

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | SEPTEMBER 13, 2022

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OUR AMERICA/WHOSE AMERICA?

23 contemporary artists respond to depictions of race in historic,
commercial ceramics; on view through Oct. 30

**Sept. 23-24: symposium programming with sister exhibition
IMPRINTED: ILLUSTRATING RACE at Norman Rockwell Museum**

NORTH ADAMS, MA - Ferrin Contemporary is proud to present ***OUR AMERICA/WHOSE AMERICA?***, a dialogue between 23 contemporary artists and a collection of commercially produced ceramics. This collection of historical objects, collected over many years by gallery founder and director **Leslie Ferrin**, are in the form of plates, souvenirs, and figurines from the early 19th through mid-20th centuries. The items were produced in England, Occupied Japan, and various factories in the USA. The exhibition title was chosen from a series of plates produced by Vernon Kilns that features illustrations of American scenes by the painter Rockwell Kent.

In response to this historical collection, contemporary works by participating artists provides new context and interpretation of these profoundly powerful objects. Seen now, decades and in some cases centuries later, the narratives they deliver through image, characterization, and stereotype, whether overt and bombastic or subtle and cunning, form a collective memory that continues to impact the way people see themselves and others today. These 23 contemporary artists use their work to assert their autonomy and subjectivity by presenting intertwined cultural critiques through lenses of their own choosing, starting with race, gender, and class. Each of these categories is tentacular and touch upon myriad other ideas including nature, warfare, food and water inequity, and more.

“Throughout our forty year history, we have used multi-artist survey exhibitions as a platform to explore social issues. We’ve focused on gender and feminist perspectives, broached relationship taboos, and challenged historical notions of ceramics and art. Last summer we partnered with Heller Gallery to present MELTING POINT as a way to use the mediums of ceramic and glass to address issues surrounding climate change. Now we feel it is time to turn our lens on the racist representations in mass market ceramics,” says Ferrin.

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ONLINE SYMPOSIUM hosted by NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT:

ILLUSTRATED CERAMICS AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

Panelists: **Leslie Ferrin** (mod), Elizabeth Alexander, Jacqueline Bishop, Judy Chartrand, Niki Johnson, and Paul Scott

Sept. 23, 7:30 to 8:45 pm - register [here](#)

Hidden in plain sight, illustrations on porcelain and ceramic ware have, throughout history, transformed functional objects into message-bearers for a wide range of political and propagandistic causes, whether exchanged by heads of state or acquired for use or display in domestic settings. Leslie Ferrin of Ferrin Contemporary will discuss the imagery, drawn from popular nineteenth century prints, that was reproduced on widely distributed ceramics portraying historical events, indigenous people, and notable explorers, inventors, and politicians through a white European lens. The panel will explore how these seemingly ordinary objects, including Rockwell collector plates, have helped to establish firmly held beliefs about American identity. Artists Elizabeth Alexander, Jacqueline Bishop, Judy Chartrand, Niki Johnson, and Paul Scott, will discuss contemporary ceramics, which reject systems of racial oppression and invite reconsideration of the sanitized version of history that was presented for generations.

Symposium continues on Sept. 24, see NRM web site for full schedule and details.

The exhibition is co-curated by Ferrin and Lauren Levato Coyne. Levato Coyne recently relocated from Detroit to North Adams, MA to assume the role of gallery director, managing the day-to-day operations of the gallery and also working closely with the artists represented by Ferrin Contemporary. "I'm thrilled to give living artists an opportunity to respond to our current moment while bringing awareness to pathways that lead us here. Ceramic souvenirs and commemorative plates are exactly the type of ubiquitous household goods that have shaped perceptions of generations of people across the globe," said Levato Coyne.

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“Big public monuments honoring a one-sided past are being addressed, and those towering figures have certainly shaped and reinforced dark or false narratives. But what about the seemingly passive domestic items that have populated the cupboards and walls of countless generations? The most normal looking things—transferware plates, ashtrays, porcelain figurines—can deliver very serious and deleterious messages, especially when viewed daily over the course of time.”

These selected objects will be on view during the exhibition to illustrate racist historic tropes, representations, and stereotypes. These works, not for sale, serve as visual evidence of the issues that permeate American art and social culture and may be lent to future exhibitions in context with contemporary works by artists in this show. If the exhibition is of interest to you, we will supply a PDF of the works in our growing collection for you to review.

Artists:

<u>Elizabeth Alexander</u>	<u>Russell Biles</u>	<u>Jacqueline Bishop</u>	<u>Judy Chartrand</u>
<u>CRANK</u>	<u>Connor Czora</u>	<u>Michelle Erickson</u>	<u>Salvador Jiménez-Flores</u>
<u>Garth Johnson</u>	<u>Akinsanya Kambon</u>	<u>Beckie Kravetz</u>	<u>Steven Young Lee</u>
<u>Jennifer Ling Datchuk</u>	<u>Beth Lo</u>	<u>Niki Johnson</u>	<u>Angelica Pozo</u>
<u>Leo Quiles</u>	<u>Paul Scott</u>	<u>Rae Stern</u>	<u>Momoko Usami</u>
<u>Kukuli Velarde</u>	<u>Jason Walker</u>		

Calendar listing:

Our America/Whose America?

Ferrin Contemporary

1315 MASS MoCA Way, building 13

North Adams, MA 01247

Aug. 6 - Oct. 30, 2022

Ferrin Contemporary Fall 2022/Winter 2023 hours

Thurs. - Sat., 11am - 5 pm

all other hours by chance or appointment

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