2023 Curatorial Fellows to Speak at Center for Craft

An opening reception on February 17 brings the fellows together for the first time

ASHEVILLE, NC (February 6, 2023) – On Friday, February 17, the Center for Craft invites the public to an opening reception celebrating the 2023 Curatorial Fellows. For the first time in the Center’s history, all three fellows will be onsite together to share their journeys as part of this internationally-recognized program. Their individual exhibitions – Crafting Denim, curated by Sonya Abrego; Something earned, Something left behind, curated by Kehayr Brown-Ransaw; and NEO MINERALIA, curated by Oscar Salguero – will be on view.

Although they have worked closely over the course of the fellowship, their visit to Asheville will be the first meeting in person. The reception is free and open to the public, and will be held from 6-7:30 p.m., with curatorial remarks at 6:45 p.m. Reservations are requested.

The Center’s emphasis on education and its broad approach to craft scholarship have helped the organization chart a new path that empowers artists and curators. The fellowship was created in 2017 as an additional offering for emerging curators interested in craft, who often rely on a limited number of internships to gain piecemeal experience in the field. It has helped launch early-career curators, supporting them with mentorship, professional development, and a $5,000 honorarium. Fellows also design an exhibition catalog, develop educational materials, and deliver a curatorial talk to accompany their exhibition.

Together, the exhibitions highlight the expansiveness of craft. Sonya Abrego’s Crafting Denim explores the rise of handmade denim through the work of three contemporary denim makers: Bowery Blue Makers, W.H. Ranch Dungarees, and North Carolina-based Raleigh Denim. Each maker approaches the design and construction of this quintessential workwear material as an artisanal practice, working on a small scale with machines and hand tools that upend the typical association of jeans with mass production. Abrego, a design historian and the author of Westernwear: Postwar American Fashion and Culture, shares that she is particularly excited for viewers to come away with new ways of looking at familiar objects. “I would love for visitors to think about the contexts for how their own clothes are made and worn,” she notes.

Kehayr Brown-Ransaw’s Something earned, Something left behind showcases six artists from a wide range of backgrounds to frame questions about the role of cultural identity in craft exhibitions. Brown-Ransaw adopted an intentional, ethical, and compassionate approach, honoring the
complexity of artists’ identities and creating space where works from makers of color could be understood on their own terms, versus through the often reductive, exclusionary craft canon. He explains that the exhibition centers “the people – their cultures, their healing, their stories, their objects,” with craft as the backdrop. “As POC artists, I think we naturally gravitate to culturally traditional art processes,” he says. Those processes “allow us to be ourselves outside of our homes and engage with oppressive systems more honestly.” The more formal elements of craft, he adds, “are secondary to the culturally specific elements that drive the work."

“I want people to know that it’s okay to see themselves,” he adds. “I hope viewers take notice of themselves and their families, [and] the parts of themselves that feel lost or given away.”

NEO MINERALIA, curated by Oscar Salguero, highlights the potential of rocks to reflect humanity’s effects on human and nonhuman ecologies. Ten “new rock specimens” are embedded with human-manufactured materials, like plastics and e-waste, as well as human-originated data, to create two new classes of rock formation: Synthetic and Digital. Through the lens of speculative fiction, the exhibition imagines what remnants of our existence might be found by future geologists, and what stories, warnings, and promises those remnants might hold.

“NEO MINERALIA is likely the beginning of a long term study and inquiry into the relationship of artistic research, craft, and speculative geology,” he says. “I hope that visitors are inspired to go outside and look deeply at something as simple as a rock.”

He adds, “I look forward to seeing the final form of all three exhibitions and how they may begin to speak to each other.”

The Center for Craft will be taking pre-orders during the event for a limited set of catalogs featuring individual essays by each curator. While exhibitions will be on view through October 21, the public is especially encouraged to attend the opening reception and take advantage of this unique opportunity to meet and hear from all three curators. Reserve your spot for the Opening Reception here.

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ABOUT CENTER FOR CRAFT Founded in 1996, the Center for Craft’s mission is to resource, catalyze, and amplify how and why craft matters. As a 501(c)3 national nonprofit that increases access to craft by empowering and resourcing artists, organizations, and communities through grants, fellowships and programs that bring people together. The Center is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential organizations working on behalf of craft in the United States. For more information, visit www.centerforcraft.org.