
MATERIAL MATTERS

The On-Line Newsletter of the Smithsonian Institution's Material Culture Forum

www.si.edu/publications/

Issue No. 57

January 2009

The Forum at Twenty

David Shayt

*Guest Editor, 20th Anniversary forum
National Museum of American History*

What sort of organization celebrates a meeting? Or twenty meetings? Or twenty YEARS of meetings? Why, the Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture, established in 1988 and still a confluence—perhaps *the* confluence—of scholars and scholarship within our own learned grove concerned about the collections that inhabit our buildings. Mere meetings meet around a table. Four times a year, the Forum has gathered together a squad of accomplished colleagues to speak to throngs on one single collections research topic at forum after forum after forum after forum. Through wars and pestilence, through one Secretary after another, through the opening and closing and reopening of museums, the Forum carries on, while being carried along on the shoulders of scholars who don overalls as event organizers, mailers,

food service planners, editors, and haulers of the essential chairs, tables, and podiums.

Unique among our eighty-two fora, the Forum of May 14, 2008 was both inward-looking and outward-gazing, as a cluster of speakers ranged across a spectrum of celebratory phenomena, from modern Jamaican Rastafari culture, to mid-19th century color photography, to contemporary museum practice, to the work of the Folklife Festival, to the future of a forthcoming new museum, to the Forum itself and its inability to stop.

The meeting name, “A Hat of Many Colors: The Forum at Twenty,” recalled the founding Forum’s focus: “Headgear: How and Why People Decorate their Heads,” at the National Portrait Gallery, March 1988. Three presenters from that first event took part in this new Forum, looking as if twenty years had hardly passed. Mary Jo Arnoldi, Peter Jakab, and Cynthia Hoover reflected on the peculiar and enduring nature of the Forum, reminding the gathering that two decades is nothing in the life of the collections we study, but a considerable time

Continued on page 2

IN MEMORIAM

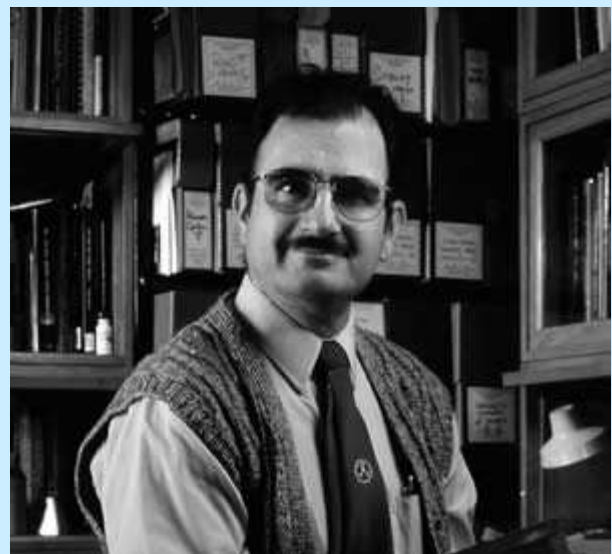
DAVID SHAYT, 1952 - 2008

In the months between the Material Culture Forum’s 20th Anniversary meeting in May 2008 and the publication of this newsletter, David Shayt died suddenly of cancer. The Smithsonian Institution and the Material Culture Forum mourn the loss of a dear friend and colleague.

This issue of *Material Matters*, which David organized before his death, illustrates his lively spirit and some of his best attributes: broad thinking about history and culture, careful attention to detail, joyous enthusiasm for museum objects, and deep affection for the community of the Smithsonian Institution.

❖ See Cynthia Adams Hoover’s remembrances on page 15.

We dedicate this issue in memory of David Shayt.



David Shayt in his office at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.

in the careers and accomplishments of those with whom we exchange knowledge and insight at these meetings.

The topic of celebration flowed in and around each of the Forum's other presentations. Elizabeth Broun, the Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, opened the Forum with expansive remarks on SAAM's Renwick Gallery and the capacious Grand Salon in which we were seated, surrounded by George Catlin's Native American portraits. Natural History anthropologist Jake Homiak then wove a brightly colored Rasta cloth of piety and celebration around the gathering, reflecting on the success and community impact of his artifact-rich "Discovering Rastafari!" exhibit, on view at NMNH through November 2008. American History's Michelle Delaney reached back into the dimmer recesses of the Photography Collection at MAH to extract the story of Levi Hill and his pioneering mid-19th century color photography. John Franklin told bracing stories of his 20+ years of on-the-ground involvement with Smithsonian celebrations near and far. Ford Bell offered a presidential perspective on the state of museums from his perch at the American Association of Museums. And Jackie Serwer gave enticing hints of future material culture at the National Museum of African-American History and Culture.

But it was Cynthia Hoover who made the day complete with her eye-witness account of the Forum's birth and infancy. The support and popularity the Forum enjoys today were hard-earned. Considerable elbow grease, midwifery, and tin

cup rattling were required at the outset, as is true with most new endeavors. "Material culture, isn't that something to do with Madonna?" one was asked back in the 80s. With a strong vision of what it could become, Cynthia weathered storms of disbelief and paltry funding while helping to mold the Forum into a serious venue for debate and discussion over the collections around us. For her dedication to the Forum and to her own scholarly use of collections, Cynthia received the Forum's first Material Culture Award for Distinguished Achievement: a five-legged magnifying glass or loupe, mounted on a wooden pedestal courtesy of the artisans at the Office of Exhibits Central.

Many other Forum folk made possible this 20th anniversary event. Content committee members were Anne Goodyear, Bill Tompkins, David Shayt, and Stephanie Hornbeck. April Parreco organized the catering and other event preparation. SAAM Graduate intern Jennifer Shaifer led a tour of the Renwick show, "Ornament as Art: Avant-Garde Jewelry from the Helen Williams Drutt Collection." G Street Fabrics of Rockville donated color-coded measuring tapes to the dinner guests to ensure good seating distribution and leave each guest with a useful museum tool. And good friend of the Forum and longtime champion of conspicuous culture Richard Kurin, Acting Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture, led a spirited evening discussion of the Forum's impact on scholarly life.

May the Smithsonian Material Culture Forum remain worthy of a similar rumination twenty years hence in, egads, 2028. §



National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) curator Jake Homiak's presentation about Rastafari culture kicked off the celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Smithsonian Material Culture Forum.

To the left, an honored guest salutes the opening of NMNH's exhibit "Discovering Rastafari!"

Photo: NMNH

“When Two Sevens Clash”:

Celebrating the Rastafari Millennium at the Smithsonian

Jake Homiak

National Museum of Natural History

On November 2, 2007, the National Museum of Natural History celebrated a unique event with the opening of “Discovering Rastafari,” an exhibit about the origins and development of an Afro-Caribbean Movement that began nearly 80 years ago in Jamaica and which has since spread globally over the past three decades. On that day we invited a new community into the Museum. In doing so, we fulfilled a long-held goal of the African Voices Hall which was to bring a Diasporic perspective into the Hall--thereby acknowledging that ‘Africa is everywhere African people create community.’ This was certainly true in the case of those who identify themselves as “Rastafari,” a transnational community of people largely of African descent who—irrespective of whether they were born in Jamaica, Antigua, Trinidad, or elsewhere in the Diaspora—think of themselves first and foremost as Africans.

