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RAM Showcase: Focus on Adornment

December 11, 2024 – November 22, 2025

Contemporary art jewelry often investigates cultural, social, personal, and environmental topics. Distinguished by a vocabulary of diverse media from precious metals to recycled objects, it also reflects artists' interests in material exploration and notions of wearability. RAM's holdings in art jewelry—with examples from artists from across the globe at varying stages in their careers—have grown rapidly.

Artistic self-consciousness often drives those who make work considered “art jewelry,” though this is just part of a much larger conversation. Makers explore a wide variety of issues, materials, and themes, while utilizing media—both precious and non-precious—that encourage the exploration of jewelry and its history. In this selection of seven artists of color from RAM's collection, the emphasis is on materials not traditionally anticipated for use in jewelry, such as polymer, safety pins, and silicone.

While there are theoretically no limitations to the materials any artist can use, there have historically been barriers to some artists of color in the United States—indirect or otherwise—to access tools, materials, or studio spaces. At this moment, more and more efforts are being made to support and encourage the work of artists of color while drawing attention to existing work.

Featured artists include **Lorena Angulo, Peter Chang, Tina Fung Holder, Donna Kato, Seulgi Kwon, Angie Reano Owen, and Kee-Ho Yuen**. They come from a wide range of backgrounds, artistic practices, and geographic locations. While some of the work has been shown in the galleries at RAM, all of these pieces are making their debut at Wustum, and a few have not yet been on display in either space.

Following the solo exhibition of Nicole Acosta, which featured photographs of people of the global majority wearing hoop earrings, this exhibition emphasizes an idea that RAM often explores: how adornment can go beyond decoration to become a symbolic and layered space for meaning.

Artists do not need to reference their identity in the work; however, it is valuable to recognize that heritage informs choices on a conscious or unconscious level as a part of the artists' lived experiences. While most of this work is not directly issue-oriented, the fact that the makers themselves, as artists of color, have experienced a wide range of implicit and explicit biases is a sub-context worthy of consideration. Seen through that lens, the story these objects tell is even more complex.

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Jewelry can convey meaning more explicitly than other kinds of objects. It is and has been: handmade, mass-produced; a possession, a gift, a symbol; a means to reflect social and cultural status, a means to reflect something personal. Its power applies to commercial, mass-produced jewelry (especially when it is given as a gift), yet is even greater when the jewelry itself is considered as subject—who made it and why, who wears it and how.

Biographies of Selected Artists:

Since I can remember, art has been a strong influence in my life. I come from Mexico, a country so rich in traditions, culture, and art; everything that surrounded me when I was a child living in Mexico has been very important in my formation as an artist.

I was fortunate to travel and live in many states in my country which gave me the exposure to so many different art forms and traditions. This great passion for my culture motivated me to take my first class in metals at SSA [Southwest School of Art] in San Antonio, Texas. I had so many ideas in my heart that needed to come to life and jewelry-making allowed me to do that.

Born and raised in Mexico, **Lorena Angulo** (1969 –) responds to her Mexican heritage in her artwork. Angulo is influenced by what she identifies as traditional Mexican folk art as well as a desire to create compelling objects that tell stories and keep viewers engaged. Appreciating the potential and flexibility of metal clay—a versatile material that can be manipulated and fired like clay but also comprised of and looking like metal—Angulo utilizes it to create most of her work. Currently, she is an adjunct faculty member in the Metals Department at Southwest School of Art, San Antonio, Texas. Her work is exhibited nationally and internationally and is featured in numerous books, magazines, and articles. Angulo is also the author of *Behind the Brooch*, published in 2014 by Schiffer Publishing. She is represented in RAM’s permanent collection by three brooches, two of which were acquired using funds from the Windgate Foundation Contemporary Craft Acquisition Grant.

Explore:



<http://lorenaangulo.com/>

Read:



<https://cerfplus.org/a-journey-with-lorena-angulo-discovering-opportunity-in-the-pandemic/>

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I like to incorporate a bit of fun: spice it up. People take things too seriously...

Desiring bright colors and atypical shapes for his jewelry and small sculpture, **Peter Chang** (1944–2017) experiments with various methods and materials, including acrylic purchased from shop signs in a Chinese neighborhood in Liverpool, England. Frequently using the natural world, urban environments, and everyday encounters as inspiration, Chang plays with color combinations and the potential of hues to encourage certain responses. Plastics in various forms, such as the acrylic used for Chang's works in RAM's collection, are a plentiful and malleable resource, but also exemplify the artist's goal of using "something that would reflect the age we live in."

Chang attended the Liverpool College of Art from 1963 to 1966 where he studied graphic design and art. In 1966, he was the recipient of the Liverpool Senior City Scholarship, which he used to continue his printmaking studies at Atelier 17 in Paris, France. Chang went on to do postgraduate work at University College, London studying printmaking and sculpture. Much of his career was spent living in Glasgow, Scotland. His work is found in several renowned museum collections including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York; the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh; and Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York, New York. Chang is represented in RAM's collection by four pieces of jewelry – three brooches and one bracelet.

Read:



<https://www.cooperhewitt.org/2017/03/10/color-fun-and-fantasy-the-telling-marks-of-jewelry-peter-chang/>

Watch:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_Cx4Sc-M3M

Interested in trying to "create awareness of personal adornment that exceeds the restrictive boundaries of traditional Western materials and techniques," **Tina Fung Holder** (1946 –) uses everyday items, such as safety pins and paperclips, to create jewelry as well as baskets. Raised in a village in Guyana, Fung Holder was interested in the "nature of objects," even in early childhood. She credits her interest in manmade materials to growing up in a nonindustrial environment—the quantity and availability of mass-produced items were unfamiliar, and thus, more appealing. Fung Holder was an accountant before receiving both her BFA and MFA from the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, Illinois. She currently lives in Wisconsin where she creates adornment and teaches workshops focused on her experiments with textile techniques and basket design.

