

Bruce Pepich

\ Honorary Fellow \ Racine, Wisconsin \

“ONE OF MY FRIENDS ONCE SAID that I don’t do drugs, I do art,” Bruce Pepich says. “It’s the one addiction that leaves you stronger every time you imbibe, because you learn something more from it. But you still crave more,” he adds.

Call it whatever you want: Much of Racine Art Museum’s success can be attributed to Pepich’s zeal. The executive director and curator of collections joined the institution (then the Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts) in 1974, fresh from Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, with an undergraduate degree in art history. He’s spent his entire career there, giving him the opportunity to cultivate a world-class collection of contemporary craft, and, in 2003, fulfill his vision of launching Racine Art Museum, in a new building, as one of the country’s preeminent craft museums.

Pepich, for his part, is quick to give credit to the patrons, colleagues, and many others who helped open RAM, including Karen Johnson Boyd, a major benefactor who, he says, taught him about the field.

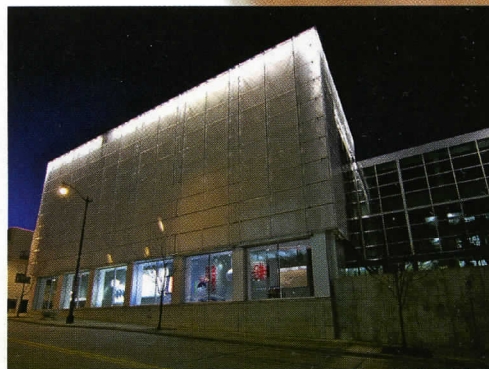
“From the 1970s forward, she was constantly looking at craft media as the equivalent to painting and sculpture media,” Pepich says. “It helped me realize things I saw early on but didn’t verbalize in my career, and set me on that path as a director and a curator.”

RAM celebrates its 10th anniversary next year. When it opened, Pepich recalls, a colleague asked him how it felt to have created the only job in the country that he would have left his old job at the Wustum for.

“That really did put it in context,” Pepich says. “I’ve really been able to make this institution change and grow along with me. It’s been a very, very good marriage.”

“The opportunity to open not only a new facility, but a new building – a totally new museum – does not come along in every person’s career.”

At Racine Art Museum’s 2003 inaugural show, Pepich realized he had ushered every object into the collection.



Wendell Castle,
Desk, 1967



ON MAKING

“A few hundred years ago, **everyone made something – you made things that you lived with.** We’re very separated from that today. The strong interest in do-it-yourself activities, in websites like Etsy, speaks of a need we have to communicate by doing something with our hands.”

BOTTOMLINE

“One of my major concerns is selling works of art. **In buying artwork, not only do you live with it and learn from it on an intimate level, but you’re putting food on an artist’s table. ... You’re keeping them in the studio.**”



John Cederquist,
Bluto's Diner, 2005