



Seattle Post-Intelligencer

# LIFE AND ARTS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2001 SECTION E

## MAGAZINES

**NEVER TOO LATE:** The Atlantic Monthly has bought the rights to publish a Mark Twain story it rejected when the author pitched it in 1876.

"We're having the Atlantic change its mind, as it were, after 125 years," said Patrick Martin, the lawyer who negotiated the sale for the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, which owned the rights. The sale price of the story, "A Murder, a Mystery and a Marriage," has not been disclosed.

The short story was written in 1876, the year Twain began "Huckleberry Finn." It was conceived by Twain as part of a friendly contest in which seven or eight writers would take a shot at writing a story that would fit a particular outline. Twain was the only writer to finish the project. The story will appear in the Atlantic Monthly's June 15 issue. It also will be published as a hardcover book by W.W. Norton & Co. in September.

## STAMPS

**LUCY ON A LETTER:** This month, the U.S. Postal Service is offering a Year of the Snake stamp and an issue to honor Roy Wilkins, who led the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People from 1955 to 1977. In October, expect the final stamp in the Looney Tunes series, featuring Porky Pig. Also due later this year are stamps saluting conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein, Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, the "Peanuts" comic strip, whose creator, Charles Schulz, died in February, and America's favorite redhead, Lucille Ball, whose classic sitcom "I Love Lucy" turns 50 this year. Among stamps for the 2001 holidays is one featuring Lorenzo Costa's "Virgin and Child."



Ball

## MOVIES

**STILL HOPPING:** The hip-hop film "Save the Last Dance" keeps grooving along at the box office, finishing in the top spot for the second row and easily fending off two new releases featuring a pair of Hollywood's biggest stars.

"Save the Last Dance," starring Julia Roberts and Laurence Fishburne, grossed \$16 million during its first two weeks of release. Through its first two weeks of release, it took in more than \$46 million.

Two new movies with Hollywood heavyweights made their way into the top 10. "Snatch" starring Brad Pitt and directed by Guy Ritchie, took in \$7 million. "The Pledge," starring Jack Nicholson and Sean Penn, made \$5.7 million in its weekend.



Artist Jil Smith makes rice paper lamp shades in her Seattle workshop. Her creations have caught the eye of interior designers and architects.

PAUL KITAGAKI JR./P-I PHOTOS

# CUSTOM MADE IN THE SHADE

ARTIST  
CAPTURES  
MORE THAN  
LIGHT  
WITH COLORFUL  
AND CREATIVE  
LAMP  
TOPPERS

BY SUSAN PHINNEY  
P-I reporter

Lamps tend to look like well-dressed people with bags on their heads: The bases are good but the shades are borrrring.

Artist Jil Smith is on a quiet crusade to give lamps the topping off they deserve with shades so shapely and colorful they're like exotic hats.

It takes only a quick visit to a lighting department to note that lamp bases vary wildly—from staid crystal table lamp to sinuous iron curve of a floor lamp. But all are likely to have similar or identical shades of white or off-white paper, or paper/fabric combinations. Shapes tend to be conical or cylindrical with an obvious, glued seam. Some are made of fabric stretched over a metal frame.

Smith says cheap shades are sometimes put on lamps because the bases are so expensive they have to cut corners to make them affordable. Unfortunately, affordable seems to be synonymous with monotonous.

Smith, a native of New Jersey with a degree in painting from Pratt Institute in New York City, worked as an art teacher, textile designer

and scenic painter before a lamp-maker friend asked her to make some shades for him. That was four years ago.

"Once I started, I made them compulsively," she says. Using a papier mache technique, she papered over balloons to make curvaceous shades that looked like sculptures lit

SEE SHADES, E8



In her war against cheap, boring lamp shades, Smith designs exotic hats for light fixtures.

# SHADES: Lit from within

FROM E1

from within. She searched out old shades with metal frames and stripped them down to create new ones.

While working out of a tiny studio in back of an antiques shop, she hung some of her shades on the store's lamps where they were spotted by interior designers and architects who shopped there. Some of them are still customers, but her working conditions have improved.

Smith now has her own company, Insatiable Studios, and she works in a big, airy space in the South Lake Union neighborhood.

This is where she created more than 100 lampshades for the new Dahlia Lounge (everything but the fish, she says). She recently completed a 16-foot replica of a tribal canoe that will be lighted from within and suspended over a casino in Spokane. Some of Smith's shades are in Chicago's Nordstrom store.

Jennifer Carlisle, an interior designer with Seattle-based Callison Architecture, recently worked with Smith on a mall project in Colorado. Carlisle designed a mobile to hang over a seating area. Smith created an eclectic group of shades for it.

Carlisle says the result was like "an unexpected piece in a vignette. She has an eye for design and a painter's eye for color. At the opening, everyone was dazzled by them." With Smith's shades illuminated, it became a functional piece of art.

Smith is no longer scrounging for old metal frames to refurbish. A metal-working firm in California makes frames to her specifications, and she has a stockpile of rice papers from Japan to use for her creations.

The first layer (the one that becomes the lampshade's liner) is white. The outer layers can be more decorative—a textured red that resembles ostrich leather to multicolored stripes. Smith sandwiched metal filings between layers of paper to create a birch bark look for the canoe project.

She also creates shades featuring Japanese silk-screened prints. One rectangular frame incorporates four different scenes.

Smith's shade prices average about \$185 retail. Custom shades, or those with silk-screened prints are higher. By comparison, a medium-size, paper-based shade is \$26 to \$47, a comparable size in silk might be \$88 in a department or lighting

store.

Smith says she loves color and pattern making, but she'd like to find a way to incorporate fine art into her life. "Lampshades are not paintings. They're functional," she explains. But they're also non-toxic. Smith says she has had health issues with some of

her art-related jobs.

Smith moved to Seattle in 1993 knowing only that it was "on the water, near mountains, and wasn't as cold as Chicago," she explains with a smile. "I left New York because I was overstimulated." After working for the art museum in Little Rock, Ark.,

for a couple of years, she was "understimulated." That's when she decided to try Seattle.

When she's finished with her "day job," Smith goes home and

creates. She says she might work on a multimedia painting, or if she's really frustrated, she'll do craft projects.

What's her idea of a craft project? Using broken tiles, she's created mo-

saics on the edges of her driveway.

P-I reporter Susan Phinney can be reached at 206-448-8397 or [susanphinney@seattle-pi.com](mailto:susanphinney@seattle-pi.com)

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