

# R|A|M

## **RAM Showcase: Abstraction**

February 9 – June 11, 2022

Abstract art—a term that can be applied to work that ranges from non-representational to that with imagery more closely aligned to perceived reality—is considered a product of a modern, so-called Western world. As technological and industrial advances began to greatly impact everyday life, artists saw abstraction as a way to address intellectual, philosophical, and sometimes even spiritual, concepts.

In the United States, abstract art strongly gained hold as a visual language in the wake of World War II. Contemporary artists who adopt abstraction as part of their practice often use it to explore intangible ideas and emotions, the nature of materials, and/or formal art elements such as pattern, color, shape, and line.

The *RAM Showcase* series of exhibitions highlight conversations around the work of artists of color. Some of the artists featured in *Abstraction*, **Sam Gilliam** in particular, have historically come under fire for preferring abstraction and not addressing contemporary social, political, or cultural issues directly in their work. Gilliam did not want to be pressured by anyone to make a certain kind of work. He felt abstraction could be more powerful than political subject matter. When asked if he “considered his art black art,” Gilliam answered, “Being black is a very important point of tension and self-discovery. To have a sense of self-acceptance, we blacks have to throw off this dichotomy that has been forced on us by the white experience...I think there is a need to live *universally*.”

### **Biographies and statements from select featured artists**

**Candida Alvarez’s** drawings, photographs, and prints are inspired by world news and personal memories. Alvarez earned a BFA from Fordham University, New York, in 1977 and continued her education at Yale School of Art, New Haven, Connecticut—earning an MFA there in 1997. Her work can be found in collections such as the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois; and the Virginia Museum of Art, Richmond, Virginia.

In an interview, Alvarez stated, “Having run away from seemingly inadequate definitions for abstract painting, I find myself immersed in a relationship that tracks, exchanges, and shreds the world of news, front-page photography, design, and pictorial memory into a subject-less pictorial mash-up. In essence, there is no more picture; there is only painting.”

<https://www.candidaalvarez.com/>

<https://www.gavlakgallery.com/artists/candida-alvarez>

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University of Wisconsin-Parkside Professor **Trenton Baylor** has been creating sculptural furniture for several years although he originally studied painting while at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is inspired by a range of things, from what he finds beautiful to what he—by his own admission—does not know or understand. Baylor's process often begins with design drawings and maquettes or models. RAM's collection includes a watercolor by Baylor purchased from ***Watercolor Wisconsin 2002***.

<https://www.uwp.edu/learn/instructorprofiles/facultystaffdetail.cfm?uid=baylor>

Originally from the border area of Reynosa, Mexico, and McAllen, Texas, **Laritz Garcia** values her involvement in youth outreach—as well as painting and illustration—as an influence on her jewelry design. About her work, she states: "My approach encompasses a dual investigation of gestural drawing and traditional metalworking practices such as hand piercing metal. I use inks and calligraphy brushes to make linear illustrations that are the base from which ideas are developed into refined pieces of adornment."

<https://www.laritzagarciajewelry.com/about>

**Sam Gilliam** is regarded as one of the great innovators in post-World War II American painting. He emerged in Washington, DC, in the mid-1960s as part of the Washington Color School. This group consisted of artists who developed a form of abstract art from color field painting. Gilliam is recognized as the first artist to push the boundaries of painting by working with a draped and painted canvas that would hang without stretcher bars. He still lives and works in Washington, DC, creating monumental sculptures as well as two-dimensional prints. In more of his recent work, Gilliam uses polypropylene, computer-generated imaging, metallic and iridescent acrylics, handmade paper, aluminum, steel, plywood, and plastic.

<https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/sam-gilliam-41>

<https://www.pacegallery.com/artists/sam-gilliam/>

[https://art.state.gov/personnel/sam\\_gilliam/](https://art.state.gov/personnel/sam_gilliam/)

Jeweler **Jim Harrison** is a member of the **Red House Clan**. Harrison's work—with depictions of the night sky, desert landscapes, and yei and yeibichai figures—is inspired by his growing up on the Navajo Reservation, as well as his ancestry. *Yei* is the Navajo name for a deity or a holy one whereas *yeibichai* are masked dancers that impersonate the gods on the last day of a ceremony. Harrison primarily works with sterling silver and multi-colored inlaid stones such as coral, turquoise, lapis, sugalite, and mother-of-pearl.

<https://www.pueblodirect.com/pages/jim-harrison>

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As a self-identified Midwestern Sculptor, **Richard Hunt** began creating work at the age of 15 when he built his own sculpture studio in his South Side Chicago bedroom. Hunt learned how to solder in 1954, then transitioned from sculpting with clay to working with metal. His public sculptures can be found in Washington, DC; Chicago, Illinois; New York, New York; Vienna, Austria, and Jerusalem, Israel. As the Smithsonian American Art Museum suggests, his public work bridges the “gap between abstract art and the black experience in America.” Hunt is also a well-known printmaker. Primarily working with lithographs, he also plays with abstracted forms when working in two dimensions.

