



Spectrum: Contemporary Artists in Color

January 31 – July 10, 2016

Color is both a simple and complex concept—associated with emotions, symbols, and thoughts. Human beings learn about color at a young age and it becomes familiar. Still, the use of it as an artistic or design choice is layered and sometimes subjective.

Studies involving color “officially” began in the 1700s. Sir Isaac Newton is credited as inventing the first color wheel, which showed sunlight divided into a spectrum. In 1810, Johann Wolfgang Goethe drew on Newton’s investigations as he explored the psychological effects of various hues. The color wheel most often used today—based on the primary shades of red, yellow, and blue—was formulated by Swiss color and art theorist, Johannes Itten, an instructor at the Bauhaus School of Applied Arts in Weimar, Germany. Modern artists, such as Josef Albers (1888-1976) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), identified color as a primary element of their compositions, underscoring its use to convey ideas and expression.

While many contemporary artists use color as a principal element, ***Spectrum*** focuses on it—sometimes combined in patterns or through multiple objects—as a defining principle in form and design for work that is not figurative. This exhibition primarily features glass, ceramic, and polymer works by artists from RAM’s collection, such as **Sonja Blomdahl, Sandra Byers, Rose Cabat, Jeffrey Lloyd Dever, Lindly Huanani, Cliff Lee, James Lovera, and Dante Marioni.**

Biographies

Brief bios on select artists featured in this exhibition reflect their broad-ranging interests.

Originally from Waltham Massachusetts, **Sonja Blomdahl** received her BFA from Massachusetts College of Art in 1974. She went on to study at the Orrefors Glass Studio in Sweden and with Venetian glass master Checco OngaroIn. In 1983, Blomdahl built her own hot glass studio in Seattle, Washington, where she has since resided. She is known for the deep, rich hues of her hand-blown glass vessels.

Midwestern ceramicist **Sandra Byers** lives and works in Rock Springs, Wisconsin. Her work focuses on small, delicate, natural forms. Working in porcelain, Byers suggests rather than replicates the veins of leaves, the curves of shells, and other patterns found in nature. In contrast to many of the artists in this exhibition, her work is diminutive, highlighting the subtlety of shape and strong but muted color. Byers use of color stems from the inspiration of nature. As she states, “Colors on a spring hillside and a field of ripening corn breathe new life into me.”

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Also working in small, organic forms, **Rose Cabat** (1914-2015) began making her “weed pots” known as **Feelies** in the late 1950s, after moving to Arizona from New York with her husband and son. These small, round wheel-thrown forms are characterized by very narrow, almost closed, openings and bright glazes. Cabat believed that if “a vase could hold weeds, or flowers...can’t it just be a spot of beauty?” In honor of her 100th birthday, the Tucson Museum of Art held a retrospective of her work in 2014.

Benjamin Edols and **Kathy Elliot** have been making glass works collaboratively since 1993 when they met at the Canberra School of Art where Edols was working on her BA. Both have been working with glass since the late 1980s, with Edols receiving his BA from the Sydney College of the Arts and a postgraduate diploma from the Canberra School of Art in 1992. Specializing in various techniques, Edols primarily blows glass while Elliot specializes in cold working techniques. Their work is known for vibrant color, organic forms, and subtle, carved textures.

James Lovera was born in Hayward, California and attended the California School of Fine Art (now the Art Institute), graduating in 1942. From 1948 to 1986, he taught ceramics, design, and, not surprisingly, color theory at San Jose State University. Lovera’s work has a simplicity of form, emblazoned with contemporary color that responds to hues in nature. While not reflected in the particular pieces in this exhibition, he is also very interested in surface texture. For example, Lovera’s “crater glazes” offer a craggy, pocked surface that plays with his intense color saturation.

Cliff Lee works in kaolin clay (porcelain) and creates a wide variety of vessels that are both thrown and carved. He is well-known for recreating Chinese glazes long lost to history, including imperial yellow (a Ming dynasty glaze he rediscovered after 17 years of work). Many of his carved works are inspired by China’s Song dynasty. Though he favors sleek and slender forms, Lee employs a wide variety of colors, from the ancient tones of celadon (a greenish-blue glaze used in ancient China), to oxblood (a deep crimson), to a glaze he calls “Lava,” which creates a molten texture in rich hues of purple and teal.

Polymer artist **Lindly Haunani** is a founding member of the National Polymer Clay Guild. She is also the author of **Color Inspirations** and the producer of a series of DVDs entitled **Confident Color**. Not surprisingly, Haunani’s lively, vibrant, and sometimes, humorous work relies on color as a key design element. RAM’s collection contains several of her polymer works, including neckpieces, a sushi platter, and asparagus-themed adornment.

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Ceramicists **Gertrud** and **Otto Natlzer** are an Austrian duo, who married in 1934 and worked collaboratively until Gertrude's death in 1971. Gertrude created the ceramic forms, while Otto developed unique glazes. Otto's first job had been as a textile designer for a necktie factory, which was shuttered in the 1930s by the Nazis. He met Gertrude, a secretary, in 1933. After winning the 1937 Paris Exposition Silver Medal for ceramics, the pair immigrated to America in 1938. The Natzlers produced work that married form and color. Otto is known for having created over 2,000 types of glaze, which were thoughtfully paired with Gertrude's simple, organic, and seemingly impossibly thin shapes.

A pioneer of polymer, American artist **Pier Voulkos** is the daughter of well-known ceramicist **Peter Voulkos**. She is arguably the first jewelry designer to work with polymer, a medium she has been exploring since encountering it in a German toy shop in the late 1970s. Her work sometimes incorporates metallic clay (a moldable medium consisting of very small particles of metal, such as silver, gold, bronze, or copper), which gives her jewelry, boxes, and objects a distinctive luster.

Mary Ann "Toots" Zynsky was born and raised in Massachusetts. Known professionally and to her friends as Toots Zynsky, she received her BFA in 1973 at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence, where she studied with internationally renowned glass artist **Dale Chihuly**. She later participated in the founding of the Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State with Chihuly and other artists. In 1980, Zynsky became assistant director and head of the hot shop at the New York Experimental Glass Workshop in New York City. Though she has worked with the slumped glass method, the vessels in this exhibition are made using her distinctive heat-formed filet de verre (glass thread) method, which allows for compelling explorations of color.