

## George Rodriguez

I knew what ceramics was in the abstract when I signed up for my first class at the University of Texas, El Paso (UTEP). I knew it was a thing where you made cups and decorative figurines and ancient vases. I quickly learned that clay is alive, and ceramics is a process, and both have endless possibilities. I work with this ancient material to address my contemporary experiences. Through the creation of guardian figures, tomb sculptures, and shrines, I depict my community—current and forthcoming. I hope to bring these objects—ancient relics that transcend time—into the present. They carry hope and loss, acceptance and challenge, ornament, and simplicity.

The clay that I first used in undergraduate school came out of a box, tightly sealed in a plastic bag, and manufactured by Armadillo Clay in Austin, Texas. Then as a student, I played with endless varieties of clay, as we are all prone to youthful explorations. The first clay that I deeply connected with was Akio Takamori's Cone 6 stoneware, still in a plastic bag but this time from Tacoma Clay Art Center. After this clay erased my fingerprints from overuse, I left it and looked for an alternative. After a couple of years of exploring other clays, I came back to Akio. I mix it up myself. I feel it in my forearms and lower back. It makes me sweat. We've been in a relationship for more than ten years, and I sing its praises today as it if was our first pinch.



I started my ceramics education and studies by creating a lot of self-portraits. I pride myself on being a good listener but often lack the courage to speak up. Self-portraiture was a way to give my opinion without actually speaking words. I felt empowered. The self-portraits also act as time markers. My first sculpture in beginning ceramics class was a portrait of me in puzzle pieces. In graduate school, I made my portrait into a large ceramic piñata. After the 2016 presidential election, I created a self-portrait that presented my emotions in *State of the Union*. Most recently, *Seven Indulgences* is a large urn with my portrait and my sins. In my first solo gallery show at Foster White Gallery titled *GEORGE* in 2011, I took my portrait and turned it into other Georges (Boy George, George Washington, Curious George, George Clinton, etc.). I knew that artist Robert Arneson worked in a similar fashion, and he was someone whose work I admired. He carried humor and message in a symbiotic package.

Through scale, I like to push the boundaries of clay. Fragility and strength coexist. I've always enjoyed working large. In undergraduate school, I worked to the limitations of the largest kiln and would make three-foot tall figures. This was before I knew about making things in sections. I enjoyed the engineering of the sculpture and the challenge of making the clay balance. In graduate school at the University of Washington (UW), they had a kiln I could stand in, aptly named the Doug kiln after Doug Jeck. I

took that as a challenge and my first sculpture was a large matador boy figure. Since then, I learned a lot about large-scale ceramic construction, transportation, and cohabitation. I love how physical it is and that it involves my entire body. I love the planning it takes to map a large-scale piece and figure out the steps to make it happen. I love that I need to exercise patience and listen to what the clay needs. I love that I need to rely on the people around me because I couldn't do it by myself.

Community is important. I value the communities that I have formed and am continuing to expand on. Through my artwork, I aim to bring people closer through the creation process or, as markers, for people to congregate around. The past few years have been spent trying to spend as much time outside my studio creating with others, as in my personal sanctuary. I recently created a series of meditation rooms filled with decorative tiles titled *Reflect and Gather*. I brought people from the community (senior centers, high schools, art studios, etc.) into my studio, and we made tiles together. We all gathered in my studio for conversations and tile pressing. Each room, comprised of more than 2,000 handmade decorative tiles, creates an environment of disarming stillness and meditation. Alongside these meditation rooms is a communal gathering space in the form of a plaza. The plaza is the area to socialize and connect outside of ourselves. I wanted to create an environment of care through community support and self-reflection. The community helped in the creation of these tiles and then were able to spend time in conversations alongside the work.

