

RAM Showcase: Storytellers— Narrative Photography from Artists of Color



ADÁL

Un Trabajo Abandonado
(An Abandoned Job), 1973
Silver gelatin print
7 1/4 x 6 1/2 inches
Racine Art Museum, the Karen
Johnson Boyd Collection
Photography: Jarvis Lawson

Photography can be used to record or construct narratives about people, places, and things. Its history is built on the layered relationship between the photographer and the subject. Regardless of the subject matter, all photographs are influenced by choices filtered through the camera and at least one human who dictates numerous factors directly affecting the outcome. Considering this, viewers might wonder about the intent of the photograph—who took it and why? Images can be appreciated without knowing these details. However, the viewer's understanding of what is being depicted and

the story being told may change based on this knowledge.

The artists whose works are included in this exhibition harness the storytelling power of photographic imagery. They address social, cultural, and personal issues, including identity, the environment, community, history, and the everyday. As artists of color, their conversations are charged with the subtext of race and heritage, even if these issues are not directly addressed in their work. *RAM Showcase: Storytellers*, with all artwork drawn from RAM's collection, spotlights artists of color who use photography to tell their stories in their voices, and coincides with other exhibitions that celebrate and support voices of color via photographic imagery.

More on featured artists

Drawing on the cultural history of adornment, Milwaukee-based artist **Nicole Acosta** (1982 –) creates portraits of individuals in hoop earrings. Acosta gathers the voices of people of color as they share stories prompted by the question, "What do hoop earrings mean to you?" More than just documentation, Acosta's images evoke the personality of the sitter and engage in a dialogue about the power of jewelry as a symbolic and not just aesthetic choice.



Nicole Acosta

Lisette, 2023, Printed 2024
Digital inkjet print, edition 1/2
36 x 24 inches

Racine Art Museum, United Way of Racine County
Equity and Innovation Grant Purchase
Photography: Courtesy of the Artist

R | A | M

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Photographer and performance artist **ADÁL** (1947 – 2020) created experimental work centered on the complexities of migrant identity, specifically related to his own experience of emigrating from Puerto Rico to the United States as a teenager. Living in New York for much of his adult life, ADÁL's work addresses Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the United States and the perception of the large Puerto Rican diaspora in New York City. Associated with the Nuyorican movement, ADÁL often worked collaboratively with other Puerto Rican artists, intellectuals, and activists living in New York City who had shared experiences of displacement and discrimination.



Both a photographer and a teacher, Racine-based **René Amado** (1980–) has focused on a broad range of subjects in his work—whether by professional necessity or personal interest—from street photography to portraits to culinary themes. Engaged in lowrider culture most of his life in one way or another, Amado is dedicated to preserving it visually and using it to create a powerful narrative underscoring how objects and images can address personal and community development, tradition and innovation, and creativity and aesthetics.

René Amado
Homeboys, 2022
 Digital inkjet print
 8 3/4 x 11 1/2 inches
 Racine Art Museum, Christopher Johns Memorial Purchase Award from *Wisconsin Photography 2022*
 Photography: Courtesy of the Artist

Currently Professor of Art at Columbia College Chicago and named a MacArthur Fellow in 2017, **Dawoud Bey** (1953–) creates photographs that encourage viewers to consider the expansive social and cultural dynamics that shape his subjects. Large projects have involved the participation of his sitters, such as youth from communities identified as marginalized, in constructing their own photographed representations. Community, memory, and identity become the focus of Bey's investigations, even when the images are not formal portraits.

Born in Harlem, **Roy DeCarava** (1919 – 2009) used photography to reflect aspects of Black life in the United States. Coming of age during the Harlem Renaissance (1920s – 30s), DeCarava could see creativity and expression flourishing. His black and white photographs captured varied topics such as everyday life, Black musicians of the New York jazz scene, and the Civil Rights Movement. DeCarava is often credited for bringing much-needed photographic attention to the Black experience in America.



Dawoud Bey
A Boy Eating a Foxy Pop, Brooklyn, NY, 1988, Printed 1997
 Silver gelatin print
 12 1/2 x 9 3/4 inches
 Racine Art Museum, the Karen Johnson Boyd Collection
 Photography: Jon Bolton

Sally Larsen (Apache/Aleut, 1954–) describes herself as a multi-media artist who makes conceptual photographs. Larsen combines traditional photography techniques with contemporary digital methods to create images that sit ambiguously between the past and the present. She echoes earlier photographers of the Southwest landscape by utilizing some of the same topography as subject matter—purposefully leaving out people, she highlights these places as memory sites in the wake of colonialism.



