

BLURRING THE BOUNDRIES: APPLYING GENDER STUDIES AND MATERIAL  
CULTURE STUDIES TO “FINE ART,” DECORATIVE ART, AND CRAFT

By  
Lisa A. Schaup

A MASTER'S PROJECT  
Presented to the Arts and Administration Program  
And the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts  
  
Summer 2005

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Research Advisor \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Douglas Blandy, Professor and Associate Dean of the School of  
Architecture and Allied Arts



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## VITA

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Corvallis Arts Center, Corvallis, Oregon. 2003.  
Memorial Union Quad, Corvallis, Oregon. 2002.  
ArtsEdge, Seattle, Washington. 1997.  
Lighthouse Roasters, Seattle, Washington. 1997.  
Studio of Annie Girgich, Seattle, Washington. 1996.  
Columbia Winery, Woodinville, Washington. 1995.  
Façère Jewelry Art, Seattle, Washington. 1994.  
Opus 204, Seattle, Washington. 1993.

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Maude Kerns Art Center, Development and Youth Art Arena committees, Art in the Vineyard. Eugene, Oregon. 2005.  
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#### ABSTRACT

The decorative arts and crafts have long been relegated to second-class status in art museums and art history education due to the perception within the ‘high’ or fine art community of museum administrators, art academics, connoisseurs, and audiences of these forms as “feminine.” Recently, however, progressive shifts have occurred in attitudes. Women are playing an increasingly larger role in the arts and culture sector; thus they may have a major impact on the philosophical shift which is blurring the boundaries between art and craft. However, there are still considerable biases within the artistic sector against decorative art and craft. Material culture studies and gender studies offer lines of inquiry that redirect the ways objects are interpreted and valued. By reviewing and analyzing literature on material culture and gender in the arts from the 1970s to the present, this qualitative historical inquiry illuminates issues regarding the way women and some men in the decorative art and craft sectors are breaking cultural barriers. This research project suggests the ways arts professionals can continue to cross cultural barriers and change perceptions about art and craft through the use of gender and material cultural studies.



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Kind permission to take and use this photo came from Larry Fong, Assistant Director and Curator [Figure 1]

AMERICAN GALLERY AT THE JORDEN SCHNITZER MUSEUM OF ART  
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON  
EUGENE, OREGON

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The decorative arts and crafts have long been relegated to second class status in art museums and art history education due to the perception within the ‘high’ or fine art community of museum administrators, art academics, connoisseurs, and audiences that these forms of art are “feminine.” Decorative arts and crafts have been with us for a long time. The cave paintings at Lascaux, Scythian gold jewelry, and Cycladic feminine statuary were but a few examples. Artifacts from ancient societies were often the only way we can begin to understand and appreciate their cultures and aesthetics. Some of these objects were utilitarian and were imbued with a style of form or decoration which inspires respect and a desire to connect to people from the distant past. Our common humanity was evoked. Perhaps these works were created by both men and women.

In more recent history, time spent on various tasks became more specialized by gender. In patriarchal societies, most women’s work and art was done in the home, while men labored in more public areas, in more competitive arenas. So, recognition for the arts produced by women was slower. In Dr. Sandra Flood’s article on Canadian craft, she wrote that one of the conclusions of her research was, even though she did not set out on her research with a gendered focus, “Feminist re-evaluation of male generated histories and practice has led me to speculate that the association of women and craft in the eyes of the male world of government and museums may have seriously undermined craft’s status and credibility, and distorted its history” (as cited in Jean Johnson, 2002, p.31). The lack of fair appreciation and representation of women’s works continued today in

many modern cultures as an artifact of our past cultural development. Perhaps this old perception of decorative arts and crafts today as “feminine,” or “functional” inhibited appreciation of these art forms within the modern “high” or “fine arts” communities of museum administrators, art academics, connoisseurs, and audiences. This research sought at first, to define the role of jewelry as a form of art in the fine art arena and thus, will frequently mention this form of art. But focusing on this form of art did not allow the inclusion of other media in which women create objects. This study did not intend to cover the entire scope of decorative art and craft media, such as quilting, embroidery, woodworking, stained glass making, hand-printing, bookbinding, and illustration. The research did pull out intriguing examples within particular disciplines which reinforced that material and gender studies are essential ingredients for the understanding of the history of women as visual artists.

Progressive shifts occurred in attitudes toward women and crafters. Women played an increasingly larger role in the arts and culture sector; thus they had an impact on the philosophical shift which blurred the boundaries between art and craft. However, there were still considerable biases within the artistic sector against decorative art and craft. Material culture studies and gender studies offered lines of inquiry that redirect the ways objects were interpreted and valued. By reviewing and analyzing literature on material culture and gender in the arts from the 1970s to the present, this qualitative historical inquiry illuminated issues regarding the way women and some men in the decorative art and craft sectors were breaking cultural barriers. This research project suggested the ways arts professionals continued to cross cultural barriers and change perceptions through the use of gender and material cultural studies.

There was recent trend in art institutions to recognize crafts and the decorative arts as legitimate branches of art history (Whalen, 2001-2002). Institutions such as the Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., undertook the mission and scholarship to soften the division between the fine arts and craft. Yet the Renwick was still segregated from the Smithsonian art museums on the Washington Mall (Stevens, 1999). How was academia and the museum community incorporating this shift toward greater appreciation and representation? The decorative arts are material culture, so it was beneficial for scholars and art institutions to consider material culture studies as an approach to understanding art in its historical context (Hoffman, 1999) as a way to understand and appreciate aesthetics in daily life.

Would arts professionals be more willing to accommodate this shift considering that craft could be perceived as an accessible and personal art form? It was common to recognize movements in painting and to use these to understand history. Public works—paintings, frescoes, statuary, and architecture—may commemorate political events or religious/mythical stories. The decorative arts were material culture and offer more personal and individual stories than for example, a work of ‘great’ art that was associated with a great institution. In addition, the gender issues surrounding the study of this art were neglected in art history studies (Risatti, 1996). Women as artists were historically less visible and a less represented in art museums and art history textbooks. This study addressed the gender gap by suggesting that material studies would help art historians and others value and elevate the decorative arts and crafts to a worthy level. Patriarchal power structures that created a notion that crafts are material, commercial, domestic, or feminine in nature remain a barrier to including them in the category of high art.

Historically, the leadership in academia and fine art institutions has reflected and perpetuated this bias (Whalen, 2001-2002) because that leadership has not involved women on an artistic or leadership level. The study of material culture in an art history context could reach across many fields in academia, such as history, folklore, cultural geography, art history, archeology, sociology, museum studies, and anthropology (Turgeon, 2001-2002). The field of gender studies provided a lens through which feminist philosophy has affected art history and promoted decorative arts and crafts as art. The field of material studies informed this study in that it provided a rich social framework for understanding to the way women were involved in the visual arts as decorators, crafters, and appreciators because material studies did not neglect art that is functional or decorative in design.

Arts leaders hoped to extend art appreciation to larger audiences and to engage the interest of the every citizen and her/his family in large metropolitan as well as small community museums as well as private business galleries. Ultimately, to increase human understanding and tolerance of ideas, history, and ways of life, the arts professionals must embrace decorative arts and crafts from all cultures as works of art, in the fullest sense. This study attempted to identify key concepts from the literature and from contemporary interviews from arts professionals that relate to crafts and the decorative arts. These concepts could provide an architecture that bridges the gaps between appreciations for different forms of visual art. This ‘architecture’ was complex and not entirely resolved or by any means entirely sturdy in that there were still ongoing conversations within the fields that deal with the decorative arts and crafts but ultimately what emerged was that there needed to be better education and written histories of these forms of art.



### *Purpose for the Study*

The purpose of this study was to explore to what extent the boundaries between decorative art, craft, and fine art were blurring. This purpose was explored within the context of material culture studies and gender studies. The findings of this study should encourage art educators and arts administrators to take a broad approach to the appreciation of material culture such as craft. Specifically, the objective of this study was to identify changing trends and to develop ideas that could contribute to the status and frequency of exhibits which include crafts and decorative arts.

### *Significance of the Study*

The significance of this study was that it focused attention of some museum and art professionals on the issue of how material culture is presented, explained, and appreciated in museums and galleries. Through interviews with the researcher, these leaders shared their observations of current practices and ideas for future work. The synthesis of this work encouraged more integration of decorative arts and crafts with “fine arts” and offer specific approaches to continuing improvements.

Part of the equation of the problem of fair representation of decorative art and craft lay in the definitions that these word evoke. This research explored the meanings of words such as, material culture, craft, decorative art in chapter three. Because there were so many different interpretations of these words and because these definitions were changing, it would have been difficult to create a simple list of definitions here.

If decorative arts and crafts, accessible and easily understood arts, were given more visibility in respected museums, then audiences for art as a whole could be larger and stronger. The ultimate significance and benefit of the study would be for the public to

gain a better understanding of all art forms by recognizing quality works in whatever context or media they appear.

### *Conceptual Framework*

This study was descriptive. It was, in part, a historical inquiry to discover how craft and decorative art is understood as an art form. The study explored the following:

- academic, curatorial, and art educational perceptions and interpretations of ancient, modern and contemporary craft as objects of art
- art institutions and their portrayal of craft and decorative art as art
- scholarship in the field of material studies and the decorative arts
- the role of gender in the decorative art field

Perception, scholarship, and portrayal of crafts were related through gender and class because some crafts were associated with men (particularly metallurgy and furniture making), whereas women were often associated with textiles (Whalen, 2001-2002). It was important to note that not only were women involved in the creation of certain decorative arts and crafts but also that many of these forms of art were associated with the home, the domestic sphere, and rural life. Therefore, they may have not be appreciated financially in the same way that other forms of art were (Flood, 2002, p. 31). Domestic and craft objects might not have been valued as much as objects within the public realm because there might be a financial and intellectual devaluation of these objects based on traditional values around the 'home,' i.e. who is in the home, who takes care of the people in the home, and what objects the people in the home use to accomplish those goals, i.e. crafts women (Flood, 2002, p. 31).

The social class of an artist or collector might have also determined the development of skill or preference. For example, an artist who had access to the tools and knowledge of a craft via a family member who was also a skilled artisan, may have had an advantage of a family reputation when seeking to provide a living for oneself. This was the case with May Morris, the daughter of William Morris. Because her family rose to the elite, she had power and access that many other artisans did not (Callen, 1979, p.2). Thus, gender and class provided insight into a longstanding division between art and craft within art collections. Some scholars argued that gender is class. Examining the differences between collectors and collections associated with femininity, domesticity, and the home (for example, textiles or pottery) and collectors and collections associated with masculinity (weapons or large paintings, for example) revealed powerful gender influences. Some forms of art included works made by both men and women. The art of jewelry was associated with both spheres. This study returned often to jewelry because it was a craft that crosses boundaries in profound cultural ways. Jewelry aside from being art, was also a commodity, often a gift and a sign of personal identity and style. Therefore, it was a prime example of material culture that associated itself with ornament and adornment. Ornament and adornment were both features of other examples of decorative arts and crafts which also adorned the home, and the domestic, and the personal sphere. This association with the domestic atmosphere and art in the public museum blurred the boundaries between art and everyday life.

As women became more frequent practitioners in arts management, academia, and art, they appeared to be producing a shift in the cultural understanding of craft as an art form. Exhibiting the decorative object from the private “feminine” sphere facilitated a

shift in attitudes within the public sphere. Mini “blockbuster shows” such as the recent Fabergé show at the Portland Art Museum often featured jewelry which probably had women involved in the process of creating, appreciating, collecting, and demanding this art. Contemporary art had blurred the line between craft and fine art partly because some artists were taking a mixed media approach to their work (Riedel, 1996). The literature within the decorative arts field and the contemporary jewelry realm revealed a strong push toward the blurring of traditional definitions of art and craft. The perceptions of art were affected by the grouping of objects in the exhibitions of public institutions. The decorative object from the private sphere facilitated a shift in attitudes within the public sphere. A greater understanding of these objects through major exhibitions mounted by arts professionals was changing culture and blurring the boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art.

Academic institutions trained art professionals and provide important insights to students through exposure to teaching and research. Perhaps there was a need to change the way art history was taught. Rigorous scholarship and critical thinking could reframe art to be more inclusive of art objects which had traditionally been called crafts. As more women become art history academicians, it may be that greater attention will be given to decorative arts and crafts. In the 1980s the new art history sought to include designed objects and commercial art by categorizing art as “Visual Culture,” but this movement failed to include materiality and the very qualities that relate art to everyday life (Attifield, 2000). Material culture studies, which provided an interdisciplinary approach to the history of collected objects, could effect meaningful change toward the attitude of women’s contribution to the arts and toward the attitude of craftspeople of any gender.

The purpose of this argument was to prove that it was not only women's work which is held at a lower status in the art museum but it was that work associated with the home, the domestic sphere, or rural or everyday life, i.e. crafts and decorative arts, was held at this lower status because that area was more closely associate with the female gender. Certainly, women artists were a large part of this group and thus this could account for their apparent absence in art and art historical education. Gender and class were also important in terms of art collecting. Women, as they gained recognition and income equity in work outside the home, may have created more demand for the past and current work of women artists and crafters.

## CHAPTER II

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore to what extent the boundaries between decorative art, craft, and fine art were blurring. This purpose was explored within the context of material culture studies and gender studies. Specifically, the objective of this study was to identify changing trends and to develop ideas that could contribute to the status and frequency of exhibits which include crafts and decorative arts. The purpose of this study was achieved with the following qualitative research design which relied on an extensive literature review and interviews with current arts professionals. The findings of this study should encourage art educators and arts administrators to take a broad approach to appreciation of material culture.

The preliminary ideas for selecting these research methods are from personal experiences. I have been a “craftsperson(bench goldsmith)/artist/designer” who has been involved in the jewelry industry since I was sixteen. During my life, I observed that some art institutions and support systems devalued skilled work. I was also an art history student with emphasis on Pacific Northwest Contemporary Art and Pacific Northwest and other Native American Art, (B.A. Art History 2002), and I was a Laurel intern in museum collections management at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. I believe that a qualitative approach, the combination of interpretivist, constructivist, feminist and postmodern, and the critical inquiry (Neuman, 2003, pp. 75 -87) mode were best suited for this research.

During the research phase, arts professionals helped to identify current approaches about the integration of decorative arts and crafts. Ideas and methods for continuing the momentum of progress were outcomes of the study.

This study positioned itself within an interpretive critical theory approach with constructivist ideals. This methodology lent itself to the study because interpretative and critical inquiry at a meso-theoretical (Neuman, 2003, p. 53) level had the ability to examine the current cross sectional context within which a shift in the philosophical perception of craft as art and occurs. A critical component of this study was the examination the influences that postmodernist gender roles had on perceptions and interpretations of craft within the art museum. Grounded theory ( p. 52) assisted in analyzing data found in a historical literary analysis and contemporary interviews to develop a guide for the museology field.

Although boundaries and categories become less distinct for collectors, connoisseurs, curators, and audiences within the art museum, recent research literature had explored only nominally the role gender might currently play in academia and museum management. Yet a philosophical shift had implications for the way valuations were set for cultural objects. Considering that a major shift in perception could produce cultural change within the arts and society, this research looked at the way gender and material cultural studies change perceptions of the decorative arts and crafts.

Ideals surrounding the word craft had multiple influences yet there were still dominant constructions which promote gender inequities. These constructions and the opposing reality were important in this inquiry. Understanding the context in which this

reality occurred within an obscured knowledge set (concepts pulled from the research that are not necessarily obvious), assist and inform perceptions of the participants.

Observations and interviews helped to structure the evolving design of the qualitative research which had an open ended result based on small measures of achievement. The study raised questions and heightened awareness that could foster positive action creating a new gender dynamic in the decorative arts, crafts, and fine arts field. This purpose was achieved by answering the following questions.

#### *Main Research Questions*

The strategy for researching the following questions was descriptive and explanatory (Neuman, 2003, pp. 30-31) in nature. This study incorporated historical inquiry using examples of decorative art and/or craft museums, interviews, and literature analysis.

- ❖ The main question asks if art museums have begun to view the decorative arts and crafts as legitimate art, equal in value to “high art”

Sub-questions within this larger question are:

- Would the inclusion of material cultural studies within art history education support and encourage a view of the decorative arts and crafts as genuine art?
- Would the study of gender in relation to the decorative arts and crafts facilitate this shift?
- Are art museum directors, curators, and art academia applying material culture and gender studies to the arts and crafts and what difference is this making in the way arts and crafts are viewed?



Since this research delved into the definition of art and examined its social constructs, a separate chapter defined the use and origins of terms such as fine art, craft, decorative art, material cultural studies, gender, class, contemporary art, and art museum. The scope of this study was limited by the number of sample cases included. The study used interviews with arts practitioners as a research instrument. A limitation of this study was that it was not applicable to generalization because of the small numbers of examples. A bias regarding the objectives of this research was that it sought to contribute to the field of museum studies and that it advocated for decorative arts and crafts to be displayed in the context of fine art. It also advocated for material cultural studies and gender studies to be included in art historical studies. The objective of this project was to provide further understanding of gender and domestic constructs which have created damaging perceptions regarding the existence of women in fine art and crafters of any gender in the decorative arts.

