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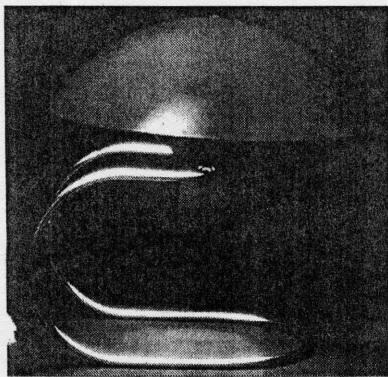


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INDEXES ON
PAGES 66 & 67

1900-2000 Women Designers In The USA

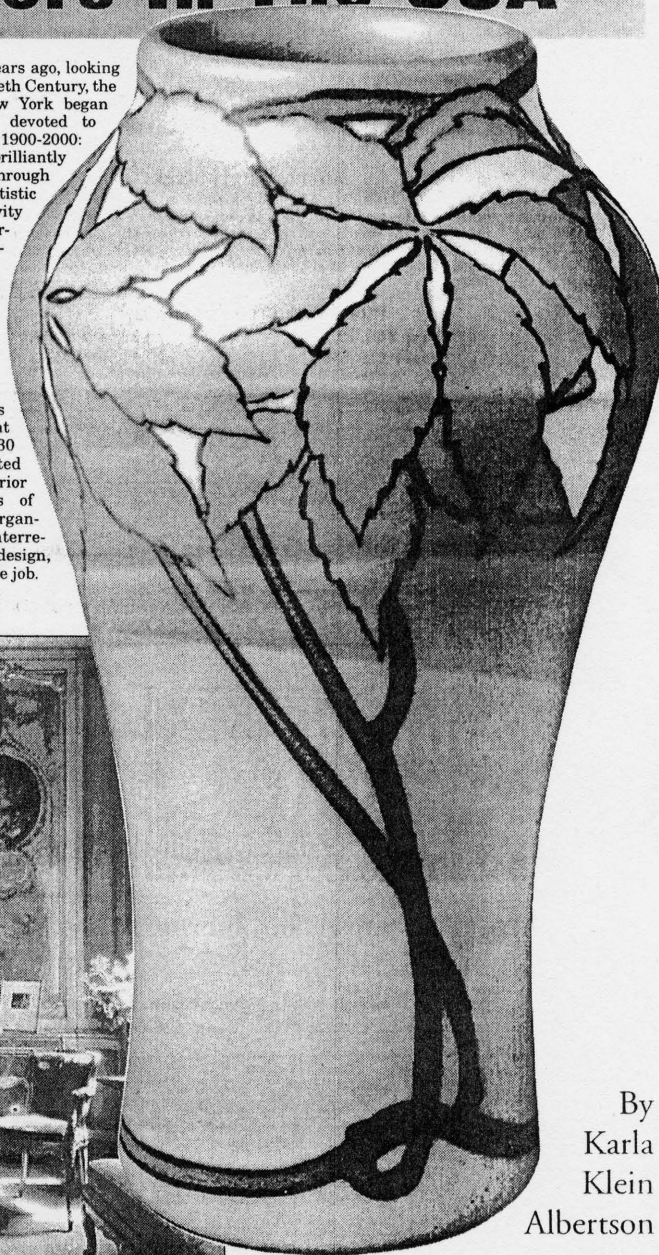


Greta von Nessen, "Anywhere" lamp, 1952, polished and lacquered aluminum. Philadelphia Museum of Art. After graduating from the School for Industrial Arts in Stockholm, von Nessen came to the United States in 1925 with her husband Walter and established a studio in New York for the design of lamps and lighting fixtures, which became her specialty. The "Anywhere" lamp could be hung, wall-mounted, or set on a table.

