

June Spiezer:
"Whatever I Was Looking At"

A Post 1960 Collection of Chicago Art
September 9 - October 18, 2008

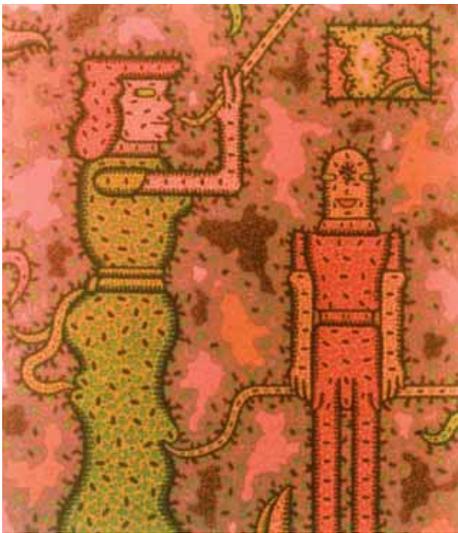
H. F. JOHNSON  gallery of art

Cover: **Ed Paschke**
Red Sweeney, 1975 (detailed)
oil on canvas
74 x 40

June Spiezer:

Whatever I Was Looking At

A Post-1960s Collection of Chicago



Ray Yoshida

Playful Private Pricking, 1982

acrylic on canvas on canvas

32 x 28

“Francis and June were two wonderful characters; well, June still is. In the 30 years I had an art gallery they were the best collectors I ever encountered—with the purest excitement and most sincere passion about art and artists. Different personalities. Francis always let June shine, and shine she did; with her irreverent jokes and mismatched, yet thematic, earrings. Francis on the other hand was comparatively taciturn yet ribald at all the right times. June is passionate, Francis pragmatic. These were ‘real’ people. Older in body but younger in spirit than their peers—or even those decades younger than them. Art keep them young and engaged. Not only would they identify with a work of art, but they’d want to know the artist and have a relationship with him or her.”

—**Paul Klein**, Art Curator, Writer, and Art Dealer



Left: **Richard Marquis**
Crazy Quilt Teapot, 1987
blown glass
5 x 8 x 6

Right: **Roger Brown**
The Earth from Outer Space, 1980
oil on canvas
18 x 35 2/4

The June and Francis Collection of Chicago Art is the largest existing collection of Chicago Art from the period of around 1960 to the present. In its way it is a monument of its kind, rich in quality and variety, showing a wide range of media and an even wider range of ideas. It is guaranteed, when viewed as a whole, to expand any person's ideas of Chicago art. It is also a gateway to viewing the unique personality of Chicago art. Much of this work is gradually coming to be valued as equally significant by comparison with artwork coming from more well known artists in New York, the West Coast and Europe.

