



For more information on the individual artists featured in **Cutting Edge**, please scan QR code at right or visit ramart.org.



Endnotes

1. Jason Pfohl, "An Odyssey in Glass: A Survey of Antique Glass Piercing Jewelry and Technology," *The Point*, Issue 38, 10.
2. Robert K. Liu, "Contemporary Glass Jewelry: A Continuing Tradition," *Ornament*, 24.3.2001, 45.
3. Because of the types of techniques used to create the shape and form of their adornment, some of those who use glass beads have more in common with fiber than glass. However, the choice to use the glass bead is still purposeful. Glass beads have been (and still are) used for numerous reasons including to echo historical forms or jewelry, to connect to the aesthetics of other cultures, to imitate stones, to reflect light, or within certain societies, to barter.

(above left)
Donald Friedlich, *Aqua Series Brooch*, 2007
 Glass, 14k-gold, 18k-gold, and 22k-gold
 3 1/4 x 2 3/4 x 3/8 inches
 Collection of the Artist
 Photo: James Beards

(left)
Melissa Schmidt, *Absolute Necklace*, 2011
 Glass
 7 x 7 x 2 inches
 Collection of the Artist
 Photo: Don Casper

(above right)
Julie Mihalisin, *Neckpiece*, 1992
 Glass and sterling silver
 13 x 4 1/2 x 1 1/8 inches
 Racine Art Museum, Gift of Dale and Doug Anderson
 Photo: Jon Bolton



Cutting Edge RAM Explores Contemporary Glass Jewelry



James Minson, *Washi Necklace*, 1999
 Glass, paper, and metal
 12 x 10 x 1 1/2 inches
 Racine Art Museum, Gift of the Artist
 Photo: Jon Bolton

Following a historical precedent for utilizing glass in adornment, contemporary artists create dynamic art jewelry that underscores the aesthetic and theoretical potential of an ancient material.

Cutting Edge represents the intersection of two important elements of artistic production—art jewelry and glass. Whether engaging with long-standing traditions, such as producing *millefiore* beads, or utilizing glass in equally compelling, yet inherently modern, conceptual frameworks—these artists emphasize the flexibility and variability of glass as a medium for expression. This exhibition is distinguished by artists who use a variety of techniques and explore a broad range of subject matter.

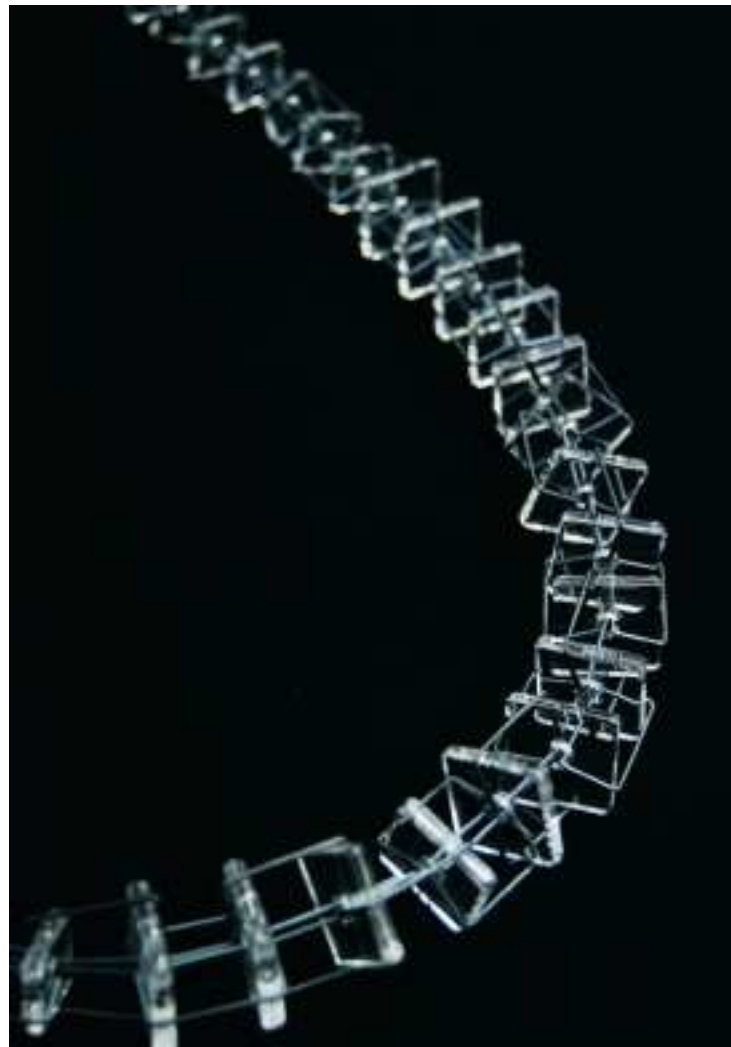
While given more attention recently, art jewelry made using glass represents an important, yet sometimes overlooked element of contemporary glass. **Cutting Edge** emphasizes artists who regularly address the medium in their practice. Earthenware and fused glass jewelry by modern maker **Elsa Freund** (1912-2001) adds historical dimension. Significantly, several of the featured artists are also represented in RAM's permanent collection through jewelry, small objects, or both—artists such as **Donald Friedlich** (WI), **Jacqueline Lillie** (France), **Linda MacNeil** (WA), **Julie Mihalisin** (WA), **James Minson** (WA), **Judy Onofrio** (MN), **Barbara Packer** (NY), **Axel Russmeyer** (Germany), and **Joyce Scott** (MD). Others whose works are included: **Dolores Barrett** (CA), **Patty Cokus** (WA), **Jane D'Arensbourg** (NY), **Charlene Foster** (NY), **Foster and Malone** (NY),



Carrie Garrott (TX), **Karen Gilbert** (CA), **Suzanne Golden** (NY), **Gesine Hackenberg** (Netherlands), **Valerie Hector** (IL), **Kristina Logan** (NH), **Pavel Novak** (NJ), **Kait Rhoads** (WA), **Joyce Roessler** (MA), **Erica Rosenfeld** (NY), **Philip Sajet** (France), **Melissa Schmidt** (MO), **Blanche Tilden** (Australia), and **Jette Vogt** (NE).

