

Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir

Boris Bally

Harriete Estel Berman

Boym Partners

Jerry Bleem

Cat Chow

Sonya Clark

Mitra Fabian

Livia Marin

Régis Mayot

Jason Rogenes

Devorah Sperber

Laura Splan

Marcel Wanders

Dominic Wilcox

# MANUF<sup>®</sup>ACTURED

## The conspicuous transformation of everyday objects

*Manuf<sup>®</sup>actured* introduces a provocative new class of objects emerging from the permeable edges of art, craft and design. The exhibition highlights works from fifteen international artists who appropriate manufactured products to create sculptural works and installations of all sizes and scales. Rather than transform a single natural material, the artists on view employ a variety of pristine goods culled directly from manufacturers and store shelves as their raw materials. Nevertheless, each piece exhibits craft's time-honored, labor-intensive repetitive processes as a strategy for object-making.

*Organized for the Museum of Contemporary Craft by guest co-curators  
Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov.*



# FULL CIRCLE

Namita Gupta Wiggers

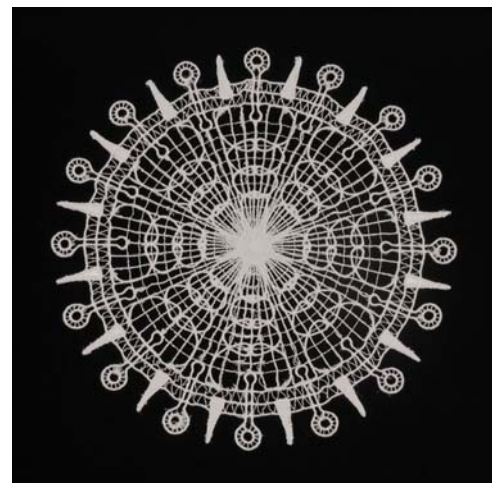
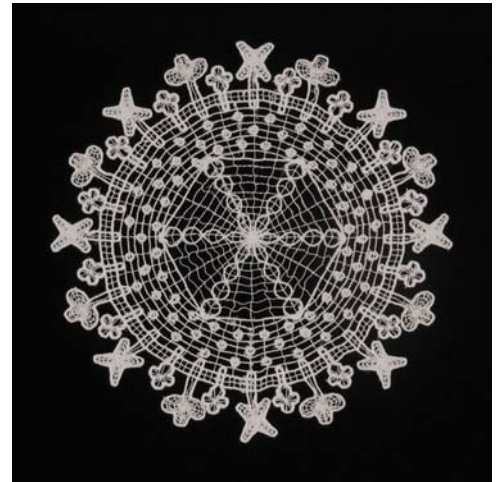
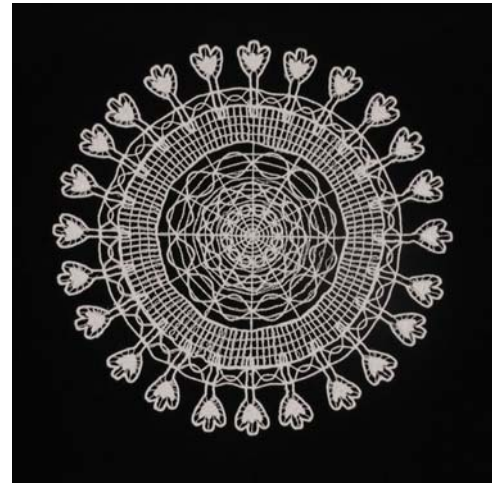
Industrialization is often blamed as the demise of craft. The ability to produce functional objects more quickly and efficiently shifted the place of craft and the handmade object in modern times. As it became less essential for those who create with their hands to make tableware, textiles or furniture, object-making shifted within and outside of the craft arena to include the production of utilitarian-based forms. Societal needs shifted to different places on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Conceptual practice merged with craft, resulting in a contestatory relationship that continues to percolate to this day.

