

## 50 Years at the Intersection of Art, Craft & Design

by Jennifer Scanlan

In 2006, the Museum of Arts & Design celebrates its 50th anniversary. This milestone is acknowledged in the special exhibit, *Jubilee! 50 Years on 53rd Street* at SOFA NEW YORK, featuring masterworks from each decade since the museum opened in 1956, all from the Museum's permanent collection. This timeline gives us the opportunity to explore these years in even greater depth, by highlighting pieces that express some of the artistic and cultural currents of the past 50 years.

As the Museum celebrates this anniversary, it is preparing to move into a new building at 2 Columbus Circle in New York City. For the first time, expanded gallery spaces, including a Center for the Study of Jewelry, will allow the Museum to display its permanent collection. Three entire floors will be dedicated to changing exhibitions, while the Center for the Study of Arts & Design, located on the fourth and fifth floors, will include open artists' studios, as MAD continues to explore the exciting work being done in glass, fiber, metal, wood and ceramics.

## The Fifties

*The Museum opens at 29 West 53rd Street as the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in the midst of a post-war resurgence of interest in craft, nurtured by the vision of Aileen Osborn Webb, its founder.*

Maurice Heaton's elegant fused and slumped glass reflects the biomorphic forms so popular in the fifties, at the same time revealing the artistic potential of this material, which would be realized in later years in the studio glass movement.

European artists who had immigrated to the United States in the years before and after World War II helped establish America as a center of artistic ferment. **Maija Grotell** came to the United States from Finland in 1927, eventually becoming head of the ceramics department at Cranbrook Academy. Extremely influential as both a teacher and an artist, Grotell was known for pure, simple shapes and innovative glazes.

The handcrafted look, imbued with the physical presence of the maker, became an important part of the visual vocabulary of the fifties. **Jack Lenor Larson** was an innovator in bringing the beautifully variegated colors and textures of handwoven textiles to industrial production.

Artists such as **Lenore Tawney** pushed textile arts to new limits, transforming fiber into a sculptural medium. This piece is one of the first weavings to juxtapose areas of plain weave with large areas of unwoven warp.

# 1956



*Maurice Heaton (1900-1990)*  
Amoeboid Plate, c. 1950  
enameled glass, 20.5d  
photo: Maggie Nimkin  
Gift of Jerome and Simona  
Chazen, 2003

*Maija Grotell (1899-1973)*  
Vase, 1953  
glazed earthenware  
15 x 13.5 x 13.5  
photo: Eva Heyd  
Museum purchase from  
Cranbrook Academy of Art, 1967.  
Donated to the American Craft  
Museum by the American Craft  
Council, 1990



*Jack Lenor Larsen (b. 1927)*  
Remoulade, 1956  
wool (weft), cotton, linen, jute,  
rayon, metallic yarns, 88 x 51  
photo: Eva Heyd

*Gift of the artist to the David  
Campbell Memorial, 1967.  
Donated to the American Craft  
Museum by the American Craft  
Council, 1990*



*Lenore Tawney (b. 1907)*  
Bound Man, 1957  
wool, silk, linen,  
goat hair, 84 x 36  
Museum purchase, 1958.  
Donated to the American  
Craft Museum by the  
American Craft Council, 1990

Peter Voulkos was a pioneer in challenging arbitrary boundaries between fine art and craft. *Cross* was made during a seminal movement for Voulkos: inspired by contemporary movements in painting, Voulkos definitively moved away from the creation of ceramics as functional objects, exploring instead the material's unique sculptural qualities.

Betty Cooke's elegant jewelry manifested the abstract organic shapes associated with mid-century modernism.

## The Sixties

The 1960s was an era of experimentation and rebellion, and in reaction to the earnestness of the fifties, artists often introduced humor and references to pop culture. The west coast became a major center for craft artists and from 1965 to 1968, the Museum of Contemporary Crafts had a branch in San Francisco called the Museum West.