### *Research Design*

The research approach for this qualitative study was explanatory and descriptive. The researcher interviewed arts practitioners such as, directors, collection managers, a curator, an artist, and an art educator. Substantiating evidence was gathered through literature analysis and historical inquiry that blends the historic with current understanding. The literature review employed historical inquiry. The literature discussed contributes cultural context pertains to the following areas of research: the history of women in arts and crafts movements and periods and contexts of philosophical shifts in attitudes regarding decorative art and craft. The historical shifts regarding the arts and

crafts discussion provides a perspective from which to examine the current atmosphere in which the "working arts" and skilled work were valued.

Incorporating historical, contextual understanding, and understanding the significance of objects and ideas as a past culture would have understood them produced a rich base of research credibility and authenticity. Historical evidence allowed an interpretation of the past for present use. The references discussed in this literature review demonstrate the persuasive qualities of historical inquiry and the way in which it benefited this master's project focusing on the decorative arts, gender perceptions, and material culture.

If there was a current trend for art museums within the United States to push for more inclusive art education, why were the decorative arts and crafts still relegated to second class status or segregated in the displays of an art museum? Why were they still separate? This study examined the roles arts professionals, educators, collectors, donors, and art institutions played in influencing and favoring certain forms of art over others. An accurate reflection of contemporary views on the issue of art vs. craft required research participants (arts professionals) who were willing to take part in an interview or questionnaire. A small selection of individuals, such as educators, directors, curators, collection managers, and artists chose to participate.

### *Data Collection and Analysis Procedures*

#### *Overview*

The collection of data for this research project was qualitative. Evidence was gathered, coded and analyzed in order to construct a theory that emerged from the interpretation. In order to explore processes and events that had affected attitudes toward

craft and decorative art, data collection included an extensive literature review of documents that explored a current shift from high art to inclusive art. The research used historical inquiry and contemporary evidence to draw parallels and differences between past and present conversations about the decorative arts and crafts. As a result, it provided contextual historical understanding of the working arts, crafts, and decorative arts and established a foundation for a cross-sectional (Neuman, 2003, p. 21) snapshot of current movements within the sector. Final synthesis of the evidence informed a concluding chapter, highlighting the best practices regarding the inclusion of the decorative arts and arts and crafts within the traditional exclusionary fine and high art arena. It was hoped that those practices will advance social understandings regarding the participation of women and craftspeople in art.

#### *Data Collection instruments*

The tools applied in this research project include interviews, documents, and photographs. The interview research tool (see appendix B) included open ended questions that asked how the interviewee's institution is handling objects that were considered craft or decorative art. The interviews (see appendix A) were conducted either in person or by e-mail. All employed the same letter so that there was consistency. Documents and photographs were coded and appropriately filed using the document analysis tool (see appendix C). These documents included articles, catalogues, and other relevant items including photographs and brochures.

#### *Recruitment instrument and consent forms*

A recruitment letter was sent out to explain the goal of the research and to enlist professional experts in the field. Recruitment letters targeted arts practitioners in

institutions and fields, such as: an art museum, a craft museum, Universities, and working artists. Participants included individuals such as a professor, two directors, a curator, collection managers, and an artist.

#### *Data Collection and disposition procedures*

The collection of data involved constant reflection through notes and memos. Literature was collected from books, catalogues, brochures, the Web, articles, and press releases. These literature sources were identified through bibliographies, key word and author searches on the University of Oregon library and Google Web sites. Interviews also informed the literature review and provided current views on the subjects concerning this research. Participants were identified through personal and scholarly contacts which were attained while the researcher was in graduate school at the University of Oregon. The participants were asked seven semi-structured questions about the views they held on the ways decorative art and craft are perceived in their field or institution. The collection process informed a developing analytical interpretation of a significant shift in perception regarding craft and decorative art. The research was refined to focus on emerging themes that support developed recommendations in chapter six.

#### *Limitations and Biases of the Study*

Information obtained from arts professionals by the researcher depended upon the ability of individual professionals to provide information in a timely manner. There may have been barriers associated with interviewees' willingness to consider craft and decorative arts as a legitimate form of art. Some interviewees declined to sign the consent form. Findings indicate that there was a lack of understanding of the decorative arts and crafts because they were associated with material culture, gender, personal style, rural

life, and the home. Thus, one might conclude that there was a bias against art traditionally associated with women in Western culture. Now, however, contemporary artists and arts administrators were pushing the gender boundaries forward by exhibiting nontraditional materials. Material cultural studies and gender studies benefited art history by allowing them to become more inclusive of all forms of art and all the creators of those forms of art.

### *Outcome*

The outcome of the project was a set of recommendations that could enable the incorporation of crafts and decorative arts into the “fine art” setting. Chapter three contributed to the current understanding of the definitions and phrases associated with ‘fine’ art, decorative arts and crafts. From this chapter we learned that there were many ways to look at these definitions but that gender and material culture studies offered a more inclusive way of understanding decorative art and craft as art. Chapter four was an historical inquiry into the role of women and the decorative arts, crafts and contemporary art. Chapter five contributed to this study with an analysis of interviews of current arts practitioners and their views regarding the decorative arts and crafts in relation to ‘fine’ art, gender studies, and material culture studies. The historical studies and interviews reviewed and analyzed in this study were important to this research because they showed that the old arts and crafts controversy is alive and well, no matter how antiquated.

The final chapter, six, consisted of recommendations produced by this study and offered a multi-faceted way to approach the interpretation of the “working-arts” and provided the means for broadening perceptions across the gender, social, economic, and

material cultural aspects of women and craftspeople working in art. Writings within the decorative arts field and the contemporary craft realm revealed a strong push toward the blurring of traditional definitions of art and craft as well as a desire to find the language to critique decorative art and craft. Craft and decorative art appeared to have histories which were individual and personal therefore it is important to recognize craft histories and document contemporary perceptions as well as the stories of crafters today. The recommendations suggested in this project target individuals within art practices such as museum directors, curators, educators, artists, critics, curators, exhibition proprietors, art historians, art administrators, collectors, and collection managers. These recommendations included questions to ask when considering this form of art within respected fields which were demonstrated distributors and influencers of culture and taste. There were some recommended resources for further research regarding the decorative arts and crafts.

## CHAPTER III

### The Division between “High Art,” Decorative Art, and Craft

....why don't we discard the word 'art' and replace it with the word 'work'?

Milton Glaser, 1989 (as cited in Bayley, 1989, p. 2)

The purpose of this study was to explore to what extent the boundaries between decorative art, craft, and fine art were blurring. This purpose was explored within the context of material culture studies and gender studies. The findings of this study should encourage art educators and arts administrators to take a broad approach to the appreciation of material culture such as craft. Specifically, the objective of this study was to identify changing trends and to develop ideas that could contribute to the status and frequency of exhibits which include crafts and decorative arts.

This literature review described the definitions/meanings of certain words and phrases, as well as the attitudes, which had become associated with those words. This review also included the historical documents, which affected attitudes contributing to the treatment of “material culture” art within the milieu of art historical studies and eventually the art museum. Describing the classification of art objects was controversial because some commonly used terms, such as “decorative arts,” reflect nostalgia for a feminine aesthetic in everyday life and a subtle recognition of class values. This nostalgia and class awareness affected the way in which we describe the ordinary and extraordinary objects around us. Extraordinary works of beauty and quality had everyday uses, improve quality of life, and define culture both historically and currently. “Craft”

was often viewed as feminine, domestic, or amateur. Language, especially certain customary words and phrases, could influence attitudes about art values and the placement of decorative art and craft within or outside “fine art” settings.

### *Art for the Art Museum*

If we looked at jewelry again as an example of a contemporary craft category, one finds a frustration in the contemporary jewelry field that was exhibited by Bruce Metcalf's interview with former contemporary jewelry gallery owner Susan Cummins. Cummins believed that collectors and artists had too few venues in which to communicate. She thought there was a need for museums to take on the role of educating the public about contemporary jewelry and that artists should be more involved with creating an audience for these objects (Metcalf, 2003). Connoisseurship was about education, information, and exposure to an art form. In order to diffuse what she felt that there was a huge prejudice in the fine arts toward jewelry, connoisseurs must have access to this education. An interview with Kenneth Trapp in 1995 when he was curator of Decorative Arts at the Oakland Museum agreed that jewelry was a legitimate form of art, but that it was not a neatly categorized area. Trapp was working to validate the medium because he believed Americans tended to think that jewelry was not masculine enough for museums.

This notion of masculinity within the museum was noted by Hooper-Greenhill's (1989) remarks that the power relations within the museum were “skewed” toward the work of the museum. In other words, the public was offered knowledge for passive consumption. Thus, it would make sense that the viewer through the interaction with an installation space unconsciously or consciously absorbed this power structure. Karen



Boyd was working to correct this situation. She donated an important collection of American contemporary crafts to the Racine Art Museum in Wisconsin. She worked with Executive Director and Curator of Collections Bruce W. Pepich to present paintings and sculpture along side contemporary craft in a manner that could “erase lines” between fine art and craft, artist and craftsman (Brite, 2003). This collaboration represented advancing understandings that shape movements in contemporary crafts, which helped to dissolve traditional power structures in museums.

The mission of the Renwick Gallery, Washington, DC, was to acquire, exhibit, study, and preserve American crafts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The guidelines for acquisition suggested collecting one-of-a-kind pieces created by traditional trades and industries using materials such as: clay, wood, glass, metal, and fiber. The curator, Kenneth Trapp, said that he did not draw a distinction between fine craft that is functional and conceptual pieces. He said that he chose objects with a seasoned museum eye, and he saw his job as a guardian of culture as well as an educator (Stevens, 1999). In a separate interview with Risatti (1996), Trapp communicated his hopes for the museum and the changing definitions of art and craft. He offered an interesting perspective on collecting today, saying that collecting exciting new art was difficult because it was highly politicized and confronts sexual, racial, and gender issues. He believed that rigid definitions were limiting because “art objects work with art objects” and so art collections were improved if they were interspersed with decorative art and craft. Craft was a form of art that may or may not have been more accessible and sensory-oriented for the viewer, that depended on the individual, the object, and how that object was interpreted. Decorative art and craft as

mediums, encouraged art educators toward material culture studies for accurate interpretation.

Part of the perception that material culture was not art was that it was associated with commodity and product. “In the cultural economy the museums ‘play the role of banks’” (Wernick, 1997, p. 176). Ultimately, throughout history, it was the popular art or some reflection of that taste that survived. It was reproduced; it was recognized, saved, and given to future generations. Bayley (1989) made an interesting observation about art and the museum as it related to culture. He stated that:

The department store and the museum arose out of the same circumstances, but since the consumer society that gave rise to them also promoted the notion that culture was remote from the market place, they were in opposition, even while they had so much in common. As the department stores were huge edifices dedicated to the gods of commerce, so the museums were huge edifices in the service of nationalized culture. Each was in its different way dedicated to exhibition and it is noteworthy that both the great stores and the great museums were all located in the centres of great cities. (p.61)

His observation led him to conclude that by the 1920s the best museums and stores realized that “culture *is* commerce” (p.66). Even earlier Richard F. Bach, in his 1920 essay, *Museums and the Industrial World*, (Bayley, 1989, p. 67), spoke to art education within the museum and how industrial arts spoke to the “average purse” :

In the industrial arts and in the types of thought which guide or control them, which serve or contribute to them, there is fertile virgin soil for the museum of art, offering direct as well as subtle lines of influence by which, properly used,

museums may bind themselves forever to the most intimate feelings of the people, reaching them through their home furnishings, their utensils, their objects of personal adornment, their clothing. (p.67)

The ideas here pointed to the realization that all art was both commodity and culture. Curators studied and understood art as a way of perceiving quality and experience (Ames, as cited in Schlereth, 1985, p.85). Ames noted that Michael Ettema believed that much of the “scholarship on the decorative arts is unreflective and that today’s curators and museum educators unconsciously perpetuate the traditions of the collectors and the antiquarians...by assuming that knowledge of old things constitutes knowledge of history.” (p.85) The decorative arts and crafts were often referred to as antiques. Antiques as they related to the family and domestic sphere of the home also related to the idea of commodity and material culture. They were used in the home and experienced as art within the context of everyday life.

#### *Art History and Decorative Arts History Methods*

On critiquing methods of art history, Alan Gowens, wrote about the social function of art historical research,

With social function, which considers arts and artifacts not only as aesthetic objects or reflections of the spirit of their times, but also as instruments furthering the ideological foundations of society, art history has finally become the effective and prime instrument for historical research that it should always have been, revealing and analyzing those fundamental attitudes and presuppositions by which

any age lives, and on which all of the institutions of every society must ultimately rest. (Ames as cited in Schlereth, 1985, p. 86).

A socio-political view of the 'new' art history emerged out of developments in art history theory. The 'new' art history referred to some fundamental changes occurring in the practice of art history. These changes accounted for new approaches to the study of art through social philosophy such as, modern capitalism, nationalism, visual representation; feminism; subjects, identities and visual ideology; structures and meanings in art and society; and the representation of sexuality (Harris, 2001). One such theory which related to this study was one that Griselda Pollock wrote about in her 1982 essay, 'Vision, Voice and Power: Feminist Art Histories and Marxism' (Harris, 2001, p. 108). Her essay was an example of how social histories wove a richer picture of women participating in visual culture. For example, Pollock remarked that she thought of herself as a feminist. She found it awkward to be in a socialist debate however, the "paradigm for the social history of art lies within Marxist cultural theory and historical practice. Yet in so much as society is structured by relations of inequality at the point of material production, so too is it structured by sexual divisions and inequalities" (Harris, 2001, p. 109). Marxist philosophy held *some* ideals, which feminists agreed with because it dealt "with class formation and antagonism understood as the 'motor' for historical change in societies since the Renaissance. This was, of course, what 'political Marxism' had always been about" (Harris, 2001, p. 109). This example of political and social change with regard to interpreting art could, it followed, could be more inclusive of the decorative arts and crafts.

The following section provided some examples of how the decorative arts and crafts and their creators were currently being researched and documented. There were a few periods in American history when the hierarchy of mainstream arts shifted from exclusive art practices to include works of art with which women were often associated (Davis, 1997). By examining the 1930s, the late 1960s and 1970s, and the 1980s, Davis undertook a historical inquiry and illuminated the political contexts, which motivated cultural change by the fine arts community. In examining a few key movements such as the New Deal's Works Progress Administration Index of American Design, and the Women Artist's Movement of the 1970s, she identified, through a comparative case study approach, "societal preconditions for acceptance" of craft elements in the fine art arena (Davis, 1997, p.69). She discovered a blurring of the philosophical boundaries between art and craft during certain periods, in the twentieth century. A second article on this subject by Robertson (1997) examined the Victorian era and the sexual politics surrounding domesticity, the private and public sphere, and the artifacts that served as agents of societal change. She documented modernization and change in philosophical ideas relevant to this research project. The historical inquiry into politics and context was useful in documenting the development of the shift within the arts culture via gender based social analysis

Bean's (2004) article was a historical inquiry into the relationship between the Catholic Church and modern technology through the examination of the Beniger Brothers' catalogs featuring decorative art used by Catholic churches. She compared religious attitudes and the craftsman's attitudes toward technology, exposing a cultural cross section of the two attitudes. She approached the history of this New York firm with

the cultural context of the church and the growth of industry in America in mind. She suggested that the brothers 'marketed tradition' (Bean, 2004, p. 83). She documented the church's resistance to experimenting with electric lighting and the way that resistance reflects in the catalogs, thus provided a glimpse of how technology and religion intersected during modernization. Strack (2003-2004) studied three types of decorative objects collected in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She explored the history of science within an art historical context by demonstrating that European trade with Arabia and Asia produced knowledge in apothecaries. Discussing iconography and examining the purpose and significance of particular objects to understand how different cultures used them through the analysis of historical documents was a useful exercise in illustrating the importance of craft as art.

Helland (2003) posed a historical inquiry that elaborated "upon the court dress as art object" (p.5). She explored cultural issues surrounding the production process, which could apply to the knowledge of production processes today. She used late 1880s issues of the *Irish Times*, *The Queen*, *The Lady's Newspaper*, and *Lady's Pictorial* as primary sources for documenting fashion in the drawing rooms of that period. In examining the lace-working culture and the aristocratic use of lace, she indirectly provided insight into the present world of fashion by showing societal class structures that still existed and remained supporters of for example, contemporary couture fashion houses.