1 GEORGE RODRIGUEZ

2 GEORGE RODRIGUEZ, *Seven Indulgences*, 2020, 62" x 36" x 36", Stoneware with glaze, Large funerary urn with a self-portrait and the seven deadly sins, Photo Courtesy of Artist



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3 GEORGE RODRIGUEZ, *Reflect and Gather*, 2019, ceramic with glaze, wood, steel, lights, plastic. The installation is comprised of over 6000 tiles to crate rooms for reflection and a plaza to gather. In collaboration with multiple members of the greater Seattle community. Photo by James Harnois.

I am fortunate to have ceramics guide me into a life I didn't know possible. Who would have thought I could make a living making objects out of dirt, water, and fire? I am so grateful and thankful for the generosity that my mentors have given me. Special thanks to Vince Burke at the UTEP for opening the door and encouraging me during the green stage of my making. Thank you to Jamie Walker at the UW for your sound advice in and out of the studio, to John Arnold Taylor, former tech at UW for the jokes, ingenuity, and friendship; to Akio Takamori for the sincerity and superb storytelling; to Doug Jeck for your honesty and advocacy. Doug and Akio, you two continue in my memories and heart. Thank you for guiding me this far.

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4 GEORGE RODRIGUEZ, *Mexican/American Gothic*, 2018, 84" X 60" X 30", Stoneware with glaze, wood, screws. Immigrant depiction based on Wood's American Gothic with female figure as a hotel maid and male figure as a field worker. Tiled Background. Photo courtesy of Spike Mafford. Collection of Renwick Gallery



Chanakarn Semachai

## Wonder Fruit

I came across a story of a man who went to jail before social media took over and changed forever how we live and interact with other human beings and the world around us. The first day he earned his freedom back, he was walking around and noticed that people had little devices on their ears and were talking to themselves. Tons of people were staring at their big phones, and no one was reading newspapers or books in the subway anymore. He had so many new things to learn and keep up with. He felt out of place, as if he didn't know this world anymore. This story got me thinking; what if dinosaurs came back to life in this present world? How would they feel? They were here first, a long time ago. They died and we took over, slowly changing their world. They would probably struggle to fit in and strive to live the life that suits this modern world. And yet, they will stand out anyway simply because they are dinosaurs.

In 2016, I moved from Thailand to the US to pursue my masters degree and was unavoidably immersed in an entirely new culture. I faced new and unforgettable experiences that have changed my thought processes and the way I make art forever.

During my time abroad, whenever I explored new places and surrounded myself in a new environment, I felt like I was a dinosaur. People's glares and culturally-insensitive comments gave me a deep stinging sensation that I did not belong. And living in a small college town with a less-than-five-percent Asian population enhanced those feelings. On one heavy snow day, I was walking to the studio while bundled in a coat and scarf with nothing showing except my eyes. I noticed a middle-aged man was staring at me. Instantly, I ran to the bathroom to look into the mirror, wondering if a person could tell if I'm Asian based on the two-inch gap between my beanie and my scarf. That was the moment I realized that this insecurity isn't good for anyone, especially me.

Since then, the more time I spent observing others in my foreign surroundings, I saw more and more people from all around the world who share similar feelings. I realized that you don't need to fit

in to be happy. I don't understand why the word 'immigrant' is associated with anything negative. I long to be in a place where my first language doesn't apply. I want to know how the experience would affect my practice, and me as a person. I learned from my experiences in the US more than any other period in my life. I learned that we should embrace our differences and find ways to live with them. I want to proudly amplify them, love them.

**Live Hopefully!  
You're brilliant and  
amazing and  
beautiful.**

The use of different colors in my work is a way for me to demonstrate everyone's differences. Each person, as well as each color, is unique. To further demonstrate this point, I have developed a special technique for creating and casting color effects on my work by layering plexiglass. Combining colors on top of colors allows me to tell stories of cross-cultural experiences and dual or multi-cultural backgrounds, each combination is entirely unique. We are the color, the 'fruits' of our own experiences.