# 1960



Peter Voulkos (1924 – 2002)  
*Cross*, 1959  
 hand-built stoneware,  
 low-fire glaze, 30.5 x 23 x 10  
 photo: Eva Heyd  
 Gift of the Johnson Wax Company,  
 from OBJECTS: USA, 1977.  
 Donated to the American Craft  
 Museum by the American Craft  
 Council, 1990



Betty Cooke (b. 1924)  
 Neckpiece, c. 1959  
 sterling silver, silver wire  
 7.5 x 10 x .75  
 photo: Eva Heyd  
 Gift of the artist, 1995

James Melchert (b. 1930)  
 Leg Pot 1, 1962  
 thrown and slab-constructed  
 stoneware, lead, cloth inlay  
 11 x 32 x 13  
 photo: Eva Heyd  
 Gift of the Johnson Wax Company,  
 from OBJECTS: USA, 1977.  
 Donated to the American Craft  
 Museum by the American Craft  
 Council, 1990



Harvey Littleton (b. 1922)  
 Bottle, 1964  
 blown glass, 10 x 5.5 x 5.5  
 photo: Eva Heyd  
 Museum purchase, 1964. Donated  
 to the American Craft Museum by  
 the American Craft Council, 1990

The American ceramics movement gained energy, as Peter Voulkos and his contemporaries taught a new generation of ceramists. One of these students, **Jim Melchert**, moved out from under Voulkos's powerful presence by going in a different direction, quite literally: his *Leg Pot* series consisted of horizontally oriented vessels.

The studio glass movement emerged in the 1960s with **Harvey Littleton's** seminal glass workshop of 1962 in Toledo, Ohio. Through experimentation with materials and process, Littleton, working with Dominic Labino, freed glassblowing from the factory environment and allowed artists to explore its creative possibilities.

The sixties was a period of growth in the studio furniture movement, building on the firm foundation laid in previous generations by masters such as George Nakashima, Sam Maloof, and Wharton Esherick. **Wendell Castle's** affinity with Esherick in particular is clear in *Music Rack*, drawing on Esherick's iconic music stand to create a work that seems to have grown naturally into its form.

**Robert Arneson** was one of the West Coast generation of studio ceramics who rebelled against the accepted tenets of ceramists art. In *Self-portrait of the Artist Losing his Marbles*, Arneson broke the rules by working with a "ruined" piece: a crack that occurred during the firing process became the conceptual centerpiece for this ironic piece.

Reinvigorating turn-of-the-century practices, painters and sculptors applied their ideas to such mediums as ceramics, furniture, and textiles. For *Place Setting*, **Roy Lichtenstein** painted a series of blanks. This painted setting was then reproduced as a limited edition. The "artists and industry" theme exploded in the 1980s and '90s, and continues today.

# 1965

Wendell Castle (b. 1932)  
Music Rack, 1964  
bent and laminated oak and  
rosewood, 55.5 x 25 x 20  
photo: John Ferrari  
Museum purchase from artist,  
1964. Donated to the American  
Craft Museum by the American  
Craft Council, 1990



Robert Arneson (1930-1992)  
Self-portrait of the Artist  
Losing his Marbles, 1965  
hand-built earthenware,  
lustre glaze, marbles, pigments,  
31 x 17.5 x 9.5  
photo: Eva Heyd  
Gift of the Johnson Wax Company,  
from OBJECTS: USA, 1977.  
Donated to the American  
Craft Museum by the American  
Craft Council, 1990



Roy Lichtenstein (1925-1997)  
Place Setting, 1966  
edition of 800  
glazed porcelain  
various dimensions  
photo: Eva Heyd  
Gift of Joan Kron, 1992

**Arline Fisch** was one of the artists instrumental in redefining our understanding of jewelry as something more than decoration. Fisch's *Body Ornament* fluidly and sinuously crosses the lines between jewelry, clothing, and sculpture to become wearable art.

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**Stanley Lechtzin**, an artist who has lived at the edge of innovation for over four decades, combines the forms of nature with technology. In the 1960s, Lechtzin pioneered the use of electroforming in the United States to create distinctive and organic jewelry.

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 In 1963, the Museum of Contemporary Crafts held the seminal exhibition *Woven Forms*, which included the work of **Claire Zeisler**, along with fiber arts pioneers Sheila Hicks, Lenore Tawney, and Dorian Zachai. *Red Wednesday* reflects Zeisler's subsequent move away from the two-dimensional loom and into three-dimensional knotting techniques, claiming fiber as a sculptural medium.