This shift is particularly problematic today for those who choose to work in one of the five historically defined craft media: wood, glass, metal, fiber and clay. The academy today provides a menu of offerings to students in visual art disciplines. Whether you study art, craft or design, you can add clay and performance or embroidery and computer animation to your repertoire of making skills. Promiscuity with materials, techniques and concepts prevails as artists have – and continue – to actively cross the boundaries between visual arts disciplines.

In early 2006, Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov first proposed a project that evolved into this exhibition and the accompanying publication. *Manuf@ctured: The Conspicuous Transformation of Everyday Objects* is a focused critical study of an emerging class of objects created by artists, craftspeople and designers who are working *with* rather than against industrialization and globalization. Consumer desires made consumption go global, a problematic process for a number of reasons, including the demise of regional identity. The fifteen international artists included in this exhibition, however, reveal a significant shift in the relationship to such globally available goods that counters homogeneity in a surprising way. Steven and Mara define this cultural shift as *manuf@cturing*, a process through which makers use banal and abundant industrially-produced objects as their raw materials, seamlessly merging techniques and processes drawn from art, craft *and* design to create uniquely hand-made work.

Thus, as our guest curators have identified, the conversation comes full circle. The hand and machine work together, and the visual arts are merged into a single practice. Importantly, the artists included in this exhibition call our attention to new materials and ways of working. Through careful curatorial selection, this exhibition also reveals how *manuf@cturing* returns our attention to traditional craft forms: the bowl, teacup, dress, comb, light fixture, rug and chair. Here, utilitarian-based forms remain conceptual, not functional, but their creators are visibly operating from within rather than against industrialization.

Museum of Contemporary Craft thanks Steven and Mara, the participating artists, craftspeople and designers, and Chronicle Books for their collaborative vision and work beyond the call of duty that made this exhibition and accompanying publication possible. As a museum that engages craft as a richly diverse subject of study, this exhibition reveals one of the many new and exciting ways in which craft prevails in contemporary culture.





# ART, CRAFT AND DESIGN REALIGNED AND THE BIRTH OF MANUF®ACTURING

STEVEN SKOV HOLT AND MARA HOLT SKOV

At the beginning of this new century, craft was in crisis mode. Craft was being banished from institutions, organizations and general civilized discourse, sending craft-centric circles spinning with anxiety about the future of their field. Some of the greatest fears took hold when New York's American Craft Museum became the Museum of Arts and Design in 2002. Just a year later, the California College of Arts & Crafts (where Steven has been on the faculty since 1995) became California College of the Arts. But it wasn't just the large urban institutions that were shifting semantic positions. Even arts organizations in smaller towns were experiencing similar existential moments, electing to drop the term craft altogether. Some in the craft world embraced the changes while others responded with grumbling, confusion and even anger.

Only one year ago, the seventy-year-old Contemporary Crafts Museum & Gallery went through a similar questioning period and ultimately changed its name to Museum of Contemporary Craft. Their choice could almost be considered a radical one for the time – to embrace craft and focus on the term in its most active form, as a verb. *Manuf@actured: The Conspicuous Transformation of Everyday Objects* is a key part of their mission to present new, relevant and expansive ways to define the discipline.

For craft was not expiring as much as it was changing, evolving in a way that few could identify and that even fewer could anticipate. In fact, the small-scale titular loss of craft on one level turned out to be the large-scale rediscovery of craft on numerous others. On the professional front, craft materials



emerged as key constituents of contemporary sculpture, furniture, fashion and industrial design; craft processes found new relevance as artists explored the meanings that accrued to mass produced goods, and industrial designers explored the promise of rapid prototyping and individualized production; luxury brands focused marketing muscle on their products' artisanal traditions and highlighted areas where the handmade was celebrated for its virtuosity. In the two-dimensional realm, a surge in hand-made typography re-energized graphic projects everywhere – from restaurant menus to corporate identities.

