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Wisconsin Artists: 1960–90

September 20, 2023 – February 3, 2024

This exhibition surveys art in Wisconsin from 1960 to 1990. Not only was this an exceptionally fertile time in the history of a state with a (surprising to some) rich and layered history of creative production, it is also the period that Don Reitz—an artist with a concurrent exhibition at RAM—taught in the ceramics department at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

The work on display was specifically created during this period while the artists lived in Wisconsin. Identifying similarities among artists in a region can be daunting since there can be multiple points of comparison and contrast—as is the case with any group of people. The goals of this exhibition are not to define the work relative to the region, but to showcase it both as a way to contextualize Reitz’s work and celebrate those involved in building the legacy of art in this state, especially in the years leading up to the establishment of RAM and its 2003 opening.

All work—including works on paper, baskets, furniture, jewelry, painting, and ceramics—is drawn from RAM’s collection and reflects the range of ideas, media, and processes at play in the state and memorialized within the museum’s holdings.

Biographies and statements from select featured artists

Painter **Gibson Byrd** (1923–2002), a qualified member of the Shawnee Tribe, was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. After he graduated high school, Byrd worked as a draftsman, and then served as a B-17 engineer/top turret gunner in World War II. In 1949, he received a BA in art from the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and, in 1950, his MFA from the University of Iowa, Iowa City. After briefly teaching high school art in Tulsa, Oklahoma, he served as the Director of the Kalamazoo Art Center in Kalamazoo, Michigan. In 1955, Byrd became a member of the University of Wisconsin–Madison art faculty where he worked for 30 years alongside other significant Wisconsin-based artists such as Warrington Colescott, Walter S. Hamady, Frances Myers, and John Wilde—all of whom are also substantially represented in RAM’s collection. His work has been shown in thematic group exhibitions at RAM’s Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts and RAM including *Open Storage: RAM Showcases Ceramic, Fiber, and Regional Archives* in 2020. Byrd focused on the figure in a style known as social realism for much of his career, but turned to landscape in the latter part of his life. RAM has 18 works by Byrd in its collection, many of which are gifts from the artist, his family, and Kohler Foundation Inc.

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These sculptures originate from my cross-cultural background, and I intend that they reflect worlds which exist within other complex underworlds...Architectural references have led me to deal with many personal and aesthetic concerns. The forms allude to the interposition of cultures, complexities and mysteries that are created when cultures interact...

—Christopher Davis-Benavides

Christopher Davis-Benavides (1955–) utilizes his cross-cultural background—born in Lima, Peru, and living and working in the United States—to feed his ceramic work. Using architectural forms to serve as a “metaphor for human activity,” he employs techniques that allow him to build up layers of color and surface texture to suggest elemental changes and shifts over time. Davis-Benavides earned his BFA at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and his MA at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He has received numerous awards and honors including a J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Award; a Wisconsin Arts Board Project Grant; an Arts/Industry residency at the John Michael Kohler Center for the Arts; and an Advanced Opportunity Fellowship at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His art is found in many collections in addition to RAM, including the Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, Arkansas; Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin; and Museo de Arte de Lima, Peru. RAM currently has four of Davis-Benavides’ sculptures in its permanent collection.

Book artist and photographer **Jim Escalante** (1954–) was born in Mexico City, Mexico. He earned his BFA in 1976 in photography from North Texas State University, Denton, Texas. In 1978, he went on to found Iguana Press in Madison, specializing in limited edition printed books. In 1981, Escalante received his MFA in typography and photography from the University of Wisconsin–Madison where he studied under the guidance of Walter Hamady. From 1989 until his retirement in 2019, he was a professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, teaching graphic design, printmaking, and book arts. Escalante explains that his interest in book arts stems from an appreciation of the written language and enjoyment of both contemporary and traditional printing processes. RAM currently has six of Escalante’s artists’ books in the collection, five of which were produced by Iguana Press.

Explore:



<http://jimescalante.com>

Watch:



<https://youtube.com/@jaescala/videos>

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Renowned and Wisconsin-based, **Donald Friedlich** (1954–) has used glass in his jewelry—as well as steel, stone, slate, diamonds, and gold—to investigate a wealth of topics including wearability, the properties of materials, the natural world, humor, food, and the idea of jewelry itself. For some time, Friedlich has focused on glass, and it has become a hallmark of his practice. Often, he works with glass the way a sculptor might—grinding and carving a cast form. Of his work, he has stated: “Whether I’m working in glass or gold, I try to be sensitive to the unique visual and physical qualities of each material and to exploit them to their best advantage.” Large in scale, brooches—such as the three in RAM’s collection—make their own statement, yet also respond to the body of the wearer. Friedlich earned his BFA in jewelry and metalsmithing from the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, in 1982. Friedlich has served a term as President of the Society of North American Goldsmiths and earlier as Chair of the Editorial Advisory Committee of *Metalsmith* magazine. His work is in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England; the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Massachusetts, and many others. Friedlich has accomplished much throughout his career. In 2003, he was the first jeweler to be an Artist-in-Residence at The Studio of the Corning Museum of Glass, New York. In 2004, he was a featured speaker at an international jewelry conference in Melbourne, Australia, and was an Artist-in-Residence in both the Glass and Goldsmithing Programs at the Australian National University, Canberra.