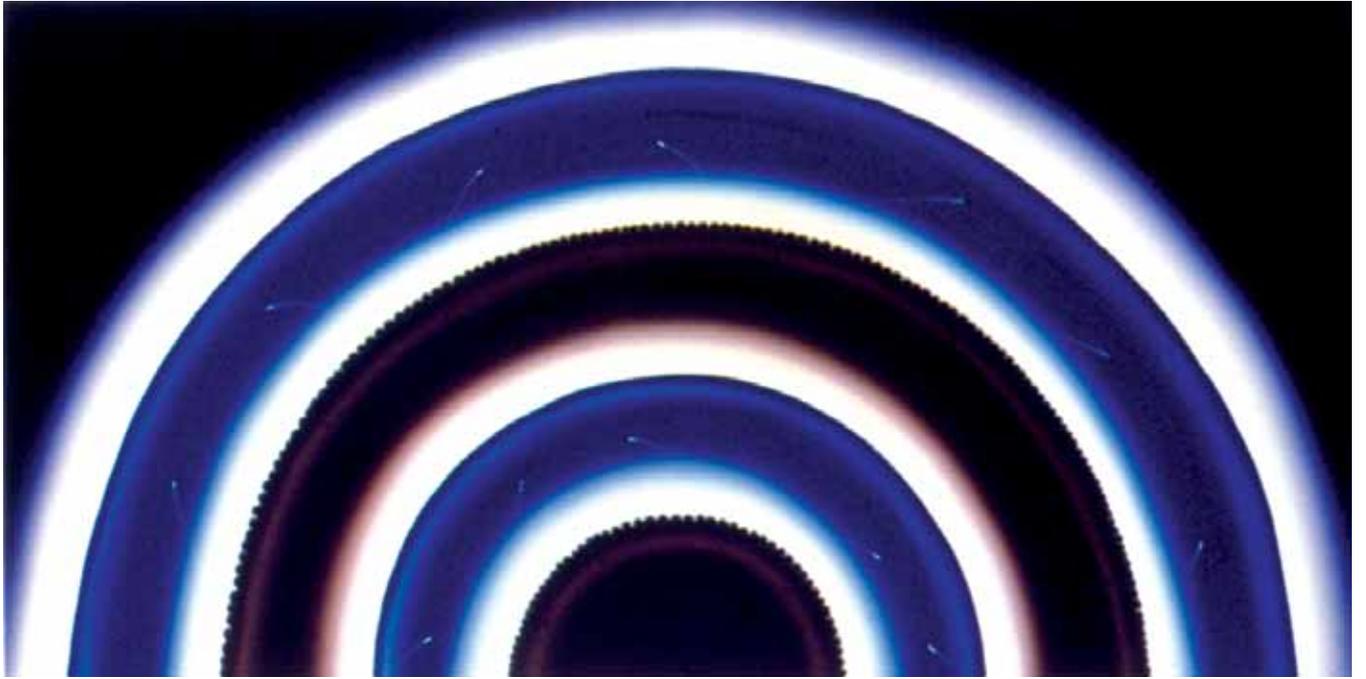
Though many pieces from the collection have been lent out for various exhibits around the world, this is the first showing of a large selection of the collection outside of The Rockford Art Museum or tours of the Spiezer residence.

In 2006, the Pennsylvania Academy of Art had a showing of Chicago Art from the 1920's through to the 1980's. It included Ed Paschke's "Red Sweeney" from the Spiezer collection and exhibited many of the same artists represented in the Spiezer collection. This exhibit, **Art in Chicago: Resisting Regionalism, Transforming Modernism** was curated by Robert Cossolino, who commented:

"There's a real need for rethinking 20th-century art to include the whole country. One of the unique characteristics of Chicago is there's always been a very pronounced effort to not be derivative, to not follow the status quo. They insisted on following their own vision."

Many critics and art writers found this show a revelation. Critic, Mark Brandl, of the online magazine *Shark Forum* has commented:

"When it comes to aesthetic and creative movements, Chicago is often more closely connected with architecture and music than painting and sculpture. However, a new Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts exhibition—curated by a native of Chicago—aims to give a new look at the Second City as a place that inspired and produced trailblazing visual art."





Left: **Josh Garber**
Swim, 1995
welded steel
26 x 16 x 14

Right: **Susanne Doremus**
Interior with Mirror, 1984
oil on canvas
52 x 63 1/2

The current showcase of a large portion of the Spiezer collection hopes to add weight to the case that Chicago Art is ripe for reevaluation. The question of what value Chicago art has is an important one. It effects the range of what art is seen on the world stage and Chicago art has frequently been short changed on this account. The reasons for the relative neglect of Chicago Art on the international art scene are complex.

Major art magazines, major auction houses like Sotheby's and Christies, and major art dealers and critics are located on the East and West Coast and in Europe. The national art magazines have representatives here but don't always give major space to Chicago art. For reasons known only to themselves Chicago Museums have not been advocates of showcasing Chicago artists in any great numbers. But with this exhibit, Carthage College hopes to open more eyes to the distinct personalities and wonderful inventive powers of Chicago artists.

June Spiezer has commented:

"In New York City many artists seek to follow what is trendy, but Chicago artists choose to see the world their own way. They don't give a damn about what other people consider 'new,' but make their own standards for what is 'new.' As a result Chicago artists have a strong tendency to be fresher, more creative in their art. In a sense, the relative isolation of Chicago art means artists are free to do what they like and this makes them more interesting!"

