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**The Visionary Gift that Foreshadowed
Racine Art Museum's Collection Focus**

Racine, WI February 15, 2017

When RAM's Wustum Museum of Fine Arts first opened in 1941, it did not have a permanent collection. Any of the work on display in the galleries was borrowed from artists, collectors, and other museums as short term loans. This changed, and Wustum became an institution with an art collection, when Sylvester Jerry, the museum's first director, was able to obtain over 260 works produced through the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1943. Open at Racine Art Museum, February 19 - June 4, 2017, **WPA Art from RAM's Collection** includes a selection of prints, watercolors, drawings, photographs, and textiles generated through the WPA. This gift of work was visionary for Wustum and RAM in that it foreshadowed what would eventually become the collecting foci—works on paper and contemporary craft.

Working with state and local governments, the WPA was a national program that provided jobs and income for many unemployed during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Fortunately, the Works Progress Administration offered employment to 10,000 artists and craftspeople. Working from community art centers around the country, these artists were creating murals, paintings, sculpture, posters, textiles, theatre design, and more. Each state administered the program independently—RAM has examples of artwork produced through Wisconsin, New York, California, and Illinois. This exhibition provides us with a window to the past; a view toward understanding what it was like to be an artist during this devastating time.

While there were artists from a wide variety of backgrounds supported by the FAP/WPA, the subject matter of much of the visual art produced emphasized landscapes, social circumstances, architecture, and people. Following trends of the day, the artists favored realistic-rather than abstracted-styles. There were some making

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pointed statements about cultural circumstances or documenting the effect of economic disparity, yet there were also those creating designs—as seen in the textiles produced through the Milwaukee Handicraft Project (MHP)—that were based on nature, the landscape, and folk traditions.

RAM has work from artists that were, or became, well-regarded nationally and internationally, such as the photographer Berenice Abbott and the painter Stuart Davis. They were a part of the New York WPA along with Arshile Gorky, Louise Nevelson, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and David Smith. Thirty Wisconsin artists are represented in RAM's holdings, including Edmund Lewandowski, Schomer Lichtner, Robert Schellin, Alfred Sessler, Robert von Neumann, and Santos Zingale, who became well-known artists as well as highly influential teachers and mentors in the region.

While the works produced through the WPA are now historical, they first entered the collection as contemporary art, made by artists who were alive and still making work. This is significant because it reflects an ongoing commitment on the part of RAM's Wustum Museum and RAM to support living artists by exhibiting and collecting their work. Today, the museum celebrates the importance of this visionary gift and the discerning attention given to collecting fine examples of contemporary craft and works on paper.

This exhibition is made possible at Racine Art Museum by: Platinum Sponsors - Karen Johnson Boyd and William B. Boyd, Windgate Charitable Foundation; Diamond Sponsor - Osborne and Scekcic Family Foundation, SC Johnson; Gold Sponsors - Herzfeld Foundation, Johnson Bank, National Endowment for the Arts, W.T. Walker Group, Inc.; Silver Sponsors - Andis Foundation, Racine Community Foundation, Real Racine, Runzheimer International Ltd, United Way Racine County, Wisconsin Arts Board; Bronze Sponsors - CNH Industrial, EC Styberg Foundation, Educators Credit Union, In Sink Erator, The Norbell Foundation, Orkney Springs Retreat, Ruud Family Foundation, Southern Connecticut Polymer Clay Guild, Wisconsin Public Radio.

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Together, the two campuses of the Racine Art Museum, RAM in downtown Racine at 441 Main Street and the Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts at 2519 Northwestern Avenue, seek to elevate the stature of contemporary crafts to that of fine art by exhibiting significant works in craft media with painting, sculpture and photography, while providing outstanding educational art programming.

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Docent led contemporary craft and architectural tours of the museums are available. Both campuses of the Racine Art Museum, are open Tuesday – Saturday 10:00 am – 5:00 pm, and are closed Mondays, Federal holidays and Easter. RAM is open Sunday Noon – 5:00 pm, while Wustum is closed Sundays. An admission fee of \$5 for adults, with reduced fees for students and seniors, applies at RAM. Admission to Wustum is free. Members are always admitted without charge to either campus.