

BERKELEY ART CENTER

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PRESS INQUIRIES

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Nicki Green, *Soft Brick*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

Origin Stories: Expanded Ceramics in the Bay Area

January 23–April 3, 2021

Curated by Tanya Zimbardo

Artists: Ebitenyefa Baralaye, Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik and Maria Inés Leal García, The Brick Factory, Ilana Crispi, Futurefarmers, Nicki Green, Dana Hemenway, Kari Marboe, Mutual Stores, Stephanie Syjuco

December 17, 2020, Berkeley, CA – *Origin Stories: Expanded Ceramics in the Bay Area* spans the past decade, bringing together key works by 10 artists and artist groups who consider ceramics in relation to site and place. Curated by Tanya Zimbardo, this survey exhibition features sculpture, video, artist publications, and take-away prints. Select works trace where material comes from in the landscape, while others investigate histories of ceramic production and the movement of objects across borders. Several artists bring a conceptually driven approach to functional ceramics, embracing the potential to invite participation. The exhibition showcases the contributions of both interdisciplinary artists and artists who primarily work with clay to a larger and vibrant contemporary field.

For Dana Hemenway's *Untitled (nails)* (2010), the holes left from hanging hardware from previous exhibitions become reused for her porcelain nails. This subtle intervention into the gallery space upends values associated with art objects and display, precious material, and utilitarian items. Porcelain also appears in the "reverse-readymade" of a toilet deconstructed and reformed into handmade bricks in *Erratum: Brief Interruptions in the Waste Stream* (2010). Amy Franceschini and Michael Swaine of Futurefarmers are seen in a video animation of six performance acts, which includes smashing a toilet with sledgehammers and reconstituting the shards into brick forms. Addressing waste systems and their ecological impacts, the artist book edition features a joined pair of wooden brick molds that hold a brick and a stack of letterpress-printed cards.

The experimental reuse of ceramic waste is the basis of an artist residency program run by Mutual Stores, a studio collective and pair of storefronts in Oakland. The project reflects values of sustainability, both in terms of environmental concerns and offering artist community support. For this exhibition, Rosa Novak and Kate Pruitt, two of the co-founders, identify sites in California where ceramic materials originate. As a point of departure, they invited fellow artists in the exhibition to share their material lists in order to trace where these materials are sourced. This new commission *Tailings* (2020–21) shares nonlinear narratives both online and through postcards throughout the exhibition run. In addition, Mutual Stores are presenting a modular structure that houses their archive of materials and risograph-printed artist publications by past residents.

When a new kiln arrived in the ceramics studio at the University of California at Berkeley to replace the one originally installed by the ceramic programs' legendary founder Peter Voukos, artist Nicki Green photographed and saved the material from this apparatus. A graduate student at the time, Green saw the potential to bring her perspective as a trans woman to witnessing the deconstruction of this space he built and the symbolic dismantling of patriarchy. Green incorporated the salvaged floor tile and bricks into a major body of sculptures and a performance lecture. *Soft Brick* (2017) features a box of kiln bricks supporting a vessel filled with cast-off, recycled stoneware from Green's studio.

In *Extra Good Showing* (2017), Kari Marboe foregrounds 1900s correspondence between the pioneering architect Julia Morgan and the architectural tile company Gladding, McBean & Co. of Lincoln, California. Drawn from the artist's research at the California State Library, Marboe edited a text for this performance and for a new text-based print using "clay ink" from Lincoln. With each direction given, participants sculpt clay and engage with a past form of correspondence, connect with a site-specific material, and perform an archive. Presented in relation to the building's windowed doorways, Marboe will additionally show an example of her *Looking Sculptures* (2017–present), which invite visitors to playfully peer at one another through a hole in a sculptural form. Through a new commission, Hemenway will likewise respond to distinct architectural details of the Berkeley Art Center's building.