In retrospect, what we experienced with the term craft was both a linguistic switcheroo, and the radical systemic shift that insiders feared. Even though the word lost some of its prominence, the key signifiers of craft remained undiminished. Craft – the process, the intention and the action verb centered on a deep and abiding sense of materiality – has seemingly been inserted back into everything that matters most in visual culture. Select artists from nearly every creative field – from art to design, music to theater, and cinema to literature – have been quick to claim or reclaim craft as part of their professional heritage, an integral part of their toolkit, and absolutely essential to the creation of great work. While the word may have disappeared from some very visible marquees, the good news is that the material concerns, processes and transformations that craft addresses are enjoying larger and more visually literate audiences than ever before.

*Manuf@actured* is based on that escalating visual literacy but also on the welcome willingness (a quality that has

always been there, but is particularly prevalent now) among artists, craftspeople and designers to approach, absorb and act upon new ideas, new ways of making, and new types of materials. With respect to *manuf@actured* objects, the results so far have been three-fold: the creation of a class of strange-yet-familiar objects that are art-craft-design hybrids; the utilization of a wide range of already manufactured products and product components as powerful and readily available raw materials; and elevated attention, curiosity and dialogue among growing numbers of aficionados, collectors, critics and consumers. More people than ever before are turned-on to the merits, opportunities, and pleasures endemic to 21st-century object making.

Each of the artists, craftspeople and designers in *Manuf@actured* embodies the concept of conspicuous transformation, itself an updating of the term “conspicuous consumption” noted by sociologist Thorstein Veblen. They use a vast array of consumer goods as their raw material: tin cans, staples, detergent bottles, plastic tape, marker caps, lipsticks, zippers, foam packaging, plastic combs, thread spools, highway signs and more. They take these often virgin products of consumer culture and either separate them into modules, aggregate them together in great numbers, or both. This is *manuf@acturing*: the active and thoughtful accumulation, organization and transformation of common materials through a novel combination of hand, tool, machine and production processes.

The thing that is new in *manuf@actured* objects is that it appears to be the first time that artists, craftspeople and designers are pulling their raw materials from the racks of pristine manufactured goods or post-consumer products and packaging that have entered the waste stream. Because they are manufactured, these materials can be acquired in vast quantities with the relative ease of getting one’s groceries. Abundance on this scale often generates strategies of repetition – objects are multiplied by whatever power the artist chooses. Pedestals can overflow, corners can be filled, whole walls can be covered; complete rooms can be outfitted, dwarfing the eon-spanning metrics traditionally provided by the scale of the human body.

While diverse, the practitioners in *Manuf@actured* have the following in common: they all share the ability to transform familiar, banal, even previously manufactured materials into objects of great meaning. They all evince the deepest respect for their materials through their careful attention to even the tiniest of details. They all advance a new definition for what is considered beautiful through their pure visual presence, even as they offer social commentary about our immersion within consumer society and our disconnection from both nature and the act of creating.

*Manuf@actured* includes a wide variety of works that challenge our notions of what materials can be, accelerating our visual culture, and pointing toward a new type of environmentally-aware bridge between the creative disciplines. The work ranges from the precision-bound domestic ironies of metalsmith Harriete Estel Berman to the meticulously twisted wigs of fiber

