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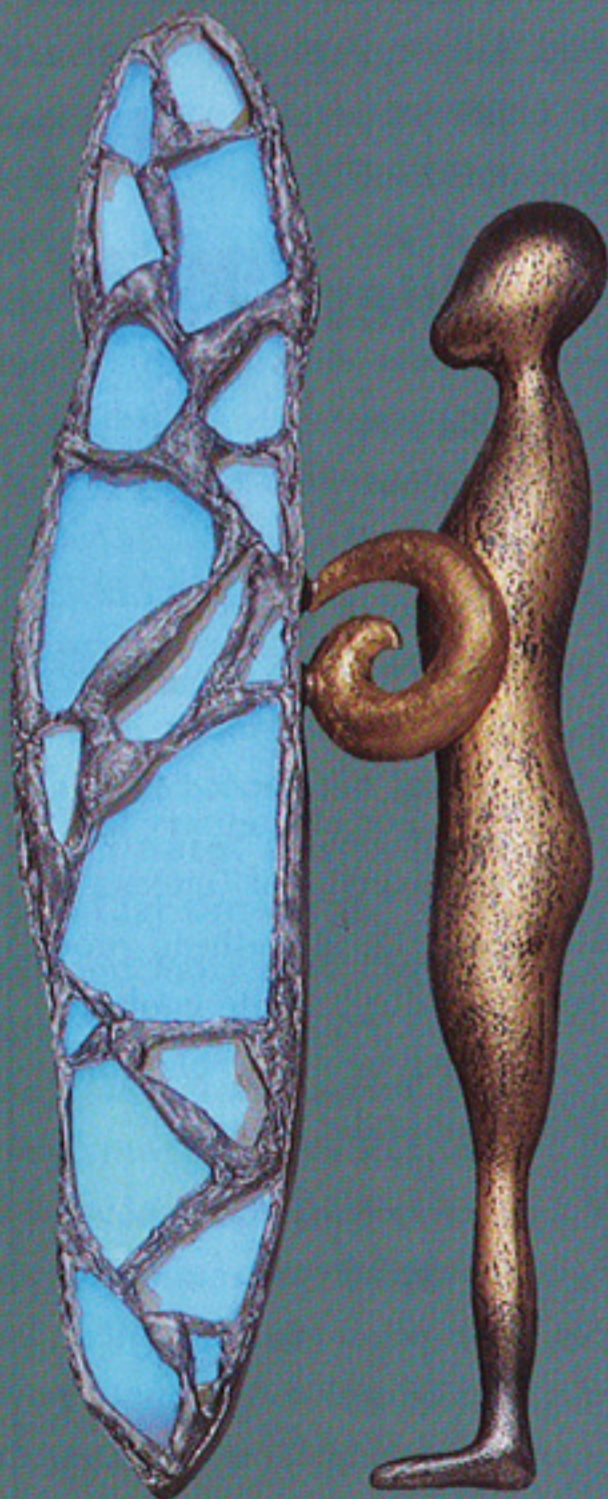
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THE OPENING OF THE NEW MINT MUSEUM
OF CRAFT & DESIGN MARKS THE NEWEST
ADDITION TO THE "NEW SOUTH."

Banking on the Arts

BY MARGARET MARCHUK



Arriving in Charlotte, North Carolina, for a reception celebrating the opening of the Mint Museum of Craft & Design, I was curious about this "new Southern city." Known nationally for its rank and wealth as a banking industry hotbed, from what I saw and heard it may well become known as a place that puts its money where its art is.

In July of 1997, NationsBank (now Bank of America) gave the historic 82,000-square-foot Montaldo Building on North Tryon Street, along with the cost of renovating it, to the Mint Museum of Art. At a total cost of \$9.5 million, this was the largest gift in the Mint Museum's 62-year history. Perhaps even more amazing, especially to other museum directors around the country, is that the doors opened only



ABOVE: Sherri Markovitz' Bear's Lair of beadwork and mixed media.

TOP: Jewelry designer Holly Lee created this Spinning Sphere Amulet of 18K gold, sterling silver, and rutilated quartz.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Marjorie Simon's More Male & Female Necklace in silver and brass.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: Jung-Hoo Kim, a Korean-born artist, created this brooch of silver, gold, and glass.