For the international Rastafari community, however, the opening of the exhibit on November 2nd was much more than merely a Smithsonian event. This is the date on which nearly a million Rastafari worldwide annually celebrate the founding of their movement. On that day in 1930, seventy-seven years ago, a young Ethiopian nobleman named Ras Tafari Makonnen (tracing his descent from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba), was crowned His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie the First, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Elect of God and Light of the World. In Jamaica, where the largely black and impoverished masses were intimately familiar with the text of the Bible, a small group of preachers interpreted the Emperor’s coronation as evidence of the Second Coming of Christ. Some linked it further to a prophecy attributed to the Jamaican pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey who allegedly told his followers to “Look to Africa where a black king will be crowned for the day of deliverance is near.”

Since that time, those who call themselves Rastafari have constructed a worldview and way of life that is identified with the theocratic state and imperial imagery of Ethiopia as it

existed under the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I. From this, an improbable worldwide movement has emerged that, in identifying with the published statements of Emperor Selassie, simultaneously combines Afrocentric perspectives with ecumenical anti-racist sentiments that proclaim the equality of all peoples. The fact that the grandson of the Emperor, Prince Ermias Selassie, attended the exhibit opening along with over 400 Rastafari, a number being Elders from Jamaica, made the opening festivities on November 2nd all the more meaningful. It was especially heartwarming to see representatives from Jamaica functioning as self-appointed docents within the exhibit itself as they articulated their ideals and way of life to other members of the visiting public.

But again, for the Rastafari themselves there was more to this date than met the eye. This was not merely an annual celebration of the coronation—this was the 77th anniversary of that date, the number seven having both biblical and mystical significance for the Rastafari. The fact that this celebration coincided roughly with two other dates of major importance to the Rastafari called forth all manner of other interpretations about the meaning of our opening. These were the dates of the Ethiopian millennium (that preceded on September 11, 2007--seven years after the millennium marked on the Julian calendar), and the Bicentennial of the end of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807. For Rastas, who are steeped not only in biblical prophecy but in the study of “signs and numbers”—these conjunctures on which “multiple sevens clashed,” heralded a new millennium and a new beginning. I’ve referred to this here as “when TWO SEVENS CLASHED,” because the idea had previously been commemorated in 1977 by a famous reggae hit of the same name (see, Joseph Hill, “When Two Sevens Clash”. *Culture*, 1977).

In addition to this conjuring with signs and numbers, there were other layers of meaning associated with our celebration. With the opening of the first exhibit about their culture in any major museum, many Rastafari saw the event as a vindication of their philosophy and way of life. Here was yet another confirmation of their existential passage from so-called “cultists” in Jamaica who were once scorned, persecuted and even martyred for their faith to contemporary international ambassadors with a message of social justice and equality of all peoples.

Coming initially from the most impoverished strata of Jamaica’s uprooted peasantry, the early Rastafari of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, forged a minimalist but powerful

continued on page 4

culture that, by being mapped onto the surfaces of the body, served as a sign of their symbolic separation from a Eurocentric colonial society. Many of these cultural innovations, in fact, became the basis for their persecution in Jamaica. This was certainly true with respect to the growing of dreadlocks, the sacramental use of cannabis, and a distinctive form of dress marked by the red-yellow-green Ethiopian colors.

All of these practices emerged out of a worldview of a people steeped in the narratives of the Bible. Old Testament themes loom large here—the arc of the collective Rastafari experience being represented through metaphors of exile, deliverance, and return. ‘Exile’, in fact, is precisely how the Rastafari see both the enslavement of their African ancestors as well as the condition of contemporary peoples of African descent in the post-plantation societies of the West. Even passing familiarity with Rasta-inspired reggae music might lead one to make the connection between this theme and the anthems of reggae. Recall, for example, Bob Marley’s “Exodus” (1977), a recording that the BBC named “song of the century.” Throughout the 1970s, a decade of unprecedented Rastafari influence in Jamaica, such redemptive biblical themes continuously found expression in reggae as one of the ways in which the Rastafari created their own enabling history.

Most outside of Rastafari, however, are unaware that this process had begun decades earlier. In this regard, the exhibit explores the ways in which Rastafari have written themselves into history by interpreting events that inspired blacks in the Diaspora during the early twentieth century. Among other things, the exhibit illustrates various material expressions of this ‘reading’ in the form of internationally circulated images of Emperor Selassie, accounts in illustrated weekly news magazines, as well as ephemeral publications, posters, and tracts produced by the Rastafari themselves. At least for some in the movement, the exhibit has become a kind of pilgrimage site and source of collective pride— not only as a sign of Rastafari presence within the officialdom of Babylon, but because it has gathered together and displays many of the original material significations that are at the genesis of their worldview. For many, these original ‘objects’ and other media of remembrance (like the Holy Piby, a proto-Rastafari text and a personal scrapbook containing news clippings about Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia) have never actually been seen before but only referenced in disembodied form.

Some have pointed out that “Discovering Rastafari!” fits

uneasily into the natural history setting, one in which other cultures have traditionally been reified as thing-like entities and treated as exotic expressions that punctuate the diversity of the natural world. Not so in the contemporary African Voices Hall. With its pluralist emphasis on ‘voices’ and multiple perspectives as inherent features of the cultures it showcases, the Hall is a congenial forum for this temporary exhibit. In a twenty-minute video that plays continuously, we’re tried to foreground Rastafari as a culture in which workings of the voice are central to the subjective agency of individuals who speak for and represent their culture. Here the inseparability of voice/sound as a means of asserting social presence should be seen as a central aesthetic feature of this predominantly oral culture. Whether in extended ritual discourses of ‘reasoning’, through traditional chanting and drumming, via traveling elders who speak on behalf of the movement, or through reggae music and the circulation of artists, CDs and DVDs, Rastafari has disseminated its

continued on page 5



*Opening of “Discovering Rastafari!” exhibit, November, 2, 2007
Photo: National Museum of Natural History (NMNH)*

message through multiple registers of the voice (and now in varied languages) around the world. (This description, in turn, provides a hint as to how and what one might collect in such a culture.)

Our hope is that visitors will also recognize that Rastafari represents a particular kind of culture. What is being celebrated in this space is not a stable or essentialized culture and identity—but rather a fluid and evolving one that is much like the societies of the Caribbean with which the Rastafari themselves are most closely associated. Culture in this context is not formed on the basis of stable received traditions, but rather is continuously emergent, a never-finished hybrid form that is always in process. In this respect, Rastafari represents a collective form of self-fashioning that can be seen as a hallmark of communities throughout the Afro-Atlantic.

In turn, the hybrid, processual and open-ended nature of their culture accounts for much of the diversity that one encounters in Rastafari and in the exhibit itself. This includes both organizational diversity—reflected in a section on “many mansions”—as well as in the ideological diversity that derives from the engagement of practitioners with ideologies of race, nation, class and gender that all remain salient not only across Caribbean region, but around the globe. Whether one starts with the House of Nyabinghi, the Boboshanti, or the Twelve Tribes of Israel (all different “mansions” or organizations featured in the exhibit), all begin with an emphasis on Emperor Selassie, an African monarch, as a way to order their beliefs and relationships in the world.

“You see everyman in the King! And that is because he lives in all of we!”

This Afro-centric perspective is where Rastafari is coming from—but, as the exhibit seeks to illustrate, it does not necessarily define where it is going. What was celebrated back on November 2, 2007 was not simply the Emperor’s coronation, but a moment in the collective Rastafari struggle to raise again and work through perennial questions of identity, morality and social justice. For some, to be sure, the clash of those “apocalyptic sevens” may have meant the triumph of a “Black supremacy,” a specially racialized Rastafari perspective. For most, however, they represented a transcendence of categorical distinctions of all kinds—between the ‘many mansions of Rastafari’, between nations, and between those interpenetrating categories we humans stubbornly continue to code as ‘race.’