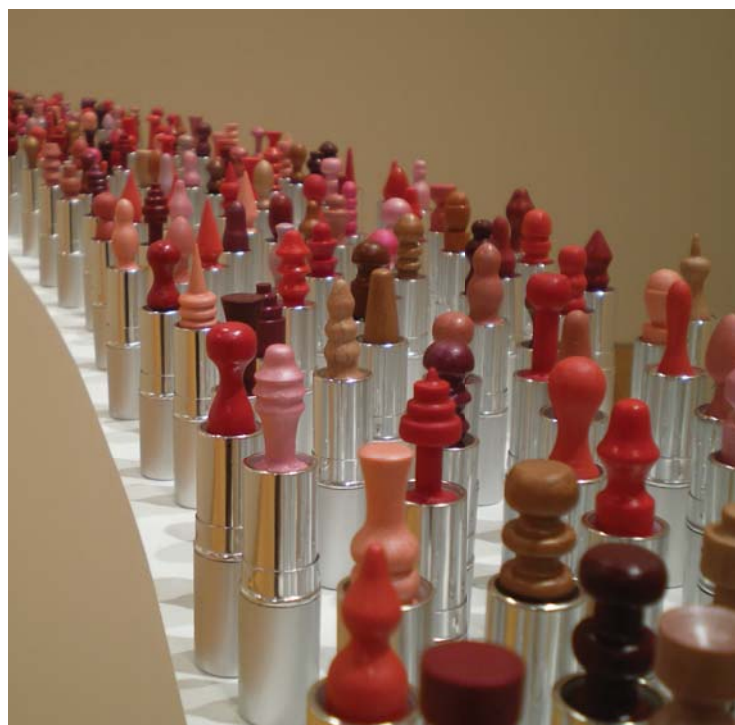
artist Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir; from the minimalist cubes of crocheted cotton frozen in resin by designer Marcel Wanders to artist Jason Rogenes’ glowing otherworldly light totems. Seen together – for the first time anywhere – the pieces shown in this exhibition are remarkably varied and thought-provoking.

As object-making has moved toward *manuf@acturing*, it has increasingly drawn upon the lessons, processes and intellectual challenges that artists, craftspeople and designers have always negotiated at the highest echelons. This new kind of craft is now thoroughly and unmistakably contemporary.

In so many ways, craft is still about what it was always about – the integral process of making, the joy of mastery, material exploration, secret but attainable knowledge, the mark of the maker, reference points to human scale, the kinesthetic relationships between hand and mind, and honest and sincere rendition. We are in the midst of an art, craft and design revolution, one in which the fringes are as fascinating as the familiar center – further fulfilling contemporary visual culture’s radical promise of innovation and possibility.

Lifting a lesson from popular culture (something that *manuf@actured* objects are prone to do), consider the story of the venerable Obi-Wan Kenobi. He died a noble death in *Star Wars*, willingly succumbing to Darth Vader’s light saber so that his energy could be released throughout the universe. In a similar way, craft has vanished one moment only to manifest more broadly than ever a moment later. This time it has been absorbed into seemingly every element of creative culture – a powerful force and equally powerful source guiding the makers of objects whenever and wherever questions of material-based poetics are raised, celebrated and rewarded.

Adapted from “Art, Craft, and Design ReAligned” as printed in *Manuf@actured: The Conspicuous Transformation of Everyday Objects*, published by Chronicle Books, 2008.



## RELATED PROGRAMS

Visit [www.MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org/manufactured](http://www.MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org/manufactured) for additional information about these programs.

### CRAFTPERSPECTIVES LECTURE

#### *Manuf@ctured: From Readymade to AlreadyMade*

Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov

Thursday, September 18, 6:30 PM, University of Oregon's White Stag Building (70 NW Couch Street). Cost: \$5 (Free for members and students with i.d.)

CO-PRESENTED BY: University of Oregon

### FAMILY DISCOVERY SUNDAY

#### Hot Off the Press

Sunday, September 28, 1–4 PM, The Lab. Free.

Artist Charissa Brock will help participants create paper vessels and other art objects using only leftover paper strips from printers and staples.

### FAMILY DISCOVERY SUNDAY

#### Binding the Unbreakable with Sonya Clark

Sunday, October 12, 1–4 PM, The Lab. Free.

Create a collaborative art object out of thousands of unbreakable, thread wrapped combs with *Manuf@ctured* artist Sonya Clark.

### EXHIBITION TOUR

#### Curator Walkthrough

Tuesday, October 14, noon, Tour convenes at front desk. Free.

Museum Curator Namita Gupta Wiggers provides a tour.