Explore:



<https://donaldfriedlich.com>

Read:



<https://wisconsinacademy.org/magazine/donald-friedlich-life-stone-gold-and-glass>

Milwaukee painter **Ruth Grotenrath** (1912–1988) received her BA at Milwaukee State Teachers College (now the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee) in 1933. As part of the Works Project Administration (WPA), Grotenrath painted three local post office murals. She continued to paint throughout her life, during which time she had several solo exhibitions. Her work was shown at the 1939 World’s Fair and in the *Chicago and Vicinity* show at the Art Institute of Chicago. She was the subject of a retrospective at the Milwaukee Art Museum in the 1980s. Both her work and that of her husband, Schomer Lichtner, appeared in the very first exhibition at RAM’s Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts in 1941, and again in 2011 after RAM acquired several more examples of works created by each artist. Notably, Lichtner and Grotenrath would drive down from Milwaukee for many years to teach art classes at Wustum.

Read: <https://archive.jsonline.com/blogs/entertainment/119956394.html>



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Wisconsin fiber and ceramic artist **Anne Kingsbury** (1943–) received her BS in 1965 from the University of Wisconsin–River Falls, and her MFA in 1967 in printmaking and ceramics from Claremont Graduate School. Kingsbury moved to Milwaukee in 1975, where she briefly taught at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee as an assistant professor. In 1979, Kingsbury and her husband co-founded the Woodland Pattern Book Center in Milwaukee, a non-profit community organization which focuses on small press literature. After nearly 40 years at Woodland Pattern Book Center, Kingsbury retired in 2018 to focus on her own studio practice. Kingsbury's interest in the written word is evident in her art—she often incorporates words and phrases into her pieces. Kingsbury was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Award in 1976–77, was selected as a Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters Fellow in 2008, and was chosen as a Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Mary L. Nohl Fund Fellow in 2014. RAM currently has four works by Kingsbury in its collection.

Explore: <https://woodlandpattern.org>



Wisconsin woodturner **Harry Nohr** (1896–1977) was born in Waupaca and received up to an eighth grade education. While serving as a soldier in World War I, Nohr began his artistic career by creating and selling vases made from ammunition shells. After the war, he began working as the Mineral Point postmaster and focused on his woodturning in his spare time. He is best known for his wooden bowls created from the wood of locally-harvested Wisconsin trees. Four of Nohr's bowls were shown as part of SC Johnson's 1969 *Objects: USA* touring exhibition and one of his bowls is in the permanent collection of the Johnson Foundation's Wingspread in Racine. RAM currently has eight works by Nohr in the collection, all of which were made in the 1960s–70s.

Textile artist **Sister Mary Remy Revor** (1914–1998) was born in Chippewa Falls. Revor served as a professor of art at the Arrowmont School of Crafts at the University of Tennessee, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and Mount Mary College, Milwaukee. She used techniques such as block print, batik, and silkscreen to create colorful patterns on fabric wall hangings and tapestries. Revor gained a significant amount of recognition for her work. In 1967, she was awarded the Craftsmanship Medal by the American Institute of Architects for her work in fabric design. One of her textiles was exhibited in SC Johnson's 1969 *Objects: USA* touring exhibition and, also in 1969, she was granted a Fulbright scholarship to research textiles at the School of Industrial Arts, Helsinki, Finland. Owing to the School Sisters of Notre Dame and Kohler Foundation, Inc., RAM recently received a gift of nine textiles by Revor.

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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.

**Gibson Byrd, Warrington Colescott, Christopher Davis-Benavides,
Jim Escalante, and Ruth Lee Kao**



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.

Jan Buckman, Nancy Ekholm Burkert, Sandra Byers, Lisa Englander, Susan Stamm Evans, Martha Glowacki, Ruth Grotenrath, Audrey Handler, Annette Zolin Hirsh, Ruth Lee Kao, Anne Kingsbury, Marlene Lipinski, Dona Look, Ruth Miles, Francis Myers, JoAnna Poehlmann, Kaaren Wiken, Sister Mary Remy Revor, Diane Sheehan, Jean Stamsta, Linda Threadgill, Christel-Anthony Tucholke, and Lee Weiss