Photos courtesy The Mint Museum of Craft & Design

18 months later. For those who imagine that the South moves at a slower pace than the rest of the country, the speed of such a major expansion is mind boggling.

Indeed, history is repeating itself as the five-story Montaldo Building, which for more than 40 years presented the latest New York and Paris fashions, has been reborn as a showcase for international craft. On January 10, to much fanfare, this building reopened its doors as the Mint Museum of Craft & Design (MMCD). Intended as the uptown sister to the Mint Museum of Art on Randolph Road, outside center city, this facility's ambition is to join the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., and the American Craft Museum in New York City as a national crafts resource through its permanent collections, original exhibitions, and scholarship.

The donation of the Montaldo Building parallels the history of the Mint Museum of Art's own development. In 1936, community efforts salvaged the 1836 Charlotte branch of the United States Mint, moved the building to its present location, and renovated it to house the Museum of Art.

"Our original art museum on Randolph Road began literally as a building without a collection," remarks Mint CEO and President Bruce Evans. "We're opening our new branch, the Mint Museum of Craft & Design, with a fair base collection, coupled with enormous growth potential as evidenced by over \$2 million in donations of craft objects from across the country since announcing the new museum 18 months ago."

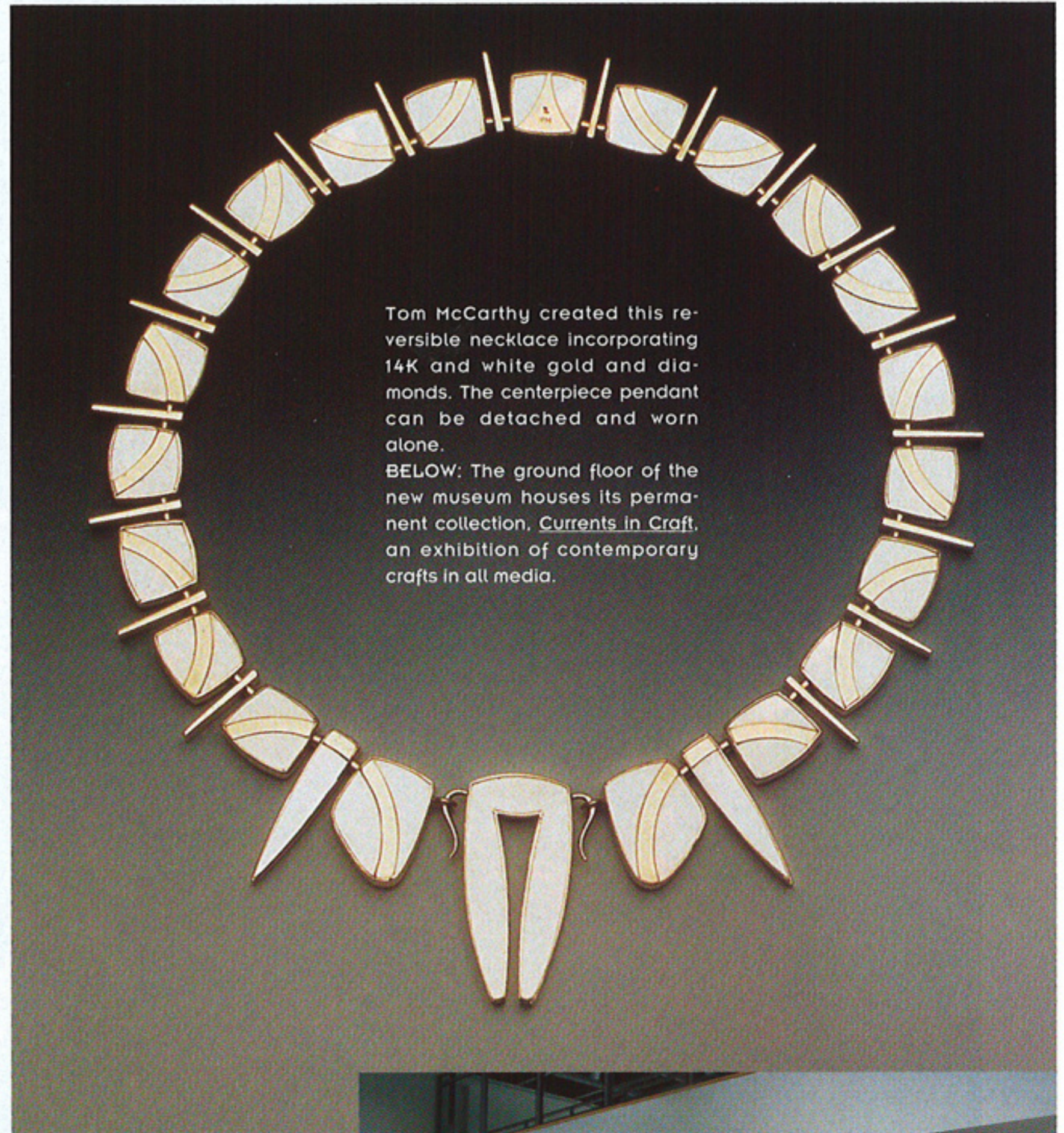
MMCD Director Mark Leach points out, "We are a work in progress because we have a great way to go in meeting our collection goals. The principal selection criterion is artistic excellence — works of unusual quality produced by established and emerging artists that delineate historical, technical, and stylistic innovation."