The *Optik Art* series is part of a collection of jewelry that **Wendy Ramshaw** and **David Watkins** designed to be inexpensive to produce and pack. This series reflects "Swinging London" of the 1960s, "Optic Art" trends in the fine and graphic arts, a playful and experimental attitude towards materials and jewelry-making, and the appearance of an influential British school of jewelry design.



*Arline M. Fisch (b. 1931)*  
 Body Ornament, 1966  
 sterling silver, synthetic crepe,  
 silk, 45 x 12.25  
 Gift of the Johnson Wax  
 Company, from OBJECTS: USA,  
 1977. Donated to the American  
 Craft Museum by the American  
 Craft Council, 1990



*Stanley Lechtzin (b. 1936)*  
 Pendant 4C, 1967  
 silver-gilt, amethyst crystal, fresh-  
 water pearls, 14 x 7.25 x 1.25  
 photo: Eva Heyd  
 Gift of the Johnson Wax Company,  
 from OBJECTS: USA, 1977.  
 Donated to the American Craft  
 Museum by the American Craft  
 Council, 1990



*Claire Zeisler (1903-1991)*  
 Red Wednesday, 1967  
 jute and wool macramé  
 68 x 40 x 40  
 photo: Eva Heyd  
 Gift of the Dreyfus Corporation,  
 1989. Donated to the American  
 Craft Museum by the American  
 Craft Council, 1990

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*Wendy Ramshaw (b. 1939)*  
 and *David Watkins (b. 1940)*  
 "Optik Art" Jewelry, c. 1968  
 paper  
 3.25 x 5.25 x 5.5  
 Gift of the artists, 2001



## The Seventies

Objects: USA opened the 1970s, organized by Lee Nordness and Museum director Paul Smith. This pivotal exhibition demonstrated the strength of artists working with both traditional and innovative methods and materials, and provided wide-spread and influential exposure to their art. Social and political commentary surfaced in many works produced in the decade, placing contemporary craft in the mainstream of cultural debate.

*Dogs are nice...* appeared in Jack Earl's solo exhibition at the Museum in 1971. It is from the *Dog* series, a group of works that indicated the direction of his career towards a "stream of consciousness" narrative style, related to historical figurative compositions, but with insistently vernacular subject matter.

In his series of works made with decals, ceramist Howard Kottler presented political commentary using found objects, reflecting the era's atmosphere of social unrest and the art world's re-exploration of materials.

Mary Ann Scherr's body monitor jewelry incorporated new technologies to address real medical problems without disregarding the needs of beauty, merging the worlds of art and science. *Electronic Oxygen Belt* contains a photo cell which senses pollution, electronically triggering a sound device to alert the wearer.

In spirit with the counterculture movement of California in the 1970s, Garry Knox Bennett thumbed his nose at conventions. *Clock with Terminal Susskinds Syndrome* is beautifully constructed and at the same time infused with a black sense of humor—the "valentine heart" shapes contrast with the gruesome forms of a real organ.

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1975



Howard Kottler (1930-1989)  
Mug Shot, 1973  
ceramic, decals, metal toy gun,  
Plexiglas, 7 x 7 x 5  
photo: Eva Heyd  
Museum purchase with funds  
provided by the Howard Kottler  
Endowment for Ceramic Art, 1991

Jack Earl (b. 1934)

*Dogs are nice and make wonderful companions I've been told, and most people get dogs when they are young and cute and so much fun to play with, not thinking about how long a dog can live. You got to train them when they are young too. Of course a kid can't train a dog right. I wouldn't take a grown dog who had had a previous owner, cause you never can tell what you are getting, even though some of them look real good and will lay still for you. You can't change a used dog's bad habits either and they stink, dogs all smell the same. The best dog has a greedy streak and will howl and*

*drool, and paw until they get what they want and I like old dogs best because they just lay around and don't bother you so much anymore., 1971 glazed porcelain, china paints dog: 17 x 14 x 27; title plaque: 13 x 8.5 x 1 Gift of Karen Johnson Boyd, 1979. Donated to the American Craft Museum by the American Craft Council, 1990*