The San Francisco Bay Area is known as one of the most expensive real estate markets. Its historic Gold Rush is often brought into analogy with the tech industry boom. Ilana Crispi has been mining the soil under her rent-controlled apartment in the Mission District in San Francisco, transforming it into ceramics. She has also used the dirt to grow tea to share with the public and invite passersby to pan the material in a sluice box. The *Mission Dirt* (2018–ongoing) project has encompassed a range of activities and presentations on the street and in the gallery context. Crispi has, in her words, created "a kind of guerrilla land grab" from under the home to share with the neighborhood. "I'm practicing alchemy," she says.

While living in the Bay Area during a teaching fellowship, Ebitenyefa Baralaye made and exhibited *Cont(Ax)ts Tenderloin* (2017) in the unexpected places of his neighborhood sidewalks. In the video, a set of oval-shaped stoneware pieces perform different formations on the ground. The artist is absent, but the ceramics suggest the abstract presence of footsteps, mapping interactions with that location.

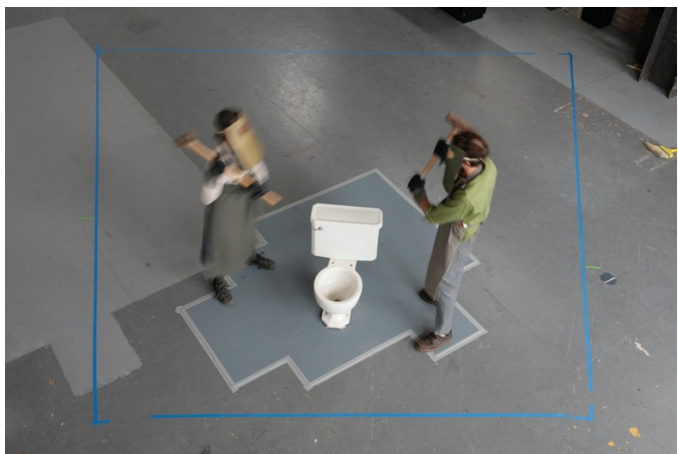
In Stephanie Syjuco's digital animation *Empire/Other* (2013), the artist uses 3D modeling to force pairs of ceramic artifacts to "become like the other." Produced with support from the FLACC Workplace for Visual Artists, Belgium, Syjuco's research-based project involved scanning Congolese and Belgian Art Nouveau ceramic vessels from the collection of the Museum Aan de Stroom (MAS Museum) in Antwerp, and the City Museum Stellingwerff-Waerdenhof in Hasselt, Belgium. For Syjuco, the fractured results become a metaphor for the historical traumas of empire and colonization.

Oakland-based interdisciplinary artist Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik first met and collaborated with Maria Inés Leal Garcia, a ceramic artisan based in Capula, Michoacan, Mexico, and member of the collective Dignicraft, while they were fellows in residence at Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, California. Leal produced lead-free handmade cups for an iteration of Bhaumik's masala chai stall installation *MamaSita's Tiny Tea House* (2013–ongoing). Over a few years, they worked together with Dignicraft to transport ceramicware safely across the border. Bhaumik chronicled these events in the tiny artist book *MamaSita's little librito documenting the journey of dignicraft ceramics across a big frontera* (2016).

Pots in Action (@potsinaction), a curated Instagram feed (2015–19, founded by Maine-based Ayumi Horie), challenged the ceramic canon and covered a wide range of themes within ceramics with over 70 global guest hosts. For #PIAconceptual, hosted by Erik Scollon, a San Francisco-based artist/educator and member of The Brick Factory, people were invited to contribute their “ceramics truisms” – a nod to artist Jenny Holzer. The Brick Factory and Friends’ *CERAMICS TRUISMS (after Holzer)* (2019) is an updated version of the list featuring these crowd-sourced texts, available as both a downloadable PDF and a new take-away tabloid print.

Together, the works in the show offer a snapshot of converging conceptual and material practices in the Bay Area that have pushed ceramics into new and unusual territories. As Zimbardo observes, several of the artists are not only contemporaries, but taught or studied with one another. “I believe that *Origin Stories* is informed by a shared commitment of educators to fostering a more inclusive field and a critical approach to ceramics histories,” she says.

