

# Magic Mud: Masterworks in Clay from RAM's Collection



**Toshiko Takaezu**  
From the *Star Series*, 1999 – 2000  
Glazed stoneware  
Racine Art Museum, Gift of the Artist  
Dimensions vary  
Photography: Michael Tropea, Chicago

The Racine Art Museum's contemporary craft collection—the largest in the United States—currently has more works in ceramic than any other singular media. A 1999 gift of almost 250 teapots from collector **Donna Moog** both defined and highlighted a collecting strength of the museum, and set the stage for future gifts and acquisitions.

Represented by sculptural, as well as functional, works created by both emerging and established artists, RAM's holdings in clay are dynamic and diverse.

While not encyclopedic, **Magic Mud** emphasizes the variety of work in RAM's collection by primarily featuring either multiple examples of an artist's work and/or a work that is relatively large in size and scope. With functional and sculptural work, as well as an installation, this show reflects the varied face of ceramics in the United States over the last few decades. A number of options for different clay bodies, firing, and building techniques are represented. The exhibition continues in the Ruffo and Schumann Galleries with smaller-scale sculpture, vessels, and teapots.

Artists whose works are featured include **Christina Cordova, Richard DeVore, Eddie Dominguez, Jack Earl, James Lovera, Michael Lucero, Mark Pharis, Jeff Oestreich, Beth Cavener Stichter, Toshiko Takaezu, Peter Voukos, and Paula Winokur.**

The contemporary landscape of clay cannot be easily summarized except to say that it is fluid and full of examples of different approaches to an ancient material.

In the mid-twentieth century, those working in clay purposefully pushed the boundaries of the medium, both literally and figuratively. Narrative, sculptural works and abstract, non-functional forms began to crop up in studios and galleries nation-wide as artists explored the past, present, and future of a medium wrought with history. Simultaneously, potters and those creating functional work continued to do so—forging new paths and maintaining, even if modifying, traditions.

## Quotations

The following tidbits from and about the artists whose works are included in **Magic Mud** offer insight into their imagination and intent as artists:

**Racine Art Museum**  
441 Main Street  
Downtown Racine  
262.638.8300  
ramart.org

**Annette Corcoran** (Ruffo and Schumann Galleries)

*My current work is still guided by birds in the ever-changing exploration of nature and clay; that is the interplay of observation, fantasy, imagination and technical skills. I embrace a process of experimentation in representing the movement and individual character of each bird...*



**Richard DeVore**  
R 384-1983, 1983  
Glazed stoneware  
Racine Art Museum, Gift of Karen Johnson Boyd  
13 x 12 x 10 1/2 inches  
Photography: Jon Bolton

### Christina Cordova

*Through the primary vehicle of the figure and the materiality of clay I am in constant search for a presence...It is through these objects that I begin to understand the indeterminate and ever changing aspects of our humanity.*

### Eddie Dominguez

*All of my work is imbued with my love of the land, the home environment, nostalgia and ideas of culture...To me, art was my next-door neighbor making a quilt; it was my aunt crocheting, or my mother making a dress... The most honest influences that I have had can be found in the little things of my home...*

### Ruth Duckworth (Ruffo and Schumann Galleries)

*Quite often, when I am working on a piece (some take me several weeks to do), I suddenly find there is something wrong, however slightly, with the form. I have to keep working on it even if it means that the piece doesn't survive. I know that other people would probably not notice this—but once I have the form, I can't live without it.*

### James Lovera

*By concentrating on perfecting form, James Lovera unleashes upon the "canvas" of his chargers and bowls interpretations of the textures and hues that surround him in nature...He has also pushed the chemistry of his glazes to fit to porcelain like a skin.*  
—Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts

### Mark Pharis

*My forms and volumes are arrived at through the use of two-dimensional paper patterns and made from clay slabs...In addition to the many admirable and influential historical pots that have served as an inspiration and foundation for all potters, I admire architecture—the grace and use of materials that opulate rural agricultural landscape.*

### Beth Cavener Stichter

*The sculptures I create focus on human psychology, stripped of context and rationalization, and articulated through animal and human forms. On the surface, these figures are simply feral and domestic individuals suspended in a moment of tension... I want to pry at those uncomfortable, awkward edges between animal and human.*

### Paula Winokur

*Porcelain is a material usually thought of as delicate, fragile and transparent. Considered the primary clay from which all other clays are derived, it comes from the earth as pure white, strong and durable. It attracted me because of these qualities rather than its transparency...*



**Annette Corcoran**  
*Short Billed Dowitcher, 2006*  
Porcelain  
Racine Art Museum, Gift of Gail M. Brown  
7 5/8 x 9 3/4 x 4 1/2 inches  
Photography: Jon Bolton



**Michael Lucero**  
*Castle High (Seated Totem Series), 2007*  
Glazed white earthenware and found wood chair frame  
Racine Art Museum, Gift of David and Jacqueline Charak  
70 x 20 x 16 inches  
Photography: Jon Bolton

### Star Series

*One of the best things about clay is that I can be completely free and honest with it. And clay responds to me. The clay is alive and responsive to every touch and feeling...The whole process is an interplay between the clay and myself, and often the clay has much to say.*  
—Toshiko Takaezu

A third of **Magic Mud** is dedicated to Toshiko Takaezu's **Star Series**, a massive grouping of 13 forms that has been described as a "masterpiece." Inspired by the generosity of longtime RAM donor, Karen Johnson Boyd, and by her own desire to keep the work together, Takaezu gifted the entire series to RAM. The series, with large enclosed vessel forms named after stars or star-related entities, can be configured in numerous ways. As with other works, Takaezu treats the glazes as paint, offering abstract compositions of color and drips. Each piece was hand-built with clay coils over a 5-day period.