



Precedents: Past Meets Present in Contemporary Glass and Clay

February 9 – September 24, 2022

Artists gather influences from an almost endless variety of sources including cultural, social, and historical people, places, and ideas, as well as personal experiences and perspectives, and, last but not least, the work of other artists and other creatives. Whether or not an individual contemporary artist is directly inspired by an object or image from the past, it can be useful to compare and contrast recently made work with older similar examples. This kind of juxtaposition offers new contexts for understanding how motifs resurface regularly through generations, how much variety is possible within the dynamic of objects made in a certain material of relative size, and how artists might look at each other's work for inspiration.

While RAM has an array of work in the collection, this particular exhibition was spurred by the recent acquisition of a number of nineteenth-century glass goblets and mid-twentieth-century ceramic vessels. A selection of contemporary goblets—part of a gift of more than 100 works by various artists—are paired with historic pieces. The goblets of **Fritz Dreisbach** and **James Minson**, to name just two, reflect contemporary approaches that incorporate tradition yet also expand upon it. Small-scale ceramic vases and bowls from early-twentieth-century producers—such as **Van Briggle Pottery** and **Weller Pottery**—are paired with works from later in the century. These contemporary pieces include brilliantly colored *Feelies* from **Rose Cabat** and a patterned vessel from Acoma Pueblo maker, **Margaret Ascencio**.

Biographies and statements from select featured artists

During the rise of the **Arts and Crafts** movement in the late nineteenth century, glass and ceramics were just two materials used in a large-scale effort to reinforce the importance of items made by hand. As the Industrial Revolution encouraged mass production and mechanization, craftspeople wanted to downplay items that were commercially produced while stressing the value and beauty of the handmade. "Art pottery" from the time period, such as that featured in **Precedents**, was being produced around the country in factory-type conditions but by skilled workers, in limited quantities. Manufacturers such as **Van Briggle Pottery** (Colorado) and **Weller Pottery** (Ohio) reinforced these ideas, further underscoring Arts and Craft philosophies about functional and/or aesthetically pleasing objects made by hand.

Jade Snow Wong was not only a significant ceramic and enamel artist, she was also one of the first people to write about the experience of being a twentieth-century Chinese American as she did in her autobiography, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. Wong graduated from Mills College in Oakland, California, in 1942. After college, her enamel and ceramic works garnered so much attention from collectors and curators that she was offered a solo show at the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois. Her solo exhibition then travelled to Detroit,

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Michigan; Omaha, Nebraska; and Portland, Oregon. As Wong's writings and artwork gathered acclaim, the US State Department took notice and asked her to serve as a cultural ambassador in Asia. Today, her artwork can be found in the Detroit Institute of Art, Michigan; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York; and the International Ceramic Museum, Faenza, Italy. There is currently one of Wong's works in RAM's collection.

Maria Martinez (1887 – 1980) learned to make ceramics by watching her elders. By the age of 13, Martinez was already celebrated within the San Ildefonso Pueblo for her skills. Along with her husband, **Julian Martinez** (1879 – 1943), she aided in reviving an ancient local process for creating all-black pottery. Over many generations in the Pueblo, ceramic pieces had been created in red or polychrome. The blackware produced by Maria and Julian Martinez stood in blunt contrast to these works and became very popular by the 1920s both within and beyond the Pueblo. Today, Maria Martinez is considered one of the most influential Native American artists of the twentieth century.

George Ohr's (1857 – 1918) extravagant personality, bushy handlebar mustache, and self-imposed nickname, "The Mad Potter of Biloxi," have become as much a part of the artist's legacy as his compelling ceramic pieces. Known for exceptionally thin-walled pots with looping handles or sloping sides and unusual—often metallic—glazes, Ohr's work has served as inspiration for many modern artists who responded to his experiments and self-styled promotion. Ohr studied under **Joseph Fortune Meyer** at Newcomb College, New Orleans, Louisiana, in the Art Pottery department. Throughout his career, Ohr moved between New Orleans and Biloxi, Mississippi. His greatest success was posthumous. In 1968, pieces Ohr had given to family members were sold to an antiques dealer who promoted his work across the northeast United States, launching nationwide interest in the artist. Today, his work can be found in the collections of well-known institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York and the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington, DC.

Hallmarks of early nineteenth-century glassware—including some of the goblets in RAM's collection—are highly ornamental with engraving, cutting, polishing, and painting. These techniques have complex histories, as noted by a Milwaukee area artist, **JoAnna Poehlmann**, involved in a recent gift of goblets to RAM:

1. Etched and engraved glass began in the Bohemian mountains in the 1500s where the stonecutters (known as "steinschneiders") were cutting agates, amethysts, jasper, garnets, topazes, sapphires, etc. found in the hills. Rudolph I commissioned these craftsmen to carve and engrave glass in his court.

