



RAM Showcase: Indigenous Baskets

December 10, 2025 – April 18, 2026

Often passed down from one generation to the next, Indigenous basketry techniques reflect deep cultural knowledge and regional identity. Traditionally made using natural materials gathered from a tribe's surroundings, baskets are geographically rooted. Depending on material, artists may coil, plait, or twine to create the basket structure. In addition to serving utilitarian purposes such as storage and transport, they also metaphorically hold spiritual and cultural significance for the communities that create them. Today, Native artists simultaneously draw on traditional practices and expand the boundaries of what an Indigenous basket is.

RAM Showcase: Indigenous Baskets presents a selection of Native American and First Nations baskets from across North America, including a piece by Wisconsin-based artist Liandra Skenandore. Spanning from the twentieth century to the present, some included works exemplify traditional materials and techniques, while others incorporate unconventional materials or innovative approaches.

Biographies and statements from the featured artists

Creating more than 25,000 baskets in her lifetime, Kawehnoke Mohawk artist **Mary Adams** (1917 – 1999), also known as Kawennatakie or “voice coming toward us,” began making traditional Mohawk splint ash and sweetgrass baskets as a child to help financially provide for her family. The plaited and woodsplint technique became common amongst Iroquoian people after contact with German and Swedish colonists. Sometimes called “thistle weave,” the technique produced heavily textured surfaces with protruding design elements created from twisted splints. Regardless of how complex the baskets were, Adams was paid the same amount of money by the wholesale merchant to complete them. In her 50s, Adams had enough financial stability to begin making more creative baskets, and her work became increasingly complex and imaginative.

Adams was a practicing Catholic. Often considered to be the culmination of her life's work, *Pope Basket* has more than 150 handwoven miniature baskets hanging from a larger basket that references cathedral architecture. Adams created this work as a gift for Pope John Paul II in honor of Kateri Tekakwitha, a seventeenth-century Kahnawake Mohawk woman who was being considered for sainthood at the time and is now the first Native American to be canonized into the Roman Catholic church. The original basket is now part of the collection of the Vatican Museums.

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Other examples of Adams' baskets are included in the collections of the Iroquois Indian Museum, New York; the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Ontario; the New York State Governor's Collection of Art, Albany; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. In 1997, she was awarded the "Excellence in Iroquois Arts Award" in the category of "The Best of the Best" from the Iroquois Indian Museum. Adams is represented in RAM's collection by two splint ash and sweetgrass baskets.

There is a stigma to basket makers: 'Traditional' or 'Non-Traditional.' I am both. I work with horsehair and waxed thread, which are non-traditional materials. I approach the weaving with tradition. I respect the many generations of ancestral basket makers.

Linda Aguilar (1946–) uses traditional Chumash basket making techniques but with a twist—she works with the more contemporary materials of horsehair and waxed thread, also incorporating found objects ranging from shells and bone to bingo chips and pieces of credit cards. Aguilar's coiled baskets embrace tradition but also seek to branch beyond their functional predecessors into something that serves a primarily aesthetic purpose while still taking the form of a vessel.

Aguilar is a self-taught basket maker. Utilizing the sewing skills that she learned as a child and her degree in painting from the University of California, Santa Barbara, basket making was something that came naturally to the artist without any formal training. In 2011, she was awarded the Dobkin Fellowship for a residency at the School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe, New Mexico, and from November 2013 to January 2014, Aguilar was the Native Arts Artist-in-Residence at the Denver Art Museum. Her work is included in the permanent collections of museums such as the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, DC, and the Autry Museum of the American West, Los Angeles, California. Her work is also held by private collectors including Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Aguilar is represented at RAM by two horsehair baskets incorporating found objects.

Third generation basket maker **Rowena Bradley** (1922 – 2003) was a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The youngest of eight children, she made her first basket at the age of six by watching her mother weave. Bradley is known as one of very few Cherokee basket makers who carried on the double weave technique—sometimes called "two-way weaving"—a complex practice which involves weaving both the patterned inside and outside of the basket at the same time using the same piece of material. Techniques like this were lost as Indigenous people were forced to relocate from their homelands on the Trail of Tears which caused many deaths and disconnected them from the natural resources that they were used to working with.

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To achieve contrast in her patterns, Bradley used a variety of natural plants from the region to dye the rivercane before beginning the weaving process. Many of the techniques that she utilized were learned from her mother or are traditional Cherokee designs. However, Bradley sometimes incorporated her own patterns into her work.

In 1974, Bradley's work was featured in an exhibition at Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual in Cherokee, North Carolina. Of the 15 baskets included in the show, three were added to the permanent collection of the US Department of Interior's Indian Arts and Crafts Board. She has also earned numerous awards for her baskets at the annual Cherokee Indian Fair. Bradley is represented in RAM's collection by two double weave rivercane baskets.

Mohawk basket maker **Charlotte Delormier** (1910 – 1998), also called by her traditional name, Warisarot Kenetahawi, used a variety of materials and techniques in her work to produce a wide range of baskets during her lifetime. Many of her baskets, including those in RAM's collection, utilize the woodsplint technique which is often called "thistle weave" to create textured surfaces with protruding design elements created from twisted splints. Delormier's thistle weave baskets sometimes used dyed splints to create contrasting patterns in color or add accents. In other examples, Delormier incorporated plaited or woven sweetgrass into her work.

