

STITCHED STORIES

Narrative Quilts and Textiles

June 10 – November 21, 2026

This exhibition brings together quilted, woven, and embroidered works from RAM's collection that tell stories through fabric and thread. Whether incorporating representational imagery or utilizing abstraction, these small- and large-scale fiber works explore the multitude of ways in which textiles can be used to convey meaning. Drawing from both personal memory and imagined worlds, the artists represented in *Stitched Stories* demonstrate the versatility of fiber as a medium for storytelling as they transport viewers to faraway lands—from the bottom of the ocean to outer space. Significantly, several artists with Wisconsin ties are represented, underscoring the rich history of textile production in the state.

Biographies for selected Wisconsin artists included in the exhibition:

"In the 1970s, I was lucky to find a first teaching position in home economics at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. While many women were engaged in overt political action, I was engaged in the struggles of being liberated. I loved teaching and helped women (and a few men) find the authority within themselves. My work in general communicates a woman's intuitiveness and sensibility."

With degrees in psychology, anthropology, and visual arts, **Renie Breskin Adams** (1938–) brings marked thoughtfulness and sensitivity to what she calls her "embroidered pictures." Adams draws on things she has experienced, thought, felt, and imagined—translating them into colorful two-dimensional works that combine embroidery with knotless netting, weaving, crocheting, knotting, and occasionally paint or ink. Over the last 20 years, RAM has acquired over 80 works by Adams, establishing an archive and making RAM the largest single repository of her work.

As a child, Adams sewed, crocheted afghans, and made rag dolls. As a student in her twenties, she first studied drawing and painting while a research associate in psychology and education. A weaving class offered her the opportunity to explore composition and style in a way that drawing and painting did not. Over time, Adams has made a habit of experimenting with different techniques and merges methods as needed. Adams taught fiber arts at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and then at Northern Illinois University, from which she has since retired. Currently, Adams conducts workshops in textile design, hand embroidery, crochet, weaving, and knotless netting at art schools across the country.

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Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin-based **Ann Fahl** (1947–) has been sewing since the age of 12. After studying at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Fahl went into business and retailing, working for Gimbels, Marshall Field & Co., and several fabric chains. In 1978, Fahl took a beginning quilting class, and in 1981, she won her first blue ribbon for a quilt and began teaching classes herself. She has travelled across the US to work with quilters' guilds and participate in symposiums. Over her career, Fahl has authored three published quilting books and a number of instructional booklets. In addition to five examples at the Racine Art Museum, her work is included in the collections of The National Quilt Museum, Paducah, Kentucky; Northwestern Mutual Insurance Co.; Ripon College, Wisconsin; and many private collections. Fahl is now retired from competition and teaching, and is devoting her time to family history research while still making the occasional quilt.

"I use both pattern and image to record my stories. My intention is to challenge the subordination of pattern in Western art. I surround image with pattern, putting both on equal ground. The pattern does not function simply as a frame, but it is essential to the narrative."

Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, artist and educator **Charlene Nemec-Kessel** (1970 – 2023) worked across various media throughout her career with a focus on fiber. A significant body of Nemec-Kessel's work consists of woven and embroidered pieces that frame the composition in dense fields of pattern which she considers to be equally as important as the central image. In these works, she often draws on historical weaving traditions, incorporating symbols from late Renaissance and Medieval tapestries into her work. Often narrative in content, Nemec-Kessel uses her figurative work to explore topics such as the power play between genders. She notes that her narratives often are drawn from observation of those around her, with stories evolving as the weaving progresses.

In 1993, Nemec-Kessel received her BA in fine art from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and from 1995 to 1997, returned to complete her MA. After graduating, she taught as an Associate Lecturer in fiber art at both the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and Concordia University, Mequon, Wisconsin. In 1997, she received an Award for Excellence for her work in the SOFA Chicago national juried exhibition "Expressions of Culture." She later went on to become Assistant Professor at Concordia University where she worked until her passing in 2023. She is represented in RAM's collection by one work.

Based in Madison, Wisconsin, textile artist **Leah Evans** (1979–) creates work focused on the ways in which people impact their environment and, in turn, how the environment affects people. While her pieces are not always based on specific places, she uses aerial photography, maps, and satellite imagery to inform her image-making, creating imagined landscapes in order to discuss environmental consequences and land use. She explains, "[...] elements of my work demonstrate the influence of nature on our constructs, such as a river changing its course, thereby causing a shift in property divisions, and shifting coastlines due to

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climate change.” She is represented in RAM’s collection by one such work depicting a river.

Environmental concerns have always been of importance to Evans and her creative process—during her time studying textile design at the University of Kansas, she notes that her most influential course was environmental history.

