



RAM Showcase: Russell T. Gordon and James Tanner

June 22, 2022 – February 11, 2023

Russell T. Gordon (1936 – 2013) was an artist and educator born in Pennsylvania and spent most of his career working in Canada. James Tanner (b. 1941) is also an artist and educator, born in Florida and retiring as professor emeritus from Minnesota State University, Mankato. Gordon traditionally favored two-dimensional expressions, such as through prints and paintings. Tanner is best known as a ceramic artist but has experimented with other media, including glass, bronze, and paint. While both of their works have been shown at RAM before, this exhibition is an opportunity to share more about the artists—reflecting on a few moments of intersection between them.

Gordon and Tanner are both black male artists who were also educators with significant positions in their respective universities. Interestingly, both men received MS and MFA degrees from University of Wisconsin-Madison in the late 1960s—Gordon focusing on painting and drawing while Tanner was spending time in the ceramics, glass, and printmaking studios. While their heritage influenced their work, neither seem to have used social protest or cultural prejudice as their primary subject matter.

Far from encyclopedic, the works here represent a small portion of what these artists have achieved—reflecting how each tried their hand with various materials and how each has used bold patterns and/or colors. RAM is fortunate enough to have multiple works from both artists, including pieces where a large, abstracted face makes up or dominates the composition.

Biographies and statements from featured artists

Russell T. Gordon

b. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1936 – d. Canada, 2013

I believe that images, like words, are in themselves meaningless, and are resurrected in context. For me, abstract images are redefined in new settings and materials, thereby changing their significance and, at the same time, reminding us of their meaning in other situations. This is not indeterminacy or equivocation: Each situation is a solid and concrete reality that changes across time and experience.

– Russell T. Gordon

Education

1967 MFA and 1966 MS, University of Wisconsin–Madison
1962 BFA, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Select Solo Exhibitions

(Gordon participated in numerous group exhibitions)
2000 Theo Waddington Gallery, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
1988 Chicago International Art Exposition, Chicago, Illinois

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1980 Braunstein Gallery, San Francisco, California
1973 Gallery Alliance, Copenhagen, Denmark
1969 San Francisco Art Institute, California

Select Public Collections

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC
Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, California
Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois
Racine Art Museum, Wisconsin

Throughout his career, Gordon held many positions in academia, including Assistant Professor at the University of California, Berkeley (1969 – 70); Associate Professor at Mills College in Oakland, California (1974 – 75); and Associate Professor at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada (1975 – 98).

<https://www.concordia.ca/cunews/main/stories/2013/12/17/in-memoriam-russelltgordon19362013.html>

James Tanner

b. Jacksonville, Florida, 1941 –

My work is about the meditative nature of how things fit together. The connections that inform awareness determine outcomes in behavior.

– James Tanner

Education

1964 BA Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, Florida
1966 MS and 1967 MFA University of Wisconsin–Madison

Select Solo Exhibitions

(Gordon has participated in numerous group exhibitions and his work has been featured at the major craft exposition, SOFA, in Chicago)
2013 St. Paul Academy & Summit School, Minnesota
2009 Western Carolina University, Fine Art Museum, Cullowhee, North Carolina
1995 Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri
1992 Rochester Art Center, Minnesota
1992 Sioux City Art Center, Iowa

Select Public Collections

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
Museum of Arts and Design, New York City, New York
Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Racine Art Museum, Wisconsin

In his career, Tanner has earned many awards and honors, including being named to the Council of Fellows, American Craft Council; earning a Lifetime Achievement Award,

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Minnesota Craft Council and a McKnight Foundation Fellowship; and retiring as Professor Emeritus, Minnesota State University, Mankato.

<https://tandt-studios.com/>

About RAM Showcase Exhibitions

RAM Showcase exhibitions highlight the work of contemporary artists of color.

In this moment in time, it is critical that RAM spotlights voices that have been historically underrepresented, such as women and artists of color. Artists of color are identified in this context as non-white and non-European. 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 encountered.

While the work of artists of color has been and will continue to be shown in various contexts at both campuses, the *Showcase* series highlights conversations around equity, inclusion, and social justice. This means underscoring the presence of the work of artists of color, primarily from the collection, as well as, at times, featuring artists addressing critical social and cultural issues across a broad spectrum.

Further, as an educational institution rooted in the humanities and using art as a catalyst, the museum wants to encourage inquiry and exploration of the world we live in. RAM hopes spotlighting artists of color spurs further engagement with these artists and their ideas.

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