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### It's Like Poetry: Building a Toshiko Takaezu archive at Racine Art Museum



Toshiko Takaezu, Moon, ca. 1985. Glazed stoneware, 20 x 21 3/4 inches diameter. Racine Art Museum, Gift of the Artist. Photography by Jon Bolton.



**RACINE, WI.** - Open August 2, 2019 through July 26, 2020 in the Windows on Fifth Gallery at the [Racine Art Museum](#), *It's Like Poetry: Building a Toshiko Takaezu Archive* at RAM features a variety of works from RAM's collection by renowned artist Toshiko Takaezu (1922-2011). This exhibition will replace *Raise Your Glass (Goblets): Recent Acquisitions from Alan and Barbara Boroff and the Kohler Foundation, Inc.*, which is on view in the unique, street-facing gallery space until July 21.

RAM's archive now numbers over 30 works, including Takaezu's most expansive grouping, the installation comprised of 14 "human-sized" forms, the *Star Series*. Significantly, RAM's holdings span the range of Takaezu's working career—with a double-spouted pot from the 1950s being the earliest and the *Star Series* (1999-2000) being the latest. There are also drawings and prints—works with forms that echo the shapes of Takaezu's three-dimensional pieces while also reflecting her sensitivity to shape and color. This exhibition features small bowls, toasting goblets, platters, two-foot high closed pieces, and large spheres created over several decades of the artist's career.

While unassuming in her disposition, Takaezu was a bona fide ceramic superstar. She created work—paintings, prints, fiber, and cast bronze in addition to her well-known ceramic pieces of varying sizes—that embodied a poetic balance between art and life. RAM has been acquiring a range of pieces by Takaezu—from individual forms to multi-part installations—and establishing an archive that documents this significant artist who pushed the boundaries of clay in the late twentieth century.

Born in Hawaii to Japanese immigrants, Takaezu eventually studied ceramics at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan with Maja Grotell (1899-1973). Grotell encouraged an approach to making that emphasized technical accomplishment and individual expression—tenets Takaezu adopted in her practice. Often described as blending principles of so-called Eastern and Western thought, Takaezu did spend some time in Japan, learning about her heritage, its pottery traditions, and approaches to holistically blending art and life.

Takaezu held a variety of different teaching positions in her lifetime, including a year-long stint at University of Wisconsin-Madison while Harvey Littleton (then associated with clay not glass) went on sabbatical. She looked at teaching as both a way to guide students and a way to discover more of herself as an artist.

In the 1960s, when Takaezu taught at the Cleveland Institute of Art, a conversation about the boundaries between art and craft, or lack thereof, began to gain momentum. Takaezu blurred the boundaries between the sculptural and the functional by creating closed forms, installations, bowls, vessels, and garden seats. She was recognized as a leader in new approaches to the medium for her innovative treatment of clay and its surfaces.

Takaezu was inspired by nature and the environment, noting the early influence of her home state, Hawaii. She combined this with an interest in color and surface—her signature Makaha blue (a rich blue) being one of many tones she used. She was an artist in tune with concepts of balance and harmony—interior/exterior, planning/unpredictability, calm/tense, large/small.



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