Examining the past provided insight into present societal conditions through the historic comparative case study approach. A historic comparative to gender was used in Cottrill's (2003) description of Natatacha Rambovia's role as the first female art director in Hollywood and the scandal of her divorce from Rudolph Valentino. Her article was a

historical inquiry into the life and art of one woman and her impact on “feminine decorative vocabularies” (p.126). She supported a contemporary recasting of Rambova's career through historical accounts of gender constructions in magazine articles from the 1920s, a book by Rambova on Valentino, and a 1995 book by Rita Felski. These ways of looking at material culture, the decorative arts, and gender helped researchers understand the present shift by widening perspectives to include other kinds of history for example, the history of science and documentation for example, popular women's magazines.

### *Material Cultural Studies*

Bolin and Blandy (2003) offered seven guidelines in support of material culture within art education and they believed that “Students, art education, and our democracy, will be more readily served by embracing far-reaching holistic forms and practices that can be critically examined through the interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and trans-disciplinary methods associated with material culture studies” ( p. 261). This quote essentially defined material culture studies as a methodology applicable to the study of everyday and functional objects of art. Advocating for material culture studies in art education was important because it reached across a wide range of interdisciplinary studies. The term material culture was an appropriate term to use when examining the arts and crafts that this project examined. It included the study of both object and culture. Schlereth (1985) defined material culture as follows:

“Material culture entails the actions of manufacture and use, and the expressed theories about the production, use, and the nature of material objects...

“The underlying premise is that objects made or modified by humans, consciously or unconsciously, directly, or indirectly, reflect the belief patterns of individuals who made,

commissioned, purchased, or used them, and, by extension, the belief patterns of the larger society to which they belonged” (pp.3-4). Material culture was historical evidence; it predates verbal culture. As evidence, material culture had certain characteristics: evidential precedence, temporal tenacity, three-dimensionality, wider representatives, and affective understanding. Anthropologist William Rathje saw this evidence as unbiased data because it was not translated or reinterpreted but remained as “events themselves” (p.9). Convincing ‘elitists’ to use this kind of interpretation for the decorative arts and crafts could have been difficult because the evidence is unbiased.

Simon J. Bonner (In Schlereth, 1985, p.129) gave an eloquent definition of material culture as something that came from the heart and hands, a shared experience within a community of people, learned ideas and symbols that visibly connected them to different societies around them. It was tangible, it could have been art or food or jewelry, but mostly it was about the way objects were incorporated into everyday life and the “gestures and processes that extend ideas and feelings into three-dimensional form.” (p. 129) It was about not only the objects but also it is about the connection of objects to people.

Jean Baudrillard wrote about material culture as a methodology that reflected that use-value was not an inherent property of an object. Neither was functionality reflective of human needs. He said that functionality was “nothing but the different types of relations and significations that converge, contradict themselves, and twist around it” (Dant, 1999, p. 49). The object did not exist in relation to human needs but was produced as a signal in a system that related differences with other objects; it was a social exchange of signs and values (Dant, 1999, p. 49).



Some examples of how material culture methodology could benefit the study of the decorative arts and crafts were mentioned here. In a 1999 essay, curator Joel M. Hoffman described the dilemmas of a Decorative Arts Museum that was based on the collection of a “provocative” man named Mitchell Wolfson Jr. The collection was partially an 'Arts and Crafts' collection of objects not necessarily pertaining to the arts but more to the ideas of an era and a man. The curator concluded that small objects could tell social, economical, and political stories as well as large objects of art. He was among the scholars who was attempting to rescue the decorative arts from second-class status treatment. This shift was 'signaled by a decline in the designation of the “minor arts”, decorative arts and crafts from the “fine arts”’ (Holman, 2001-2002). Hoffman (1999) said that the adoption of material culture studies reflected the expanding definition of the decorative arts.

Turgin (2001-2002), exposed the way objects can change culture. Turgin examined the historical role French beads played in northeastern North America through the lens of material culture. For the Native Americans, the beads were not only a substitute for local materials but they were an expression of an intercultural dynamic. In the past, material objects were not included for studies in scholarly journals; however, objects were vehicles for new and innovative ways of understanding past and present societies. Turgin proposed the theory that objects were mobile and change as they moved through time and space. Objects were not simply the products of a culture; they participated in the construction and transformation of culture, too. If this was so, the historical representation of the decorative arts in the art museum had an impact on the construction of social ideals regarding the position of women and crafters in art.

*Gender Studies, Class, and Domesticity in the Decorative Art Field.*

Gender studies have grown as a field since the 1970s. It was often associated with feminism but now, there was a notion that gender studies include men because men also have a role in the creation of social constructs. Feminism had increased the number of women in the arts today, not merely because of reduced “overt sex discrimination, but also [because] of considerable struggle on the part of feminist activists (like the Guerilla girls)” (Korsmeyer, 2004, p. 107). These activists were able to gain entrance into the gallery and museum establishments by, sometimes embarrassingly, pointed out the lack of equal representation. Feminist influence also increased the exploration of gender as a subject matter, as well as other matters concerning identity: race and ethnicity, for example. Art critic Lucy Lippard stated that feminism in art was not to be pinned down or categorized within a particular style or movement but, instead, “consists of many styles and individual expressions and for the most part succeeds in bypassing the star system. At its most provocative and constructive, feminism questions all the precepts of art as we know it” (2004, p.118).

Classism was an appropriate construct from which to explore this topic. It was defined in the book Women’s Lives (Kirk & Okazawa-Ray, 2001, p.581) as “attitudes, actions, and institutional practices that subordinate working-class and poor people on the basis of their economic condition.” Class was relevant because social hierarchy was replicated in the way objects were valued.

Craft and the decorative arts were often associated with the domestic classism. Fiona Carson, in her essay entitled *Feminist Debate and Fine Art Practices*, cited Rozsika Parker’s research exploring “another way in which the feminine stereotype was

linked to art production” (Carson, 2001, p. 27). Parker traced the development and privatization of embroidery from Victorian ideology. Carson remarked that it was during the Renaissance that ‘fine’ art was established as a public activity of high status associated with male professionals where embroidery became a low-status craft associated predominantly with women and domestic spaces. Where it was professionalized, women were excluded” (p.27). She went on to reveal that even contemporary women artists who worked with fiber such as Eva Hesse and Magdalena Abakanowicz endure “implications of this social stratification...still in place” (p.27). This stratification was an important concept to relating the ways women were excluded or not acknowledged in the traditional art market.

Karen J. Boyd, donor to a collection in to the Racine Art Museum, Wisconsin, (Brite, 2003), worked with the executive director and curator to develop an exhibition plan that would integrate crafts and art and correct interpretations regarding the status of craft. Art associated with women has long been devalued and some studies exposed this prejudice through social and political analysis. However, Gorden considered another framework, which lay, in an unseen dimension of learned cultural behavior that contributes to gender-based devaluation. This framework concerned the way objects were perceived (Gorden, 1997, p. 237). She proposed that detailed, intimate, and soft objects- for example textiles- were closely associated with women's work. Therefore, has it been left out of art history and museums for this reason? Her study contributed to the understanding of the decorative arts and patriarchal devaluation because she reflected on the unseen spaces that occupy our daily lives. She particularly focused on those special concerns of women and their relationship to art as a more intimate experience. A hand-

knitted scarf or a hand-thrown and hand-painted bowl, as examples, could be part of the gift economy that crafters of any gender take part. Gordon might suppose that this kind of object was appreciated more by the female gender because it was tactile and closer to the body or used in the home. Thus, women had a different spatial appreciation of art and material culture.

### *Women in the Arts*

The story of women in the arts could be obscured by the idea of artist as genius. Carson looked at the idea of genius through Linda Nochli's lens. She explained the "golden nugget" theory as lying at the heart of art historical structures" (Carson, 2001, p.26). The theory proposed that 'genius' was a right given only to man. She also noted that women were excluded from formal artistic training, especially from studying the nude. Only a few, such as Artemisia Gentileschi, achieved professional status due to their membership in artistic families. Women artists, she suggested, citing Rozika Parker and Griselda Pollock's book *Old Mistresses* (1981), were "mentioned in order to be categorized, set apart and marginalized." (p. 26). They concluded "women artists would be bound up with and discussed in terms of contemporary definitions of femininity and the perpetuation of the feminine stereotype" (p.27). This information contributed to the broader argument that the decorative arts and crafts were segregated and discriminated against for far too long in Western society.

### *'Fine' or 'High' Art*

In an attempt to define fine or high art, as it was most commonly known to art historians and collectors in Western society, one would draw up examples of painting, sculpture, and works on paper prized by art institutions, by art history, and by art

connoisseurs. The traditional discipline of art history set out to define the great, the unique, the masterpiece or ultimate expression of human existence. The problem was that in western societies the creators of this vocabulary were men who had little regard for the contributions of women and crafters. The decorative arts and crafts were treated as 'other' just as indigenous art, or material culture, is. Nevertheless, when the private sphere went public via the gallery and art museum, a change in interpretation took place. 'Fine' art became separated and perceived as a different a 'species' or class of art than that of decoration or craft. Western painting, sculpture, works on paper, and architecture become something far different than perhaps they were originally intended to be. This concept applied to feminine work in that, feminine work was often associated with commodity and material culture as ornament and decoration for the body and home. However, the western decorative aesthetic was also subject to the kind of display, which separated decoration and ornament from the world of fine art. For example, a turn of the century ball gown might not have been displayed in the same room with a famous turn of the century painting. Linda Nochlin asked in the title of her 1971 essay, "Why have there been no great women artists?" (as cited in Neil & Ridely, 1995, p. 554) addressed preconceived notions of what fine and high art was. She said that the question,

if answered adequately, create a sort of chain reaction, expanding not merely to encompass the accepted assumptions of the single field, but outward to embrace history and the social sciences, or even psychology and literature, and thereby, from the outset, can challenge the assumption that the traditional divisions of intellectual inquiry are still adequate to deal with the meaningful questions of our time.... (p. 553).

Even though the social and educational value of the gallery and art museum were extraordinary, the neglect and segregation of ‘applied’ or ‘lower’ art was in itself demeaning to its creators and appreciators.

### *Decorative Art*

Decorative art often referred to a craft object that has ‘fine’ qualities. Materials and functionality usually set this art apart from ‘fine’ art in the traditional sense. It was also associated with various media such as, glass, clay, wood, or silk. On decorative art, Kenneth Ames in his essay, *The Stuff of Everyday Life* (In Schlereth, 1985) said that, “the expression ‘decorative arts’ is a product of the art orientation and is both pejorative and misleading- pejorative because it subordinated a group of objects to the “real” arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture, and misleading because it indicates that their primary function is decorative” (p. 85). He also believed that scholars were needed in the decorative arts field that was “in need of immigrants and agitators” (p. 104). The term decorative art had little meaning in the contemporary conversation. It was preferred that the term contemporary craft replace the term decorative art by for example, the Director of the Contemporary Crafts Museum and Gallery, David Cohen (See Appendix A). However, there were also arguments about the word craft. For example, recently the American Craft museum in New York changed its name to Museum of Arts and Design.

There was also a notion that craft needed to become a more critical media, thus the name ‘critical craft’ referred to craft that might more closely align itself with the traditional notion of conceptual art and yet at the same time retained its identity as craft. For example, Bruce Metcalf, jeweler and craft writer adamantly felt that contemporary craft needed to have its own and separate space and vocabulary apart from art. “Thus it is

my contention that any discourse on craft history or craft theory that looks to art for its philosophical framework or its vocabulary or basic themes is doomed to misrepresent its subject” (1999, p. 22).

### *Craft*

The word craft brought up a couple of inferences. It could mean skill not necessarily pertaining to art. The word also suggested a pre-industrial life where potters and weavers, for example, produced objects of use ingrained with the artistic expression of the creator. Nostalgia for the way things were draws ‘hobbyists’ to try their own hand at creating crafts. Perhaps the notion that such activity was pre-industrial and, therefore, somehow primitive added to the perception that craft is not art. Shanks said that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century especially, crafts rivaled aesthetics. He cited John Ruskin and William Morris as champions of the arts and crafts movement of that century. The Arts and Crafts movement was an important turning point in the history of craft. Before that, before industrialization, crafts were a necessary part of life. Not like today, when a person could get the things they needed without visiting a hand crafter. Thus, the movement was reaction against the mass-produced object and against goods of low quality. Morris was influenced by Ruskin’s work, *The Nature of Gothic*, where he spoke about the dignity of labor, Morris practiced this theory (Metcalf, 1999, p. 15). Shanks said that Morris tried to “restore dignity, respectability to labor, to oppose the separation of art and politics, morality and religion. Craft was to be art in society” (p. 108). Morris was a socialist. Metcalf commented that Morris, “Not only did Morris pull hand work out of the working classes, but he put women’s work on an equal footing with men’s” (p.15), for example, he was an appreciator of embroidery. According to Metcalf, the Bauhaus movement also

had an impact on craft theory but it rejected the “historicism of William Morris’s medievalism” (p. 18). In the 1940s the “GI Bill” provided a free education for soldiers returning from war and according to Metcalf, craft education increased at the college level. In the 1950s, artists like Peter Voulkos evoked abstract expressionism. Like action painting only in the medium of clay, but he was a subsidized artist, in that he could afford to take risks because he had a teaching job which allowed him a regular paycheck.

Michael Shanks (1992) wrote that in the United States since the 1970s, the definition of craft had involved an allegiance to materials and its traditional purposes had been challenged. “An attempt has been made to question the boundaries of art and craft” (p. 108). For example, a piece of contemporary art jewelry might not have been viewed as ‘wearable’ in the ordinary context of everyday life.

Perceptions of craft had changed, in that one could find a quality objects produced by machines today. Labor concerns now, grow out the globalized economy of the exploitation and social conditions of workers involved in creating goods. Today, Metcalf stated that there are two paradigms “a little war” (1999, p. 19) as he said in the craft community between the artist-craftsperson and the business-crafts person. He said that most professions have this parallel but that “Craft-as-art gets more institutional perks” (p. 19). There were many opinions about what craft was for example that it was a hand-made object or that it must have had a function. Metcalf felt strongly that art and craft were very different and they had different theories associated with their educations. As noted in the quote below, Metcalf remarked on his opinions of how contemporary craft was seen today.



“The conceptualist bent of contemporary art is blind-utterly to some of the most important attributes of modern craft. The art world has no use for the fact that craft objects are made by hand, and that learning a craft is difficult and demanding. Within the artworld,”craft” is typically regarded as mere skill, incapable of embodying a consistent artistic vision or a complex philosophical statement. Furthermore, the artworld has nothing but contempt for the way that craft objects are frequently employed in the non-monetary economy of gift giving. Nor does the artworld value the many histories of craft, except when a certified artist might condescend to call attention to them. Although these many dismissals of craft attitudes and craft values are breaking down, they are still commonplace in artworld capitals” (1999, p. 22).

### *Design*

The 2005 Target Store’s tag line, “Design for all” reflected the consumer’s desire for design and the influence of art on capitalist society. During one of Target’s television ads, there was a scene where an older man whimsically pulls a round stool out of a Modernist painting of different colored dots. The top of the stool looked like one of the dots within the painting, but he took it out to place it on the floor and sat on it. It was a stool. According to Henry Sayre (2000, p. 376) people involved with graphics, industrial, and allied arts began to call themselves designers during the industrial push of the 1920s. They were seen as serving industry. One example was Josiah Wedgwood. He produced ornamental pottery in the late 1700s in England. He produced highly skilled ware and the high-end line was considered “an object of fine art” (Sayre, p. 377). However, Wedgwood’s popularity came from his mass-produced “useful” ware.

Sayre said that the only thing that differentiates craft from design was that craft is handmade to serve a useful function and only one person needed to like it or buy it.

Design, by contrast, needed to appeal to the mass market (2000, p.377). A truly gifted designer must have understood the craft and the medium to produce a successful design.

The designer of a mass-produced, mass-marketed object, for example, Bakelite jewelry from the 1910-1940s, could not enter into the world of 'fine' art. One might say that designers had nothing to do with the creation of the actual object and that craftspeople had everything to do with creating a one-of-a-kind piece, but there was some cross over. Designers needed to know how the object is actually made; otherwise, the design was often poor. It was unfortunate that the people believed that designers did not create one-of-a-kind pieces. The mass-produced object was an extension of a well-conceived plan that had everything to do with knowing exactly how the medium would allow the achievement of the product. A contemporary example of partnerships between art and craft non-profit organizations and industry/technology combining forces to create well-designed objects was mentioned in Ingrid Bachman's essay, *New Craft Paradigms*. She said, "In Holland, Droog Design, an innovative design company and research lab, provides some of the most imaginative forms in contemporary design, challenging conventional notions of function and non-function, design and art, managing even to revitalize macramé, that emblem of the 1970s, to produce their dynamic knotted chair constructed of carbon and aramid fibers" (p. 48). Thus, the everyday object could be excluded from the art conversation because it was the result of an aesthetic ideal. Of course, not all objects were designed this way but objects that appeal to the mass-market

often had this similar goal and therefore could have been considered, well designed. Design achieved perfection when aesthetic and function are seamless.

