

KEEN **VISION**

The Gary C.
Werths Collection

Saint Louis University Museum of Art

Lino Tagliapietra, *Installation for First Venice Glass Biennial*, 1996, blown glass.

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Having accepted a commission to design a church in New Harmony, Indiana, Philip Johnson made frequent visits to the town to supervise the execution of his now famous, “roofless” design (1960). During these trips Johnson would while away time by searching out antiques in local stores. He soon discovered the antique business that Gary C. Werths owned in New Harmony, and he became a frequent visitor. Johnson’s conversations often included reflections on the trends in art and sculpture, and Werths credits those conversations with Johnson as the initial catalyst for his own emerging interest in modern and contemporary art.

New Harmony was once home to not just one but two utopian communities. Remarkably preserved, New Harmony throughout its history has remained open to innovative ideas and spirit. Johnson’s “roofless” church also houses a bronze work by famed sculptor, Jacques Lipchitz. Lipchitz was also a frequent visitor to New Harmony, and he found his way into conversation with Werths. These conversations piqued Werths’ interests in Lipchitz’s sculpture, and three pieces by the sculptor are now a part of his collection.

The demands of business required frequent travel throughout the United States and Europe, and Werths decided to move his growing antiques business to a larger city. He chose St. Louis, first establishing his business in the Crystal Palace building in the Gaslight Square neighborhood. He relocated in 1990 to McPherson Avenue in the Central West End and expanded his business further. His continued success resulted in expansion and even the eventual displacement of St. Louis’ Central West End Rolls Royce dealership.

Werths became a charter member of the Central West End Bank as well as the City Bank of St. Louis. He is past president of the Central West End Association and has served as a member of the board of the Metropolitan Zoological Park and Museum District. Other cultural institutions besides Saint Louis University have been the beneficiaries of his continued interest in the renaissance of St. Louis and its historic neighborhoods.

Drawing upon those long-ago conversations with Johnson and Lipchitz, Werths began collecting contemporary art as he neared retirement. After a lifetime of working with antiques, the art of the 20th century became an ardent and bracing interest. He continues to engage artists in conversation, learning still more in each encounter, and counts many of the artists he has collected as more than passing acquaintances. Through his personal interest in collecting, Werths has also met many collectors from the St. Louis area. “St. Louis collectors are absolutely terrific in sharing,” Werths said. “It’s a wonderful way to learn and very gratifying.” ■

keenvision The Gary C. Werths Collection is the third exhibit in the **art•struck** series at the Saint Louis University Museum of Art.

When we first imagined our **art•struck** series at the Saint Louis University Museum of Art, we thought to create a unique place in our St. Louis community for the enrichment that great and good art might provide. And we, at first, thought it would be the opportunity for showing art that would make **art•struck** intriguing and important. Yet our experience has proven otherwise. Rather than individual artists or particular works proving themselves unforgettable, it has been the collectors themselves who have proven most memorable.

Dr. William D. Merwin, Ronald S. Poe and now, Gary C. Werths, have made their passions public through the sharing of their collections. As the director of this institution, I am pleased that they have placed their confidence in us. And, as a member of our St. Louis community, I am more than pleased that we have among us such discerning and generous collectors. They enrich our community and astound our imaginations.

Each day, as we have implemented the installation of “Keen Vision: The Gary C. Werths Collection,” I have walked the floor of our featured exhibition gallery looking over works of art that astonish. I have walked past works, which by right should have frozen me in place. And on occasion, I have been stunned to place. Stopped short when my eye was transfixed by this exhibit’s presentation of the legacy of such talented individuals, encouraged as well as renewed by the opportunity for reflection upon ideals of beauty, fame and name.

To look upon such art, is privilege. It is also indicative of an attitude. Each time I walk through the exhibit I am reminded of what Gary C. Werths shared with me in casual conversation when we first explored the possibility of this show at SLUMA. He explained his reason for sharing his collection. He desired he said, “to encourage an eye for art.”

“To encourage an eye for art.” In these days, when our society all too often surrenders all too easily to the pragmatic, how refreshing is this desire? And where better to “encourage an eye for art” than at a university art museum, situated in the heart of the Grand Center Arts District, near to wonderful schools like Cardinal Ritter Prep, Metro Academic and Classical, Loyola Academy and Rosati Kain High School? How could we reflect his desire any other way but as we have in titling this show, “Keen Vision: The Gary C. Werths Collection?”

