

living room
1. A room that is set aside for ordinary social use (as opposed to a bedroom, etc.)

1933 *Discovery* July 218/2

The growing popularity of the living-room as the central dominant feature of the modern dwelling... has completely altered the design of the house.¹

living

noun 1 the action of leading one's life; being alive.
2 an income sufficient to live on, or the means of earning it.
adjective 1 alive. 2 (of a language) still spoken and used.
3 for or related to daily life: living quarters.²

THE LIVING ROOM

October 11, 2007 – March 23, 2008 | Museum of Contemporary Craft | Curated by Namita Gupta Wiggers

How can a collection be used to examine a current cultural trend? Using the Museum's collection of historic craft, *The Living Room* is an examination of the renewed interest in mid-century modernism through an abstracted contemporary domestic setting.

At first glance, *The Living Room* is a tableau, a cutaway "model" of an imagined twenty-first century home. With mid-century modern craft objects incorporated into the setting, however, the installation moves away from a commentary on current decorating styles to raise questions, instead, about the place of craft and today's mid-century modern revival. Drawing upon two primary approaches to museum display: the imagined "period" room and the *Wunderkammer*-style glass cabinets, *The Living Room* is a critique of the way craft is presented within a museum context.

Why is the exhibition called "The Living Room"?

The living room is one of the primary architectural spaces through which early modernists actualized the Bauhaus ideals of "form follows function." Turning the often empty parlor into the primary dwelling space, the modern living room, particularly in the United States, became the center of the average person's household. During the early decades of the twentieth century, a new visual culture for dwelling in an industrialized and modern moment emerged. Painting moved from representation to abstraction; design engaged industrial materials, processes and clean lines; and architecture embraced glass, steel and open floor plans.

What is happening in homes today?

Open nearly any magazine or catalog focused on domestic living today – or of the past ten years – and the prevailing fascination with mid-century modernism is readily apparent. For younger generations "discovering" modernism for the first time, this frequently takes the form of a domestic mélange of "early attic/late garage" finds, Ikea basics, Danish modern furniture, and, as discretionary income increases, a select few classic modern pieces purchased via E-bay or Craigslist, or from specialty stores making licensed reproductions readily available to a growing market. Although continuing the modernist

aesthetic of simplicity and spatial openness, the mixture of objects includes not only a range of sources, but a mixture of historical periods; a texture, pattern and color-driven aesthetic; and a great sense of pride in the DIY spirit of making, modifying or even tracking down the perfect accoutrement or furnishing for the space.

How is craft a part of this mid-century modern revival?

During the mid-century, craft changed dramatically in the United States. Following World War II, many returning veterans, men and women, attended college on the GI Bill, pursued degrees in art, and began teaching in academic institutions. For many in this group, it was the first opportunity for an advanced degree within their families. And for academic institutions, it introduced new ideas, ways of working, and challenges to traditions and expected norms. It also linked vernacular and everyday experiences into the academy, breaking down and redefining questions of class, materiality, process and aesthetics. Many of the changes included challenges to expected uses of materials, deconstruction of traditional functional forms, such as the vessel, and a shift of scale and focus that moved craft-based media out of a strictly functional and domestic realm, linking craft to industrial design and art arenas, and establishing what is known today as the American Craft Movement.

Today, large numbers of art school graduates find themselves seeking a place in a vastly more diversified art arena than that faced by the artists redefining craft in the fifties and sixties. Coming from all geographic regions across the US – urban, suburban, rural, and from a broad range of socio-economic arenas – they are looking for ways to make a living by their hands. As media specificity and the boundaries between art, craft and design continue to erode, this younger generation is playful, ironic, and fascinated with kitsch, art history and mid-century craft as a source for experimentation – and business. For

example, Jonathan Adler currently produces vases based on the textures and forms of mid-century Scandinavian ceramics and “people” vases bearing strong resemblance to Marguerite Wildenhain’s mid-century vessels. With an art history degree from Brown and art experience from RISD, Adler is an example of how artists today engage craft history in their own domestic work.

