

Artist Bios & Statements – 2022 MCFE

Abiam Alvarez -

Artwork Statement:

The fields have been harvested, the produce has been processed, packaged, and is heading out for delivery. As we drive past the familiar fields of California's Central Valley, we see the massive planes of land—the never-ending crops stretched to the horizon—and the farm workers who follow behind the tractor ahead, picking the crops. The abundance of crops gives us a great sense of comfort, a sense that is amplified as we casually stroll through the aisles overflowing, abundant with produce; there is great value placed on the goods from the many California valleys.

The crop and the dirt are being elevated by making it out of a new medium, by placing the ceramic dirt onto pedestals and attaching it to the wall. There are also bins of ceramic that are erupting or flooding. The soil itself is valuable for the production and creation of the produce, but here, the dirt and soil are just seen in their most simplified form.

The work here is contradictory. Although some forms are celebratory, others are unappealing. While the bins are containers for holding the produce they also function as receptacles for throwing away that which is unused and rejected.

Short Bio:

Abiam Alvarez is a California artist residing in Gilroy who works with clay to create representational sculptures that speak of the labors and political issues surrounding agriculture, consumerism, and immigrant workers. He earned an MFA from San Jose State University in 2019, and is currently a full-time ceramics educator.

Japheth Asiedu-Kwarteng -

Artwork Statement:

Inspired by Kente cloth—expanding its symbolism both in writing and in artworks—in my works, I explore the communicative potential of the language of fabrics and fibers to discuss issues of separation, fear, rejection, love, nostalgia, racism, appropriation, and the other complexities of the diaspora.

The combination of my works as my diary uses a monumental visual language to commemorate my memories, mixed feelings, and traumatic experiences. It is my appreciation, made material, of possessing multiple personalities while living in dual worlds: my identity as a transnational.

I Miss You Dada (2021), for instance, speaks to my experience of possessing dual identity and being a stranger to my family and my current space in the US. It speaks to my shock of seeing my son run from me because of my long stay away from home—missing his birth and the first twenty months of his life.

I identify with Kente as a revered cloth of royalty, which always sends my thoughts home to my young family. These thoughts of my family and conversation with them influence how I name my works. I reflect on their pain and struggle with my absence while I make these works.

Short Bio:

Japheth Asiedu-Kwarteng is a ceramics and mixed-media artist. Asiedu-Kwarteng is a member of NCECA

and has been featured in several prestigious exhibitions, including the 2021 NCECA Annual exhibition. He was a presenter at the 2021 NCECA conference. Asiedu-Kwarteng is a fellow with NCECA Multicultural, Baber and Lela Winegarner fellowships respectively.

Yael Braha -

Artwork Statement:

My past training in graphic design and cinema informs my ceramic artwork. Maya Angelou said: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." During my creative process, I pose myself questions such as: "What if my ceramic work, like a movie's character, had a personality? How can their personalities transpire and be perceived by the viewer? How can I make people feel emotions through my work?" I seek answers to these questions by exploring the synergy of forms, surface designs, materials, and atmospheric firings.

Influenced by my family's history of refugees, and by the witnessing of people around the world being displaced even today, I am compelled to create ceramic work in which I explore themes of displacement, survival, erosion, growth, and transformation.

Short Bio:

Daughter of refugees from North Africa, Yael Braha was born and raised in Italy, in a visually abundant environment that shaped her love for composition, aesthetics, and visual arts. She earned her BA from the European Institute of Design and her MFA from San Francisco State University.

Summer Brooks -

Artwork Statement:

Our cultural values of beauty were stripped from us. Media plays into colorism by primarily grandstanding lighter-skinned women as more feminine and desirable while darker complexions are viewed as aggressive and unattractive. I want to create art celebrating the beauty of Black. Through my work, I am celebrating Blackness. I have not always appreciated myself due to colorism and racism. Colorism and racism have not only been erasing my history, but they have showcased what Black features are deemed 'desirable.' Black is beautiful and should be presented as a spectrum, not a constraint.

Pottery acts as a vessel to not only touch my roots but to inject my work into the canon of ceramics. My pots are decorated with Black women loving themselves and images celebrating my history. My sculptures are celebrations of their beauty through being comfortable with their afros and dark skin. The figures also showcase the struggle I had to face with people touching my hair without consent, to being told my skin is too dark. Although these struggles are shown, figures heal from the hardships and grow into their beautiful selves. Red terracotta clay is not just used for its rich color but for its rich history.