“Keen Vision: The Gary C. Werths Collection” is a significant exhibition, in part, because one finds within it the works of many notable artists such as Pablo Picasso, Alberto Giacometti, Jacques Lipchitz, Jim Dine, Kiki Smith and William Morris. But it is made more significant because of the motive of our collector, Gary C. Werths, who has chosen to share such work with us. ■

One of the truisms about contemporary glass is the association of the material with functionality. For most of its history, glass was used exclusively for utilitarian objects that were highly decorated. The first evidence of man-made glass occurs in Mesopotamia in the late-third/early-second millennium B.C.E. Glass blowing technique was developed sometime between 27 BCE and 14C.E. in Syria and spread throughout the Roman world reaching the Island of Murano, which became a center for high quality glass manufacture in the late medieval period.

Until the 19th century, glass was expensive and highly valued. With the new technological developments and the rise of industry, glass became more ordinary and the emphasis shifted on functionality. Factories were built to keep up with demand. It was more efficient to keep furnaces on at all times. As a result, factory workers experimented and made off-hand glass objects called “whimsies.” These whimsies attracted artists who saw the potential for glass as an art medium.

The pioneers of glass art between the 1930s-1960s practiced warm glass techniques that did not involve extremely high temperatures and could be executed in small studios. Such artists include Frederick Carder of the Steuben Glass Works who worked with a small kiln (1930's - 1950's), and Edris Eckhardt, who formed freestanding sculptures in her basement studio in the 1950s and 1960s.

The “studio glass movement” began in 1962 when Harvey Littleton, a ceramics professor, and Dominick Labino, a chemist and engineer, held two workshops at the Toledo Museum of Art, during which they began experimenting with melting glass in a small furnace. For their experiment, Littleton

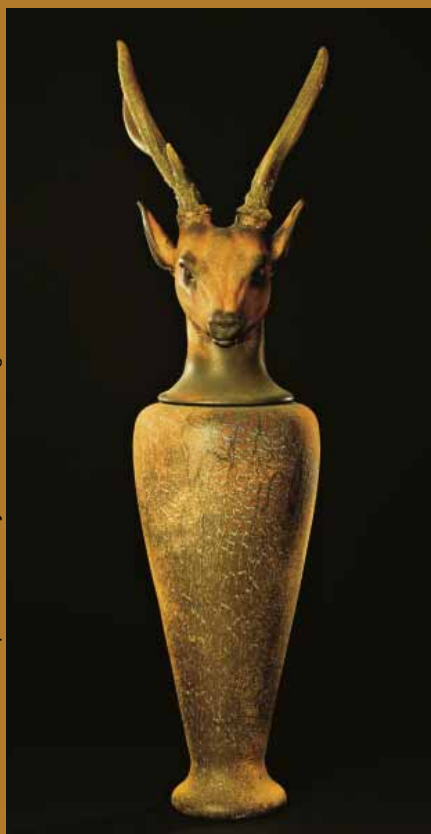
and Labino reduced the size of glassmaking equipment and created new glass formulas that made glass making possible in the artist's studio. Thus Littleton and Labino are credited with being the first to make molten glass available to artists working in private studios. Studio glass became an international movement, producing artists such as Dale Chihuly and Dante Marioni. Lino Tagliapietra was the first Murano-trained artist to share his knowledge with artists working in United States.

Glass was intended to be a sculpture medium from the 1960s, when it was introduced into art departments at major universities. It is a versatile material allowing the creative capacity of the artist, not the medium, to define the work. That explains the wide range of aesthetics from the minimalist forms of Jaroslava Brychtova and Stanislav Libensky to the complicated installations of Dale Chihuly and Lino Tagliapietra.