Before I went to the US, my future in clay seemed cloudy, so light and so vague. I didn't know how strong our clay community is. Looking back, I wouldn't even dare to imagine persuing a career in clay. I was raised and now live in Bangkok, Thailand, where ceramics has deep roots in our history

and lifestyle. For this, I am undoubtedly grateful, but also tremendously terrified. With cheap labor and numerous ceramics factories, most Thais perceive the concept of clay as being nothing more than a bowl you can find at a bargain shop. Most of the time, they devalue the handmade and view clay as a cheap material, so ceramics is on the verge of not being considered an art form. This feels like an obstacle but this also means there is still plenty of room to grow.

Becoming one of the 2022 NCECA Emerging Artists is not only a benefit to me, but I know with complete certainty that it will generate hope for other BIPOC artists like me. As an Asian woman from a tiny, forever developing country in Southeast Asia, I desire to improve my quality of life using all of the power one can create with a passion for clay.



1 CHANAKARN SEMACHAI



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2 CHANAKARN SEMACHAI, *Something, Something a Day Makes a Dogtor Come 'n' Play!*, 2019, Stoneware, underglaze, glaze, luster, nichrome wire, plexiglass Cone 04 oxidation-fired, 28" x 19" x 21", Photo credit: Chanakarn Semachai



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3 CHANAKARN SEMACHAI, *Punch and Her Yoyo Dino in a Kiln*, Edinboro, Pennsylvania, 2018, Photo credit: Brandon Lipe



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4 CHANAKARN SEMACHAI, *I Cry Rain*, 2021, Stoneware, underglaze, glaze, luster, plexiglass, Cone 04 oxidation-fired, 12" x 18" x 10", Photo credit: Chanakarn Semachai



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5 CHANAKARN SEMACHAI, *Assorted Mugs*, 2021, Stoneware, underglaze, glaze, luster Cone 6 oxidation-fired, Approximately 5.5" x 4" x 4" (each), Photo credit: Chanakarn Semachai

**Chanakarn Semachai** (Punch) was born and raised in Bangkok, Thailand. She graduated in 2012 with her BA in Thailand, and she earned an MFA degree from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania in 2019. She focuses on issues of identity and multiculturalism in her artwork. Currently, Semachai teaches ceramics at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.

# PANEL: THE FIBER OF BEING

Qwist Joseph, Akiko Jackson, Jennifer Ling Datchuk, and Sharon Norwood



1 QWIST JOSEPH, *Dowsing For Before*, 2019, Digital image



2 AKIKO JACKSON, *Heritage Braid*, 2007–present, Synthetic hair and metal fasteners



3 SHARON NORWOOD, *Hair Matters*, 2018, Decal drawing on fine china

In this panel discussion, artists Akiko Jackson, Jennifer Ling Datchuk, Sharon Norwood, and Qwist Joseph dive into the connection between the hair on our bodies and our sense of belonging in the world. Together, the group dissects how that relationship informs their artistic practices and identities. Hair's original evolutionary purpose was to keep mammals warm and protect them. Fast forward a couple hundred million years and this simple keratin protein has become a profound material for cultural commentary. All four of these artists investigate the effects of living within a culture that views hair, a personal and private attribute, as a public symbol.

Akiko Jackson often references hair as a way to embrace her heritage, history, and body. In her work, she considers how we hold space, share space, and give space to trauma and mourning. Jackson is interested in looking at the *body* as an abstraction and as a reference for cultural discussions. When affordable and discarded materials are used, she makes a connection to her background and where she comes from—hair, old clothing, ceramic, metal—these tangible objects are dispensable in many ways, and Jackson holds reverence for their historical agency and potential for transformation.

Jennifer Ling Datchuk envisions hair as tiny threads that link us to our past and present stories. Through her work, she speaks to the power of these delicate strands and their ability to identify us to the world. In *Blue and White Bowl*, she bleached her hair and got a bowl cut—referring to a rite of passage for Asian children. As a kid, she too was a victim to her mom cutting the shape of a rice bowl atop her head. The piece references both these at-home haircuts of her childhood, one easily recognized by Asians, and traditional blue and white Chinese porcelain.

