



**SIX SPECIAL EXHIBITS AT SOFA CHICAGO 2006  
DEMONSTRATE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRADITION AND TRADITIONAL**

CHICAGO, AUGUST 20, 2006. Six Special Exhibits at SOFA CHICAGO 2006 survey paradigm shifts away from traditional artisan media and subject matter in countries as diverse as Ireland and Korea. Not defined by their culture or geography, today's world artists may reference tradition in their forms, materials and processes, but seek foremost to express their own artistic vision.

The Special Exhibit ***Forty Shades of Green*** will feature the work of 40 Irish makers across the fields of craft, fine art and literature, **presented by The Crafts Council of Ireland**. The title of the Special Exhibit references the ballad written by Johnny Cash, *40 Shades of Green*, which reads in part:

*"I Close My Eyes And Picture The Emerald Of The Sea  
From The Fishing Boats At Dingle To The Shores Of Dundee  
I Miss The River Shannon And Folks At Skipa-Ree  
The Moor Lands And The Midlands With Their Forty Shades Of Green..."*

**Artist and exhibit curator Brian Kennedy said**, "It's fitting that one of the ballads seen to most capture the image of Ireland to people abroad was written by an American." Kennedy was determined this body of work would illustrate the difference between tradition and traditional in Irish arts. "Notions of tradition can be too simplistic. They say if it's from Ireland then it should be an Aran sweater or a landscape. What we are doing here is not turning our backs on tradition but acknowledging that it can be influenced from places very far afield. Creation does not always recognize national boundaries...Of course, all of the makers are also addressing what Irishness means to them, if it means anything. But for a lot of these people, they are not defined by the country they live in or their country of birth. Their work is not defined by geography or politics but their own ideas and where they come from personally." <sup>i</sup> Brian Kennedy will present an accompanying talk in the Lecture Series.

***Tradition and Innovation: Korean Contemporary Ceramics*** will present 15 works by 15 artists, demonstrating the dynamic and vibrant contemporary Korean ceramic art scene, evolved from a distinguished 5000 year-long history and practice. **Curator Jaeyoung Kang** said, "*Tradition and Innovation* intends to show a wide spectrum of

Korean ceramics today. Korean ceramics began with the production of vessels for daily use and is now witnessing an up-surge of unlimited imagination as it embraces contemporary expressive language and new challenges of our times. Five minimal works with backgrounds of the five Korean traditional colors (red, yellow, blue, black and white, which symbolize the five traditional elements in Oriental cosmology—fire, earth, water, metal, and wood) will demonstrate this reinterpretation of traditional ceramics.”

*Tradition and Innovation* will also introduce American audiences to the **World Ceramic Exposition Foundation (WOCEF) of Korea**, which currently operates Icheon World Ceramic Center, Gwangju Joseon Royal Kiln Museum, and Yeosu World Ceramic Livingware Gallery, museums that house ceramic art exclusively. WOCEF also organizes the prestigious World Ceramic Biennale Korea. **Judith Schwartz, director, Craft Media Area, New York University Department of Art and Art Professions** will make an accompanying Lecture Series presentation. **Presented by World Ceramic Exposition Foundation (WOCEF).**

Demonstrating that contemporary artists from the United States and beyond are referencing world traditions in nontraditional forms, ***The Presence of Absence: Contemplating the Void in Contemporary Wood Sculpture*** will explore contemporary artists' investigations of negative space through a selection of approximately 25 works in wood. **Curator Harold B. Nelson, director, Long Beach Museum of Art, CA** explains that the Special Exhibit's focus on “the void – the negative space within or around...turned, carved or constructed forms,” demonstrates an international “embrace of the concept of *Ma* (the recognition and celebration of negative space), a principal central to Asian aesthetics...This is particularly true of wood sculpture, fiber, and basketry which are so deeply indebted to Asian traditions, forms, and practice.” **Nelson and artists Mark Lindquist, Gyongy Laky and William Hunter** will make an accompanying presentation in the Lecture Series. **Presented by Collectors of Wood Art.**