How the Collection Came About

June and Francis Spiezer first got started in collecting when they saw work by some artists in exhibits in the Hyde Park area. Some of the artists went on to become members of the "Hairy Who" and "The Chicago Imagists." Their interest in the art led the Spiezer's to take a class in "Art as Investment" which included an on-site visit to the gallery area in downtown Chicago. They met artists and were fascinated. An interesting new world seemed to open for them both through the artwork they saw and socializing with the artists. Early on they decided on their "method" of collecting. They would only purchase things if they both liked them, and thought they would concentrate on young and upcoming





Left: **John Littleton and Katherine Vogel**
Bag Explosion, 1990
blown and fused glass
13 3/4 x 10 1/2 x 11 1/4

Right: **Jackie Kazarian**
Not Knot #18, 1991
acrylic on canvas
34 x 34

artists, finding them more “affordable” but also with the thought that artists, early in their career, needed support from collectors. Their choice of those that were once considered “young and upcoming” artists has been proven by time to be unfailingly accurate. To give but one example, early on they collected the small sculpture “White Hand” by John Philip Myers, now a highly respected sculptor. They bought this work for several hundred dollars, and has increased in market value by one hundred fold. Such was their passion for collecting that they often paid for things on “time” and there were months when they were sending off payments on four recently collected paintings at once! Though June and Francis frequently agreed on the artists they liked there were occasions when they disagreed 100%. Rather interestingly Francis liked the work of Leon Golub and June did not. June liked the work of Robert Lostutter and Francis said “No way!” Neither artist is represented in the collection.

They felt a loyalty to Chicago artists. They ate, drank and discussed life and art with them and enjoyed their company. They had a unique feeling for the personalities of the artists and had what art dealers often refer to as “a magic eye.”

They also felt a loyalty to Chicago gallery owners, with whom they developed friendships. June Spiezer comments:

“Let other people from other cities support their galleries, we have to support ours. Francis and I both knew we would buy primarily from Chicago galleries and artists because they were available, we could talk to them. I see these artists around. They’re friendly, and I like this, rather than buying some artist from New York or California I don’t know and won’t see.”

Chicago’s Various Artistic Styles

Chicago artists are strongly individualistic in their approach to aesthetics. Yet there are elements in Chicago Area art which establish some basic stylistic directions that reflect on Chicago’s unique personality. The following short survey represents only a start of a list of Chicago Art styles and categories.

In considering trends in Chicago art by far the best known groups are often lumped together under the name “The Chicago Imagists.” This includes, “The Monster Roster ” (post war artists who started making a name in the 1950’s), the “Hairy Who,” and “The Chicago Imagists” who start to be active in the early





Left: **Maria Tomasula**
Rite, (DATE?!???)
oil on canvas
18 x 14

Right: **Jim Lutes**
I Should Have Called, 1989-90
oil on wood
48 1/2 x 48 1/2 (framed)

and mid 1960's. These are fairly loose groups in that each artist has their own style but they all manipulate imagery from the seamy underside of urban life; tattoos, comic books, advertising, old signs and labels, junk, etc. They share a sardonic viewpoint, mixed with a taste for the grotesque and fantastic, and utilize super intense color often in flat, decorative, playing card like designs. Their work frequently blurs the line between what is funky what is philosophical, what is outrageous and what is poetic. Notable examples are Paschke's "Red Sweeney," Roger Brown's "The Earth from Outer Space" Karl Wursum's "Inner E Stare Bonnet" (with a strong anticipation of the design of the Dalek creatures of "Dr. Who" fame), and Jim Nutt's "Oh, My Goodness."

