

## Gallery Guide

### Materiality

The exhibition *Materiality* features artists Mille Guldbek, Nnenna Okore, Ann Rosen, Ragnhildur Steffánsdóttir, Margi Weir and Marjorie Woodruff, all of whom are inspired by the unusual materials they use to create their works of art. The word “materiality” refers to “the quality of being composed of matter,” but also can be defined as “being of great relevance or significance.” The works exhibited here are represented by both definitions; these artists define their creative practice through the materials they choose for their art to make works that are both significant and socially relevant. Each of these artists find meaning in the materials and media used for their works, and the materials used become important to the context and understanding of the work. In addition, the show features a wide variety of media from vinyl forms to the use of grain sacks, or even recycled materials.

According to the Getty Museum’s Research Institute, “artists across time and space have infused materials not only with ritual and symbolic significance but also social, political, and economic functions.” (from their website [www.getty.edu/research](http://www.getty.edu/research)) Various materials used in art make artists’ ideas tangible. While, universally, artists use various media to make their work, there are times when emphasis is placed on what the work is made of. The work would appear totally different with a different use of materials, so that artists usually choose their media and materials carefully to best enhance or portray their ideas. Ideas made tangible can have a certain appearance, but also a certain texture or presence that challenges what we normally conceive an object to be. Take, for example, Meret Oppenheim’s *Furry Teacup*, created in 1936, that has come to define Surrealism. Oppenheim applied the fur of a gazelle to a normal china cup and saucer; this changed the meaning of that saucer from one that might be used by a genteel woman to one that instead oozes sensuality and makes reference to sexuality. That object can be said to have great materiality, because the materials used are what supply the meaning to that Surrealist object of art. Were the object presented made out of glass, plastic or rubber, the meaning of the work would change with the material used.

A work that has materiality is one that makes its presence known in a physical way, rather than something that belongs in the metaphysical world; the latter idea is said to have “immateriality.” While changing the material of an object to something unexpected may feel dream-like, the physical presence of the object is of this world, right here in front of the viewer. When artists make us conscious of the materials they

use in work, they are looking at how materials behave under certain circumstances, how modifying a material may change our perception of an object, or they may simply want to emphasize how appropriate a material is for their creative vision. Artwork that has strong materiality may deploy the materials for an aesthetic quality only or for their ability to signify meaning. This exhibition “focuses on the moments when materials become willful actors and agents within artistic processes, entangling their audience in a web of connections,” as MIT Press describes the focus of an anthology of writing on materiality. ([www.mitpress.edu/books/materiality](http://www.mitpress.edu/books/materiality))

In the exhibition, *Materiality*, meanings of the work are enhanced by or inherent in the materials used. The works maintain a strong physical presence, experienced by the viewer through sensory perception. Once the senses are engaged, the viewer then further experiences the work through intellectual engagement, bringing perception from previous experiences and an understanding of history and context. If the work has been made with extensive labor, viewers perceive the level of refinement of the materials used. The viewer feels conscious of how artists may begin with unusual materials transformed by their imagination into something new and original. The process of creating the work may be evident to the viewer, enhancing his or her understanding of the work.

Each of the artists in the exhibition *Materiality* respects the materials used in her work. Each artist chooses wisely, and is obviously entranced by the materials that make up her work. The materials inspire, challenge, and engage these artists to explore, express, and reflect on the ideas and look of the work. Technical challenges of the materials used delight these artists. The look, feel and processing of each material used fascinates each artist to further explore her media. They challenge themselves by using materials that are unusual, creative, metaphorical and imbued with meaning. When artists are challenged, they move beyond established parameters to make works that are highly significant; in turn, they challenge us to question and open our eyes to new ideas and forms. Materiality in art engages us and makes the experience of art stimulating and intoxicating.

*For more information, please see catalogue **Materiality: Works of Significance***