What does it mean for craft to be included in the “project of modernity”?

Craft was present, too, particularly in the mid-century modern living room. But our understanding of the place of craft in modernity is murky at best, particularly in comparison to the repeatedly and well-documented modern histories of the other visual arenas of art, architecture and design. Peter Greenhalgh, who has written extensively on craft and modernism, notes that:

Most definitions and historical musings on modernity either leave out the concept of craft altogether, or, if they include it, it is in the form of something outside of, even the negation of, modernity. It is something the modern leaves behind, or something that was set up to resist the modern. This vision of craft is about the most damning thing that could happen to any practice in the visual arts. To be ignored in the project of modernity is to be denied space within the cultural hierarchy.³

Why were these objects selected from the Museum’s collection?

For this exhibition, mid-century is defined as the mid-forties through the sixties, engaging the collection’s strengths as a means of investigating the mid-century modern cultural trend. During the fifties, this institution hosted a series of *Northwest Ceramic Annual Exhibitions*, modeled after the prestigious *Ceramic National Exhibitions* hosted by the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY. Several prize-winning works from the annual exhibitions are part of the collection, providing a physical and visual document of how craft changed in the post-wwII years. In order to use the collection to question contemporary domestic practice, the exhibition combines modern craft with furniture borrowed from a range of sources to reflect on domestic spaces today.

How does the exhibition examine museum practices and approaches to the presentation of craft?

Period rooms, such as those found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art include painting, sculpture, furniture, silver, china, textiles, etc. within the context of a single domestic setting, providing visitors with a cross-section

of visual production in, say, France of the 17th century. Here, craft is in the service of history, often lost in the visual noise of an imagined setting. Several art museums, such as The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, are taking a different approach with their contemporary collections, exhibiting works typically categorized as decorative arts, fine art and design within thematic exhibitions. While this provides a relatively neutral arena to engage the visual arts, few museums have the scope to effectively execute exhibitions of this kind.

In *Mining the Museum: An Installation*, Fred Wilson paired unlikely objects from the collection of the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore (1992–3), such as slave shackles with fine silver, revealing how a collection can simultaneously critique museum practice and reveal socio-cultural meanings associated with and through objects.

In craft institutions today, collections are most often presented in ways that mirror art museums and gallery settings. Objects are organized chronologically, thematically, by region or by media, and displayed on large pedestals or in built-in casework. The experience of craft in this format works well for objects created for the “white cube” in more recent decades, but falls short in its presentation of historic craft that is non-functional, but more visibly linked to a history of utility and scaled for a domestic setting.

The Living Room is an experimental installation that takes Wilson’s contemporary practice of engaging individual objects as carriers of meanings that shift and change in relationship to one another, and as objects within a culturally-charged space as its exploratory strategy. Presenting selected objects from the Museum collection in two formats: imagined contemporary domestic settings and the built-in casework of the art arena, *The Living Room* asks viewers to consider how museums display craft. Competing with better-known modern design in one setting, and isolated from its domestic focus in another, are these types of installations providing a visitor experience that addresses craft as a subject of its own? Or do they place craft in situations where important differentiating elements are lost?

How will the exhibition change during the next six months?

Because craft is the lens through which the exhibition examines current interests in mid-century modernism, the checklist will remain constant, but the objects will be re-installed three times during the six-month duration to

highlight different relationships and concepts. The furniture and tableware – borrowed from Canoe, Corporate Environments of Oregon, a Knoll Dealer; Era Mid-Century Furnishings and Art; Workplace Resource of Oregon, a Herman Miller Dealer; and Hive Modern, and the purchases from IKEA and West Elm – function as “exhibition furniture,” much like pedestals in a more typical display, and will remain constant throughout the exhibition.