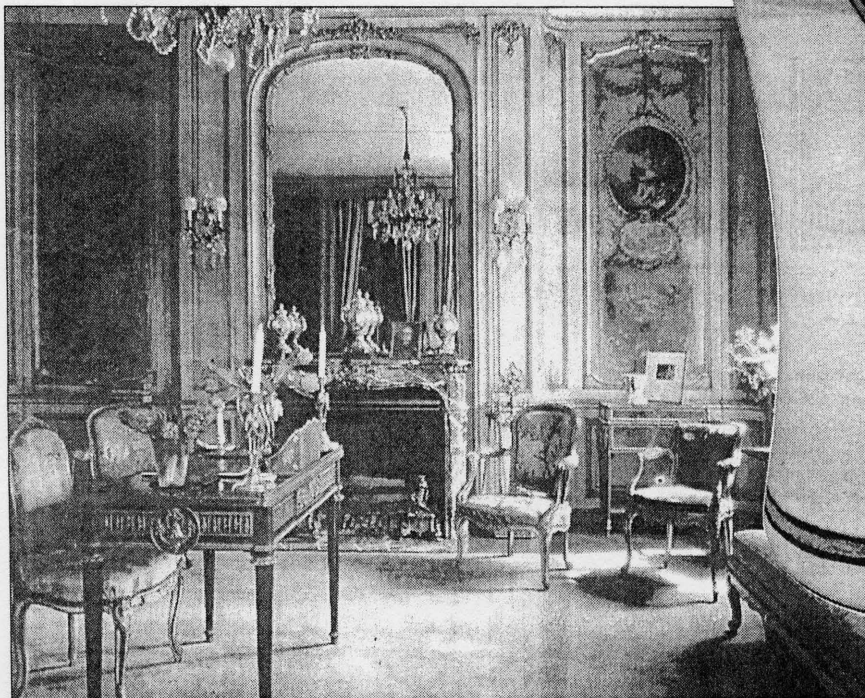
NEW YORK CITY — Three years ago, looking forward to the end of the Twentieth Century, the Bard Graduate Center in New York began planning a major exhibition devoted to "Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference." The brilliantly conceived show, which runs through February 25, covers miles of artistic ground from the personal creativity of pieced quilts and Native American baskets to professional pursuits such as architecture and Hollywood costume design.

The graduate center's founder and director, Dr Susan Weber Soros, entrusted the execution of the project to Bard Professor Pat Kirkham, who also edited the comprehensive volume, which accompanies the show. Kirkham has taught design history for the last 30 years in England and the United States with furniture and interior design two important areas of interest. For many years, the organizer also has researched the interrelationship of gender and design, adding to her credentials for the job.

(continued on page 68)



By
Karla
Klein
Albertson



Elsie de Wolfe, Boudoir of Adelaide Howard Childs Frick, Frick Mansion, New York, 1913. Photographed in 1965. Armed with flair and determination, de Wolfe turned to interior design in the early years of the Twentieth Century, inspired by Edith Wharton's *The Decoration of Houses* (1897). She began her career at New York's Colony Club for women, designed by her friend Stanford White, and won a major commission in 1913 to furnish the new Frick mansion on Fifth Avenue.

Anna Marie Valentien, glazed earthenware vase, circa 1902, Rookwood Pottery, Cincinnati, Ohio. Private collection. Women played an important role in the production of art pottery during the Arts and Crafts Movement. Valentien designed and decorated vases such as this at Cincinnati's Rookwood Pottery, founded in 1880 by Maria Longworth Nichols.

1900-2000 Women Designers In The USA

(continued from page one)

While many institutions have offered exhibitions on Twentieth Century design during the last year, Bard felt the need to emphasize the activity of women in the field during the last hundred years and decided to present an overall view of the field, rather than just concentrate on one particular area. Kirkham drew on her own experience in teaching design history and then collaborated with a lengthy list of specialist colleagues to produce this comprehensive picture. She emphasizes, "This opportunity to collaborate with other people has been very exciting."

The curator continues, "I themed it a bit, but basically the material in the exhibition is presented chronologically to give people a sense of the progress of the century." For example, two of the five sections of time are "Designing

Modernities: Circa 1918-1945," during which women artist became champions of the new modern design aesthetic, and "Designing the 'American Dream': 1945-1980," a period when up-to-date fashion and furnishings became affordable to everyone. Exhibits from this latter era include Greta von Nessen's aluminum "Anywhere" lamp, 1952, and a red wool Bonnie Cashin suit from 1964. It is noteworthy that the recent "Bonnie Cashin, Practical Dreamer" exhibition at the Fashion Institute of Technology (September 19, 2000, through January 6, 2001) was a research project by one of Kirkham's PhD students, who co-curated that show.

While the exhibition has been seen by thousands of visitors since it began November 15, 2000, it is the accompanying reference, also titled *Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference,*

that will have a long term impact on the field. With 400 color illustrations, a full bibliography, and extensive timeline, the reference is a must-have book for the study of Twentieth Century art history.

The book takes a slightly different approach to designing women than the chronological march of the exhibition, by focusing on broad specialties such as interior, landscape, industrial, or costume design. Important contributions in areas rarely integrated into this overall theme till now are the chapters "Three Strikes Against Me: African American Women Designers" by Pat Kirkham and Shauna Stallworth and "The Sacred Hoop: Native American Women Designers" by Pamela Kladzyk.

