



Open Storage: RAM Showcases Ceramic, Fiber, and Regional Archives

January 26 – August 30, 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 12 artists—**Sandra Byers, Gibson Byrd, John N. Colt, Theodore Czebotar, Lillian Elliott, Joseph Frieber, Ed Rossbach, Kay Sekimachi, Jean Stamsta, Merle Temkin, Murray Weiss, and Beatrice Wood**—through multiple examples of their work. Arranged as a series of solo showcases, **Open Storage** also highlights the earliest kinds of work given to RAM—textiles and works on paper. While ceramic works and art jewelry currently number as the two largest types of contemporary craft represented, examples of textiles, prints, drawings, and works on paper were part of the very first gifts of artwork in the 1940s.

The combination of artists in this show demonstrates how RAM acquires the work of nationally and internationally recognized artists as well as by those who have called the local area home as they built their artistic reputations.

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

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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 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.

My best pots have a soul. They are born; I do not make them.

—Sandra Byers

Midwestern ceramicist **Sandra Byers** graduated with her BS in design from Cornell University in 1971. It was at Cornell that she met her now husband, fellow ceramicist Winthrop Byers, with whom she shares a studio in a late nineteenth century school building in Rock Springs, Wisconsin. Byers initially made small, functional wares, but began working with porcelain in the mid-1970s. Despite the difficult nature of the material, Byers, whose work is hand-built and not thrown, embraced organic, non-functional, unglazed, or minimally glazed forms which suggested rather than replicated the veins of leaves, the curves of shells, and other patterns found in nature. Each piece is meticulously pinched, pressed, and carved, with a focus on form and design. Working on a small scale and in muted colors, Byers allows shape and shadow to be the focus of her work. Byers was a Kohler Company artist in residence in 1982, and currently has 23 pieces in RAM's permanent collection all of which are displayed here.

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When I went to Iowa to graduate school, I was impressed by Picasso and Matisse, but mostly I saw American-scene painters and early American Modernists. There was a Hopper that I liked. It was an empty room. I was puzzled at first...But I finally got the idea after a while, and I was really impressed by Hopper then.

–Gibson Byrd

Painter **Gibson Byrd** (1923 – 2002) received his BA in Art from the University of Tulsa and his MFA from the University of Iowa. After briefly teaching high school, Byrd became a member of the University of Wisconsin-Madison art faculty where he worked for 30 years alongside **Warrington Colescott**, **Walter S. Hamady**—whose work is on display this spring in **Open Storage: RAM Showcases Artist Book Archives, Frances Myers**, and **John Wilde**. For much of his career Byrd focused on the figure in a style known as social realism, but turned to landscape in the latter part of his life. Primarily an oil painter, Byrd has also worked in gouache and pastel. His work has been shown nationally and internationally, including in thematic group exhibitions at RAM's Wustum Museum. RAM currently has 18 works by Byrd in the permanent collection.

When Apollo journeyed to the Moon, it carried our eyes. We looked back at Earth, a blue sphere, eighty percent water. Earth's creatures are eighty percent water. My work consists of ideas about metamorphosis, change and transformation-life processes eventuated through colored water.

–John N. Colt

Widely considered one of Wisconsin's most important twentieth-century artists by scholars, **John N. Colt** was born in Madison, Wisconsin in 1925. His father, **Arthur Colt**, ran a painting school in Madison, and offered summer painting classes in the greater Dane County area. During WWII, Colt enlisted and served as a submarine electrician. In 1946, he returned to Madison where he earned both his BA and MFA from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Colt taught briefly around Wisconsin, including at Milwaukee's Layton School of Art, until 1957 when he joined the art faculty at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. There he taught alongside notable artists, such as **Robert Burkert**, who is represented in RAM's collection with 44 pieces, and **Joseph Frieber**, whose work is on display in this exhibition. Before his retirement from the University in 1990, Colt was a visiting professor at several colleges including at the American University in Beirut. He was posthumously awarded a Wisconsin Visual Arts Achievement Award in 1999. RAM currently has 35 watercolors, paintings, and other works on paper by Colt with more works promised by Ruth Kjaer and the Kohler Foundation, Inc.

