

# american craft

December/January 2008

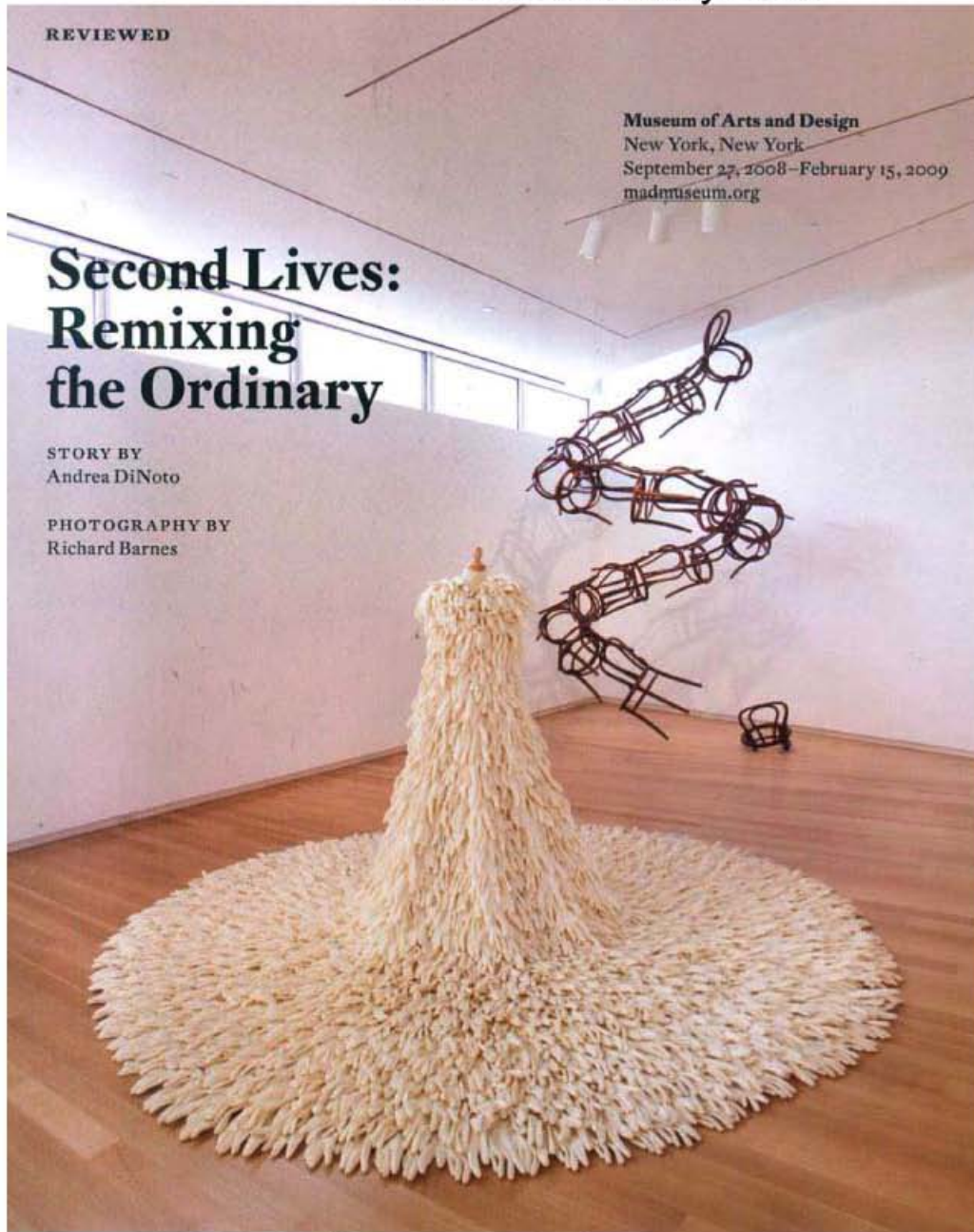
REVIEWED

Museum of Arts and Design  
New York, New York  
September 27, 2008–February 15, 2009  
madmuseum.org

## Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary

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Left: Left and right:  
Susie MacMurray,  
*A Mixture of Frailties*,  
2004, latex washing  
gloves (h. 72 $\frac{3}{4}$  in,  
dia. 10 ft 7 in); Pablo  
Reinoso, *Spiraltonet*,  
2008, Thonet chairs  
(dimensions variable).

Opposite Top: Left to  
right: Jill Townsley,  
*Spoons*, 2008, plastic  
spoons, rubber bands  
(h. 8 ft 5 in, w. 11 ft 4 in,  
d. 11 ft 4 in); Long-Bin  
Chen, *Reading Chair  
with Buddha Heads*,  
2007, New York City  
phone books, catalogs,  
wood (h. 98 in, w. 49  
in, d. 48 in); Donald  
Lipski, *Spilt Milk No.  
99*, 2008, wine bottles,  
artificial milk, wax,  
steel, felt (dia. 10 ft).