Then there is a group of Chicago abstractionists, who, unlike the more formal and geometry oriented abstractions of post-Mondrian Europe, or the painterly abstractions of the New York Expressionists, prefer something more machine like, kinetic and fast moving, with an element of "Futuristic" energy. Lines have a way of being spun out, like a fast moving elevated trains or traffic blurred in motion on an expressway, their layouts often involves sequence of shapes spinning or interweaving. Such works as those by Josh Garber's "Swim" or Jim Lutes' "I Should Have Called" represent this aspect of Chicago Art. Art Green's "Good Intentions" has the dynamism of a layered overhead map of a shopping mall or modern multi-faceted building, Julia Fish's "Great Divide" creates a different kind of dynamism by contrasting dark and light, geometric and soft, in a yin yang tableaux that is part enigma, part aerial map.

Then there is the art of the theatrical and quasi-surreal which often involve a fantastic landscape with curious, slightly surreal scenario being played out on it. Examples of this genre frequently involve images of Chicago's streets, buildings, backyards, slums, trash heaps and parks. This can be seen in works like Hollis Sigler's "It Keeps Her Going" or Steven Hudson's "Apocalyptic Millennium 16, The Launderer" or Mark Summer Forth's "Night Train" which reveals a distinctly Midwestern bedroom with golden neon light falling through a window onto the lone sleeper. Anne Farley Gaines, "Pinions of Light" juxtaposes floral, animal and water imagery before a burning street for curious mixture of ecstasy and tragedy. There is work in this category that is surreal but narrative, suggesting elements of a story or myth, examples would be Jim Mesple's "Jonah and Persephone" or Susanne Doremus' "Interior with Mirror." All these works reflects Chicago's visual urban environment pushed into the realms of high imagination and fantasy.





Upper left: **Jo Hormuth**
Frozen Turkey Dinners, 1995
 cast hydrocal (2 pieces)



Lower left: **Anne Farley Gaines**
Pinions of Light, n.d.
 watercolor on paper
 28 x 36

Right: **Hollis Sigler**
It Keeps Her Going, 1991-92
 oil on canvas
 53 1/2 x 65 3/4

Another strong element in Chicago Art is wild humor, though the wit and fun in the art are often intended to conceal deeper meanings. Such a work as Gladys Nilsson's "Hall of Mirrors" is one example. In it, a mischievous strip show, or lingerie fashion show, seems to be taking place. It is performed by creatures, which are half children's illustration and half cartoon, and lays out a tableau that is vaguely reminiscent of a "roaring twenties" "speak easy" saloon floorshow. Shang-ah Choi's "Eyes" inhabits something of the same humorous, fantastic world, with doll-like blond Venus's transfiguring into ancient Greek statues and back again in a misty, antediluvian landscape. Ray Yoshida's "Playful Private Pricking" is a painting of witty visual double entendres but still manages to create a luminous, beautiful atmosphere. Rather surprisingly many of the glass pieces in Chicago Art are humorous, like Richard Marquis' "Crazy Quilt Teapot" or John Phillip Myers, "White Hand" portraying a hand, which seems to be transforming into something like sliced bread. It is a sculpture funny and nightmarish at the same time. Another strange hand, this one in a puppet glove, very different in effect, appears in Spencer Dornitzer's "I Have Quiet Demons" but it is also part fun and part bad dream.

Then there is a genre of painting that might be considered "grotesque." Works which look at ugliness as a high form of character, suggesting suffering and pain as lessons that can be learned from. Such works as Joe Siegenmeister's "Sheldon" unlock disturbing levels of pain and dementia, but also invites a degree of compassion. Tom Czarnopys, "Untitled" bronze sculpture of a cringing baby in a chrysalis, is similar in feeling and hints at the forces of creation having a dark, nightmarish side.

Chicago Artists also often seem fascinated by everyday objects, and some of their works might fall into the category of a kind of "Magic Realism." These are sharply observed and tightly painted pieces of small chunks of reality, often with a slightly surreal tweaking. Frank Trankina's "Red Shoes" is one example, where a pair of red shoes has a curious resonance, reminiscent perhaps of an important memory that is only hinted at, never stated. Very different but still object based, is Jo Hormuth's hilarious "Frozen Turkey Dinners" which manages to evoke twisted balloons, pet dachshunds, hot dogs, and erect phalluses at one and the same time. John Littleton and Katherine Vogel's glass sculpture "Bag Explosion" turns images of paper bags into jewel like objects that seem to dance to some unheard music.