2. In King Henry VIII's time, dinnerware (forks, spoons) hadn't been in use yet and people were eating with their fingers (which were greasy) and a lot of glasses were broken by

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slipping to the floor. The solution was to apply raspberry prunts which gave more traction when holding the stems. Venetian glasses have the Lion of St. Mark's imprinted on their prunts.*

***Prunts** are blobs of glass that are attached to an object. As stated above, prunts can be used to help keep a firm grip on the vessel. They can also be seen as a type of decoration on glassware.

Designs were streamlined moving into the twentieth century but the emphasis of the **Arts and Crafts** philosophies—where form and decoration would relate to purpose and material—still helped to shape glass production. Certain designers, such as **Louis C. Tiffany**, thrived as decorative arts flourished. With **Tiffany & Co.**, he strived to create vessels that would identify him as an artist while also making editioned works that could be marketed to a larger audience. Tiffany gave his glass vessels the invented name of *Favrile*. Derived from the Latin word *faber*, which means smith or artisan, his term *Favrile* connected the work directly to the idea of being handmade. **Charles de Kay** in his 1914 book, *The Art Work of Louis C. Tiffany*, described Tiffany's *Favrile* works as being "...distinguished by certain remarkable shapes and brilliant or deeply toned colors, usually iridescent like the wings of certain American butterflies, the necks of pigeons and peacock, the wing-covers of various beetles."

Fritz Dreisbach was a major catalyst within the studio glass movement. Dreisbach studied the history of glass extensively—early American and Venetian *latticino* influences are recognizable in his work. *Latticino* is the meticulous arrangement of glass filaments into a lattice pattern within the glass. About this work, Dreisbach stated, "What I am after is glass that light moves through easily, appearing never to stop." In 2002, the Glass Art Society presented Dreisbach with its highest honor, the Lifetime Achievement Award, for his "unique and significant contributions to the world of glass." In addition to being featured in numerous collections and exhibitions, Dreisbach was an artist-in-residence at numerous schools, including Tacoma Glass Museum, Washington; Neusole Glass-Works, Cincinnati, Ohio; and West Texas A & M University, Canyon, Texas.

Elizabeth Mears began flameworking glass in the early 1990s when she studied the technique at Penland School of Crafts, Bakersville, North Carolina. Today, Mears' work is made with a combination of glass and mixed media. She uses flameworking—a process by which a torch is used to melt glass—to get a high level of depth and detail in her pieces. Mears' works reflect both her inner and outer worlds, using nature as a catalyst to express the relationships between the two spheres. Mears has two main bodies of work: limited production runs and sculptures. Limited production pieces consist of goblets, candlesticks, and stoppered bottles while her sculptures are wall and pedestal installations that incorporate mixed media.

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Third generation glassworker, **James Minson**, followed in the path of his grandparents who were scientific glassblowers in London, England and later established the Minson Scientific Company in Sydney, Australia. Minson studied Jewelry Making, Glass, and Silversmithing at Sydney College of the Arts, earning a BA there. He continued his education at Antioch University, Seattle, Washington, where he earned an MA in Psychology and Art Therapy. Today, Minson's work is represented in the collections of the Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York; Krannert Art Museum at the University of Illinois at Urbana, Champaign, Illinois; and the Perlen Museum, Berlin, Germany. Combining his knowledge with a desire to use art to help people, Minson established a glass studio in 2002 at the Misioneros del Camino, a Guatemalan orphanage. While pursuing his masters degree in Psychology, Minson created a study that evaluated the beneficial effects that creating glass art had in other aspects of the Guatemalan children's lives.

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.

Margaret Ascencio
Kishi Eiko
Margaret Ponce Israel
Cliff Lee

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Maria Martinez
Kayo O'Young
Rito Talavera Quezada
Akio Takamori
Jade Snow Wong

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.

Nancy Y. Adams
Margaret Ascencio
Suzan Benzle
Rose Cabat
Elaine Coleman
Roseline Delisle
Kishi Eiko
Karen Gilbert
Tracy Glover
Margaret Ponce Israel
Karen Karnes
Eileen Lewenstein
Maria Martinez
Elizabeth Ryland Mears
Margaret Neher
Kayo O'Young
Jade Snow Wong
Beatrice Wood
Irina Zaytceva