

White Gold: The Appeal of Lustre

“White gold” was a name given to porcelain wares centuries ago in Western Europe, inspired by the value placed on both the objects produced and the perceived preciousness of the processes of their manufacture. Playing on that name, this exhibition features the work of contemporary artists who—in one form or another—utilize shiny materials, such as lustre glazes and gold, often in combination with more earthy media, like clay.

From the 1500s through the 1700s, demand for porcelain wares—primarily put in service as luxury items—and competition among makers became so important that the worth of the porcelain was compared to other valuable goods, including gold. These determinations set the stage for how we understand certain kinds of materials today.

Combining works on loan with works from RAM’s collection, **White Gold** is not as concerned with historical wares as it is with the way materials can become metaphors for relationships between societies and objects. This exhibition offers a context for exploring how metals and lustre glazes can be visually compelling while raising questions about their economic, sentimental, and cultural significance.

Artists whose works are featured include **Ralph Bacerra, Bennett Bean, A. Blair Clemo, Philip Cornelius, Megan Corwin, Leopold Foulem, Keiko Fukazawa, John Glick, Rain Harris, Rian de Jong, Cindy Kolodziejski, Tara Locklear, Philip Maberry, Ruta Reifen, Adrian Saxe, Yoko Sekino-Bove, Joan Takayama-Ogawa, Jason Walker, Beatrice Wood, Irina Zatceyva, and Silvia Zampa.**

The history of ceramic production is rich with works that have surfaces that are metallic and, for lack of a better word, shiny. In a formal, traditional sense, lusterware (works with iridescent metallic glazes that suggest precious metals) is an ancient invention traceable to ninth-century Islamic potters in what is today Iraq. Similar to the Western Europeans who struggled to find a recipe for top-notch porcelain in later years, the potters of Eastern Islamic lands were encouraged in their endeavors by the success of and demand for high-quality wares imported from China.

The idea that “gold” could be produced from and applied to materials that contained no actual gold has been incredibly appealing to many cultures. The desire to mimic the look and impart a sense of value to an object by adding a gilt finish or accent has persisted over time. However, the question

of why human beings—and birds, as well as other animals—are drawn to the shiny may not be explainable in terms that are only social or economic. As featured artist **Yoko Sekino-Bové** suggests: “I think our obsession for gold, silver, and shiny things may even go deeper than the social and economic meanings, since some birds such as crows and jays collect them without knowing what these are. They just get attracted to the shininess, and our passion for the precious metals may be partially instinctive.”

Gold is associated with wealth, elegance, luxury, even the divine. The aesthetic shine and shimmer of metallic color appeals to the eye. With the works of **White Gold**, gold—



Ruta Reifen
Ring (Waiting for Godot Series), 2012
Porcelain and gold-plated brass
Collection of the Artist
1 x 1/2 x 1/2 inches
Photography: Ran Plotenzki



Adrian Saxe
Ewer (Jawgasm: RTC), 1994
Porcelain and stoneware with glazes and lustres
Racine Art Museum, The Donna Moog Teapot Collection
14 1/4 x 9 x 4 inches
Photography: Michael Tropea, Chicago

Racine Art Museum
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Nancy Megan Corwin
My Dollies Have Gold Nugget Jewelry Brooch, 2012
 Porcelain, 24k- and 14k-gold, wood, pearls, and paint
 Courtesy of Facère Jewelry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA
 2 3/4 x 2 1/2 inches diameter
 Photography: Douglas Yaple

Nancy Megan Corwin

The deep glow of gold has been an irresistible attraction to humans since its first use. Porcelain shares in this message of beauty and preciousness, especially when used in finely crafted dolls, too delicate to function as anything but indicators of status and wealth. The baby and/or doll decorated with precious materials is stripped of what we consider to be normal and becomes a symbol in our Western society of “money to burn.”

A. Blair Clemo

Much of my work is glazed in a manganese saturate glaze, resulting in a metallic façade on the surface. At first glance, the viewer may expect that the object is cast from precious metal, the form and surface heavily referencing ornate silver service ware. Upon closer viewing, this façade becomes evident and calls into question how we assess an object’s value based on the material it is made from.

Rain Harris

Lusters impart a luxuriant surface that treads a thin line between the sensual and the lascivious...I look to the contradictions that reside between the tasteful and the tawdry; I question the notion of good taste.

or the look of it—and luster are utilized as accents or sheens in glazes. The shine those materials provide is an integral part of pattern and form and influences the context for the entire work. The pieces featured represent investigations of a variety of topics—from the interplay of form, function, and decoration to the relationship between human beings and the natural world.

Quotations

In the following, featured **White Gold** artists provide insight into their work and their use of materials.

Ralph Bacerra

My pieces are based on traditional ideas and engage in certain cultural appropriations—in form, in design, in glaze choices. However, my work is not postmodern in the sense that I am not making any statements...

I am committed more to the idea of pure beauty. When it is finished, the piece should be like an ornament, exquisitely beautiful.



Rain Harris
Bliss, 2006
 Porcelain, lustres, Lucite beads, glass, and citrine
 Collection of the Artist
 12 x 7 1/2 x 13 inches
 Photography Courtesy of the Artist



Yoko Sekino-Bové

I don’t expect the gold luster to instantly increase the value and/or attractiveness of my work, but I want to play with the idea of what people consider as “value” by using a fake golden shininess...I find the usage of a fake gold color created by a completely unrelated metal on my genuine-fake teapots amusing if not exaggerating my point. All that glitters is not gold, as they say.

Yoko Sekino-Bové
Total Rip-Off Teapot, Genuine Fake China Series, 2010
 Porcelain, glazes, and gold luster
 Collection of the Artist
 4 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches
 Photography Courtesy of the Artist