### *Contemporary Art*

Contemporary art could be the place where artistic experimentation can influence the decorative arts, crafts, and fine arts. It was hard to classify and categorize because by its very nature it incorporates diversity in materials and content. Private and public places and spaces were frequent subject areas for contemporary art. Blending artistic traditions such as photography and jewelry was part of the contemporary vocabulary. A vocabulary, which did not attempt to exclude the viewer as a participant in the work of art, was one that engaged the viewer in an aesthetic experience. Meanings were flexible and accommodate the viewers' education and personal experiences. Since the fine art world had delegated only certain materials to fine art, and, as Korsmeyer stated, "excluded 'utilitarian' craft objects including things for domestic use, many feminist contemporary artists had deliberately incorporated craft materials into their work. Moreover, since some craft traditions in which women participated were joint efforts and did not single out an individual creator, that is, some feminist projects are collaborative,..." (Korsmeyer, 2004, p. 120). She described the role that Judy Chicago took as 'Director' of projects like "The Dinner Party." The collaborative role that this particular work of art represents recalled a traditional social atmosphere, which reflects the way women artists and crafters often work. Creating the decorative arts and crafts was often a collaborative effort on the part of many different artisans who specialize in a particular area and agreed to come together to create a masterpiece. Contemporary art also often needed this kind of support system in the form of its collaborators.

## *Conclusion*

Objects and their definitions were diverse and so were the people who make them. Artist and artisan were traditionally thought of as a “builders of machines” (C. W. Pursell, Jr. in Schlereth, 1985, p. 119) for example, Leonardo da Vinci invented the “exploded view,” (a graphic method for understanding machines). This kind of communication between designers used nonverbal “visual thinking.” In this manner, science and technology will influence art but art will ultimately “choose the specific shape of the future.” (Ferguson in Schlereth, 1985, p. 120) The way we used words like decorative art, craft, and design needed to reflect a conscious effort deserving of its makers inventive efforts and creativity. How was craft and decorative art this reflected in the fine art arena today? In Paul Greenhalgh’s words,

The separation of craft from art and design is one of the phenomena of late-twentieth-century Western culture. The consequences of this split have been quite startling. It has led to the idea that there exists some sort of mental attribute known as ‘creativity’ that precedes or can be divorced from knowledge of how to make things. This has led to art without craft. At the same time, there has been the evolution of ‘the crafts’ as a separate art form. Enough people have wanted to go on making things. Enough people believe that they can expand their ideas and knowledge about the work through learning and practicing a craft (as cited in Jean Johnson, 2002, p. 3).

## CHAPTER IV

### Women in the Arts Movements

My success is as fragile as the success of the women who preceded me. I've always looked at art in terms of the long, old, historic picture. I know when I went to art school I was told there were never any great women artists. History has been erased and as a result, women have a great deal of difficulty being able to build on their predecessors rather than reinventing the wheel. My work embodies and insists upon being able to build upon reclamation of women's history, for males and females, because to have history of men is to have only half of human history.

Judy Chicago, 1997-1998 Interview (as cited in Sackler, 2002, p. 117).

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to explore to what extent the boundaries between decorative art, craft, and fine art were blurring. This purpose was explored within the context of material culture studies and gender studies. The findings of this study encourage art educators and arts administrators to take a broad approach to the appreciation of material culture such as craft. Specifically, the objective of this study was to identify changing trends and to develop ideas that could contribute to the status and frequency of exhibits which include crafts and decorative arts. This chapter contributes to the knowledge of women in the history of art as decorators, crafters, 'fine' and contemporary artists.

In order to understand historical influences on current issues, an overview of the influence of women in past arts and crafts movements was essential. Women artists throughout history worked with all media. Usually these artists were considered as exceptions to the general perception that only men could attain “master” status. This chapter focused on the development of women as artists from the 1700s until today. There were women artists in fields such as lace making, pottery, embroidery, needlework, woodcarving, furniture, interior design, hand printing, bookbinding, and illustration. Indeed some women were expert artists in multiple areas, especially as designers.

#### *Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement In Scotland and England*

Influences and ideas cross-pollinated between Europe and America. Key figures such as William Morris in the Arts and Crafts movement in England toured and lectured in America at the turn of the nineteenth century. Leaders of the Arts and Crafts philosophy pushed for an intimate relationship between industry and the arts.

It was important to understand the class structures that were in place during this movement. By understanding the reality of women’s social lives in the past, we could gain insight into contemporary movements. For example, in the “Design for all” Target Store Advertising campaign, 2005, design as a feature of everyday life was marketed ‘for the benefit of all.’ Perhaps social structures had not changed so drastically since 1870. In 1979, Anthea Callen wrote a book entitled, *Women Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement 1870-1914*. She stated in her introduction that her goal “is to provide--for layman, specialist, historian and feminist alike-- a volume of new material which will contribute to our understanding of woman’s position as ‘outsider’ in a patriarchal culture, at the same time providing a broader knowledge of the real nature of the Arts and Crafts

movement while throwing new light on the social and economic circumstances of the middle-class women workers at the turn of the nineteenth century” (1979, Preface). The Target ad reflected some of the same values of the arts and crafts movement in that it was taking a stance that design is art and quality of life for everyone. Design should be for every purse, and for every day.

Against the backdrop of the industrial age, the Arts and Crafts movement, often considered based on a Marxist or socialist philosophy, aimed to revive handwork versus machine work as a matter of moral, social, and aesthetic conviction. It was thought by the leaders of this movement, that this revival would somehow preserve the rural economy in a humanitarian and nationalistic manner. Many people also thought that this social policy would keep people in urban areas and reduce poverty. For example, one art that aristocratic women were interested in was that of lace making. Lace making was a “grueling craft” (Callen, 1979, p.5) and was considered a dying art but still considered prestigious. Owning lace was a mark of wealth and status for the wearer. Thus, lace-making associations were created to provide better communication between lace-makers and buyers as well as better wages for lace-makers. For working gentle women, the notion that one needed to have an income was against social norms of the day. Traditionally the man had all control of the money in the household and the women, devoid of this power, were often left without skills or money (Callen, 1979). Gentle women often worked anonymously because the social stigma was great. Without the social support systems to promote their work, Callen reasons, only a few women became well known as professional craftswomen. Those few women, who achieved acclaim, not

always during their lifetimes, were commonly associated with famous firms, such as William Morris's firm or design schools, such as Glasgow Institute for Fine Arts.

The social structure of women in the Arts and Crafts Movement associated with John Ruskin and William Morris was divided into four categories, according to Callen (1979, p.2). Divisions were based on class stratification. First, there were the working class or peasant women who were an essential part of the work force, which helped to organize a traditional rural crafts revival. Then there were the aristocratic, upper middle class women who were also donors and organizers of the revival of rural crafts and of the artistic training of women who had fallen on unfortunate circumstances. These women found that they must make a living independently either within the home with discreet freelance piecework or within a workshop. The last category were those women who were in the 'inner circle' of educated middle-class women, often related by birth or marriage to the key male figures within the vanguard of the movement" (1979, p. 2).

There were several women involved with William Morris's business. He did not design jewelry but his daughter did. May Morris was an example of the second generation of women in the Arts and Crafts Movement. According to Callen, May Morris was living in a period where women jewelers were beginning to take on more design responsibility versus the 'lower tasks' that did not threaten men's work, such as polishing or memorial hair braiding, which required delicate hands (Callen, 1979, p. 153).

May Morris at the turn of the twentieth century, was responsible for the production as well as the design of her pieces. She was part of a larger aesthetic dress movement, which was influenced by from mediaeval ideals and dress, especially in the artistic circles (Callen, 1979, p. 153). There was a notion that jewelry should have less



ostentatious qualities and qualities that were more artistic became a popular. Diamond setting was replaced by techniques like enameling and cloisonné, for example. May Morris's jewelry was described by Callen as "typical of the best artistic designs of the period; often based on natural forms, these pieces make good use of the unpretentious 'cabochon' stone cut, so popular in the late nineteenth century" (p. 154).

Even though jewelry had a male dominated history, this art quickly became acceptable as an "artistic pursuit for women; apart from the need for manual dexterity in the intricate work--an ability traditionally attributed to women-- it was a craft which could easily be practiced from a small workshop in the home" (Callen, 1979, p. 155). One of the problems that Callen encountered during her research was that recognition of and attribution to women artists was difficult to determine because they so often worked in partnership with a husband. This lack of recognition was due in part because the usual critiques centered around the "man's contribution" (p. 156). During this time the materials were inexpensive, which made it difficult for craft jewelers to earn a living. In Glasgow, women jewelers received attention and due recognition under the Victorian category of "female art" (p. 160). However, according to Callen, the "female art" category disappeared in the twentieth century and in 1979, no term was available to replace it. Therefore, there was no frame of reference for discussing women artists. For this reason, women artists and their works of art have largely been "ignored by art historians and critics" (Callen, 1979, p. 160).

### *Women of Arts and Crafts Tradition in the United States*

In America, around the turn of the twentieth century, art education was similar to for women in England and Scotland. In fact, May Morris toured the United States and lectured. Middle class women were often seen as tutors and were more desirable when they had an art education, but they could not escape the label of ‘amateurs’ in the field. Callen stated that the main reason that women were becoming more dependent on finding their own resources as a way to survive, was due to the growing emigration of the male workforce to the West. Mrs. Sarah Worthington King Peter promoted the establishment of a School of Design for Women in Philadelphia in 1844. Her reasons, “...we have a constantly increasing number of young women who are chiefly or entirely dependent upon their own resources, possessing respectable acquirements, good abilities, sometimes even fine talent, yet are shut out from every means of exercising them profitably for themselves or others” (Callen, 1979, p. 44). Women became a part of industrial design and crafts often for financial reasons and therefore an association of women’s art with work and commodity and the gifting economy, devalued the objects that they were creating because they were seen as ordinary, everyday, and part of the home.

Women in the United States appeared to be in a better situation than those in England because they were not discouraged from work and they had more of a desire to have a personal income (Callen, 1979). There were some relatively progressive attitudes toward women having an artistic career in the United States. Walter Smith wrote that the arts were an area that would especially benefit by the influence and talents of women and he advocated for the equal treatment of women in design careers. He states, “...we train and grind up our boys in athletic sports, in euclid and conic sections, and the differential

calculus, and our girls in Berlin-wool work, in waltz-playing, and the Paris fashions, and then proclaim that men can reason, women only appreciate...half of the troubles we find in the world arise from, and are a just judgment upon our presumption in making distinctions between them, in fostering the self-conceit of the one, and sacrificing the independence of the other. Let the same education from the first to the last, physical and mental be furnished for both sexes..." (Callen, 1979, p. 44).

Pottery became an important field for women artists. The Newcomb College Pottery of New Orleans appeared in 1895 at Tulane University within the women's education departments. Again, the purpose of this training, according to Callen, was to train needy women for "honorable work" (1979, p. 46). Women were mostly responsible for the development of art pottery in the United States and organizational societies were formed to encourage appreciation and offer classes and exhibitions. This movement was part of the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States, according to Callen.

There were also women involved in jewelry making although somewhat fewer than in England. The elite could afford to take up metalworking as an "upper-class pastime. Other women were trained and employed at large workshops such as Tiffany and Co. in New York, but mostly remained anonymous under the master's name and influence" (Callen, 1979, p. 162). Patty Gay and Julia Munson worked in the late 1890s experimenting with enameling in the tradition of Alexander Fischer and Rene Lalique. Tiffany was interested in enameling as a way of creating color and he often took notes regarding the findings of his women employees. Other American metalworkers during this period were Frances M. Glessner, Clara Bark Welles, and Elizabeth E. Copland. In 1893, the women's building in the Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition featured

women in the visual arts from all disciplines including “arts and crafts,” from all over the world (Broude, 1994, p. 12).

*Work Progress Administration’s Index of American Design (1935- 1942)*

The Depression era Work Projects Administration’s Index of American Design was created to help unemployed artists and to document “the best in American Design Heritage from 1650-1890” (Davis, 1997, p. 55). The creators of this program were an artist, Ruth Reeves, and a New York City public librarian, Ramona Javitz. It employed more than a thousand artists throughout the thirty-seven states. They created more than 17,000 “copies” in various media such as watercolor and pencil and thus recorded designs. The objects documented were from a large range of media including costumes, jewelry, domestic utensils, even firearms and weathervanes. Although the appreciation for women’s work in the arts grew with the introduction of the Index, it was not a gender-oriented project. Davis notes that it was designed after traditional European collecting practices for documenting the history of design in pattern books. The Index also mirrored a strong interest in the “traditional arts of the United States that emerged during the 1870s, remained in evidence in the American arts and crafts movement, and reached a peak in the 1920s and 1930s” (Davis, 1994, p. 57). Although not related to the Index, the culture inspired collectors of American folk-art, such as Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to contribute to the Metropolitan Museum’s American Wing. National policymakers hoped that national pride in these objects would lift the spirits of the American public, during the Great Depression. Before the Index there was a perception that the arts in America were inferior, but as Holger Cahill, Director of the Federal Arts Project in 1937, stated, “The Index I believe gives definite proof that the paths of American design are eminently

worth following, in fact, they are worthy of loving and patient study” (Davis, 1994, p. 58).

At this time, due in partial to the influence of the Index, the world of fine art became more accepting of American folk culture and art. Particularly within the avant-garde movements, the impact of folk art met with popular appeal. However, there were those who disagreed with this growing acceptance. One such person was Ammede Ozenfant, who felt that there needed to be a division and elevation of certain artists, and that they must avoid any contact with decorators who thought of themselves as equals to that of “Great Art” artists (Davis, 1994, p. 58). Some felt that it was refreshing to see that the popular arts were recognized and that the pedestals that ‘artists’ were placed on were arrogant and silly.

Sometimes the drawings and paintings from the Index were displayed in department stores like Macy’s and Marshall Fields as well as within fine art settings such as the Museum of Modern Art. Art critics felt that the Index de-contextualized design from the object and that in this manner the designs had more power as an artistic resource. Still the Index was not fully integrated and respected as “real art” because it had an association with welfare (Davis, 1994, p. 59). The Index was never completed the way it had been planned and there were arguments within the government about how to care for the collection. After the 1940s there were few exhibitions and the Index remains under researched. It was not until the 1970s that folk art made solid appearances in fine art museums (Davis, p. 60).

### *Women Artists Movement 1970s*

During the 1960s, the Women Artists Movement focused on the unfair discrimination against women in the fine arts community nationally. Artists staged protests in New York and California to confront sexist practices. By confronting the traditional art distribution system in a political manner, they sought to be included or to set up their own institutions. Protestors picketed at mainstream art shows and set up alternative venues for shows. They desired to establish a way to document and recognize women in art, both historical and contemporary.

As Davis pointed out, the climate was right for protest during the 1970s because there were other causes addressing cultural conflicts like the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement. As sexism became recognized as a problem in the workplace, women artists gained a listening audience for their grievances. Curator and writer Randy Rosen found that, “The intellectual ferment of the pluralistic 1970s had made for a de-centered, unstable art market in which the ‘star system’ gave way to an emphasis on theoretical and artistic explorations. Modernism’s clearly delineated mainstream had split into rivulets of new artists and new critical arguments” (Davis, 1994, p. 62).

The artists’ efforts succeeded to an extent, but with the election of Ronald Reagan and more conservative social agendas, the gains of this movement suffered from a backlash in the 1980s. Eloise C. Snyder found that “assimilation is a reciprocal process, and the strength of the movement to change the social order as well as the strength of the social order to resist such change are both important in determining exactly how successful a social movement will be” (p. 62). Another social theorist, Roberta Ash,

found that the more change there is within an institution the more power relations and property controls were threatened and then was more resisted (p. 63).

Judy Chicago is an artist whose work played an important role in the feminist art movement of the 1970s and a great American artist. Her collaborative work entitled *The Dinner Party*, 1974-1979 was an effort of appreciation for, “Having discovered my rich and previously unknown heritage as a woman, I set out to convey what I believed would be potentially empowering information to a broad and diverse audience through a monumental work of art that symbolized the history of women in Western civilization” (Sackler, 2002, p. 44). This work was an installation, which combined traditional decorative arts and crafts and those crafters with a contemporary retelling of women’s history through the lens of feminism.