***Material Difference Too*** celebrates the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of **Friends of Fiber Art International** at SOFA CHICAGO and is presented in conjunction with a sister exhibition, *Material Difference: Soft Sculpture and Wall Works*, **curated by Chicago-based independent critic and curator, Polly Ullrich**, on view at the Chicago Cultural

Center during the exposition. The collecting and exhibition of art in fibrous materials has been particularly strong in the Midwest since the 1960s, and especially so in more recent decades among private collectors in the region. Drawing on the breadth and depth of many of these collections, the *Material Difference* exhibitions at SOFA and the Cultural Center will showcase masterworks by dozens of the best fiber artists from the United States, Europe and beyond.

Incorporating both traditional and experimental art forms, the exhibitions will reveal the wide and influential reach of fiber art today. Camille Cook of Friends of Fiber Art International said, "(Today) there is no limit to what can be used to serve the urge to create. Textile materials and techniques have crossed the line between craft and fine art...We can enjoy the fruits of this freedom in outstanding objects to be seen at SOFA CHICAGO and the Cultural Center." Of special regional interest said Cook is one artist in *Material Difference*, **Magdalena Abakanowicz**, "who has conspicuously crossed the fine art boundary...She has progressed through different materials with more enthusiasm and success than any other fiber artist." Abakanowicz is in the process of completing a major installation in Chicago's Grant Park entitled *Agora*, consisting of 106 nine-foot-tall cast-iron figures. **browngrotta arts, Wilton, CT** will have two works by Abakanowicz on-offer at SOFA CHICAGO.

***Progressions***, a curated exhibit of contemporary decorative artwork by artists currently living in Israel, will be the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Special Exhibit at SOFA CHICAGO presented by the **Association for Israel's Decorative Arts (AIDA)**. To-date the AIDA Special Exhibit at SOFA has fostered the careers of a total of 21 artists, who as a result of their exposure at the exposition have acquired US gallery representation. **Doug Anderson, co-founder of AIDA with his wife, Dale**, explained the formation of AIDA in 2003: "We wanted to show a face of Israel that the newspapers don't show, Israelis who make art, not in military uniform defending their country. We wanted the Israelis to see the reaction to their work so they would become energized and we wanted them to become familiar with their international equivalents."

Just as AIDA has shown Americans the strengths and human face of Israeli artists, it has been a saving grace for them in the throes of regional conflict. One of this year's AIDA artists, **Mikhal Gamzou**, who works in fiber, expressed this sentiment in an email to AIDA adviser, Davira Tarragon: "When (AIDA) . . . chose me to participate in SOFA, it

was a big joy. Now going through this tenseness and anxiety, the work for SOFA is almost my sole retreat. I work non-stop and this is my blessed escape from the news.”

Perhaps no other organization has fostered the advance of traditional crafts into contemporary arts than **The Museum of Arts & Design, New York, (MAD)**. **MAD** will present a golden anniversary Special Exhibit at SOFA CHICAGO entitled ***Jubilee! 50 Years on 53rd Street***, featuring masterworks from each decade since the Museum opened in 1956, all from its permanent collection. Featured artists include **Lenore Tawney, Peter Voulkos, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Arneson, Dale Chihuly, Cindy Sherman and Frank Gehry**, among many others. Presented in the form of a time-line, the exhibit highlights pieces that express some of the artistic and cultural currents of the past 50 years. Visitors will see the forward progression of contemporary arts through specific examples of experimentation with materials and process.

**The American Association of Woodturners** will also present a “mini” Special Exhibit of select pieces in ***Turned Wood Art***, curated by **Mary Lacer** in the Resource Center at SOFA CHICAGO.

SOFA CHICAGO Special Exhibits are complementary with admission and are intended to augment the gallery presentations.

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.cork2005.ie/press/feature.asp?id=125>