- complimentary catalog of a major Renwick Gallery exhibit.
- one complimentary ticket to the annual Spring Symposium.

**Patrons#** (\$500 or more) receive

- above benefits.
- two complimentary tickets to the annual Spring Symposium.

**Craft Leaders Caucus#** (\$1,000 or more) receive

- above benefits plus those delineated under "Craft Leaders Caucus."

\* entire contribution is tax deductible.

# all but \$10 is a tax deductible contribution.

**Benefactors#** (\$2,500 or more) receive

- above benefits.
- acknowledgement as a donor of an object in the permanent collection of the Renwick Gallery.

To join the Alliance, please complete the form below and mail it with your check, payable to the James Renwick Alliance, 6801 Winterberry Lane, Bethesda, MD 20817. All or most of your contribution is tax deductible.

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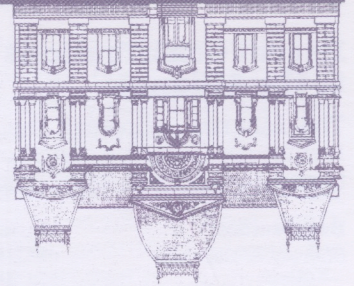
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Bethesda, MD 20817

# RENWICK QUARTERLY

**Sept., Oct., Nov., 1994**

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

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*Charles R. Gailis*

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