



# OUT OF THIS WORLD

SHAKER DESIGN PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

**March 13, 2008 – June 15, 2008**

The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture

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## SHAKER DESIGN PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

From March 13 to June 15, 2008, The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture is presenting *Out of This World: Shaker Design Past, Present, and Future*, an exploration of 200 years of Shaker design and spirituality. In addition—and for the first time in a major exhibition—*Out of This World* illustrates the Shaker influence on diverse contemporary design, including Scandinavian furniture and the work of George Nakashima.



### BACKGROUND

The Shaker movement was founded by Ann Lee (1736–1784), who immigrated to America from England in 1774, along with a small band of followers. From New York they traveled north, buying land near Albany; by 1781 they were established enough to undertake a mission to New England. After Mother Ann's death, subsequent leaders spread the faith throughout New England and to Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky. The society reached its apogee of about 6,000 members in the years just before the Civil War and then slowly went into a decline, with only the last glimmerings still with us. Yet the Shakers have lasted longer and gained more fame than any other utopian community this country has produced.

While being held in an English jail, Mother Ann had a vision that Jesus came to her and became one with her. It was a vision of the second coming, but this time with the spirit residing in a woman (equality of the sexes was an important tenet of Shaker life). Hence the real name of the society is the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing. The name Shaker is derived from the fact that while members would sit in silent communion, like the Quakers, at some point during their meditations they would be taken with "a mighty shaking."

### THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition and catalogue for *Out of This World* examine, for the first time, Shaker design in the broadest possible contexts of time and space, ranging from 1820 to the present and taking into consideration the non-Shaker influences that the Believers consciously accepted or rejected throughout their history.

and Hans Wegner (1914–2007) and American designers George Nakashima (1905–1990) and Roy McMakin (b. 1956).

The first gallery, "The Shaker World," includes classic furniture produced from 1820 to 1860, the period of gospel simplicity, when the Shakers were most isolated from the outside world. These masterpieces originate from workshops and dwelling houses in the Shaker communities of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and New York.



"The Commercial World" is a rich display of Shaker-made goods, including woodenware, textiles, medicinal herbs and remedies, and food products and garden seed packaging, all made specifically for consumption by non-Shaker customers. It also includes candid photographs taken by Believers to document their positive and profitable interactions with the "world's people."

"The Spiritual World" presents seldom seen, spiritually inspired gift drawings produced before 1850 that provide insight into the Shakers' colorful, yet private, perception of the next world. This gallery also features musical manuscripts; an innovative music writing pen; and recordings of the hymns, anthems, and songs that formed such an integral part of Shaker spiritual life.

"The Fancy World" places Shaker design in context with other early 19th-century styles and features painted furniture, ceramics, and textiles in the Fancy style (1800–1840), all produced in the secular world that the Shakers consciously rejected.

Organized by Jean Burks, senior curator at Vermont's Shelburne Museum and one of the world's preeminent experts on Shaker furniture, the exhibition contains more than 150 pieces, including approximately 130 works on loan from private collections and museums such as Canterbury Shaker Village in Canterbury, New Hampshire, and the Shaker Museum and Library in Old Chatham, New York. The majority of these works have never been on public view, including M. Stephen Miller's extraordinary collection of seed packaging, boxes, and poplar ware made by Shakers for sale to the outside world, as well as an important double trustee's desk recently acquired by the American Folk Art Museum. The exhibition also includes household objects, textiles, rarely seen spiritual drawings that reflect Shaker visions of a heavenly sphere, products made for sale to 20th-century consumers, and other objects that illustrate the influence that Shaker design has had, and continues to have, on contemporary style.



The exhibition is divided into five sections: masterpieces of Shaker furniture made between 1820 and 1860; objects from Shaker lands and by Shaker hands made specifically for sale to the “world’s people” (non-Shakers); American Fancy, a popular 19th-century movement rejected by the Shakers; Shaker spirituality, as expressed in the rarely seen gift drawings; and the strong Shaker influence on contemporary designers such as Danish furniture makers Borge Mogensen (1914–1972)

“The Contemporary World” highlights the strong influence of Shaker design on 20th-century Scandinavian furniture, Japanese-inspired American furniture, and work by contemporary Shaker-inspired artists. As noted earlier, this is the first major exhibition to explore the relationship between Shaker and contemporary design.

### THE CATALOGUE

A catalogue published by The Bard Graduate Center and Yale University Press accompanies the exhibition. It presents the latest research in each of the five areas of the exhibition by contributing authors who are the acknowledged experts in their fields. In no other publication can one find this kind of all-encompassing approach to defining Shaker design—past, present, and future.

Included in the catalogue are essays by Robert P. Emlen, University Curator and Senior Lecturer in American Civilization, Brown University (“Shaker Villages”); Gerard C. Wertkin, former Director, American Folk Art Museum, New York City (“The Spiritual World: Shaker Gift Drawings and Music”); Dr. Jean Humez, Women’s Studies Program, University of Massachusetts, Boston (“Shaker Women and Their Religion”); Jean Burks (“The Shaker World: Shaker ‘Classic’ Furniture Design”); and M. Stephen Miller, author and collector (“The Commercial World: Designed for Sale: Shaker Commerce with the World”).



### RELATED PROGRAMS

An array of lectures, panels, and other offerings will be presented in conjunction with *Out of This World: Shaker Design Past, Present, and Future*. For further information, please call 212-501-3011 or e-mail [programs@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:programs@bgc.bard.edu).

### EXHIBITION TOURS

Group tours of *Out of This World* may be scheduled Tuesday through Friday between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., and on Thursdays until 7:00 p.m. Reservations are required for all groups. For further information, please call the Bard Graduate Center Gallery at 212-501-3013 or TTY 212-501-3012, or e-mail [gallery@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:gallery@bgc.bard.edu).

### LOCATION

The Bard Graduate Center is located at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue, in New York City. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Admission is \$3 general, \$2 seniors and students (with valid ID), and free on Thursday evenings after 5:00 p.m. For further information about the Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit [www.bgc.bard.edu](http://www.bgc.bard.edu).

### SUPPORT

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### UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

**Summer 2008** *Thomas Hope: Designer and Patron in Regency London*

**Fall–Winter 2008–2009** *Twixt Art and Nature: English Embroidery 1575–1700, Selections from The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

# BGC

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## IMAGES

### Cover

**Counter**, unidentified Shaker maker, about 1830,  
Enfield, N.H. On loan from Bob and Aileen Hamilton.

### Back cover

**Six-Drawer Chest**, Roy McMakin, 2003.  
On loan from Matthew Marks Gallery.

### Interior flap

**Tall Case Clock**, maker unknown, about 1830.  
Case, probably New Hampshire; works, Connecticut.  
Collection of Shelburne Museum.

### Inside, from top to bottom

**Settee**, unidentified Shaker maker, about 1830,  
Enfield, N.H. On loan from Bob and Aileen Hamilton.

**Blanket Box**, unidentified Shaker maker, about 1830,  
Enfield, N.H. On loan from Bob and Aileen Hamilton.

**Music Staff Liner Pen**, Isaac Newton Youngs (1793–1865),  
about 1830, Mount Lebanon, N.Y.  
On loan from Bob and Aileen Hamilton.

