



Zero Waste: Jewelry

October 30, 2024 – February 22, 2025

Found items from the natural world, including bones, twigs, shells, and fibers, have often been utilized throughout the history of jewelry to create wearable pieces. While Western jewelry historically has a popular association with precious metals and gemstones—excepting, perhaps, less expensive fashion jewelry—many contemporary art jewelers have found interest in and formed a practice incorporating non-precious materials into their work. Frequent visitors to RAM see contemporary jewelry made of a wide variety of media, including hair curlers, US currency, candy, newspaper, and zippers.

Some materials may be more valuable, durable, or wearable than others. However, if the intent is present, many things can be manipulated to be worn in one way or another. Comprised entirely of works from RAM's collection, this exhibition highlights art jewelry made from repurposed materials originally intended for a use other than adornment. These works support RAM's Zero Waste Art Initiative, an ongoing and multi-faceted project encouraging reconsideration of consumption habits and creative solutions for reuse. As outlined by RAM's Education Department, this initiative "is working to establish partnerships with local businesses and manufacturing plants to reduce their waste and keep it out of landfills by turning these materials into educational, eco-art."

Biographies and statements from select featured artists

Interested in utilizing a variety of media to explore his ideas about human motivation and behavior, **Ben J. Cunningham** (1961–) creates adornment, objects, and installations. Cunningham utilizes unexpected, sometimes impermanent, materials, in place of gemstones. In his work, value is measured by metaphorical and symbolic standards rather than material ones. While there is often a philosophical underpinning to his work—and serious content—he also sometimes lets his work reflect his joy and appreciation for his life circumstances.

After obtaining his BS in Fashion Merchandising, Marketing, and Spanish from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in Indiana, Pennsylvania, Cunningham earned his MA in Jewelry and Sculpture from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and his MFA in Jewelry/Light Metals and Sculpture from Rhode Island School of Design, Providence. Cunningham teaches at Millersville University, Pennsylvania, and exhibits and lectures on an international scale. His work has been featured in several publications, including

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Metalsmith, Art in America, and American Craft Magazine. With over 30 works gifted in 2017, RAM has become a major repository for Cunningham's work.

Read:



benjcunningham.com

The material itself is really the main inspiration. I love the juxtaposition between the soft fabric of a zipper and the hard metal teeth. It's a really incredible material and it lends itself to creating so many shapes. Often when I'm in the process of making multiples of one shape for a particular design, it will inspire me to take that same shape and use it in a different way to come up with yet a new design. After all, a zipper is one long line, and you can make anything from a line...!

Brooklyn-based **Kate Cusack** (1979–) is best known for her sculptural jewelry made from zippers. Creating dramatic pieces that relate to the body, Cusack transforms ordinary materials into wearable work. She is drawn to zippers as her medium because of their combination of rigid metal teeth and flexible fabric, which allows her to create organic shapes. She is represented in RAM's collection by one example of her zipper jewelry.

Cusack received her BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore; and her MFA from the Yale School of Drama, New Haven, Connecticut. Before starting her jewelry business, Cusack worked as a theatre and dance costume designer. This greatly informed her jewelry practice as she learned about the durability and construction required for pieces that are worn on the body. She also worked as a window designer creating displays from unconventional materials, for example, a 2002 Mother's Day window display in New York City featured a set of five custom Marie Antoinette-inspired wigs made from plastic wrap.

Explore:



katecusack.com

Read:



[ykkamericas.com/
women-designers-
series-kate-cusack](http://ykkamericas.com/women-designers-series-kate-cusack)

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My work has been and is about making order and beauty out of chaos. I continue to make and find parts that I assemble. I am a gatherer, not a hoarder. I sometimes think that finding abandoned objects appeals to the nurturer in my personality as I adopt these various things that have a new life as part of a work of art...

American jeweler and metalsmith **Robert W. Ebendorf** (1938–) has long been at the forefront of contemporary art jewelry. Using found objects—as well as non-precious materials and precious metals—to create his work, Ebendorf combines a vast knowledge of metalsmithing techniques with the capacity to see the beauty in the unexpected. A Fulbright Scholar, Tiffany Foundation Grant Award winner, founding member of the Society for North American Goldsmiths (SNAG), and recipient of the 2014 SNAG Lifetime Achievement Award, Ebendorf's work is represented in museums around the world. He has made his mark on contemporary craft as not only an artist, but also as educator, organizer, mentor, and collector. His list of accolades is long, and his web of influence is extensive. Ebendorf is represented by over 55 pieces in RAM's archive, most of which were created individually, though several collaborative works are included as well.

