

RAM

RAM showcasing its significant ceramic art collection



8 HOURS AGO • BY [LEE ROBERTS](#)

Clay, and its many artistic possibilities, are being explored at a conference in Milwaukee this week that is expected to draw thousands of art professionals, students and enthusiasts from across the country.

The National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (aka NCECA, pronounced N-seeka) 48th annual conference is at the Wisconsin Center through March 22 — and more than 80 corresponding ceramics exhibitions are being hosted at venues around

the state, including the Racine Art Museum, 441 Main St.

All of RAM's galleries are currently filled with ceramics, featured in several concurrent shows including "Magic Mud: Masterworks in Clay from RAM's Collection." And while the museum's exhibitions coincide with NCECA (and will bring visitors from the conference to Racine), they easily stand on their own as a view of RAM's significant holdings of both contemporary sculptural and functional clay.

The Racine Art Museum's contemporary craft collection is the largest in the country, according to Lena Vigna, curator of exhibitions at RAM. Within that collection, the museum has more works in ceramic (1,254 than any other singular medium.

"Almost everything we have out now is from our collection," said Vigna.

'Magic Mud'

Visitors can get an idea of the depth and richness of RAM's ceramic collection through the "Magic Mud" exhibit, which occupies the museum's upstairs galleries through May 4. While it is not encyclopedic, this show is a good representation of the range of ceramic art in the collection, Vigna said.

Included are some of the museum's largest ceramics, such as Toshiko Takaezu's 13-piece "Star Series" which is being shown in its entirety for the first time since its 2005 RAM debut. Visitors can also see a sampling of more functional ceramics, from pieces from RAM's teapot collection to James Lovera's series of glazed porcelain bowls, with richly colored surfaces in "Egg Blue," "Deep Yellow Satin" and more.

There is also work that represents various movements in contemporary ceramics through time. In a piece by Peter Voulkos, for example, visitors can see clay being used as an expressive, sculptural material, reflecting the abstract expressionist movement of the mid-20th century, Vigna said. Voulkos, who had a very physical approach to creating his work,

was often tied to the work of abstract expressionist painters, such as Jackson Pollock, she said.

Visitors may also find items they might not expect to be made out of clay, Vigna said — a sizeable glacier formed completely out of porcelain, for example; or a nearly life-sized horse, seemingly trapped in the gallery wall.

And when they make their way into the gallery devoted to Takaezu's "Star Series," visitors can walk among the massive vessels, each of which is named for a different celestial being. Their size gives the vessels an almost human quality and, by walking through them, one can feel a certain connection to the piece.

"It really is a masterpiece," Vigna said. "This seemed like the perfect opportunity to bring it out."

Dynamic and varied

RAM's downstairs galleries currently feature two other ceramic exhibits.

"White Gold: The Appeal of Lustre" runs through July 6 and includes contemporary sculpture, pottery and adornment that utilizes shiny materials, such as lustre glazes and gold details.

"Collection Focus: Sergei Isupov," which runs through June 8, features the imaginative work of Russian-born artist Sergei Isupov, who visitors can meet during an artist's reception on Friday, March 21 (see breakout for details. More about both of these shows, as well as other current and coming exhibits, can be found at www.ramart.org).

Works from RAM's collection are also being exhibited at the NCECA conference, in a traveling exhibition called "Bodies at Rest: Figurative Clay from RAM's Collection," through Friday, March 21.

If You Go

WHAT: "Magic Mud: Masterworks in Clay from RAM's Collection"

WHERE: Racine Art Museum, 441 Main St.

WHEN: Now through May 4. Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday (closed Mondays, federal holidays and Easter).

COST: Museum admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for seniors (63 and older) and youth (ages 12 to 18), and free for children younger than 12. Admission is free to all on the first Friday of every month.

INFO: Go to www.ramart.org or call 262-638-8300.

Meet the artist

The Racine Art Museum is offering the opportunity to meet artist Sergei Isupov at a special event from 6 to 8:30 p.m. on Friday, March 21. The artist, whose work is now shown in RAM's "Collection Focus: Sergei Isupov" exhibit, will do a book signing at 7 p.m. The evening will also include light refreshments and a cash bar. Admission is free for RAM

members and \$10 for the general public.

“Collection Focus: Sergei Isupov” showcases the work of “this innovative artist who has pushed the possibilities of clay by combining two-dimensional narrative with three-dimensional ceramic form,” according to RAM. The exhibit will continue at the museum, 441 Main St., through June 8.

For more information, go to www.ramart.org.

Racine's potters

The work of seven Racine County potters is featured in the “Alternative Firing Techniques” exhibition at the Racine Arts Council, 316 Sixth St., through April 26.

And the ceramic art of Racine native Kevin DeKeuster and his wife, JoAnne, is being shown in an exhibition at Milwaukee’s Rock Bottom Brewery through Saturday, March 22.

For more about these shows, see Scene & Heard on Page 5.