It seems appropriate that such a museum would emerge here in the South in a region so rich in the crafts tradition, both Native American and European. The nearby Penland School of the Arts, Jugtown, Seagrove, and John C. Campbell Folk School exemplify that crafts have long been, and still are, an important and vital component of life in this area. North Carolina has an incredibly rich handmade heritage, especially pottery and furniture, and there are a number of organizations located in the state focusing on various aspects of the field. It was the desire of these craft-related organizations to collaborate on projects that served as impetus for a focus group of 40 collectors, curators, and craft professionals to meet in December of 1997 to help develop MMCD's mission.



WELCOMING VISITORS into the lobby of the museum is an extravagant, blown-glass sculptural chandelier commissioned from glass artist Dale Chihuly. The chandelier, weighing one ton, is suspended from four thin, seemingly delicate, metal cables. Serving a role both functional and artistic is a 40-foot wall created by Massachusetts studio glass artist Tom Patti, interpreting North Carolina's textile heritage in a far different medium. These initial artistic impressions serve as an indication of the awe-inspiring craftwork of ceramics, glass, fiber, metal, and wood that awaits within.

The permanent collection on the ground floor of the MMCD, *Currents in Craft*, illustrates contemporary expressions in crafts media. Metalwork and jewelry by Tom Mc-



Tom McCarthy created this reversible necklace incorporating 14K and white gold and diamonds. The centerpiece pendant can be detached and worn alone.

BELOW: The ground floor of the new museum houses its permanent collection, *Currents in Craft*, an exhibition of contemporary crafts in all media.



Carthy and Marvin Jensen take their place alongside glass by Karla Trinkley, Michael Schiener, Stanislav Libensky, and Jaroslava Brychtova; ceramics by Maija Grotell, Don Reitz, and Ah Leon; fiber by Kari Lonning, Michael James, and Billie Ruth Sudduth; furniture by Wendell Castle, Cheryl Riley, and Randy Shull; and wood turning by Edward Moulthrop, Stony Lamar, and Mark Lindquist.



Randy J. Stromsoe's *Centerpiece Bowl on Three-Legged Stand*, of sterling silver, pewter, and gold leaf, forged and raised. The piece is part of the White House Craft Collection, on display at the Mint until May 30.

Currently there are about a dozen works representing jewelry making and design and metalsmithing on exhibit in the permanent collection. This area of the collection may expand, according to Mary Douglas, MMCD Curator, after they have set formal reviewing procedures in place.

In viewing two of the jewelry pieces, it is evident that selection of work for the museum must be a tough process. Tom McCarthy's necklace, which was gifted to MMCD, represents the exceptional craftsmanship on display. This Florida artist created a reversible necklace incorporating 14-karat gold, white gold, and diamonds, with a centerpiece pendant which can be detached and worn alone. A beaded necklace, *Hunger*, by Maryland artist Joyce Scott (see "A World Bead," October, 1995), is an unconventional treatment of jewelry that incorporates her social commentary on the food shortage in Africa. Her elaborate neckpiece of glass beads, thread, photographs, and plastic presents an interesting dichotomy as it draws one in with its beauty of handcraft, yet it gives beadwork a new application as the purveyor of ugly social realities.