Here I would simply point out something that the Rastafari themselves often note: that the world’s most famous Rastaman—Robert Nesta Marley—and the historic figure that he and all other Rastafari revere—Emperor Haile Selassie the First of Ethiopia—are both, from a Rasta perspective, ambiguous signifiers of race. Both Selassie and Marley were the product of societies marked by complex hierarchies and conceptualizations of racial identity. Moreover, they both emerged in cultures that represented long-term historical processes of racial, ethnic, and cultural amalgamation, one in the Horn of Africa and the other in the post-plantation Caribbean. It is therefore perhaps not unexpected that both of these figures should stand as intermediaries for bridging what are seen as racial divisions.

As a means to resist their Euro-centric ‘babylon’ in Jamaica, the early Rastafari took as their starting point essentialized divisions between “black” and “white.” Rastafari ideology, however, has developed considerably over the years, incorporating many of the ambiguities found in the class-color ideologies of their own societies. And it is with some frequency that Rastafari note these ambiguities of classification as part of the global significance of their movement. I once had a Rastafari Elder put it to me this way. “Ya see, Jah son,” he said, “I couldn’t really say His Majesty is a black man and couldn’t say he is a white man. Because when you look at him you see black, you see white, brown, yellow, clear, Semitic—all of them. You see everyman in the King! And that is because he lives in all of we!”

Somewhere in that mystery is what, for me, the Rastafari ultimately celebrate. And in that mystery is the key to another understanding. It is related to what Stuart Hall, the celebrated cultural studies theorist, once famously said about diaporic identities like Rastafari; that they are “defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (Hall 1990:235). Both in humanistic terms, as referenced by the statement of the Elder, and in anthropological terms related to Hall’s assertion, this dynamic of working through identity and difference is what, for me, makes the movement and its ongoing development worth our attention and study. As we all deal with an increasingly complex and fractured global world, the determination with which the Rastafari seek to engage unresolved dialogues over difference—between us and them—may be precisely what makes their movement of universal relevance in the twenty-first century. §

Celebration Delayed: Hillotypes, Early Experiments in Color Photography

Michelle Delaney

National Museum of American History

“Celebration Delayed: Hillotypes, Early Experiments in Color Photography” introduces the purpose and results of the year-long Getty Foundation Conservation Grant for the conservation study and scientific analysis of the 62 Hillotypes in the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. This grant study is a first attempt by the National Museum of American History (NMAH) to fully document this rare and historic collection made by Levi L. Hill in the 1850s, and plan for the most appropriate long-term preservation of the plates. Funding for this effort was primarily provided by The Getty Foundation, with in-kind support from the Smithsonian and the Getty Conservation Institute, with written support from the National Daguerreian Society.

Today the primary conservation concern and a most pressing challenge for NMAH’s Photographic History Collection is pursuing appropriate research on the Hillotypes, while at the same time preventing further damage from the resulting increase in attention. This first grant project has provided a better understanding of the nature of these rare and unique historical artifacts, and guidelines for their preservation. In October 2007 the final grant report was submitted to the Getty Foundation detailing the scientific examination of the Hillotype photographs using non-destructive reflectance FTIR (Fourier Transform Infra-Red spectroscopy) and XRF (x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy) to identify metals, pigments, and coatings used by Rev. Hill in the original formula, developing and finishing processes.

The Smithsonian’s involvement with the collection began in 1933 when Rev. Hill’s son-in-law, Dr. John Boggs Garrison, of Hopewell, New Jersey, offered to the US National Museum, Section of Photography “a number of silver plates on which are photographed, more or less distinctively, the colors of the things he had before the camera.” Many of the images are camera reproductions of European prints, few

are portraits or landscapes from life. Understanding the historical nature of these plates and their legacy to early American photography, Smithsonian photographer and curator A.J. Olmsted encouraged his superiors to approve the donation from Dr. Garrison. So later in 1933, the 62 Hillotype plates, an original 1856 “Treatise on Heliochromy” book by Hill, and a portrait of Hill were accepted into the Smithsonian collection. The Hillotypes have been seen by few researchers since, and fewer yet have opted to publish their opinions on the validity of the Hillotype process for color daguerreotypes.

The decision to pursue a conservation grant project and the scientific analysis of the Hillotypes collection for the Smithsonian was difficult, knowing that controversy over the validity of Hill’s work continues even today among my colleagues, curators and conservators, in the United States and Europe. This is mostly due to the fact that Levi Hill kept his formula for color daguerreotypes secret for five years while working to perfect his process at his home in rural West Kill, New York. This frustrated many in the photographic community. The opposing camps of those who believe that Hill had a legitimate color process and those who believe him a humbug, fraud, or charlatan remain vocal. It is my intention with new research and scientific evidence discovered during this initial Getty Grant to consider a third camp on the Hillotype issue, one that offers a 21st century perspective on this experimental collection providing greater insight into the images and their preservation through non-destructive scientific analysis,

continued on page 7



Boudreau Hillotype 86.0699.03 Image: NMAH

especially as advances in portable equipment become available to study this important collection without moving it offsite from the Museum. The Getty Grant and future efforts will foster our understanding of Hill's experiments with successful color photography, and decision to apply enhanced colors with organic and inorganic pigments to a selection of these images.

Little information on Hill's life before 1850 exists. According to his autobiographical information shared in his 1856 *Treatise on Heliochromy*. Born in 1826, in Athens, Greene County, New York, Hill's life and experiences take him up and down the Hudson Valley corridor, Kingston to New York and Albany, and throughout the Catskill Mountains region. Besides becoming expert with typography and printing, Hill learned miniature painting, and eventually followed his strong religious beliefs to train and serve as a Baptist minister in West Kill, New York, and other local parishes. When ill health and reported bronchitis interfere with his ministry, Hill looks to daguerreotype photography as an alternative career, believing the chemicals iodine and bromine used in the process would help his disease.

In January [1850] ... Hill announced his success, achieving color on a prepared daguerreotype plate. But, he would not divulge his process for another five years.

He began experimenting with the photography of natural colors in 1847, without any formal training in chemistry. To sustain this expensive pursuit, he published a "Treatise on Daguerreotypy" in 1850 which even remains one of the best manuals on the process ever printed. In January of the same year, Hill announced his success, achieving color on a prepared daguerreotype plate. But, he would not divulge his process for another five years. He wanted to perfect the

process, and could not easily duplicate the formula.

Hill reported receiving as many as 8,000 letters in response to his announcement, and many visits from interested photographers. Samuel FB Morse visited and encouraged belief in Hill's process. Others, like DDT Davie and his committee from the New York State Daguerreian Society, declared their contempt for Hill. His attempt to protect his interest in the invention and patent the process caused impatience and hardship within the community of Daguerreian artists. Hill insisted his "heliochrome" color process, a direct positive color photographic process based on the color sensitivity to certain metallic salts, was different from those being developed in France by Niepce de St. Victor and Becquerel. Only he and his wife knew his chemical process, neither would share the details until sure of "suitable compensation."

Years of experimentation never yielded Hill a commercially viable process. Nor was he able to obtain a patent from the US government. Hill lost his wife to consumption, or possibly the ill affects of the great variety of chemicals used in the Hillotype process, in 1855. A year later he published his *Treatise*, disclosing his formula, despite its imperfections. However, the damage caused to his fellow Daguerreian artists through loss of business was severe, as patrons waited to have their portraits done in full color. Hill's inability to fulfill the promise of success was evident – even to previous supporters.

