



This Present Moment is Here and Now

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Installation photography of *This Present Moment: Crafting a Better World*, Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2022, Courtesy of Smithsonian American Art Museum. All photos by Albert Ting unless otherwise noted.

We're celebrating fifty years of the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Renwick Gallery with ***This Present Moment: Crafting a Better World***, a new exhibition that showcases the dynamic landscape of American craft. The exhibition features artworks from the museums' ambitious acquisition campaign, begun in 2020, that brought more than 200 objects by leading craft artists into the national collection. The campaign focused on artworks made by a broadly representative and diverse group of American artists including Black, Latinx, Asian American, LGBTQ+, Indigenous, and women artists. These artists have crafted spaces for daydreaming, stories of persistence, models of resilience, and methods of activism that resonate today. Activating both floors of

gallery space and highlighting a range of craft mediums from fiber and ceramics to glass and mixed media it asks the questions, "How have you reimagined your idea of home during the global pandemic?" "How is craft relevant to your life?" To craft a better world, it must first be imagined.



Ceramics by Toshiko Takaezu

This Present Moment features 171 artworks from the museum's permanent collection, with 135 of the new acquisitions on view for the first time at the Renwick. The exhibition highlights a wide range of craft mediums, from fiber and ceramics to glass and mixed media, that deepen the history of the studio craft movement while also introducing contemporary artworks that push the boundaries of handmade in the twenty-first century.



Masks by Carolyn Crump. Photo by Rebekah Meorado

For the past fifty years, the Renwick has celebrated the creativity of American craft artists, and the vital role craft plays in modern life. “Craft has always been a measure of the present moment,” said Mary Savig, the Lloyd Herman Curator of Craft. “This is because craft is inherently a measure of who we are—our labor and our memory. With this ambitious exhibition and acquisition campaign, we embraced the opportunity to document the contours of the present moment, including the global pandemic with acquisitions like **face masks**. The success of this endeavor relies on the collective efforts of many, many people. Together, our efforts measure our hopes for a better world.”

Some of the artists included in the exhibition are:

SONYA CLARK



Through her large-scale woven replica of the Confederate truce flag used at Appomattox, Sonya Clark asks the question, “What if this flag of truce was the flag we knew, instead of the Confederate battle flag?”

BISA BUTLER



Artist Bisa Butler explores the lives and histories of African Americans through her life-size portrait quilts, honoring both notable figures as well as bringing forgotten individuals to the forefront.

SHARON KERRY-HARLAN



Kerry-Harlan reflects on current events-including the effects of the pandemic-that have affirmed structures of racism in American society: "Despite these dire situations, resilience remains among African American and their allies to realize a better future." Portrait of Resilience pieces together materials and symbols from the past and present to create a portrait of a Black American girl in this current moment, whose youthful bubble braid is haloed with the crown-like appearance of a COVID-19 particle.

WANXIN ZHANG



An homage to Chinese culture, Wanxin Zhang's series of *Color Faces* recall colored masks worn during opera performances to represent a range of characters, personality traits, and backgrounds. The phrase "color face" is also an intentional play on words that describes Zhang's continuing experience of otherness within the country that has been his home for over thirty years.

This Present Moment: Crafting a Better World is on view through April 2, 2023 at SAAM's Renwick Gallery. See more artworks from the exhibition in our [online gallery](#), and learn more about the public programs we're presenting, including a series of virtual studio tours.