



## **From Private Collection to Public Treasure: Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd at RAM**

May 27, 2018 – February 3, 2019

In the summer of 2018, all of RAM's galleries are dedicated to artwork given to RAM by collector Karen Johnson Boyd (1924 - 2016). A series of four individually titled exhibitions, with varying opening and closing dates, highlight her interests, accomplishments, and lifelong commitment to supporting the arts and artists.

Gallery 3

### **Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd: Collecting In-Depth at Home and at RAM**

May 27 – December 30, 2018

**Karen Johnson Boyd** was an advocate for and a collector of art, especially contemporary American craft and works-on-paper. She was passionate about sharing her affinity with others and presented RAM with almost 1,700 pieces over several decades, the largest number of works given by a single donor.

Her establishment of **Perimeter Gallery** in Chicago in 1982, with its emphasis on a broad range of artists and media, and her consistent patronage of visual art in other ways, made Mrs. Boyd a distinguished—albeit quiet—major collector. The works gathered here, including multiple examples by individual artists, reflect her desire to collect in-depth across disciplines and to support artists' development over a period of time while documenting their careers.

In fact, Mrs. Boyd's philosophies towards collecting—revolutionary for the time—are reflected in the words she used to describe the artists represented at Perimeter: "My idea was not to have it all craft, but to have it a mixture of art that I thought was good—the craftsman, the painter, the sculptor, the photographer—everybody together....Everybody was supposed to be segregated, and I didn't think that was fair. If they were all artists—as long as they're good enough—they deserved to be together, indiscriminately."

It is interesting to note that Mrs. Boyd would frequently change the work on display in her home or alter placement of individual works. The **Frank Lloyd Wright**-designed home that she commissioned in the late 1950s and lived in for the rest of her life, with its many built-in cabinets and windows, was not actually an ideal space for absorbing the work she collected. In fact, Mrs. Boyd often acquired work that would not fit in her home—work that she purchased because it supported artists and public institutions, such as RAM.

Organized under the categories of fiber art, work from Japan, work from Perimeter Gallery artists, and functional ceramics—all specialty areas of interest for Mrs. Boyd—this exhibition also includes work that is at RAM because of her influence and legacy.

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## Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd: Perimeter Gallery

May 27 – December 30, 2018

While Mrs. Boyd has been commended for her support of contemporary craft in particular, she herself both relished this role and set out to blur some of the theoretical boundaries that have distinguished craft from traditional fine art.

With her establishment of Chicago's Perimeter Gallery in the early 1980s, she further advocated for the support of contemporary art, making sure to recognize both established artists and emerging talents. While craft-related artists like **Jack Earl**, **Ken Loeber**, and **Dona Look** were featured in the gallery, so too were painters and printmakers like **Paul Caster**, **Warrington Colescott**, and **John Wilde**. The gallery, which closed in March 2016 after 34 years of operation, became a critical outlet for Wisconsin artists. Notably, and purposefully, this work was presented alongside that of internationally recognized painters, such as **Robert Kushner** and **David Shapiro**.

Before establishing Perimeter Gallery, Mrs. Boyd shined the spotlight on makers through the gallery's predecessor, **Perimeter Press**. The Press commissioned artists, like **Keiko Hara** and **Frances Meyers**, to create limited edition print portfolios and, beginning with **Jack Earl**, set out to publish monographs on living American artists.

## Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd: Japan

May 27 – December 30, 2018

A lifelong world traveler, Mrs. Boyd engaged in a series of art-focused international trips with curator **Lee Nordness** to assemble an art collection for display at SC Johnson's international conference center, the **Council House**, in Racine. Having an affinity for a broad range of visual arts, she selected many kinds of work from numerous countries for the collection.

Mrs. Boyd also gathered from international sources for her personal interests. Drawn to the Japanese aesthetic in particular, she began to acquire contemporary Japanese prints in the 1960s; later adding photography, baskets, glass, and ceramics from artists working in their home country of Japan and abroad. She was drawn to how certain Japanese artists investigated and employed materials and the way in which Japanese culture seemed to favor functional objects and works in craft media.

In 1984, Mrs. Boyd commissioned the Japanese-American painter/printmaker **Keiko Hara** to curate an exhibition of contemporary Japanese printmakers for Perimeter Gallery. Mrs. Boyd purchased the works displayed in this show and has donated many of them to RAM. She also acquired a wide range of pieces, in various media, by the Japanese painter, printmaker, and ceramic sculptor **Shoichi Ida**, whose work was represented by Perimeter Gallery for over 20 years.

