

The New York Times

UrbanEye

ART

The Living Room as Art

Published: January 6, 2010

For those of you who found the London apartment in “[An Education](#)” swoon-inducing or the Los Angeles bungalow in “[A Single Man](#)” as enticing as the very chic clothes, then head to [Greenwich House](#)’s newest exhibition, “Studio Pottery and Mid Century Style,” at 6 p.m. tonight. The show features a meticulous recreation of an American living room around 1960. The exhibition will include ceramics from the late 1950s and early to mid-1960s by Peter Voulkos, Gertrude and Otto Natzler as well as furniture by Florence Knoll, Eero Saarinen, Eames and others, not to mention textiles and lighting. To kick off the event, guests are invited to dress up in their own “**Mad Men**”-inspired frocks and nibble on period food and drink while they take in the stylish scene.

Website Address: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-archer/handmade-holiday_b_382696.html



Sarah Archer

Director, Greenwich House Pottery, NYC

Posted: December 7, 2009 12:14 PM

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An outlet mall sweater that will never fit. Fancy toiletries so heavily perfumed you can't bear to keep them in the house. A DVD of an Adam Sandler movie that you wouldn't have gone to see when it was in the theaters. "Rich Dad, Poor Dad".

This December, millions of gifts will be bought, wrapped, shipped, opened -- and either returned, or consigned to obscurity in the basement.

Between the economic meltdown squeezing our budgets and the overload of errands that we squeeze into our frenetic days, the art of gift-giving is in a rut. The advent of the non-committal gift card says it all: shopping for our loved ones has never been quicker and easier -- or less thoughtful.

One solution is to abandon the practice altogether in favor of a wholesome, "non-commercial" holiday. But gifts have always connected human beings to each other in meaningful ways, cementing family bonds, friendships and community ties. Objects are the supporting players in the rituals that mark the passage of time, both religious and secular.

Many of the most extraordinary objects in museums today were originally given as gifts. Their production supported talented artisans, embodied cultural and artistic values, and reinforced relationships between people, families and communities.

Think for a moment of the objects you hold most dear: is it the latest high tech gadget? Or is it a brooch your grandmother decided to give you on a whim when you admired it as a child? A hand-knit sweater from your mom that would retail for almost nothing at a flea market?

As the director of [Greenwich House Pottery](#), one of America's oldest non-profit ceramics studios, I spend most of my days advocating for the importance of the handmade object in modern life. Like a performance, a hand thrown porcelain bowl or hand-wrought silver bracelet will never exist again, anywhere else. Each one has its own special character. Part of the appeal of handmade objects lies in knowing how much skill, creativity, patience and talent is required to create a one-of-a-kind object. Their production keeps techniques and traditions alive.

Whatever your budget, handmade goods are this season's must-have gift: purchasing them as presents for everyone on your list, from toddlers to empty-nesters, has all kinds of benefits you might not even realize.

Handmade objects provide us with an active link to our past, and play a key role in education. Ceramics gives school children everywhere working in clay a connection to the vibrant traditions of Greek, Roman, Near Eastern and Pre-Columbian pottery--some of the oldest works of art on Earth. Getting to learn from a teacher who opens a tactile window into another age, alternating museum visits or slide shows with hands-on projects, can trigger an early love of history and art.

That potter who sells you a porcelain serving dish this December might also be teaching local kids how to work in clay for the first time: a learning process that stretches their creativity, and might furnish a set of proud parents with an enthusiastic, slightly wobbly homage to an Athenian red-figure vase. By rounding out her income from teaching and sales, your purchase helps fund that web of enrichment.

Everything we buy connects us to dozens, if not hundreds of other individuals at various points along an object's journey, and often not in a good way. The array of ultra-cheap goods that has fueled consumption in the United States for decades has an insidious dark side. By making retail prices as low as possible, many retailers and manufacturers make it all but impossible for their employees to earn a living wage. Everything has a price, including discounts.

When you buy affordable artworks or household goods at a local studio sale, an affordable art fair, or websites like [Etsy.com](#) and [TheGuild.com](#), you can see these relationships more clearly and even get to know the people who make what you buy.

In the spirit of the holidays, we can make the relationships between people in commerce less exploitative and more fruitful by putting some consideration into who makes, ships, retails, and profits from the things we purchase. With a little forethought, you can buy gifts that benefit the maker, seller, buyer and recipient, and even the students of an artist-educator. You can patronize companies that conserve resources by making clever use of salvaged wood in their furniture designs. Or you can stock up on imported fair trade textiles made by artists who are protected by a cooperative guild, ensuring that their wages cannot be undercut.

At the moment of frenzied paper-ripping when we open a gift, we usually forget all the other people involved. This holiday season, let's remember them.

The best part is how your loved ones will feel when they realize that instead of just personalizing the back of an iPod Touch, you went out of your way to find something, be it an exquisite necklace or the perfect office mug, that is just as unique as they are. Demonstrate how special they are to you by giving them something that no one else will ever have--with a nod to the greater good.

Greenwich House Pottery Mid-Century Style Party Thursday in NYC



Here's a fun free design event in NYC tomorrow if you're in town!

From Mad Men to An Education to runway chic, everything mid-twentieth century is once again having its moment. Perhaps it's some manifestation of the current economic crisis that leaves us nostalgic for an era of prosperity, or just the longing for simpler times. It is fitting then that Greenwich House Pottery's Jane Harstook Gallery will be hosting [Studio Pottery and Mid-Century Style](#), a period room installation that conjures up a living space that incorporates both the craft and design of this era.

The installation will open on January 7. Fittingly, the opening soiree will feature period food, drink, and costume. 'Studio Pottery' will run until February 4, and is curated by Sarah Archer, Director of Greenwich House Pottery, in

collaboration with Rago Arts (New Jersey), ReGeneration Furniture (NYC) and Astroturf Antiques (Brooklyn, NY). The show will include ceramics from the late 1950's and early to mid-1960's by Peter Voukos, Gertrude and Otto Natzler, among others. Furniture will include pieces by Florence Knoll, Eero Saarinen, Eames and others.

You are invited--though hardly required-- to dress up in your favorite mid-century, Mad Men-esque garb.


Happy New Year: 1960

Greenwich House Pottery

Thursday, January 7th, 6-8pm

16 Jones Street NYC

Above photo by Sonja Shield.

Posted by **Becky Stern** | Jan 6, 2010 04:14 PM 

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