Mid-Century Modern

On view October and November 2007

The first installation examines mid-century modernism. Juxtaposing three casserole dishes, for example, by Edith Heath, who taught Frances Senska, who in turn taught Peter Voulkos prompts considerations of how each of these lidded vessels differently occupies space. Jack Lenor Larsen’s *Remoulade* combines a range of types of yarns, each with different thicknesses and elasticity, into a handwoven textile. An innovator, Larsen is known for finding industry approaches that retained the hand-crafted texture of a textile while enabling him to produce quantities for clients like Frank Lloyd Wright. Here, the design pieces provide a contextual foundation to understand how craft inhabited both homes in the fifties and might inhabit those of today.

Ornamental Modern

On view December 2007 and January 2008

The second installation examines a contemporary interest in ornamental forms, layered patterns, and kitsch within the resurgence of mid-century modern design. This incorporation of curvilinear forms and ornamental silhouettes directly challenges what has come to define Bauhaus aesthetics, instead redefining the mid-century revival in distinctively feminine forms, such as Eva Zeisel’s coffee table now available through Design Within Reach. The works of Robert Arneson, Patti Warashina and Fred Bauer are presented as precursors to today’s interest in irony, such as the popular stark white ceramics by Suck UK. Right now, color and pattern and an interest in process prevails, revealed in the layered fabric from Reprodepot showcased on Sam Maloof’s settee, and the laser-cut tyvek of Tord Boontje’s *Until Dawn* curtain.

Eco-Modern

On view February and March 2008

The final installation examines eco-modernism, linking eco-consciousness, a philosophy of re-use, a natural and organic palette, and the impact of Orientalist philosophy on mid-century modernism. When Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada conducted their national lecture tour in 1952, their Orientalist philosophical approach rooted in Zen Buddhism dramatically changed ceramics and counter culture in the 1950s. Using simple methods and materials available to village potters worldwide, the focus of the movement was not to emulate folk artisans, but to imbue modern work with a comparable functional simplicity. Works by Hamada, Ray Grimm and Peter Voulkos provide an understanding of how craft engaged – and then transformed – Mingei ideas.

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1. Oxford English Dictionary Online, Oxford University Press, 2007, from second edition 1989.
 2. http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/living?view=uk
 3. Greenhalgh, Peter, “Worrying About the Modern World,” *American Craft*, Vol. 67, No.5, pp. 121–128.

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oregon home
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Resources

www.designspongeonline.com

www.greenjeansbrooklyn.blogspot.com

Greenhalgh, Peter, “Worrying About the Modern World,” *American Craft*, Vol. 67, No.5, pp. 121–128.

Marincola, Paula, ed. Glenn Adamson, “Handy-Crafts: A Doctrine.” *What Makes a Great Exhibition?* Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006.

Oldham, Todd and Julia Szabo. *Handmade Modern: Mid-Century Inspired Projects for Your Home*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

Yelavich, Susan. *Contemporary World Interiors*. New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2007.

724 Northwest Davis Street | Portland, Oregon 97209 | TEL 503.223.2654
www.MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org | Tuesday–Sunday 11 AM–6 PM and Thursday 11 AM–8 PM

Museum of Contemporary Craft

THE LIVING ROOM

October 11, 2007 – March 23, 2008 | Museum of Contemporary Craft | Curated by Namita Gupta Wiggers

Laura Andreson
Blue Bowl, 1981
Porcelain with green/blue crystal glaze
Gift of Tempe and Myron Berggren
1998.96.01

Laura Andreson
Lavendar Bottle, 1974
Porcelain
Gift of Tempe and Myron Berggren
1998.96.02

Joe Apodaca
Coffee Pot, 1963
Sterling silver, rosewood
On temporary loan from Joe and Linda Apodaca, with intention of donation
IL 2007.05.01

Linda Apodaca
Casserole, 1967
Sterling silver, rosewood
On temporary loan from Joe and Linda Apodaca, with intention of donation
IL 2007.05.02