Sharon Norwood invites the viewer to consider our relationships to the real world history of 'otherness' by reframing the familiar and providing an alternate context for understanding. We are inexplicably connected through our intertwined histories. She seeks to interrogate those spaces that both fracture and unite our understanding of self and of 'others.' Her creative research often deals with issues of identity where the line is used to challenge our passive ways of looking. The subject comes from an internal dialogue with social, political and cultural content, both past and present. Norwood is interested in speaking in nuanced ways about our understanding of race, gender, beauty, and class. In her work, the curly line takes on special importance, shifting between political and nonpolitical. At times it becomes a trope for the black body, and at other times it lives within a decorative aesthetic that connects us back to the formal language of drawing and gestural mark making.

Qwist Joseph, who lost all of his hair due to Alopecia Universalis in his 20s, investigates hair's connection to toxic masculinity, a damaging force in his own life and American culture. The photograph *Dowsing For Before* showcases a flaming orange wig. In some ways, losing his hair was like shedding a stifling gendered armor, but a decade on the seductive power of nostalgia still pulls at him like a weighty hunk of fired clay. His work allows him to examine contradictions like these, opening space for growth and a deeper understanding of his own complicity in oppressive cultural forces.

Much like the food and plants of California's great central valley, hair is grown, nourished and harvested. This cheeky connection to NCECA's 2022 theme, *Fertile Ground*, is only a small aspect of what is a deeply interesting and unexpected addition to the programming of the 56th annual conference in Sacramento.

**Akiko Jackson** is from Kahuku, Hawaii, a rural north-shore community on the island of O'ahu. She holds an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University and is an artist in residence at the Clay Studio in Philadelphia. Exhibitions include the *4th World Ceramic Biennale Korea* in Icheon. ([www.akikojackson.com](http://www.akikojackson.com))

**Jennifer Ling Datchuk** is an Assistant Professor of Studio Art at Texas State University in San Marcos. Datchuk holds an MFA in Artisanry from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and a BFA in Crafts from Kent State University. In 2020, she was named a United States Artist Fellow in Craft.

**Sharon Norwood** is an artist of Jamaican ancestry working in painting and ceramics. Norwood earned a BFA from the University of South Florida and an MFA from Florida State University. She has exhibited extensively and most recently participated as artist-in-residence at the McColl Center for the Creative Arts.

**Qwist Joseph** holds a BFA from Colorado State University and an MFA from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. In 2019, he completed a residency at the Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program and was named a 2019 NCECA Emerging Artist. Recently, his work was included in the *Officine Saffi Exhibition* in Milan, Italy.



4 JENNIFER LING DATCHUK, *Blue and White Bowl*, 2015,  
Digital image

# LECTURE: BREAKING: BREAD, PLATES, AND EXCLUSIONS

Joshua Reyes (SiouxBean)

The changeover from a rolled broad-leaf as a container, or a bamboo tube as a cooking vessel, to the compounded problem of pot-making is analogous to the transition from the use of mechanical to nuclear energy.



1 Cone 10 reduction with Mishima inlay

From potter's apprentice, pizza cook, studio technician, barback, busboy, factory worker, caterer, artist, Michelin-star server, educator, and chef, artist **SiouxBean** has experienced the true proletarian side of two major industries and art forms. He has a total of 20 years of immersion in clay, food, and beverage. Bread, plates, and exclusions exist everywhere. Here, SiouxBean will share with you his work over the years, his path, and how he's helped break food and clay boundaries.

Explore the process of clay as a vehicle for community, engagement, and agricultural presentation throughout the world. Celebrate and examine culturally significant foods, typically served or prepared in traditional clay vessels, and explore the connections between food, clay, and culture, specifically in Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Enlisting the support of the food and beverage industry and their community of vastly diverse workers, SiouxBean examines different cultures through the lens of our personal identities in America.

Rooted in his artistic research, SiouxBean explores personal methods of tying performance, food, and clay together, highlighting his personal identity, and addressing his own experience as a Mexican/Filipino American who was raised in predominantly white communities.