The Smithsonian's Hillotype Collection remains a unique collection documenting one American's early efforts to invent and market (unsuccessfully) a color photography process. Conservation efforts and research on the Hillotypes will continue in future years to further preserve these historic images and present the works to scholars and the general public through publications and exhibitions. §



Comparison of a portrait of Hill (on left) with an engraving of Hill (on the right).

Images: NMAH

Celebrating a Selection of Milestones at the Smithsonian Institution

John Franklin

National Museum of African-American History and Culture

My perspective on celebrating milestones at the Smithsonian comes from three vantage points, the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies and now from the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Preparations were underway in 1974 for the US Bicentennial when Bernice Reagon found me in Senegal. I was teaching English for the Ministry of Higher Education and she needed an interpreter to explain the Festival of American Folklife to Senegalese cultural authorities. I subsequently became a staff person, researcher and presenter for the African Diaspora program of the 1976 Festival. Representatives from Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Benin



Gate from the city of Djénné, Mali constructed by masons on the National Mall for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2003.

Image: Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

and Zaire were invited to come to Washington paired with delegations from Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad, Venezuela, Guyana and Brazil. The Festival was beside the reflecting pool as depicted in embroidery by Ethel Mohamed (see p. 9). The contexts for our program were a simple worship structure, a front porch and a market place for craft demonstrations for comparative presentations by African Americans and those from Africa and the rest of the Diaspora. Those contexts for cultural presentations evolved as you will see with the cooperation of curators, designers and technical directors. Bess Lomax Hawes, and Margaret Mead, visited that year with Ralph Rinzler and Wilton Dillon.

Images of the Smithsonian Institution Folklife Festival are available courtesy of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Many excellent examples also appear in Richard Kurin's book *Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Culture Of, By and For the People* (Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, 1998).

I returned to the Smithsonian in 1987 to work for Wilton Dillon in the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies organizing symposia on the Bicentennial of the US Constitution, an international conference, with the University of Virginia, African Americans and the Evolution of a Living Constitution in 1998 with the Joint Center for Political Studies, and Les Droits de l'Homme and Scientific Progress with the National Academy of Sciences marking the bicentennial of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. Conference summaries, educational materials, and SI books such as these were the products of these commemorations. After initially being a guest from the "community," my new job included planning the Smithsonian's Martin Luther King observances for several years, usually a lecture followed by a cultural performance. In the late 1980s the entire Smithsonian was planning the Quincentenary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas and I participated in the pan-institutional meetings. The 1992 Folklife Festival complemented American History's new exhibition on New Mexico, American Encounters, with a New Mexico Festival program. A workshop was built for furniture maker Tim Roybal and an adobe plaza for the context of these Matachines dancers. The program on Maroon societies, gathered representatives from Jamaica, Surinam, French Guyana, Texas, Mexico and Colombia to share experiences of independence from slavery and colonial rule.

I next curated a pair of festival programs on archipelagos: the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, celebrating its 21st anniversary of independence in 1994 and Cape Verde

continued on page 9

celebrating its 20th in 1995. For the Bahamian Sacred music stage, Pete Reiniger and his crew recreated a rural Cat Island church for this rushin' procession. Ralph Rinzler passed away during that Festival and his wake was held in this church. A market place was created for the vendors and artists, including the painter, Amos Ferguson.

For the Cape Verdean Connection, linking Cape Verdean Americans with their families in the Cape Verde Islands, Naci Gomi performed the Batuk. 7.500 kilos of stone were brought by ship to construct a stone kitchen and a piece of road on the Mall. Manuel Da Luz, a specialist in Cape Verdean Criolo language presented these Cape Verdean musicians. President Mascarenas came for the actual day of independence, July 5th.

In 1996, in addition to organizing the Cultural Olympics program in Atlanta, Folklife presented Iowa celebrating its sesquicentennial and prepared for the Smithsonian's own 150th birthday with a program on Smithsonian workers. An All Star Junkanoo group from the Bahamas was brought to Washington to process on the Mall on August 11th, 1996. Cheyene Kim, of Horticulture discussed orchid culture and the trades and craftsmen showed how they build spaces in our buildings. The Smithsonian's birthday was celebrated with fireworks out of and around the Castle.

In 1997 at the African Immigrant Festival program, the North American Asantahene was enstooled here on the Mall at the express request of the Asantahene, leader of the Akan people of Ghana.

In 2000 Washington, D.C. celebrated its 200th birthday with a Festival program on the traditions of this capital city. Rob Schneider, Festival technical director, and his crew

constructed this row house façade with porch and iron railing for our narrative stage.

Finally Samuel Sidibe, Director of the National Museum of Mali, NMNH Curator Mary Jo Arnoldi and I curated the 2003 Folklife Festival program on Mali, a huge program with close to 400 participants. To create the contexts for this complex society, five structures were built with the assistance of two Malian architects and a Malian construction crew: a mud brick house from Segou, a Songhai house of woven mats, at Tuareg tent made of leather, a Dogon Togunaa or Men's meeting house and this gate from the city of Djénné. The masons of Djénné braved a cold rainy May to complete the gate in time for the end of the Festival. The artists felt at home in this built environment and President Amadou Toumani Toure was overjoyed that Mali had such a presence in Washington. So you can see how different the Festival contexts are from the early days of the 1970s.

In my new work at the National Museum of African American History and Culture we are working with the Folklife Festival and produced concerts on New Orleans African American Musical Traditions after Hurricane Katrina and supported the research and production of last year's program on the African roots of Virginia's Culture.

This year we are planning a 2009 program on the powerful role of words in African American Culture. The museum has exhibitions and programs up and running and we are looking at significant years in American and African American history. We are currently planning a symposium for later this year that looks back at 1968, its importance to the nation, to the African American community, to Washington, D.C. and its implications and relevance to today. §



Embroidery by Ethel Mohamed depicting the 1976 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Image: Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

The State of Museums

Ford Bell

President and CEO, American Association of Museums

It is an honor to be here among so many experts in the study and interpretation of material culture. It is a truly vast field. I know this based on the last time I tried to clean out my garage. I confess that there was a lot of material but very little culture involved in the job.

You deal, of course, in more valuable artifacts. Part of our job at the American Association of Museums (AAM) is to make sure that there continue to be enough high-quality museums around to keep that material culture in. In fact, it occurs to me that museums themselves are telling examples of our material culture. I suppose this opens the door to the final decadence of the Post-Modern Era, a Museum of Museums. Is there still some space left on the National Mall, I wonder?

Maybe we won't need it. On the surface, the situation looks pretty cheerful. Nationally, museums have never been more popular than they are right now. There have never been as many of them, and there have never been so many people walking in our doors. According to our own estimates, there are now some 17,500 museums in the United States. Based on the most recent statistics from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the number of museum visits annually in the United States is approaching one billion. Museum construction over the past decade and a half – new museums and renovations – increased from \$365 million annually in 1993 to almost \$1.7 billion in 2006. That's more than double the rate of growth for all private construction in the U.S. during the same period.

*In terms of the quality of product vs. price,
museums are unsurpassed.*

As cultural institutions, museums have enormous strengths. We are one of the most trusted sources of information, rated in public opinion polls far above newspapers, ahead of colleges, and – no surprise – way above politicians. Museums are a source of civic pride in communities large and small, in every state and virtually every county in America. We are an increasingly important educational resource, partnering with school districts everywhere and supplementing the public school curriculum for millions of school children nationally.

