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Shie and Acord: New Acquisitions

June 18 – September 24, 2017

Inspired by events and observations from their personal lives, the wife and husband team of **Susan Shie** and **James Acord** craft lively quilts that combine text, fabric, thread, paint, and found objects. This show celebrates a recent gift to RAM's collection of both small- and large-scale works that demonstrate their collaborative working process.

While both artists contribute to their shared pieces in various ways, each does have specific interests and skills that inform their process. Shie—a sewer and painter—thinks about the quilts as diary “pages.” She applies text with a marker or airbrush, and then, hand stitches the printed elements while Acord machine stitches cursive text. Shie also adds paint, hand embroidery, and beadwork as well as sewn and shaped figures. Acord—a maker of custom leather goods—focuses on further hand embellishment and the addition of other crafted narrative elements, such as tooled leather cockroaches and animals. Found objects pulled from every day circumstances—such as an old silk bedspread, eating utensils, and seashells—are attached to the surfaces.

Full of dynamic imagery, color, and pattern, Shie and Acord's quilts offer opportunities for study and engagement with layers of details. While their works explore personal narratives, the subject matter also reflects their shared compassion for humanity and the environment. In fact, in 1989, Shie founded a project called Green Quilts, which asked “artists to dedicate their quilts to spiritual healing of the environment.” Shie and Acord have made several quilts that address these concerns, three of which are now part of RAM's collection.

Wooster, Ohio native **Susan Shie** says she hates “art rules.” She considers herself an “outsider artist,” someone who—in her own words—doesn't “fit in with either what we think of as the current painting tradition or with the regular art quilt part of the art world.” Shie received a BA in painting from The College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio, in 1981, but has been creating quilts since 1979. It was at The College of Wooster that Shie met ground-breaking feminist artist **Miriam Shapiro**, who was visiting the campus. Shapiro encouraged Shie to merge her “women's work” and fine art. Shie went on to earn her MFA in painting from Kent University's School of Art in 1986. Since then, she has been working as a studio artist and teaching painting, quilting, and drawing.

Her unique aesthetic, attention to detail, whimsical inclusion of non-traditional materials and found objects, and biographical subject matter have garnered Shie national and international acclaim. Winner of Best in Show at Quilt National 1987, she was an artist-in-residence at the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, Xi'an, China, in 1990, and in Dublin and Sligo, Ireland in 1994. Shie received a Visual Artist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, taught in New York at the PS1 Contemporary Art Center (an international contemporary art space now

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affiliated with the Museum of Modern Art), and was pronounced Teacher of the Year by *Professional Quilter Magazine* in 2008. Among her many other achievements, Shie's work also graced the cover of Quilt National's 2007 catalogue.

James Acord was born in Fairfield, Illinois, but has been living in Wooster since the age of eleven. A welder by trade, Acord was encouraged by Shie to explore his creative side after the two met in 1976. He began teaching himself leather work the following year, and soon after, he opened Barnfire Leather, his own custom leather work studio. By 1984, Acord left his job as a welder to focus on Barnfire Leather full-time. Specializing in fly fishing cases, he works directly with his customers designing and creating each piece by hand. Acord, who never employs machinery or stamps, has a custom order waiting list which currently extends into 2018.

Susan Shie and James Acord have worked collaboratively since 1989, when Acord first incorporated his leather work into Shie's quilts. Shie states, "even though Jimmy (Acord) is not doing much on the quilts anymore, or teaching much with me, especially not much outside of home...we still manage to collaborate a little back and forth in both studios." That same year, Shie also began **The Green Quilts Project**. Inspired during meditation, Shie began encouraging others to create quilts based on their spiritual philosophies for the purposes of healing. Several of the quilts in this exhibition are **Green Quilts**, though many other artists contributed to and participated in this initiative, which reached its pinnacle around 1995. Once the quilter had completed a **Green Quilt**, they would receive an official label and photograph their work for an archive of the project kept by Shie. **Green Quilts** theme shows happened periodically around the country until the project came to an end in May 2004.

In 1990, Susan Shie and James Acord married. The couple then bought their current home, Turtle Moon Studios, complete with "his" and "hers" studios, and began hosting Turtle Art Camps in 1995. Artists, both local and national, come and live at Turtle Moon Studios for a week at a time to learn drawing, painting, and quilting from Shie, and airbrushing from Acord.

Outside the home, Shie has taught workshops at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tennessee; the INTERQUILT symposium in Girona, Spain; and the UK Festival of Quilts. She has also lectured and taught at numerous quilting guilds and art centers around the US. Recently, Shie has begun teaching various classes online. She says, "The main thing is to learn to trust your drawing instincts and not judge your work, but enjoy making it." Shie encourages her students to produce "freehand, original work that reflects personal stories in images and writing."

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Of her technique, which has evolved over the decades, Shie states: "I used to embellish my work with not only huge amounts of hand stitching, but also lots and lots of tiny glass beads. It took many months to finish most of my pieces then. But now I prefer to let the detail created by my air pen, writing and drawing, to be what intrigues the viewer, and the sewing has become very secondary to the painted composition in my current work. This switching to machine quilting is because I've realized that it's the storytelling: the pictures and the writing, which are important to me, not how the piece is sewn, not the texture. Anyhow, the tiny writing itself makes a new texture, which I'm enjoying exploring the strengths of, when you consider that the viewer may not read it at all. Now it doubles as pattern."

We are pleased to present these nine works by Susan Shie, many in collaboration with her husband James Acord, from RAM's permanent collection. The Texas Quilt Museum will also host a solo exhibition of Shie's work later this year, entitled ***The Way I See It: The Narrative Art of Susan Shie***, which will run October 5 – December 22, 2017.