In conjunction with *Origin Stories*, a series of related virtual public programs and artist conversations will be announced in accordance with the latest public health orders.



Futurefarmers, *Erratum: Brief Interruptions in the Waste Stream*, 2010. Courtesy of the artists and Gallery 16.



Ilana Crispi, *Mission Dirt Project*, 2018–ongoing. Courtesy of the artist.

EVENT LISTING INFORMATION

What: *Origin Stories: Expanded Ceramics in the Bay Area*, a group exhibition exploring key works in diverse media from the past decade that take different approaches to investigating ceramics in relation to site and place. Curated by Tanya Zimbardo

When: Saturday, January 23–Saturday, April 3, 2021

Gallery Hours: Wednesday–Sunday, 11am–5pm by appointment

Location: 1275 Walnut Street, Live Oak Park, Berkeley, CA 94709

Cost: Free

EVENT LISTING INFORMATION

What: *Origin Stories* Online Walkthrough with Tanya Zimbardo

When: January, date and time to be announced

Location: On Facebook Live from Berkeley Art Center

Cost: Free

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Ebitenyefa Baralaye is a ceramicist, sculptor, and designer. His work explores cultural, spiritual, and material translations of form/objects, text, and symbols interpreted through a diaspora lens and abstracted around the aesthetics of craft and design. Baralaye received a BFA in ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA in ceramics from the Cranbrook Academy of Art. Baralaye was an AICAD Teaching Fellow at the San Francisco Art Institute from 2016 to 2018 and will be featured in the exhibition and catalogue “Objects: USA 2020.” Baralaye has held solo exhibitions at the Museum of the African Diaspora (San Francisco), Traywick Contemporary (Berkeley), New York Design Center, Kristin Wigley-Fleming Fine Arts Gallery (Luther College VPA, Decorah, Iowa). He is currently an assistant professor and the section head of ceramics at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Michigan. Website: baralaye.com

Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik is an artist, writer, and educator who uses art as a strategy to connect memory and history with the urgent social issues of our time. Her work focuses on decolonization, the hierarchy of the senses, and the impact of migration. Raised in Los Angeles, Tongva Land, and based in Oakland, Ohlone Land, she is Indian and Japanese Colombian American. Sita holds a BA in Studio Art from Scripps College, an MFA in interdisciplinary art and an MA in Visual and Critical Studies from California College of the Arts. Bhaumik has exhibited, collaborated, and cooked in the United States, Holland, Ireland, Hong Kong, and Mexico. These institutions include: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco), Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, San Jose Museum of Art, Oakland Museum of California, Southern Exposure, 826 Valencia, Stanford University, Smithsonian APAC, Future Food House in Rotterdam, and MaD Asia. She has been a Fellow at the Lucas Artist Program at Montalvo and an artist in residence at Shankill Castle in Kilkenny, Ireland, and Denniston Hill in Upstate New York. Bhaumik is a founding member of the People’s Kitchen Collective in Oakland along with Jocelyn Jackson and Saqib Keval. Website: www.sitabhaumik.com

Maria Inés Leal García has collaborated with Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik to contribute handmade, lead-free masala chai cups to the installation *MamaSita’s Tiny Tea House* (2013–ongoing). With Dignicraft, a Mexican media artist and ceramicist collective, Leal García was in residence as a Lucas Arts Fellow at Montalvo Arts Center in 2013 and participated in their project *Encuentros/Encounters: Three Artisans* in the Bay Area and in Tijuana. The decorative stippling technique used by Leal García is referred to as “capulineado,” because it reflects the flower motif traditionally used in Capula, Michoacan, Mexico, where she is based as an artisan. Leal García has reimagined this motif with a simple, playful, and elegant touch. Thanks to the support of nonprofit organizations her work is lead-free and she uses gas kilns.