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## Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd: Fiber

May 27 – December 30, 2018

Karen Johnson Boyd's interest in textiles encompassed the wide range of forms artists were making in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—sculptures, wall works of both small and large scale, and basketry. Even though her home—with its **Frank Lloyd Wright**-designed aesthetic of expansive windows and built-in furnishings—left little room for displaying large wall work, Mrs. Boyd would purchase such pieces in order to support artists specifically as well as the field.

Drawn to a diverse array of styles and subjects, Mrs. Boyd collected fibers the way she collected other media—in an encyclopedic fashion, with many artists being represented by multiple examples from throughout their careers. She supported artists of varying ages and with regional, national, and international reputations.

Possibly due to the ready display options in her home, baskets occupied the largest portion of her fiber collection. As per usual, she would display this work in her home in close proximity to works in other media. She would also regularly alter her environment, adding and subtracting works as she created new contexts for viewing. As significantly, she would share these alterations with frequent visitors. Interested in either Wright architecture, her collection, or both, people would often make their way to Mrs. Boyd's home. She became known for accommodating even those unscheduled to visit. When collectors and students of a particular media would arrange a tour, she would voluntarily change out works, bringing out pieces that would appeal to their particular interests.

## Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd: Functional Ceramics

May 27 – December 30, 2018

*I just let myself respond. And the next day I go back and try to figure out why I liked something. If you're going to buy an artwork and live with it, you should certainly buy what you like.*

— Karen Johnson Boyd

With these words, Karen Johnson Boyd gives away one of the tenets that underscores her general collecting philosophy—one she applied to artworks she acquired as well as functional handmade pieces like clay serving ware and textile table runners. Combining architect-designed handmade furniture in her Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home with artwork and functional ceramics, Mrs. Boyd supported artists and craftspeople alike. In fact, she tried to blur the distinctions others would make between different types of creative pursuits, and is further quoted as saying, "Ever since I was a member of the American Craft Council Board, I've wanted to get artists working in the craft media to be recognized as fine artists, and I think we are making good progress."

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Mrs. Boyd's interest in clay is well-documented. Her non-hierarchical approach to collecting and display extended to works that she would utilize in her daily life, as functional objects in her home. Work similar to what is on display here—porcelain or stoneware vessels, platters, and serving ware—were blended with sculptural work and two-dimensional images to create what has been described as an “aesthetic environment.”

## **Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd: A Lifetime Legacy**

May 27 – December 30, 2018

With a commitment to the arts firmly launched early in her life, Karen Johnson Boyd went about reflecting that passion with action. Mrs. Boyd's interest in the arts took many forms. She collected artwork and made it herself. In addition, she was also involved in helping SC Johnson establish their corporate collection, published art books and prints, and encouraged regional, national, and international artists. Mrs. Boyd founded Perimeter Gallery and served in various administrative capacities in her support of the arts including as a Trustee of the American Craft Council, Honorary Chair of the capital campaign to build RAM, and a long-time committee and Board member at RAM.

Mrs. Boyd's efforts have been celebrated regionally and nationally with awards from the American Craft Council, the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, the Governor of the State of Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters. She has also been recognized at Wustum and RAM in various ways over the years—from exhibitions acknowledging substantial gifts, to the naming of galleries at RAM in her honor as a tribute to her commitment. In addition, artworks, such as those featured in this portion of the exhibition, have been given to the collection with her in mind by artists, family, and friends. These gestures extend Mrs. Boyd's goodwill and reflect the impact she had on people in the field through her thoughtfulness and dedication.

Gallery 1

## **Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd: Contemporary Clay**

July 1, 2018 – January 20, 2019

With wide-ranging interests including baskets, photography, painting, and ceramics, Karen Johnson Boyd began collecting while a student at Bennington College in Vermont. While there, she studied the broader cultural, historical, and artistic context of ceramics. The medium became a primary emphasis for her collecting pursuits over the years. She affirmed: “Clay always seemed like the basic material to me. It's so responsive. And once I took a ceramics class and we really got in there with clay, I just started feeling good about things people made with their hands.”

