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**Fiber Artist Mary Giles is the Focus of Racine Art Museum Exhibition**

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The 19th Amendment of the United States Constitution granted women the right to vote 100 years ago. Throughout 2020, various organizations—including the Racine Art Museum (RAM)—have recognized this significant milestone. RAM is pleased to further illuminate the critical and pivotal role of women in the field of art and contemporary craft with the exhibition, *Collection Focus: Mary Giles*, open October 21, 2020 through January 23, 2021.

With a cabinetmaker father and a mother who knitted, quilted, and did Scandinavian decorative painting know as rosemaling, Mary Giles (1944–2018) seemed destined to work creatively with her hands. Revered for her willingness to push the boundaries of form and concept, Giles made objects throughout her career that reflected her interest in materials and traditional basketmaking techniques. An affinity for the natural world cultivated during her youth, fueled the artist's investigations of various media including waxed linen, porcupine quills, and various metals like copper and iron.

Favoring the techniques of coiling—a process associated with Native American basket traditions—Giles moved between three and two dimensions throughout her career as a fiber sculptor. She created wall pieces, in addition to sculpture, that suggests aspects of the environment, human figures, and vessels. One of the artist's most distinctive additions to her works were thin metal strips—some shaped as human figures—that she layered over a surface or core. In addition to creating

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texture contrasts and adding color, shine, and form, the choice of metal further underscored her interest in the human condition. She stated, "Over time, some of these metals are going to change, and that's fine...That's part of all of our processes—nature's process, the aging process."

In its current makeup, RAM's fiber collection is anchored by artists interested in baskets and basketmaking techniques. Mary Giles, with 19 pieces now at RAM and others promised, is one of the most well-represented fiber artists with works spanning over three decades. RAM has been acquiring Giles' work since the early 2000s through gifts from donors, but these pieces have never been brought together in a single gallery space until now.

In continuation of RAM's commitment to contemporary craft and to further scholarship in the field, the museum is producing a 16-page exhibition catalogue, with essays on the significance of Mary Giles' work along with representative images from the museum's permanent collection. This full-color publication will also be available for purchase on-site in the RAM Museum Store and online at [racineartmuseumstore.org](http://racineartmuseumstore.org).

Exhibitions at Racine Art Museum are made possible by: **Platinum Sponsors**—Anonymous, Nicholas and Nancy Kurten, and Wingate Foundation; **Diamond Sponsors**—National Endowment for the Arts, Osborne and Scekcic Family Foundation, Ruffo Family Foundation, Inc.; **Gold Sponsors**—Anonymous, Tom and Irene Creecy, David Flegel, Herzfeld Foundation, Racine Community Foundation, Twin Disc, W.T. Walker Group, Inc.; **Silver Sponsors**—A.C. Buhler Family, Andis Foundation, David Charak, Lucy G. Feller, Johnson Bank, Dorothy MacVicar, Real Racine, Trio Foundation of St. Louis, Wisconsin Arts Board; **Bronze Sponsors**—Andis Company, Virginia Buhler, Cotsen Foundation for Academic Research, Tom and Jane Devine, David and Ellen Easley, Educators Credit Union, Eye Care Center of Waterford, Ben and Dawn Flegel, Fredrick and Deborah Ganaway, William A. Guenther, Tom and Sharon Harty, Angela Jacobi, Bill Keland, Knight Barry Title Group, Eric Koopmeiners and Lena Vigna; **Media Sponsor**—Wisconsin Public Radio.

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Together, the two campuses of the Racine Art Museum, RAM in downtown Racine at 441 Main Street and the Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts at 2519 Northwestern Avenue, seek to elevate the stature of contemporary crafts to that of fine art by exhibiting significant works in craft media with painting, sculpture, and photography, while providing outstanding educational art programming.