Mary Ann Scherr (b. 1931)  
Electronic Oxygen Belt, 1974  
sterling silver, electronics, amber,  
oxygen mask, pendant: 12 x 4 x 1  
Gift of Mary Lee Hu, 1979.  
Donated to the American Craft  
Museum by the American Craft  
Council, 1990



Garry Knox Bennett (b. 1934)  
Clock with Terminal Susskinds  
Syndrome, 1977  
23k gold plate over brass, copper  
tubing, enamel paint, lacquer,  
glass, bone, clock parts  
21 x 13.5 x 3  
Gift of Bernard Stowens, 1993

As the studio glass movement matured, artists explored techniques other than glassblowing. **Mary Shaffer's** *Controlled Breakage #28* exploited glass's dual nature as a flowing liquid and a brittle solid.

Spurred by a bicentennial resurgence of interest in historic quilting, as well as the exhibition *The New American Quilt* at the Museum in 1976, the art quilt emerged in the late seventies and early eighties as a vital form of artistic expression. **Nancy Crow** was a key figure in the movement, combining the traditional patchwork format with an innovative use of color and pattern.

## The Eighties

*The Museum opened the 1980s with a new name—the American Craft Museum—and six years later had a new address—40 West 53rd Street. The strength of the contemporary craft movement could be seen in the confidence of larger scale works, and brighter colors, and ground-breaking exhibitions of robots, confectionary, and shoes, for example, that exploded traditional stereotypes of craft.*

1980

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*Mary Shaffer (b. 1947)*  
*Controlled Breakage #28, 1978*  
*fused and slumped plate glass*  
 10.75 x 20.5 x 7.25  
*Gift of Dorsar Investment Co.,*  
*Stephen L. Feinberg, Chairman, 1992*



*Nancy Crow (b. 1943)*  
*Bittersweet XIV, 1981*  
*strip-pieced, pieced, and hand-*  
*quilted cottons, 68.5 x 68.5*  
*photo: Sheldon Comfort Collins*  
*Museum purchase with funds*  
*provided by a grant from the*  
*National Endowment for the*  
*Arts, 1984. Donated to the*  
*American Craft Museum by the*  
*American Craft Council, 1990*



*Charles Simonds (b. 1945)*  
*Priapus, 1982-83*  
*unfired clay, wood*  
 16 x 26 x 26  
*photo: Eva Heyd*  
*Gift of Joel M. Barish, 2000*

More and more artists from the so-called “fine arts” arena embraced craft mediums, an outgrowth of the transgressive practices of such artists as Judy Chicago in her 1970s *Dinner Party*. **Charles Simonds’s** landscapes are metaphors for human culture, as recorded in the growth and decay of human settlements on the earth. These works echo on a smaller scale the earthworks that became an important genre of contemporary art in the 1970s and ‘80s.

Glass artists were gaining increasingly wide exposure. **Tom Patti** became an important figure both for his large-scale installations and, at the complete opposite end of the spectrum, his small-scale, internally oriented fused glass sculptures.

In 1989, the Museum organized the exhibition *Craft Today USA*, which opened at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and toured internationally. *Minoan Teapot* by metalsmith **Randy Long** was part of this exhibition, and demonstrates the artist’s skills with silver holloware. It is stylistically related to the contemporary postmodernist designs of the Italian Memphis group in its use of unusual materials and quirky forms.

Throughout the 1980s, many studio jewelers made innovative use of new materials, bold forms, and exuberant colors. **Marjorie Schick** earned an international reputation in this period with her sculptural jewelry that related colors to the shapes and rhythms of the human form and the immediate space around the wearer.