Sally Larsen
Canyon de Chelly, 1994
 Orotone print, edition 2/10
 12 1/2 x 18 1/2 inches
 Racine Art Museum, the Karen Johnson Boyd Collection
 Photography: Jarvis Lawson

Reinterpreting works from the Western art historical canon using costumes, make-up, and in his later work, digital editing, **Yasumasa Morimura** (Japanese, 1951–) explores notions of racial and gender identity, specifically as they relate to the West’s view of Japan. Through these self-portraits, Morimura asks the viewer to re-evaluate their relationship with these well-known images. Substituting his own body for that of the reference material’s subject, including oftentimes posing in place of a female subject, Morimura draws attention to the way that Asian culture is viewed as feminine by the Western world.



Yasumasa Morimura
Blue Pissoir (Urinal), 1994
 Cibachrome print, edition of 250
 8 x 10 inches
 Racine Art Museum, the Karen Johnson Boyd Collection
 Photography: Jon Bolton

Patrick Nagatani (1945 – 2017) was an artist committed to investigating the possibilities of photographic technology. A former faculty member at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, Nagatani obtained his MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles, and worked in Hollywood special effects for some time on movies such as *Blade Runner* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Employing hand-coloring, multiple printings, and constructed scenarios, Nagatani built his photographic narratives through props, careful direction, and image manipulation.

Growing up in Guatemala amidst a civil war, **Luis González Palma’s** (Guatemalan, 1957–) portraits explore cultural issues affecting the Indigenous Mayas and the Mestizo people of Guatemala. His portraits are heavy with symbolism—pulling from both Catholic iconography and Indigenous Mayan beliefs, González Palma is interested in the ways that Guatemalan culture has been shaped through the lens of colonialism. While his portraits are often sepia-toned, González Palma opts to leave the whites of his subjects’ eyes un-tinted, intensifying their direct stares at the viewer.

Charese Smiley’s (Active 2020s) *Hollow Self-Reflection* is a compelling take on the self-portrait as it encourages careful and engaged looking. Despite Smiley’s direct gaze toward the left side of the photograph, the reflective image is not immediately obvious. While she looks in that direction, her face is not wholly visible from any angle. The artist shared that this photograph “brings up a number of different emotions” for her.

Wisconsin-based photographer **Linda Wabanimkee Matson** (Ottawa/Chippewa, 1958–) balances architectural symmetry and geometric pattern with organic forms. In 2004, her sepia-toned silver gelatin print *Serene* received the Arlene Heft Memorial Purchase Award from *Wisconsin Photography* and was added to RAM’s collection. With photographs that often emphasize color, pattern, and abstraction, Wabanimkee Matson captures the natural and built world—her Instagram account is filled with photographic series including one featuring RAM’s Wustum Museum.



Lena Vigna
RAM Director of Exhibitions

Katelyn Mitchell
RAM Curatorial Assistant



Owing to the award of a **United Way Equity Innovation Fund grant**, RAM has organized three different exhibitions and multiple community outreach programs that feature Mexican American artists Nicole Acosta and René Amado. Both artists use their work to address cultural identity—often centering a multidisciplinary approach that highlights their perspectives as artists of color and offers a dynamic platform to examine and reframe personal, social, and cultural issues.

Linda Wabanimkee Matson
Serene, 2004
Sepia-toned silver gelatin print
4 3/4 x 4 3/4 inches
Racine Art Museum, Arlene Heft Memorial Purchase
Award from *Wisconsin Photography* 2004
Photography: Jarvis Lawson

Programs such as these are vital as they spotlight significant voices of color. Acosta and Amado speak to their heritage while adding to the dynamism of the contemporary art landscape and offering perspectives that can potentially engage those not otherwise inclined to visit contemporary art museums. Additionally, these two regional

artists reflect the strength of creativity in the area. With *RAM Showcase: Storytellers* in particular, the work of Acosta and Amado is presented alongside established international photographers—with distinctive perspectives, all of the artists offer individual stories, yet nuanced and varied meaning can be derived from juxtapositions within the exhibition.



Charese Smiley
Hollow Self Reflection, 2022
Digital inkjet print
17 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches
Racine Art Museum, Carol McNeill Skorupan Memorial
Purchase Award from *Wisconsin Photography* 2022
Photography: Courtesy of the Artist