

**Social Recession:  
55<sup>th</sup> Annual NCECA Ceramic Arts Invitational**

**Curated by Shannon R. Stratton**

Living in a culture that places a high value on individuality tends to obscure the reality of interdependence, and 2020 forced a reckoning with the costs of that disconnection. In March of 2020, former United States Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy and Dr. Alice T. Chen penned an article for *The Atlantic*, positing the theory that the novel corona virus could cause a “social recession” due to unraveling social bonds caused by quarantine and social-distancing measures. They explain how the lack of social contact can lead to harmful effects on mood, health, our ability to learn and work, and our overall sense of community. And while Murthy and Chen were considering the effects of enforced separation due to a health crisis, the legacy of settler colonialism and white supremacy that has shaped capitalism, Western culture and, specifically, the United States, has long disrupted social bonds, destroying communities, histories, and traditions in its wake. The results of extractive and oppressive culture and policy stand in sharp relief alongside the pandemic.

For the 2021 NCECA Annual, artists were invited to submit work in which they considered the tension between together and apart, interdependence, belonging, hospitality, and modes of support that allow people to extend themselves with mindfulness and compassion towards each other and to the non-human world. They were asked to draw on their personal and cultural experiences to explore themes of the social and how social connection, as a renewable resource, is a means for addressing the challenges we face, both individually and as a society.

The resulting exhibition covers a range of topics inspired by this theme—some made prior to the pandemic, and others made during. Some projects speak directly to the pandemic, while others address mental health, labor rights, grief and mourning, and the interdependence of the human and nonhuman worlds. In short, I would suggest this grouping of work is grounded in themes of connection and disconnection; collectively the artists ask us to consider the power of interdependence, compassion, and empathy.

Shannon R. Stratton  
Executive Director  
Ox-Bow School of Art and Artist Residency (Saugatuck, MI)

# A L I C E F. A N D H A R R I S K. W E S T O N A R T G A L L E R Y

## NCECA

Since its inception in the mid-1960s, the purpose of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) has been to foster a sense of connectedness for the fields of ceramic art and education. Why is it that our drive to learn and create is so intertwined with our urge for connection? As artists, teachers, and learners, one of the most powerful experiences of connectedness we can have is to discover a sense of kinship with other creators. Curator Shannon Rae Stratton frames the 2021 NCECA Annual, *Social Recession*, within the paradoxical nature of this time when the impulse to wonder, investigate, and create is accompanied in our daily lives with the dissolution of interpersonal connection. Immense gratitude goes out to the exhibition's curator and the artists who responded to this evocative concept during this uniquely challenging time. This exhibition would not be possible without the dedication and support of the Alice F. and Harris K. Weston Art Gallery. A grant from the National Endowment for the Arts also provides support for NCECA's 2021 exhibitions in Cincinnati, Ohio.