And in many communities, museums have proven to be

economic engines, revitalizing neighborhoods and sometimes whole towns, attracting audiences, local, regional and international, that span the entire range of age and background.

Add to this the simple fact that museums are one of the best bargains available, anywhere. Where else can you and your whole family go to learn, be inspired, be entertained and sometimes create the kind of memories that stay with you all your life? And all for less than the price of a movie. The median admission fee for museums in the U.S. is \$6. More than a third are free, including of course, this one and the other institutions of the finest museum complex in the world, the Smithsonian. In terms of the quality of product versus price, museums are unsurpassed.

Well, if everything is so perfect, why don't we all just pat ourselves on the back and take a couple of weeks off?

Where do I start?

All those impressive new buildings tend to mask the national problem of collections stewardship. You are probably aware of the disturbing data compiled by Heritage Preservation: museums have never been in possession of more things, but our ability to care for them properly lags far behind our ability to acquire them. 80% of collecting institutions have no emergency plan that includes collections, and no staff trained to carry it out. A large proportion of what we hold in public trust is now at risk from natural and man-made disasters.

And where will the multiple millions of dollars come from to address this issue? In a recent national survey that we conducted, funding was the number one concern of museums. On average nationally, it costs a museum \$23 to service each visitor. But all sources of earned income combined, everything from sales in the museum store to memberships, provide about \$7 of that cost. The majority of the remainder has to come from our largest source of funding: individuals. It is the generosity of the American public that allows most museums in this country to open their doors every day.

Diversity is another challenge for museums. Not just in our staffs, which is important enough, but also in what we teach, present and interpret – in the realm of material culture, What material? Whose culture? All members of our communities need to see themselves somewhere in our museums, they need to hear their own stories being told, or how can we expect them to come and keep coming back, or support us,

continued on page 11

or encourage their children to come? How can we expect their elected representatives to pass legislation that favors museums if we don't have any real impact on their lives as citizens? Urban planners and others like to tell us that the future of this country is an increasing cultural diversity. But I beg to differ: the present of this country is diverse. We've already arrived at the future. Now we need to respond to it and help shape it.

Because we all work on behalf of the public, ethics is a primary concern in virtually everything we do. AAM's Code of Ethics calls for acting at the highest standard of ethical behavior, urging institutions and their staffs to go beyond the legal requirement and do what is best to serve the public interest. I don't have to tell you, that's not always how it works out. To name just a few major areas of ethical concern:

- Donor relations: How do we maintain the integrity of the institution and still engage in that necessary mating dance with our financial supporters?
- Corporate relations, including corporate sponsorships: same issue.
- Provenance research of the existing collection or of acquisitions: Are we doing enough? Where is the financing to do more?
- Deaccessioning: When it can be done, when it should not be done and how the proceeds are used.
- Rightful Ownership or Title to Art and Artifacts: A very tough, complex, worldwide issue that needs the best collective wisdom of the profession to address.
- Green museums/global warming. Environmental concerns are among the most pressing public issues of the early 21st century. How can museums present the science of climate change in a way that advances public understanding and elevates the debate? Should museums be models of "green" practice, leading by example? Can we, without "taking sides"? Or should we take sides?

At AAM, public awareness is one of our major concerns. Museums need to be seen as they truly are: essential, not a luxury, no less important to the success of our communities than a quality public school or a reliable source of energy. We are committed to getting that message out there, forcefully and convincingly, to elected officials, the media,

funders and the public.

Excellence is the goal: in every area of museum operations, from collections care to financial management, community relations, education and more. This is what AAM promotes, for all of our institutions, from the smallest historic house to the largest natural history museum. Excellence is what will justify the public trust and continued public support. Ethics is a big part of it, as I mentioned. So too are the standards of the field.

Our latest book is titled *Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*. It is a summary of years of work done by those of you in the field, by our own Accreditation Committee, our 13 Standing Professional Committees, the thousands of AAM peer reviewers. Rigorous national standards are how we assure legislators, on the local and federal levels, that the museum profession can regulate itself in the public interest. We don't need lawmakers to step in and do it for us.

I'm sure that's an argument that will resonate with some of you in this room.

I just returned last week from Denver, where we held our annual meeting. By all accounts, one of our very best meetings in the past 102 years, which is how long we've been around. For those of you who were in Denver and joined 6,000 of your colleagues from around the world, teaching, learning and also managing to have a really good time, thank you. Next May we are just up the road, in Philadelphia. I hope I will see many of you there.

For those of you who are AAM members, I thank you for your support of what we are striving to do. For those you who don't know about us, or used to be members in the past, give us a look. I think you'll be pleased to see how much we offer, and perhaps excited by some of our new initiatives, such as our Center for the Future of Museums; or our national advocacy effort, the Campaign for the Value of Museums; or the re-invention of AAM Accreditation, our forthcoming National Program for Museum Excellence; and our efforts to advance the leadership opportunities for younger professionals through our Mentoring Program and our Emerging Museum Professionals initiative.

But also, I hope you will consider how much the museum community needs you, each of you, to help us advance the cause of museums. Because that is how we at AAM see this irreplaceable resource of education, inspiration and cultural heritage.

Museums are a cause. Help us get the word out. §

Looking Forward: A Preview of the Collections of the National Museum of African American History and Culture

Jacquelyn Serwer

National Museum of African American History and Culture

I want to express my thanks to David Shayt and his committee for organizing this celebratory occasion. I am very pleased to share information about our collection activities so far, and our plans as we go forward.

Planning a collection and a building simultaneously is a complicated endeavor.

First I want to reassure all of my Smithsonian colleagues that the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) has no intention of trying to steal away relevant collections from our sister museums! We have positive expectations, however, that Smithsonian museums will work with us in a collaborative way as the National Portrait Gallery and the National Museum of American History have done already. And, when appropriate, we hope



As the National Museum of African American History and Culture builds its collections, artifacts such as this Madam C.J. Walker pin, are being donated to the Museum through a project called "Save Our African American Treasures: A National Collections Initiative."

Image: National Museum of African American History and Culture

our Smithsonian counterparts will share collection items with us, as needed.

Currently, we are engaged in a very intensive pre-planning process, working with an architectural team headed by two architects—Max Bond, a well-known New York architect who is involved with the new museum at Ground Zero, and Phil Freelon, an architect from Raleigh, North Carolina, who designed MOAD (Museum of the African Diaspora) in San Francisco, and the August Wilson Center in Pittsburgh. Closer by, his firm also designed the Reginald Lewis Museum in Baltimore.

The architects have included an exhibition design firm as part of the team—Amaze Design—and the museum consulting firm of Lord Cultural Resources. By the end of this year, we will have a document with all of the specs and requirements for our building. This process will be followed by an international competition for the actual design of the museum.

In working through this process, we have arrived at a preliminary plan for the core themes and opening exhibitions. With this framework in mind, we are searching for collections that will help us tell the stories that relate to the themes and spaces we have identified.

You can imagine that planning a collection and a building simultaneously is a complicated endeavor. In the case of most new museums, there is an existing collection that needs

continued on page 13

SAVE OUR AFRICAN AMERICAN TREASURES

The National Museum of African American History and Culture has launched a program to help identify historic African American objects and encourage people to protect and preserve them. The Treasures initiative features a guide, Web-based instruction, and hands-on workshops in key cities around the country.

