



## **Open Storage: RAM Showcases Artists' Book Archives**

February 16 – June 7, 2020

Historically, collection-building for museums has gone on behind-the-scenes. In the last decade, more institutions have offered transparency regarding how collections are developed, stored, and conserved. **Open Storage** offers a series of exhibitions that clarify this process by drawing attention to some of RAM's particular strengths—collecting the work of artists in-depth and establishing archives that further document their working processes and careers. While RAM frequently talks about the importance of gifts from donor's estates, archive building—both by artists and institutions—is critically important for the field because it offers a more comprehensive look at creative activity.

This exhibition features the work of two artists—**Walter Hamady** and **Claire Van Vliet**—through multiple examples of their work. Both primarily focus on artist's books. Hamady was a long-time University of Wisconsin-Madison professor and founder of The Perishable Press Limited while Van Vliet is a MacArthur Fellow and founder of Janus Press. RAM's archive has artist book examples from both as well as other types of their work—collages and sculpture by Hamady alongside prints by Van Vliet.

Over the years, RAM has paid attention to noteworthy artists through **Collection Focus** shows that featured multiple works by a single maker. In 2019, the museum launched a series of archive focus exhibitions with **Treasure Trove: Establishing Jewelry and Metal Archives at RAM**. The archive series exhibitions—like those on display this spring that emphasize ceramics, fiber, glass, wood, artist books, and regional artists—exemplify RAM's status as North America's largest contemporary craft collection while also drawing attention to the institution's overall diversity of holdings.

Exhibitions such as these not only outline the work of an artist—which is shaped by personal perspective, culture, the time in which it was made, and numerous other factors—but also underscore the imperative role that RAM plays in documenting contemporary craft and works on paper.

While this series is organized according to type of material used or object created, it is worth noting that institutional collections—even if they begin with strictly defined parameters—often have to modify how they catalog the work included. For example, when archives come from an artist directly, they may also include personal photographs, studio tools, or other items that offer compelling insight into the creative process but do not fit into precisely defined artwork categories.

These exhibitions, drawn from RAM's holdings, also highlight noteworthy statistics—namely that, by current count, 40% of the artists in the collection are women. This number, which is

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consistently increasing, is already substantially greater than the percentages calculated at other organizations with permanent collections and active exhibition programs. This has been achieved at RAM by considering the work of different genders on equal playing terms. And, notably, it has been helped by open-minded donors who have been interested in collecting quality work regardless of gender.

If RAM's collection is broken into groups based on materials used, works made with clay would comprise the largest category. Significantly, it is worth noting that three of the most-collected ceramic artists at RAM are women—**Sandra Byers, Mara Superior,** and **Beatrice Wood**. While not featured in the galleries at this time, Mara Superior is the most-collected ceramic artist at RAM overall with 33 pieces and printmaker **Beth Van Hoesen** holds the honor of being RAM's most-collected artist regardless of media. Van Hoesen is represented to date with 307 works including prints, watercolors, drawings, and metal printing plates.

**Walter Hamady** is famous among book designers for his tongue-in-cheek style as well as his innovative approach to book design. A Michigan native, Hamady received his BFA from Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, and his MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. In 1964, while still an undergraduate, Hamady founded a private press that he named The Perishable Press, Ltd. The press was in operation on his property in Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, from 1966 until his death in 2019. In 1966, Hamady began teaching letterpress printmaking, book-binding, and papermaking at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As both a maker and an instructor, he helped make Madison a center for book arts. Hamady Influenced a host of future artist book makers including **Katherine Kuehn, Barbara Tetenbaum, Janet Ballweg, Jim E. Escalante, Marta Gomez, Kevin Henkes, Jim Lee, Ruth Lingen, Jeffrey W. Morin, Pati Scobey,** and **Walter Tisdale**. Hamady also worked with several contemporary poets and collaborated with many artists like **John Wilde, Warrington Colescott, Henrik Drescher,** and **Jack Beal**. Hamady retired from UW-Madison in 1996, though he continued to produce books at his own press through the early 2000s.

Eschewing traditional book structure, Hamady not only manipulated the organization of his books, but also incorporated whimsical typography, found objects, and unique binding techniques. Hamady produced over 100 limited publications through The Perishable Press, Ltd. He is also known for his monotypes, collages, and assemblages, which incorporate found objects and found printed text. In 1991, he had a retrospective at RAM's Wustum Museum entitled, **Walter Hamady: Handmade Books, Collages, and Sculpture**. Hamady presented RAM with a significant collection of artists' books, which includes some of his own work and many pieces by his former students. Of the 500 artists' books in RAM's collection, 33 are works by Hamady.

