

## Wisconsin museum elevates contemporary crafts

Mary Lu Laffey

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Lena Vigna, curator of exhibitions, explains the steps Adams took to create the crocheted, dyed cotton thread art piece, "Blue Birds of Happiness."

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Ten years ago, collector Donna Moog offered the Racine Art Museum a gift it could not refuse: 250 teapots. During the next 10 years, her gesture evolved into a signature collection for the contemporary crafts museum. With 8,000 pieces of work from national and international artists, the RAM holds the largest and most significant collection of contemporary crafts on the continent.

The RAM teapot collection, now numbering 400, is the largest in the United States. It is one of the many reasons 50,000 visitors step through the front door of the Racine, Wis., museum each year.

Another is the opportunity to witness the museum's mission to elevate the nature of craft to fine art. Dedicated to dispelling the difference between fine arts and crafts, and between the artist and the craftsperson, the RAM presents work from artists that create meaningful statements in craft media — ceramics, fibers, glass, metals, polymer and wood — alongside paintings and sculpture.

Year 'round, the teapot collection rotates in the museum library; some are always on display. For several months this year, teapots were spotlighted on the first floor, tipping their contemporary spouts to all who entered.

### Take Tea

The teapot as a functional object can be traced 800 years to China. During the centuries, its form became quite familiar to the rest of the world. While most early teapots were metal, today's are ceramic. Some are functional and others are pure whimsy.

"Can this really make tea?" is a frequently asked question. Docents usually continue the conversation with a question of their own — "Show me a teapot that you like and you tell me if you can make tea [with it]." Often adding, "There's more to a teapot than a spout, handle and lid."

## Fabric art

Embroidered art from Renie Breslin Adams fills a RAM Collection Focus gallery on the second floor adjacent to installations from a traveling exhibit, The Box Project, Uncommon Threads.

Lena Vigna, curator of exhibitions at the RAM, said Adams' dedication to working with textiles and interest in building narratives has pushed boundaries with humorous, good-natured imagery and an unexpected blending of techniques.

Adams refers to her work as "embroidered pictures." She translates her life experiences into brilliant, two-dimensional expressions of fabric art using colorful embroidery and knotless netting with other needle arts.

Japanese artist Masae Bamba created fabric and wire installation "Drops 2013." As part of The Box Project, "Drops 2013" is one of 36 fiber art pieces displayed at the RAM. The RAM is the final stop for Uncommon Threads exhibit, which, after closing on Aug. 27, is on its way to Washington, D.C.

## Heads up

For those planning a destination wedding, family reunion, off-site meeting or club trip, with advance reservations, the RAM offers docent-led tours for groups of 10 or more.

### Go!

**Racine Art Museum:** The RAM commands a corner in the center of downtown Racine, Wis., within walking distance of the harbor and panoramas of Lake Michigan. It also anchors a stretch of private and co-op art galleries that are worth the stroll and a stop. Admission costs \$5 adults; children younger than 12 are free when accompanied by an adult. The first Friday of each month is free admission day, courtesy of the Osborne and Scekic Family Foundation. Its sister institute, Wustum Museum of Fine Art, also is in Racine. Contact 262-638-8300 or ramart.org.

**Racine County Convention and Visitors Bureau:** Realracine is the official convention and visitors bureau for Racine County. For leads on events and happenings to plan a trip, go to [realracine.com](http://realracine.com).

**Getting there:** Road trip! Racine is 134 miles from Kankakee.

**Staying where:** Doubletree by Hilton Racine Harbourwalk Hotel is located on the Racine Marina with gorgeous Lake Michigan views. The property is newly renovated. A signature chocolate chip cookie, hot from the oven, is offered at check-in. Accessibility includes Braille elevators. Free WiFi, indoor pool, fitness room, 24-hour Pavilion Pantry and walking distance from downtown Racine. Self-park costs \$2. For directions and packages, go to [doubletree3.hilton.com](http://doubletree3.hilton.com).

**Dining, too:** Reefpoint Brew House is a short walk from the Doubletree and right on the marina. Live music and a great kitchen that features platters of specialties from ribs to seafood. Trivia Night is Wednesday. Contact 262-898-7333 or [reefpointbrewhouse.com](http://reefpointbrewhouse.com).

