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Handmade Up North: Jewelry and Small Metals by Wisconsin Artists

March 14 – October 3, 2026

Whether directly or indirectly, many artists create work that responds to the environment they inhabit through subject matter, techniques, or materials.

Handmade Up North showcases a variety of art jewelry and small-scale metalwork from artists with Wisconsin ties, each offering personal and cultural reflections on life in the region. Drawing from a wide range of styles and media, included works reference Wisconsin's abundant nature and wildlife, urban and rural landscapes, importance as an agricultural hub, and distinctive Midwestern sense of community.

In addition to works from RAM's permanent collection, loaned examples of beadwork and quillwork adornment from Anishinaabe artist Emily Minogizhigookwe Nelis Locklear broaden the exhibition's perspective—offering a more holistic view of the region's artistic heritage and highlighting enduring Indigenous traditions.

Biographies from Selected Artists

Born in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, where he still maintains a studio, metal artist **Robert Farrell** finds inspiration in the everyday—old toys, antiques, architecture, and agriculture—in order to create small-scale sculptures from sterling silver and enamel on copper. Working without the assistance of studio assistants or production techniques such as casting, Farrell produces one-of-a-kind sculptural and tabletop objects in his studio using only hand tools and basic power tools. He states, "I've always assumed that, surely, everyone understands the value and importance of genuinely hand-made objects and am always disappointed to discover that some people simply don't care how an object is made, or by whom, or whether by a machine or human hands. I, personally, believe that a one-of-a-kind object is inherently different from an object that exists in multiples—it is unique and, consequently, more 'precious.'"

In 1987, Farrell received a BA in studio arts and English from the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater. In 1989, he earned his MFA from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with a focus on metal and jewelry. His work is included in museums in the US and abroad, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC; the Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, North Carolina; and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. He is represented in RAM's collection by three works.

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Interested in trying to “create awareness of personal adornment that exceeds the restrictive boundaries of traditional Western materials and techniques,” **Tina Fung Holder** (1946–) uses everyday items, such as safety pins and paperclips, to create jewelry as well as baskets. Raised in a village in Guyana, Fung Holder was interested in the “nature of objects,” even in early childhood. She credits her interest in manmade materials to growing up in a nonindustrial environment—the quantity and availability of mass-produced items were unfamiliar, and thus, more appealing. Fung Holder was an accountant before receiving both her BFA and MFA from the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, Illinois. She currently lives in Wisconsin where she creates adornment and teaches workshops focused on her experiments with textile techniques and basket design.

Fung Holder’s work has been widely exhibited throughout her career. In addition to the 16 pieces currently in RAM’s holdings, her work is included in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Arts and Design, New York, New York; and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts.

Racine native and internationally recognized metalsmith **Terri Gelenian-Wood** (1955 – 2006) is best known for tableware that combines high polish sterling silver with intensely colored plastics—such as Corian® or Formica®. Gelenian-Wood received her BFA from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and her MFA from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. RAM’s extensive archive of over 40 works by Gelenian-Wood includes multi-piece flatware sets, silver and gemstone brooches, and plastic laminate hair accessories. In addition to being exhibited extensively on a national scale, her work has been frequently included in RAM and Wustum exhibitions over the years. In addition to RAM, her work is held at The Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey; The Library of Congress, Washington, DC; and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England.

Born in Milwaukee, **Annette Hirsh** (1921 – 2020) learned to draw as a child while taking classes at the Milwaukee Jewish Center. She went on to study art at Milwaukee State Teachers College (now University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee), however, her studies never included any work with metal. Early in Hirsh’s career, she worked in the advertising department at Gimbel’s department store where she would create watercolor paintings to be published in local newspapers. She briefly moved with her husband to Chicago in 1944, and when the pair moved back to Milwaukee in 1946, they opened an upholstery business. Around this time, Hirsh became one of the founding members of the League of Milwaukee Artists.

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In the 1960s, Hirsh began to experiment with metalwork using an acetylene torch to create small jewelry. Taking evening classes at Shorewood Opportunity School, Wisconsin, Hirsh learned about more complex processes and equipment such as lost wax casting. In the 1990s, Hirsh moved from small pieces of jewelry to larger pieces such as religious wall plaques. In addition to seven examples in RAM's collection, Hirsh is also represented in the collection of the Jewish Museum Milwaukee.

Ken Loeber (1948–) manipulates metal—as well as other media such as coral, pearls, and shells—into compelling adornment, hollowware, and flatware. 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. Loeber attributes his interest in defining and shaping form to a background in sculpture. He was awarded an MFA in the field from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee in 1978. Loeber's resulting body of work seamlessly blends one-of-a-kind brooches and lines of production jewelry with flatware and hollowware.

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. In 1985, he was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Midwest Fellowship and a Wisconsin Visual Art Achievement Award in 2017. In 2001, one of Loeber's brooches was presented to Queen Sophia of Spain as a gift from the US State Department. He is represented as an archive artist in RAM's collection with over 100 pieces, and his work was highlighted in a 2013 solo exhibition.

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“Ojibwe floral designs are connected with the world around us. Medicines, traditional foods, and plants that aid the support of Ojibwe lifeways are often forever memorialized in our beads. [...] My designs are directly reflective of my home, Mashkiziibiing, and the surrounding areas in northern Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan—our foods, medicines, and other plant relatives, intertwined by the vines of life. Ojibwe floral designs connect me with my home, my family, the land, and the Ojibwe language, and I strive to showcase that deep-rooted love and connection in each piece I create.”

