

[Cover] *Fossils: Patterns of Organic Energy*, detail, 1994, etched copper, wood, patinas, found objects, and Ralston-Oklahoma brachiopods, 26" dia. X 10" deep, photo by Chris Ramsay

[1] *Extinct*, 2001, steel, brass, bronze, resin, 1950's paper globe, stamps and images of extinct plants, animals, insects and other living things, and found objects, 15" x 13" x 12", photo by Chris Ramsay

[2] *Endangered*, 2001, steel, brass, bronze, resin, 1950's paper globe, stamps, images of endangered plants, animals, insects and other living things, and found objects, 15" x 13" x 12", photo by Chris Ramsay

[3] *Meditation in Stillwater No. 5*, 2007, brooch, etched steel, nickel, bronze, and Oklahoma crinoid stems, 3.5" dia. X .5" deep, photo by Chris Ramsay

[4] *A World View: Birds*, 1999, steel wire, fabricated bronze armature, wood and brass fabricated stereoscope, battery-operated light, found ceramic birds, cast bronze, and early 1900's bird stereocards, 27" x 17" dia., photo by Chris Ramsay

[5] *As You Save... So You Prosper*, detail, 2000 (first edition), ten 5" x 4" diameter globes of similar size and shape, displayed side-by-side on a 4' shelf, each featuring a different National Park postage stamp from the 1934-35 commemorative series and soil, photo by Chris Ramsay

[6] *A World View: Insects*, 1999, steel wire, fabricated bronze armature, wood and brass fabricated stereoscope, battery-operated light, paint, cast bronze, early 1900's insect stereocards, 27" x 17" dia., photo by Chris Ramsay

[7] *As You Save... So You Prosper*, 2000 (first edition), ten 5" x 4" diameter globes of similar size and shape, displayed side-by-side on a 4' shelf, each featuring a different National Park postage stamp from the 1934-35 commemorative series and soil, photo by Chris Ramsay

[8] *Moment to Moment*, 2001, metal globes, postcard images, found objects, bronze, steel, and lenses, globes: 12" x 10" dia., overall: 13" x 36" x 7 1/2", photo by Chris Ramsay



Museum Hours: Monday – Saturday, 11 am – 5 pm; Open until 8 pm on Thursdays

Free Admission

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Chris Ramsay: Meditations in Stillwater

September 15, 2014 – January 17, 2015



[2]

The mixed-media works of artist Chris Ramsay reflect a vision of the world in which an infinite variety of parts is unified by a force, invisible and mysterious, that overcomes absolute randomness. Like gravity, this force evokes action at a distance; like electromagnetism, it disperses objects in fields of energy. Although the patterns that it elicits among things are readily intuited, they elude simple description. They extend across time as well as space and add to objects a relevance to one another that is something like that of heavenly bodies during an eclipse: an effect of interaction that is both ephemeral and recursive because of its origins in cyclical processes. Implications of birth, growth, death, and decay impart to Ramsay's objects a sense of belonging naturally within a larger scheme, a scheme that seems equally dependent upon the existence of material things. Like all forces in nature this scheme would be nothing in the absence of physical objects on which to act.

Objects have fascinated Ramsay since childhood, when he developed the habit of pocketing pebbles, bits of glass, broken toys, parts of machinery, and other small treasures while walking to and from school. In his bedroom these chance acquisitions were arranged on

shelves to create meaningful relationships. The ability to integrate different kinds of objects with one another in this way – to manipulate things by hand to produce compositions that were more than the sums of their parts – would years later inspire his interest in jewelry making. As a graduate student at Texas Tech University in the 1980s he fully acknowledged the origins of his art when he produced a series of pocket jewelry designed to be carried, taken out, and explored, rather than simply worn on a lapel or suspended from earlobes.

If the acts of collecting, arranging, and preserving that characterize Ramsay's art are habits that can be traced back to childhood, the significance that he ascribes to these acts emerged only later – like so many milestones in life – through experience of loss. While still in his early twenties, he helped a cancer-stricken friend create a garden: a living legacy to persist and grow beyond the span of a single life. A few days after his young friend's untimely passing, Ramsay experienced an event that deepened both the mystery and the meaning of existence. At night he awoke to the sensation of a slap to the forehead. Sensing something over his left shoulder, he turned to see two perfect, concentric rings of bluish light advancing toward him. Although the effect vanished at the flip of a lamp switch, the experience has persisted in Ramsay's memory as confirmation of a hidden continuity between all things, whether they be entering into physical existence or passing from it.

Ramsay's "circles," not so much a series title as a term that serves to group similar works, include both brooches and large, wall-mounted sculptures that are often basin-like in form. Of the latter, *Fossils: Patterns of Organic Energy* (cover) is exemplary in both its conceptual content and its formal elements, the latter of which recall, through concentric circles and a spiral, the strange rings of energy that still burn brightly in Ramsay's memory. The fossils, including both actual brachiopods that Ramsay gathered from an Oklahoma road cut and bronze versions of the same, could be interpreted as *memento mori*, reminders of the inevitability of death. For Ramsay, however, they are also reminders of the perseverance of life: of an energy

that is perpetual and invincible in the collective, even if it wanes and flickers out in the individual.