In 1973, her work was purchased by a member of the US Department of the Interior's Indian Arts and Crafts Board for their collection and was later transferred into the collection of the Smithsonian. Now, her work is included in collections, including the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC; the Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau, Quebec; and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. She is represented in RAM's collection by one example.

A leader in the Passamaquoddy/Wabanaki movement to preserve basket making traditions, **Mary Mitchell Gabriel** (1908 – 2004) learned sweetgrass and brown ash splint techniques from her grandmother, completing her first basket at seven or eight years old. In her adulthood, Gabriel worked at the Emple Knitting Mill in Bangor, Maine, and did additional domestic work on the weekends to support herself and her seven children. In her limited spare time, she would weave baskets with materials given to her by friends. Living in the city, Gabriel did not have direct access to harvest her own materials—sweetgrass was gathered from the coastal salt marshes during the summer and allowed to dry for several months before being braided. In the 1980s, the Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement enabled Gabriel to return to her childhood home, where she began making and selling baskets at a much faster rate.

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While Gabriel is a very significant figure in Passamaquoddy basket making, wider recognition did not come until much later in life. In 1993, Gabriel helped found the Maine Indian Basket Makers Alliance and was the first Passamaquoddy to be awarded the Maine Arts Commission's Individual Artist Award. In 1994, she was the recipient of the National Heritage Fellowship award from the National Endowment for the Arts, being one of 11 folk artists selected out of 220 nominees. That same year, she was selected for a Maryann Hartman Award from the University of Maine and gave her acceptance speech in Passamaquoddy. In 1999, The Center for the Study of Lives at the University of Southern Maine released a documentary on Gabriel and her daughters titled "Gabriel Women: Passamaquoddy Basketmakers." Gabriel's baskets are included in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; the Abbe Museum, Bar Harbor, Maine; and the Hudson Museum, Orono, Maine. She is represented in RAM's collection by one example.

Born in the village of Old Masset in Haida Gwaii, British Columbia, **Isabel Rorick** (1955–) is part of a long line of Haida hatmakers spanning back to her great-grandmother. Haida hat-making uses a similar technique to Haida basket weaving—twining together spruce roots and sometimes applying a painted design onto the finished surface. Rorick first began making spruce root hats in 1982 under the instruction of family members and continues the legacy by working alongside her son, Robin, as a collaborator.

After collecting and processing the spruce roots herself, Rorick creates her hats without the assistance of a hat form, giving each finished piece a unique size and shape. In addition to traditional spruce roots, she also incorporates natural grasses and maiden hair fern into some of her work. From start to finish, each hat takes approximately six weeks to weave, including the internal woven hat band which is used to protect the wearer from rain and sun. Rorick finishes her hats with a signature mark of three rings, a symbol which she also incorporates into her baskets and rattles. Her recent work is a series of rattles that address ecological concerns about fragile ecosystems and human impact on nature. In 2001, Rorick was a finalist for the Saidye Bronfman Award for Excellence in Crafts, and in 2009, she was awarded the British Columbia Creative Achievement Award for Aboriginal Art. She is represented in RAM's collection by one spruce root basket.

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An enrolled citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, Mvskoke Creek Nation, and Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, **Liandra Skenandore** (1993–) specializes in weaving black ash baskets from logs that she harvests and processes herself. Skenandore splits her splints by hand before using a knife and scissors to prepare the strips for weaving. Wood from the black ash tree is ideal for making baskets due to its strength and flexibility. The baskets which Skenandore creates are utilitarian in nature, such as the pack basket currently on display, and typically do not include much surface decoration, instead emphasizing the beauty of the materials and the craftsmanship.

As a participant in the 2020 Mentor Artist Fellowship Program with the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, she apprenticed for 15 months under renowned black ash basket maker April Stone (Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe), who has been weaving baskets since 1998. Skenandore teaches workshops throughout the region, including at the Driftless Folk School in Viroqua, Wisconsin. She also serves as a member of the Milwaukee Art Museum's Native Advisory Group.

Ojibway artist **Dawn Walden** (1949–) creates baskets using traditional processes and materials but experiments with size to create large-scale work, some as tall as a person. Important to Walden's practice is collecting and processing all of the materials that are used in her work—she feels this keeps her in touch with nature and her heritage. Even for large baskets, like those in her *Random Order* series, the materials are gathered and prepared in the same way. In this body of work, the baskets are double-layered with a traditional first layer of weaving covered by a second layer of seemingly random weaving. The outermost weaving is inspired by the nests of the birds who “steal” pieces of cedar while she is processing them for her work.

Born in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan as a member of the Mackinac Band of Chippewa and Ottawa Indians, Walden was taught basketmaking at a young age by Ojibway and Chippewa master weavers. Teaching and keeping the basket making tradition alive are paramount to Walden, and as such, she is involved in several groups, including the Native American Basketry Association, the Seattle Basketry Guild, and the National Basketry Association. In 2018, Walden was awarded a United States Artists Fellowship for her work in traditional arts. In addition to the piece in RAM's collection, another example of Walden's *Random Order* series can be found at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.