The next one-day program, including preservation advice, item review, and oral history recordings is:

TREASURES - CHICAGO

Saturday, January 19, 2008

9:30AM to 4:30PM

Harold Washington Library

400 S. State Street, Chicago, IL 60605

For more information see: www.nmaahc.si.edu

a building. Instead, our mandate requires multi-tasking to create both at the same time. As our director, Lonnie Bunch, likes to say, “We are crossing the ocean and building the boat at the same time.” NOT USUALLY RECOMMENDED!

As museum people, you understand that even with plans and structures, there are serendipitous moments when you acquire collections that you did not necessarily have in mind, but represent a fabulous addition to the museum’s holdings.

The Black Fashion Museum is the most exciting example of our unanticipated good fortune. The heirs of the museum founder, Lois K. Alexander Lane, donated the entire collection to NMAAHC. It consists of over 1,000 items.

We have a long road ahead, but we welcome the adventure.

These include accessories and apparel by designers of color, clothing worn by famous black Americans, and cast costumes from Broadway musicals with African American casts such as “The Wiz” and “Bubbling Brown Sugar.” It contains, as well, a number of 19th-century garments, including slave clothing.

We also have acquired the H.C. Anderson collection of over 4,000 photographs, negatives and studio artifacts. This material covers the career of a small-town photographer from Mississippi who chronicled the life of the black community during the era of segregation.

Although we are at the very beginning of our collecting enterprise, we are pleased to have acquired some other important items, and here are a few highlights:

- Jacob Lawrence’s celebrated series of silk screen prints, *The Legend of John Brown* (1977)
- A segregation sign from a Nashville, Tennessee city bus
- A sleeping car porter white hat, with insignia intact
- A Madam C.J. Walker pin (these last two came to us through our Save Our African American Treasures Program)
- A major painting by Charles Alston, *Walking*, 1958, inspired by the Montgomery bus boycott



- A Regiment flag for the black soldiers who liberated San Juan Hill during the Spanish American War
- Blacks in the military propaganda posters from WWI
- A pew from Quinn Chapel in Chicago, the oldest black congregation in Chicago, and one of the oldest in the US

And I could go on. We have a long road ahead, but we welcome the adventure.

We are grateful for the assistance of our Smithsonian colleagues who—with great generosity—have shared their information and expertise.

We hope to continue relying on their support as we face the challenge of creating a museum collection worthy of the Smithsonian that will document the African American experience for visitors of all backgrounds. §



Portraits of prominent African Americans form the inaugural exhibition of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, “Let Our Motto Be Resistance!,” on display at the National Portrait Gallery.

*Above from top to bottom: Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee; Amiri Baraka
Images: National Portrait Gallery*

Twenty Years of the Smithsonian Institution Forum on Material Culture: After Dinner Remarks

Cynthia Adams Hoover

Curator, Emeritus, National Museum of American History

I'm pleased to return to this beautiful room where some years ago I played a role in a material culture happening. In this Grand Salon, we, in what was then called the Division of Musical Instruments at the National Museum of American History, staged an evening of 19th-century American ballroom music titled "There's a Good Time Coming!" an evening that re-created a band using 19th-century Smithsonian instruments playing 19th-century American band arrangements (from the Library of Congress).

The players and dancers (excellent young dancers from the Ohio State University trained in early dance techniques) were dressed in costumes re-created from illustrations found on sheet music covers and other contemporary prints. The music was recorded for a Nonesuch recording that won a Stereo Review Record of the Year Award and was featured on some of the airline music channels during the period leading up to the American Bicentennial. It was a magical experience in which the use of objects in context transported us to an earlier era.

We celebrate not only the institution's superb collections of things, but also you, the exceptional collection of scholars who introduce us to new ways of looking, interpreting, and presenting.

Here we are—celebrating 20 years of the Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture, our grass-roots interdisciplinary Smithsonian organization centered on learning about culture by looking carefully at objects and their contexts.

We celebrate not only the institution's superb collections of things, but also **you**, the exceptional collection of scholars who introduce us to new ways of looking, interpreting, and presenting.

From the beginning the Forum has cut across bureaus and disciplines. And recognizing that the bureaucratic structure of the Institution can and sometimes does inhibit free discussion, we organized our meetings to be gatherings

where all are asked to leave administrative and bureaucratic rank at the door to allow for open communication and mutual respect, without regard to age, experience, or administrative position.

WHAT ARE WE CELEBRATING?

Let's start by celebrating a constant presence and focus on collections at the Institution for over 20 years, a presence known primarily through:

- 82 quarterly dinner meetings

Covering a wide range of topics (see <http://prism.si.edu/sigroups/matculture/chronology.htm> for a list), these meetings have been the heart and soul of the Material Culture Forum.

- 56 issues of our publication

The on-line journal *Material Matters* (the last 8 issues are on the website) was first known as *The Grapevine*.

- 10 Yale-Smithsonian Seminars on Material Culture

These memorable collaborative discussions and "happenings" based on chosen themes were held annually from 1988 to 1997 (alternating meetings at Yale and SI).

- Collections-Based Research Funds

From 1994 to 1999 almost \$400,000 was awarded to 39 research projects

We also celebrate the Forum Community that cuts across disciplines and bureaus.

All of the activities I just mentioned would never have happened without the dedicated scores of Forum members who planned and presented the programs, who wrote articles for the newsletter—and helped mail it, who asked probing questions, who at and after dinners followed up on ideas that sometimes led to joint exhibitions and publications that crossed disciplines. Thanks to all, especially the eleven Chairs, the numerous members of the Steering Committee, those who have participated in programs, and to those in the Castle who have provided invaluable support.

Finally we celebrate friendships: bonds and connections that have been made through the Forum and the study of material culture. Several of us planning this event have been Forum friends since our first gathering in 1988. At every meeting, if you make the effort to reach out, you'll find new colleagues who become a source of intellectual stimulation as well as companionship and advice.

continued on p. 15

And, if you stay around long enough, you can take pride in the new books they have published, the exhibitions they have organized, the awards and honors they have won, the leadership positions they have assumed in their professional fields.

Here at the Smithsonian, some have been appointed to head their bureaus; one has been appointed Acting Under Secretary. These people—those who upheld the Institution’s mission to increase and diffuse knowledge throughout their careers and especially during this past bumpy decade—represent the soul of the Smithsonian.

As the new leaders of the Institution begin to chart a new course for the Smithsonian, may they look back at comments from a report of a 1973 Smithsonian conference to determine the Institution’s priorities. In a memo to the staff, Robert A. Brooks, Under Secretary for Administration (1972-76) under S. Dillon Ripley, wrote:

Until we can develop an internal and a public understanding of the importance of collection-oriented scholarship, we will not evoke the true meaning of the Smithsonian Institution itself.

The report then raised some questions:

What are we doing with research on collections and the exhibition of objects? What are we telling the public and what are they learning from us? What is the learning process which the Institution offers the nation?

Take heart, dear Forum friends. Maybe there’s a good time coming when the Forum can help give a stronger voice to one view of the true meaning of the Smithsonian Institution, as we ponder how the care, stewardship, study, and exhibition of our collections can help the nation and the world learn from things.¶

Cynthia Adams Hoover, Curator Emeritus, National Museum of American History, accepts the First Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture Award for Distinguished Achievement from Peter Jakab, Associate Director of Collections and Curatorial Affairs, National Air and Space Museum.

The award statue is a mounted five-legged loupe magnifying a sample of Smithsonite, the mineral named for James Smithson, the benefactor of the Smithsonian Institution.