Installation for First Venice Glass Biennial, 1996, is a masterful realization of Lino Tagliapietra's background with 16th-century Muranese technique and 20th-century surface cutting. Tagliapietra was born in 1934, on the island of Murano, which has an unparalleled tradition in glass making. He began his career alongside Archimede Seguso as an apprentice at age 11. By his 21st birthday he was a maestro. He is known for his ability to bring together the best of classic and contemporary design. Tagliapietra left Murano for the first time in 1979 when Dale Chihuly invited him to teach few classes at Pilchuck, where he encountered a very different approach to experimentation and collaboration. His work expanded from single objects to installations increasingly elaborate, which extended his concept of composition. For the first Venezia Aperto Vetro glass biennial in 1996, he made an installation (Exhibit number 56) of hand-blown colored glass with black canes. Some pieces have cold-worked surfaces with cuts varying from piece to piece. The objects in the installation have varied dimensions, all with large tops and small bases, and are arranged in rows on a metal stand. Tagliapietra stretches the Italian vessel tradition by allowing the artist to fully express his imagination.

By contrast, William Morris is interested in primitive artifacts reflecting the relationship between humans and the environment. His animal references are the result of his early camping and exploring the outdoors near his native Carmel, California. His fascination with nature and archeology resulted in repeated trips to Lascaux, France, and to Stonehenge in England. Morris' work is a mixture of Native American petroglyphs, ancient Iranian “rhytons” and the art of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Africa in an attempt to reach universal values that transcend the individual. Morris has become known for his astonishing technical skill. Particularly notable is his ability to make glass appear solid or opaque and assume the form of ceramics, bones, stone or animal skins. He has also developed techniques that lend glass a matte, textured or crackled surface. Images are sometimes applied using transfers and/or stencils.

The significance of William Morris is not in his technical ability but in his delving into the fundamental essence of humankind. In his *Suspended Artifacts* series, he employs complex arrangements of hanging bones, vessels of unknown function, heads of birds and animals, as well as prehistoric imagery, in an attempt to link past and present. The most impressive of his pieces are the Canopic Jars (Muntjac and Buck). He alludes to Egyptian sculpture, prehistoric cave painting and modern relation to nature.



William Morris, Canopic Jar: Muntjac, 1996, blown glass.



Joel Phillip Myers Myers, who is widely acknowledged as one of the founding fathers of studio art glass, always remains true to his love of color as evidenced by the brightly hued forms with organic elements collaged onto the surfaces. His colorful and weighty *Red Fish* was inspired by the nature surrounding his summer residence in Denmark. The upward arched piece seems weightless. Myers achieved the illusion by encasing the red in a thick layer of transparent glass and allowing the entire piece to rest on a very small base.

Mary Ann “Toots” Zinsky’s work stands out from other contemporary glass because of the technique she uses in building a vessel. After graduation from college, she collaborated with Venini. Her strong ties with Murano are underlined by the use of canes in her work. With the assistance of a Dutch engineer, she transformed them into fine threads of glass that she later transformed into colorful, dynamic sculptures. They usually employ 30 layers of thread, and they look a lot more fragile than they are. The glass threads create a texture that give the appearance of brushstrokes. Zinsky’s major sources of inspiration are the sea and birds.

In this glass sculpture, Littleton takes full advantage of the once flowing quality of molten glass and captures it in that state. The deep color in the teardrop base of each unit suggests a source of energy for the whirling tendrils as they reach skyward. His sculptural forms are reflecting his continual experimentation in glass.

Dale Chihuly has made an extraordinary contribution to the development of the studio glass movement. After studying with Harvey Littleton at Madison, he established an influential glass program at the Rhode Island School of Design. In 1971, he was a co-founder of the Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State. Chihuly’s collaboration with Tagliapietra was not his first encounter with Venetian glass. The Venetian series started in 1988. Chihuly made this series from his interest in the private Italian art, including deco glass made mostly by Martinuzzi and Scarpa. Lino Tagliapietra served as the gaffer during this series.

The *Venetians* are very different from what Chihuly has previously created. He starts with refined and symmetrical shape, but he adds an extravagant surface ornamentation to the glass core, overwhelming it with luxuriant growths. For the first time he starts with a traditional vessel form, but he

surrounds it with spiraling leaves or flame-like twisted coils that erupt from the base and sides. The dynamic elements of the Venetians transform the vessel into a purely sculptural object. Color and texture complement each other in pure Venetian style but are totally transformed by Chihuly’s imagination. He manages to strike the perfect balance between “high” and “low” showing that he is keenly aware of these distinctions and moves rather freely across the semantic barriers, thus safely anchoring glass in the realm of art.

