



### **RAM Staff Selects: A Community-Curated Exhibition**

October 11, 2023 – January 13, 2024

What do Nancy Ekholm Burkert, Ai Kijima, and Roy Superior have in common? In addition to being artists represented in RAM's collection, they also had work selected for inclusion in the Twentieth Anniversary exhibition, *RAM Staff Selects*. In an effort to broaden the voices heard in the galleries and acknowledge the critical role staff, board, and volunteers play in getting an organization to a milestone anniversary, the curatorial process shifted into the hands of those who are not typically selecting works for display.

With a group that favors objects over images and takes advantage of North America's largest contemporary craft collection, the works selected are as varied as the artists and the individuals making the selections. Featured pieces include Wendell Castle's silver leaf-topped desk, Robert Ebendorf's necklace made of items found on a beach, Mariko Kusumoto's multi-piece metal theatre set diorama, and Mark Newport's embroidered comic book cover. Several works chosen were also voted as favorites in 2013 when the public was invited to select their most beloved pieces for RAM's Tenth Anniversary.

Those selecting works were encouraged to share their rationale for their choices, if so desired—see below for further insights from several participants.

#### **Why RAM Staff Selected These Works:**

##### ***Mountain Mahogany Sphere* by Roger Asay and Rebecca Davis**

Selected by Kiefer Waterman, Chief Preparator

*Mountain Mahogany Sphere is interesting in that it is crafted impeccably. Each tiny piece is notched together to make a perfect sphere. The fact that the wood is kept with bark on highlights the material used. It seems like something you could find in nature and wonder how the elements could craft such a symmetrical object?*

*It also looks like it would be fun to throw.*

##### ***Excessive* by Azure Bielefeldt**

Selected by Tyler Potter, Marketing and Communications Specialist

*This piece absolutely stunned me when I first saw it in Wisconsin Photography 2020. The masterful documentation of this moment in time is simultaneously captivating and horrifying. The subject matter continues to be as relevant as it was in 2020.*

# R|A|M

## **At Rest on the Expressway by Nancy Ekholm Burkert**

Selected by Emma Vanderwall, Community Educator

*For the second grade field trip [school program at Wustum] we use this piece to activate our imaginations and think about where she [the subject] might be going. We then talk about where we would want to go if we could go anywhere in the world—this always brings up fun and touching conversations with the kids. Some of them talk about wanting to go to Disneyland, and some want to go to heaven to visit family members who have passed. It is a great open-ended work that is easily relatable and can be interpreted by people of all ages.*

## **Desk (Silver Leaf Desk) by Wendell Castle**

Selected by Neil Staeck, Former President and Member, RAMA Board of Directors

*From the moment I saw it in storage as a new board member, I have loved the desk we have in our collection made by Wendell Castle.*

## **Salmon and Rose Persian Set with Cranberry Lip Wrap by Dale Chihuly**

Selected by Laura D'Amato, Director of Operations and Development

*I'm picking Dale Chihuly's Salmon and Rose Persian Set with Cranberry Lip Wrap, first of all, because it looks cool. But also, it was the first piece from our collection that I talked with a visitor about way back in 2005 when I had just started working here.*

## **Pileated Woodpecker by Annette Corcoran**

Selected by Pat Guttenberg, Docent and Volunteer

*I chose Pileated Woodpecker by Annette Corcoran because of the realistic aspects and the graceful lines she used.*

## **R 384-1983 by Richard DeVore**

Selected by Cherry Wardrip, Volunteer

*When I started working at RAM, I was amazed to see a Dick [Richard] DeVore piece. I grew up in Ohio and his father and mine were friends. Now I've read some more about him and see that we both graduated from the University of Toledo. There's a personal, but distant, connection.*

# R|A|M

## **Off The Street, From the Beach Necklace by Robert W. Ebendorf**

Selected by Chris Sklba, Former Member, RAMA Board of Directors

*Ebendorf's work shows the artist's inventive efforts to [showcase the beauty of non-precious materials and] keep creating during times [when there may be] a lack of access to traditional materials.*

## **Dangerous Sacrifices by Carol Eckert**

Selected by Laura Grayson, Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director

*I like Carol Eckert's animal imagery and I admire her mastery of the medium and attention to detail.*

## **Grandmother Figure by Viola Frey**

Selected by Bruce W. Pepich, Executive Director and Curator of Collections

*Asking me to pick my favorite work from RAM's collection is like asking a parent, "Who is your favorite child?" When I came to the museum, the collection held more than 300 works. Today, our holdings are close to 11,000. Most of these works represent a relationship to an artist or collector, making them even more meaningful to me than their aesthetic value alone.*

*Since the majority of our acquisitions come to RAM as gifts and not as purchases, hunting for pieces on our "wish list" and bringing in a "prize" can be an exciting part of my job. Many RAM guests will remember our 2009 Viola Frey retrospective. Frey is an internationally known ceramic sculptor, famous for her large-scale work and expressive painterly glaze techniques. I have been seeking one of her oversized figural works and this piece has recently arrived as a gift from long-time collection donors and supporters, Janis and William Wetsman, who live in Detroit.*