Photo: Harold Dorwin for Smithsonian Institution



A sign at the entrance of the Grand Salon at the Renwick Gallery listed all of the different kinds of material culture that have been explored during twenty years of meetings by the Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture.

Photo: Harold Dorwin for Smithsonian Institution

First Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture Award for Distinguished Achievement

At the 20th Anniversary meeting, the Material Culture Forum presented the first Award for Distinguished Achievement to its founding member, Cynthia Adams Hoover, Curator Emeritus, National Museum of American History. What follows is the full text of the award's citation and Hoover's gracious remarks upon receiving it. The physical award, a five-legged magnifying glass or loupe mounted on a wooden pedestal, was designed by David Shayt and created by the Office of Exhibits Central. Peter Jakab, Associate Director for Collections and Curatorial Affairs at the National Air and Space Museum, presented the award.

The Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture Award for Distinguish Achievement

Cynthia Adams Hoover

May 14, 2008

The Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture Award for Distinguish Achievement recognizes extraordinary contributions to research, interpretation, and promotion of material culture studies; and furthering the mission, spirit, and reach of the Smithsonian Institution. The inaugural recipient of the award has made notable and lasting contributions in every one of these ways.

For more than four decades, this person has strived to make objects the center of their personal research, and fostered awareness in countless others of the importance of the study of artifacts as evidence, and the role of objects in interpreting history and culture. Through her fieldwork, collecting, curation of exhibitions, organization of archives, and editing and authoring publications, our honoree has left a lasting mark on her area of research specialization, the history of music. Through tireless service to the Smithsonian and other academic and cultural institutions, she has championed and helped define material culture studies as it is practiced today. Perhaps her central and most influential contribution has been the conceptualization, founding, and sustaining leadership of the Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture itself, which today we mark 20 years and 80 meetings of the Forum.

For these myriad accomplishments in support of material culture studies, it is my distinct honor and privilege to present the inaugural Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture Award for Distinguish Achievement to Cynthia Adams Hoover.

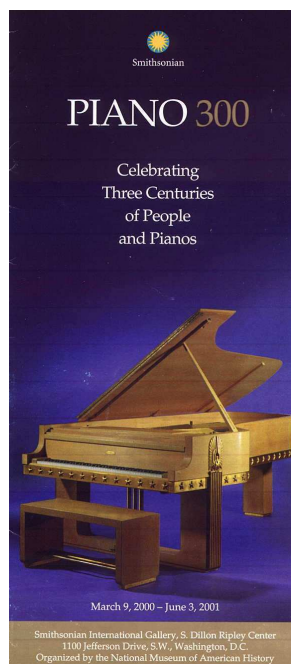
Acceptance of Distinguished Achievement Award

Cynthia Adams Hoover

Curator, Emeritus, National Museum of American History

What an unexpected thrill it was to receive the Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture Award for Distinguished Achievement at the 20th Anniversary meeting on May 14, 2008. Thanks to everyone for this honor, which was so cleverly presented by Peter Jakab from NASM, a founding member who participated in the first Forum meeting in March 1988. The beautifully-mounted Smithsonian specimen holds a place of honor in our home, thanks to the fine work of Jonathan Zastrow, Smithsonian Exhibits Central, who also made the exquisite piano action models for our PIANO 300 exhibition in 2000. The award is a tribute to all of you who kept a spark of an idea alive and flourishing.

May we continue to learn from things—and from each other. §



Poster for "Piano 300," an exhibit curated by Cynthia Adams Hoover, the first recipient of the Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture Award for Distinguished Achievement.

Image: Smithsonian Institution

Reflections on Twenty Years of the Forum

Peter L. Jakab

National Air and Space Museum

Like so many reflecting on the Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture, I can't believe it has been 20 years since we gathered for the first dinner meeting. Like National Museum of Natural History curator Mary Jo Arnoldi, I was privileged to present a paper in that first meeting of the Forum, and have attended the majority of them since.

In the chaotic swirl that life at the Smithsonian can sometimes be, the Forum has served as an intellectual and collegial way station.

One observation I would like to make at this major milestone is how remarkably consistent the Forum has been. The format, the mix of speakers, the interdisciplinary approach, the grass roots ethos of the group, and the general overall quality have remained true to the goals and spirit of the Forum for two decades. That is no small achievement in a large institution like this one. Such groups can often diverge from their original intent or simply wither because of lack of dedication to sustain them. The Forum, gladly, has avoided those pitfalls. Further, in the chaotic swirl that life at the Smithsonian can sometimes be, the Forum has served as an intellectual and collegial way station. On many occasions,

after a frustrating day in the office, I attended a meeting of the Forum, and then was reminded why I do what I do. The Forum serves as a continual expression of the wonderful collections and smart people with whom we are lucky to work.

Mary Jo Arnoldi and I share another bit of Forum history. We were the first co-chairs to take over leadership of the Forum after Cynthia Adams Hoover founded the group and, for eight years, skillfully and carefully guided it to being a vital aspect of intellectual life at the Smithsonian. Cynthia had done such a wonderful job making the Forum a valued treasure, it shouldered Mary Jo and me with the unenviable responsibility of not "breaking" it. Fortunately, we didn't break it, and the traditions and quality of the Forum have been sustained by the many subsequent chairs.

But what has really made the Forum special is the membership. The hundreds of people who have given presentations, served on the steering committee, organized meetings, performed logistical and administrative tasks, provided support from the Castle, and attended Forum meetings and dinners, exchanging in wonderful discussion and sharing interesting ideas and commentary. At its core, this collective body of scholars, curators, archivists, librarians, fellows, and others dedicated to the study of material culture are what makes the Forum, the Forum. So, on behalf of all my fellow co-chairs, past and present, I thank all of you, the membership, for continuing to make the Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture the gem that it is. §

Announcing:

Smithsonian Institution Contemporary History Colloquium 2008/09

Fall 2008 marked the inauguration of the Smithsonian Contemporary History Colloquium. The Colloquium (a revamping of the long-standing Historical Seminar on Contemporary American Science and Technology at the National Air and Space Museum) aims to promote discussion on the cultural transformations of the twentieth century, with a special focus on understanding the connections among science, technology, and American society and its relations with the rest of the world.

In pursuing this goal, the Colloquium seeks to make productive contact with a wide variety of scholarship in art and cultural history, political science, economics and other topics—within the SI, in our local scholarly community, and nationally. To sharpen discussion, the Colloquium each year will organize around several themes and invite presentations from accomplished scholars outside the immediate DC area.

Ideas about potential themes and presenters are welcome. For schedules, location and additional information, and to be placed on the mailing list, contact Allan Needell at needella@si.edu (202.633-2412).

A Tribute to David Shayt

Cynthia Adams Hoover

Curator Emeritus, National Museum of American History

“Collections are the basis of everything that history museums do,” wrote David Shayt in 2006, in his article “Artifacts of Disaster: Creating the Smithsonian’s Katrina Collection” (*Technology and Culture*, vol. 47, no. 2, April 2006).

Shayt, an Associate Curator in the National Museum of American History Division of Work and Industry, lived by these words throughout his 30 years at the Smithsonian. With his death on November 4, 2008, the Smithsonian Institution and the greater museum world have lost a passionate proponent of the importance of objects and the study of their cultural contexts in guiding the research, exhibitions, and programs in museums.

David Shayt was known for collecting and studying large clock towers with bells, lunchboxes, the art of cymbal making, ivory piano keys and billiard balls, yo-yos, coffins, Krispy Kreme, and, more recently, artifacts from Ground Zero and Hurricane Katrina.