The Pattern and Decoration Movement during the 1970s was also part of this feminist art movement. At CalArts in the Feminist Art Program, artist and teacher Miriam Schapiro began to create works that “presented a clear feminine statement and were loaded with personal and political meaning” (Broude, 1994, p. 208). She collaborated with Judy Chicago on *The Dinner Party*. In 1977, Schapiro said that, “I wanted to validate the traditional activities of women, to connect myself to the unknown women artists who made quilts, who had done the invisible ‘women’s work’ of civilization. I wanted to acknowledge them, to honor them” (p. 208). “Women’s work,” according to Bourde (p. 208), was separated as a form of “low art” versus Western “high art.” As art became more abstract in the twentieth century, the divide between two classes of hierarchy became blurred. The effort to uphold this division “became dependent on a rhetoric that was both sexist and racist in its insistence upon “virility” and the

transcendence of the Western high art tradition and the superiority of that tradition over all other non-Western forms of visual expression” (p. 208). In the feminist journal, *Heresies*, a 1978 article revealed the attitudes used by mainstream modernists who were part of the traditional power structure of the art world. Adolf Loos, for example, in 1908 wrote that “ornament is a crime” and Le Corbusier said that there was a hierarchy in the arts and that decorative arts was at the bottom, the human form, on top, “because we are men” (p. 208). The article made it clear that decoration and ornament were without fail associated with the female gender in the Western system. Bourde also points out that within a language there was a power relationship and it portrayed decoration as inferior to abstraction. Pattern painting emerged in the 1970s, as a way to recognize patterns and design as part of the art aesthetic, but was considered an art market trend and then diffused. Amy Goldin, a Professor lecturing on criticism and aesthetic theory, had an impact on artists like Robert Kushner and Kim MacConnel. They said that Goldin sought to question Eurocentric culture and the hierarchal system over decorative work and hoped to embrace a larger audience with multiculturalism. These arts also sought to push the limits between “high-art tradition’s ultimate taboo, the distinction between the aesthetic and the utilitarian” (Bourde, 1994. p. 211).

The 1980s saw the inclusion of women into the art market, and a National Museum of Women in the Arts opened in 1986 in Washington, DC. Davis notes that although this showed the ongoing interest in promoting women in the arts, it was the “quieter, more conservative protest options that were likely to succeed in the 1980s” (p.63). Yet in 1985, a more confrontational group, The Guerrilla Girls, began using tactics like anonymously posting the names of sexist institutions and art writers. The



women's campaign to be accepted into the formal art market also involved recognition by the artists that decorative art and craft was part of the fine art vocabulary for women.

### *Conclusion*

By briefly examining these historic movements, the importance of looking at art from the perspective of gender and material culture became apparent. While women in the United States and other western nations have made progress, more needs to be done to change damaging perceptions about art. Material culture was and in some ways still is looked upon as "other" and associated with the domestic sphere and non-western cultures. In a globalized world, arbitrators of taste must, as a matter of understanding and communicating with other cultures and empowering women, embrace that so-called craft and decorative art as art equal in value to 'fine' art. To do anything less is to disregard, disenfranchise, and isolate western culture from the wealth of creative works around us.

Jewelry is only one example of a form of art, which bridges the private and public sphere. It is part of the "visual rhetoric of the meanings of the body, as the more overt manifestations in Fine Arts and popular culture" (Sandino, 2002, p. 107). Sandino reflected on the situation of women jewelers today and found that there are "two regimes": that of gender and that of craft. (p.107). Sandino noted that over the last twenty years the way body and space were used has transformed and decoration does not carry negative meaning. However, issues remain even with these shifts in attitude. She offered Peter Wollen's quote: "the problem in the end is ...how to find ways to disentangle and deconstruct the cascade of antinomies that constituted the identity of modernism: functional/decorative, useful/wasteful, natural/artificial, machine/body, masculine/feminine" (p.107).

It was through these narrative histories of women in the visual and crafting arts, that one could gain a better understanding about the art history that western art museums portray. The difficulty here was that there were few documented clear lines of lineage in the development of crafting education and theory. As women enter the visual art fields in greater numbers, the interest and need for these histories appear. This chapter demonstrated the way material culture and gender studies offer potential ways to uncover these important stories.

## CHAPTER V

### An Analysis of Contemporary Interviews with Arts Professionals

Does language start to be the enemy which prevents craft from advancing?

David Cohen, Executive Director,  
Contemporary Craft Museum and Gallery,  
2005 Interview

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to explore to what extent the boundaries between decorative art, craft, and fine art were blurring. This purpose was explored within the context of material culture studies and gender studies. The findings of this study should encourage art educators and arts administrators to take a broad approach to the appreciation of material culture such as craft. Specifically, the objective of this study was to identify changing trends and to develop ideas that could contribute to the status and frequency of exhibits which include crafts and decorative arts. This chapter revealed how current arts practitioners are approaching the problem.

A contemporary regional snapshot of views on the decorative arts and crafts within the fine art arena helped to situate the current attitudes and practices about crafts, decorative arts, and contemporary art. This section is a compilation of interviews of professionals involved with the arts in the Pacific Northwest. In addition, one artist was included who now lives in Kent, Ohio. She received her BA in Metalsmithing from the University of Oregon in 1989.

This researcher posed a series of six semi-structured interview questions regarding the value and description of the decorative arts and crafts within the

participants' institutions/fields. Seven participants signed the consent forms granting permission for the use of their information for this project. The participants are listed below:

Professor Doug Blandy, *Professor and Associate Dean, Academic Affairs, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.*

David Cohen, *Executive Director. Contemporary Crafts Museum & Gallery. Portland, Oregon.*

Larry Fong, *Curator/Associate Director. Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon.*

Gai Householder- Russo, *Jeweler/Designer, Owner of Aromaware, Currently living in Kent, Ohio. BA in Metalsmithing from the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.*

Jean Nattinger, *Registrar. Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon.*

Colleen Thomas, *Assistant Registrar. Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon.*

David Turner, *Director. Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon.*

The results of this research were obtained primarily through contacts at the University of Oregon in the Spring of 2005. All interview transcripts are provided in appendix A for further reference.

### *The Role of Craft*

After conducting the interviews, it was apparent that there were different trains of thought regarding the word "craft."

Craft has a tradition with deep roots in some communities. For example, in 1937 the Contemporary Craft Museum and Gallery in Portland, Oregon was founded. David

Cohen, Executive Director, said that his organization began with the idea that craft artists needed support and that they wanted to expand appreciation for this form of art.

Not all persons interviewed felt that there was a need for craft to be viewed as art. Some said that craft could have separate yet equal standards of quality and appreciation.

At the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, the interview participants saw craft as being comprised of the many other media, aside from painting, prints, sculpture, and photographs, which involve creative activities. These media included many artifacts from the vast and founding collection from Gertrude Bass Warner, which is rich with the decorative art from Asia. The Registrar Jean Nattinger, said that she observed that “people came into the museum when there was only Asian art on view and say, ‘where’s the art?’ because all of this collection was ... material culture, ... that reflected more on them than on us.” However, decorative art and craft appeared to have an appreciative audience that includes the Director, Curators, Collection Managers, and Donors at the JSMA. David Turner said that they have a strong collection of Asian Royal Garments, ceramics, and some warrior armor. There are also glass, jewelry, dolls, and shoes. Colleen Thomas said, she personally sees the utilitarian object as art. There are some pieces of pottery and metalwork in the European and American collections. According to later questions, many participants felt that the museum was handling all objects in an equal manner but there may be some differences in that the way that the labeling texts are handled. Such as, material culture may have a contextual analysis associated with the copy where as a painting might not.

For jewelry designer Gai Russo, the word craft had more to do with hand-skills and fashion. She said, “I am not interested too interested in its meaning just that it looks

good on the wearer and she/he feels confident wearing my work. I don't care for heavy handed self-analysis of one's work...I leave that up to the critics and the clients."

Defining craft as a set of skills had resonance with Professor Douglas Blandy, Associate Dean of the school of Architecture and Allied Arts. He believed that each department in the University of Oregon had a set of skills related to it. He thought of craft as broad-based, especially with his sociological interest in art. He believed that the word "craft" was used both in negative and positive manners, depending on the creative context and the appreciation context.

The perceptions of craft as a word were loaded with different meanings. Those meanings are an important part of retelling the history of women and crafters. With the aid of material and gender studies, traditional art history could adapt to integrate craft as a necessary part of culture.

*Material Studies as a Necessary Piece in Art History Studies.*

There appeared to be a distinction between material studies and material cultural studies. Material studies referred to the study of a medium and material and artists in the craft realm take this study very seriously. The materials used for creating a work often evolved out of experimentation with materials. This exploration could lead to previously unseen results, which were highly creative. David Cohen (CCMG) and Gai Russo (Aromaware) referred to this kind of study of material. This kind of study might for example, explore the how a crafter could change the color of a metal. However, Russo also believed that art historians understand this kind of study and that art majors understand the impact of art history. Material culture studies would be a way to integrate material studies into art history.

David Turner (JSMA) felt that the art history discipline “has become more inclusive of material objects which, is a good thing.” Larry Fong (JMSA) agreed and felt strongly that material culture studies were “vital in determination of significant use/function; making/creating; dating/authentication.” This sentiment was echoed by Jean Nattinger (JSMA) who believed that, to understand a culture, one must look at their material culture. In fact, she noted that for early civilizations, like ancient Egypt, the art had a functional value. In some cases, the art was more utilitarian. For her, one must look at all the forms of art in order to understand the culture. She thought that people might draw distinctions between art and craft by reading many complex layers of meaning into a painting where by contrast a beautiful bowl might be understood as craft, first. She thought that for the nine years that she has been with the museum, the museum has treated art forms equally because the founding collection of the museum is based primarily on decorative arts from a female donor.

For someone with a background in anthropology and art history, Colleen Thomas (JSMA), material culture was necessary for the interpretation of art. She states, “The material culture studies come up with theories about how a culture worked and how it functioned and I think you can read a lot of important information in works of fine art that could be better informed if you know something about the culture from which it came. That is what material studies does for art history.”

Professor Blandy also believed that other disciplines--anthropology, folklore, and sociology--contribute to the understanding of creative work. He said, “These broad-based definitions of creative work [help to explain] what people do to make the ordinary, extraordinary. The material cultural studies approach seems well suited to the study of

that, rather than narrowly defined conceptions of art, which I might associate with certain approaches to art history. So I think material cultural studies approach broadens the conversation.” The conversation must ultimately include even more detailed distinctions within the craft discipline, such as sculpture and metalsmithing, critical work and ‘decorative work.’ Decorative and design work can require intense intellectual planning, but sometimes it is the act of experimentation itself which creates a unique work. Material cultural studies and gender studies refocus the art history picture to include identifiable everyday objects of exceptional beauty and function.

*The Shifting Perceptions toward the Decorative Arts and Craft as Forms of Art*

At the Contemporary Craft Museum and Gallery, craft has always been appreciated; but the museum must build that appreciation outside the institution. David Cohen remarks that the term decorative art is a “leftover from the fine art museum world, which didn’t know how to categorize functional art. Is there such a thing as contemporary decorative arts – no one I know ever refers to things this way.”

Larry Fong saw no shift in perceptions within the Jordan Schnitzer Museum because their Asian art collection is “so rich in decorative arts.” Jean Nattinger agreed. The staff members of this institution were trying to be more inclusive when they planned their other exhibitions. According to David Turner, they were developing an exhibition on design that will include objects such as “furniture, metalwork, clothes, etc.” Jean Nattinger said that the way the decorative arts and crafts were preserved had not changed much. She remarked on photos of the galleries in the 1940s. At that time, the museum had a group of glass pieces in one case and then, just before they closed prior to expansion and renovation, they had a similar display in the throne room. However, with



the Museum reopening she said that there may have been a shift. They were starting to think of presenting pieces in a contextual manner. They have always treated material objects as art and as things of beauty but she thought that the idea to display them in a context, rather than segregated, was new. According to Nattinger, Charles Lachman, curator of Asian Art had a contextual approach to curating than perhaps some other Chinese art scholars who might talk more about artistry, styles, and aesthetics. Colleen Thomas also felt that there had not been a shift at JSMA, at least not for the short time that she has been there. She believed that the decorative arts had always been "...highly regarded by this institution [JSMA] because of its roots in Asian art. I guess, if I see any shift it might be in looking towards art of other cultures, expanding the exhibits to show western art where the decorative arts are not as highly regarded...."

Gai Russo as a designer began to see "an acknowledgement by the metalsmith world of small, fashion-oriented jewelry designers."

Professor Blandy had not sensed a shift in the Architecture and Allied Arts School and he attributed this to the fact that the school of Architecture and Allied Arts had always had a strong association with craft, in the studio area particularly. He said, "I think that there is a long-term commitment to celebrating that type of work within this school." Indeed, the University of Oregon appeared to have a progressive attitude toward the applied arts. They held a Product Design Symposium on March 13, 2005 to discuss creating a product design curriculum.

We have researched a range of programs, had some preliminary conversations, and blocked out a first draft of a four-year plan. The draft plan at this point is a pivot for a conversation about the many ways that a

curriculum could be focused, dependant on a collective vision for the program. We realized that to arrive at that collective vision, we could use some intensive conversation with ... professionals and academics in the field. (University of Oregon, School of Architecture and Allied Arts Web site, May 2005).

With this vision, a discussion of interdisciplinary material cultural history in design is necessary. The museum is a part of that discussion and educational endeavor.

*Material Culture: Valued, Interpreted, and Compared to "Fine Art"*

Is material culture, often related to design, achieving greater respect considering this interest in industry and art education? David Cohen stated that, "There is a second-tier association with craft which is caused by a range of issues [such as] museums not giving craft the seal of approval, a lack of critical writing, and the word craft itself which means so many things to different people." Material culture was often looked at first for its function and secondly for its beauty, according to David Turner. He felt that it was important to analyze functional design. "Yet artists are finding ways to add more visual qualities to the work, often far removed from the functional qualities, so it is important to look at the aesthetics of the material culture pieces, like its proportions, the surface, the color, the patterns of design, the exaggerated parts, etc." Larry Fong said that at first these objects may have been interpreted differently because there were no artist attributions but now "in modern and contemporary works this has changed." Three arts practitioners brought up three relevant issues discussed in contemporary craft today: the hierarchy in arts appreciation attitudes, how to critique functional work, and the attribution and recognition of the creators.

Jean Nattinger agreed that the JSMA treats objects on an equal basis but thought that paintings, for example might have been discussed differently on the labels than material culture labels, in that this material would have had a contextual discussion associated with its labels. As a collections manager, she felt that the JSMA had a well-rounded picture of culture but she recognized that they cannot collect everything. She said that based on their collecting goals, they looked at material culture in a different way. They might take a Chinese Bronze but perhaps not “an early American quilt or sampler, even though that is an important part of material culture. Our focus has been more on fine art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even though we have some jewelry as examples,” They could not start collecting in a new area. She noted that collecting had evolved more with an emphasis on craft in Asian areas because she believed that Asian cultures saw “everything as a work of art in a way that we do not necessarily always in our culture and more utilitarian except for, maybe the really high-end examples.” Colleen Thomas had similar observations in that she believed that material culture was given as much prominence as works considered as fine art. She felt that much of the Western art was meant to adorn, not to be used, and therefore was shown out of context. Items in the Chinese gallery “will be displayed in a way that reminds the viewer that these were objects that did not just adorn, but were meant to be functional, too.” For JSMA there was a constant balancing act, between what they chose to collect and maintaining the mission of the museum. The JSMA had revised its mission to include contemporary regional works and European works. Therefore, this could dilute the decorative arts status of the museum unless there was a commitment in the organization to balance those areas with decorative arts and crafts as well.

However, as Gai Russo pointed out, “‘art jewelry’ ‘is much more readily collected by people [because] it is easily attainable, often less costly than fine art pieces. Plus you can wear it.” She thought that people were more comfortable buying an abstract piece of jewelry versus an abstract painting or sculpture. Because there may be, less risk associated with this kind of purchase, financially and socially.

Professor Blandy thought that context was the key to interpreting objects. He speculated that material culture might be interpreted differently than fine art in the art department or the art history department, than in folklore or arts administration departments. In those departments, “there might be a discussion about how those distinctions are made, who benefits and who does not, and the like.” Those distinctions depended on the social constructs, often by “tastemakers,” marketers, and money.

*Objects Associated with a Particular Gender Valued and Interpreted Differently*

In an effort to investigate whether material culture objects were perceived as having had gender values placed upon them, the participants were asked if that they saw any differences. At the CCMG, objects associated with a particular gender were not valued and interpreted differently. At JSMA, there was a conscious effort to remain gender neutral when they planned their exhibitions so that there was, as David Turner states, “balance between genders.” Larry Fong noted a distinction in that “certain materials might be traditionally male or female oriented.” According to Jean Nattinger, the museum was “trying to have an awareness of gender that maybe was not always there in the past. In a lot of cases gender was not brought out, but now there is a conscious effort.” Colleen Thomas felt that all the displays currently at JSMA were gender neutral. JSMA appeared to have accomplished this mission.

Similarly, Professor Blandy stated that he was not aware of objects associated with a particular gender being valued or interpreted differently within the AAA school at the University of Oregon.

It was interesting to look at gender from the perspective of the jewelry designer and a producer of material culture. Gai Russo remarked, “ninety-nine percent of her work is made for women to buy or for men to buy and give to women.”

The customs for adornment vis-à-vis gender may have been different for various cultures. This may have been an underlying reason why jewelry and ornament had in the past, been relegated to second-class status within the western art museum as decorative or craft. These traditions might have been interpreted in museum exhibits as part of their education programs. However, these interviews did not flush out these hidden gender biases within these institutions.

