

Raise Your Glass (Goblets) Recent Acquisitions from Alan and Barbara Boroff and the Kohler Foundation, Inc.

In a contemporary context, glass goblets may seem like a rarified object—one associated with historical ceremonies or formal banquets. But in the fine craft field, glass goblets are almost akin to ceramic teapots in that they are functional forms that makers can explore either as exercises in technique and style or as singular forms that reflect an idea or serve a purpose.

This **Windows on Fifth Gallery** exhibition debuts over 100 glass goblets donated to RAM by **Alan and Barbara Boroff and the Kohler Foundation, Inc.** The show offers examples by a wide range of contemporary glass artists—those that focus on creating glass vessels specifically and those who typically use glass in their work in other ways but have tried their hand at the goblet form. Likewise, a variety of styles, techniques, and sizes are represented. Artists whose works are featured include: **Lucio Bubacco, Fritz Dreisbach, Shane Fero, Katherine Gray, Richard Jolley, James Minson, Michael J. Schunke, and Charles Savoie.**

Glass

An ancient material, glass has long been associated with being ornamental and decorative and/or functional and practical. First developed as an opaque substance often meant to resemble precious stones, such as lapis lazuli and turquoise, glass became renowned for transparency in approximately the eighth century BC. Once relegated to the domain of the wealthy and privileged, it became affordable for everyday people as techniques of glass blowing, and other methods of working with glass, were perfected.

Glass vessels of various shapes and sizes were readily produced. Practical and cultural interests dictated use and form. As one example, Greece's interest in wine in the second century BC subsequently extended to Rome, necessitating the production of numerous vessels for transport, storage, and consumption. This wine culture incorporated pottery as well as glass forms that were likely modeled on already-existing metal and ceramic cups, bottles, and jars. Ultimately, glass blowers, like those in Venice, became so skilled with materials and techniques, they developed new designs, such as the wineglass. While the popularity of glass as a material with both functional and artistic possibilities has risen and fallen dependent on time, resources, and social interest, artists and craftspeople have consistently turned to it as a source of inspiration and experimentation.

Goblets

A goblet is simply defined as a drinking glass with a foot or stem—often noted as not having a functional handle or handles (though individual designs sometimes challenge this). Synonyms such as **mug** and **stein** do not evoke the same shape while a **chalice** suggests something ceremonial or formal. The word goblet comes from fourteenth-century words, **gobelet** (Old French for little cup) and **gob** (Celtic for mouth), although the name has been assigned in modern times to even older objects.

Styles and sizes of goblets have been dependent on use, taste, and technical concerns. For example, a slender goblet approximately eight inches tall with a very broad base and two-tone flowers and petals decorating the stem is characteristic of late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth-century **Murano** design, which saw naturalistic forms in polychrome colors being added to clear glass.

Featured Artists

Lucio Bubacco, introduced to glass at a young age and licensed to produce Venetian glass memorabilia by the age of 15, centers his aesthetic around lamp-worked (hand-formed) figures and imaginative scenarios. Interested in the movement of bodies, he studied anatomical drawing and has since developed a unique process of working a more flexible yet more fragile type of glass. In his exploration of grand themes such as death and beauty, Bubacco often incorporates a large cup or goblet shape.



Katherine Gray, *Goblet*, ca. 2000, Glass
Racine Art Museum, Gift of Alan and Barbara Boroff
and the Kohler Foundation, Inc.
Photography: Jon Bolton



A relentless experimenter and early maverick in the studio glass movement, **Fritz Dreisbach** plays with technique and form for his modern interpretations of glass vessels and objects. He looks to historical examples for inspiration, but constructs pieces with a personal interest in investigating the properties of glass itself. Since the 1980s, Dreisbach has crafted what he calls “reversible goblets,” vessels that can be flipped to serve multiple purposes. With his **Art vs. Craft / Lariat Series**, he responded to craft world concerns that addressed the difference between art and craft—one orientation of the goblets features a functional bowl that can be used for drinking while the other, which emphasizes a decorative looping stem, is meant as sculpture. The naturally occurring drooping of the glass in these works resembles a **lariat**—a long rope used to lasso livestock. Dreisbach also saw this series as an homage to the early 20th century American entertainer/cowboy, **Will Rogers**, who would often use one as part of his act.

Reveling in the transparent qualities of glass and responding to historical traditions of glassblowing, **Katharine Gray** creates discrete objects and entire installations that explore her fascination with the material. Within her practice, Gray utilizes blown glass

and/or found secondhand glass objects to investigate ideas and theoretical interests—from the natural to the organic to the environmental. About glass, she states: “I use a material that we don’t generally ‘see’; it is often flawlessly clear and colorless, hence invisible in that regard, but glass can also be so ubiquitous and banal that it does not register in our psyches either. To my mind, these two polarities are what set this material apart from so many others. It is both known and unknown, quotidian, and transcendent at the same time.”

At RAM

Contemporary glass at RAM is reflected through a variety of different techniques and types of work. There are both functional and sculptural pieces, art jewelry, and two-dimensional glass paintings. Glass is blended with other media or worked on its own. This gift of goblets joins others already acquired, and the large number of works included establishes a parallel with another significant group of objects—RAM’s contemporary ceramic teapot collection, currently the largest public holdings in the country. While some of these goblets introduce artists to RAM’s collection, others reinforce artists already established.

About the Donors

This important recent gift to RAM reflects the passionate collecting of **Alan** (1932 – 2016) and **Barbara Boroff** who acquired over 650 glass goblets before sharing them with public institutions. The museum has work that dates back to the 1980s, but the Boroffs have collected from the 1960s to the present, including multiple pieces from the same artist made at different times. The Boroffs employed an approach that was both analytical and heartfelt. On one hand, their desire to amass a historically significant collection spurred them toward supporting a wide range of artists including those that have been living and working for decades and those newer to the field. On the other hand, Barbara Boroff has discussed a commitment toward advocating for artists making a living through selling their work. They have cultivated personal relationships with several of the makers over the years. The Boroffs also educated themselves about glass—studying books, visiting artists, and attending glass art-focused events—and have encouraged others to invest time in the field. They have loaned work to museums and Barbara has curated exhibitions.

This acquisition is also possible in part due to the Wisconsin-based **Kohler Foundation, Inc. (KFI)**, which is “committed to the preservation of art environments and important collections, as well as Wisconsin culture and heritage.” KFI played a role in RAM’s attainment of this large gift of goblets. Since they have made it a priority to secure the work of significant collections for public institutions, they assisted by cataloging the work—including noting condition, details, and any special needs—and managed packing and transport from the Boroff home to RAM.



(above)
Michael J. Schunke, *Goblet*, 2001, Glass
Racine Art Museum,
Gift of Alan and Barbara Boroff
and the Kohler Foundation, Inc.

(top left)
Fritz Dreisbach, *Art Vs. Craft: Reversible Goblets*
(AKA *A Tribute to Will Rogers*,
A Ropin' Fool), 1982, Glass
Racine Art Museum,
Gift of Alan and Barbara Boroff
and the Kohler Foundation, Inc.
Photography: Jon Bolton