Short Bio:

Summer Brooks completed an exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis, *The New Garden Variety*. Her work has been shown at Art Saint Louis and the Albrecht Kemper Museum. Brooks is currently a resident in Kansas City, Missouri at Belger Yard Studios. She has received NCECA's Multicultural Fellowship award.

Grace Gittelman -

Artwork Statement:

Grace Esther Gittelman explores their Korean and Jewish non-binary identity through hybridized Korean ceramics. They use Onggi, a traditional Korean fermentation vessel, as a response to both Japan's colonization of Korean ceramics and ceramicists and the US Imperialism in Korea. Gittelman creates Onggi 'cabbages' in an Americana kitsch style to speak to their American heritage, adding blood-like drips that mimic kimchi juice to reveal their Korean ancestor's physical and cultural heritage. Moon jars symbolize two halves becoming a whole according to their traditional construction. Gittelman transforms this archetypal form into *Moon Cheese Jars* to show the connection of American cheese to the fusion of their Korean and American identities, and gives a nod to Jewish folklore. Through creating ceramic pillows of their pets, the artist navigates what makes something or someone authentically Korean? They navigate the complexity of their identity and the way they are perceived by challenging the value and concept of authenticity through the most intuitive forms, materiality, and food. Gittelman references these archetypes of food and folklore from their childhood to create their own mythology about their experience of being a minority within a minority.

Short Bio:

Grace Esther Gittelman (b. 1998) graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) with a BFA in 2020. They are a Chicago based Korean and white Jewish artist and educator. They are a 2021 NCECA Multicultural Fellow and their recent exhibitions include The Clay Art Center's State of Emergence and a solo show at Jude Gallery in Chicago, *Say "Kimchi"!*

Rika Kova -

Artwork Statement:

"The fact that I was born and raised on a farm in Siberia..."

There is a different life somewhere out there. Life with early mornings when you run outside to get eggs out of the chicken house to make omelets. There is a life where you milk a cow before having a glass of milk and pick the vegetables in the garden for your salad; A life with long evenings by the fire, followed by songs. There is a life with constant but pleasant troubles, and everyday hard work—a happy life though, and happy people.

The fact that I was born and raised on a farm in Siberia affects how I look at the world and is reflected in my work. I use different media as a way through which I can connect with the place where I grew up and the place where I live now.

My inspiration comes from simple things: a trodden path, a lake near my house, the clouds, the shape of a leaf. I think about how the path bends with the river and how the lake would look from the sky. I think about the possibilities of making those shapes out of clay.

Short Bio:

Rika Kova is a Chicago-based artist, born and raised in Siberia, where she studied economics in college. At the age of 20, Kova immigrated to the US, where she earned an AA from the City College of Philadelphia, and is pursuing a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Walter Moore -**Artwork Statement:**

Homebuilding is my creative process of choice. Working with a clay slab, I can completely control the shape and form of my pieces, allowing the shape to become the focus of the piece. The shape precedes the idea as to what the piece will be and how the piece will function.

I draw the shape onto a newspaper and transfer that shape onto cardboards and make cutouts to develop different shapes. I tape the cardboard pieces together and then I get an idea what the finished piece will look like. I experiment by taping many cardboard cutouts in different ways before settling on the best form. When satisfied, I roll out slabs, let them dry out pressed between boards and newspaper to keep the slabs from buckling and, with a knife, I cut out the cardboard shapes and score and slip to attach them together.

I create 'a unique group' of pieces that share the same shape in slightly different ways.

My goal is to create common forms in clay that exhibit human qualities that can show unity rather than division. I thrive to make the abstract form accepted as realistic and function as a utilitarian object.

Short Bio:

Walter Moore is a potter. He's African American. Introduced to pottery by his mother, Moore is mostly self-taught from a plethora of classes, demonstrations, and workshops. Two of his best teachers are trial and error. He wants to be the best potter. Moore approaches pottery making with great alacrity.

Neha Pullarwar -**Artwork Statement:**

My practice has been a deep urge to engender sensitivity within the community of audiences for my work, and to advocate ecological and social change in a local and global environmental scenario that is declining rapidly under human onslaught.

I live and work in Maharashtra, western coast of the Indian peninsula. My time is divided between a studio in lush, green environs of the Alibag Island, and more bustling suburbs of Mumbai. I am keenly aware of the contrasts in my surroundings, finding meaning in including and translating these experiences in artwork.

