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## **Standing on Ceremony: Functional Ware from RAM's Collection**

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Objects that are connected to rituals—and therefore connected to social and cultural traditions—have a symbolic or metaphoric significance as well as a practical function. For example, the teapot can be a container for liquid but it could also be considered a vessel for communication and a symbol of interpersonal relationships as well as historic events. As part of a ritual, it is held in human hands yet it can also be “understood” without being touched. The teapot could be viewed in combination with other pieces, such as a cup and saucer. These sets imply further use and activity. As such, the teapot is a rather mundane object that can still have power.

*Standing on Ceremony* highlights functional artworks from Racine Art Museum's collection that could be used for everyday rituals, such as drinking and eating. Ceramic tea services and metal serving ware offer opportunities to reflect on the marriage of form and function in contemporary crafts.

In addition, the exhibition features goblets, vessels, jewelry, and non-functional works that allow a broader view of the concepts of ceremony and ritual. Self-consciously, contemporary artists sometimes choose to investigate the relationship between power, spirituality, and objects. They reference a broad range of sources—African rituals, Native American ceremonies, Western and non-Western religious traditions—as they create works that reverently speak to the desire to imbue materials and items with extraordinary meaning. The work they create references ritual objects even if they are no longer meant to be used in the same way.

Ritual objects could be any objects used in a ceremonial function. In museum collections, formally-described ritual objects include masks, chalices, totems, effigies, menorahs, vestments, and various other items. Artists and object makers across cultures have been employed to craft objects for grand ceremonial use.

In the broadest sense of the word, ceremonies could also be aspects of everyday life as well. Cups, teapots, bowls, plates, and serving flatware, like those made by **Fung Choo**, **Fred Fenster**, **Ken Ferguson**, **Terri Gelenian-Wood**, **Karen Karnes**, and **Toshiko Takaezu**, play with the idea of function as an aspect of daily rituals.

Ritual is a performance and certain objects become a part of the meaning conveyed in the various steps of the ceremony. **Judith Salomon** creates teapots because she “likes the idea of setting a table with functional pots, which leads to eating, and eating means there is community.”

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**Chris Gustin** is also interested in the way pottery can connect to the human figure, stating, “the pots that I respond to all speak to a clear, direct sense of the hand.” The direct correlation between objects such as these and the body—articulated through design—ties them to their intended use as well as to their metaphorical capacity.

Others, such as **Carol Eckert**, focus on the idea that objects could defy function in a traditional sense but still be useful. Looking to the legends and myths of many cultures—Egyptian, African, Minoan, Scandinavian, Oceanic and Pre-Columbian—she creates compelling sculptural narratives populated with a menagerie of animals, both real and mythical. The creatures themselves—as well as the non-functional baskets, “books,” wall reliefs, and staffs that they adorn—are constructed of a thin copper wire wrapped (or “coiled”) with embroidery floss.

Her vessels and staffs, in particular, reference objects whose function is beyond the practical and, in some ways, beyond even the metaphorical. Eckert has described them as “ceremonial” in function—a designation that makes a poetic link between the animals, the shapes, and her original source of inspiration for coiling—the Yoruba headdress. In theory, Eckert connects these types of objects to historical links between art and spirituality.

**JoAnne Russo** gathers materials from the forest—such as black ash, pine needles, sweetgrass, and porcupine quills—to give each basket she creates a sense of “animism.” The concept of animism—the anthropological idea that non-human entities possess a spiritual essence—again connects concepts of spirituality, myth, and ritual to objects.

Further playing off of the meaning of objects, potter **Linda Sikora**, like many of the artists shown here, “thinks of her pots not in animistic terms, but rather as dynamic objects in a living system.” She suggests that effective pots have affect and agency.