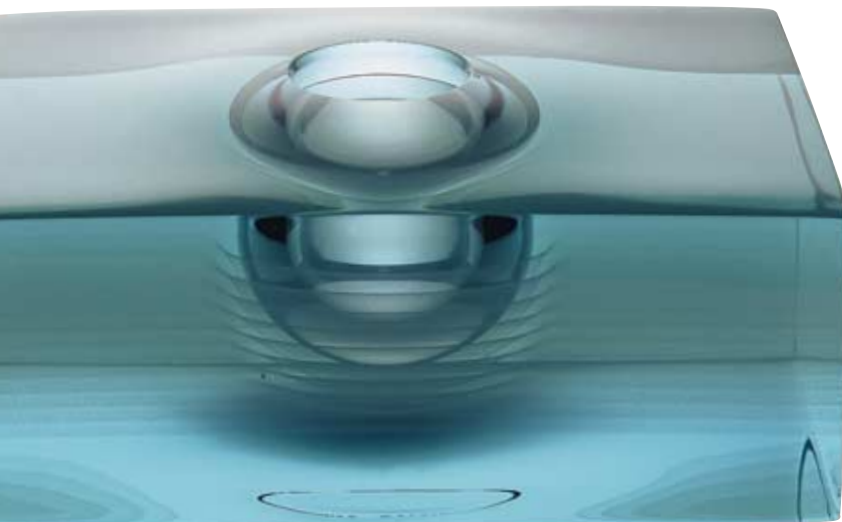
Responding to contemporary currents in studio jewelry, particularly in Europe, that used non-traditional materials and irony to question the “value” of jewelry, **Verena Sieber-Fuchs** used unconventional materials that added provocative non-jewelry associations ranging from the humorous to the deeply political.

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*Randy J. Long (b. 1951)*  
*Minoan Teapot, 1988*  
*sterling silver, granite, 18k gold, 24k gold leaf, wood*  
*5 x 7 x 3.5*  
*Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Weiss, 1991*

*Tom Patti (b. 1943)*  
*Compacted Solarized Bands, 1987*  
*fused commercial plate glass*  
*2.5 x 6.25 x 4.5*  
*Gift of Edna S. Beron, 1994*



*Verena Sieber-Fuchs (b. 1943)*  
*What About a New Hat, 1988*  
*colored marshmallows, silver mesh, wire, 9 x 7.5 x 7.5*  
*photo: Eva Heyd*  
*Gift of Donna Schneier, 1997*



*Marjorie Schick (b. 1941)*  
*Necklace, 1988*  
*wood, paint, acrylic*  
*25.75 x 31 x 6*  
*Gift of Dr. James B. M. Schick, Robert M. Schick and Mrs. Eleanor Krask, 1993*

## The Nineties

Museum director Janet Karden began the effort to document the history of craft through the Centenary Project, organizing three exhibitions that explored American craft from 1900 to World War II. At the same time, artists mined the past to create innovative forms of expression.

Beginning in the 1960s, Dale Chihuly became a major force in the studio glass movement, both through the establishment of the Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State in 1971 and through his expressive, powerful glass sculptures and installations that continually expanded the limits of the glassblowing art. With the *Venetian* series of the early 1990s, Chihuly incorporated Murano glassblowing techniques and baroque aesthetics into his vocabulary.

Cindy Sherman became well known in the 1980s for her role-playing self-portrait photography. In the 1990s she combined photography with porcelain in *Madame de Pompadour Nee Poisson (1721-1764) Soup Tureen and Platter*, in which she depicts herself as King Louis XV's extravagant mistress on a soup tureen inspired by the original design commissioned by Madame de Pompadour in 1756.

In 1994, the Museum hosted the exhibition *Uncommon Beauty in Common Objects: The Legacy of African American Craft Art*, which included Xenobia Bailey's striking *Zulu Queen Harvest Fire Coat*. Inspired in part by the growing interest in African traditions within the contemporary art and design community, Bailey also used Native American imagery and contemporary music as sources for her spectacular work.