Like circles, spheres are common in Ramsay's art, particularly in those he calls "stones" and "globes." The former consist of marble spheroids cut and inlaid with buttons, potsherds, shells, and other small objects by employing skills acquired through an artist's residency at Pietrasanta, Italy. The latter, the globes, apply the idea of preservation, central to Ramsay's habit of collecting, specifically to the context of the earth and its resources. Such works as *Endangered* (fig. 2) and *Extinct* (fig. 1) combine paper globes from the 1950s with inlaid metal-framed lenses, beneath which can be glimpsed postage-stamp and postcard images of flora and fauna species that today are threatened or have already been entirely eradicated due to human impact on the biosphere. Although the nostalgia evoked by the vintage globes makes these works more melancholy than alarming,

the message is clear.

Ramsay directs that message more specifically in *As You Save...So You Prosper* (fig. 5 & 7), a multi-globe/coin-bank sculpture in which historical postage stamps provide clues to the contents of the metal spheres: earth from each of ten national parks.

The sense that meanings lie like secret souls ensconced within objects is pervasive in Ramsay's work. In some cases the viewer is invited to peer into interiors to discover these meanings in the form of vintage photographs. The pair of sculptures titled *A World View–Birds* (fig. 4) and *A World View–Insects* (fig. 6), for example, contain antique



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stereopticon cards purchased at a de-acquisition sale at the Stillwater Public Library. The act of looking inward at such content parallels the process of understanding objects by examining the physical clues to their histories, but just as importantly it is an apt metaphor of the process of introspection: a looking into one's self. In an important sense, Ramsay's works are not just about an intuited force that, contrary to entropy, draws objects together across time and distance and establishes a natural order of things. More importantly, they are about negotiating a personal path within this natural order: they are about the walk, the discovery, and the meditation on objects and how the traces of their circumstances, the histories written upon them, hint at an ineffable meaning in which we are all ultimately participants.

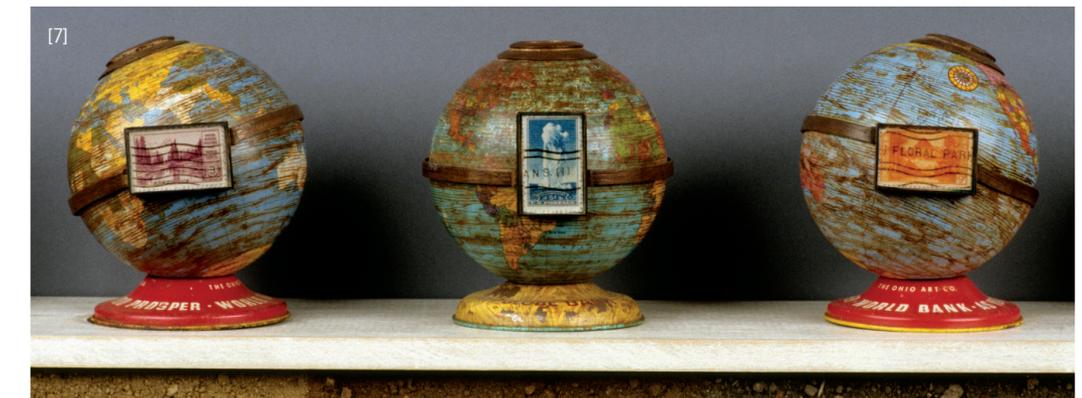
Glen R. Brown, Curator

Chris Ramsay

Professor Chris Ramsay received studio art degrees at Michigan (BFA 83') and Texas Tech (MFA 86') universities and has taught jewelry/metals courses at Oklahoma State University since 1990. Additionally he served as Head of the OSU Art Department from 2009-2012. He is the recipient of Mid-America Arts Alliance/National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Crafts, Oklahoma Visual Arts Coalition Award of Excellence, teaching awards and multiple Artist-in-Residencies, including Acadia National Park. His work has been included in over 200 invitational, competitive, group, and one-person exhibitions, and regionally can be found in the permanent collection of the Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OK.

Glen R. Brown

Glen R. Brown is a Professor of Art History and Director of Graduate Studies at Kansas State University. He has authored numerous publications on contemporary metalwork and jewelry for *Metalsmith* magazine and is a regular contributor to *Ornament*. He has also written extensively about contemporary and historical ceramics and was elected to membership in the International Academy of Ceramics, Geneva, Switzerland in 2005. Since 2004 he has been an Associate Fellow of the International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln. He is an advisory board member for the Cub Creek Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Appomattox, VA and a former treasurer of the Kansas Artist Craftsmen Association.



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This exhibition is organized by the Oklahoma State University Museum of Art.

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Exhibitions and programs at the Oklahoma State University Museum of Art are sponsored by OSUMA Founding Patrons, OSU/A&M Board of Regents, OSU Foundation, and the Oklahoma Arts Council.