<https://americanart.si.edu/artist/richard-hunt-2357>

Ceramic artist **Eva Kwong** was born in Hong Kong, and moved to the United States as a teenager. While earning a BFA at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence, Rhode Island, and working at their natural history and science-oriented Nature Lab, Kwong discovered a love for the intersection of art and science. After her time at RISD, Kwong went on to earn an MFA at the Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. About her work, Kwong states: “Growing up in two cultures and speaking two languages informed the sense of duality in my work...I look for the interconnections between things in the world...The microscopic is juxtaposed with the cosmic, the imagined with the real, the observed with the conceptualized, and the personal with the universal.”

<https://www.evakwong.com/>  
<https://artaxis.org/artist/eva-kwong/>

Beginning a professional career in art after serving in the military, **John L. Moore** creates work that reflects an interest in human nature. Most specifically, he is compelled to explore an “interest in the relationship between humankind and its surroundings, especially the urban landscape, and the interior, psychic spaces our experience of the physical world helps to shape.” Moore earned a BFA and an MFA in painting from Kent State University, Ohio. He has earned awards such as the Tree of Life Foundation Individual Artist Grant. Moore’s work can be found within the collections of Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama; the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; and the Brooklyn Museum, New York.

<https://johnlmoore.net/>  
[http://www.clevelandartsprize.org/awardees/john\\_moore.html](http://www.clevelandartsprize.org/awardees/john_moore.html)

Boundary-breaking and extremely influential, **Toshiko Takaezu** (1922 – 2011) set a new standard for what clay could do as a material and as an idea. RAM became a favorite place for the artist and, ultimately, the repository of more than 20 works—including

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large-scale sculpture, small vessels, and lithographs created throughout her career. Takaezu's legacy encompasses not only her work but also her willingness to share her wisdom and her innate ability to foster creativity.

<https://www.toshikotakaezufoundation.org/artwork/>

<https://www.ramart.org/exhibit/building-toshiko-takaezu-archive-ram/>

**Joan Takayama-Ogawa** is a third-generation ceramic artist originally from Tokoname, Japan—a city known for its pottery production. Takayama-Ogawa, who studied with Otis College of Art and Design Professor **Ralph Bacerra**, creates work that reflects her cultural heritage. Playing on her rich personal history and wide-ranging interests, Takayama-Ogawa creates teapots and tea sets that reflect her association with Japanese culture. Her varied subject matter includes: politics, social issues, issues particularly impacting people of color such as systemic racism and racial profiling, climate change, food as a metaphor, and pieces that honor Native American art. Takayama-Ogawa has published over 30 books and magazines, and her work can be found in the collections of institutions such as the Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC; the de Young Museum, San Francisco, California; and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California.

<https://www.joantakayamaogawa.com/>

<https://www.craftinamerica.org/artist/joan-takayama-ogawa>

Based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, **Evelyn Patricia Terry**, practices as a full-time professional visual artist, presenter, writer, and art collector. Initially interested in printmaking and drawing, Terry additionally explores artists' books, found object assemblages, mixed media collages, paintings, installations, and public art. During a more than 50-year art career, her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally in addition to being widely collected. Some of the other institutions that hold her work include the Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin, and the Haggerty Museum at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Terry has earned numerous commissions, grants, fellowships, and various exhibition awards, including the InterMedia/McKnight Interdisciplinary Fellowship, Saint Paul, Minnesota and Artists of the Year Award from the Milwaukee Arts Board, Wisconsin.

<http://www.evelynpatriciaterry.com/>

<https://pbswisconsin.org/watch/wisconsin-life/evelyn-patricia-terry-ttrby7/>

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First as a glassblower, then as a sculptor, and presently as a painter, **Acquaetta Williams** has created a wide variety of work. Inspired by stories of African-American women, she often emphasizes color, pattern, and shape. Williams received an MFA from the University of Wisconsin and took classes at Pilchuck Glass School in Stanwood, Washington. At Pilchuck, her love for art was cemented under the instruction of glass artist **Harvey Littleton**.

<https://acquaetta.com/>

Together, **Shan Zuo** and **Da Huang Zhou**, create the artistic duo known as the **Zhou Brothers**. Shan Zuo and Du Huang are well known for a collaborative working process that spans over 40 years. The duo was initially inspired by mountain cave paintings near their hometown. From this starting point, the brothers developed an abstract style that was different from what others were doing at the same time in China. Not limited by media, the Zhou Brothers experiment with various modes of making, including paintings, performances, and sculptures. Their works combine their unique perspective and aesthetic with their creative interpretations of western and eastern philosophy, art, and literature. After originally becoming successful in China, the Zhou Brothers moved to Chicago, Illinois to continue their art careers in the US.

<https://www.zhoubrothers.com/>  
<https://www.zhouartcenter.com/zhou-brothers.html>

## **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

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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.

Candida Alvarez  
Laritza Garcia  
Eva Kwong  
Toshiko Takaezu  
Joan Takayama-Ogawa  
Evelyn Patricia Terry  
Acquaetta Williams