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Fung Holder's work has been widely exhibited throughout her career. In addition to the 16 pieces currently in RAM's holdings, her work is included in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Arts and Design, New York, New York; and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts.

Explore:



<http://tfhdesigns.com/TFHHome.html>

Watch:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nR-hJHrK-0>

Donna Kato (1951 –) began working with polymer in 1991. During the latter half of the 1990s, as polymer was undergoing a revival in the United States, Kato played a part in the resurgence as both artist and educator. She has written several books that have become essential for artists, such as *The Art of Polymer Clay*. Kato's work currently on display, *Sculpted Animal Necklace*, consists of large beads that are in the form of molded animals made early in her career. She ultimately shifted to techniques that focus on pattern and surface using millefiori and imitative practices that made her well-known in her field. Significantly, Kato has also developed a new form of polymer known as Kato Polyclay. This variant of the material differs from others in its strength, stability, and firmness, and is available in a wide array of colors. Kato is represented in RAM's collection by two polymer works.

Watch:



<https://www.youtube.com/c/DonnaKatoArt/videos>

I am drawn to cellular growth and change. Cellular organisms generally follow certain 'rules' of nature such as order and harmony. As a cell cycles through stages of creation, growth, division, and extinction, changes can be observed and yet, unpredictable and fantastical elements are still possible. Analyzing cellular form and shape, I create new organisms. Inspired by consistently changing structures and mysterious colors, I use silicone for its materiality, texture, and transparency. This synthetic resin can suggest something organic while also being appealing to both wearer and viewer.

South Korean artist **Seulgi Kwon** (1983 –) uses silicone, thread, pigment, and paper

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to create works that mimic the translucency of glass. Kwon's large-scale brooches and neckpieces reflect an interest in the natural world and she embodies an aesthetic that balances the familiar with the unfamiliar. Her brooch, *Autumn Rains*, was recently acquired by RAM using a Windgate Foundation grant to support collecting contemporary craft.

Kwon has a BFA, MFA, and PhD from Kookmin University, Seoul, South Korea. Her work has been exhibited internationally and is featured in the collections of numerous institutions including RAM, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts; Seoul Museum of Craft Art, South Korea; and Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England.

Explore:



<https://kwonseulgi.com>

Explore:



<https://www.mobilia-gallery.com/artists/seulgi-kwon/>

Angie Reano Owen (1946 –) is a member of the Santo Domingo Pueblo, located in New Mexico. Owen was born into a family of jewelry-makers, learning the techniques of her mother and selling her mother's pieces beginning at the age of eight. "I thoroughly enjoyed meeting people," she recounts. "Of course, I was told not to speak English. I sold more by not speaking English."

After graduating high school and a brief job at a lumber mill, Owen returned to New Mexico and continued the family tradition of jewelry-making. Encouraged by her friends and family, she emulated the mosaic-style jewelry of her mother. She researched prehistoric styles of mosaic jewelry created by the Hohokam and Anasazi cultures of the Southwest, visiting museums and private collections throughout the region to study the techniques of her ancestors.

Owen has since received numerous awards for her mosaic bracelets, including Best of Division in Mosaic at the Heard Museum and the annual Indian Market in Santa Fe. Her pieces are inlaid with the same glycymeris shells used by the Hohokam, following her signature herringbone pattern. She is also known for her chicklet necklaces, made of strands of beads incorporating small mosaic cubes. Owen is credited by museums and other native artists as single-handedly reviving an ancient tradition of mosaic overlay.

Her pieces have been included in exhibitions at the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington D.C.; the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, New York; the Albuquerque Museum, New Mexico; the Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona; and

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the Millicent Rogers Museum, El Prado, New Mexico. She is represented in RAM's collection by three works – a pair of earrings, a cuff bracelet, and a necklace.

Read:



https://www.abqjournal.com/lifestyle/arts/kewa-artist-angie-owen-uses-techniques-of-her-ancestors-to-craft-award-winning-jewelry/article_10b73632-5610-5efd-802b-bc62d15a4614.html

Read:



<https://bischoffsgallery.com/online-store/edison-sandy-smith-2703-2705-2716-2717-2719-2720-2721-2723-2728-2729-2730.htm>

Jewelry artist **Kee-ho Yuen** (1956 –) was born in Hong Kong. He received his B.A. from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1983, before going on to receive his M.F.A. in Metalsmithing and Jewelry from the University of Iowa in 1989. Yuen recently retired from his role as a professor and head of the University of Iowa's jewelry and metal arts program.

Yuen sees his work as an ever-evolving collage of the philosophies and sensibilities of the East and West. His work is inspired by the timelessness of human emotion and interaction, while also serving as an aesthetic and technical investigation. Its tone bounces between seriousness and whimsicality, employing a wide variety of traditional and contemporary materials and techniques. Yuen has used advanced 3D computer modelling and CNC machining alongside traditional enameling and fabrication. He does not see his work as an argument or an attempt to convince, but as an anchor for himself and the attitudes that are important to him.

His work can be found in permanent collections around the world, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.; and the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, New York. Owing to a recent gift, Yuen is represented in RAM's collection by seven works.

Explore:



<https://www.kee-ho-yuen.com/>

Explore:



<https://myweb.uiowa.edu/kyuen/work.html>



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.

Lorena Angulo, Tina Fung Holder, Donna Kato, Seulgi Kwon, and Angie Reano Owen