



Fool the Eye: Addressing Illusion in Contemporary Art

February 9 – September 24, 2022

Traditionally, the phrase *trompe l'oeil* (French for fool or deceive the eye) is associated with two-dimensional imagery that appears to be three-dimensional space or objects. While the phrase gained popularity in the early nineteenth century, illusionistic images—especially as associated with artistic endeavors—were being created centuries before that in Greco-Roman mosaics, Renaissance cathedral ceilings, and Dutch still lifes. More modern interpretations include large-scale murals on building exteriors as well as street chalk drawings.

Trompe l'oeil artwork is regarded by some as the manipulation of materials with highly technical skill. In addition, there is a kind of humor implicit in the object's creation—knowing that the viewer will likely have a moment of surprise or disbelief. Expanding on this, contemporary artists use illusion to draw attention to the meaning of objects, to suggest narratives and stories of human presence or absence, or to comment on society, culture, and history.

Three-dimensional explorations of illusion have often included suggesting one material through another—such as sculpting “fabric” made of marble. This exhibition, with works drawn from RAM's collection, features contemporary interpretations of trompe l'oeil technique. While most of the works included are three-dimensional, two-dimensional examples offer more direct links to art historical precedents.

Biographies and statements from select featured artists

John Cederquist creates furniture that fools the eye. Employing a bold style based on cartoons, Japanese aesthetics, and pop culture iconography, Cederquist turns chair backs and cabinet doors into fabrics, water, and self-referential illusions. After being struck by the construction of space in old cartoons, he decided to try to explore furniture in “two-and-a-half dimensions.” While utilizing traditional furniture forms as a structure and base, he pieces together surface imagery in a way that suggests perspective and depth. Essentially, Cederquist has developed his distinct aesthetic using a style of marquetry—where he uses veneers, resins, stains, and shaped wood components that are pieced and inlaid, almost like a puzzle. RAM has two works by Cederquist in the collection, including one of the artist's famed kimono-shaped cabinets which has a broad design that provides a large flat background for his elaborate imagery.

With a BA and an MFA from Long Beach State College, California, Cederquist taught two- and three-dimensional design at Saddleback College in Mission Viejo, California from 1976 to 2008. He continues to make work and participate in exhibitions across the country. In addition to RAM's collection, Cederquist's work is in other major museum collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois.

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Canadian artist **Karen Dahl** has become well-known for her ceramic sculptures that confound viewers. Dahl's works appear to be assorted objects arranged into groupings—sometimes fantastical, always intriguing. In reality, they are life-size interpretations of commonplace objects crafted with hand-built and press-molded clay, which is hand-painted and airbrushed with glazes.

Of her work, she states: “As a child leafing through art books, and later visiting art galleries during my travels, I have always gravitated towards early European still-life depictions—the more realistic, the better. Not surprisingly, the objects surrounding me in everyday life, both natural and man-made, have always inspired me. I am a compulsive collector and I adore the bizarre and unusual...My work is trompe l’oeil with layers of mystery, reflection, humour [sic] and occasional menace.”

To the three works by Dahl already in RAM's collection, ten more were recently added along with 17 works by her husband, **James Doran**. Doran exhibits a similar aesthetic but crafts his works out of enamel on metal.

Paul Dresang began his artistic career creating fully functional vessels. In 1985, Dresang started to work with porcelain, and discovered his passion for creating pieces inspired by surrealism. He is well known for making teapots that look as if they are emerging from unzipped leather bags. Dresang hopes to make a personal connection with the viewer by triggering a memory or experience. About his work, he states, “I hope they [in reference to the person viewing his art] will want to touch it—need to touch it. I want my work to provide the ultimate lure of the object and I am finished and most satisfied only when they too are hooked.”

Dresang earned a BFA at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh and continued his education at the University of Minnesota, earning an MFA in ceramics in 1974. His work can be found in other collections throughout the world such as the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Logan, Utah; the Renwick Gallery, National Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; and the Tai Pei County Ceramics Museum, Tai Pei, Taiwan.