# 1990



Dale Chihuly (b. 1941)  
Cadmium Yellow Orange  
Venetian #306, 1990  
blown glass, 26.5 x 16 x 13.75  
Gift of the artist and  
Charles Cowles, 1990



Cindy Sherman (b. 1954)  
Madame de Pompadour Nee  
Poisson (1721-1764) Soup  
Tureen and Platter, 1990  
hardpaste porcelain, decals,  
glazes, 11.5 x 22 x 14  
photo: Eva Heyd  
Gift of Nanette L. Laitman, 2000

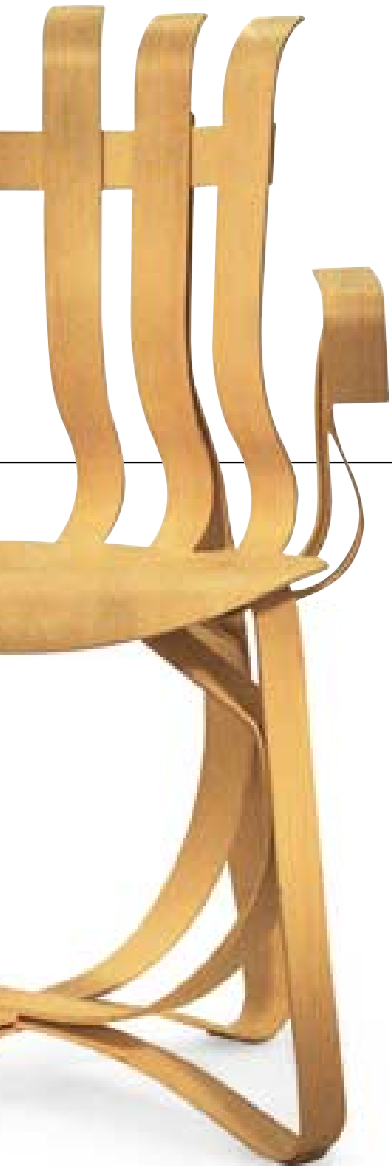


Xenobia Bailey (b. 1958)  
Zulu Queen Harvest Fire Coat, 1990  
acrylic, cotton 4-ply yarn,  
glass beads, mirrors, buttons;  
single stitch crochet, 45 x 30 x 19  
Museum purchase with funds  
provided by the Horace W.  
Goldsmith Foundation, 1994



Frank Gehry (b. 1929)  
Cross Check Armchair, 1991  
bent laminated maple, plywood  
33.25 x 26 x 25.5  
Gift of Knoll North America, 1992

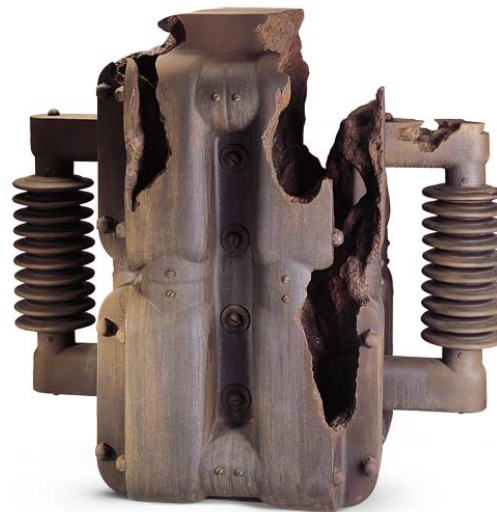
Crossovers between the fields of art, architecture, craft, and design were ubiquitous in the 1990s. In 1992, the Museum hosted *Frank Gehry: New Bentwood Furniture Designs*. This piece demonstrates that **Frank Gehry** was equally adept at creating light, sinuous forms in architecture and in furniture.



*Mark Sfirri (b. 1952)*  
Rejects from the  
Bat Factory, 1995  
oak, cherry, walnut,  
maple, mahogany,  
rosewood, 33 x 26 x 5  
Gift of Mari Lipton from the  
Irv Lipton Collection, 2003

A student of master woodworker Tage Frid at the Rhode Island School of Design, **Mark Sfirri** continued the craftsmanship of the woodturning tradition, while adding an element of whimsy. In his *Rejects from the Bat Factory* series, Sfirri used a complex system of multi-axial turning to transform a familiar object.

Beginning in the late eighties and early nineties, many ceramic artists worked with trompe l'oeil techniques to create sculptures that questioned the nature of materials. **Steven Montgomery's** sculptures evoke metal and machinery, often rusting or deteriorating, questioning the distinction between "handcrafted" and "industrial."