Left: **David Russick**
Just David, Self-Portrait after Malevich, 1989
acrylic on canvas
32 x 24

Right: **Lorraine Peltz**
Graph #2, 1994
oil on canvas
36 x 48

The Collection: Past, Present and Future

The Spiezer collection is notable as the only collection of Chicago Art of the period that is partially housed in, and the majority of the collection is ceded perpetually to, a major museum, the Rockford Art Museum. The Spiezers observed that too much donated work was consigned to the basement of the Chicago Art Institute so they began to look around for institutions that would show their collection, not just store it. They wanted the art they owned to be enjoyed by people. Francis Spiezer was in the service in Rockford during World War II. While there, he found that the people of Rockford were immensely friendly; they would never let him pay for a meal when he sat down in a restaurant. As he had such good memories of the city, the Spiezers worked out an arrangement with the Rockford Art Museum where the entire collection would be willed to the museum, with a certain portion turned over to the museum on a yearly basis. Other stipulations were that every ten years, forever, the collection would have to be shown in its entirety, and that the collection could never be broken up or sold. At this writing about two thirds of the collection is housed in the Rockford Art Museum and one third resides in the Spiezer residence. As Mrs. Spiezer adds a new work she usually cedes a work to Rockford to make room for the new one to hang in her home. The Rockford Art Museum also has the advantage of the possessing the largest art museum exhibition space in Illinois outside of Chicago.

The Spiezer Collection includes paintings, prints, drawings, assemblages, ceramics, sculptures, mixed media, a few objects without classification and a very considerable collection of fine art glass. This largesse of vision is possible because, with a few notable exceptions, the Spiezers have chosen only one work per artist, concentrating on choosing a key work by most of the artists in their collection. But what glorious choices they have made! June Spiezer is still collecting and the collection is growing. Every ten years the Rockford Art Museum shows the entire collection and the next such show is slated for 2009.





Tim Lowly
Well, 1992
 tempera on handkerchief
 16 1/4 x 16 1/2

Listed Works

Leon Applebaum
Lapis Blue Snake Vase, n.d.
 blown glass
 14 1/2 x 7 1/2 diameter

Chuck Beckwith
Untitled, 1991
 wood inlaid with
 ceramic mosaic
 3 1/2 x 7 1/4 x 6 1/2

Sonja Blomdahl
Orange Bowl, 1990
 blown and fused
 glass spheres
 8 1/2 x 13 diameter

Nicholas Blosser
Hot June, 1989
 tempera on wood
 11 x 16

Phyllis Bramson
*Then is Now, Now
 is Then*, 1991-92
 mixed media
 36 1/4 x 77

Roger Brown
*View of the Earth from
 Outer Space*, 1980
 oil on canvas
 18 x 35 3/4

Sang-ah Choi
Eyes, 2001
 acrylic, sumi ink, felt tip
 pen, gold leaf paint, and
 polymer resin coating on
 wood panel
 10 x 32

Antonia Contro
*Untitled (landscape with
 wishbones)*, n.d.
 oil on canvas
 8 x 14

Janet Cooling
Female Snake, 1980
 oil on canvas
 14 x 11

Ke Ke Cribbs
Silky, 1986
 glass
 11 x 5 1/8 x 4 3/4

Tom Czarnopys
Untitled, 1989
 cast bronze with patinas
 16 x 8 x 10

Susanne Doremus
Interior with Mirror, 1984
 oil on canvas
 52 x 63 1/2

Spenser A. Dornitzer
I Have Quiet Demons, 1994
 oil on canvas
 13 x 15

L.J. Douglas
Waiting for Odysseus, 1982
 oil on canvas
 62 x 48

Kathleen Eggert
Untitled, n.d.
 glass
 10 x 10 x 7 1/4

Sarah Barnhardt Fields
Housescape #9, 1990
 oil stick and pastel
 on paper
 26 x 26