William Carlson, professor of art and head of the crafts and sculpture programs at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, creates laminated sculptures that incorporate materials ranging from glass of his own making, to bits and bands of commercially produced safety glass, as well as a wide variety of granites as well as a wide variety of granites. He employs impeccable craftsmanship to cut, polish and laminate these materials, transforming them into austere constructions that address the artist’s concern with issues of interior space, geometry, texture and color. His work is an analysis of relationships between geometric shapes, mass, color and texture, actual and otherwise. His triangles are penetrating aggressive wedges, while the squares are all passive. Their passivity is emphasized by the horizontals and verticals repeated throughout. The details in each piece are



Mary Ann “Toots” Zinsky, Soft Golden Chaos, 1996, extruded and fused glass rods.

continuous reminders of works by Vasily Kandinski, Piet Mondrian and David Smith. Carlson is widely considered one of the most important figures in the studio glass movement and has influenced the movement as an artist and as an educator.

The joint artistic work of Jaroslava Brychtova and Stanislav Libensky is significant because they mastered, on a monumental scale and with demanding technology, their chosen medium: Glass. They stretched the limits of glass as an artistic medium and paved the way for future generations of artists. For nearly five decades, they have explored the artistic potential of glass on a grand scale. Brychtova and Libensky succeeded despite the challenges imposed by the political and social climate behind the Iron Curtain.

During the last 20 years, glass has become another fine art medium through concerted efforts by artists, museums, galleries and collectors. ■



Dale Chihuly, Silver and Black Venetian with Red, 1993, blown and formed glass.

werths: I have never seen a Chihuly I did not like, nor the colors. The colors are so vivid in the way they are twisted around each other. It is amazing how he blows the glass and how the colors highlight each other.

werths: I saw this Picasso in a Christie's London auction catalogue. I had never bought over the phone, particularly out of the country. I had to stay up all night because of the time difference. It was quite an experience! When I received it, I was very pleased with it, but I do not know if I would ever buy and not see a piece of art first. It is much more fun to go over and see it for yourself.



Pablo Picasso, Femme Debout, 1945, bronze, 8/10.

werths: Harvey Littleton was an early master of glass. I am really happy to have the pieces I have. Littleton is just exquisite. This work is made of six pieces individually, but the six together make the piece phenomenal ... just a real master.