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Remove yourself and let it [art] become what it will be.

–Theodore Czebotar

Milwaukee native **Theodore Czebotar** was born in 1915. At the age of 18, Czebotar dropped out of high school and hopped trains, traveling extensively through the American West. He worked briefly for the WPA in Denver, before returning to his itinerant lifestyle, where he traded sketches for food. In 1936, Czebotar lived briefly in San Francisco before returning to Wisconsin after a bad car accident. During his time in Wisconsin, Czebotar took up residence in Racine, where he showed his work at the Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Art. It was then that Czebotar befriended renowned Wisconsin artist **John Stuart Curry**. Curry gave Czebotar a letter of recommendation to his own New York City art dealer, and it was at Curry's own gallery that Czebotar had his first solo show. By 1942, Czebotar relocated to New York City where his work was shown alongside the likes of **Edward Hopper**. During WWII, Czebotar moved upstate to the Hudson Valley with his future wife **Elizabeth Snapper** whom he would marry in 1952. The two would live in that Fishkill home in the Hudson Valley for the rest of their lives. Czebotar and Snapper died within five months of each other in 1996, after fifty three years together.

Despite changing subject matter, including landscapes that spanned the country, Czebotar's style, which was somewhere between the American regionalism of Curry and the isolationist perspective of Hopper, never wavered in intensity and was not influenced by changing art tastes. RAM currently has 81 pieces by Czebotar in the permanent collection.

I have to remember not to even try to make something which is lighthearted and simple as opposed to something that I care deeply about and put all my feelings into.

With baskets, it's exciting that you have the possibility of making a structure—building it up, quietly, slowly—that's expressive, that uses materials in a new way, and that supports itself.

–Lillian Elliott

Born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1930, **Lillian Elliott** studied at the Detroit Institute of Arts and then at the Cranbrook Academy of Art where she earned her MFA. After graduating in 1955, Elliott became the sole female designer in the Ford Motor Co. Styling Department until 1958. Shortly after leaving Ford, she moved to California where she taught at the University of California, Berkeley, for five years alongside fiber artist **Ed Rossbach**, whose work is also featured in this exhibition. While in California, she took a course with fiber artist **Kay Sekimachi** (whose work is also included in this exhibition).

Even though her MFA degree emphasized ceramics and painting, Elliott became a significant name in contemporary fiber when she expanded the boundaries of basket making. Elliott not only used unexpected materials in new ways, she treated the basket

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as sculpture—a structure with an “inside” and an “outside” that could be explored from many different angles. Elliott was the recipient of two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and a **Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant**. She was recognized as a Living Treasure of California in 1985 and elected a Fellow of the American Craft Council in 1990. Thanks to various donors, RAM now owns 10 examples of Elliott’s work and an additional five collaborative pieces she made with artist **Pat Hickman**.

It depends a great deal on what happens to the canvas rather than what happens “over there” [referring to the subject)]. The unplanned is often important...I can’t paint what I can’t imagine and I can’t see what I can’t fathom.

—Joseph Friebert

Born in Buffalo, New York, in 1908, **Joseph Friebert** grew up in Milwaukee during its socialist heyday. Unsurprisingly, Friebert’s upbringing as the son of a union organizer had a huge effect on his work, which tackles social and political issues. He met his wife, fellow Wisconsin artist **Betsy Ritz**, during the Depression at an evening life-drawing class. The two married in 1937. Friebert’s daughter and brother are also artists.

Friebert began his career as a pharmacist after graduating from Marquette University. At the behest of family and friends, he enrolled at the Milwaukee State Teachers College (now the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee) where he earned a degree in art education in 1945. He went on to earn his MA at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (1951) and was awarded a Ford Foundation Fellowship at Columbia University (1952) which allowed him to study for a year at the Art Students League of New York. Having previously taught part time at both the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and the Layton School of Art, Friebert became full-time faculty at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee in 1957, where he taught painting and figure drawing until his retirement in 1976.