Looking more closely at the second of these, the chapter of

Native American design is further divided into basketry, textiles, pottery, regalia, beadwork, and quilting. Pueblo blackware is represented by the well-known work of Maria Martinez of San Ildefonso, a Santa Clara vase by Margaret Tafoya, circa 1945-1960, and a stunning 1999 creation with dramatic ribbed swirls by contemporary Santa Clara potter Nancy Youngblood Lugo.

While the volume certainly presents many objects, the primary emphasis is on the women who made them. The story of Anna Wagner Keichline of Bellfonte, Pa., is one of many interesting short biographies which recall a time when "woman" was not an everyday adjective before "designer." At age 14, she was already winning prizes for furniture made in a workshop set up by her supportive parents. Her photo

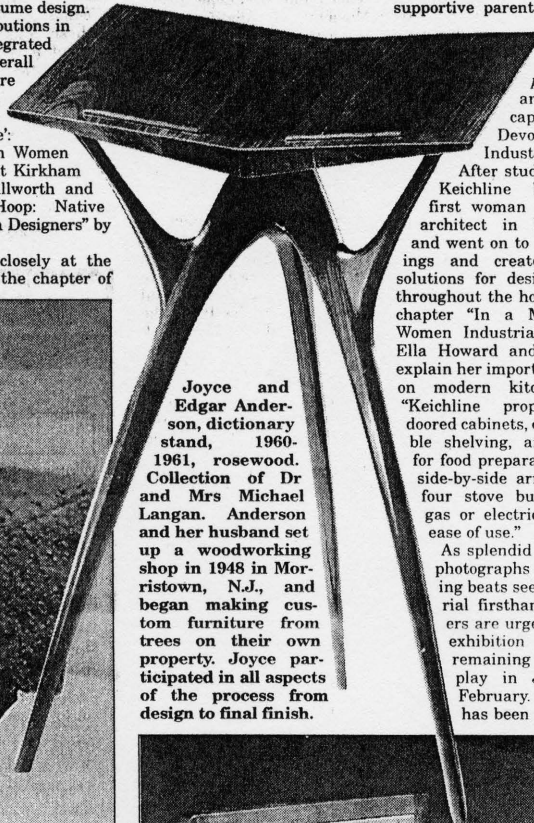
appeared in a 1903 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article with the caption "May Devote Life to Industrial Art."

After study at Cornell, Keichline became the first woman listed as an architect in Pennsylvania and went on to design buildings and create innovative solutions for design problems throughout the home. In their chapter "In a Man's World: Women Industrial Designers," Ella Howard and Eric Setliff explain her important influence on modern kitchen design: "Keichline proposed glass-doored cabinets, easily accessible shelving, ample surface for food preparation, and the side-by-side arrangement of four stove burners (either gas or electric) for greater ease of use."

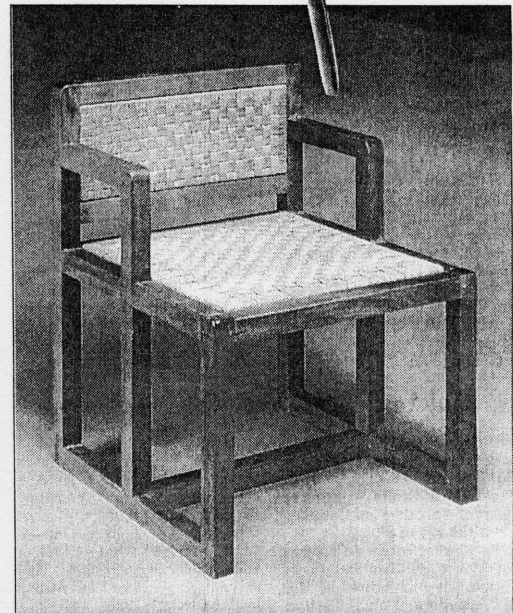
As splendid as the book's photographs may be, nothing beats seeing the material firsthand, and readers are urged to view the exhibition during its remaining weeks on display in January and February. Pat Kirkham has been very gratified