*Suggestions for the Way Decorative Arts and Crafts are Displayed and Studied*

David Cohen underscored the feeling in the craft community that there needed to be more “critical writing and text books with interesting stories [about master craft artists] a [so that] lineages can be traced, understood, and codified, as we have with painting and sculpture.”

Gai Russo’s comments reflected a broader notion in the crafts community that there needed to be a better understanding of these forms of art by the public, “More museums [should be] housing decorative arts and crafts, or sections of museums focusing on them specifically.”

According to David Turner, some noteworthy ways that the decorative arts and material cultural objects were displayed were in “open study collections.” This means

that a category such as pots were all shown together so that distinctions between taste, style, shapes, and decoration could have been made. He said that Native American pot displays were “most notable at the School of American Research in Santa Fe, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Santa Fe, New Mexico and the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma.”

Jean Nattinger also found that this type of display was very educational. She said, “I would love to have some sort of display that puts them together and draws the differences and shows what is real and shows what is not real and if it is fake.” However, at the same time she liked the idea of showing them more contextually. She noted that Charles Lachman will use a ‘treasure wall’ in the Throne room of JSMA, which was patterned after something that was actually done at the time that these objects were used. She also gave the Russian Icon room as an example of a room that “is loosely based on what an icon space would be like in a Byzantine church. Now we even have the music.” Contextual displays for decorative art were important because it created the atmosphere within which certain artistic and societal ideals were formulated.

Colleen Thomas noted a method of displaying decorative arts and crafts that is displeasing to her. She said that she did not like to see “works completely embedded in a narrative of a day in the life of the person who would have used this.” It bothers her because this type of interpretation was only a guess about the person and the object. She also saw it as talking down to the viewer and she would rather have seen an appreciation of function and form. “If it is, even down to a purse, please give me an example of why this purse is important, is it just that the design is nice or it that someone important carried it, or is it that everyone during this time had to have a purse and you could tell

their status by what was on their purse.” This was the kind of information that she would have wanted to know.

Turner felt that sometimes it was best to highlight one or only a few isolated objects. “This will help equate the decorative arts with the traditional display styles of paintings and works on paper.”

For Larry Fong the full integration of decorative and craft objects with paintings and sculpture was his preference.

Professor Douglas Blandy said that his own bias “is toward a sociological orientation. And so, I think that they should be displayed in a way that is reflective of those types of orientations, which would require interpretive material to be displayed along with them.” However, much of an exhibition depended on what that exhibition’s purpose or perspective was. For example, Professor Blandy’s exhibit on Zines at the University of Oregon Knight Library, tended to use a sociological or folkloric perspective, which was contextually oriented. He worked with people as well as the objects associated with them, so the exhibition has a partnership model, “so that people come to some common understanding and agreements around how the objects should be displayed so it is a bit like facilitating presentation of self.” However, he also noted that “de-contextualizing” an object could be very informative and he gave Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* exhibit as an example. These thoughts showed that there was an interest and need for better representation of material culture in art museums.

The practices for studying and displaying the decorative arts and crafts mentioned in these interviews had only vague inferences to gender studies, and this

perhaps related to a broader societal or folkloric context. However, material studies had support as a method for researching objects of this nature.

### *Conclusion*

A further conversation with Larry Fong (2005) revealed a long-standing dedication to material cultural studies within art history. His enthusiasm for this way of looking at art was apparent in the Regional and Contemporary Art wing of JSMA. He describes it this way:

The small installation [Figure 1] with the pottery, furniture, sculpture and paintings (don't forget to include the Lee Kelly bench and the Richard Notkin and Peter Voulkos ceramic) suggests an integration of craft (pottery), furniture design (Bertoia), and art (painting/sculpture) by mid-twentieth century. Although art museums (e.g., MoMA) have long established architecture and design collections, the growing appreciation of design in craft and furniture, and the artists' interests in both areas began to more evenly blend the two. As pottery strides into expressive forms beyond just function, painting/graphics (Lichtenstein) depends so much on 'craft' techniques.

These interviews provided insight into the views of current arts practitioners. Craft was viewed as a particular kind of activity and not always as art. There also appeared to be a positive response toward the use of material culture studies. Indeed, when it came to the Asian collection at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, it was essential. It was interesting to note that there was a distinction in that nonwestern culture collections were primarily viewed as decorative. In the case of JSMA, Gertrude Bass



Warner was the primary collector/donor for this collection. Because the JSMA had such a large decorative arts collection, they had an advantage of being at the forefront of understanding the value of decorative art as art. Charles Lachman curator of Asian Art was described as having a material culture approach to curating.

These interviews showed that the conversation about craft and decorative art in relation to fine art was still one that was not entirely resolved and gender does not yet appear to be part of the material culture approach to interpreting decorative arts but it needs to be a part of it. Those professionals who were interviewed were thoughtful and enlightened in their approaches to the problem. Opportunities to integrate decorative arts and crafts into more traditional art collections and exhibits appeared to be limited by the art holdings, space, and resources to acquire new objects. However, overwhelmingly, these individuals seemed to recognize the need for including crafts in their collections and developing a broad appreciation for these artistic contributions by exhibiting examples in their institutions. This chapter contributed to the perception that there are many approaches to understanding the decorative arts and crafts within established art institutions. Material culture studies and gender studies enhanced this understanding in fundamental ways by including artistic material created by women and crafters in the spectrum of art history.

## CHAPTER VI

### Conclusions and Recommendations : A Guide for the Fair Representation of the Decorative Arts and Craft

....no art history apart from other kinds of history.  
T.J. Clark, 1981 (Harris, 2001, p.65)

The purpose of this study was to explore to what extent the boundaries between decorative art, craft, and fine art are blurring. This purpose was explored within the context of material culture studies and gender studies. The findings of this study encourage art professionals, art educators, and arts administrators to take a broad approach to the appreciation of material culture such as decorative art and craft. The findings reveal that there are current and historical trends that are showing increased inclusion of material culture within the arts milieu. Specifically, the objective of this study was to identify changing trends and to develop ideas that will contribute to the status and frequency of education and exhibits that include crafts and decorative arts.

The recommendations in chapter six evolved from research regarding the questions:

- ❖ Have art museums have begun to view the decorative arts and crafts as legitimate art, equal in value to “high art?”

- Would the inclusion of material cultural studies within art history education support and encourage a view of the decorative arts and crafts as genuine art?
- Would the study of gender in relation to the decorative arts and crafts facilitate this shift?
- Are art museum directors, curators, and art academia applying material culture and gender studies to the arts and crafts and what difference is this making in the way arts and crafts are viewed?

The findings of the limited scope of this research showed that there was a conscious effort within the visual arts professions to acknowledge some material culture as legitimate forms of human creativity. The recognition of gender and particularly of women artists participating in the visual arts had also gained especially for contemporary works of art. However, historical attributions to women artists and crafters were often obscured due to anonymity. Therefore, this area requires more research. Recent efforts to include designers within the context of the art museum helped to facilitate the greater appreciation of crafters and decorators as participants in the daily recognition of material culture as art. Finally, it appeared that the perception of other cultures and the display and conversation of their works of art which more often includes material culture could be different than those perceptions of Western art and therefore there is still a division between what is considered 'high' or 'fine' art in the Western tradition and what is considered 'high' or 'fine' art in other cultures. Thus, one might conclude that there is

still a perception that the decorative arts and crafts are ‘other’ or different from ‘high’ or ‘fine’ art.

### *Purpose of Chapter Six*

The purpose of chapter six is to point out key findings from the previous chapters and develop a set of recommendations that enable the incorporation of decorative arts and crafts into the “fine’ art setting for specific professionals associate with art museums. The history of the art versus craft struggle in the last century has been dynamic and exciting. Current trends continue to develop attitudes and practices. One would hope that future events would continue to break down the traditional distinctions between these forms of art and culture into a broader, more inclusive appreciation of the world of art around us.

An objective of this project was to identify useful information for the future study of the decorative arts and crafts. This purpose is achieved by providing an overview of chapters three through five, a set of findings associated with these chapters, conclusions, and recommendations for visual arts professionals. Since this is a relatively new field with few resources, these suggestions are merely meant to guide, assist, and do not imply full knowledge of this subject.

### *Overview of Chapters Three, Four, and Five*

In chapter three, the intent is to show how culture and language, especially certain commonly used terms and phrases, play a role in creating impressions and attitudes toward the decorative arts and crafts. By examining some interpretations which are key in describing works of “fine” or ”high” art and craft, it is apparent that gender and material culture studies can aid in understanding craft as art. This objective is fulfilled by first looking at how society sees art for the art museum then continues to explore definitions

of art history and methods for documenting and understanding decorative arts histories. Then follows an examination of the meanings of material culture, the study of it, and how it includes the decorative arts and crafts. Next, there is a discussion of women and their role in the arts. The definition of gender studies reflects also on class and the term domesticity. Finally, an investigation into the meanings of the terms, “fine” or ”high” art, decorative art, craft, design, and contemporary art complete the chapter. These definitions are important because they are the foundation for how art professionals write and talk about art. If attitudes and language usage change among art professionals because of material culture and gender studies, the public could alter its attitudes and tastes regarding the decorative arts and crafts.

Chapter four examined the role of women in arts movements starting with the arts and crafts movements in Scotland, England, and the United States. The inquiry continues with an investigation of the Works Progress Administration’s Index of American Design in the United States and ends with an examination of women artists in the 1970s. This examination was necessary in order to understand historical influences on current issues. Women make art in all media, such as embroidery, that media has not always been considered the media of ‘fine’ art. It is through these historical narratives that one can gain an understanding of women and crafters traditional exclusion or segregation in the art museum.

Chapter five consists of an analysis of interviews with arts professionals regarding the following subjects: the role of craft; material studies as a necessary piece in art history studies; shifting perceptions toward the decorative arts and crafts as a form of art; decorative art as it is valued and interpreted compared to ‘fine’ art; objects associated

with a particular gender valued and interpreted differently; and suggestions for the way decorative arts and crafts are displayed and studied. Seven participants, primarily from the Oregon were asked six-semi-structured interview questions. This chapter is a contemporary look at views within the visual art arena, which help to situate current attitudes and practices considered about decorative arts and crafts.

*Key Findings from chapters Three, Four, and Five*

*Divisions Between 'High Art,' Decorative Art, and Craft*

- Definitions are changing.
- The hierarchal lines between 'high' and 'low art are blurring because definitions are changing.
- The 'new' art history includes gender studies due to three decades of feminist art history.
- Function is not a definer in contemporary and critical craft.
- Material culture studies and gender studies are research methods, which are applicable to all forms of art.
- Definitions influence cultural understandings and perceptions of art.
- Classifications are important but they must reflect the social and historical context in which they are made.

*Women in Arts Movements*

- People need to be aware that there are and were great women artists and crafters.
- Their efforts need to be documented and celebrated.
- Part of documenting their history involves social and economic research, which includes gender and material culture studies.

- Great women artists and crafters have been segregated in Western art and viewed as exceptional oddities.
- The history of design uncovers many working crafters and reveals a wealth of un researched areas in the decorative arts and crafts.
- Feminist movements of the 1970s had a great and often positive impact on the art community.
- As a result of this history, boundaries are blurring between the private and public spheres in contemporary art.

### *Arts Professionals*

- The terms decorative art and craft are problematic so they must be used carefully and in the appropriate context.
- There are still distinctions within art museums between different cultures and cultural artifacts as to what art is.
- The study of materials has a different meaning than material cultural studies.
- Material cultural studies are recognized as a necessary part of art history studies.
- Gender is recognized when it is possible as a distinguishing factor for the display and appreciation of forms of art.
- The display of decorative arts and crafts is becoming more integrated with ‘fine’ art and is usually incorporated in the milieu of design within the small scope of this study.
- There are many creative ways to display and appreciate these forms of art, which can engage the participant in a meaningful experience.

### *Recommendations for Visual Arts Professionals*

The thoughts collected here show that there is an interest among professionals and a need for better representation of material culture in art museums. Here are some issues to consider when making decisions about the interpretation, critique, and valuation of objects as art. The following statements and questions are suggestions for arts professionals to think about when they desire to create a more democratic view of the visual arts.

#### *As Director*

- Does, our organization have a written statement regarding gender neutrality and equality within the institution that refers to the treatment of works of art and artists?
- Does the mission of the organization include collecting, documenting, and interpreting works of material culture as art?
- What education is offered by the organization that shows the value of material culture as art?
- What donations to the museum are cultivated which improve the inclusion of decorative arts and crafts?
- Are public events and exhibits promoted that integrate all art forms including arts and crafts?
- Do some exhibits document the development of artists and crafts creators, or the development of like objects through time?



### *As Curator*

- It may be difficult to find out whom the creators of certain material objects were, especially works that are not contemporary; however, it is very important that this research take place.
- Are we documenting the activities of artists working in material culture today?
- Are we looking at ways and vocabularies to critique craft objects?
- Are we collecting material culture objects of enduring value?
- How are we attempting to critique craft objects?
- How are we interpreting objects to the public?
- What terminology is being used now and how is it being used?
- Are we sensitive to the historical bias against material culture?

### *As Collection Manager*

- Does this object fit with our mission?
- Are we documenting the activities and processes of artists working in material culture today?
- How could this object fit with our mission and promote appreciation for material culture and women in the arts?
- Are we actively seeking donations of material art for the collection?
- Are funds available and being used to purchase high quality works to add to the collection?

### *As Art Educator within the Art Museum and Schools:*

- Since half of the audience is female, are we pointing out exceptional works of art created by women to this audience?

- Are we educating the audience about the different tools and terms used to create different forms of art? Everyone in the art audience should be encouraged to recognize beauty and quality in the objects they see each day, whether art or craft.
- Are the cultural traditions of the artist that produced an object being interpreted in museum exhibits as part of education programs?

*As Artist*

- Be an advocate for your art.
- Document your mentors.
- Mentor individuals who have an interest in becoming artists who carry on and developing material culture.
- Develop relationships with those who care about your art, who collect beautiful objects, and who may be the sources of ideas.
- Work to educate your critical community about the vocabulary used in your art.
- Encourage understanding and appreciation of the forms, materials, and methods used in your art.

*As Art Historian and Art Critic*

- Consider the way gender and material studies could contribute to your research in addition to the rich history of aesthetic study and philosophy.
- Collaborate with other experts who do not know as much about aesthetic values.
- Collaborate with scholars in other disciplines outside of art history who can contribute to your understanding of material culture.
- Advocate for craft and design histories to be a part of art history education.

- Be sensitive and thoughtful about your use of language so that students and the public gain a better appreciation for decorative arts and crafts.
- Seek to know more and write about the creators of ancient, historic, or current works.
- Publish the stories of artists, materials, and methods and try to put them in the context of their cultures as well as interpreting aesthetic value.

*As Art Administrator*

- Be aware of the old and new forms of art that deal with material culture and gender.
- Provide visible opportunities for contemporary artists working in non-traditional art media.
- Attend and participate in local community art and craft events and fairs that may help to identify contemporary artists of note.
- Be alert to beautiful objects around you and find out more about what you see.

*Some other ideas to consider when selecting an artist or artists*

- First, is this a quality object, does it display excellent crafts-ship.
- What words will you chose to describe this object? Will you use decorative art and craft and choose to explain it in a manner that associates it with fine art.
- What gendered language will you use?
- Will you display this piece in context with other art or will you choose to have many pieces together so that the differences and similarities will be apparent upon close inspection?

### *Conclusion*

In some times and places, function, decoration and symbolism have been in seamless unity. However, in our time, and in the West, the symbolism is sharply separated from the other two; the symbolic can be art, and it is presumed to be pure, ideal, or intellectual, while function and decoration are popular, commercial, and base. Of course, that division in itself does not make sense, because the creators of symbolic objects have to make a living too, and art has always been available through commission or purchase...It's all commercial.

Janet Koplos, *What's Crafts Criticism Anyway?* 1999.

### *Summation of Study*

This study focused attention of some museum and art professionals on the issue of how material culture is presented, explained, and appreciated in art museums and galleries. Through interactions with the researcher, these leaders shared their observations of current practices and ideas for future work. Practitioners raised several relevant issues discussed in contemporary craft. Among them are the hierarchy in arts appreciation attitudes, how to critique functional work, and the attribution and recognition of the creators. The synthesis of this work encourages more integration of 'fine' arts with decorative arts and crafts and offers specific approaches to continuing improvements.

If decorative arts and crafts, are accessible and easily understood arts, and are given more visibility in respected museums, then audiences for art as a whole will be larger and stronger. The ultimate significance and benefit of the study would be for the public to gain a better understanding of all art forms by recognizing quality works in whatever context or media they appear.

This study found that there are deeply rooted social histories within the women's history, which explain why there was little documentation of great women artists. There were few systems to support them and they preferred a certain amount of anonymity in the Victorian Era. Women did find resources to help each other, through creativity, commerce, protest, and activism. It is apparent that women are beginning to have a positive impact on the museology field in various capacities.