He exhibited widely during his long career both nationally and internationally, most notably at the American Pavilion of the 1956 Venice Biennale. Friebert’s work can be found in many American art museums, including the Museum of Wisconsin Art, the Chazen Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Milwaukee Art Museum. Friebert was posthumously awarded the Wisconsin Visual Art Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009 and last year his sketchbooks and personal papers became part of the collection of the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian. Besides painting and drawing, Friebert was also a printmaker. RAM has 19 works by Friebert, including prints, pastel and charcoal drawings, and paintings.

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The concept of baskets throughout history is so tied to form and function, and specific cultures, that all this is somehow reflected in the new baskets, no matter how free from them the contemporary basket maker seems, or perhaps would like to be. The idea of a basket exists somehow in the artist's mind, and that idea came from somewhere.

–Ed Rossbach

Ed Rossbach was born in Chicago in 1914. He earned his BA from the University of Washington in 1940 and his MA from Columbia University in 1941, at which point he joined the army and was stationed in the Aleutian Islands off of Alaska during World War II, where he began making baskets. After the war, Rossbach returned to school thanks to the GI Bill, and received his MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1947. Not long after his time at Cranbrook, Rossbach moved to California where he taught textiles at the University of California, Berkeley for 29 years. Like other weavers, basket makers, and fiber artists of his generation, Rossbach not only experimented with unorthodox forms but also incorporated non-traditional, modern materials such as plastic, newspaper, and food wrappers. His work speaks to an older tradition of craft through the techniques he used, but his materials addressed issues of consumerism, commercialism, and excess. Rossbach was named a Living Treasure of California in 1975, the same year he was named a Fellow by the American Craft Council. He is the author of several books on fiber art including *The New Basketry* (1976) and *The Nature of Basketry* (1986). Rossbach was married to fellow fiber artist **Katherine Westphal** (whose work can also be found in RAM's collection). Rossbach, who currently has 16 pieces at RAM, died in Berkeley, California, in 2002.

When I find a weaving structure I get excited about, I have to see all it can do.

–Kay Sekimachi

Born in San Francisco in 1926, **Kay Sekimachi** first began making art in a Japanese internment camp where she and her family were held during WWII. After the war, she attended the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, and began weaving in 1949. Sekimachi eventually pioneered the use of a loom to create three dimensional sculptural forms. In the 1950s, she studied with pioneering fiber artist **Trude Guermonprez** at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts. Both she and Guermonprez would later have their work featured in the seminal fine craft exhibition **OBJECTS: USA** (1969). Like **Jean Stamsta**, whose work is also featured in this exhibition, Sekimachi practiced tubular weaving, but increasingly incorporated unusual materials like nylon monofilament, linen, and rice paper, to give her forms a sense of airy transparency. Sekimachi married well-known wood turner **Robert Stocksdale** in 1972. The two often worked collaboratively, creating bowl duos in mirrored forms; hers out of fiber, his out of wood. More than one example of these are in RAM's collection and several are on display this spring in various galleries. More of Stocksdale's work is on view this spring in **Open Storage: RAM Showcases Wood Archives** in RAM's Ruffo and Schumann galleries. Like her husband, Sekimachi is also an American Craft Council Gold Medalist. Her work has been featured in numerous exhibitions and collections around the world. There are currently 20 of her works at RAM.

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The machine today [1972] produces marvelous yardages in excellent designs for every use, so in weaving I feel justified in being free from every necessity except those of good craftsmanship and free expression.

–Jean Stamsta

Jean Stamsta was born November 2, 1936, in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with her B.S. and B.A. in Art Education. Stamsta also studied at Fiberwork Center for the Textile Arts in San Francisco and at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine. Long a fan of intense color, she is known for creating hand dyed fabrics and the technique of “tubular weaving.” Stamsta played with color and pattern, creating abstract compositions and sculptural forms, imaginative landscapes, and still lifes. She received a National Endowment for the Arts Craftsman’s Fellowship Grant in 1974 and was a guest curator for the 1986 Milwaukee Art Museum fiber exhibition, **Fiber R/Evolution**. Her works can be found in the collections of the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, the Milwaukee Art Museum, the Museum of Wisconsin Art, and the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, as well as RAM’s collection where she is represented by 15 pieces. Stamsta died in Monches, Wisconsin, in 2013.