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Canadian born artist **Claire Van Vliet** graduated high school at 15 and earned her BA from San Diego State College, California, and her MFA from Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California. In 1955, she started her own private press, Janus Press. After living briefly in Europe, Van Vliet returned to the United States in 1957 and began working for the Lanston Monotype Machine Company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While in Philadelphia, she taught printmaking at the Philadelphia Museum College of Art and was an apprentice at The Pickering Press, which was run by a fellow Lanston Company employee, printmaker **John Anderson**.

Now based in Newark, Vermont, Janus Press has allowed Van Vliet to work collaboratively with a host of printmakers and writers including renowned British poet **Ted Hughes** and artist **Ruth Fine**, whose work is also part of RAM's permanent collection. The recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship—sometimes referred to as a MacArthur Genius Grant—in 1989, Van Vliet holds two honorary doctorates, one from the University of Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the other from San Diego State University, California. Known for her printmaking, artists' books, and typography design, Van Vliet currently has 26 artist books and prints in RAM's collection.

**COLLECTION FOCUS** solo exhibitions organized over the last 14 years at RAM further reflect the museum's commitment to collecting and showing the work of artists in-depth.

The following artists were featured in these RAM exhibitions presented during the dates listed below:

**Renie Breskin Adams** – June 18 – September 24, 2017  
**Dorothy Gill Barnes** – November 20, 2011 – January 15, 2012  
**Robert Burkert** – October 8, 2017 – February, 4, 2018  
**Jack Earl** – December 21, 2008 – March 8, 2009  
**Robert W. Ebendorf** – February 14 – May 9, 2004  
**Carol Eckert** – October 17, 2010 – February 6, 2011  
**David Ellsworth** – November 20, 2011 – January 15, 2012  
**Sergei Isupov** – February 23 – June 8, 2014  
**Rosita Johanson** – October 21, 2012 – February 3, 2013  
**Ken Loeber** – September 15, 2013 – February 2, 2014  
**Michael Lucero** – October 27, 2014 – January 26, 2015  
**John McQueen** – October 17, 2010 – February 6, 2011  
**John Wilde** – October 6, 2013 – January 12, 2014

Study guides are available in the Museum Store for the exhibitions listed above.

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Other selected solo exhibitions presented at RAM:

***Meet Rauschke and Wiken: New Additions to RAM's Wood Collection –***

June 4 – September 3, 2006

***Toshiko Takaezu: Heaven and Earth –*** September 6, 2005 – January 8, 2006

***Beth Van Hoesen: The Observant Eye –*** May 20 – September 9, 2012

***Ruth Grotenrath and Schomer Lichtner at RAM –*** January 23 – May 8, 2011

***Michael Pry: The Harley Portraits –*** August 30 – November 30, 2013

***Much of What is Seen is Not: Frank Boyden as Printmaker –***

February 23 – June 8, 2014

***California Dreamin': Mark Adams and Frank Lobdell –*** February 21 – June 5, 2016

***RAM Collects: Wood Letter Openers by Norm Sartorius from Ronald***

***and Kay Springwater –*** October 18, 2015 – February 7, 2016

***Shie and Acord: Recent Acquisitions –*** June 18 – September 24, 2017

***It's Like Poetry: Building a Toshiko Takaezu Archive at RAM –***

August 19, 2019 – July 26, 2020

Other RAM archive exhibitions:

***Treasure Trove: Establishing Jewelry and Metals Archives at RAM***

January 20 – September 20, 2019

Featured works by the following artists: Dan Adams, Carolyn Morris Bach, Kat Cole, Michael Croft, Ben J. Cunningham, Robert W. Ebendorf, Sandra Enterline, John J. Grant, Arline Fisch, Steven Ford, David Forlano, Else Bates Freund, Terri Gelenian-Wood, Danielle Gori-Montanelli, Tina Fung Holder, Tory Hughes, Ken Loeber, Dona Look, Eleanor Moty, Harold O'Connor, Ivy Ross, Antonia Schwed, Joyce Scott, Kiff Slemmons, Mary Tingley, Cynthia Toops, Pier Voukos, Elise Winters, and Marci Zelmanoff.