Robert Arneson
Art Works, 1970
Porcelain
Gift of Myron Berggren
1998.88.01

Robert Arneson
Red-Yellow Rock Form, n.d.
Stoneware
Gift of Arlene Schnitzer
1998.91.01

Fred Bauer
Green Giants Lunch, 1969
Lustered ceramic, mother of pearl, platinum
Gift of Ed Cauduro
1998.69.01

Harry Bertoia
Diamond Lounge Chair, 1952
Welded stainless steel with chrome finish, upholstery
On loan from Corporate Environments of Oregon, A Knoll dealer

Harry Bertoia
Bird Chair, 1952
Welded stainless steel with chrome finish, upholstery
On loan from Corporate Environments of Oregon, A Knoll dealer

Tord Björklund
Björsta Sideboard, currently available
Particle board with birch veneer
Purchased from IKEA

J.B. Blunk
Folded Bowl, n.d.
Bizen-style
Gift of Lydia Herrick Hodge
1998.56.01

Tord Boontje
Until Dawn, currently available
Tyvek
Purchased from Cheeky B

Rose Cabat
Gold Feelie, 1980d
Porcelain
Gift of Hal Cary
1998.91.07

Rose Cabat
Green Feelie, 1980d
Porcelain
Gift of Hal Cary
1998.91.06

Rose Cabat
Yellow & Brown Feelie, 1980d
Porcelain
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Rose Cabat
Light Green Feelie, 1980d
Porcelain
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Rose Cabat
Green & Brown Feelie, 1980d
Porcelain
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Lou Cabeen
Ambition, 1995
Found family textiles
Gift of Lou Cabeen
2007.11.1
(On view December 2007 and January 2008)

Chilewich
Placemats, currently available
Woven vinyl
Purchased from Sur La Table

William Creitz
Bottle with Small Neck, 1968
Stoneware
Unknown Gift
1998.68.03

George Cummings
Tall Vessel, c. 1970
Stoneware
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate
2007.01.08

George Cummings
Vase, c. 1977
Porcellaneous
Gift of George Cummings
2007.15.1

Løvig, Dansk Designs
Danish Sideboard, 1972
Teak
Purchased from Era Mid-Century Furnishings and Art

Charles and Ray Eames
Coffee Table, 1946
Molded plywood
On loan from Workplace Resource of Oregon, A Herman Miller dealer

Betty Feves
Three Figures No. 4, 1955
Stoneware
Oregon Ceramic Studio Purchase, Osmon B. Stubbs Memorial Award, 1955
1998.55.02

Betty Feves
Five Spindly Figures, c. 1960
Earthenware
Gift of Ruth Halvorsen
1998.93.08

Betty Feves
Vessel Sculpture, c. 1960
Stoneware
Gift of Ken Shores
2000.15.05

Betty Feves
Covered Casserole, n.d.
Ceramic
Gift of Dr. Francis J. Newton
2004.09.47

Ray Grimm
Don Quixote, 1956
Stoneware
Unknown Gift
1998.59.01

Ray Grimm
Iron Blue Chun Thesis Bowl, 1955
Porcelain
Gift of Jere and Ray Grimm
1998.93.05

Ray Grimm
Oxblood Bowl, 1955
Ceramic
Gift of Jere and Ray Grimm
1998.93.11

Joacim Gustavsson
Nordmyra Chairs, currently available
Birch and plywood
Purchased from IKEA

Shoji Hamada
Plate from Workshop, c. 1952
Ceramic
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Shoji Hamada
Water vessel, n.d.
Ceramic
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Tom Hardy
Metal Bull Sculpture, c. 1958
Rusted steel
Gift of Hal Cary
1998.91.24

