



RAM Artist Fellowship Exhibition 2019
Presented by the Osborne and Scekic Family Foundation
August 23 – November 16, 2019

Opening in late August, the **RAM Artist Fellowship Exhibition 2019 Sponsored by the Osborne and Scekic Family Foundation** offers a series of concurrent solo shows with the work of four area artists that were recipients of **RAM Artist Fellowships** in 2018. With that honor comes a \$2,500 stipend for each recipient that may be used for any expenses that assist in the development of new work and advance their artistic careers.

Representing a diverse range of styles and media, the current fellowship recipients are **Alex Mandli, Crystal Neubauer, Marilyn Propp, and Amy Misurelli Sorensen**. Meant to showcase the diversity and vitality of the Racine/Kenosha visual arts community, the biennial fellowships provide support for the professional development of the area's artists. The exhibition presents a sampling of the dynamic visual arts scene in this corner of southeastern Wisconsin.

RAM Curator of Exhibitions Lena Vigna Interviewed Crystal Neubauer – January 2019

Lena Vigna: Please share the basics of your art career thus far, including education, years working, etc. How long have you been part of the Racine/Kenosha community?

Crystal Neubauer: I am a self-taught artist, having no higher education or art degree. However, I had the privilege of attending a University High School with an outstanding arts curriculum where I was introduced to college level art courses and the seeds of my creativity were nurtured. I had my children very young and went the traditional job route right out of high school, eventually working my way up to Project Management in the printing industry. Though it was a very high stress, low creativity career, I consider the organizational and leadership skills I developed through that path to be invaluable to my current journey as a full-time working artist. Eventually, I returned to my love of art and began finding my niche as an artist in my mid-thirties.

In the past 15 years of building my art career, I've traveled all over the US teaching workshops. I will be heading to Australia to teach at the Fiber Arts Conference in spring 2020. I had a book and a series of videos published through North Light Books on the art of collage four years ago this summer. My work is represented by several galleries and is a part of private and corporate collections throughout the country.

I moved to the Racine/Kenosha area in October 2015 for the affordable studio space, and was pleased to find such a strong and thriving arts community. After years of developing my art tribe in the online world, it is deeply satisfying to make connections face-to-face.

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Vigna: Would you please describe your work—what materials you use, what subject matters you explore?

Neubauer: I have dabbled in many media over the years, but I always make my way back to collage or include collage elements in my work. I see these scraps and bits and salvaged pieces as metaphors for the fragments of our lives—where certain parts look more appealing than others but all are necessary to complete the whole picture of who we are as people and as a society. I seek to open a dialogue around self-worth and identity issues through the use of salvaged materials. While this conversation sometimes crosses over into political and spiritual commentary, it is always about embracing and owning every experience as relevant to the whole.

Vigna: How often are you in your studio? Do you work outside of your studio much or at all?

Neubauer: I earn my living entirely as an artist now, which means I work at developing multiple streams of revenue through teaching, art sales, book and videos, etc. I am currently working to develop a series of online courses that will allow me to continue to teach but not travel quite as often. When I am not away on a teaching trip, I divide my time between working at home on the computer and working in the studio. Typically, that translates to a pretty even split—either mornings at home and afternoons in the studio, or a couple of full days per week at each.

Vigna: What inspires you most these days? But also what do you go to bed thinking about most nights?

Neubauer: My current obsession is working on a large scale with non-traditional foundations to create my work. I went through a season early in my art career, working on small—even jewelry-sized—assemblages, and now I am looking at some of the work that I do as large-scale assemblage. I constantly see patterns and possible inspiration in nature, on the sides of old buildings, on the ground underfoot. Everywhere I look, I notice small compositions that I want to translate into larger works. I go to bed rendering foundations and attachments in my head, often scribbling notes for myself just as I drift off, which I then have to decipher when I am awake.

Vigna: Why the RAM Artist Fellowship? Since we are midway through the process, can you assess how you are feeling at this point? Are you where you thought you would be? Have your plans changed since the fellowship year started?

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Neubauer: I applied for the 2016–2017 Fellowship when I first moved to the area and got one of the most encouraging rejection letters I've ever received. I knew right away I would try again and was thrilled to be awarded a Fellowship for this cycle. It feels good to have the acceptance of my local peers. I see it as a mutual relationship—where I am able to both give to and receive from the community.

One of the things I find most exciting about the Fellowship is the encouragement to be experimental. The body of work I will be creating for the show is not what I had originally planned but has evolved from my earlier ideas. I am really excited to see where it leads!