Watch:



[youtube.com/
watch?v=9yCLdzFNycw](https://youtube.com/watch?v=9yCLdzFNycw)

Listen:



[why-make.com/podcast/
2023/9/18/why-make-
episode-54-bob-ebendorf](https://why-make.com/podcast/2023/9/18/why-make-episode-54-bob-ebendorf)

Holly Anne Mitchell (1970–) uses recycled newspaper to create beaded bracelets, brooches, necklaces, and earrings that speak to eco-friendly practices as well as challenge assumptions about which materials can be used for jewelry. Mitchell is inspired by social and cultural issues as well as material and aesthetic ones. The tone of her work can range from playful—as is the case with Mitchell's bracelet in RAM's collection, *The Joke's On You!*—to serious.

After graduating in 1992 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Mitchell worked on creating a marketable line of her jewelry. She has been included in numerous exhibitions such as at the Newseum in Washington, DC; Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; and Museum of Arts and Design, New York, New York. She has received honors and awards, including an honorable mention at the Smithsonian Craft Show, Washington, DC; Niche Award Finalist, Niche Magazine; and an Associate Craft Fellowship with the Indiana Arts Commission, Indianapolis, Indiana. Mitchell is represented in RAM's collection by one work.

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Watch:



[youtube.com/
watch?v=VkpYziCIKGU](https://youtube.com/watch?v=VkpYziCIKGU)

Read:



[ornamentmagazine.org/
holly-anne-mitchell](http://ornamentmagazine.org/holly-anne-mitchell)

I like my work to have a sense of playfulness, so I often make movable parts. The dynamic aspect of my work is drawn to kinetic movement. Heating, manipulating, and suspending polypropylene with metal and nylon [and more recently sculpting polyester] allows me to convey this movement. The end result is a flowing form that interacts with the motion of the wearer. Searching for, examining, and discovering materials is a necessary and fun part of the process.

Jeweler **Yuka Saito** (1967–) graduated from Tezukayama Gakuin University in Osaka, Japan and worked as a museum curator while studying under maker Fumiko Tsubo for five years. She eventually came to the United States to study at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, New York. Known for her use of unusual materials, Saito has been working primarily in polypropylene since 1996, combining it with more traditional jewelry elements such as platinum and gold. She is concerned with how her works interact with the wearer. As a result, Saito creates colorful pieces that embody an abstract, organic aesthetic, and often have parts that move. Saito is represented in RAM's collection by three works.

Read:



[mobilia-gallery.com/wp-content/
uploads/2015/11/SaitoY_Info_Article_
AmericanCraft_Scan_2015.pdf](http://mobilia-gallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/SaitoY_Info_Article_AmericanCraft_Scan_2015.pdf)

Everything can be translated into jewelry. Everything has some jewelry language in it... I'm super into fashion. I'm a hoarder of clothes in general—vintage and accessories... From collecting these metal purses, I got the idea that I wanted to make my own: sculptures that were wearable but could still exist as fashion objects. I started repurposing purses and adding different elements, just like having fun with it.

All my jewelry is an extension of myself and my thoughts. I'm very attracted to typography from Mexico, the kind that can be found on tortillerias or little shops that I see on the street. There are lots of tacky elements. In a way, I'm highlighting the designs that I see in Mexico, especially the ones that some people look at and are like, "Oh, that's ugly." But I see the beauty in that. I think it's so beautiful.

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Georgina Treviño (1989–) is a contemporary artist and jeweler from Tijuana, Mexico, based in San Diego, California. Treviño's work intersects fashion and art jewelry—reflecting her interest in lowbrow pop culture and 1980s punk rock, as well as her roots in both Mexico and the United States. Treviño earned a BA from San Diego State University. Her work has been part of several national and international exhibitions, and she is represented at RAM and in the collection of the Museum of Arts and Design, New York. She has been featured in numerous publications, including the *Los Angeles Times*, *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Allure*, and *Playboy*. Treviño has worked directly with celebrities such as Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Bad Bunny, Lizzo, and Doja Cat, as well as corporations, including, Nike, Bimba y Lola, Fenty, and Spotify.

Explore:



georginatrevinojewelry.com

Nancy Worden's (1954 – 2021) love of creating jewelry began when she was young. Worden took her first jewelry class at Central Washington University when she was still in high school and went on to earn a BFA at Central Washington and a MFA at the University of Georgia. By the 1990s, Worden had developed a style that was uniquely her own, merging both personal and political themes. She used found materials—some would say somewhat unusual ones such as hair curlers and eyeglass lenses—for their formal and metaphorical associations.

