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Smithsonian American Art Museum Announces Four Artists Selected for Its Renwick Craft Invitational 2011

A panel of three distinguished experts in American crafts and decorative arts has selected ceramic artist Cliff Lee, furnituremaker Matthias Pliessnig, glass artist Judith Schaechter and silversmith Ubaldo Vitali for the Renwick Craft Invitational 2011. Each artist is a master of his or her selected medium and creates artworks that combine historical techniques with contemporary forms.

“The Smithsonian American Art Museum’s biennial Renwick Craft Invitational has become a wonderful forum for presenting exceptional artists from across the United States who are well established in their respective craft fields but deserve greater recognition on a national level,” said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The artists were chosen by Nicholas Bell, curator at the museum’s Renwick Gallery; Ulysses Dietz, senior curator of decorative arts at the Newark Museum in New Jersey; and Andrew Wagner, editor-in-chief of ReadyMade magazine.

“The four extraordinary artists who will be featured in the 2011 Renwick Craft Invitational create works of superior craftsmanship that address the classic craft notion of function without sacrificing a contemporary aesthetic,” said Bell.

Lee (b. 1951), a neurosurgeon by training who works in Stevens, Pa., creates elegant porcelain vessels with the exactitude of a doctor, often using his knowledge of chemistry to recreate medieval Chinese glazes long thought lost to history. Pliessnig (b. 1978), a furniture maker in Philadelphia, uses boat-building techniques in new ways to create graceful forms with curved wood strips that may have up to 5,000 points of contact without the aid of hardware. Schaechter (b. 1961), a glass artist based in Philadelphia, brings a wealth of knowledge about traditional stained-glass practice to her moody windows. Vitali (b. 1944), a fourth-generation silversmith and master conservator of historic silver in Maplewood, N.J., uses classical techniques he learned in Rome to create luminous works for popes, kings and presidents.

Bell is the curator for the exhibition. A catalog will accompany the exhibition with contributions by Bell, Dietz and Wagner. The Renwick Craft Invitational 2011 will be the spring exhibition at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The Renwick Craft Invitational 2011 is made possible through The Ryna and Melvin Cohen Family Foundation Endowment.

The biennial exhibition series at the Renwick Gallery was established in 2000 to honor the creativity and talent of craft artists working today. The first in the series, “Five Women in Craft,” featured Myra Mimplitsch Gray, Mary Jackson, Janel Jacobson, Sondra Sherman and Consuelo Jiménez Underwood. Subsequent exhibitions were “Four Discoveries in Craft” in 2002, which showcased the work of James Koehler, Gyöngy Laky, Kristina Logan and Kim Rawdin; “From the Ground Up” in 2007, which featured the work of Paula Bartron, Jocelyn Châteauvert, Beth Lipman and Beth Cavener Stichter; and “Staged Stories” in 2009, which includes Christyl Boger, Mark Newport, Mary Van Cline and SunKoo Yuh.

About the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with approximately 41,500 works of art in all media spanning more than three centuries. The 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). Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Web site: americanart.si.edu. Follow the museum on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, ArtBabble, iTunes and YouTube.

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