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Reveling in the essential properties of the material, Mrs. Boyd was drawn to different approaches, a variety of subject matter, and a number of surface treatments—from smoothed glazed surfaces to rough textural ones. She passionately collected sculptural work but she would also purchase and use functional pottery for both daily and special occasions.

This show offers a dual perspective for understanding Mrs. Boyd's interest in contemporary ceramics. There is a sampling of work she found compelling and chose to live with. In addition, large portions of ***The Nude in Clay*** and ***The Nude in Clay II***—two exhibitions she curated for Perimeter Gallery in the 1990s that traveled to RAM's Wustum Museum—are assembled. Focused on figurative works, these exhibitions reflected contemporary interpretations of an enduring subject matter. Mrs. Boyd chose artists who blended ancient and modern sources; emphasized form, structure, and surface; and considered historical, social, and cultural attitudes about the human body.

## Gallery 2

### **Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd: A Multi-Dimensional Approach**

June 24, 2018 – February 3, 2019

Collector Karen Johnson Boyd's upbringing encouraged her interest in visual arts and creative endeavors. Taught "how to look at art" by her grandfather, painter **Olaf Brauner**, she took painting and drawing classes in her youth and took up photography in later years. Also interested in architecture, Mrs. Boyd lived in two homes designed by **Frank Lloyd Wright**—a fact that may have impacted how she understood the tenets important to Wright, such as the interplay of line, form, and texture, as well as the significance of connecting to the environment and the natural world.

Mrs. Boyd was intrigued, as a teenager, by her father **Herbert F. Johnson's** choice of Frank Lloyd Wright as the architect for the SC Johnson headquarters in Racine (built 1937-1939) and for their family home, **Wingspread**. In the 1950s, her fondness for Wright's architectural style was reflected in her inviting him to design a home for her in Racine, where she lived for the rest of her life.

This exhibition features two-dimensional and three-dimensional works in a variety of media. Mrs. Boyd supported artists working in craft media as well as those in photography, drawing, collage, painting, and printmaking. She collected contemporary printmakers in-depth, like noted Wisconsinites **Warrington Colescott** and **Frances Myers**, in addition to famed Madison-based painter and draftsman, **John Wilde**. Her strong interest in photography, as both a photographer and collector, led her to acquire works by celebrated artists such as **Diane Arbus**, **Roy DeCarava**, **Michael Kenna**, and **Aaron Siskind**—whose works are shown next to prints by the contemporary painters **Richard Diebenkorn**, **David Hockney**, and **Wayne Thiebaud**.

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In some ways, Mrs. Boyd was revolutionary. Her trademark style—in terms of the work she collected and how she displayed it—was to blend all media together. For example, glass would be shown next to works-on-paper, baskets, ceramics, metals, and furniture. RAM's approach to acquiring and displaying work is similar—two- and three-dimensional objects in a variety of media are shown together to demonstrate their commonalities.

Ruffo and Schumann Galleries

## **Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd: Art Jewelry/Sculpture to Wear**

June 24, 2018 – February 3, 2019

Karen Johnson Boyd did not just collect art, she wore it. While her attention to ceramics and fiber is well-documented, her notice of and appreciation for contemporary art jewelry deserves further exploration as well. Mrs. Boyd's admiration encompassed artists who used gold and silver along with non-precious materials, such as found objects, wood, shell, titanium, and crystals to make adornment. Similar to her other collecting areas of interest, she would make intuitive decisions and acquire what appealed to her. While she did not wear everything in equal measure, she was often adorned, favoring brooches over other forms of jewelry.

Mrs. Boyd's gifts to RAM include an enamel and mother-of-pearl necklace and earring set by landmark jeweler **Earl Pardon**; glass bead neckpieces by recent MacArthur Grant award winner **Joyce Scott**; and a colorful acrylic brooch by British jeweler **Peter Chang**.

Interested in collecting nationally and internationally, Mrs. Boyd often turned her attention to artists that were based close to home also. Wisconsin jewelers and metalsmiths **Ken Loeber** and **Eleanor Moty** were collected by Mrs. Boyd in such depth that they are being shown in the large exhibition, ***Honoring Karen Johnson Boyd: Collecting In-Depth at Home and at RAM***. Mrs. Boyd's advocacy of Loeber's work in particular resulted in her establishing an archive for the artist at RAM. Currently, Loeber is documented by 49 examples of his work, including brooches, neckpieces, serving ware, and puzzle boxes representing his career path from 1970 through 2013.