



museum of arts and design

MAD TO SHOWCASE FOUNDER'S ENDURING VISION AND SEMINAL IMPACT ON AMERICAN CRAFT CULTURE IN FALL EXHIBITION

What Would Mrs. Webb Do? Examines Aileen Osborn Webb's Pioneering Support of Contemporary Craft as Driver of Innovation and her Pivotal Role in Advancing the Field

New York, NY (August 14, 2014) – Featuring a range of objects created over the past 60 years, the exhibition ***What Would Mrs. Webb Do? A Founder's Vision*** celebrates Aileen Osborn Webb, who established the Museum of Arts and Design, then the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, in 1956. On view from September 23, 2014, through February 8, 2015, the exhibition explores how Webb, through her advocacy work at MAD and other leading institutions across the country and internationally, championed the skilled maker as integral to America's future.

"Aileen Osborn Webb was one of the great visionaries of the twentieth century," says Glenn Adamson, MAD's Nanette L. Laitman Director. "Her progressive conception of how the world around us can be made more humanely, more responsibly, has never been more relevant. With this project, we want to remind people of this amazing woman's many achievements, and show how the Museum today is carrying her mission forward."

With over 100 works encompassing glass, ceramics, wood, metalwork, and fiber, nearly all from the Museum's permanent collection, the exhibition pays tribute to Webb while also illustrating the ongoing impact of her advocacy. Represented makers – all of whom directly benefitted from the support of Webb and others who shared her ideals -- include Sam Maloof and Joris Laarman (furniture); Jack Lenor Larsen and Lia Cook (textiles); Peter Voulkos and Jun Kaneko (ceramics); Harvey Littleton and Judith Schaechter (glass); and John Prip and Myra Mimplitsch-Gray (metal). *What Would Mrs. Webb Do?* also explores the contributions of Nanette L. Laitman and the Windgate Foundation, two key proponents for skilled makers today.

A press preview for the exhibition will be held September 23, 2014 at 9:00 am.

"Modern makers owe a debt to Mrs. Webb, who created the first professional framework for craftspeople to meet, exchange ideas, and show their work," says exhibition curator Jeannine Falino. "We are sharing some of the best pieces made during her tenure along with examples by artists today who continue to benefit from her progressive ideas."

The exhibition is organized in two parts. First is a selection of outstanding work by American makers from the 1950s to the late 1960s whose practice directly benefitted from the support of Webb. This part of the exhibition highlights the many crafts-related institutions that she launched, such as the American Craft Council, the School of American Craftsmen, and the World Crafts Council. All still form a vital support structure for today's makers. Here the exhibition also surveys the museum's achievements under her direction, with a focus on the landmark exhibition *Objects: USA*, which opened in 1969 and subsequently traveled to thirty museums here and abroad.

The second part of the exhibition focuses on those who carry Mrs. Webb's vision forward to the present day. Nanette L. Laitman (a current trustee of the Museum) promotes our mission in countless ways, and also provided support for 235 recorded oral histories of American craftsmen by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Excerpts of these interviews are highlighted in the exhibition

alongside key examples of these craftsmen's works of art. Some of the Museum's most recent and celebrated acquisitions on view also underscore the role played by the Windgate Foundation in shaping the current discourse on contemporary craft through its support of makers and non-profit institutions—the Museum of Arts and Design among them.

What Would Mrs. Webb Do? showcases the strength of the Museum's permanent collection. From groundbreaking works by early masters Wharton Esherick, Anni Albers, and John Paul Miller, to recent creations by Judith Schaechter, Hiroshi Suzuki, and Joris Laarman, visitors are presented with a breadth of achievements that Mrs. Webb first set in motion. The Museum of Arts and Design continues to uphold Webb's commitment to creative, skilled entrepreneurs with projects like *NYC Makers: The MAD Biennial* (on view through October 12).

Highlights from the exhibition include the following works:

- **Wharton Esherick's** library ladder (1966). Considered the dean of the modern studio craft movement, Esherick was honored in 1959 as the subject of the Museum's first one-man show.
- **Merry Renk's** *White Cloud* wedding crown (1968), which was made expressly for the Museum's *Objects: USA* exhibition, and is shown alongside her original working templates.
- A large earthenware vessel (1957) thrown by Austrian-born potter **Gertrud Natzler**, for which her husband, **Otto Natzler**, created a rich volcanic glaze.
- The *Young Hercules* (1967) by **Ed Rossbach**, which revisits ancient, diminutive Coptic textiles with a broad, crocheted rendition, fragments included.
- **Marguerite Wildenhain's** delicately scaled yet rigorously thrown pitcher from the 1950s that was owned by Mrs. Webb, an avocational potter.
- **Betty Woodman's** large wall installation entitled *Pompeii* (1991). The American Craft Council is honoring Woodman this year with the Gold Medal for Consummate Craftsmanship.
- The quiet perfectionism of jeweler **Thomas Gentile's** pin (1991) made of synthetic resin and pigment inlays reveals the artist's use of non-precious materials to exquisite ends.
- MacArthur Foundation recipient **Tom Joyce's** *Inlaid Square Bowl* (1998), in which Joyce updates the blacksmith's traditional role of crafting objects for use to fashioning a vessel for contemplation. Like many artists in the exhibition, Joyce's oral history was recorded by the Archives of American Art thanks to the generosity and vision of Nanette L. Laitman and excerpts of his comments will be on view. See his newly-installed outdoor sculptures on the Broadway side of the Museum.
- The trompe-l'oeil creation *Story Book* (2002) celebrating the book arts and executed in wood, a fabulous feat of the imagination made possible through deft craftsmanship and expert design. Made by **Michele Holzapfel** with a team of craftsmen including David Holzapfel, Donna Hawes, Dan MacArthur, Kim Thayer, Steve Smith, and Brown & Roberts Hardware.
- New collaborations, reminiscent of the postwar designer-craftsman era, that are carried forward by artists like **Ted Muehling**, whose *Branch Candlesticks* (2002) were fabricated by German porcelain manufacturer Nymphenburg.
- **Joris Laarman's** *Maker Chair* (2014), comprised of 3-D printed puzzle parts that assemble to create furniture. Through its name and method of fabrication, the *Maker Chair* reflects the changing notion that creating has expanded beyond the physical to include the virtual world.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND THEMES

The exhibition will explore the following periods and themes:

- **Early Webb activism** which led to the formation of the American Craft Council and the Museum: Mrs. Webb wisely saw that the emerging craft field required the advocacy of a professional organization that could support aspiring artists, and a museum that would introduce their work to the public. The American Craft Council, founded in 1939 and the Museum of Contemporary Crafts (today's Museum of Arts and Design, founded in 1956) were the first such organizations created in this country. Webb also established America House in 1940 for members to sell their work; it was the very first craft-based retail store in Manhattan, closing only in 1971 as commercial galleries emerged to take its place.
- **School for American Craftsmen:** Wanting to help returning veterans with new and independent careers, Webb created the School for American Craftsmen (SAC) in 1944, where the original emphasis was on creating work in wood, metal, and fiber for limited production. The school soon expanded to include students from all walks of life and continues to thrive today at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Hollowware, jewelry and ceramics by early SAC professors John Prip, Hans Christensen, and Frans Wildenhain are among the artists featured in this section.
- **The Museum of Arts and Design:** Today's Museum of Arts and Design started in 1956 as the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, and its mission then as today was to feature current developments in the cross-disciplinary world of making. The exhibition includes objects from *Designer Craftsman 1953 U.S.A.*, sponsored by the American Crafts Council, and the Museum's inaugural exhibition *Craftsman in a Changing World* (1956). Additional objects illustrates other exhibitions from these early years, such as its first one-man show entitled *The Furniture and Sculpture of Wharton Esherick* (1959), *Enamels* (1959), and the series of *Young American* exhibitions beginning in 1957 that featured emerging artists.
- **Craft Horizons magazine and editor Rose Slivka:** *Craft Horizons*, now known as *American Craft Magazine*, played a major role in bringing the latest developments to artists around the country. When ceramist Peter Voulkos upended the world of traditional potters by tearing and otherwise disrupting vessel walls to create new work, it was editor Rose Slivka who championed this paradigm shift with the article "The New Ceramic Presence" in 1961. A group of Voulkos ceramics demonstrates his artistic journey and its impassioned advocacy by Slivka.
- **World Craft Council:** By the 1960s, as American makers began to benefit from the combined efforts of the ACC, Museum, school, and magazine, Webb began to realize that much good could be achieved for makers around the globe. In 1964 she assembled the first World Craft Council at Columbia University in New York. Kiln demonstrations by Paul Soldner, electroforming by Stanley Lechtzin, and the first public attempts at modern glassblowing by Harvey Littleton brought these technical advancements to a new audience. Works by all three artists are featured in the exhibition.
- **Paul Smith Era:** A wide-ranging series of fun, inviting, and thought-provoking exhibitions began at the Museum under the direction of Paul Smith, who arrived at the Museum in 1957. He soon became curator and eventually director of the Museum. Smith's openness to developments around the country, and his willingness to share them with the public made the Museum an exciting venue during his long tenure. A review of his memorable exhibitions culminates in a focus on works produced for *Objects: USA* (1969), the landmark traveling exhibition mounted after an extensive road trip by Smith and dealer Lee Nordness that offered a lively assessment of the crafted object in America.
- **ACC Gold medalists:** Beginning in 1970 and under Mrs. Webb's direction, the American Craft Council began awarding a gold medal each year to recognize those who had achieved distinction in

their chosen medium. Many of these artists are well-represented in the Museum's collection and in the exhibition, and include Wendell Castle (furniture), Albert Paley (metal), John Paul Miller (jewelry), Katherine Westphal (textiles) and Betty Woodman (ceramics).

