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High Fiber: Recent Large-Scale Acquisitions in Fiber

September 30, 2012 – January 20, 2013

Following are abbreviated biographies of artists featured in RAM's permanent collection and this exhibition. Compiled from various sources.

Nancy Hemenway Barton (1920-2008) is known for her ability to transform fabric—such as lamb's wool, linen, mohair alpaca, and karakul—into graceful tapestries. Barton worked closely with the theme of poetic nature—many of her pieces are characterized by a multitude of ruffled waves, soft clouds, and flowing water. Her works have been acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Farnsworth Art Museum, Maine, as well as other public and private collections worldwide.

Carol Eckert is a contemporary artist widely recognized as an innovator in the field of fibers. She has combined a talent for working with her hands with an experimental nature and her discovery of the ancient technique of coiling, a process linked to Native American traditions of basketry and various functional crafts. Eckert's unique coiled sculptures of animals are non-functional and metaphorical, inspired by ceremonial vessels as well as other historical objects and images. She has over 15 pieces in RAM's permanent collection, where she was featured in a collection focus exhibition in 2010. Eckert also has works at Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, Mint Museum of Craft and Design, North Carolina, and the Denver Art Museum.

Each piece begins with symbols and stories - creation stories, legends of great floods, tales of journeys and quests, parables of good and evil. I am intrigued that cultures from so many different places and times share related traditions.

—Carol Eckert

Since the 1970's, **Françoise Grossen** has produced dynamic fiber sculptures that explore gravity, scale, repetition, and process. Favoring natural materials, such as sisal, and techniques like braiding, Grossen has worked intuitively to shape rope and maximize its expressive potential. Her work has been collected by the Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, Museum of Arts and Design, New York, and the Milwaukee Art Museum.

I like the encounter with my large relief forms and panels to be twofold: the first, seen from a distance; the second, more attentive, should reveal new surprises. The work has evolved from monumental or 'body scale' forms hanging from the ceiling or wall to a series of independent floor sculptures with biomorphic associations. These elements assume creature forms and evoke associations from our common unconscious memory

R|A|M

with many layers of meaning. The substance of my work is an enjoyment and fascination with the beauty of large-scale tubular, flexible material, positive and negative space, texture and mass.

—Françoise Grossen

Jan Hopkins is a fiber artist working with alternative materials and unconventional techniques to create striking sculptures. Over the years, her forms have evolved into narrative sculptural feminine forms, basketry, and shoes, as well as teapots. As her work has progressed, Hopkins has begun to produce large-scale clothing pieces that tell stories of both a personal and universal nature. For example, inspired by a young teacher who struggled to find ways to help teenage girls with self-esteem issues, she recently created a pair of shoes, emblazoned with letters that spelled the phrase "Girl Power."

Stepping back and looking at the progression of my work makes me excited to continue my exploration of new ideas and materials.

—Jan Hopkins

Born in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1949, **Michael James** is a pre-eminent American quilt maker. James received his B.A. from the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth with a concentration in painting and printmaking and his M.F.A. from the Rochester Institute of Technology. James's approach to quilt making has been influenced as much by his training as a painter as by his study of the history and development of American quilt making techniques.

Art is my religion and the studio is my temple.

—Michael James

Ruth Kao (1933-1985) was born in Beijing, China. She was a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where she taught three-dimensional design in addition to loom and non-loom fiber art. Kao's textiles reflect the influences of her cultural heritage and her academic training. Her early work was in painting, but she quickly began to translate her studies of color into large, handwoven geometric tapestries. In her later fiber work, Kao combined her knowledge of contemporary American sculpture and installation work with her interest in teaching students about silk and its production. Concerned with finding a way to combine quality craftsmanship and sophisticated designs, Kao designed and supervised the production of a series of silk knotted tapestries woven by the **Jiangsu** weavers of the Peoples Republic of China.

R|A|M

Nancy Koenigsberg's work has been exhibited and collected internationally. Educated at Goucher College, the New School for Social Research, Skidmore College, and the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Koenigsberg contrasts open and closed forms, the ridged with the supple, as well as the defined with the ambiguous. Like others featured in this exhibition, Koenigsberg combines traditional techniques—weaving and knotting—with contemporary materials.

For the past twenty years my work has been concerned with interlocking lines and the spaces they form. My interest is in creating a sense of weightlessness and luminescence by the manipulation of narrow gauge industrial wire. I am exploring the contradiction between metal elements known for their strength and durability and the delicacy of the textiles which are created. These lace-like layers of nets allow for transparency and the passage of light and the formation of shadows. In other works the nets are thickly layered and become almost opaque. Lines cross and re-cross to create a complex fabric and tangle of shadows. The objects appear fragile, but I seek to maintain their strength through the use of these metals.