David’s collecting can best be described as eclectic and agile. At the beginning of his Smithsonian career, he was deeply involved with hand tools, but it was not long before he was known for collecting and studying large clock towers with bells, lunchboxes, the art of cymbal making, ivory piano keys and billiard balls, yo-yos, coffins, Krispy Kreme, and more recently artifacts from Ground Zero and Hurricane Katrina.

As wide-ranging as David’s collecting was, it was strongly based on his deep interest in the history of technology and American popular culture.

When did objects become important in his life? In a 2004 (April 25) *Washington Post* article reviewing lunchbox exhibitions he had organized, David explained that “his own early lunchbox, emblazoned with nuclear submarines and a diagram showing how one worked, inspired him to become a Marine and later a historian of technology.”

A look at his life provides other clues about the origins of his interests and skills. After finishing high school in the San Francisco area, David did join the Marine Corps where he served as a security specialist in the U.S. Embassies in Guyana and Haiti. He then earned a B.A. in Communications at Humboldt State University in 1977 and briefly worked with the collections at the Landor Museum of Packaging Antiquities in San Francisco before joining the Smithsonian staff. In 1983 he received an M.A. in American Studies from George Washington University.

The Marine stint in Guyana helps to explain David’s strong interest in preserving and restoring Guyana’s public clocks and bell towers. His interest in containers like tool chests, lunchboxes, coffins, and 64-crayon boxes may have begun in his work with the Landor Museum of Packaging. His articulate presentations and pithy responses to public and news inquiries may have been honed by his studies in communications.

His passion for well-chosen objects for public spaces carried over into his private life in Gaithersburg, Maryland, where he served seven years on a Community Advisory Committee to



When the Smithsonian Institution needed someone to go to Louisiana to collect evidence of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, David Shayt and photographer Hugh Talman went.

Shayt’s sensitivity to the people behind the objects is illustrated by this photograph of a makeshift sign that he persuaded this family to give to the Smithsonian.

Image: National Museum of American History

develop Old Towne revitalization. He helped to acquire a clock tower for a future brick plaza. Typical of David's attention to detail and authenticity, he did not choose an electric clock with motorized workings but instead "a 1915 Howard 'round top' weight-driven pendulum-regulated time-and-strike mechanical clock" restored by experts in Maine whom his family visited on vacation. (*Gaithersburg Gazette*, November 19, 2008)

At the Smithsonian, David was always generous with his time, expertise, and assistance—a quality recognized in his receiving in 1996 a Smithsonian Unsung Hero Award. I can attest to David's invaluable help through my years as curator of musical instruments: notices of upcoming auctions with tools relating to music industries, arrangements for the loan of a spectacular tool chest for display in the PIANO 300 exhibition, and as an energetic companion on a field trip to Ivoryton and Deep River, Connecticut, where we collected items from an important keyboard manufacturer and visited the museum in Deep River. (David soon after wrote two articles about the ivory industry.)

In recent years David became more involved with the Material Culture Forum, including a presentation on his collection for Hurricane Katrina. As a new member of the Forum Steering Committee, he immediately proposed several ideas for programs and volunteered to co-chair the Forum's 20th anniversary meeting last May. Elsewhere in this issue you will see the results of his impressive organizational skills for that meeting. He was meticulous in every detail—ordered poster boards to show subject matter from the 20 years of meetings and turned his antennae to find a donor to provide meeting keepsakes that would be of use to all who work with objects: a small tape measure fitted with cloth tape marked in both inches and centimeters.



Material culture associated with David Shayt: ivory billiard balls and the Castle bell (being installed at right). Images: National Museum of American History/SI

One of his most lasting and noticeable contributions was his bold proposal for the Smithsonian 150th anniversary in 1996: install a clock and bell in the Smithsonian Castle Tower, something proposed in 1851 but never completed. With David's dogged and energetic presence, a donor was found. David arranged for a bell to be cast by the world-renowned Whitechapel Bell Foundry in England (and somehow also arranged for top SI Castle administrators to be in London when the bell was being cast) and then oversaw the dramatic installation by crane of the bell to the top of the Castle tower. Today when you hear the bell striking the hour as you walk down the Mall, remember our colleague David Shayt who engineered this to happen. As David commented, "even though it's the National Mall, we also think of it as a village green, and the bell will serve as a community sound." David believed in the importance of objects and the crucial role the Smithsonian plays in the preservation of culture through objects. "There's an accurate perception that we are forever," he told the *Post* in 1992, "that we will care for—not necessarily exhibit but care for—and honor an object eternally. That perception of immortality is very precious to people." (*Washington Post*, November 12, 2008).

We greatly miss our colleague David Shayt, whose life and work represent the best of the Smithsonian's promise to collect, care for, and interpret its objects for its national and international public. §



PLAN TO ATTEND: “Collecting Popular Culture”

January 27, 2009

National Portrait Gallery, Donald W. Reynolds Center, 8th and F Street, NW

3:30 p.m. – 4:15 p.m. TOUR of “Ballyhoo! Posters as Portraiture,” with Wendy Wick Reaves, Curator of Prints and Drawings, National Portrait Gallery

National Portrait Gallery, 2nd floor west, open and free to all

4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION, McEvoy Auditorium, sub-level 1

- ❖ Welcoming Remarks by Martin Sullivan, Director, National Portrait Gallery
- ❖ Moderated by Wendy Wick Reaves, Curator of Prints and Drawings, National Portrait Gallery
- ❖ “Ray Guns, Spaceships, and Action Figures,” Margaret Weitekamp, National Air and Space Museum
- ❖ “Imported Textiles, Local Meaning,” Bryna Freyer, Curator, National Museum of African Art
- ❖ “But Is it History?” Ellen Roney Hughes, Curator, Division of Music, Sports, and Entertainment History, National Museum of American History

6:15 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. WINE RECEPTION & INFORMAL DISCUSSION: Reynolds Center Multipurpose Rooms, 1st floor, open and free to all

7:15 p.m. – 8:45 p.m. BUFFET DINNER & DISCUSSIONS: Kogod Courtyard, by reservation, \$30.00 per person (Contact Stephanie Hornbeck at shornbec.si.edu to reserve a space.)

Coming in March: “The Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship Program,” at the Hirshhorn (HMSG)

Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture

Steering Committee, 2008-2009

Stephanie Hornbeck (NMAfA), Chair
April Parreco (NPM), Events Coordinator
Margaret Weitekamp (NASM), *Material Matters* Editor
John Franklin (NMAAHC)
Bryna Freyer (NMAfA)
Cécile Ganteaume (NMAI)
Anne Collins Goodyear (NPG)
Cynthia Hoover (emeritus NMAH, founder of the Forum)
Ann Juneau (SIL-NMNH)
Adrienne Kaeppler (NMNH)
Milena Kalinovska (HMSG)
Christine Mullen Kreamer (NMAfA)
Dianne Niedner (OUHC/OUSAM)
Nancy Pope (NPM)
David Shayt (NMAH)
Mary Augusta Thomas (SIL)
William Tompkins (NCP)

MATERIAL MATTERS

is created by the Smithsonian Forum on Material Culture. It is available free on the internet to all interested staff of the Smithsonian Institution, as well as to colleagues in other institutions and to members of the general public.

Managing editor:

Margaret A. Weitekamp
National Air and Space Museum
Smithsonian Institution
P.O. Box 37012, MRC 311
Independence Ave. at 6th St., SW
Washington, DC 20013-7012
(202) 633-2416 Fax (202) 275-1909
e-mail: WeitekampM@si.edu