

SOFA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 12, 2009

12th ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL SOFA NEW YORK FAIR: STRONG ASSET CLASS OF CONTEMPORARY DECORATIVE ARTS AND DESIGN

SOFA FAIR DESIGNATED "A Sweet Spot in the Art Market"
—*CBS MarketWatch*

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NEW YORK, February 10, 2009. Long considered the world's premier fairs for outstanding contemporary decorative arts and design, the next edition of SOFA, the **12th annual international Sculpture Objects & Functional Art Fair in New York City** will feature an unrivalled range of arts and design with consistently demonstrated asset class values in today's international markets. Slated for April 16-19, 2009 with an Opening Night Preview Gala on Wednesday, April 15 at the historic Park Avenue Armory, SOFA NEW YORK regularly draws record numbers of collectors, curators, art advisors, architects, interior designers and new enthusiasts.

"Proven values in arts and design distinguish SOFA NEW YORK throughout as our dealers showcase artists and designers who have achieved prominent placement in world renowned museums with a great deal at accessible price points," says **Mark Lyman, Founder/Director of the SOFA Fairs and Vice President, dmg Art and Antiques.** "That museum representation further confirms the validity of the extraordinary artistry showcased at the fair in the global marketplace," he says. Sixteen years ago, Lyman noticed that contemporary decorative artists and designers merited an international fair and since then he has developed three SOFA fairs, adding a new edition June 11 – 14, 2009 in Santa Fe, NM, Opening Night Preview, Wednesday, June 10 to benefit the New Mexico Museum of Art's inaugural *Design Collection*. At SOFA CHICAGO last November, CBS MarketWatch cited the fair for sales exemplifying market stability.

Among the many artists coveted by collectors and curators is ceramicist **Miyashita Zenji**, renowned as a living legend in Japan and represented in museums far beyond Asia, showing at SOFA NY with New York dealer **Joan B. Mirviss Ltd.** She is presenting the first solo show of the artist outside Japan, as well as ceramics by other Japanese artists.

"With Miyashita's works gracing the collections of over thirty museums, including the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** and **The Minneapolis Institute of Arts**, as well as a loyal following of private collectors, his prices have remained strong and gone up 40 percent over the last decade," says Mirviss. Miyashita's sculptural work perfectly marries abstract landscape imagery with innovative form via colored clay applications in subtle hues on stoneware and is priced from \$3,000-\$15,000.

"The fact that his sculptures are in the Metropolitan Museum's Asian art collection as well as their 20th century decorative arts holdings demonstrates his wide appeal across multiple specialties," says Mirviss, who has sold to more than 40 museums as well as a number of corporate collections such as **Goldman Sachs** and **Coca Cola**. She says lately new buyers from France, Holland and Germany have been scooping up examples by Japan's latest ceramicists, indicating the new international reach of such artists.

Silver and gold sculpture, vessels and jewelry are also highly sought by a growing band of collectors. "Because of the inherent value of silver, we're seeing a consistently strong demand for silver art objects and it's not letting up," says **Clare Beck at Adrian Sassoon** in London. "The sense of luxury coupled with intricate craftsmanship of hand forging attracts clients to precious metals," she says. On their stand will be silversmith **Junko Mori** whose hand forged sculptural objects are inspired by actual plants and pine cones, and begin at \$8,000. Plus, Mori is participating in the SOFA NY Salon Artists Conversations, which along with an acclaimed lecture series, is free to SOFA attendees. Interestingly, at Sassoon's last SOFA NEW YORK show, Europeans like the Brits and Italians shopped his stand.

In addition, new dealer **Alastair Crawford** of Manhattan, who specializes in **Georg Jensen** silver, will be launching his own contemporary line of silver flatware with handles of jasper and lapis lazuli, along with silver and gold vessels as well as jewelry. "Many clients were asking for handmade silver examples and unique items and with this new dimension to my dealership, I can fulfill those requests," says Crawford, who is completing commissions for silver scones for a Dallas client. "I'm seeing clients seeking the security of investing in tangible assets like silver and gold that historically weathers recessions," he says. Other dealers seeing an uptick in gold artist jewelry include **Aaron Faber Gallery** and **Charon Kransen Arts**, both of New York.

Then Philadelphia dealer Bob Aibel, who heads up **Moderne Gallery**, says "Studio furniture by the masters **George Nakashima**, **Wharton Esherick** and **Sam Maloof** remains in keen demand." He believes the strength of that market is because choice work by those designers fits in a wide range of stylistic interiors, including contemporary, Modernist and Asian. At the same time, their design sensibilities are in sync with today's emphasis on simplicity and integrity of materials. Due to his large holdings of such prized design, Aibel has been interviewed in Wallpaper magazine and the German AD singled him out as "the world's leading Nakashima dealer." Architects and interior designers on his client list include **Michael Smith**, whose clients include **President Barak Obama**, and **Thad Hayes** and **Alan Wanzenberg**. On his stand will be two rare Nakashima consoles dating from the seventies as well as an early coffee table.