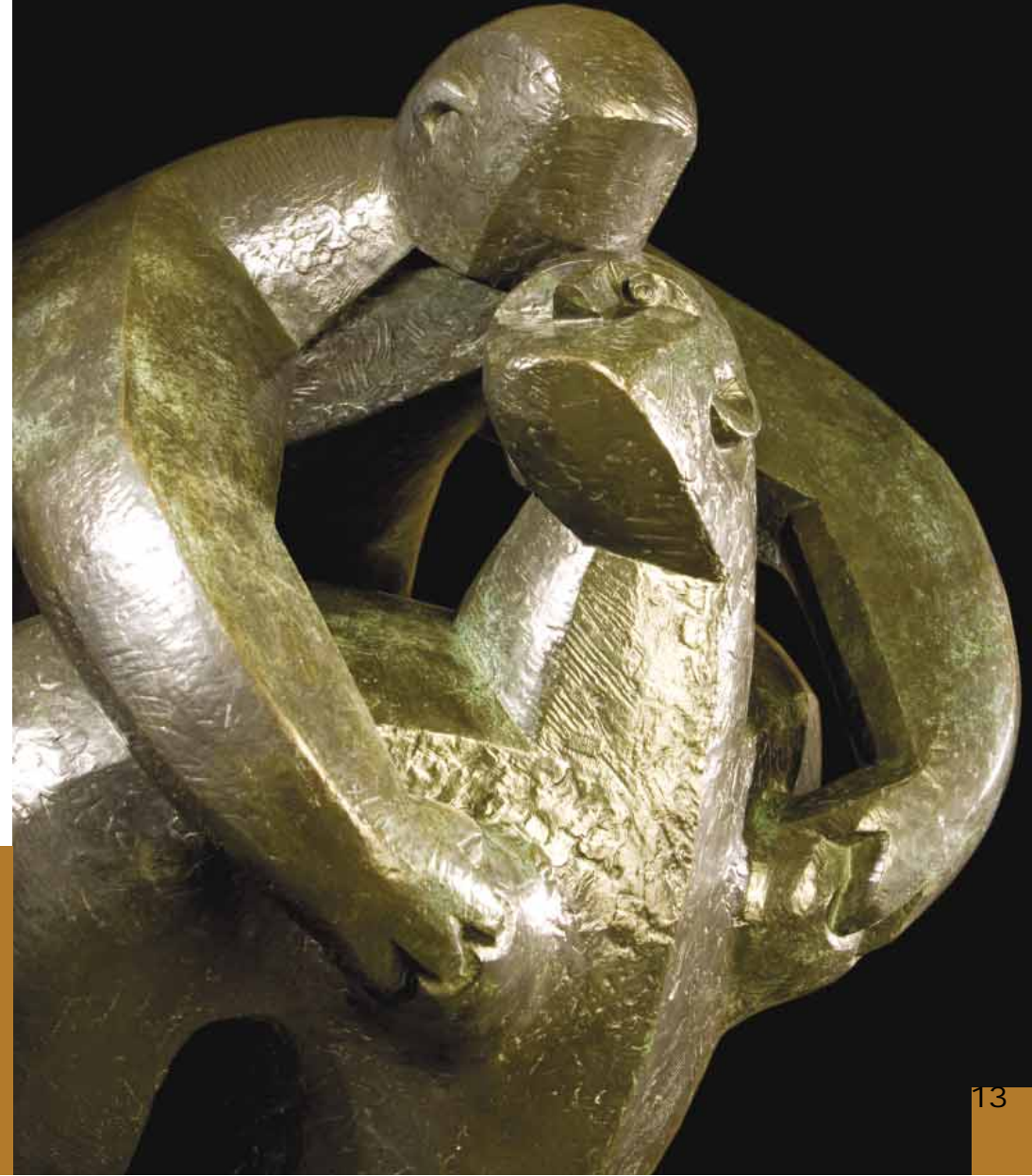




William Carlson, *Vetri Muralis*, 1996, granite, vetrolite, metal.

werths: This piece really represents the beginning of my collecting. When I owned my shop in New Harmony, Jacqus Lipchitz was commissioned to design the gates and a sculpture for a church designed by Philip Johnson. That's why I have three works by Lipchitz ... just from my past experiences with him.

Jacques Lipchitz, *Mother and Child*, 1930, bronze.



werths: Carlson takes glass, marble, and stone and puts them all together in phenomenal pieces. He was a professor of art and head of the crafts and sculpture programs at the University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign. He retired and is now working at the University of Miami (Florida). This past year, when we went to Art Basel, we recognized him at one of the galleries and were able to personally meet him.

Femme Debout

Pablo Picasso, Bronze, 1945, Bronze, 8/10.

Picasso's love affair with the female form is apparent in *Femme Debout*, or *Standing Woman*. A tiny girl, standing at five inches, she proudly displays her womanly attributes. Framed by a crown, or halo, of hair, the face lacks definition in its abstraction, reminding the viewer to look beyond the superficial to the depths of the human soul. Primitive, the form of the body suggests arms and legs, but these are not clearly defined. The breasts, like two pieces of forbidden fruit, hang enticingly from this "tree"; she is perhaps modeled on one of Picasso's female-muse-companions, a Françoise? A Jacqueline?

The tiny, muted size of *Femme Debout* brings to mind the thousands of female figurines that fill the ancient collections of museums, variously sized dolls that were buried within funerary mounds throughout the ancient world. Depictions of the all powerful and all knowing female "goddess," these figurines include the Woman of Willendorf, Austria, c. 22,000-21,000 B.C.E. and that of Bassempouy, France, c. 22,000 B.C.E. All bear the attributes of the ultra, nurturing and fertile female. By returning to the primitive simplicity and abstraction of these earlier models, Picasso has revealed the essence of the feminine. Exhibit number 74

Large III

Alberto Giacometti, 1953, Bronze, 4/6.

