



Precious Metals: Shining Examples from RAM's Collection

June 19 – October 2, 2016

Why do things that shine appeal to so many people? Scientific studies shared in early 2014 link the attraction to innate characteristics of human beings, including critical connections to sunlight and water. Culturally and socially, a shiny surface also seems to suggest something luxurious or to be treasured. The so-called “precious metals”—generally gold, silver, and varieties of platinum—are historically associated with being rare, naturally occurring, lustrous, and of high economic value.

This exhibition plays with the concept of preciousness and with how value is assigned to objects. Mainly comprised of shiny artworks made of precious metals, it also features shiny artworks of other materials and other metals—a comparison that is meant to draw attention to choices artists make about using one media over another. Whether referencing historical traditions, exploring ideas about culture and society, responding to the physical properties of metals, or experimenting with texture and color, contemporary artists consider the implications of their chosen materials in terms of what they want to convey.

RAM's collection includes many examples of jewelry, hollowware, and vessels either made of or adorned with something “lustrous.” In addition, there are artists who use gold or metallic leaf to amplify aspects of two-dimensional images. Drawing directly from RAM's holdings, ***Precious Metals*** features a wide variety of work.

Go for Baroque, on view at RAM from May 22 to September 4, explores similar concepts regarding the relationship between art, materials, and social and cultural issues.

Artist Biographies

The following are brief biographies of a select number of RAM collection artists whose works are featured in ***Precious Metals***.

Metalsmith **Arline Fisch** is best known for her introduction of weaving techniques into the field of contemporary jewelry. Fisch knits, weaves, crochets, braids, and plaits precious metals, creating supple textures and reflective planes. Born in Brooklyn in 1931, Fisch has her BS in art education from Skidmore College, and her MA from the University of Illinois. In 1956, she went to Denmark where she studied silversmithing at the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen. From 1961 to 2000, Fisch taught at San Diego State University. Among her many professional accomplishments, she won the American Craft Council Gold Metal in 2001, is a three time Fulbright scholarship

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winner, and spent three years as the president of the Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG), of which she was a founding member. Fisch's jewelry is not only part of RAM's collection, but in 2008 she also created a site specific installation, ***Creatures of the Deep***, for RAM's Windows on Fifth Gallery. This large scale display of organic sculpture remained at RAM through 2009, and then traveled extensively across the country. The installation was featured at art institutions in San Francisco, Memphis, and Houston.

Conceptual ceramicist **Leopold Foulem** was born in Caraquet, New Brunswick, Canada in 1945. Foulem studied at the New Brunswick Handicraft School and, briefly, at the Institut des Arts Appliqués, before receiving his bachelor's degree from the Montréal Alberta College of Art and Design. He went on to study at the Sheridan School of Craft and Design, and attended summer school at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine (where Arline Fisch has taught), before obtaining his MFA from Indiana State University. Interested in the history of ceramics, Foulem blends found objects and a wide variety of ceramic techniques to achieve colorful, playful works of art that combine historical styles, pop culture iconography, humor, and irony. Besides having his work in museum collections around the world, Foulem is also an expert on the ceramics of **Pablo Picasso**.

Current Professor of Art at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, **Lisa Gralnick** has been creating thought-provoking work for over three decades. While initially emphasizing a minimal aesthetic through jewelry and small objects, for some time, Gralnick has embraced a multi-media exploration of the meaning of objects as connected to social and cultural history and to the human condition. Gralnick has her BA from Kent State University. She received her MA from State University of New York – New Paltz, where she studied under contemporary jewelry pioneers **Robert W. Ebendorf** and **Kurt Matzdorf**, both of whom are featured in RAM's collection. Gralnick has previously taught at the Parsons School of Design – New York and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. She is a two-time fellow of the National Endowment for the Arts, and was recently interviewed by the Smithsonian Institution for their Archives of American Art.

Myra Mimplitsch-Gray has her BFA from the Philadelphia College of Art and her MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art. She is interested in the histories of objects and their uses, in addition to becoming known for exploring complex topics through a minimalist aesthetic and a strong sense of design. **Mimplitsch-Gray's** work is featured in museum collections around the world including the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the National Museum of Scotland, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 2014, the National Ornamental Metal Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, named Mimplitsch-Gray a "master metalsmith." She is currently a professor at the State University New York – New Paltz where she received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1998.

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Wisconsin native and fiber artist **Glen Kaufman** was born in Fort Atkinson in 1932. After attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Kaufman received his MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1959. Like Arline Fisch would do later, Kaufman attended the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen on a Fulbright scholarship. From 1967 to 2008, he taught fiber art at the University of Georgia-Athens, but spent a good deal of his time in Japan. The Asian influence on his work is apparent in his choice of materials (silk), but also his affinity for the shoji-like grid (a shoji being a heavily segmented wood and rice paper screen popular in Japan for dividing spaces). Using limited color palettes with accents of gold and silver leaf, Kaufman is able to turn each work into a “personal window” where “the image floats on a surface behind the window grid.” In addition, he uses metal leaf to further complicate the sense of depth. He states, “the metal leaf I use has inherent reflective qualities that vary depending on the type, color, thickness, and weave of the ground cloth. The reflection of light on the leaf and silk—which changes depending on the light source and the time of day—give an inner life and dynamic visual energy to these works.”

Japanese printmaker **Iwami Reika** was a pioneer in the male dominated printmaking culture of Japan in the years after WWII. Born in 1927 in Tokyo, Iwami attended Sunday art classes at Bunka Gakuin College, where she studied doll making, oil painting, and eventually printmaking. By 1953, she was exhibiting her prints through the Nihon Hanga Kyōkai (the Japanese Print Association). She became a lifelong member of that organization in 1955, the same year she graduated from Bunka Gakuin. In 1957, Iwami—in collaboration with **Yoshida Chizuko**—founded the Joryū Hanga Kyōkai (the Women’s Print Association), a collective of nine Japanese female printmakers. Though Iwami uses the centuries old technique of woodblock, her work is far from traditional. Abstract and organic, Iwami’s work relies on a minimal color palette of black and white with touches of gold and silver leaf, using texture and form to carry her compositions. One of only two female Japanese print artists to achieve international recognition, Iwami’s work is featured in the collections of the British Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among others.

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 theatre and the arts, all of which her parents hoped would allow her to marry well. Wood, however, rejected her parents’ plans. Over the course of her one hundred and four 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 wasn’t until 1933, when she enrolled in a ceramics course at Hollywood

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High School, that Beatrice found her life's work. Wood was known to remark, "I never meant to become a potter. It happened very accidentally." She was later mentored by renowned potters **Gertrude** and **Otto Natzler**, whose work can also be found in RAM's collection. Her friend **Anaïs Nin** would later say that Wood combined "her colors like a painter, (made) them vibrate like a musician." Lustre glazes became her trademark. In fact, it was a set of baroque dessert plates with a high shine lustre that encouraged her to first try her hand at making—when she could not find a matching teapot; she decided to try to make her own. Artist, world citizen, and muse, Wood said she owed it all "to art books, young men, and chocolate."