The second-floor permanent collection, which opened in March, documents the evolution of craft, from its 19th-century utilitarian role through the elevation of the handmade object during the Arts and Crafts movement to the computer-aided design of today's unique objects. The MMCD's permanent exhibition is based on the Mint Museum of Art's ceramics collection, including the Delhorn European Pottery and Porcelain Collection, the Francis and Lilly Robicsek Collec-

tion of Pre-Columbian and Andean ceramic art and the extensive North Carolina pottery collection.

In addition to such a rich foundation, the new museum was gifted with a collection of 403 ceramic objects from retired real estate developer Alan Chasanoff. The MMCD also received 120 wood-turned objects from Washington, D.C., collectors Jane and Arthur Mason, who have what is widely considered the finest private collection of turned-wood pieces in America. The Masons also donated eight glass, ceramic, and metal works by such masters as Dale Chihuly, Stanislav Libensky, and Michael Lucero.



ADDED VENUES. The new craft museum is home to two other exhibition venues: The Bank of America Gallery and the Charlotte Design Alliance. From its growth as Nations-Bank into the merger forming an international financial institution known as Bank of America, this institution has created one of the nation's premiere corporate collections of American art. The bank plans to showcase this work in its own gallery within the MMCD structure. The inaugural exhibition at the Bank of America gallery is *Celebration and Vision: The Hewitt Collection of African American Art*. The collection of 58 works is a gift from the bank to Charlotte's Afro-American Cultural Center.

The other exhibition venue belongs to the Charlotte Design Alliance, a collaboration between MMCD and the College of Architecture of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC). They will present architecture and urban design exhibitions, public seminars, lectures, and other programs in studio space on the MMCD mezzanine level. UNCC will also have a presence on the museum's third floor, as they are leasing it to expand the university's uptown course offerings and give the school greater visibility in the center of Charlotte.



Myra Mimplitch Gray's *Purge*, a gold-plated brass decorative object.

The MMCD opened with two inaugural exhibitions: *The White House Collection of American Crafts*, organized by the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art, and *Harvey K. Littleton Reflections, 1946-1994*, a retrospective of the work of the founder of the American studio glass movement.

The White House Collection, assembled in 1993 at the request of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, makes the final stop of its national tour at MMCD, running through

May 30. Featuring 72 works by America's leading contemporary craft artists, the collection does not pretend to be a broad survey of all facets of modern craft. Rather, the criteria for inclusion was determined by the architecture, historical settings, and furnishings of the White House period rooms. That said, the backgrounds of the craft artists included are diverse. The artists represent all regions of the United States, and all media, from established masters to emerging talent.

The artists also run the gamut from self taught to university trained. Sam Maloof, at age 82, is a self-taught artist who is still producing graceful wood forms, such as the walnut

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At the Cultural Crossroads . . .
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Adil Qazi

which are brought by Asian or European customers, or beads brought from Afghani and Pakistani traders. Also, three or four times a year, one of the brothers will go to collect beads from small villages in Ladakh, India, or other countries. They have even had some Native American beads, though the price of these tends to be somewhat prohibitive for the Qazi brothers.

One of Qazi's favorite materials is old bronze because of the patina; the warmth of the color inspires him. Unfortunately, he reports, the brothers have not found many bronze beads recently. He also likes to work with gold, but too much gold can make the work very expensive and difficult to sell. "So, we work mainly with silver and accent with gold," he says.

"I cannot tell you which is my favorite piece. If I did not like it, I would not make it. In a month, there may be two or three I like the best, but once I display them, then they are certainly gone. So, I have none to show you, because once I show it to the people, then they like it." Qazi's comment is made in a very matter-of-fact way. It is not a boast; it is just the truth, as he understands it from his customers.

"It is not for us to say how our work is," Qazi offers, with charming modesty. "It is for the people to tell us how it is. When people come to visit, it is very encouraging. About 90 percent of the comments are positive."