Currently located in North Carolina, Anishinaabe artist **Emily Minogiizhigookwe Nelis Lochlear** is a proud citizen of the Bad River Band of Ojibwe (Mashkiziibiing), and grew up on the reservation in Odanah, Wisconsin. She began beading in 2012 and has worked in different media and techniques, including *makiziniikewin* (moccasin making), sewing, and quillwork. She is the owner of Good Day Beadwork, working alongside her husband Joe Locklear (Lumbee/Oglala Lakota) who specializes in the wrapped quillwork technique. The name for Good Day Beadwork is derived from Nelis Lochlear's Anishinaabe name, Minogiizhigookwe, meaning Good Day Woman. Nelis Lochlear works primarily in Ojibwe floral beadwork designs and is passionate about sharing their use within Ojibwe culture. She combines traditional materials and processes, such as smoked brain-tanned deer hide and porcupine quills, with more modern ones, such as modern cut beads or experimentation with digital art, to complement her hand-beaded pieces. In 2025, Nelis Lochlear was the Quillwork Artist-in-Residence at the Northland College Indigenous Cultures Center in Ashland, Wisconsin, where she also facilitated workshops.

Whether referencing the landscape or architecture or both, metalsmith **Eleanor Moty** (1945–) creates distinctive jewelry that poetically encompasses both wearer and viewer. Moty first gained recognition in the 1960s and 1970s for the use of cutting-edge fabrication techniques in her jewelry, like electroplating and photoetching, processes that were previously used exclusively in electronics manufacture. Moty's early work utilized these modern methods of manufacture to create organic forms. She shifted her focus toward including stones in her work, and the large-scale brooches she has been creating over the last couple of decades exemplify her dialogue with the “linear imagery” of quartz stones.

Moty is now retired after teaching for 28 years at the University of Wisconsin-Madison—in a department she helped develop into one of the most well-regarded in the country—where she was the first woman and humanities professor to be awarded the H.I. Romnes Faculty Fellowship for her excellence in teaching. Currently, Moty lives in Arizona, where she has found new types of landscape

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as inspiration. Of her minimalist, often austere work, Moty says she always looks “at the land no matter where I am and appreciate something about it.” She refers to her vaguely organic shapes as “ghost images.”

Moty received her BFA in 1968 from the University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign, studying under Robert van Neumann and visiting artist J. Fred Woell. In 1971, she earned her MFA from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, focusing further on electroforming while working with Stanley Lechtzin. In 1998, she was elected to the American Craft Council College of Fellows.

Moty’s work was highlighted in a 2022 solo exhibition at RAM titled *Quiet Elegance: The Jewelry of Eleanor Moty*. She is represented in RAM’s collection by 23 works.

“People think toads are so ugly. I think they’re so beautiful. God worked just as hard on those as he did on a hippopotamus. A little machine is in there, and it’s working, and it’s doing its thing, you know? It’s amazing.”

Well-known Wisconsin painter, printmaker, illustrator, and collector of natural world treasures, **JoAnna Poehlmann** (1932–) is also known for her dry sense of humor and clever word play. Poehlmann’s two-dimensional works and artists’ books can be found in museum and library collections around the world, including 44 examples in RAM’s collection where she is considered an archive artist. Throughout the years, Poehlmann has received 14 awards in RAM’s *Watercolor Wisconsin* exhibition. Additionally, her work has been shown in several nontraditional venues such as the Baltimore Zoo, Maryland, the Marcus Performing Arts Center, Milwaukee, and the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center, Milwaukee. In 2004, Poehlmann was awarded the Milwaukee Arts Board Mildred L. Harpole Artist of the Year Award, and in 2011, she was inducted as a Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters Fellow for her work in the visual arts.

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“Art, like life, is a challenge. It challenges all our resources, mentally and physically. It can’t be predictably created from a linear didactic formula. It eludes methodology, technology, or ritual. It is, like life, more about being human, being vulnerable, being imperfect, and about things unexplainable. It is not a science. Art is about surprise, about the unexpected, about letting go and risking. It is about taking steps towards places where they may not be any footholds, and falling, and failing.”

J. Fred Woell’s (1934 – 2015) work often combines themes of consumerism and violence to create humorous assemblages. Feeling strongly that gold should not determine a piece’s value, he instead created “anti-jewelry” which pioneered the concept of found objects in art to wear. Woell earned his BFA from the University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign; an MFA at the University of Wisconsin–Madison; and a second MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield, Michigan. After graduating, Woell taught metals classes for elementary and high school students, creating his own jewelry in his spare time. Later, he moved to Deer Isle, Maine, and taught at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts intermittently until he retired in 2001. He also taught metals courses at Boston University from 1976–1987 and at the State University of New York at New Paltz from 1989–1993.

Throughout his career, Woell has earned honors such as three National Endowment for the Arts grants. He was inducted into the American Craft Council’s College of Fellows in 1995 and earned the Society of Arts and Crafts’ Artist Award in 2004. In addition to 11 pieces at RAM, Woell’s art is in the permanent collections of Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; Honolulu Museum of Art Spalding House; and the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum. Patricia Wheeler—Woell’s wife—stated that he was still working in his studio until a couple days before his passing.