Giacometti's mature style is expressed in this interpretation of the female body. This lovingly and beautifully rendered "goddess" stands erect, arms firmly at the sides and framing the body. Lumps and droplets of the cast metal cascade from the figure's head to its thin, spindly legs, which are set into a thick metal base. The hips and belly are shaped and formed into a severely sculpted, geometrically shaped and narrow waist. Thin and elegant, with large pendulous breasts, her face is framed by a head of centrally parted, rich full hair. The figure gazes at the viewer through soft eyes; a strong nose and mouth complete the visage. Sharply upraised, the shoulders emphasize the stiff, frontal pose of the figure. It is this formal quality of the stance that brings to mind the canon used to depict nobility in ancient Egyptian sculpture; most especially, that of Queen Khamerernebt, c. 2525 B.C.E., standing with her husband, Menkaure. Giacometti's queen, however, stands with her arms straight down at her sides, in the manner of the Pharaoh himself. One looks more closely to see if she is holding the bars of power, but no; her hands are melded into her thighs. She is not subservient or timid; rather, strongly conscious of being a beautiful female. Exhibit number 73



Fernando Botero, *La France*, 1985, cast bronze.

La France

Fernando Botero, 1985, Bronze.

A Venus resting after her conquest of Apollo; Manet's *Olympia*, 1863, many years, and a few more pounds, later; the reclining female nude propped up on one arm, toying with a strand of beads wound around her neck. Botero's interpretations of the female form are often whimsical, lighthearted, certainly earthy. Never rendered in Giacometti's anorexically thin style, Botero's women are enormous, fleshy, bovine beauties.

Columbian-born Fernando Botero began his work by painting fleshy figures, both male and female, in a classical tradition. According to Botero, art is deformation, and his work clearly indicates a passion for examining and exulting the human body. *La France*, a sensuous exhibitionist, is a reclining muse bored with modeling for the painter and dreams of her next meal. The figure's breasts are oddly small, as if all attention must be paid to the fleshy belly, hips and thighs of this reclining nude. With knees slightly bent, the left leg rests along the right, foot tucked slightly behind the other. For Botero, the insinuation of stopped motion expresses volumes. Exhibit number 83

Study for Standing Woman

Gaston Lachaise, 1935, Bronze, 4/12.

Standing at 10 inches, this nude figure is a maquette, or study, for several of Lachaise's other works, which include *Standing Woman (Elevation)*, 1927; or *Standing Woman*, 1932. His smaller work lacks none of the intensity or power of the others

despite its size. Perched on her rough pedestal, this defiant, fleshy female thrusts one leg forward, in contrapposto, or counter-shifted weight, her right hand on her hip and left arm comfortably at her side. Soft folds in the bronze suggest the stretch marks of pregnancy verified by her large belly and soft breasts; female and mother, she has paid her dues and is not ashamed to show her own battle scars.

Unlike *Standing Woman* and *Elevation*, however, this woman is without a head. Lacking wings or a ship, she nevertheless possesses the calm austerity of the *Nike of*

Samothrace, another famous (albeit headless) woman who brings victory to the steps of the Musee du Louvre in Paris. Certainly the ancient Greco-Roman model was foremost in Lachaise's mind when executing his own works (impossible to get around, really). In removing, or omitting the head, Lachaise sought greater focus on the figure's body. The body is paramount; the soul of woman is on display here (more "keen" vision). Without the trappings of makeup and hairstyle, Lachaise allows for an even more intimate look at the femaleness of being female; of what makes a woman a woman. No classically proportioned female, this study is much truer to the female anatomy for all of its fleshiness. This "goddess" has found her place on earth, her victories are her children, her solidity her penance. Exhibit number 72

Mother and Child

Jacques Lipchitz, 1930, Bronze.

