



## **Get a Bead On: Jewelry and Small Objects**

July 21, 2021 – January 22, 2022

One of the primary definitions of a bead emphasizes its use in adornment or an ornamental capacity. Contemporary artists who work with beads sometimes adhere to these parameters and sometimes challenge them. This exhibition, comprised of works from RAM's collection, reveals the expansive potential of beads for structure as well as decoration in contemporary art jewelry and small-scale objects.

As shifting Native American beadwork practices have made clear, the materials used to form beads can change depending on geography, use, cultural and personal preference, and availability. Contemporary artists—many with multiple options available to them—make choices based on aesthetic, conceptual, practical, personal, and symbolic intent. For example, silversmith **Jasper Nelson** draws on generational Navajo family knowledge and interest to create beaded neckpieces with a minimalist aesthetic. Interested in highlighting the “foodstuffs of our communal desire,” **Linda Dolack** covers candy boxes, food containers, and grocery carts with glass beads as she ironically highlights mass consumption and production. **Holly Anne Mitchell** uses recycled newspaper to create beaded bracelets, brooches, necklaces, and earrings that speak to eco-friendly practices as well as challenge assumptions about which materials can be used for jewelry.

Drawn together by a common form, the works included in this exhibition reflect a variety of perspectives on materials, techniques, and wearability. In addition to addressing these formal qualities, the artists whose work is featured also explore a range of social and cultural themes—as indicated above—including perceptions of race, material consumption, and excess.

### **Biographies and statements from select featured artists**

Artist **Linda Dolack** was born in 1949. Dolack's artwork uses exaggeration and humor as a means of celebrating contemporary popular culture. She explains, “Since childhood, I have been fascinated by the way foods are mass marketed and eventually become the foodstuffs of our communal desire. Through media advertisement, musical jingles, signage and the artwork of packaging, processed or ‘junk’ foods transform into familiar comfort foods. Drawn to these ubiquitous foods, it seemed natural for me to investigate and ultimately celebrate this manipulation.” To create her pieces, Dolack either hand embroiders or directly applies brightly colored, sparkling glass beads to discarded food packaging—creating newly embellished versions of common food items. Dolack's work can be found in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Boston, Massachusetts; the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, New York; and the Corner Children's Hospital, Chicago, Illinois.

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Born in 1954 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, **Christina Eustace** began making jewelry as a young child. Eustace's first creations were tiny shot balls that were then melted and used as decorative elements. She often experimented with creating her own jewelry while her parents were out selling adornment they had made. Eustace went to the University of New Mexico and studied fine arts, taking a range of different classes such as painting, ceramics, and jewelry. With a mother of Cochiti Pueblo descent and a Zuni father, Eustace draws on her native heritage. Often, her work is based on ancient petroglyphs. The piece currently on display has several elements of known petroglyphs—such as Kokopelli, the flute player associated with fertility; the Zuni Bear symbolizing good health; and the straight arrows symbolizing protection. Eustace's work can be found throughout the US and in the British Museum in London, England. She has received awards from the Santa Fe Indian Market, Santa Fe, New Mexico; the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and the Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado.

**Jan Huling** was born in 1953 in Chicago, Illinois, but was raised in St. Louis, Missouri. Huling began to focus on art later in life, following a career as a successful product designer. To put it simply, she beads and embellishes forms, often dolls or animals. Her goal is to transform the everyday into, in her words, "spectacular, meaningful, hypnotic works of art." To create patterns, Huling strings glass seed beads and lays them onto a form in a line of glue. When the beads are correctly positioned, she slides out the thread. Huling designs spontaneously; rather than planning how her design should look, she allows each one to grow as a meditation on color, form, pattern, and texture. Huling has garnered numerous awards and honors, including Category Winner, Sculptural Works at **Fiber Art Now's Excellence in Fibers IV** juried exhibition; an artist residency at 360 Xochi Quetzal, Lake Chapala, Mexico; and a fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

Born in 1951, **Donna Kato** began working with polymer in 1991. During the latter half of the 1990s, as polymer was undergoing a revival in the United States, Kato played a part in the resurgence as both artist and educator. She has written several books that have become essential for artists, such as **The Art of Polymer Clay**. Kato's work currently on display, **Sculpted Animal Necklace**, consists of large beads that are in the form of molded animals made early in her career. She ultimately shifted to techniques that focus on pattern and surface using millefiori and imitative practices that made her well-known in her field. Significantly, Kato has also developed a new form of polymer known as Kato Polyclay. This variant of the material differs from others in its strength, stability, and firmness, and is available in a wide array of colors.