It was not so long ago when Native American history was not in our elementary and secondary school history books. It is still this way for the great women artists and crafters in our art history textbooks. For example, some of these artists were Native American women making beaded deerskin dresses, baskets, and cradles. One such great artist was Washoe basketmaker, Louisa Keyser (1850-1925) (Belo & Phillips, 1998, p. 136).

Where are the great women artists represented and acknowledged? Are they "invisible" because they who worked in "other" genre called "decorative art" and "craft?" Even the word craft is caught on the word processor grammar check as "jargon." It fails to appear in the glossaries of some of the most used art history texts. It does not even appear in the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Art Terms (2001) which, ironically, has an unattributed photo of a hand-painted Art Deco style teapot on the cover. This bizarre

contradiction is representative of a denial by current art culture of the meaning and value of craft. Even when one searches for the meaning of decorative arts, one is left with a brief discussion on design, the industrial age, William Morris, Ruskin, Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Arts and Crafts Movement. Aside from Georgia O'Keefe and a small but growing discussion of feminist art history and contemporary art, the representation of women as creators of art is still barely visible.

The very mention of 'fine' art recalls Michelangelo and Da Vinci, not the teacups that your grandmother collected (and perhaps hand-painted), or the jewelry she wore, or the textiles she made. Why is that? Perhaps they have just been ignored because their presence is so pervasive and obvious. Recognition and appreciation for beautiful, functional, everyday objects would place the home and family as part of the art of life. In order to find the great woman artists, perhaps we must look at material culture as fine art. This project does not conclude that women artists, alone, are neglected in the field but that the mere association of an artist with the home and the body imply a different kind of appreciation than that required in the Western 'fine' art realm.

During the final phases of this research, the following quote appeared:

Feminist re-evaluation of male-generated histories and practice has led me to speculate that the association of women in craft in the eyes of the male world of government and museums may have seriously undermined craft's status and credibility, and distorted its history. (Flood, 1999, p.31)

Flood's statement sums up part of the experience that the researcher encountered throughout this project. Although, it is apparent that women and men are beginning to have a positive impact on the museology field in various capacities. There is a notion

among some within the craft community that the growing appreciation for craft as an artistic media came from the 1970's feminist movements. Women and crafters who generate decorative arts and crafts have made great strides within the traditional artistic establishment and continually find creative ways to promote and distribute their art. The art vs. craft theory is historical baggage (Riedel, 1995). Now is the time for our culture to integrate the contributions of women and crafters and their art.

### *Areas Needing Further Study*

In comparison to the Western Art historical tradition, research regarding women in the visual arts is lacking. This is a challenge to the visual arts community to take a fresh look at the contributions of the women and crafters of the past and to recognize those working now by documenting their work in exhibits and literature.

Suggestions for further research include the question: Does 'fine' art have a physical function as well as an economic one? If we take the stance that 'fine' art is ultimately useful, then the barriers between decorative art and craft and "fine" art perhaps will fall away.

Kenneth Ames in his essay, *The Stuff of Everyday Life* (as cited in Schlereth, 1985, p. 104) believes that the decorative arts field has a rich legacy to share and that the field is "in need of immigrants and agitators." The University of North Carolina regional center offers a substantial Craft Research Fund from their program from the Center for Craft, Creativity, and Design to assist in further research in the area of American Studio Craft. Research in the history of craft and design and theory is lacking and thus, this area is fertile for future exploration.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interviews

Professor Doug Blandy, *Professor and Associate Dean, Academic Affairs, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, and Former Director, Arts and Administration Program, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.*

David Cohen, *Executive Director. Contemporary Crafts Museum & Gallery. Portland, Oregon.*

Larry Fong, *Curator/Associate Director. Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon.*

Gai Householder- Russo, *Jeweler/Designer, Owner of Aromaware, Currently living in Kent, Ohio. BA in Metalsmithing from the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon*

Jean Nattinger, *Registrar. Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon*

Colleen Thomas, *Assistant Registrar. Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon*

David Turner, *Director. Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon.*

Professor Doug Blandy

*Date:* May 10, 2005

*Location:* University of Oregon, Arts Administration Department

*Position:* AAA Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

*To what extent does craft have a role in your institution?*

I will define the institution as the school of architecture and allied arts and I would say that craft has a huge role depending upon how you define it. So it would be helpful for me to know how you are defining craft in relationship to your study,

*Well I am looking at it in terms of skill-sets but the definition is something that I am looking at.*

Sure, so all of the departments in the school have skill- sets associated with them and therefore if you associate craft with skill-sets then you know, clearly craft is something we are concerned with in the school of Architecture and Allied Arts.

*How do you see craft as an aesthetic descriptor?*

That is a good question, I think; you know that you have to...

*I mean do you see it as a valid art discipline?*

Oh, yes. You know I think that there has been debate particularly within Western aesthetics about what the relationship art to craft is, how they are the same and how they are different and the like. You know I tend to think of it as much more of a broad based discussion than that. In that, as you know with my sociological interest in art, craft is

used both positively and negatively depending upon the context in which the work is being created or appreciated.

*Do you see material studies as a necessary piece in art history studies? Why or Why not?*

Yes.

*Why?*

Well, I think that because of you know, what anthropologists, what folklorists, what sociologists, what other scholars have helped us to understand is that people in a variety of contexts are creating things related to what they do, what they hear, what they see and what they smell and, you know, all of our sensory modalities. Because of those broad based definitions of creative work and what people do and how people bring how people make the ordinary extraordinary, material culture seems well suited, to the study of that rather than narrowly defined conceptions of art which I might associate with certain approaches to art history. So I think material cultural studies approach broadens the conversation.

*Do you see a shift in perceptions within your institution toward the decorative arts and craft as a form of art?*

I do not think that I have ever sensed that. Because we've had craft, particularly, say for example in the studio area, we have people who are involved in book arts, people who are involved in jewelry, people who are involved in metalsmithing, things that are associated with craft or even photograph for that matter, I've never sensed that there was a devaluation of that kind of activity either positive or negatively. I think that there is a long-term commitment to celebrating that type of work within this school.

*How do you think that objects in your institution or field, which are commonly associated with material culture, are, and interpreted differently than those associated with 'Fine Art'?*

That is a good question, and again I think that it depends upon the context. So for example, possibly in the art department, that might be true or in the art history, that might be true but say for example in folklore on campus, I think they would not necessarily make those distinctions or in an arts administration class. There might be discussion about how those distinctions are made and who benefits and who does not and the like.

*Are objects associated with a particular gender prioritized and interpreted differently within your institution? If so, in what manner?*

No, not that I am aware of.

*How would you suggest decorative arts and crafts be displayed and studied?*

Well, I mean my own bias is towards a sociological and sociopolitical orientation. And so I think that they should be displayed in a way that is reflective of those types of orientations, which would require interpretive material to be displayed along with them. But I also in terms of answering that question, so I think any exhibition will have a purpose associated with it and so how a display takes place or how an exhibition takes place will be relative to that purpose. And then just to back track a bit, and then my own bias when I do exhibits or displays I tend to use the sociological or folkloric perspective.

*And how do you display objects, within a context or along side each other as a way of comparing styles?*

You could do that, the exhibits that I have been most closely associated with have used a folkloric methodology which is very contextually oriented which is working with people

who are associated with the material culture being exhibited through a partnership model of exhibition and curation so that people come to some common understanding and agreements around how the objects should be displayed so it a bit of like facilitating presentation of self. But that is just the way that I tend to work it does not mean that I do not see the value in other ways. I think that for example someone like Fred Wilson, in his *Mining the Museum* exhibit taught us that de-contextualizing objects and putting them in new contexts can be very informative. I think it is important to look at material culture in association with a variety of contexts because in doing so it is more informative for understanding and appreciation.

*What is your definition of contemporary art?*

Again, it would have to do with what perspective and what my purpose was in defining it, so there are multiple definitions of contemporary art, probably the most common would be that which is associated with art that is reflective of a certain kind of contemporary aesthetic, that is communicated through a certain sort of social structure that is associated with contemporary art galleries, contemporary museums, postmodernist galleries, postmodernist exhibition spaces and the like. But it also could be any art that is made in a certain time period; it all depends on how you want to define art and contemporary and what the context is.

Davis Cohen

*Date:* April 29, 2005

*Location:* Contemporary Crafts Museum & Gallery. Portland, Oregon.

*Position:* Executive Director

*To what extent does craft have a role in your institution?*

CCMG is a craft museum and showcase, which was founded in 1937 as the Oregon Ceramic Studio. It was begun as a way to support craft artists and grow appreciation of all craft media. Today our mission is to raise awareness and appreciation of fine craft, to expand the audience that values craft, and to be a leader and a resource for craft artists, students, and the Pacific Northwest.

*Do you see material studies as a necessary piece in art history studies? Why or Why not?*

If what you mean by material studies as a focus on the separation of studying particular media, I guess I would say that I'm mixed. As there is a clear story of the history of painting and sculpture, there is likewise a lineage of ceramic, fiber, wood artists who have transformed those media. Each of those has little overlap or connection to the others – a little but not great.

*Do you see a shift in perceptions within your institution toward the decorative arts and craft as a form of art?*

Since we have always been about craft, there has been no shift. The term decorative arts is an odd one – left over from the fine art museum world, which didn't know how to categorize functional art. Is there such a thing as contemporary decorative arts – no one I know ever refers to things this way.

*How do you think that objects in your institution or field, which are commonly associated with material culture, are, and interpreted differently than those associated with 'Fine Art'?*

There is a second tier association with craft, which is caused by a range of issues. Museums not giving craft the seal of approval, a lack of critical writing, and the word craft itself, which means so many things to different people. The knitter is in a different world than William Morris – is it all craft? Does language start to be the enemy, which prevents craft from advancing?

*Are objects associated with a particular gender prioritized and interpreted differently within your institution? If so, in what manner?*

No

*How would you suggest decorative arts and crafts be displayed and studied?*

I think there needs to be both critical writing and textbooks so these interesting stories and lineages can be traced, understood, codified, as we have with painting and sculpture. This is something the broader craft community is focused on and has begun to make inroads.

*What is your definition of contemporary art?*

Contemporary art is work being created today in all media and for all purposes.

Larry Fong

*Date:* April 26, 2005

*Location:* Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon.

*Position:* Curator/Associate Director

*To what extent does craft have a role in your institution?*

It's a huge category that permeates Asian, European and American collections.

*Do you see material studies as a necessary piece in art history studies? Why or Why not?*

Absolutely, material culture approaches have been vital in determination of significant use/function; making/creating; dating/authentication.

*Do you see a shift in perceptions within your institution toward the decorative arts and craft as a form of art?*

No, especially since our Asian art collections are so rich in decorative arts.

*How do you think that objects in your institution or field, which are commonly associated with material culture, are prioritized and interpreted differently than those associated with 'Fine Art'?*

Initially, there are no 'individual' or artist attribution, but in modern and contemporary works this has changed.

*Are objects associated with a particular gender prioritized and interpreted differently within your institution? If so, in what manner?*

No, however, certain materials might be traditionally male/female oriented.

*How would you suggest decorative arts and crafts be displayed and studied?*



For me, full integration with paintings, sculpture...

*What is your definition of contemporary art?*

Art created with recent past to present. (within 5 years)

Gai Householder- Russo

*Date:* May 2, 2005

*Location:* Kent, Ohio

*Position:* Jeweler Designer, Owner of Aromaware, BA in Metalsmithing from the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

*To what extent does craft have a role in your institution?*

I am a jewelry designer, but I see my work as not only craft but also as fashion, swaying with the hemlines so to speak. I hand craft each piece but I must say I am not too much interested in it's meaning just that it looks good on the wearer and she/he feels confident wearing my work. I don't care for the heavy handed self analysis of one's work...I leave that up to the critics and the clients.

*Do you see material studies as a necessary piece in art history studies? Why or Why not?*

If you mean understanding the type of media used in the art work or craft then yes, I do believe that it is necessary for the art historian to understand what it means to use metal...clay...acrylic...oil...just I find it absolutely critical that art majors, both undergraduate and graduate, have a minor in art history or at least something close to it!

*Do you see a shift in perceptions within your institution toward the decorative arts and craft as a form of art?*

No, not really... I am not involved in any institution...but I am beginning to see an acknowledgement by the metalsmith world of small, fashion-oriented jewelry designers.

I see jewelry as an extension of shoes...scarves...etc...

*How do you think that objects in your institution or field, which are commonly associated with material culture, are prioritized and interpreted differently than those associated with 'Fine Art'?*

I think that jewelry as an art is much more readily collected by people as it is easily attainable, often times less costly than other fine art pieces. Plus you can wear it. I think people are more comfortable buying jewelry if it is abstract vs. realistic where as they may not always feel comfortable with buying an abstract painting/sculpture.

*Are objects associated with a particular gender prioritized and interpreted differently within your institution? If so, in what manner?*

99% of my work is made for women to buy or for men to buy and give to women...I guess I am unclear on this question

*How would you suggest decorative arts and crafts be displayed and studied?*

I would suggest that decorative arts and crafts need to have more of an understanding by the public...more museums housing decorative arts and crafts or sections of museums focusing on them specifically.

*What is your definition of contemporary art?*

something being made right now...within the past year...

Jean Nattinger

*Date:* April 28, 2005

*Location:* Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon.

*Position:* Registrar

*To what extent does craft have a role in your institution?*

Well, it plays a big role I think because the way in which the museum was founded which was with the collection of Gertrude Bass Warner, who collected based on different criteria than strictly art in Asia she was interested in the culture of the various Asian civilizations so she collected a wide variety of worked that might be considered to fall into the category of more craft than art like glass, ceramics, it plays a large role because that was the founding collection, and you know I've had the experience where people came into the museum when there was only Asian art on view and say 'where is the art?' Because all of it was sort of material culture, and that reflected more on them then on us. It plays a large role.

*Do you see material studies as a necessary piece in art history studies? Why or Why not?*

Yes I do. Why because if you look at only, what would art history be if you did not look also at material culture. It would only be paintings and drawings and sculptures perhaps that are made for the sake of art or for public display of art. But for me, to really understand a culture you have to also look at their material culture what they produced as art, in fact in these early civilizations, like I'm sure many people would look at Egyptian art as art, but for them yes it has that value but it also has functional value and in some cases things that we look at as art were probably more utilitarian for them. So that the one

that comes to mind that is really obvious whether they are familiar with the Asian art or not but you cannot possibly understand the culture of Egypt by just looking at the drawings on the walls. You have to look at all of it and so it has an absolutely necessary place. What I was thinking about, I think people might draw distinctions between arts and crafts when you know you could say that you could take say a painting where you could read all these things into it that are very complex where as you have a beautiful bowl or something and it just is the craft that comes to mind first in a way maybe you can not read all those layers of meaning into a craft piece but it still is part of the bigger picture and I think that this museum has always, at least since I have been here about 8 or ten years, always treated them equally, I would say.

*Do you see a shift in perceptions within your institution toward the decorative arts and craft as a form of art?*

Not during the time that I have been here. Larry would have a broader view... I think back to the old pictures of the Galleries in the 1940s where they had a whole group of glass pieces in one case and then you would have the throne room just before we closed and we had a whole group of glass pieces in one case. But I think now there is a thought of presenting pieces in more contextual ways the new installations that Charles can probably address better. We have always treating material objects as works of art, I think that it is a byproduct of having a material object culture in a museum of art that you present it to a certain degree as a thing of beauty but then at the same time explaining its functionality so its not like we started out as an art museum and then brought in material culture. But it has been segregated not shown in an integrated form necessarily, which is something that we may be moving towards doing.

I haven't seen any big shift, I pulled out a brochure on the Korean Treasures show about ten years ago, and really in all cases he talks about context of how the pieces were used even the paintings he talks more about their social function and so on. Whereas somebody else could go into those paintings and take off an a much more perhaps fine art take, but you know until the 20<sup>th</sup> cent really most of the painting that was done even in western culture was more functional people, it wasn't until then that people started to hang paintings on walls in museums and galleries. But he (Charles Lachman) talks less about them as art actually, but that is just another way of talking about it, some other scholars might talk about it the other way. I am sure some other Chinese art scholars might talk about more artistic aspects of it, styles, aesthetics, but Charles interests is more of a contextual outlook. But you could easily find a museum where they talk more about the aesthetics, I have a feeling.

*How do you think that objects in your institution or field, which are commonly associated with material culture, are prioritized and interpreted differently than those associated with 'Fine Art'?*

This just comes back to the idea that and maybe looking at the labels upstairs you could really hone in on some specific examples, but I think that we treat things a on a pretty equal level here you might find discussions of what's going on in a painting being different than the contextual type of material used in the discussion of Asian Art. Especially in the Schnitzer gallery is probably the best place to find that type of thing. I think as far as prioritizing, you could look at the Schnitzer gallery and say well it is mainly paintings, works on paper, There is not as much in the that is jewelry per say. Video, furniture, some ceramics. He did not overlook them...not as much emphasis as

painting, when people think of art as painting and sculptures. He is sort of following a traditional model but he is making a point of incorporating the material culture. The curators think about this so much.

