



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

Christina Swanson, MA
Director of Public Relations & Marketing
cswanson@thevalentine.org
804.649.0711 x322

Our America/Whose America?

Exhibition in the Valentine's Wickham House features contemporary artists' responses to depictions of race in historic, commercial ceramics

RICHMOND, VA - The Valentine museum has partnered with Ferrin Contemporary to bring a new exhibition installation to the historic Wickham House, on view from February 20, 2024 to April 21, 2024.

Originally on display at Massachusetts-based ceramics gallery Ferrin Contemporary in 2022, *Our America/Whose America?* is a call and response exhibition between contemporary ceramic artists and commercially produced historic ceramic plates, figurines and objects collected by curator and ceramic specialist, Leslie Ferrin. Contemporary and historic works are placed in conversation with one another, installed on period furniture throughout the Wickham House, a federal period historic home on the Valentine's campus built between 1812 and 1815.

Developed over many years, Leslie Ferrin's collection includes plates, souvenirs, objects and figurines from the early-19th through mid-20th centuries produced in England, Occupied Japan, and various factories in the United States. The exhibition title was chosen from a series of plates produced by a California company, Vernon Kilns, featuring illustrations of American scenes by the painter Rockwell Kent.

In addition to this historic collection, Ferrin invited a group of artists to create new works that provide context and interpretation to the objects. The artists' contemporary works, all produced in the last decade, were conceived of and reference several recent protest movements that took place or are taking place in Virginia and throughout America. The

works present intertwined cultural critiques through the artists' unique perspective and through lenses like race, gender and class. The plates and sculptures include specific references to the environment, warfare, food and water inequity of the present moment, becoming "souvenirs" of our time with contemporary imagery and social commentary.

Featured contemporary artists include Chris Antemann, Elizabeth Alexander, Russell Biles, Jacqueline Bishop, Judy Chartrand, Cristina Córdova, CRANK, Connor Czora, Michelle Erickson, Steven Young Lee, Jennifer Ling Datchuk, Beth Lo, Justin Rothshank, Paul Scott, Kevin Snipes, Rae Stern, Mara Superior, Momoko Usami and Jason Walker.

"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?" says Leslie Ferrin of Ferrin Contemporary, "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."

Our America/Whose America? is now being installed in the first floor of the historic Wickham House, a National Historic Landmark that challenges guests to explore aspects of life in the early-19th century. This installation brings a new experience into a space that tells the complicated story of the Wickham family, the home's enslaved occupants, and the realities of urban slavery.

"This is an opportunity for visitors to be part of a unique conversation in the Wickham House," says Valentine Director Bill Martin, "By partnering to bring contemporary works into this space we're able to create a dialogue between historic narratives and the complex issues of today."

This exhibition is organized by Ferrin Contemporary in conjunction with *Coalescence*, the 58th annual conference of the [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts](#) held March 20-23, 2024 in Richmond, Virginia.

To learn more about this exhibition and related events and tours, visit: thevalentine.org

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The Valentine has been collecting, preserving and interpreting Richmond's 400-year history for over a century. Located in the heart of historic downtown, the Valentine is a place for residents and tourists to discover the diverse stories that tell the broader history of this important region.

For more than 40 years, ***Ferrin Contemporary*** has been a leading source for contemporary and modern ceramic art. Ferrin Contemporary serves as both a project incubator and traditional commercial gallery program. Curated exhibitions are presented by the gallery and in partnership with galleries, museums, and educational institutions throughout the country.