Tom Hardy
Rhino, 1946
Sandstone
Unknown Gift
1998.46.01

Tom Hardy
Seagull, 1974
Ink wash on paper
Gift of Tom Hardy
1998.74.03

Edith Heath
Selected Tableware Pieces, 1980d
Ceramic
Gift of the French Estate, Reed College
2006.05.205 a-f

Edith Heath
Selected Tableware Pieces
currently available
Ceramic
On loan from Canoe

Laurie Herrick
Redwood 5, n.d.
Wool and cedar bark
Unknown Gift
1998.91.26
(On view December 2007 and January 2008)

Lydia Herrick Hodge
Turquoise Lidded Jar, c. 1940
Ceramic
Gift of Lydia Herrick Hodge
1998.00.21

Lydia Herrick Hodge
Bull, 1940d
Ceramic
Gift of Ken Shores
2006.01.01

Lydia Herrick Hodge
small orange bowl (yellow interior with flower), 1930d
Ceramic
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate
1998.00.29

Lydia Herrick Hodge
small dish with yellow exterior, orange crackle interior, 1930d
Ceramic
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate
2004.10.29

Lydia Herrick Hodge
yellow bud vase, 1930d
Ceramic
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate
2004.10.32

Lydia Herrick Hodge
yellow bud vase, 1930d
Ceramic
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate
2004.10.33

Lydia Herrick Hodge
cream bowl with blue flower, 1930d
Ceramic
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate
2004.10.21

Lydia Herrick Hodge
small bowl with black interior, 1930d
Ceramic
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate
2004.10.31

Lydia Herrick Hodge
Small brown bowl, 1930d
Ceramic
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate
2004.10.17

Howard Kottler
The Lecher, 1967
Porcelain
Gift of Arlene Schnitzer
1998.91.31

Howard Kottler
Gold & Green Winged Form, n.d.
Raku
Gift of Hal Cary
1998.91.31

Jack Lenor Larsen
Remoulade, 1954
Machine woven linen, cotton and silk
Gift of Hal Cary
1998.91.34
(On view October and November 2007)

Bernard Leach
Bowl, n.d.
Ceramic
Gift of Ronald and Beverly Judd
2006.02.1

Glen Lukens
Yellow Crackle Bowl, 1950
Ceramic
Gift of Lydia Herrick Hodge
1998.50.01

Sam Maloof
Settee, 1970d
Wood
Gift of Raymond and Evelyn Sheehan

Sam Maloof
Bench, 1970d
Wood
Gift of Raymond and Evelyn Sheehan

John Mason
Blue Cube, c.1956
Stoneware
Unknown Gift
1998.57.01

Gertrud and Otto Natzler
Teardrop Vase, c. 1962
Ceramic
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Otto Natzler
Bright Blue Bowl, 1968
Ceramic
Gift of Tom Hardy
1998.68.13

Eric Norstad
Carved Bottle, 1956
Stoneware
Osmon B. Stubbs Memorial Award Recipient
1998.56.02

Eric Norstad
Covered Casserole, n.d.
Ceramic
Gift of Dr. Francis J. Newton
2004.09.26a,b

Eric Pfeiffer
Offi Mag Table, 2001
Molded plywood with birch veneer
On loan from Canoe

Antonio Prieto
Vase, c.1956
Ceramic with sgraffito
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate
2004.10.08

Antonio Prieto
Swirly Grey Vase, n.d.
Stoneware
Gift of Albert and Gladys Avakian
1998.75.05

Antonio Prieto
Brown Striped Vase, n.d.
Stoneware
Gift of Arlene Schnitzer
1998.91.51

Antonio Prieto
Large Chicken Bowl, n.d.
Stoneware
Unknown Gift
1998.00.53

Antonio Prieto
Small Chicken Bowl, 1960d
Stoneware
Gift of Arlene Schnitzer
1998.91.53