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Holly Anne Mitchell was born in 1970 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Mitchell uses recycled newspaper to create beaded bracelets, brooches, necklaces, and earrings that speak to eco-friendly practices as well as challenge assumptions about which materials can be used for jewelry. Mitchell is inspired by social and cultural issues as well as material and aesthetic ones. The tone of her work can range from playful—as is the case with Mitchell's bracelet in RAM's collection, *The Joke's On You!*—to serious.

Her *I Can't Breathe Neckpiece* incorporates newspaper with articles and images regarding the death of George Floyd. As she states, "It is a direct reflection and expression of my emotional response to this horrific, senseless death. As an African American, I felt a deep connection to Mr. Floyd. If it happened to Mr. Floyd, it could certainly happen to any and every African American man in my life."

After graduating in 1992 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Mitchell worked on creating a marketable line of her jewelry. Since, she has been included in numerous exhibitions such as at the Newseum in Washington, DC; Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; and Museum of Arts and Design, New York, New York. She has received honors and awards including an honorable mention at the Smithsonian Craft Show, Washington, DC; Niche Award Finalist, *Niche Magazine*; and an Associate Craft Fellowship with the Indiana Arts Commission, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Navajo artist, Jasper Nelson, was born in New Mexico in 1961. Nelson is known for his silverwork jewelry, though he also uses copper and gold. Self-taught, the artist utilizes techniques that were passed down to him generationally, as well as ones he created. One of his best known designs is a piece comprised of silver beads that appear to be pearls. One strand of beads, about 22–24 inches in length, takes Nelson two to three days to create. Throughout the year, he travels to shows throughout the US selling his work. Nelson participates in Native American art markets in Texas, Kansas, and New Mexico. Since he travels so frequently, Nelson can often be found creating adornment in the bed of his truck.

## Artists of Color

RAM is committed to supporting diverse voices—whether that diversity reflects race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, social standing, or world perspective. In this moment in time, it is critical that spotlights are placed on voices that have been historically underrepresented, and at RAM that begins with women and artists of color. Artists of color are identified in this context as non-white and non-European in heritage. This simplification—which is arguably a flawed starting point—does not account for the nuances and variations of society. It is a beginning—a way to direct those who want to educate themselves about what is possible when new perspectives are discovered.

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Modifications to this approach are expected as RAM learns and grows. Further, as an educational institution rooted in the humanities and using art as a catalyst, RAM wants to encourage inquiry and exploration about the world in which we live. RAM hopes spotlighting artists of color spurs further engagement with these artists and their ideas.

The following is a list of artists of color whose works are included in this exhibition. Because of the light-sensitive nature of some of the materials used, not all works/artists are featured during the entire exhibition. Visitors are encouraged to take note and research these artists via the internet to find out more about their biographies and larger bodies of work.

Christina Eustace  
Tina Fung Holder  
Donna Kato  
Holly Anne Mitchell  
Jasper Nelson  
Angie Reano Owen  
Joyce Scott

## **Women Artists at RAM**

RAM acknowledges the efforts of self-identifying women in the art world consistently and sincerely at all times. The museum highlights how women are inextricably woven—and often the foundation—of creative endeavors and discourse. By current count, 41% of the artists in RAM’s collection are women. This percentage—which is consistently increasing—is already substantially greater than the ratios calculated at other organizations with permanent collections and active exhibition programs. At RAM, work made by different genders is considered for inclusion in the museum’s holdings on equal terms. And notably, because RAM relies on gifts of artwork to build the collection, this policy has been reinforced by open-minded donors who have collected, and then donated, quality work regardless of the gender of the artist. The following is a list of women whose works are included in this exhibition. Because of the light-sensitive nature of some of the materials used, not all works/artists are featured during the entire exhibition. Visitors are encouraged to take note and research these artists via the internet to find out more about their biographies and larger bodies of work. This effort—similar to efforts to highlight artists of color at RAM—is not meant to single out artists to stigmatize them but to magnify and cast a spotlight on their significance. It reflects intention, goodwill, and an attempt to reckon with years of historical underrepresentation. RAM hopes this provides opportunities for audiences to learn more about these artists and their ideas.

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Flora Book  
Sharon Church  
Linda Dolack  
Kathleen Dustin  
Christina Eustace  
Linda Fifield  
Valerie Hector  
Tina Fung Holder  
Tory Hughes  
Jan Huling  
Jacqueline Irene Lillie  
Donna Kato  
Karen Thuesen Massaro  
Holly Anne Mitchell  
Marilyn Moore  
Merrill Morrison  
Judy Onofrio  
Angie Reano Owen  
Susan Rezac  
Melissa Schmidt  
Joyce Scott  
Mary Tingley  
Pier Voulkos  
Kathy Wegman