



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**PRESS CONTACT**

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**RAM's Window on Fifth Gallery:
Wisconsin Artist Jessica Calderwood Creates Flora
Forms to Explore Gender**

Racine, WI July 27, 2016

Racine Art Museum commissioned Wisconsin artist Jessica Calderwood to create a new exhibition for its Windows on Fifth Gallery, a space that spans nearly 80 feet across. Open August 5, 2016 through July 23, 2017, **Fictitious Flora** includes provocative two- and three-dimensional works that reflect Calderwood's interest in investigating gender, symbolism, and issues of aggression, peace, and social responsibility. Made of enamel, felt, polymer, vitreous china, and porcelain, her four-foot-tall figures—adorned with deftly constructed floral forms and her translation of handguns into flat images of pattern and color—address complex cultural topics, such as the relationships between the beautiful and the absurd, the powerful and the powerless, and the feminine and the masculine.

Calderwood blends a background in metalsmithing, and a specific interest in enameling, with a desire to investigate the social and cultural dynamics of contemporary society. Her work of the last several years—jewelry, sculpture, and wall reliefs that often combine images of plants and humans—has emphasized the construction, development, and articulation of femininity and identity. Recently, she has responded to current pressing cultural issues, including responsibility she feels as a contemporary artist, by incorporating images of handguns into her floral-laden artwork. Combining these familiar forms that could be used to represent the feminine and the masculine in unexpected ways, Calderwood not only challenges expectations but also raises questions about, in her words, "our culture's need to codify objects according to gender." Her interest in investigating cultural symbols as they relate to the feminine and the masculine has led her to create artwork that can encourage a rational dialogue about handguns in contemporary society as well as the broader issues of aggression, peace, and social responsibility.

(more)



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Working with a palette of pastels—primarily pinks and baby blues—as they have a cultural connection to gender, Calderwood translates both flowers and guns into design elements of pattern, color, and form. With the combination of symbols, she purposefully references floral arrangements, mandalas, and funeral wreaths as they can evoke things that are both related to the ornamental and the beautiful but also to symbols of aggression. Calderwood has been inspired by the past as well as the present, stating: "for the circular funerary wreath, I was inspired by the now famous image from 1967 of a young war protestor placing carnations into the barrel of a rifle. The floral shifts from being a symbol of not just the feminine but also of peaceful resistance."

Long interested in how flowers have meaning beyond the natural and ornamental, Calderwood has used them to explore the cultural and social associations of the imagery and language connecting flora to human beings. Early inspiration came from time spent wandering in gardens in Morocco. She also discovered a formal connection between soft decorative grapes in her childhood home, rounded forms and decorative elements on purses she owns, and the botanical elements she often creates in her own work. Culturally, flowers are often associated with women and used as symbols of femininity. Thus far, Calderwood has focused primarily on the female form. Since the head is often covered, she tends to suggest this through clothing and accessories. Because flowers as "adornment" are most associated with women—and because she has been interested in exploring ideas of the feminine—it has been easy to read her characters as female. Also, she layers her works with her personal experiences, using them as a springboard to topics that can speak to a broader audience. Most recently, however, Calderwood has begun to introduce male characters, allowing her to add in themes of propagation and fertilization, as well as even more complex associations of gender. She uses color to distinguish the sexes but the floral imagery stays strong, begging questions regarding how society codes the masculine and feminine.

The introduction of handgun imagery both reinforces and questions stereotypes of gender as initially the metaphorical "hardness" of the guns contrasts with the symbolic "softness" of the flowers. By rendering the guns in bright colors and as design elements, Calderwood looks at how potent of a symbol the gun is—what would someone think when it is rendered flat, colored blue or pink? When guns are associated with aggression, power, and violence, what does it mean when they are paired with symbols and colors that are not necessarily associated with those ideas? Rather than offer answers or a definitive viewpoint, Calderwood allows for ambiguity that could encourage conversation.

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Meet the Artist Event

On Friday, August 5 at 6:30 pm, Calderwood will give visitors a behind-the-scenes glimpse at the making of *Fictitious Flora* with RAM Curator of Exhibitions Lena Vigna. This event is during First Friday in downtown Racine when RAM offers free admission from 10:00 am to 9:00 pm along with a free hands-on art project from 4:00 to 8:00 pm. Calderwood will return to the museum in March 2017 to modify the exhibition, creating a fresh new experience.

Jessica Calderwood: Fictitious Flora is made possible at Racine Art Museum by: Platinum Sponsors - Karen Johnson Boyd and William B. Boyd, SC Johnson, Windgate Charitable Foundation; Diamond Sponsor - Osborne and Sceikic Family Foundation; Gold Sponsors - Herzfeld Foundation, Johnson Bank, National Endowment for the Arts, Racine Community Foundation, W. T. Walker Group, Inc.; Silver Sponsors - Real Racine, Wisconsin Arts Board; Bronze Sponsors - Andis Foundation, Burlington Graphic Systems, Inc., EC Styberg Foundation, Educators Credit Union, In Sink Erator, The Norbell Foundation, Orkney Springs Retreat, Rasmussen Diamonds, Wisconsin Public Radio

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Together, the two campuses of the Racine Art Museum, RAM in downtown Racine at 441 Main Street and the Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts at 2519 Northwestern Avenue, seek to elevate the stature of contemporary crafts to that of fine art by exhibiting significant works in craft media with painting, sculpture and photography, while providing outstanding educational art programming.

Docent led contemporary craft and architectural tours of the museums are available. Both campuses of the Racine Art Museum, are open Tuesday – Saturday 10:00 am – 5:00 pm, and are closed Mondays, Federal holidays and Easter. RAM is open Sunday Noon – 5:00 pm, while Wustum is closed Sundays. An admission fee of \$5 for adults, with reduced fees for students and seniors, applies at RAM. Admission to Wustum is free. Members are always admitted without charge to either campus.