Lucie Rie
Tall bottle, 1950d
Ceramic
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Lucie Rie
Small brown bowl, 1950d
Ceramic
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Lucie Rie
Small pink bowl, 1950d
Ceramic
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Lucie Rie
Teapot, c. 1950
Ceramic
On loan from the Family of Dr. Howard and Margaret Mason
L 01.03.01 a,b

Victoria Avakian Ross
White on White Bowl, c. 1948
Ceramic
Gift of the Victoria Avakian Ross Estate
1998.76.04

Eero Saarinen
Dining Table, 1956
Aluminum with oak
On loan from Hive

Frances Senska
Ray Bowl, 1954
Ceramic
Unknown Gift
1998.54.01

Frances Senska
Green Lidded Casserole, c. 1960
Stoneware
Gift of Dr. Francis J. Newton
1998.93.36

Frances Senska
Black Bottle, 1952
Stoneware
Oregon Ceramic Studio Purchase
1998.52.02

Leroy Setziol
Wall Panel, n.d.
Wood
Gift of Ruth Halvorsen
1998.93.37

David Shaner
Garden Slab, 1964
Slab built stoneware
Oregon Ceramic Studio Purchase, George T. Gerlinger Memorial Award Fund, 1964
1998.64.01

Ken Shores
Tall Goblet, c. 1960
Ceramic
Gift of Ruth Halvorsen
1998.93.40

Robert Sperry
Warrior Urn #2, 1960
Stoneware
Gift of Ed Cauduro
1998.67.01

Bob Stocksdale
Bowl, 1985
Brazilian tulipwood
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Bob Stocksdale
Bowl, 1980d
Brazilian kingwood
Promised gift from Carol and Seymour Haber

Bob Stocksdale
Ebony Bowl, 1973
Lathe turned Macassar ebony bowl
Gift of Contemporary Crafts Gallery Women's Activities Committee
1998.73.04

William Stromberg
Salad Utensils, 1952
Wood
Gift of Maurine Roberts
1998.74.05

Kyoko Tokumaru
Germination (Festive), 2002
Porcelain
Gift of Carol and Seymour Haber, Purchased from Artist-in-Residence Exhibition, 2002
2002.01.01

Unknown
Stacked Modular Bookcase, currently available
Wood
Purchased from West Elm

Peter Voulkos
Vase with Leaf, 1952
Stoneware
Gift of Rose Fenzl
2001.10.10

Peter Voulkos
Gourd Shaped Vase, 1952
Clay
Gift of Dr. Francis J. Newton
1998.93.47

Peter Voulkos
Green Swirls Vase, 1952
Stoneware
Osmon B. Stubbs Memorial Award Recipient
1998.52.03

Peter Voulkos
Striped Vase, 1950d
Earthenware
Gift of Ruth Halvorsen
1998.93.46

Peter Voulkos
Babe the Blue Ox, 1954
Ceramic
Oregon Ceramic Studio Purchase, Archie Bray Foundation, 1954
1998.54.02

Peter Voulkos
Bowl, c. 1952-53
Ceramic
Gift of Barbara Weber
2007.17.2

Peter Voulkos
Vase, c. 1952-53
Ceramic
Gift of Barbara Weber
2007.17.1

Peter Voulkos
Lidded Casserole, n.d.
Ceramic
Gift of Charles Kofler, In memory of William Rudy
1998.85.08

Peter Voulkos
Untitled, c. late 1950s
Ceramic
Gift of the Margaret Murray Gordon Estate
2004.10.03

Mike Walsh
Attachment: Target, 1974
Jute, paint, plastic tubing, vitrine containing Plexiglas fragments
Gift of Mike Walsh
2007.19.1
(On view February and March 2008)

Patti Warashina
Egg in Grass (Lidded Jar), 1969
Earthenware
Gift of Hal Cary
1998.91.70

Marguerite Wildenhain
Pond Farm Bowl, 1968-69
Stoneware
Gift of Victoria Avakian Ross
1998.75.11

Museum of Contemporary Craft