Fingerprints are the ultimate personal signature. They are uniquely my own and at the same time, anonymous, genderless and universal. Hanging threads left from the stitching process suggest a secret side or something turned inside-out.

–Merle Temkin

A graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a two-time recipient of the prestigious Pollock-Krasner award, **Merle Temkin** also attend the Rhode Island School of Design. Temkin earned her MFA in 1974 from the San Francisco Art Institute, after which she moved with her children and husband to New York City, where she still resides. Temkin’s work combines needlework, paint, cut paper, and canvas in compositions that explore pattern, color, and identity. Though she has worked on a large scale creating site specific installations and sculpture, her primary subject matter for many years was based on her own enlarged fingerprint, which she regards as a self-portrait. RAM currently has 34 of Temkin’s pieces in the collection, including 13 pieces from her **Gloves Series**. Temkin’s latest series examines the organic forms and individual patterns of trees and their bark.

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I believe the artist-photographer's core problem is to make work "come alive." First, the artist must be specific...Second, the materials must be used in a manner that targets and heightens that selectivity...In my work those goals have been pursued by photographing as a consequence of amazement, delight, curiosity, and love for what I see.

–Murray Weiss

Photographer **Murray Weiss** was born in Brooklyn, New York, where he attended The City University of New York–Brooklyn College. He went on to study with, and work for, legendary New York photographer Ralph Steiner. Like many artists, Weiss influenced future generations of artists—not just as a maker, but as a teacher. Weiss first taught at the Philadelphia College of Art, where he began as an associate professor and eventually became the director of the Fine Art Photography and Film Department. In 1972, after 17 years at the Philadelphia College of Art, Weiss moved to Milwaukee and worked for two years as the Director of the Fine Art Photography Department for the Layton School of Art. At the time, the Layton School had the only Fine Art Photography Department in the state. In 1975 Murray and fellow photographer Richard Lewis, founded the Milwaukee Center for Photography which they ran until 1986, after which Weiss became the head of the Fine Art Photography Department at Bennington College in Vermont. He retired from teaching in 1987 and moved back to Milwaukee, where he maintained a studio until his death in 2016. Weiss' work was recently included in the Milwaukee Art Museum exhibition, **Portrait of Milwaukee**, which runs until March 2020. RAM currently has over 200 works by Murray Weiss.

It never occurred to me to be a potter; it just happened. And that may be the best way for things to take place—that they flow into one's life without will.

–Beatrice Wood

Born in 1893, **Beatrice Wood** came from a wealthy New York family. Her upbringing included trips to Europe, finishing school, and a year of education in a French convent. During her time in Europe she became fluent in French, and began cultivating an interest in theater and the arts, all of which her parents hoped would allow her to marry well. Wood, however, rejected her parent's plans. Over the course of her 104 years, she was an actress (working alongside **Sarah Bernhardt**), a world traveler, a teacher, and an artist. Sometimes called the Mother of Dada, Wood was inspired by **Marcel Duchamp**, whom she met and befriended in 1916. Yet it was not until 1933, when she enrolled in a ceramics course at Hollywood High School, that Beatrice found her life's work. She was later mentored by renowned potters **Gertrud and Otto Natzler**, whose work can also be found in RAM's collection. RAM is fortunate to currently have 27 pieces by Wood in its collection. Artist, world citizen, and muse, Wood said she owed it all "to art books, young men, and chocolate."

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In the last few years, RAM's collection numbers have grown in part due to the Wisconsin-based Kohler Foundation, Inc. (KFI), which is "committed to the preservation of art environments and important collections, as well as Wisconsin culture and heritage." KFI played a role in RAM's attainment of several works on view in this gallery, especially those by John N. Colt, Theodore Czebotar, and Joseph Frieber.

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.

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.