*As a collection manager?*

I think we look at having a well rounded picture of the culture while recognizing that we cannot collect every thing, we don't have room for everything. And that does include were the Asian cultures where we already have representative material collections and a wide range we would look at something that came our way where is if it might be different between the Asian and the Western more than Arts and Craft. Based on our established collection goals which are Asian art and American and Northwest art and we take representative European pieces and possibly others to have them here to use for teaching purposes and display now that we have a European Gallery but we would look at maybe a Chinese Bronze that came our way but if somebody brought us maybe an early American quilt or sampler, you know even though that is an important part of material culture, our focus has been more like fine art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even though we have some jewelry as examples, metal example. But we don't and cannot aim to go back into earlier times and what would be a contextual piece from the modern times. You know we might take a piece of furniture if it was like an Eames chair or something like that. But it would be not likely that we would start collecting a whole new area so it is almost the way the Museum evolved that we are putting more emphasis on craft in the Asian areas. Also because in the Asian cultures they see everything as a work of art in a way that we do not necessarily always in our culture and more utilitarian except for maybe the really high end examples. So we cannot do everything too, but I think that it is

more between the two different areas that the differentiation takes place like we are more focused in Western collecting on what most people think of as art.

*Are objects associated with a particular gender prioritized and interpreted differently within your institution? If so, in what manner?*

I think that what is going on we are trying to have an awareness of gender that maybe was not always there in the past and in a lot of cases gender was not brought out but now there is a conscious effort, for example maybe the Chinese textiles, and I don't know if we have figured out who was manufacturing them, if it was women or men, or if there has been an assumption and maybe a point should be made but generally now I know that we've tried to be conscious of including women artists for example in speaking of western art. When that we know that there is an association now we bring it out pretty consciously. Prioritized only in the ways that we are trying to be more conscious in bringing out women's associations if it is with a craft, if we know and we often don't know, but if we do know it would be brought out by the curators because there is that awareness which probably was not there in the past that much.

*How would you suggest decorative arts and crafts be displayed and studied?*

I'm in favor of you know sometimes, well it's really interesting for people to see a whole group of things displayed together, like glasswork or all different types of ceramics or several examples of the same types of ceramics. I think that can be a really valuable educational tool, I mean if I were getting into collecting ceramics or something or other, I would love to have some sort of display that puts them together and draws the differences and shows what is real and shows what is not real and if it is fake. But at the same time I like the idea of showing them more contextually, like we had this idea which I think



Charles is doing, that in the Throne room there will be a treasure wall with lots of objects on it and is apparently patterned on something that was actually done. And showing reminiscence, not exactly historically accurate, of how the court would have looked using the throne and all of these other things that we have so making it kind of a contextual display. So having various objects together that create the atmosphere to a degree. Like the Icons room, a perfect example. That room is loosely based on what an icon space would be like in a Byzantine church, now we even have the music. We are trying to in that little space create the ambience and some displays. Now when you get to something like twentieth century art then you want the gallery displayed like Larry has it. But the Asian displays especially the Chinese will be along those lines too. I think that is good, I think that it is nice to go into,

San Jose, Rosicrucian museum, a kind of sect of some sort with strange beliefs relating to ancient Egypt but they have this wonderful museum in San Jose... that is full of Egyptian everything, Egyptian mummies, they have it all, they have a recreated tomb that you actually can take a tour of that is the perfect example of recreating the context. Even with the paintings, the style part of it is actually the history part of it so the more context the better, even with paintings. You can only understand the paintings if you know, you can only understand why there were doing this type of composition with this type of line, and using these type of colors because of what was going on at the time. You know like Jackson Pollock, you know... he was painting that way for a reason basically; it did not just come out of nowhere. Even if it just had to do with ideas about art why where they having those particular ideas at that particular time, what was going on.

*What is your definition of contemporary art?*

Where does it start, post world war two as opposed to modern art. I think as far as definition of art various craft, I think people when they hear the term contemporary art painting, sculpture, printing...most people think of those things, they still would not think of craft necessarily. I think that's changing probably but there is a lot more to do in educating people about the art that goes into craft and basically ... art has a craft element because you are using craft elements to create the art right. And craft, especially anything of any quality has a really artistic element in it because you have to have that eye and that feel and you know all those characteristics to create it. But I think that it has been more in our culture that in Asian culture that there has been that division in those last couple centuries, it's probably ...coming back together though. I do not know how far it will go. It's hard to say, I don't think that people will ever get to where they are thinking about, at least most people, a beautiful ceramic bowl the same way that they think about the Mona Lisa for example. It is just a different type of thing. Because one is functional in origin and one is art in origin. But there is a major crossover that people need to be made aware of I think.

It would be nice to interview people in a [traditional] art museum...one that does not have such a huge ethnographic collection, such a material culture collection...one that is more strictly art, that would be a fascinating comparison to us because I bet [the answers you would get] would be different.

Colleen Thomas

*Date:* May 1, 2005

*Location:* Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art

*Position:* Assistant Registrar

*To what extent does craft have a role in your institution?*

For me it depends on how you define craft, that is my problem. It's a challenge as it is traditionally defined versus fine art, I think that we actually have a lot of craft items in the collection, I think a lot of the textiles collections, the Chinese textiles collections would probably fall into that. The doll collection, the Japanese doll collection would defiantly fall into that and I do not think the scrolls but we have a lot of like shoes, we have shoes, but I think that might fall into more that area. Or maybe even ethnography, than fine art as traditionally defined. I personally tend to think that there is art even in the utilitarian so I would elevate it more just not everybody does.

*Do you see material studies as a necessary piece in art history studies? Why or Why not?*

I do definitely, my background is in anthropology so material culture studies has very much informed my understanding of all the art that I look at, I need it to put the art in a context. The material culture studies come up with theories about how a culture worked and how it functioned and I think you can read a lot of important information in works of fine art that could be better informed if you know something about the culture from which it came. That is what material studies does for art history.

*Do you see a shift in perceptions within your institution toward the decorative arts and craft as a form of art?*

I do not know about shift, I have not been here long enough to see an old way of doing things, I only know a current way of doing things. It seems like the decorative arts have always been highly regarded by this institution because of its roots in Asian art. I guess if I see any shift it might be in looking towards art of other cultures, expanding the exhibits to show western art where the decorative arts are not as highly regarded so it might even be a backwards step in terms of keeping decorative arts at the forefront.

*How do you think that objects in your institution or field, which are commonly associated with material culture, are prioritized and interpreted differently than those associated with 'Fine Art'?*

I do not think that they are really. I mean I am thinking of our current exhibit of Chinese grave goods, *The Art of Death*, and those works are given as much prominence and explanation as the works in the European and American Gallery that are mostly two dimensional and fine art. So, I don't think that they really are treated very differently. I know that when we go to install the Chinese gallery, I think ...well I don't think that even then it will be terribly different. I think there will be an effort to make the installation so that it contextualizes the works themselves. We will have a lot of utilitarian pieces in the Chinese Gallery, things that people would normally use in their everyday life. And they will be displayed in a way that reminds the viewer that these were objects that did not just adorn but were meant to be functional too. So I guess that would be the only way that there would be a difference is context because a lot of what we show in western art is

simply meant to adorn or it is meant as fine art, it was never meant to be used to hold water or anything.

*Are objects associated with a particular gender prioritized and interpreted differently within your institution? If so, in what manner?*

I am trying to think if we have anything on display now that is associated with particular gender.

*Well if you think of Larry's gallery and the way he displays the pottery, I do not want to lead you but, I think of a house and domesticity and the way it is in context of a house.*

I had not thought of that.

*Also utilitarian objects displayed with fine art or paintings.*

Well, in his gallery, I don't see very many utilitarian objects I mean there is a chair.

*Well, there is a plate and some bowls.*

I guess, yes, that is true, there are a few bowls. I am thinking of a piece of pottery that looks like a human heart. It's a tea pot but it looks like a heart. I cannot figure out how you would use it though. But yes there is that display with bowls and it is with the sound sculpture, the one that everyone likes to ding. And with the chairs, yes, I guess in some sense it is grouped in a domestic resonance of domesticity. There is also the video installation which, there is a little seat there and you can kick back and I would not associate that with a particular gender. The works themselves the bowls and the chair and the sound sculpture are actually done by men, so that is interesting.

*Well, I think the black bowl might be done by a women?[Maria Martinez?]*

*How would you suggest decorative arts and crafts be displayed and studied?*

I know how I do not like to see them. I don't like it when the works are completely embedded in a narrative of a day in the life of a person who would have used this. It bothers me and I am not sure if it is because I think it is an act of guessing to say this is how this person would spent their day and how this object would have fit into it. Or if it is just, that it seems that it is talking down to the viewers and I like to assume more intelligence rather than less and that there is just a hoki-ness to the mythologizing of a particular object by making it a part of like a loom part of the prairie home experience. That bothers me. I would rather see an appreciation for the overall form and its efficiency in providing a function and I guess I would like to see how it worked and what exactly its function was. If it is , even down to a purse, please give me an example of why this purse was important, is it just that the design is nice or is it that someone important carried it, or is it that everyone during this time had to have a purse and you could tell their status by what was on their purse. So that is the kind of information that I would like to know.

*What is your definition of contemporary art?*

Are you interested in a time period or what I think the style is.

*Either or both.*

That is really hard, part of the reason that I like the middle ages is that it was a long time ago and we have already figured out what it is. I think that Contemporary art goes back no further than 1990 and its sensibility is really informed by moving pictures particularly television, so I think there is a almost violent to the pace that is trying to be communicated. You know I have seen so many works of art that look like an assault. That's how I feel, it is almost that they are assaulting me with this piece and I think that is evocative of living in a world that moves really, really fast.

David Turner

*Date:* April 29, 2005

*Location:* Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, Oregon.

*Position:* Director

*To what extent does craft have a role in your institution?*

The Museum of Art pursues collections and exhibitions of art of all media. While the strengths of the collection are in paintings, prints, and photographs, there are objects of ceramics, metalwork, and fabric in the collection. We have a strong collection of Asian royal garments so we need to know how to store and care for fabric objects. In the Chinese and Japanese collections, there are good examples of ceramics, plus some warrior armor. We have scheduled a major exhibition in Fall, 2006 of contemporary Korean ceramics.

*Do you see material studies as a necessary piece in art history studies? Why or Why not?*

I believe that the study of art history has become more inclusive of material objects and that is a good thing. It is important to see ALL of the arts that a culture makes, both its “high” art which is made to elevate the spirit and nourish creativity, and the making of beautiful everyday objects that are used in the house and worn. These objects also have a history of style and a connoisseurship of craftsmanship. Museums should be showing these objects to complete the picture of the “high” art.

*Do you see a shift in perceptions within your institution toward the decorative arts and craft as a form of art?*

We are trying to be more inclusive in our exhibition planning to include all media. For instance, in the new installations of the American and European Galleries, those checklists include paintings, prints, drawings, photographs, ceramics, furniture (American), maps (European). In the Russian Icon Gallery, there are books and metalwork included there.

We are looking at developing a special exhibition on design, which would give a lot of attention to objects, such as furniture, metalwork, clothes, etc.

*How do you think that objects in your institution or field, which are commonly associated with material culture, are prioritized and interpreted differently than those associated with 'Fine Art'?*

It is common to look at material culture objects first for their use and then for their beauty. And their design often is dominated by how the object is held, worn, used so the functional design is very important to analyze. Yet artists are finding ways to add more visual qualities to the work, often far removed from the functional qualities, so it is important to look at the aesthetics of the material culture pieces, like its proportions, the surface, the color, the patterns of design, the exaggerated parts, etc.



*Are objects associated with a particular gender prioritized and interpreted differently within your institution? If so, in what manner?*

We try to remain gender-neutral in our displays but in our planning of exhibitions, try to make sure there is an attempt at balance between genders.

*How would you suggest decorative arts and crafts be displayed and studied?*

some of the best displays of decorative arts and material cultural objects I have seen are in the large “open study collections” displays. This is where there are shelves of about 100 Native American pots shown altogether so you can make easy comparisons between shapes and surface decoration. These are notable at the School of American Research in Santa Fe, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Santa Fe, and the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, OK. The LA County Museum had a great large case of about 50 ceramic tea pots shown together. I always went to see that case. And next to it was a display of contemporary ceramics vessels.

But there will be times when it is best to highlight a few single objects and show them as an isolated object to enjoy for its unique style. This will help equate the decorative arts more with the traditional display styles of paintings and works on paper.

*What is your definition of contemporary art?*

Art made in the present that deals with the future. Thomas Kincade makes paintings right now but they deal with the romantic past. They are not contemporary. Robert Bechtle is another realist painter (from the CA Bay Area) but his paintings are about new ways to look at the life around us.

## APPENDIX B

### *Research Interview Instrument*

Case and number:

Date:

Location:

Person:

Position:

Consent: \_\_\_ Oral \_\_\_ Written (form) \_\_\_ Audio Recording \_\_\_ OK to Quote

Context:

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

To what extent does craft have a role in your institution?

Do you see material studies as a necessary piece in art history studies? Why or Why not?

Do you see a shift in perceptions within your institution toward the decorative arts and craft as a form of art?

How do you think that objects in your institution or field, which are commonly associated with material culture, are prioritized and interpreted differently than those associated with 'Fine Art'?

Are objects associated with a particular gender prioritized and interpreted differently within your institution? If so, in what manner?

How would you suggest decorative arts and crafts be displayed and studied?

What is your definition of contemporary art?

Key words: Codes: New information:

## APPENDIX C

### *Research Document Analysis Instrument*

Case and number:

Date:

Location:

Type: : Book\_\_, Article\_\_, Report\_\_, Interview in an Article\_\_, Catalog\_\_,  
Online\_\_, Class notes\_\_, Other\_\_\_\_\_

Citation:

Keywords: Code:

New information and notes:

## APPENDIX D

### *Recruitment Instrument*

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541-349-0614

Name  
Title  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As an Arts Administration graduate student in museum studies at the University of Oregon, I invite you to participate in a unique study that aims to illuminate the best practices for the interpretation and integration of decorative arts and crafts in art museums.

Decorative arts and crafts are both art and material culture. Gender and cultural issues surrounding the study of this art have been neglected and remain a barrier to understanding it. In the past, leadership of institutions has reflected this bias against it. This study will illuminate areas that have been neglected by art history studies and suggest that material cultural studies, applied to the study of decorative arts and crafts would help shift our thinking.

Data collected for this study will conclude in April 2005. During the spring 2005, I will complete my final master's project in the form of a research paper. There are no costs but there are minimal social/economic risks associated with this qualitative inquiry.

It is my hope that you can contribute valuable insight and information about the current influence of gender and material culture studies to the blurring of boundaries between the "fine arts" and decorative arts and crafts, and to the ways academia and museum culture are incorporating this shift.

Thank you in advance for your interest and I hope that I can look forward to your participation. I will contact you on (a certain date) by telephone to discuss setting up a potential interview.

Sincerely,  
Lisa Schaup

## APPENDIX E

### *Consent Form*

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Lisa Schaup, from the University of Oregon Museum Studies program in the Arts Administration Program. I hope to learn if a shift is occurring regarding current attitudes toward the decorative arts and crafts within the fine art culture. These findings will contribute to a master's project. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a current arts practitioner.

If you decide to participate, there will be an interview of approximately 45 to 60 minutes, for accuracy, I would like to audio record your answers to six questions regarding the use of material studies for the interpretation of art. There are minimal risks associated with this project. The project will highlight the benefits of using gender and material studies in a traditional art history discipline for an evolving interdisciplinary society. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. If you wish to participate but desire that your information be kept confidential, a pseudonym will be assigned to your information and a code list will be kept separate from the data. In this case there is a minimal risk that there could be a loss of confidentiality could occur if your comments or information were recognized. All information will be maintained on my personal computer and my personal file cabinet. Options for protecting against potential social and economic risks include pseudonym coding, personal file storage, and not responding to questions.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the University of Oregon. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lisa Schaup, 541-349-0614, AAD Department, U of O, Eugene, OR, 97403. My advisor is Dr. Janice Rutherford. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office of Human Subjects Compliance, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510. You have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

I consent to participating in the "Blurring the Boundaries" study. Lisa Schaup has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures and the duration of my participation.

I agree to the following:

- I consent to the use of audiotapes during my interview.
- I consent to the use of note-taking during my interview.
- I do not consent to the use of audiotapes during my interview.
- I do not consent to the use of note-taking during my interview
- I consent to the use of my identification as an informant in this study.
- I consent to the possible use of quotations from the interview material with the use of my name.
- I consent to the use of the information which I provide regarding the organization that I am associated with.
- I consent to the use of the information which may include documents such as brochures or exhibit colloques from institutions that I am associated with.
- I consent to the use of the photographs from or taken in the institution I am associated with.

I have read and acknowledge and understand the information provided above and I willingly agree to participate, and that I can withdraw my consent at anytime and discontinue participation without penalty. I sign this consent form freely and voluntarily; I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies and a copy of this form has been given to me.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX F

*Human Subjects Approval*

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