- **The Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts In America, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution:** Thanks to the support provided by Nanette Laitman for the recording of these oral histories, the Museum offers selected quotes from the interviews along with works of art from the Museum's collection. Among the twenty-one artists included in this group are Tom Patti and William Morris (glass); J. B. Blunk and Wendy Maruyama (wood); Robert Ebendorf and Lisa Gralnick (jewelry); John Marshall and Gary Noffke (metalwork); and Dorothy Gill Barnes (fiber).
- **The Windgate Foundation:** In addition to its national support of exhibitions, catalogues, and programs that celebrate craft media, the Windgate Foundation has supported the purchase of objects for the Museum's collection. The exhibition includes a selection of these important acquisitions by artists such as Judith Schaechter and Preston Singetary (glass); Eiko Kishi (ceramic); Michelle Holzapfel and others (wood); and Horishi Suzuki (metalwork) among others.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION, CREDITS, AND TOUR

What Would Mrs. Webb Do? A Founder's Vision is organized by adjunct curator Jeannine Falino and curatorial assistant Barbara Gifford.

Support for *What Would Mrs. Webb Do? A Founder's Vision* is provided by Barbara Nitchie Fuldner, Barbara G. Fleischman, and Martha J. Fleischman. Additional support is made possible in part through the Collectors Circle, one of the Museum's upper level support groups.

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Curator-Led Tour of *What Would Mrs. Webb Do? A Founder's Vision*

Thursday, September 25, 2014, 6:30pm

Free with Pay-What-You-Wish Admission

Discover the new exhibition *What Would Mrs. Webb Do? A Founder's Vision* with curator Jeannine Falino as your guide. Explore the legacy of MAD's founder Aileen Osborn Webb through a range of objects created over the past 70 years, including many from the Museum's permanent collection. The exhibition pays tribute to Webb's role in pioneering a contemporary appreciation for craftsmanship and the handmade.

Radical Legacy: From the Museum of Contemporary Crafts to the Museum of Arts and Design

Tuesday, October 7, 2014, 6pm

Free

Since the Museum's founding in 1956 by the visionary Aileen Osborn Webb, MAD has celebrated all facets of making and the creative processes by which materials are transformed, from traditional techniques to cutting-edge technologies. Today, the Museum builds upon this rich history of exhibitions and programs that emphasize a cross-disciplinary approach to art and design, and reveals the workmanship behind the objects and environments that shape our everyday lives.

The panel will gather together Paul Smith, Museum Director from 1963 - 1987; Jack Lenor Larsen, America's foremost textile designer and the longest-serving trustee in the history of the Museum; and Glenn Adamson, current Nanette L. Laitman Director. Moderated by Jeannine Falino, Curator of *What Would Mrs. Webb Do? A Founder's Vision*, the discussion will trace this history as well as look forward to the new horizons of this unique institution.

Creating Sustainable Arts Organizations in NYC

Tuesday, October 16, 2014, 6pm

Free

Throughout the past 70 years, New York City has seen a variety of not-for-profit organizations support and advocate progressive cultural production in myriad ways. In today's New York City, these organizations, both old and new, are adapting and responding to contemporary urgencies and resources to remain vital in an ever-growing field of arts, design and making. Gathering together diverse voices in these efforts, this panel discussion explores local case studies, both historical and recent, to examine how arts organizations are founded and maintained.

Speakers include: Alanna Heiss, Founder and Director, Clocktower; Patricia Jones, Executive Director, Eyebeam; Anne Pasternak, President and Artistic Director, Creative Time

The People Behind the Works: A Guided Tour of *What Would Mrs. Webb Do? A Founder's Vision*

Thursday, November 13, 2014, 6:30pm

Free with Pay-What-You-Wish Admission

Join MAD for a guided tour focusing on the people behind the works on view in the exhibition *What Would Mrs. Webb Do? A Founder's Vision*. Revealing the influence of MAD's founder, Aileen Osborn Webb, on these craftspeople, artists, designers and other makers, this special tour gives insight into the unique stories of the people behind the objects on view.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) champions contemporary makers across creative fields, presenting artists, designers, and artisans who apply the highest level of ingenuity and skill to their work. Since the Museum's founding in 1956 by philanthropist and visionary Aileen Osborn Webb, MAD has celebrated all facets of making and the creative processes by which materials are transformed, from traditional techniques to cutting-edge technologies. Today, the Museum's curatorial program builds upon a rich history of exhibitions that emphasize a cross-disciplinary approach to art and design, and reveals the workmanship behind the objects and environments that shape our everyday lives. MAD provides an international platform for practitioners who are influencing the direction of cultural production and driving 21st-century innovation, fostering a participatory setting for visitors to have direct encounters with skilled making and compelling works of art and design.

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