

**Collection Focus: Ken Loeber**

September 15, 2013 – January 26, 2014

Excerpted from the Racine Art Museum Exhibition Study Guide

This exhibition features gifts and promised gifts to RAM's collection, as well as work borrowed from the artist that outlines his career path to-date. Representing nearly five decades, RAM's holdings chart the dynamism of Loeber's varied output.

The core of **Collection Focus: Ken Loeber** is a group of over 30 pieces spanning the artist's career that have recently been promised to RAM's permanent collection by long-term Loeber collector and RAM supporter Karen Johnson Boyd. These works represent major stages in the artist's development from both his one-of-a-kind and production jewelry lines as well as his hollowware pieces. These intended gifts will join six works by Loeber already presented to RAM's collection by Mrs. Boyd between 1991 and 2013.

Embarking on what has been described as a "sculptural exploration of mass and space," Loeber creates work that reflects both his observations of the world around him and his desire to craft compositions that are rooted in harmony and balance.

Brooches that combine metals—such as sterling silver and 14k-gold—with shell, coral, pearl, and crab legs exemplify Loeber's facility with media, his willingness to experiment with materials, and an incredibly lyrical sense of structure.

Before working with metals, the artist often thinks through compositions by creating collages with media that share physical traits. Loeber's use of a foil "drawing" allows him to work through technical problems that could arise during the process of creating. And, it gives him license to play that is not as easily afforded when working with the other media.

Loeber's path to jewelry and object-making was punctuated with university art education in the 1970s—he received both his BFA and MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee—and travel to places such as Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands where he explored folk crafts and wildlife. Other travels abroad informed his structural use of material (the adornment of India encouraged milling, rolling, and forging hollow shapes), his material choices (Australia offered shells from the South Pacific), and some conceptual direction (Australia also introduced tide pools as self-contained ecosystems that encapsulate ideas regarding flux and change).

While not specifically drawing on historical jewelry as a direct resource, Loeber has been creating work that echoes that of aboriginal and ancient cultures. "Common" objects from the environment—naturally-occurring and found by the jewelry-maker—become the stuff of adornment.

In the 1980s, Loeber and his wife, artist Dona Look, began a line of production jewelry. The two work collaboratively to create necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and pins of silver and gold. Often described as “clean-lined,” their jewelry has an organic quality that links directly back to the individual artists themselves.

The sculptural sensibilities that inform Loeber’s one-of-a-kind brooches and collaborative production pieces are given even greater play in the hollowware and flatware objects he has crafted over the years. While not a large portion of the artist’s work and something he no longer produces, the tea strainers, pie crimpers, small bowls, forks, and spoons exemplify his fluency with the chosen media. Further, they have allowed Loeber the opportunity to articulate his ideas through non-wearable, slightly larger forms.

Loeber suffered a severe stroke in 2002 that left him without the use of his right hand. Even though he is left-handed, the artist has had to refashion a whole new experience in the studio.

Loeber’s work, with its sensitivity to the natural world and material exploration, has been well regarded and included in significant exhibitions, both jewelry-focused and otherwise. National and international exposure has come through large-scale touring exhibitions, such as *Craft Today: USA* organized by the Museum of Arts and Design (then the American Craft Museum) in 1989 and traveling through Europe until 1993 as well as *The Art of Gold*, which toured the US from 2003 to 2006. He has been connected with Perimeter Gallery in Chicago and Carol Saunders Gallery in Columbia, South Carolina, for decades, with several solo exhibitions of his work occurring over the years.

The recipient of an artistic excellence award from the American Craft Council, Loeber has also been presented with grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and won several other honors. More public recognition was afforded the artist when the PBS series, *Craft in America*, profiled Loeber and Look in 2007.

He has work in the collections of the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, and RAM. Racine Art Museum has enjoyed a particularly long relationship with the artist—featuring his work in a handful of exhibitions and establishing a notable archive of his pieces.