Florida-based private dealer **Donna Schneier** cites iconic examples by pioneers of the studio ceramics and glass movements such as **Betty Woodman**, **Harvey Littleton** and **Toshiko Takaazu** as "really recession proof...While those artists are frequently exhibited in fine art museums, they can be acquired for a fraction of the cost of contemporary art and more importantly, their names will live on for centuries," says Schneier. She is witnessing another market shift. "Especially in the past year, I'm seeing younger collectors, many totally new to field, taking on classic work as objects of beauty and a proven asset class all rolled into one," says Schneier, who has regularly achieved sales to the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** and **Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**, among others.

Glass by leading artists is another "blue chip investment category" according to **Doug Heller**, who heads up **Heller Gallery** in Tribeca. He is featuring work by four artists: **Lino Tagliapietra**, who taught secret Venetian glass blowing techniques to **Dale Chihuly** as well as a host of other Americans; and **Nicole Chesney**, noted for her cast glass wall sculptures referencing color-field paintings, as well as Danes **Steffen Dam** and **Tobias Møhl**. Heller says of the latter, "Their sales in the past two months are both impressive and consistent." An added bonus for collectors is a Tobias Møhl costs only \$5,500 to \$17,500. "Today, more clients want something of lasting beauty by an artist who is making a considerable impact in the larger art world," says Heller who just confirmed two corporate commissions for Lino, a museum acquisition for Steffen Dam, and a private commission for Tobias Møhl. "The Møhl is an intended gift from collector and Longhouse founder **Jack Lenor Larsen** and speaks of the artist's dazzling blown and etched glass skills," adds Heller, who has sold to the **Museum of Modern Art** and the **Los Angeles County Art Museum**, among many other internationally prominent museums.

Like glass, wood artistry is now receiving enormous attention. At SOFA CHICAGO, the **del Mano Gallery** of Los Angeles achieved their most successful show in **William Hunter's** entire career with sales to the **Carnegie Institute of Art, Museum of Fine Arts Houston** and the **Mint Museum** as well as to private collectors. "For SOFA NEW YORK, we aim to repeat this by bringing William Hunter to the fair, so new collectors can meet him and have a dialogue about his latest sculptural work in Latin American rosewood," says **Ray Leier**, who founded del Mano over 30 years ago. Other artists of note include **Michael Peterson** who will be honored with a three-year museum touring show shortly. "Fifteen years ago, a Peterson cost \$500 to \$1,500," says Leier. "Now they are priced from \$6,000 to \$20,000," he says. "Wood is organic in nature and collectors today rightly fixate on this artistic trend that is never going away," says Leier. With some artists' prices beginning as low as \$500, Leier expects to introduce new collectors to an entirely different artistic endeavor.

SOFA NEW YORK 2009 will open with a preview on Wednesday, April 15 from 5:30 to 9:00 pm at the Armory, which will offer VIP cardholders first viewing and selection of top quality pieces offered at the fair. VIP cards will be sent by participating galleries to their clients. Non-cardholders may purchase a ticket for \$100 online soon at www.sofaexpo.com or at the door beginning at 5:30 pm on April 15. Opening Night attendees may also support the Museum of Arts & Design (MAD), New York by purchasing a ticket to attend a private dinner in the Armory's Tiffany Room beginning at 8:30 pm, which also entitles them to additional benefits. For dinner information and tickets, call Stephanie Lang at MAD at 212.299.7729.

Downloadable high-resolution press images are available in the Press Room at www.sofaexpo.com.

SOFA NEW YORK 2009 will be presented April 16 – 19th at the Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 67th. Opening Night, Wednesday, April 15, 5:30 – 9 pm; Invitation-only 5:30 – 7 pm (VIP); the Public Preview 7 – 9 pm (for non-VIP cardholders) tickets are available for \$100.00 online at www.sofaexpo.com or at the door. Exposition hours are Thursday & Friday, April 16-17: 11 am – 8 pm; Saturday, April 18: 11 am – 7 pm; Sunday, April 19: Noon – 6pm. Tickets are \$25 for a single day of general admission and \$40 for a four-day pass; both include catalog. For general information, visit www.sofaexpo.com ; call 800-563-SOFA (7632) or 773-506-8860; or email info@sofaexpo.com.

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