*Frey is known for her series of Grandmothers. What each of these larger-than-life ladies has in common is the floral print shirtwaist dress the figure wears. Many family photographs from the 1940s and 1950s include female relatives wearing this example of their "Sunday best." Looking at Grandmother Figure reminds me how important the female elders of our families are and of my own grandmothers. This is the work's inaugural presentation at RAM and I celebrate my excitement with its selection. I'm delighted to introduce you to our Grandmother with this exhibition.*

# R|A|M

## **Salad Servers by Terri Gelenian-Wood**

Selected by Loretta Olson, Member, RAMA Board of Directors

*Terri Gelenian-Wood is my sister. She passed away from mesothelioma 27 years after cleaning out kilns at a university in the 1970s. She was extremely talented, and was interested in mixing metals with other unique raw materials. Her attraction to metal stemmed from when she was a child and our grandfather, who worked at Massey Ferguson, would bring home small metal parts that Terri would help him sort for extra cash.*

## **Groovy Valentine by Ai Kijima**

Selected by Cory Potter, Museum Store Manager

*Groovy Valentine hits with all of the keywords that draw me into a piece of art: found object, quirky collage, rainbows, and a random shirtless man!*

## **Former Bonheur by Gyöngy Laky**

Selected by Amy Singstock, Bookkeeper and Accounting Clerk

*Aspiring oenophiles like myself will enjoy Former Bonheur by Gyöngy Laky. It may inspire us to put our collections of wine corks to a more artistic use.*

## **Sampler: Batman by Mark Newport**

Selected by Katelyn Mitchell, Curatorial Assistant

*I love the way that Newport negotiates between the original comic book cover and embroidery. The use of french knots to make up bodies and split stitch to outline the Batman logo provides an interesting sense of depth and texture to the cover.*

## **Heart Teapot: Ironclad Hostage from the Yixing Series by Richard Notkin**

Selected by Sabina Archaniolowicz, Assistant Curator of Education

*This piece is a favorite of mine because of the way Notkin marries surrealism with function while toying with the idea of trompe-l'œil.*

## **Turkische Muzik by Eduardo Paolozzi**

Selected by Katy Berggruen, Registrar and Collections Manager

*My Masters dissertation research focused on a mosaic installation by Paolozzi in the London Underground that was later relocated (in pieces) to the Edinburgh University Collections when the station underwent renovations. When I started at RAM, I was excited to see this print of his in the collection!*

# R|A|M

## ***Bull in a China Cabinet...A Story of Pacifitea by Red Weldon Sandlin***

Selected by Rachel Comande, Digital Marketing and Special Events Coordinator

*I have always appreciated a good cup of tea, but various exhibitions at RAM have given me the opportunity to appreciate teapots, too. This is one of my favorites, playing on the phrase "bull in a china shop" by creating a bullish figure out of porcelain. Of course, the piece is more complex than that, but I appreciate the pun, along with the immaculate craftsmanship as it relates to the ceramic construction and careful painting.*

## ***Najallota Insolente, Maya, México, 750 BC, Playfully disobedient.***

***Does not believe in hierarchies, la hija de la gran..., from the Plunder Me, Baby Series by Kukuli Velarde***

Selected by Carol Klees-Starks, Lead Receptionist

*I am fascinated by Najallota Insolente, Playfully disobedient for so many reasons. Najallota Insolente reflects the cultural tradition of Pre-Columbian terracotta figurines and conveys the feeling that the figure has been around for centuries. Najallota's ornate hat nods simultaneously to history, tradition, nature mythology and pure whimsy; what kind of goddess is she—if she is a goddess at all? What is the symbolism of the flowing water? Of the young, yapping dogs in her arms? The pups are amusing and lively in their struggling, squirming restlessness, too, and seem to be yelping at her too-tight grip. But of course the first thing you see is the expression on Najallota's red-painted face, her eyes screwed tightly shut and refusing to acknowledge us while she sits cross-legged and defiantly sticks out her tongue.*

*It is only upon reflection—and, to be honest, reading Velarde's title—that the full context of the figure, along with the artist's message, slaps us in the face. Is Najallota "playfully disobedient" at all? I see her as more defiant in a subversive way. She is "la hija de la gran..."—the daughter of the grand Maya, and one of Velarde's creations for her Plunder Me, Baby Series. This changes things, and gives the whimsical some serious teeth. Seen in light of the atrocities perpetrated by Western Europeans upon the Mayans and other indigenous peoples of the "New World," Najallota's response seems far too mild. But by having her mock and stick out her tongue, "insolent" and defiant in the face of fierce enemies, doesn't it diminish the power of those colonial powers? The final message, I think, is that Najallota and her people are resilient, persistent, and determined to survive with their cultures intact, in spite of everything the European world throws at them.*

# R|A|M

## **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. 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.

**Warrington Colescott, Ai Kijima, Mariko Kusumoto, Toshiko Takaezu,  
and Kukuli Velarde**



## **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.

**Adrian Arleo, Rebecca Davis, Azure Bielefeldt, Emily Brock, Nancy Ekholm Burkert, Annette Corcoran, Carol Eckert, Viola Frey, Terri Gelenian-Wood, Mary Giles, Ai Kijima, Mariko Kusumoto, Gyöngy Laky, Dona Look, Donna Rosenthal, Red Weldon Sandlin, Toshiko Takaezu, Kukuli Velarde, and Roberta Williamson**