The bluntly chiseled forms of Jacques Lipchitz' *Mother and Child* reveal two figures, one riding upon the back of the other. Both androgynous and zoomorphic, what initially appears carved is, on closer inspection, actually cast bronze covered by a rich, roughened metal patina that imparts the quality of fur or feathers over the surfaces of the two figures. The "rider" clutches the breasts of the second figure, shrouding and framing her shoulders with its arms, creating a kind of

halo around the lower figure. Standing on two stout legs, the bird-like figure bearing the second spreads its large, bulbous wings and prepares to take to the sky; yet, the creature's face has two symmetrically placed ears, frontally placed eyes and a nose. Its turtle-like head is turned upward and twists curiously to the right, an effect that causes its face to merge into that of the figure on its back in a tender and poignant gesture. The face of the second figure is blank; however, two ears indicate that it is human.

A commanding sculpture and certainly the largest in this exhibit, *Mother and Child* possesses all of the power contained in the nature of the relationship between a mother and her offspring. Tender, yet vibrantly energetic, the large wings of the mother prepare to bear the child into the sky, just as the protective mother prods its young to accept and embrace life. The fearful child, clinging to its mother's breasts, does not yet possess wings of its own. Pressing its face into hers for reassurance, it is not quite able to let go of the sustenance and security that this solid matron provides. Exhibit number 23

Untitled with Constellation

Kiki Smith, 2001, Bronze/Unique.

Kiki Smith's *Untitled with Constellation* depicts a fully rounded, free standing female nude. Representing a further departure from the beeswax figures that one associates with Smith's work, the tiny bronze figure stands at four feet and proffers her breasts to the viewer with disproportionately small hands; in fact, it is this incongruity in the proportions that dominates the entire piece — small body, small hands, large feet — crowned by an enormous, life-sized head. It is the size and features of the head that draw one's interest upon first encountering the work, as the facial features and hair represent those of an older woman. Taken together with a surprise constellation that covers the figure's shoulder blades, stars that are reductive rather than additive marks on the skin's surface, *Untitled with Constellation* is an anomaly of surprises.

With *Untitled with Constellation*, questions confronting the viewer include the meaning of the disjointed proportions throughout the piece; the apparently aged appearance of the woman's face and hair treatment; and of course, the significance of the stars. Smith's "Madonna," however, is neither youthful nor beautiful, twin attributes that visually provide proof of Mary's immaculacy and divine grace. In Smith's piece, beauty is age, and the stars are proof of some mystical and divine inner grace. At once vulnerable and bold, *Untitled with Constellation* challenges our "western" sense of the human figure. Exhibit number 84

Laura MacCaskey, Ph.D., (SUNY – Binghamton) has returned recently to St. Louis from Cape Girardeau, Missouri, where she was an assistant professor of art history at Southeast Missouri State University. ■

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- 81 Jim Dine**
Sunny Ridge. 1999
Acrylic and pastel on canvas
- 82 Jim Dine**
Bouquet. 1987-1988
Cast bronze
- 83 Fernando Botero**
La France. 1985
Cast bronze
- 84 Kiki Smith**
Untitled with Constellation. 2001
Cast bronze. Unique
- 85 Jim Dine**
The Magic Broom's Color Work. 1992
Oil on linen
- 86 Deborah Butterfield**
Red Light, Green Light. 2003
Found metal
- 87 Louis Nevelson**
Volcanic Magic. 1985
Stone, metal and paper collage
- 88 Deborah Butterfield**
Untitled (#2655). 2003
Cast bronze with patina

The Lawrence Biondi, S.J.,
Endowment for the Visual Arts

Mr. and Mrs. Oliver C. Boileau Jr.

Mr. Adam and Dr. Judith Aronson

Mr. Ronald S. Poe

Patrons of the arts at Saint Louis University
who wish to remain anonymous

Mr. Tim Piere, Harry's Restaurant

Botanicals on the Park



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Bill Merwin's collection is so fantastic, and his place in St. Louis is the best movie set you could find if they staged a New York penthouse. His artwork makes the penthouse, and his penthouse complements the artwork. On a scale of one to 10, it stretches the 10 to 100!

Meeting Adam Aronson. He is a gentleman who had the vision to place art in the branch offices of his banks. Talk about foresight! It's so commendable. Talk about pushing the envelope. Adam did that.

Philip Johnson introduced me to the art world. I am indebted to him for his friendship and kindness. He opened me up visually to art.

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Gary C. Werths

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David J. Suwalsky, S.J.
Director

William Morris, *Canopic Jar: Buck (Antlers)*, 1996.

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