The Brick Factory is a ceramics and performance collective of Nicole Burisch (Ottawa, Ontario), Thomas Myers (St. Paul, Minnesota), Erik Scollon (San Francisco, California) and Summer Zickefoose (Youngstown, Ohio). Formed in summer 2011 at Watershed Center for Ceramic Arts, they are “sometimes sincere and sometimes irreverent in [their] examination of what constitutes ceramic practice.” They focus primarily on the intersection of ceramics and performance art. Their collective work is currently atemporal and digital, but was recently featured in the book “New Directions in Ceramics: From Spectacle to Trace” by Jo Dahn, and on various online platforms such as @potsinaction on Instagram. Website: www.erikscollon.com/the-brick-factory

Ilana Crispi is a San Francisco–based artist with an interdisciplinary practice incorporating ceramic arts with local histories and geologies. She has mined urban soil for gold, shared it with neighbors, sculpted it into ceramics, and built ephemeral monuments in the landscape. Her site-specific installations invite engagement and investigate ideas of power, access, and perception and the ways in which we experience our environments. Crispi has been the resident artist at the Rochester Folk Art Guild, Montalvo Arts Center, the de Young Museum, and Can Serrat. She has shown at museums, galleries, and alternative sites in the USA, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, and China. She is Assistant Professor of Art at San Francisco State University. Website: www.ilanacrispi.com

Futurefarmers is a group of diverse practitioners aligned through an interest in making work that is relevant to a particular time and place. Founded in 1995 by Amy Franceschini, the design studio serves as a platform supporting art projects, an artist-in-residence program, and its own research interests. Its members are artists, researchers, designers, architects, and farmers who collaborate with scientists and are interested in scientific inquiry, and operate through participatory projects that create spaces and experiences where the logic of a situation disappears — encounters occur that broaden perspectives and destabilize logics of certainty. They have deconstructed systems related to food policies, public transportation, and rural farming networks to visualize and understand their intrinsic logics. The work often provides a playful entry point and tools for participants to gain insight into deeper fields of inquiry — not only to imagine, but to participate in and initiate change in the places they live. Futurefarmers’ work has been exhibited throughout the Bay Area; Whitney Museum of American Art (New York); Museum of Modern Art (New York); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York); MAXXI | Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo (Rome); New York Hall of Science; and Walker Art Center (Minneapolis). Website: www.futurefarmers.com

Nicki Green is a transdisciplinary artist working primarily in clay. Originally from New England, she completed her BFA in sculpture from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2009 and her MFA in Art Practice from the University of California, Berkeley in 2018. Her sculptures, ritual objects, and various flat works explore topics of history preservation, conceptual ornamentation, and aesthetics of otherness. Green has exhibited her work internationally,

notably at the New Museum (New York); Contemporary Jewish Museum (San Francisco); and Rockelmann & Partner Gallery (Berlin). She has contributed texts to numerous publications including a recent piece in Duke University Press' *Transgender Studies Quarterly* and a piece in "Fermenting Feminism, Copenhagen." In 2019, Green was a finalist for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's SECA Art Award and a recipient of an Arts/Industry Residency from the John Michael Kohler Art Center, among other awards. Green lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area. Website: nicki-green-txrx.squarespace.com

Kari Marboe is a Bay Area artist and Assistant Professor at California College of the Arts (CCA), Oakland and San Francisco. Marboe's works engage with storytelling, humor, and outlier opportunities for clay through sculpture, collaborations, and interactive works. She received her BFA in Ceramics from CCA and her MFA in Art Practice from the University of California, Berkeley. Marboe's archive-based ceramic works and performances have been exhibited at the Mills College Art Museum (Oakland), California Greenwich House Pottery (New York), 500 Capp Street/Southern Exposure (San Francisco), Museum of Craft and Design (San Francisco), Wave Pool Gallery (Cincinnati, Ohio), Museum of Northern California Art (Chico), Jacksonville (Florida) University, and the Waffle Shop Billboard (Philadelphia). She has done residencies at Greenwich House Pottery (New York), Mutual Stores (Oakland), Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts (Maine), and Elsewhere Museum (Northern California). Website: karimarboe.com