*Steven Montgomery (b. 1954)*  
D-Industry, 1995  
molded ceramic, paint  
26 x 26 x 15  
photo: Eva Heyd  
Museum purchase with  
funds provided by the  
Howard Kottler Endowment  
for Ceramic Art, 1991

The Pattern and Decoration movement of the 1970s was carried over into contemporary ceramics in the 1980s by artists such as **Bennett Bean** who developed an interest in surface design in the 1980s. In 1994, Bean began his *Double* and *Triple* series, moving away from the static vessel to constructed pieces that form a dynamic composition.



*Bennett Bean (b. 1941)*  
Earthenware Triple  
Vessel, c. 1997  
earthenware, painted, gilded,  
wood, 15.5 x 2 x 10.25  
photo: Eva Heyd  
Promised gift of  
Barbara Tober, 2000

# 1995

The seamless intersection of art, craft, and design is a focal point for collections development at the Museum today. **James Turrell** is well known for his large-scale installation works dealing with light and space. In *Lapsed Quaker Ware and Cupboard* he collaborated with ceramist Nicholas Mosse and woodworker Bill Burke to create an exploration of light and space in a very different format, using light-absorbing basalt ware and elegant Quaker forms.

### The New Millennium

*As the new Millennium began, the Museum reflected the changing nature of the field with a new name: the Museum of Arts & Design. Director Holly Hotchner has successfully spearheaded the purchase and renovation of the Museum's new building at 2 Columbus Circle. The Museum continues to expand its horizons in an increasingly global art world.*

# 2000



*James Turrell (b. 1943)  
Lapsed Quaker Ware  
and Cupboard, 1998  
black basalt ware, cherry  
wood, paint*

*Cupboard: 52.75 x 28.5 x 13.75  
Museum purchase with funds  
provided by the Howard Kottler  
Endowment for Ceramic Art, 2000*



*Thomas Mann (b. 1947)  
Untitled, 2002  
metal, paint, enamel, plastic  
6 x 6  
Gift of Crafts America, 2002*

Elizabeth Kubie, President of Crafts America, organized and donated to the Museum the exhibition *September 11: Artists Respond*, which opened at MAD on the one-year anniversary of the terrorist attacks. **Thomas Mann's** work was especially potent in its simplicity.

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**Eva Hild** is one of an emerging group of Scandinavian artists who are giving a renewed vitality to the medium of clay. Her handbuilt forms are both technically masterful and visually mesmerizing.

In 2002, the Museum of Arts & Design presented *Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation, Contemporary Native American Art from the Southwest*. This was the first in a series of exhibitions highlighting contemporary, non-traditional work by Indian artists. **Susan Point's** *Return* appeared in the second of the series, featuring artists west of the Mississippi, and is a striking demonstration of the artist's ability to transform traditional iconography through the use of new media and scale.

Today the Museum is aggressively expanding its collection of work by foreign artists. Among the most innovative of a new generation of sculptors in silver is Japanese-born **Hiroshi Suzuki**. He has translated the traditional craft of hammer-raising silver into a contemporary idiom. In his works he combines the coolness of metallic sheen with the warmth of an object created by hand.

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 As the Museum of Arts & Design prepares for its move into an expanded space, it continues to honor traditions and celebrate innovation, and looks forward to all of the excitement and change its next 50 years will bring.

# 2006



*Eva Hild* (b. 1966)  
 Complex 1, 2003  
 stoneware  
 27.5 x 27.5 x 19.75  
 photo: Andrea Bjorrell  
 Museum purchase with funds  
 provided by the Horace W.  
 Goldsmith Foundation, 2004



*Susan Point* (b. 1952)  
 Return, 2003  
 cast glass, stainless steel, acrylic  
 paint, red cedar, 29 x 32 x 36  
 photo: Mike Zens  
 Museum purchase with funds  
 provided by an Anonymous  
 Foundation, 2005



*Hiroshi Suzuki* (b. 1961)  
 Dual Rivulet VII, 2005  
 outer skin fine silver (999), inner  
 skin Britannia Standard silver (958)  
 8 x 14 x 14  
 photo: Maggie Nimkin  
 Museum purchase with funds  
 provided by Nanette L. Laitman and  
 an Anonymous Foundation, 2005

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