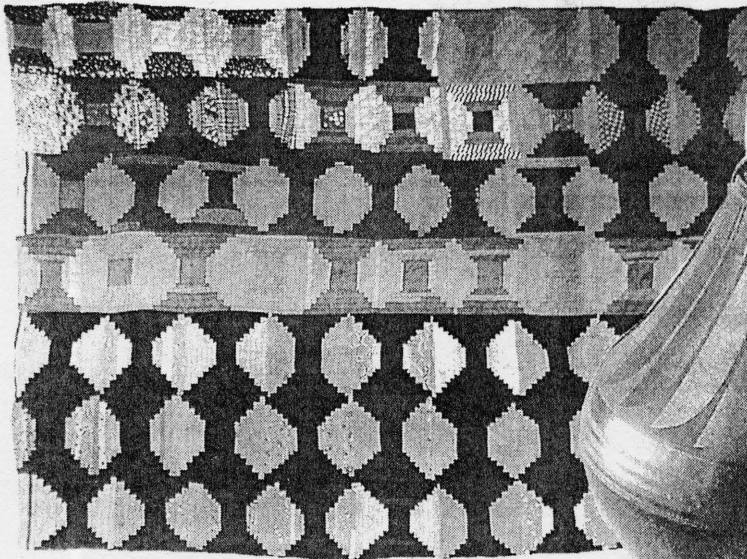
Bonnie Cashin, suit, 1964, wool, mohair, suede. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. After moving to New York in 1934, Cashin designed stage costumes, then moved on to the wholesale apparel industry. She returned to her native California in 1943 to design for Twentieth Century Fox movies, including *Laura and Anna* and the *King of Siam*. Another stint in the New York fashion world brought her five Coty awards. She was one of the first designers to explore the possibilities of leather and suede for street wear.



Joyce and Edgar Anderson, dictionary stand, 1960-1961, rosewood. Collection of Dr and Mrs Michael Langan. Anderson and her husband set up a woodworking shop in 1948 in Morristown, N.J., and began making custom furniture from trees on their own property. Joyce participated in all aspects of the process from design to final finish.

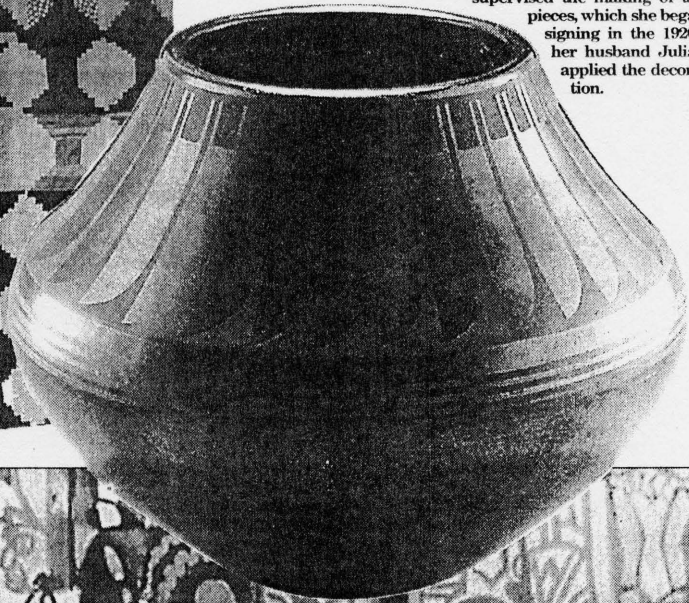


Ilonka Karasz, "Java" armchair, circa 1930, teak and woven flax. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Karasz, who emigrated to the United States from Budapest in 1913, was designing geometric furniture, ceramics, and silver by the late 1920s. Winning recognition in a man's world for her innovative creations, she believed furniture should not only be functional but also emotionally satisfying.