She balances hand and machine work in her practice by using layered techniques including appliqué, natural and synthetic dyeing, needle felting, and embroidery. Evans’ eco-consciousness spans beyond subject matter—she incorporates recycled fabric into her pieces such as vintage kimonos, upholstery remnants, and other secondhand materials.

“I am an image maker, using color, shape and line within known and experimental concepts of paper-pulp as my medium. There is a magic in transforming the natural elements of a substance into the expression of another. Composition and gesture are my language, my form of communication. My over-arching intention is the expression of freedom, one idea, one series at a time.”

Papermaker **MP Marion** (1945–) was first introduced to hand-papermaking in 1973 while enrolled in graduate school at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she studied in Walter Hamady’s lab. After teaching art in the Racine public school system, Marion decided to focus on her studio practice and became a self-employed artist. She is drawn to paper as a medium because it can be endlessly recycled, re-invigorated, and incorporated into new forms.

Marion currently operates her studio, The Prints and The Pulper, out of central Ohio, where she moved in 2004. She has served on the Board of Directors for the Morgan Paper Conservancy, Cleveland, Ohio and is a member of both the North American Hand Papermakers and International Association of Hand Papermakers and Paper Artists. Marion is represented in RAM’s collection by two paper “quilts.”

Racine-born **Shari Urquhart** (1940 – 2020) is best known for her large-scale fiber works which grew in size as her career progressed—some as large as eight to 12 feet wide, and taking up to a year to complete. With punch needle and rug-hooking as her preferred techniques, Urquhart constructed her tapestries from hand-dyed and commercial yarns of varying textures and fibers, sometimes incorporating unconventional fibers such as her dog’s fur, to achieve a large range of color. Her works pull inspiration from the narrative qualities of medieval tapestries, but focus on contemporary human interactions, exploring themes of love, gender roles, and domestic stereotypes. In order to do so, she combines art historical references with contemporary feminist symbolism.

Beginning as a painter in the era of abstract expressionism and pop art, Urquhart started experimenting with textiles while still in Madison. Her textile work was recognized on a national and international level after its inclusion in *Bad Girls*,

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Part II (1994) and *'Bad' Painting* (1978) at The New Museum in New York City, both curated by Marcia Tucker.

Urquhart attended the University of Wisconsin–Madison from which she earned three degrees, including one in teaching. After graduation, she taught at William Horlick High School in Racine from 1962 to 1964 before moving to New York City. She taught art at various institutions while living on the East Coast, including Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond; Rikers Island Correctional Center, New York; and for 25 years at the St. Francis Residence, New York. After her retirement, she returned to Kenosha where she continued her studio work until her passing in 2020. She is represented in RAM's collection by one work.

Wisconsin native and fiber artist **Glen Kaufman** (1932 – 2020) was born in Fort Atkinson. After attending the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Kaufman received his MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1959. Like Arline Fisch would do later, Kaufman attended the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen on a Fulbright scholarship. From 1967 to 2008, he taught fiber art at the University of Georgia–Athens, but spent a good deal of his time in Japan. The Asian influence on his work is apparent in his choice of materials (silk), but also his affinity for the *shoji*-like grid (a *shoji* being a heavily segmented wood and rice paper screen popular in Japan for dividing spaces). Using limited color palettes with accents of gold and silver leaf, Kaufman is able to turn each work into a “personal window” where “the image floats on a surface behind the window grid.” In addition, he uses metal leaf to further complicate the sense of depth. He states, “the metal leaf I use has inherent reflective qualities that vary depending on the type, color, thickness, and weave of the ground cloth. The reflection of light on the leaf and silk—which changes depending on the light source and the time of day—give an inner life and dynamic visual energy to these works.” At RAM, he is an archive artist, represented by 38 pieces.

Fiber and ceramic artist and community activist **Anne Kingsbury** (1943–) received her BS in 1965 from the University of Wisconsin, River Falls, and her MFA in 1967 in printmaking and ceramics from Claremont Graduate School. Kingsbury moved to Milwaukee in 1975 where she briefly taught at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee as an assistant professor. In 1979, Kingsbury and her husband co-founded the Woodland Pattern Book Center in Milwaukee, a non-profit community organization which focuses on small press literature. After nearly 40 years at Woodland Pattern Book Center, Kingsbury retired in 2018 to focus on her own studio practice. Kingsbury's interest in the written word is evident in her art; she often incorporates words and phrases into her pieces. Kingsbury was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Award in 1976/77, was selected as a Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters Fellow in 2008, and was chosen as a Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Mary L. Nohl Fund Fellow in 2014. In 2021, she was selected as the Mildred L. Harpole Artist of the Year for her work in the city of Milwaukee. RAM currently has eight works by Kingsbury in its collection, including ceramics, drawings, fiber art, and an artists' book.