Mutual Stores is a studio collective located in a pair of storefronts on Seminary Avenue in Oakland. Their mission is to expand the field of ceramics and to cultivate mutually supportive relationships with the beings, places, and materials they come into contact with as artists in an urban environment. Founded in 2018 by Brendan Page, Kate Pruitt, and Rosa Novak, the collective comprises six artist studios, the Mutual Artist-in-Residence Program based around the experimental reuse of ceramic waste, a shared gallery, and a brick library and studio archive maintained by Tania Butterworth. Current studio members are Nicki Green, M.J. Sasaki, Rosa Novak, Brendan Page, Kate Pruitt, Ken Becker, and Hannah Volckmann. Website: mutualstores.online

Stephanie Syjuco works in photography, sculpture, and installation, moving from handmade and craft-inspired mediums to digital editing and archive excavations. Using critical wit and collaborative co-creation, her projects leverage open-source systems, shareware logic, and flows of capital, in order to investigate issues of economies and empire. For 2019/2020 she is a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow at the National Museum of American History in Washington DC. Born in the Philippines, Syjuco received her MFA from Stanford University and BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute. She is the recipient of a 2014 Guggenheim Fellowship Award, a 2009 Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Award, and a 2020 Tiffany Foundation Award. Her work has been exhibited widely, including at MoMA/PS1 (New York), Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, ZKM Center for Art and Technology (Karlsruhe, Germany), the California Biennial at the Orange County Museum of Art, the 12th Havana Biennial, and the 2015 Asian Art Biennial (Taiwan), among

others. A longtime educator, she is an Associate Professor in Sculpture at the University of California, Berkeley. She lives in Oakland. Website: www.stephaniesyjuco.com

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Tanya Zimbardo is a San Francisco native whose curatorial projects primarily center on site-responsive work and histories of art and experimental cinema in California. In 2017 she organized a public conversation between Bay Area artists Jim Melchert, John Roloff, and Stephanie Syjuco, on expanded ideas of ceramics. As an assistant curator of media arts at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), Zimbardo has curated several solo exhibitions and screenings and co-curated group surveys and commissions. Her SFMOMA exhibition *Future Histories: Theaster Gates and Cauleen Smith* is on view through May 23, 2021. She has co-edited SFMOMA publications including the digital catalogue *Soundtracks* and the book *Fifty Years of Bay Area Art: The SECA Awards*. She has guest (co-)curated several exhibitions and public programs for Bay Area nonprofit arts organizations including *Alison O’Daniel: The Tuba Thieves* (2019) at McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, *Center of Gravity: Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley* (2018) for San Francisco Cinematheque, *Organic Logic* (2017) at The Garage, The 500 Capp Street Foundation; *Equilibrium: A Paul Kos Survey* (2016) at di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art; and *Public Works: Artists’ Interventions since 1970* (2015) at Mills College Art Museum. She independently co-curated such events as *Lynn Marie Kirby: Collaborations with Etel Adnan* at Mill Valley Public Library and *Barbara Hammer: Cinema of Intimacy* at The Roxie, and is currently working on the online series *In Process* (with Diego Villalobos).

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ABOUT BERKELEY ART CENTER

Berkeley Art Center (BAC) is a hub for artistic exploration and community building that champions work by Bay Area artists and curators. Nestled in Live Oak Park in North Berkeley, the gallery makes contemporary art approachable and accessible at an intimate scale. Since its founding in 1967, BAC has exhibited work by important local figures such as Robert Bechtle, Enrique Chagoya, Taraneh Hemami, Mildred Howard, Hung Liu, Jim Melchert, Chiura Obata, Sonya Rapoport, Betye Saar, Katherine Sherwood, Peter Voulkos, and Carrie Mae Weems, among many others.

For more information and images, contact Daniel Nevers at 510-644-6893 or info@berkeleyartcenter.org. Berkeley Art Center is located in Live Oak Park at 1275 Walnut Street, Berkeley, CA 94709. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 11 am to 5 pm by appointment. Admission is free. Website: www.berkeleyartcenter.org

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