



**Media only:** Laura Baptiste (202) 633-8494

July 28, 2009

**Media Web site:** [americanart.si.edu/pr](http://americanart.si.edu/pr)

**Media preview:** Tuesday, Aug. 4; 3 – 5 p.m.

## **Biennial Exhibition at the Renwick Gallery Presents Work by Four Artists Who Question Traditional Notions of Craft**

“Staged Stories: Renwick Craft Invitational 2009,” on view at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum from Aug. 7 through Jan. 3, 2010, presents the work of ceramic artist Christyl Boger, fiber artist Mark Newport, glass artist Mary Van Cline and ceramic artist SunKoo Yuh. These artists create objects that break through the barriers between fine art and craft by embracing a narrative purpose that deals with contemporary issues. This exhibition explores how these artists use elements of theater, including disguise and staging, in the conceptualization and presentation of their art.

“The Renwick Gallery has a long history of presenting exhibitions that bring to light major shifts in contemporary studio craft, and the Renwick Craft Invitational series has emerged as a significant force in the field,” said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. “‘Staged Stories’ tracks a sea change in craft art. The four artists in this exhibition depart in significant ways from long-standing craft traditions by discarding the baseline rationale of crafts—their functionality. Performance and theater are more urgent inspirations.”

“Staged Stories” is the fourth in a biennial exhibition series—established in 2000—that honors the creativity and talent of craft artists working today. The exhibition consists of 58 artworks. Selected artworks can be seen on the museum’s Web site, [americanart.si.edu/exhibitions](http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions).

Kate Bonansinga, director and chief curator of the Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts at the University of Texas at El Paso, is the guest curator of the exhibition with Robyn Kennedy, chief of the Renwick Gallery, and Nicholas Bell, curator, coordinating the exhibition at the Renwick Gallery. The four artists included in the exhibition were chosen by Bonansinga; Jane Milosch, Renwick Gallery curator; and Paul J. Smith, director emeritus of the Museum of Arts and Design.

“Boger, Newport, Van Cline and Yuh create narrative artworks that confound old categories in the world of contemporary craft,” said Bell. “Working in the traditional media of clay, fiber and glass, these four artists explore the boundaries of their media to communicate in new ways. As the exhibition title suggests, theatrical elements, including props, costumes and narration, bind together these varied works.”

Boger (b. 1959), an assistant professor at Indiana University in Bloomington, creates idealized ceramic figurines that incorporate contemporary props such as inflatable swimming pool toys. These nude figures, which exude vulnerability, combine classical Greek sculpture, 18th-century Meissen palace porcelains and contemporary kitsch. Most of the figures crouch as if to hide from the viewer, exposed rather than empowered by their nakedness. Tiny areas of luster decorate fingers, toes and other body parts like insubstantial costumes. Each figure appears introspective while also observing the viewer, and Boger capitalizes on this theatrical exchange of stares.

Newport (b. 1964), artist-in-residence and head of the fiber department at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., examines issues of masculinity through knitted superhero costumes that mix adolescent male subject matter with craft techniques usually associated with women. Newport uses characters such as Batman or the Rawhide Kid, which first appeared in comic books and were further popularized in movies and television, with common materials like acrylic yarn, to affirm his message about the influence and pervasiveness of the popular. Sometimes Newport stars in his own performances, knitting in ordinary public places while wearing one of his costumes.

Van Cline (b. 1954), who lives and works in Seattle, creates large black-and-white photographs of austere landscapes and encases them in glass to create staged environments. Populating these landscapes are idealized figures, often masked or cloaked, which evoke an enduring stillness. Van Cline combines Eastern and Western influences, including classical Greek statuary and Noh theater—a stylized form of Japanese musical drama. Her work explores ideas such as ritual, solitude, psychological reflection and catharsis, and she often incorporates the viewer into the constructed theatrical space.

Yuh (b. 1960), an associate professor at the University of Georgia in Athens, creates densely layered ceramic sculptures and drawings that compress multiple figures into a complex story. His work is largely driven by implied narratives that often suggest sociopolitical critiques. Korean art, Buddhist and Confucian beliefs, German expressionist painting and the theater of the absurd inform some aspects of Yuh’s imagery. The German expressionist influence in his work can be seen in the elongated figures, unsettling spatial configurations and the acrid colors that give Yuh’s ceramic

figures a forlorn, even desperate feel. This anxiety is communicated by the layered and dripping glazes, a technique based on that of Chinese Tang dynasty funerary sculptures.

### **Publication**

The exhibition catalog, published by the museum and Scala Publishers Ltd., includes a foreword by Broun, essays by Bonansinga and biographies for each artist. The book is available in the museum's store and online for \$24.95 (softcover).

### **Public Programs**

Several free public programs are planned in conjunction with the exhibition, including an Artists' Roundtable, moderated by Bonansinga, Friday, Sept. 25, at 6 p.m. in the McEvoy Auditorium in the museum's main building located at Eighth and F streets N.W.

Other programs, which will take place at the Renwick Gallery, include a talk, "Superheroes and Alter Egos," with Newport Friday, Aug. 7, at noon; a Family Day, Saturday, Aug. 8, from 1 to 4 p.m.; a gallery talk with Bonansinga Friday, Sept. 25, at noon; a gallery talk with Fern Bleckner, Renwick Gallery deputy chief, Thursday, Nov. 5, at noon; and a talk about Korean folktales with Young-Key Kim-Renaud, chair of the Korean Studies department at The George Washington University Sunday, Nov. 8, at 3 p.m. Starting Sept. 1, a special resource room will feature "Sit 'n' Knit," an ongoing opportunity for visitors to consult with local knitting and crocheting experts, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. the first and third Tuesdays and from 1 to 3 p.m. the second and fourth Sundays. Details and complete program descriptions are available online at [americanart.si.edu](http://americanart.si.edu).

### **Credit**

The Ryna and Melvin Cohen Family Foundation generously supports "Staged Stories: Renwick Craft Invitational 2009."

### **About the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum**

The Smithsonian American Art Museum's branch for craft and decorative arts, the Renwick Gallery, is located on Pennsylvania Avenue at 17th Street N.W. It is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Metrorail station: Farragut North (Red line) and Farragut West (Blue and Orange lines). Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Web site: [americanart.si.edu](http://americanart.si.edu).

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**Note to editors:** Selected high-resolution images for publicity only may be downloaded from <ftp://saam-press@ftp.si.edu>. Call (202) 633-8530 for the password. Additional information about the exhibition, including short biographies about each artist, is available from the museum's online press room at [americanart.si.edu/pr](http://americanart.si.edu/pr).