Elsa Freund, *Bracelet*, 1961
 Glass, glazed ceramic, and sterling silver
 2 x 3 x 2 inches
 Racine Art Museum,
 Gift of Betty Gregg Black
 Photo: Jon Bolton

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discussions of a studio-driven artistic process. This underscores the complex role jewelry holds within societies. In a contemporary context, artists self-consciously employ glass through an exploratory, investigative process that looks at the media historically, aesthetically, and, sometimes critically. They use glass that has been manipulated (blown, etched, sandblasted, cast), left raw, or in bead form. Interestingly, artists from varying backgrounds (glass, fiber, and metalsmithing are the most prominent in this group) employ the material, being drawn to it for both similar and different reasons.

In a 2001 article about contemporary glass jewelry, historian and author **Robert K. Liu** highlighted the connection between the choice of glass as a material and greater cultural and social concerns. He states: "Glass jewels in antiquity had equivalent status to stones but in more recent times, the use of such jewels has had the connotation of being a substitute or of lesser value."² With this article, Liu emphasizes the lineage of glass jewelry and adds to the comment above that many contemporary artists use the material as part of their personal investigations. In summary, glass used as a jewel for fashion may have to do with cost, while in an artistic context, the value of glass is often measured differently. The emphasis may be placed on the possibilities of the material, its metaphorical connotations, and the individual desires of the person creating the piece or the person who will wear it.

(above left)
Blanche Tilden
Long Grand Palais (detail), 2011
Glass and sterling silver
14 1/2 x 10 x 7/8 inches
Collection of the Artist
Photo: Marcus Scholz

The domestic history of glass is long and complex—in various forms, it has been used for commercial, functional, mechanical, and decorative purposes. The studio glass movement of the 1960s was a major factor in propelling glass to popularity as an artistic media. Living in the wake of that and recognizing the aesthetic capabilities and symbolic potential of glass, the artists whose works are featured in **Cutting Edge** use the ancient material to create contemporary adornment.

While the jewelry in this exhibition may have been created in the last 60 years, the link between glass and adornment is not a new one. In fact, there is archaeological evidence that suggests that since glass was first discovered as a workable material about 3500 years ago (although various techniques, such as glass blowing, are historically newer), it has been used to decorate the body. Various societies incorporated glass into adornment in different ways—depending on the particular culture's aptitude for working with the material and the social interest in expanding the technology. As one researcher of glass piercing jewelry points out, "Glass produced in one area could be re-melted on a torch or cast into molds in another region. Blocks of glass from China and Europe were imported into Southeast Asia and carved, ground, and polished into ear plugs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."¹

As with other materials used to create jewelry, glass can be utilized for symbolic, economic, fashion, personal, cultural, or aesthetic reasons. The glass bead, for example, has a history associated with personal identity, ritual, ceremony, trade, and wealth. Modern conversations about materials for creating jewelry often mix a history that may be more fashion or status-focused with



(right)
Karen Gilbert
Bundle, 2011
Glass, sterling silver, and silk
6 x 6 x 2 inches
Collection of the Artist
Photo: Courtesy of the Artist

Discussions of glass artwork (sculpture and jewelry) have often been focused on technique. There are several possibilities for manipulating the material and different approaches seem to not only define the work but reflect the temperament of the artist. Working the glass itself, in hot or cold form, is very rigorous. Simultaneously, those who use glass beads or emphasize the metal components of a piece, engage in other labor-intensive processes—instead of shaping glass, they may be building structure, such as peyote-stitching glass bead necklaces.³

While **Cutting Edge** features artists that are primarily based in the United States, the self-conscious exploration of glass as an element of adornment is certainly not geographically limited. In addition, there are artists who have been using glass for decades and those who are newer to the material.

Because many of the jewelers involved in this exhibition make work that explores both functional and theoretical boundaries—and because they choose to use a material so steeped in history and use beyond jewelry—it seemed critically appropriate to wonder "why glass?" The following reasons for choosing glass over another medium were offered by some of the **Cutting Edge** artists (either in a statement or via email):

- Glass offers myriad technical and aesthetic possibilities to artists.
- Glass has a metaphorical connection to ideas of preciousness, beauty, and fragility.
- Glass has a particular vibrancy and transparency.
- While commonplace and used in many familiar objects, glass can still be manipulated in fascinating ways.
- The plasticity of glass is appealing.
- The history of the material—as both something common and as something used for making jewelry.
- "Glass is demanding yet like no other material."
- It has "gem-like qualities."
- Glass can function as a metaphor for clarity and purity.

Linked to a nationwide anniversary of 50 years of studio glass in America and the second of two glass exhibitions RAM has organized this year, **Cutting Edge** has been supported by both the Midwest Contemporary Glass Art Group and Art Alliance for Contemporary Glass.

(above right)
Linda MacNeil
Mesh 6-95 Necklace (detail), 1995
Glass and 24k-gold
9 1/8 x 4 1/2 x 3/4 inches
Racine Art Museum,
Gift of Dale and Doug Anderson
Photo: Jon Bolton



(right)
Joyce Scott
Neckpiece, 1991
Glass, thread, and plastic sheeting
11 3/4 x 8 x 1/2 inches
Racine Art Museum,
Gift of Marilyn Radke
Photo: Jon Bolton