Throughout her career, Worden was continually involved in metals art education. She taught casting, mold making, and narrative jewelry classes at places such as Pratt Fine Arts Center, Seattle, Washington; Central Washington University, Ellensburg; Penland School of Craft, North Carolina; and in international venues. Today, her work can be found in the collections of places such as the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts; the State Heritage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia; and the Seattle Arts Museum, Washington. Worden is represented in RAM's collection by seven pieces.

Watch:



[youtube.com/
watch?v=WEA0n36HKKc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=WEA0n36HKKc)

Watch:



[youtube.com/
watch?v=S6o1jmtg1vo](https://youtube.com/watch?v=S6o1jmtg1vo)

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My work is an experiment in the concepts of value and adornment. My process in the Increasing Value series takes currency of defined value, distills it to graphic elements, and then re-imagines it into an object much more precious. These kaleidoscopes illuminate an alternative to money's intended function in our society. I leave the identifying words, letters, and numbers out of my work so the viewers can draw their own conclusions about its value. How and why are these bank notes distanced from their defined worth? Concept, process, and labor create value. The parody of a kaleidoscope is effective in portraying my alternate reality in which money can be worth more than its face value.

Lauren Vanessa Tickle (1985–) uses deconstructed currency to create intricate, layered paper jewelry that examines American materialism and ideas of wealth and status. She asks viewers to reexamine their perceived notions of value—forcing them to reckon with what is, or should be, worth more: the labor-intensive handmade jewelry or the mass-produced paper with arbitrary value that the works are made of. Cutting the dollar bills to remove elements that would easily identify their assigned monetary value, Tickle focuses on creating graphic patterns inspired by Gothic architecture and flora. She uses different denominations of dollar bills in her work, selecting the currency containing her desired design elements for the project at hand. Tickle is represented in RAM's collection by one work.

Explore:



laurentickle.com

Watch:



[artjewelryforum.org/
interviews/lauren-tickle-
is-it-legal-increasing-value](http://artjewelryforum.org/interviews/lauren-tickle-is-it-legal-increasing-value)



Artists of Color at RAM

RAM is committed to supporting diverse voices—whether that diversity reflects race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, social standing, or world perspective. In this moment in time, it is critical that spotlights are placed on voices that have been historically underrepresented, and at RAM that begins with women and artists of color. Artists of color are identified in this context as non-white and non-European in heritage. This simplification—which is arguably a flawed starting point—does not account for the nuances and variations of society. It is a beginning—a way to direct those who want to educate themselves about what is possible when new perspectives are discovered. Modifications to this approach are expected as RAM learns and grows. Further, as an educational institution rooted in the humanities and using art as a catalyst, RAM wants to encourage inquiry and exploration about the world in which we live. RAM hopes spotlighting artists of color spurs further engagement with these artists and their ideas. The following is a list of artists of color whose works are included in this exhibition. This effort is not meant to single out artists to stigmatize them but to magnify and cast a spotlight on their significance. It reflects intention, goodwill, and an attempt to reckon with years of historical underrepresentation. RAM hopes this provides opportunities for audiences to learn more about these artists and their ideas. Visitors are encouraged to take note and research these artists via the internet to find out more about their biographies and larger bodies of work.

Chong Ryol Kim, Holly Anne Mitchell, Yuka Saito, and Georgina Treviño



Women Artists at RAM

RAM acknowledges the efforts of self-identifying women in the art world consistently and sincerely at all times. The museum highlights how women are inextricably woven—and often the foundation—of creative endeavors and discourse. By current count, 41% of the artists in RAM's collection are women. This percentage—which is consistently increasing—is already substantially greater than the ratios calculated at other organizations with permanent collections and active exhibition programs. At RAM, work made by different genders is considered for inclusion in the museum's holdings on equal terms. And notably, because RAM relies on gifts of artwork to build the collection, this policy has been reinforced by open-minded donors who have collected, and then donated, quality work regardless of the gender of the artist. The following is a list of women whose works are included in this exhibition. This effort—similar to efforts to highlight artists of color at RAM—is not meant to single out artists to stigmatize them but to magnify and cast a spotlight on their significance. It reflects intention, goodwill, and an attempt to reckon with years of historical underrepresentation. RAM hopes this provides opportunities for audiences to learn more about these artists and their ideas. Visitors are encouraged to take note and research these artists via the internet to find out more about their biographies and larger bodies of work.

Teri Blond, Monica Cecchi, Kate Cusack, Lisa Fidler, Rowena Gough, Sarah Hood, Judith Hoyt, Robin Kranitzky, Holly Anne Mitchell, Kim Overstreet, Yuka Saito, Kiff Slemmons, Rebecca Strzelec, Janna Syvänoja, Lauren Vanessa Tickle, Georgina Treviño, Roberta Williamson, and Nancy Worden