SiouxBean's studio, SEED, has created an accessible space for BIPOC to explore clay and the act of making. By providing access,

SEED has been able to present a foundation for the BIPOC community to help traverse these rocky canyons. Access at SEED can come in many forms, but most directly in the way of scholarship or priority enrollment for BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and women. SiouxBean feels that it is essential that he holds himself accountable as an artist and educator by understanding the privilege and responsibility he has to provide access to higher learning and the powers of clay as a community agent.

SEED is a POC-owned and operated art studio exploring culture through teaching the craft of clay. SEED's curriculum is rooted in celebrating, exploring, and honoring the techniques, forms, and processes of the BIPOC clay community past and present, giving context and cultural information through the forms, techniques and ornamentation. SEED welcomes all members of the community and prides itself on being a safe and accessible space.

Founded in 2021, SEED was created by artist SiouxBean. Being a fully assimilated person of color, SiouxBean gains access to the knowledge of his various cultures through the mediums of clay and food. With 20 years of experience in ceramics and a BFA from California College of the Arts, SiouxBean understands the difficulties associated with access to quality facilities that safely support. SEED is a space where all cultures, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color can feel safe to explore the medium of clay craft, as well as their own history and the roots of others.

# LECTURE: BREAKING: BREAD, PLATES, AND EXCLUSIONS

2 CELEBRITY CHEF MARCUS SAMALSON preparing to break SiouxBeans plate

3 GIA MORENO wiping bottom of pot

4 GIA MORENO showing students gas firing



SEED runs a 'DRY' studio, as it is fully mindful and encompassing in its water usage, from utilizing clay scraps, to providing various 'studio' clay bodies, and processing the finest 'waste' particles into their house pots, plates, and bisque programs. These programs utilize and manage our waste material, providing a platform for education for both the student and the teacher. SEED provides another avenue for makers of all levels to gain a wider understanding of the clay medium through various internship and apprenticeship programs.

With founding educators **Gia Moreno** and **Walter Ibalong**, SEED is able to incubate and sprout into a healthy, safe, accessible, and knowledgeable environment. Moreno, a mother of two,

a ceramic artist and multicultural educator, grew up in the California delta community of Hood, and comes from a family that is heavily involved in the Chicano community, where participation in civil rights movements was a part of everyday life. Moreno began her career in ceramic art in high school, learning the love of ceramics from her great-grandmother as well as her high school teacher. During her time at Sacramento State, Moreno began to make work that was inspired by her Indigenous and Chicano roots. It was here that Moreno began to work heavily on combining her love of art, her love of the Chicano and Indigenous community, and her love of education. Moreno has dedicated her teaching career to creating lesson plans that are culturally relevant and helping other educators to create their own curriculum and pedagogy. At SEED, Moreno is in charge of building and maintaining a curriculum that is expressive of diverse cultures while eliminating cultural appropriation.

Ibalong is a mixed-race Bicolano Filipino artist who grew up in San Francisco, California. His ceramic education started at City College of San Francisco and continued on the job at a high-volume ceramic production studio where he further refined his skills. The inspiration for his ceramic work pulls heavily from his Filipino heritage through the study of Bicolano mythology, pre-colonial Filipino earthenware, traditional Filipino tattoo patterns, and the application of Baybayin, the ancient Filipino writing system. His most recent series of work, *Tatak Palayok*, is a marriage of modern ceramics and patterns based on this traditional practice of tattooing.

SEED is the product of these three artists, guided by the collaboration of the knowledge, culture, and experiences that SiouxBean has helped cultivate. As a cook, an artist, laborer, activist, organizer, and educator, he plows forward to grow more seeds of knowledge and art in the community. With continued investigation into BIPOC clay and culinary traditions, the championing of justice rights movements through the studio as a social platform, and the continued mission to provide safe, secure, and sustainable studio practices, SiouxBean continues to simmer the stock of his passion, of his soul.

5 Preparing to break plate

6 Cone 10 reduction with Mishima inlay