FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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LOS ANGELES — The Craft & Folk Art Museum presents Little Dreams in Glass and Metal: Enameling in America, 1920 to the Present, the first nationally traveling exhibition of enamel arts in more than 50 years. Enameling — the art of fusing glass to metal through a high temperature firing process — is an under-documented art form rich in history, technique, and visual opulence. The exhibition explores the history of enameling in this country over the past 100 years through objects ranging from cloisonné jewelry to large abstract wall panels. Little Dreams in Glass and Metal will be on view from January 24 – May 8, 2016 and has been organized by the Los Angeles-based Enamel Arts Foundation.

Taking its title from a phrase the artist Karl Drerup used to describe the extraordinary properties of enameling — “I appreciate knowing when someone derives joy from the long hours I spend in making these little dreams out of glass and metal” — the exhibition includes 121 works from the Enamel Arts Foundation’s collection of modern and contemporary enamels. A versatile medium that artists have explored in a wide variety of formats, enameling is adaptable to small, intimate forms such as jewelry and decorative objects, or to large-scale architectural murals and wall-mounted panels.

Up to the 1960s, enamels were collected and exhibited by major museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Cleveland Museum of Art. However, with the introduction of table-top kilns and popular instructional manuals, the widespread accessibility of the medium relegated it to the level of a hobbyist’s craft. Also, as the formal simplicity of Minimalism and Conceptualism came to dominate the art world, the perceived preciousness and ornamental aesthetic of enamels lost institutional and educational support. Despite these shifts, enameling has continued to attract a small but devoted base of artists.

According to the exhibition’s co-curators Bernard N. Jazzar and Harold B. “Hal” Nelson, “The enamels field has been overlooked for far too long. Our goal as curators and as co-founders of the Enamel Arts Foundation is to shed further light on this remarkable field and to present a fuller picture of art-making practices in their richly diverse complexity from the mid 20th century to the present.”

Though enameling is considered a traditional, time-honored medium, most of the 90 enamel artists exhibited in Little Dreams produced experimental work that was in conversation with the contemporary art movements of their time. The shapes and colors in the wall panels of Southern California artist Arthur Ames (1906-1975) reveal his affinity for formal abstraction; Harold Balazs (b. 1928) incorporated the spare geometries of Bauhaus design into his enameled objects; and husband-and-wife artists Ellamarie (1913-1976) and Jackson Woolley (1910-1992) were influenced greatly by Cubism and by Pop Art and Op Art of the 1960s.
Artists Edward Winter (1908-1976), Paul Hultberg (b. 1926), and Fred Uhl Ball (1945-1985) experimented with industrial-sized kilns and torch-firing techniques, transforming the scale of enameling from a smaller, precious art form into large and audacious enameled murals. Contemporary artists working with enamel are fusing elements of printmaking, photography, and narrative. Jessica Calderwood's (b. 1978) psychological portraits capture people's personal obsessions and vices, such as in Smoking Boy (2005). Mary Chuduk (b. 1955) adds mixed-media elements, including hair and pearls, to her enamel narratives as she explores the use of women's head coverings within different cultural contexts.

"Enamel carries the same alchemical properties as glass and ceramics, in that fire infuses the work with a surface mystery that is both magical and precious and always with a sense of drama," explains CAFAM Executive Director Suzanne Isken. “Enameling is a very skill-based and thoughtful process laden with meaning and beauty, and its contemporary rediscovery will certainly add to its increasing popularity as an art form.

The Enamel Arts Foundation has spearheaded critical scholarship, preservation, and advocacy on behalf of enameling since 2007. The non-profit organization was founded by Hal Nelson, Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, and Bernard Jazzar, Curator of the Lynda and Stewart Resnick Collection. Jazzar and Nelson’s quest to preserve and present enamel arts began 20 years ago during regular visits to antique and consignment shops where they frequently encountered anonymous enameled works. They formed their enamel arts collection, but found a lack of scholarship and publication about the art form. As art historians they set out to do their own research, which led to the development of the foundation and what has become the foremost collection of enamel arts in the United States.

An opening reception for Little Dreams in Glass and Metal: Enameling in America, 1920 to the Present will take place on Saturday, January 23 from 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. The reception is free for CAFAM members and open to the public for a $12 admission fee.

This exhibition has been made possible through funding from the Windgate Charitable Foundation, with additional support provided by the McLeod Family Foundation, Beth and Gregg Coccari, and other generous contributors.

CATALOGUE
Little Dreams in Glass and Metal is documented by a fully illustrated publication with introductory essay and artist profiles by the exhibition's co-curators. The publication is distributed by the University of North Carolina Press (www.uncpress.unc.edu) and is available in the CAFAM Shop.
PUBLIC PROGRAMS
CAFAM will offer exhibition-related workshops and events in conjunction with the exhibition, including CraftLab family workshops on the second Sunday of each month from 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.

New Visions in Enamel
Saturday, April 2 | 1:00 – 3:30 p.m.
Location: The Dorothy Collins Brown Auditorium, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90036

New Visions in Enamel is a panel featuring three leading figures in the contemporary enamels and jewelry fields: Jessica Calderwood, David Freda, and Barbara Seidenath. Each artist will show images of his or her work along with work by emerging artists in the enamels, jewelry, and metals field. The panel is moderated by Bernard Jazzar, President of the non-profit Enamel Arts Foundation.

Situated on historic Museum Row since 1973, the Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) is an invaluable contributor to Los Angeles culture, exhibiting current artists with intriguing perspectives and distinctive practices. Exploring the leading edge of craft, art, and design, CAFAM gives audience to diverse makers and artists whose work is often not represented in larger art institutions. The museum is a place to see art and make art — all under one roof. CAFAM coordinates a robust roster of hands-on workshops led by professional artists and makers. The intimate, atypical museum space and independent spirit at CAFAM combine to create an atmosphere of excitement and innovation, where people in Los Angeles deepen their relationships to art, creativity and one another. For more information, visit www.cafam.org

Location: 5814 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036
Admission: FREE every Sunday
Regularly: $7 for adults; $5 for students, teachers, seniors, and veterans; free for CAFAM members
Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Saturday & Sunday, 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.; closed Mondays. Every first Thursday of the month, extended hours 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.