I explore the medium and push the boundaries of my practice to develop objects that reflect the innate grace of ceramic but with the makings of sculptural structure and intensity. Isolated from a larger landscape and narrative, the organic forms inhabit a new conceptual space, sometimes bordering on the abstract; their textures and colors interpret but do not imitate the natural forms they are inspired by. I am working within the slender area that overlays illusion and reality—creating poetic renderings of desire for balance and harmony, and a more universally equanimous relationship with the environment. Figuratively, I draw attention to the beauty and complexity of the architecture within these varied nests, reflecting profound observation and research before producing any series. I continue to map outwardly insignificant yet valuable components of the natural world, building bridges that negate the horrors of human trespass.

Short Bio:

Neha Pullarwar is an artist primarily working with clay. She divides her time between her studio in Alibag and Mumbai, on the western coastal belt of India. She practices art in her studio and works as a curator and art consultant in Mumbai for one of the leading art collectors of India. She serves as a pottery teacher as well.

Silvia Ritterling-Alvarez -**Artwork Statement:**

I was born and raised in Morelia, Mexico. Always interested and curious about the beautiful ceramics and art crafts made by Mexican artisans, six years ago I started to take ceramics classes in Southern California. I found myself immersed in a new creative experience, learning how ceramics has impacted humanity in different cultures, in so many ways. Being a mom and after a few home relocations, I try to be practical. My pieces are mainly functional, to be used on a daily basis. It brings me a great contentment when I learn that I can touch someone's routine with a piece coming out from my hands. I usually include accents of my Mexican heritage, at the same time expressing my gratitude to the US to be my country and now providing the materials I use, to the earth, and natural elements that my ceramics process have in it.

Short bio:

I was born and raised in Mexico and now live in Southern California. I started to learn ceramics six years ago. Since the pandemic I have created a small studio in my garage, and am working on online education. Recently I started to sell my work at a studio gallery, and I am working on website base distribution.

Antra Sinha -**Artwork Statement:**

Nature fascinates me. When I see nature, I see geometry. I am inspired by the structures that emerge and evolve from the micro of the organism to the macro of the universe.

My work is guided by the material I use. I feel that, in some ways, I am the material that I am working with: I am molding clay, yet it is molding me. I feel that my mind, spirit, and body must work in concert in order to manifest the forms, which I then offer to the fire.

Recently, the Fibonacci sequence and the hexagon have both commanded my attention. I am fascinated by the countless examples of six-sided shapes, spaces, and structures to be found in the natural world. Beehives, the molecular structure of benzene, and interlocking basalt columns on the shore of Northern Ireland all share six-fold symmetry with the feather-like water crystals that we call snowflakes.

Some of my latest creations are designed in the 3-D rendering software SOLIDWORKS, which are then carved in insulation foam or a plaster block with the use of a CNC mill. I continue to use wood-firing techniques to fire these works, which enhances the milled marks intentionally created.

Short Bio:

Antra Sinha earned her MFA in Painting from the MS University of Baroda in India. Antra then became

an apprentice to Ray Meeker for a decade. In 2015, Antra was awarded a STEM scholarship to pursue another MFA at Utah State University (USU). In 2018, she became Gallery Coordinator & Art Instructor at USU.

Hye Rin Woo -

Artwork Statement:

I came to understand that, though most believe that each individual has their own universe, that those spaces were not finite, but unlimited and pluralistic. And the deepest revelation of all: that I was, in a sense, a collection of various human experiences, of the past and present moment.

Art is that which allows me to realize these things. It is a medium through which I can connect with artists of different eras and learn about the people who have existed alongside them or even with those who are to exist in the future. It mediates the infinite human imagination and serves as sustenance for the human soul. This is the reason I have chosen the path of art for my life, among many paths in life, such as technology or other humanities. As an artist, I do not strive to prove my existence or find my life's purpose through art. I simply appreciate the fact that I can utilize this versatile medium as a means to create a forum for discussion between individuals.

Short Bio:

Based on Korean traditions, Hye Rin Woo developed strong technical ceramic skills from high school. It's been nine years since she started living with clay. She traveled to a lot of countries that are famous for ceramics and realized that every region has its specific style and way of making ceramic arts. Now, she is making experimental works such as moveable ceramic gears, or bringing virtual living things to the real world, and this work is the first step in her study.