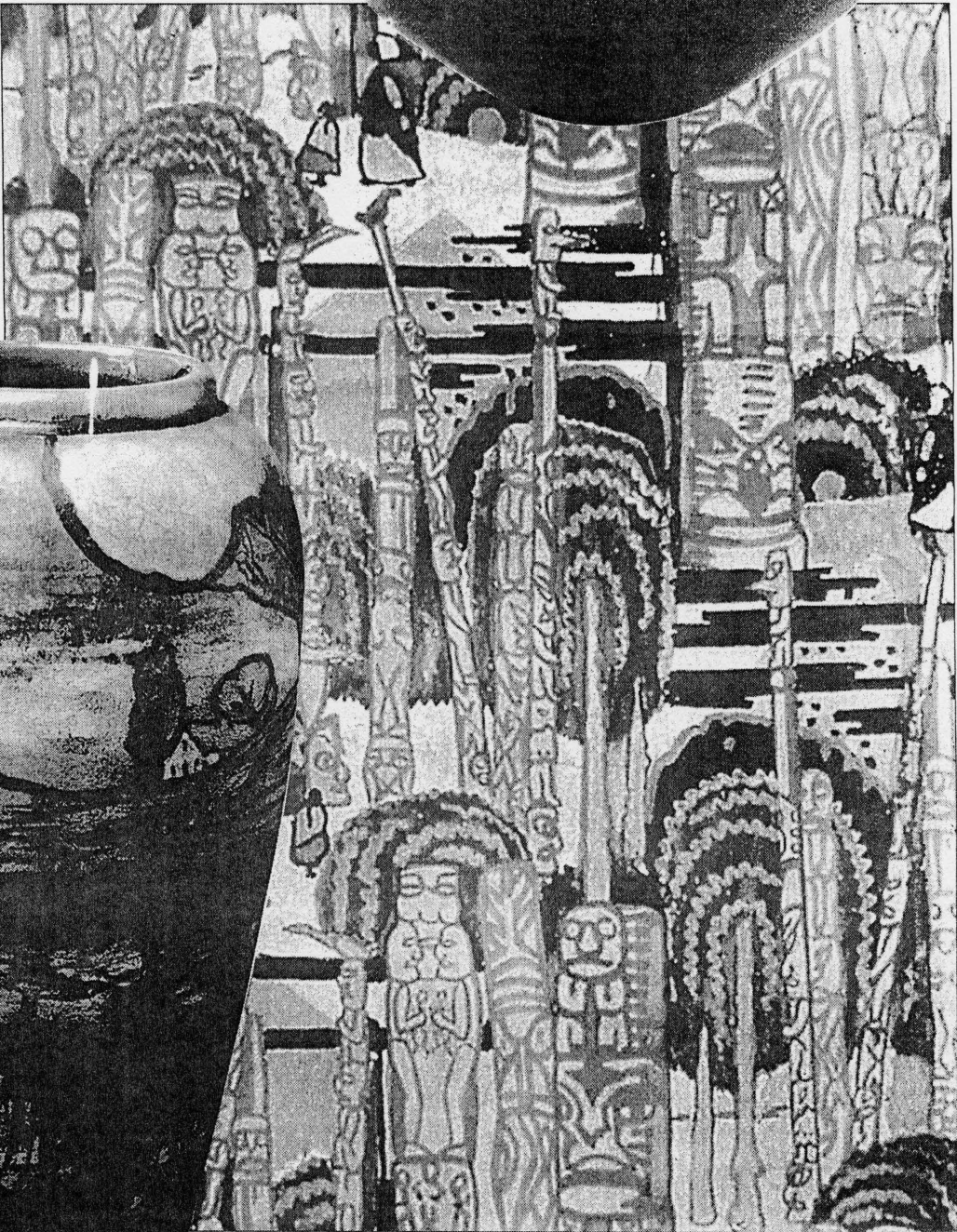


Wini Austin, "Log Cabin Quilt," circa 1925, cotton, quilted by Robert Jenison, University of Nebraska.

Maria and Julian Martinez (San Ildefonso), earthenware bowl, circa 1949-1950. Institute of American Indian Arts Museum, Santa Fe, N. Mex. Martinez, the best-known of the Twentieth Century Pueblo potters, broke new ground in her production of this technically complex black-on-black ware, whose decoration derived elements from archaeological finds in her area. While Maria supervised the making of the pieces, which she began signing in the 1920s, her husband Julian applied the decoration.



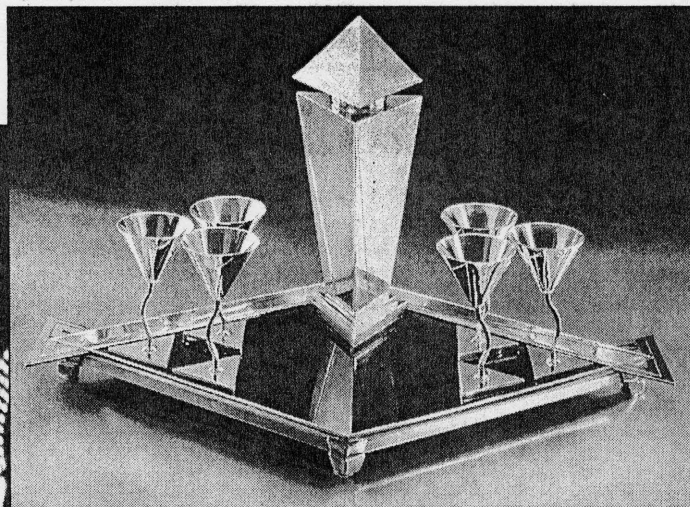
Edith Brown, glazed earthenware vase, 1922, Paul Revere Pottery, Boston, Mass. Private collection. The Paul Revere Pottery grew out of the Saturday Evening Girls' Club, founded at a branch of the Boston Public Library in 1908 to train immigrant girls as working artists. As a professional designer, Brown directed the project and produced her own distinctive scenic vases.