Qazi is admittedly pleased that his work has begun to attract admirers, as well as buyers. "My purpose is to be a designer, not just a wholesaler of beads." He has succeeded at being both, making his little shop, perhaps, the best of all possible worlds for a bead enthusiast. ♦

Adil Qazi and Creative Arts may be contacted through Jennifer Gerard and Wayne S. Hall, who import their work for their store, A World of Good, Inc., 8407 Garland Ave., Takoma Park, MD 20912; (301) 587-0871.

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rocker in the collection. *The Black Carved Jar* by potter Nathan Youngblood, of New Mexico, displays the elaborate detail work he learned under years of study with his grandmother, Margaret Tafoya, a Pueblo potter. Glass artists Dale Chihuly and Mary Ann Zynsky, metals artist Thomas Muir, and ceramic artist Dimitri Michaelides are products of university training.

The Harvey K. Littleton exhibition leads the visitor through 63 artworks and documentary photographs, exhibition catalogs, and correspondence on loan from the Archives of American Art. This exhibition presents Littleton's achievements as a teacher, glass artist, and studio craft advocate in the context of his glass production. Although he started his career as a potter, by 1960 he was carving lumps of cullet (waste glass used for remelting) into monoliths, as seen by *Glass Pieces* in the show. His signature works are bars of encased color that look like they have been pulled like taffy. His latest effort is vitreography — producing prints from glass plates. Techniques used in preparing the plates include sandblasting, hot glue resists, etching, and caustic solutions applied freehand or even by computer design. Included in the Littleton exhibition are glassworks by his role models and colleagues in studio and international glass, such as Jean Sala, Erwin Eisch, Frederick Carder, and Raoul Goldoni.

In a state which has an incredibly rich heritage in the crafts, it is appropriate that the goal of the new museum is "to give more visibility to the craft field and complement the kind of programs that are being done nationally and to offer some of our own originality to that mix," as Mark Richard Leach, director of MMCD says. Leach feels a responsibility to do something that makes a difference, both for the artists who create and for the public, in terms of developing an awareness and appreciation for what's so very special about things made by hand. In an age when we find ourselves ever more reliant upon computer technology, the personal quality of a well-designed and well-crafted handmade object has special appeal.

REINVENTION. Indeed, it was by design that this "new Southern city" has been reinvented. In the '70s, when Charlotte's uptown was beginning to look a bit run-down-at-the-heels, city civic, business, and community leaders consciously laid the groundwork so

that when the nation turned toward service industries rather than manufacturing, they would be ready with exceptional financial, transport, and distribution capabilities. Their plan worked. While the cityscape has taken on an updated appearance with a variety of distinctive modern architecture, city planners are also renovating those buildings, like the Montaldo, of historic significance. Along with its mixing of styles comes the mingling of population as Charlotte continues to expand with newcomers, not only from the North and West but also from abroad.

Yet with all this change taking place, Charlotteans have not lost a sense of their city's roots and graciousness. From the garage attendant where I parked my car, to the pedestrians I passed along my way, there was always a nod of the head, a smile, and sometimes a "hello." One grows accustomed to such simple courtesies here in North Carolina. And it seems it is this humanist quality of the southern business and civic leaders as well as the public that prompted their affirmative nods to spending millions over the years on their cultural assets. The results of the attention and expenditure are very visible: Mint Museum and Discovery Place expansion, Spirit Square renovation, Charlotte-Mecklenburg main-library expansion, the Museum of the New South, and the North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center — all within blocks of one another.

And while MMCD has its own vision of what this museum in progress will do in terms of America's crafts, civic and business leaders focus on the long-term economic benefits to the city. Indeed, the Bank of America turned down offers from developers wanting to convert the building into offices. Located in center city, this gem of a building would have turned a tidy profit on the bank's investment. Instead, the bank's leadership had a grander vision, seeing beyond their own bottom line to a sound investment from which the entire city would profit.

As McColl says regarding the Montaldo gift to the Mint, "The arts community is important to the economic vitality of our city." Mint Museum executive director Bruce Evans says it another way, "Banking put Charlotte on the map, but the arts will keep it there." ♦

The Mint Museum of Craft & Design is located at 220 North Tryon Street, Charlotte, NC; (704) 337-2000.