Painter **Manuel Hughes** was born in Arkansas in 1938. Hughes earned both a BA and an MFA in Fine Art from the University of Missouri. He has been active in the art world since the early 1970s. Hughes' work realistically captures ordinary and mundane objects set against non-descript backgrounds. This type of presentation pushes the viewer to consider each item's unique personality. Hughes divides his time between New York, New York and Paris, France, where he explores antique and thrift stores for objects—such as crates, tins, and toys—that he uses as subjects for his paintings. He dedicated more than three decades teaching at Pratt Institute's School of Design, Brooklyn, New

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York. Hughes' work can be found in institutions throughout the US such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York; the Newark Museum of Art, New Jersey; and the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York.

Turning a hobby into a primary creative focus, **Tory Hughes** (1958 – 2018) was among the earliest artists to use polymer as an artistic media. She gained a reputation for her innovative techniques—employing methods that allowed her to create pieces imitating natural materials, such as ivory or malachite. On these methods she stated, “It was obvious that there was this whole way of taking in everything that we see and using a more sophisticated, evolved awareness of what polymer was about.” She continued, “What exact kind of whitish-gray color is in that agate, and on a scale of one to ten how shiny is that surface? And then how can I get that out of polymer?” Throughout her career, Hughes was a mentor to thousands—reaching students through workshops, articles, and/or instructional videos.

Artists of Color at RAM

RAM is committed to supporting diverse voices—whether that diversity reflects race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, social standing, or world perspective.

In this moment in time, it is critical that spotlights are placed on voices that have been historically underrepresented, and at RAM that begins with women and artists of color. Artists of color are identified in this context as non-white and non-European in heritage. This simplification—which is arguably a flawed starting point—does not account for the nuances and variations of society. It is a beginning—a way to direct those who want to educate themselves about what is possible when new perspectives are discovered. Modifications to this approach are expected as RAM learns and grows. Further, as an educational institution rooted in the humanities and using art as a catalyst, RAM wants to encourage inquiry and exploration about the world in which we live. RAM hopes spotlighting artists of color spurs further engagement with these artists and their ideas.

The following is a list of artists of color whose works are included in this exhibition. This effort is not meant to single out artists to stigmatize them but to magnify and cast a spotlight on their significance. It reflects intention, goodwill, and an attempt to reckon with years of historical underrepresentation. RAM hopes this provides opportunities for audiences to learn more about these artists and their ideas. Visitors are encouraged to take note and research these artists via the internet to find out more about their biographies and larger bodies of work.

Manuel Hughes
Ah Leon
Wen Xia Lu
Jian Xing Lu

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Women Artists at RAM

RAM acknowledges the efforts of self-identifying women in the art world consistently and sincerely at all times. The museum highlights how women are inextricably woven—and often the foundation—of creative endeavors and discourse. By current count, 41% of the artists in RAM’s collection are women. This percentage—which is consistently increasing—is already substantially greater than the ratios calculated at other organizations with permanent collections and active exhibition programs. At RAM, work made by different genders is considered for inclusion in the museum’s holdings on equal terms. And notably, because RAM relies on gifts of artwork to build the collection, this policy has been reinforced by open-minded donors who have collected, and then donated, quality work regardless of the gender of the artist.

The following is a list of women whose works are included in this exhibition. This effort—similar to efforts to highlight artists of color at RAM—is not meant to single out artists to stigmatize them but to magnify and cast a spotlight on their significance. It reflects intention, goodwill, and an attempt to reckon with years of historical underrepresentation. RAM hopes this provides opportunities for audiences to learn more about these artists and their ideas. Visitors are encouraged to take note and research these artists via the internet to find out more about their biographies and larger bodies of work.

Susan Beiner
Carol Cohen
Karen Dahl
Tory Hughes
Marilyn Levine
Dulany Lingo
Lindsay Locatelli
Wendy Wallin Malinow