### KAFFEEKLATSCH DISCUSSION GROUP

#### *Keeping Portland Weird: DIY and the Resurgence of Craft*

Tuesday, November 4, noon, The Lab. Free

Join Marketing Manager Marc Moscato, guests Susan Beal and Cathy Pitters (PDX Super Crafty) and Justin Hocking (executive director, Independent Publishing Resource Center) for a discussion on DIY, its connection to craft and the contemporary resurgence of all things independent.

### ADULT WORKSHOP

#### Cat Chow Workshop

Saturday, November 8, 1–4 PM, The Lab. Cost: \$45 (Members: \$40).

*Manuf@ctured* artist Cat Chow teaches participants to combine leftover manufactured materials and scraps to fabricate a sculpture, dress, bag or just a great work of art to take home! Pre-registration required.

E-mail [education@MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org](mailto:education@MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org) or call 971.255.5507.

### EXHIBITION TOUR

#### Educator Eye Tour

Tuesday, November 18, noon, Tour convenes at front desk. Free.

Education/Public Programs Manager Jessica Baldenhofer gives an interactive tour of *Manuf@ctured*.

### NEW! LEARNING TO LOOK GUIDE FOR KIDS

The Museum is pleased to offer a new guide for kids ages 6–11, available at the front desk, for use in the exhibition. Great for families!

### NEW! CRAFTKIDS K–12 SCHOOL GROUP PROGRAM

Students are introduced to craft through inquiry and discussion-based scheduled tours. E-mail [education@MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org](mailto:education@MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org) or call 971.255.5507 for more information. Fees apply; minimum two weeks advance notice.

### SCHOOL'S OUT! / CRAFT'S IN!

Hands-on camp on days when school is not in session. Open to ages 7–12.

Pre-registration required. E-mail [education@MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org](mailto:education@MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org) or call 971.255.5507. Cost: \$45/day (Members at Household Level or above: \$40)



### NEW! ON THE WEB

[www.MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org/manufactured](http://www.MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org/manufactured)

Visit the *Manuf@ctured* exhibition web site to learn more about the exhibition, participating artists, and access extended texts. Interviews with the curators and selected exhibiting artists are also available for download.

### IN PRINT | AVAILABLE IN THE GALLERY

*Manuf@ctured: The Conspicuous Transformation of Everyday Objects*

By Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov, Published by Chronicle Books

Limited copies available after September 17, 2008.

Additional copies available after November 15, 2008

\$35 (MEMBERS \$31.50)

*Manuf@ctured: The Conspicuous Transformation of Everyday Objects* is on view at the Museum of Contemporary Craft, August 28, 2008–January 4, 2009

### CURATORS' BIO

Steven Skov Holt is a writer, curator and Distinguished Professor at California College of the Arts. Mara Holt Skov is an independent curator. Steven and Mara co-authored *Blobjects & Beyond: The New Fluidity in Design*, and live in San Francisco.

Exhibition support provided by:



Ziba Design

### CAPTIONS

PAGE 2: Dominic Wilcox, *War Bowl (Waterloo)*, 2002; melted plastic army soldiers; 5.5 × 17.5 inches diameter; Courtesy of Thorsten Van Elten Ltd., London

PAGE 3 (TOP TO BOTTOM): Laura Splan, *Doilies (Hepadna, Herpes, HIV, Influenza)*, 2004; Edition of 10 + 2 AP, computerized machine embroidery with thread, velvet, wood, Plexiglas; 16.75 × 16.75 × 2.25 inches framed; Collection of the artist

PAGE 4: Régis Mayot, *Grand Magasin*, 2001; carved plastic containers, metal, Plexiglas; 71 × 43 × 9.25 inches; Collection of the artist

PAGE 5: Livia Marin, *Ficciones de un uso*, 2004; 2,214 lipsticks; dimensions vary; Collection of the artist

PAGE 6: Boym Partners, *Salvation ceramics* developed for Moooi, 2002; ceramic dishes, Extreme Adhesive System medical glue; Photo courtesy of the artists

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

# Museum of Contemporary Craft