—Nancy Koenigsberg

Gyöngy Laky's fiber constructions have been exhibited in international galleries and museums as well as at parks in England, a meadow in Austria, a mountain village in Bulgaria, and on various hillsides and forests of the United States. Over the course of her 40 year career, Laky has built baskets, grids, and word constructions with wire, toothpicks, and screws, but her material of choice continues to be twigs. In 2005, Laky retired from the University of California, Davis, where she taught fiber art and environmental design for 30 years. Her work is found in the permanent collections of the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Salvaria Museum, Szombathely, Hungary. In 1973, Laky founded the internationally acclaimed Fiberworks, Center for the Textile Arts, in San Francisco. Fiberworks (which closed in 1987) offered exhibition space and classes emphasizing fiber media—several of the artists included in RAM's collection (and this exhibition) attended classes there.

I find the ability to respond to resources presented by nature and the immediate environment a very positive human attribute.

—Gyöngy Laky

Rebecca Medel studied Environmental Design at Arizona State University and fiber at the Pacific Basin School of Textiles Arts, and Fiberworks, Center for the Textile Arts, in San Francisco, California. Medel became very spiritual in her early life after being diagnosed with heart disease at the age of seven. Medel has used her work to explore philosophical and metaphysical issues, space, and symbolism. She established a preference for the use of linen and cotton thread because they are intrinsically structural and can be bleached and dyed.

R|A|M

I view my work and life as a search for the meaning of why I'm here.

—Rebecca Medel

Linda Kelly Osborne's formative years were spent on a small farm in Nebraska, where she observed the people around her getting on with the task of living amidst the tenuous balance and routine of the seasons. Her baskets, upright organic forms, are metaphors for the human experience—on the surface, they are hollow vessels displaying a balance of tension and flexibility under changing conditions; within, they house an unseen interior.

The actual forms have their beginnings in baskets, which to me embody so much of what we are: soft, flexible, impermanent fibrous structures. A balance of tension and compression...encountered in mass yet a uniquely individual presence, power, and mystery; made of disparate elements brought together into a complete often compellingly magical form; hollow yet with a memory for what they have held, the thin outer skin both revealing and concealing an unknown interior.

—Linda Kelly

Barbara Lee Smith has brought surface design and machine embroidery to a new artistic level by fusing layer upon layer of synthetic fabric and using the stitch as a drawing tool. Smith has taught, exhibited, and lectured nationally and internationally. Her work is included in significant museum collections.

Materials: I use only one material, an industrial grade polyester non-woven fabric. It looks like paper, but it is so tough, I can't even tear it. It is my canvas on which I paint using Golden and Daniel Smith acrylics as well as silk-paint pigments, all chosen for light-fastness.

Process and Techniques: I make a painting on the material, then bond several layers together to form a heavy base on which to collage small elements of the same painted material that are heat-set in place. The final stage that literally and visually binds the work together is drawing with the sewing machine in lines that resemble a topographical map. I see this as a three-stage process of painting, collage, and drawing to make the work.

—Barbara Lee Smith

Jean Stamsta was born November 2, 1936, in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with a B.S. and B.A. in Art Education. Stamsta also studied at Fiberworks, Center for the Textile Arts in San Francisco. Long a fan of intense color, she is known for "tubular weaving," but has also incorporated other techniques and media into her work, such as fabric, paper, canvas, paint, and glitter. Stamsta plays with color and pattern, creating abstract compositions and sculptural forms, imaginative landscapes, and still-lives. She has works in the collections of the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, Milwaukee Art Museum, and Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio.

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A graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and winner of the prestigious Pollock-Krasner award, **Merle Temkin** combines needlework, paint, cut paper, and canvas in works that explore pattern, color, and identity. Temkin's primary subject matter is based on her own enlarged fingerprint. In works she identifies as self-portraits, she explores a "symbol" that is both personal and universal. RAM's acquisition, *Only Me*, is 24 panels of acrylic paint and embroidery on paper that comprise a wall installation of fingerprint fragments.

Fingerprints are the ultimate personal signature. They are uniquely my own and at the same time, anonymous, genderless and universal. Hanging threads left from the stitching process suggest a secret side or something turned inside-out.

—Merle Temkin

Inspired by the construction of bird's nests, **Dawn Walden** uses a combination of weaving techniques to create cedar baskets that are "elegant representations of the dualities of life." Following the traditions of her Ojibwa ancestry, she personally collects and processes her cedar. After she has completed this arduous process, Walden begins each basket using the traditional, uniform weaving technique. She then employs a secondary random weave that is seen on the exterior surface. Walden has begun to play with scale, taking average size baskets and turning several into five foot tall vessel-like forms. Walden is represented by the Jane Sauer Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico and her work is featured in collections and exhibitions nationwide.

Claire Zeisler (1903-1991) was one of the pioneers of innovative, large-scale sculpture in the twentieth century. She studied with sculptor **Alexander Archipenko** as well as the Chicago weaver **Bea Swartchild**. With her knotted and braided sculptural works, Zeisler became a formidable force in fiber art. In 1963, she was one of five artists whose works were chosen for *Woven Forms*, a ground-breaking American fiber art exhibition at the then-named American Craft Museum, New York (now the Museum of Arts and Design). Zeisler studied at the Chicago Institute of Design where she began creating flat weavings using a traditional loom. By 1962, she began making freestanding, three-dimensional fiber structures using a variety of techniques.