Julia Fish
Great Divide, 1986
 oil on canvas
 20 x 48

Mark Sumner Forth
Night Train, 1990
 oil on canvas
 38 3/4 x 46 1/2

Anne Farley Gaines
Pinions of Light, n.d.
 watercolor on paper
 28 x 36

Josh Garber
Swim, 1995
 welded steel
 28 x 16 x 14

Rachel Josepher Gaspers
Sowelv I, 1991
 glass and mortar
 15 1/2 x 16 x 4 1/2

John Glick
Untitled Box, n.d.
 ceramic
 5 1/2 x 4 3/4 x 4 1/2

Harry Gold
Dreamscape, n.d.
 oil on canvas
 29 x 23

Michelle Grabner
Fishing Net, 1995
 oil on board
 19 x 23

Art Green
Good Intentions, 1980
 oil on canvas
 34 3/8 diameter (tondo)

Chrissie Heinrich
Jasmine, n.d.
 ceramic
 11 1/4 x 7 1/2 x 9

- John Henry**
Matathias' Legacy, 1988
painted aluminum
19 x 14 x 14
- Richard Jolley**
How Do I Look?, n.d.
cast glass
12 1/2 x 6 1/2 x 5
- Steven Grant LaRose**
Foliated, 1994
oil on board
41 1/2 x 31 1/2
- Joel Philip Myers**
White Hand, c. 1973
glass
11 1/8 x 5 1/4 x 4 1/2
- Daniel Ramirez**
Quote for Weichtenstein, 1978
oil on canvas
45 x 50
- Steven Heyman**
Untitled, 1991
acrylic on canvas
36 x 48
- Gary Justis**
Untitled, 1987
aluminum
23 x 18.5 x 7
- Mike Lash**
20 Or So Men In Red, n.d.
paint on gatorboard
5 1/2 x 78
- Jeffrey Nichols**
Sweep Spout, 1996
mixed media
14 x 21 x 5 1/2
- Scott Reeder**
Pencil Thinking It's a Pen, 1995
oil on canvas
16 x 20
- Jesse Hickman**
East Winter 31992, 1992
oil, pigmented gesso, and shellac on wood
9 1/2 x 10
- Robert Kameczura**
What we are, what we think we are, what other people think we are, 2004
acrylic on canvas
52 x 50
- John, Katherine and Vogel Littleton**
Bag Explosion, 1990
blown and fused glass
13 3/4 x 10 1/2 x 11 1/4
- Gladys Nilsson**
Hall of Mirrors, 1980-81
acrylic on canvas
12 1/2 x 16 1/2
- David Russick**
Just David, Self Portrait after Malevich, 1989
acrylic on canvas
32 x 24
- Jesse Hickman**
South Winter 91992, 1992
oil, pigmented gesso, and shellac on wood
9 1/2 x 10
- June Kaneko**
Untitled (gold square on blue circle), 1988
ceramic
26 1/2 x 21 x 3
- Tim Lowly**
Well, 1992
tempera on handkerchief
16 1/4 x 16 1/2
- Jim Nutt**
Oh! My Goodness (No No), 1977
etching on paper
20 1/2 x 20 1/2
- Delia Siegenthaler**
Untitled, n.d.
ceramic and paint
22 x 25
- Jesse Hickman**
West Winter 111992, 1992
oil, pigmented gesso, and shellac on wood
9 1/2 x 10
- Terry Karpowicz**
Untitled, n.d.
wood with marble base
16 1/2 x 17 x 4 1/4
- Ralph L. Odes**
Untitled Figure, 1995
marble
20 1/2 x 10 1/4 x 6 1/2
- Joe Siegenthaler**
Sheldon, 1995
acrylic, resin, hair on fired stoneware
20 x 22 x 16
- Francis and Michael Higgins**
Plate, n.d.
glass
3/4 x 9 7/16 diameter
- Jacqueline (Jackie) Kazarian**
Not Knot #18, 1991
acrylic on canvas
34 x 34
- Colleen Ott**
Untitled (camel paper-weight), n.d.
glass and metal
6 1/2 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2
- Hollis Sigler**
It Keeps Her Going, 1991-92
oil on canvas
53 1/2 x 65 3/4
- Steven Hudson**
Millenium 16/ The Launderer, 1993
oil on canvas
36 x 47
- John Kearney**
Giraffe, n.d.
metal sculpture
28 x 5 x 11
- Ed Paschke**
Red Sweeney, 1975
oil on canvas
74 x 40
- Dorothy Hughs**
Untitled, n.d.
wood, plaster and paint
17 1/2 x 9 x 7 1/2
- Richard Kooyman**
Crazy Box, 1987
wood
8 1/2 x 7 3/4 x 4 3/4
- Jerry Peart**
Chicago Reflections I, 1988
painted aluminum
21 x 17 x 7
- Therman Statom**
Frosted House, n.d.
painted glass
21 1/4 x 13 1/4 x 11 1/2
- Richard Hull**
Aimless Resolve (Trism Trasm), 1985
oil and wax on linen
36 x 48
- Linda Kramer**
Landscape with Two Eggs, 2007
mixed media on wood
25 x 25
- Jacqueline Moses**
Vestiges of Time (Monument Valley III), 1991
oil on canvas
18 x 24
- Michelle Stone**
Portrait of Jackie Moses, 2007
oil paint on canvas
14 1/2 x 11 1/2 x 2