Opposite Bottom: Left  
and right: Sonya Clark,  
*Madame C<sup>3</sup> Walker*,  
2007–2008, plastic  
combs (h. 10 ft 2 in,  
w. 7 ft 3 in); Thomas  
Glassford, *Running  
the Numbers*, 2008,  
Melamine dishware,  
brass, stainless steel  
(h. 7 ft 5 in, w. 15 ft 9 in).

Plastic spoons, Q-tips, old vinyl LPs; pots and pans, toothpaste tubes, rubber gloves. These are just a few of the everyday objects given startling, sometimes eloquent, expression in "Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary," the aptly named inaugural exhibition that launches the Museum of Arts and Design in its new home at 2 Columbus

Circle. A redesign of the 1964 structure opens the walls to views and daylight, while greatly expanding gallery space, and in a deliberate nod to the museum's craft-based history, the original marble façade has been replaced with white iridescent ceramic tiles. How appropriate, then, that MAD has chosen to launch its own "second life" with

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"Second Lives" presents the work of 54 artists from five continents, all of them proficient in the techniques of sculptural assemblage. Their objects can seem obsessive, even uncanny, but the agenda here is not simply to provide viewers with a "wow" moment (there are plenty of those), but to comment on culture, gender, politics, race, sustainability and other issues of topical interest. This art claims a legacy with Dada and Surrealism, with Abstract Expressionism (think Rauschenberg's "combines"), Pop Art, postmodernism, post-Minimalism and site-specific environmental art. Yet, it is distinctly of the moment (pieces date from the early 1990s to the present) and has attracted artists from a range of disciplines—craft to be sure, but also industrial design, installation and performance art. Their raw materials—"ordinary" objects, often in vast numbers—are here repurposed into the likes of Susie MacMurray's feminist evening gown (1,400 rubber gloves), Stuart Haygarth's working tiered chandelier (1,000+ pairs of plastic prescription eyeglasses) and Boris Bally's prickly necklace of found steel handgun triggers.

Many of these pieces are visually breathtaking, notably Nigerian artist El Anatsui's shimmering tapestry made from foils and flattened caps from liquor bottles formed into lustrous, pixel-like elements. Even if you're not aware that the artist is referencing both kente cloth and the destructive role liquor plays in African culture, your eyes marvel at his ability to elevate a banal material to the level of fine/decorative art. Similarly, Tara Donovan's illusory floor sculpture, which resembles a natural crystalline formation, reveals itself on close scrutiny as stacks of thousands of buttons glued together. (Donovan is known for mind-bending installations made from literally millions of like objects, such as Styrofoam cups and plastic drinking straws.) As curator Lowery Stokes Sims writes in the catalog, such objects "challenge what we think of as valuable." >





## REVIEWED

Right: Willie Cole,  
*Loveseat*, 2007,  
shoes, wood, PVC  
pipes, screws, staples  
[h. 43 in, w. 65 in].

Bottom: Back to front:  
Paul Villinski,  
*My Back Pages*, 2006-8,  
records, turntable,  
wire, record covers;  
Donna Marcus,  
*Dodecahedron X*, 2008,  
*Dodecahedron I*,  
2002, *Fall 2*, 2002  
[dia. 33 in, 26 in, 44 in].



But not every object in “Second Lives” relies on multiples for its effect. The Wisconsin craftsman Jim Rose is represented with a Shaker-inspired quilt cupboard made entirely from rusted and painted found steel. The counterintuitive pairing of refined Shaker style with industrial refuse becomes a persuasive design coup in the hands of an artist who has embraced material reclamation as a métier. Cultural reclamation is the subject of Michael Rakowitz’s politically charged installation which displays papier-mâché reproductions of a portion of the 7,000+ items looted from the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad during the aftermath of the American invasion in 2003. Each object, made from Arabic newspapers and food labels, is paired with an accession card bearing a quote from the likes of Donald Rumsfeld (“Stuff happens”) and others who observed this sorry event. The catalog expands on Rakowitz’s work, as it does for all of the artists in this show, providing photos of additional objects and installations in galleries and museums around the world.

Beyond “Second Lives,” MAD’s important permanent collections of jewelry and objects in various media are exhibited on two floors, at long last a proper setting for its core holdings. Jewelry is optimally presented in handsome custom-designed vitrines with publicly accessible study drawers. The viewing experience would benefit from additional signage explaining the rationale behind the thematic organization, as would the “Permanently MAD” works in clay, wood, metal, glass and fiber. Iconic works by Peter Voulkos, Robert Arneson, Wendell Castle, Lenore Tawney and others are a joy to behold up close, but the overall impression is of many masterworks vying for one’s attention. On the other hand, interactive touch screens are provided throughout that allow exploration of selected works in greater depth. The museum’s stated mission—to be a platform for voices in the artistic world not ordinarily heard from—is now fully engaged and will surely draw both curious newcomers along with its loyal constituency to this eagerly anticipated resource for transformative art, craft and design. ✦

*The catalog, with essays by David Revere McFadden and Lowery Stokes Sims, is \$75, [www.madmuseum.org](http://www.madmuseum.org).*