Lois Mailou Jones, design for "Totem Poles" fabric, 1928, tempera on paper. Estate of Lois Mailou Jones.

1900-2000 Women Designers In The USA

Elsa Tennhardt, cocktail set, circa 1928. Silver plate, glass, cork. Manufactured by E. and J. Bass Co., New York. Private collection. Fascinated by the angularity of New York's skyscrapers, Tennhardt patented the triangular design used in this stylishly cubist cocktail set.



by the response so far of show visitors excited by the wealth of information presented on the accomplishments of woman designers in the last century. "A lot of people say they feel very inspired," she notes. "One designer told me she wanted to go home and do more work."

More than a catalogue,

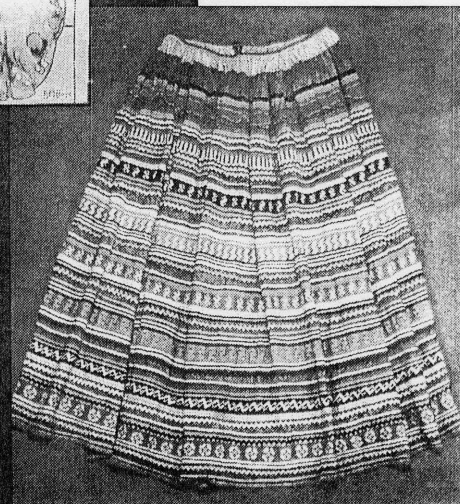
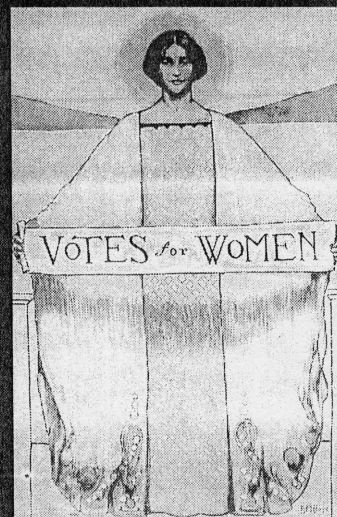
Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference, published by the Yale University Press in association with Bard, presents a collection of 17 essays by eminent scholars exploring the influence of women in design during the Twentieth Century. The volume includes chapters on the Arts and Crafts Movement, Native American artists, textiles, quilts, the fashion world, and interior design. Order through bookstores or directly from the Bard Graduate Center, 212/501-3023, hardbound, \$80.

Also available is a special Fall 2000 issue of the BGC journal, *Studies in the Decorative Arts* (\$15), devoted to articles and book reviews related to the exhibition: order by calling 212/501-3058 or e-mail journal@bgc.bard.edu.

This important exhibition has been accompanied by a broad variety of special events including films and lectures on special topics such as Florence Knoll Bassett, Eva Zeisel, and African-American Women Designers. For program information, call the BGC education office at 201/501-3013.

The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts is at 18 West 86th Street. Hours are Tuesday through Sunday, 11 am to 5 pm; Thursday, 11 am to 8 pm. For information, 212/501-3000, or www.bgc.bard.edu.

Bertha M. Boyé, "Votes for Women," circa 1913. The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard College, Cambridge, Mass. Women's suffrage was the central issue for feminists in the early Twentieth Century. Boyé's symmetrical central figure radiates a sense of confidence in the justice of their cause.



Lena Frank (Micosukee), skirt, 1944, cotton, rayon satin. American Museum of Natural History, New York. The Seminole and Micosukee women of Florida produced intricately stitched patchwork clothing in bright tropical colors drawn from the Everglades and Great Cypress Swamp. The designs of narrow horizontal bands sewn together by machine reflect the infinite creativity of their makers.

Josephine Hartwell Shaw, necklace, 1910, silver, gold, pearls. Private collection. In the environment of the Arts and Crafts Movement, artistic jewelry making was considered an appropriate occupation for women. Shaw's necklace, employing mixed metals to capture the irregular pearls, is also influenced by Art Nouveau metalwork.