Francis and June Spiezer in their home in 2004.

Donna Tadelman

Beckoning, 1991
oil on linen
14 1/2 x 16 1/2

Lino Tagliapietra

F31 Murano, 1982
blown glass vessel
3 x 18.5 diameter

Tony Tasset

Still Life, 1986
mixed media, wine bottle,
two wine glasses, leather,
black lacquered frame
38 x 30 1/2 x 7 1/2

Maria Tomasula

Rite, 1994
oil on canvas
18 x 14

Frank Trankina

Red Shoes, 1992
oil on canvas
14 x 16

Mark Van Wagner

Matter of Abstraction, 1990
linoleum, concrete, bark
and oil paint on masonite
with painted lace
43 x 24 x 2

Janusz Walentynowicz

Untitled, n.d.
cast glass
5 1/2 x 9 x 8

Chuck Walker

Hospital Tree, 1985
oil on canvas
30 x 24

Margaret Wharton

Bread and Butter, 1990
mixed media construction
5 1/2 x 9 1/4 x 6 1/4

Ann Weins

Two Eggs Balanced, 1992
oil and leaf on panel
15 3/4 x 22 3/4

James Wilbat

Base, 1989
Blown Glass
12 x 6 x 4 diameter

Karl Wirsum

Inner "E" Stare Bonnet,
1980
lithograph
19 1/8 x 14 1/8

Ray Yoshida

Playful Private Pricking,
1982
acrylic on canvas
32 x 28

Mary Ann "Toots" Zynsky

Green Bowl, 1985
pulled glass strands;
slumped and fused
4 1/2 x 15 1/2 diameter

Robert Kameczura

Robert Kameczura is a Chicago artist, arts activist and arts writer. He is the fine arts critic for Big Shoulders magazine (www.sobs.org), and the founder of The Mythopian Artists Group.



Rockford Art Museum

One of the largest art museums in Illinois, Rockford Art Museum features a changing array of dynamic, award-winning contemporary exhibitions that showcase a variety of genres, styles and media. RAM houses an extensive collection of American art from the 19th century through today, with a focus on work by historic and contemporary regional artists as well as American Masters, Glass Art, Modern and Contemporary Art, Outsider Art, and Photography. Important RAM collections include the Francis and June Spiezer Collection of Art, the Temmie and Arnold Gilbert Collection of Photography, the Hager Collection of Self-Taught African American Art, and the Francis Minert Collection of Photography.

Opening Reception:

Sunday, September 14, 2008 from 1-4 p.m.

Regular Gallery Hours:

Tuesday–Friday • 10 a.m.–3p.m.

Thursday evening • 6-8 p.m.

Saturday • 1-4 p.m.

For more information, please contact Diane Levesque at (262) 551-5853 or send an email to dlevesque@carthage.edu. To learn more about the H. F. Johnson Gallery of Art please visit www.carthage.edu/dept/art/gallery.





Carthage

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