



BMA to Present *Recasting Colonialism: Michelle Erickson Ceramics* in May

Exhibition features Erickson's contemporary ceramics addressing exploitation and inequality in context with historic European and Asian ceramics from the BMA's collection

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BALTIMORE, MD (March 6, 2023)—In recent years, ceramics have made a significant resurgence within contemporary dialogues and explorations, with artists bringing new perspectives and technical approaches to the genre and exhibitions revealing the understudied histories of ceramic objects. With its forthcoming exhibition, *Recasting Colonialism: Michelle Erickson Ceramics*, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) presents the provocative work of an artist whose practice leverages 18th-century ceramic techniques to explore the connections between the global trade of ceramics during the expansion of Western colonization and the pervasiveness of exploitation and inequality in the 21st century. The exhibition will feature 16 ceramic objects by Erickson, produced between 2005 and 2021, alongside more than 30 European and Asian ceramics from the 17th to 19th centuries drawn from the BMA's expansive collection. Together, the works capture a complicated history of people and objects in circulation and highlights the little-known role of ceramics in perpetuating colonialist ideals that continue to reverberate as racism, sexism, and environmental discrimination in the present moment. *Recasting Colonialism* will be on view at the BMA from May 7 through October 1, 2023.

"Michelle Erickson's practice highlights the reality that the racism of today is born of historic oppression that we have not yet adequately addressed or challenged. At the same time, her work reveals the ways in which objects carry histories and meanings beyond their formal contours and play important roles in shaping our social, political, and economic structures," said Asma Naeem, the BMA's Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. "We look forward to opening *Recasting Colonialism* and to inviting conversation about Michelle's practice and the critical themes with which she is engaged—subjects that most certainly hold relevance and importance to our immediate community and well beyond."

Erickson grew up in Virginia surrounded by English colonial sites that conflicted with her Middle Eastern family's 20th-century migration story. To explore her relationship with American history, she began studying the clay bodies and glaze formulas of ceramics produced in the 17th and 18th centuries, a period of rapid global expansion. She meticulously recreates these forms and palettes before subverting them through decoration and a visual vocabulary that engages with contemporary social and political issues. The resulting works are in instances witty and jarring and embrace a wide range of subjects, from the presidency of Donald Trump to the realities of child

soldiers in post-colonial countries, and to broader everyday experiences of racism and discrimination in consumer culture. By utilizing historical techniques within a deeply contemporary context, Erickson reveals the brutality that underpinned both Western expansionism and the global scale of its effect in this current moment.

To further re-instigate the politics of these objects for the 21st century, Erickson's works will be featured alongside 17th- through 19th-century ceramic works from the BMA's collection, including some shown for the first time. These objects reveal the vast network of oceanic trade routes established between Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas, which by the 18th century had supported the exchange of more than 60 million pieces of porcelain. The competition between European and American merchants led to the founding of European factories and furthered colonial expansion, and with it the growth of the slave trade. *Recasting Colonialism* establishes a bridge between the past and present, encouraging critical inquiry into the materiality of everyday objects within our dialogues about colonialism, racism, and discrimination in its many forms.

The exhibition is curated by Brittany Luberda, the Anne Stone Associate Curator of Decorative Arts.

Michelle Erickson

Michelle Erickson is an independent ceramic artist and scholar internationally recognized for her mastery of colonial-era ceramic techniques. Her pieces reinvent ceramic history to create 21st-century social, political, and environmental narratives distinguished by insightful commentary on the human spirit. Examples of her work are in the collections of the Mint Museum of Craft and Design; The Museum of Art and Design, NY; Peabody Essex Museum; Milwaukee Art Museum; The Chipstone Foundation; New-York Historical Society; The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent; Yale University Art Gallery; and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; among others. Her recent solo exhibitions include *Wild Porcelain*, Legion of Honor/Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (2021-23); *Politics, Porcelain & Revolution*, Museum of the American Revolution (2018); *The Last Drop*, North Carolina Pottery Center (2017-18); *You & I Are Earth*, Wilton House Museum in Richmond, VA (2016); and *Conversations in Clay*, Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (2015). In 2007, Erickson was commissioned to design and create the official gift to be given to Queen Elizabeth II during her visit to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, VA. Erickson's scholarship on the rediscovery of 17th- and 18th-century ceramics techniques has been published in several volumes of the annual journal *Ceramics in America* and she has lectured and demonstrated her art at numerous institutions. When Michelle was an artist-in-residence at London's Victoria & Albert Museum in 2012, she filmed three videos about remaking historic ceramics, one of which now has over 1.2 million views. She has also consulted on and designed ceramics for several major motion pictures such as *The Patriot*, *The New World*, and the HBO series *John Adams*. Erickson holds a BFA from the College of William and Mary in Virginia.

Baltimore Museum of Art

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held

narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 97,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world's largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation's finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

Visitor Information

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with extended hours on Thursdays until 9 p.m. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year's Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

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