

## THE RIDDLE EFFECT

JUNE 2 – SEPTEMBER 8, 2019

Craft Contemporary presents an exhibition of work of Los Angeles artist John T. Riddle Jr. and his contemporaries

LOS ANGELES – Craft Contemporary will present *The RIDDLE Effect* from June 2 – September 8, 2019, an exhibition that examines the work of influential Los Angeles artist, curator, and teacher John T. Riddle, Jr. (1933–2002) within the context of his contemporaries and students. Riddle is known for chronicling the history, struggles, and triumphs of black Americans through figurative paintings and prints, small and large-scale abstract ceramic sculptures, and assemblage and iron works made from found objects collected after the 1965 Watts Rebellion.

The first major exhibition of Riddle's work in Los Angeles in almost two decades, *The RIDDLE Effect* includes some of the artist's most powerful pieces, many on view publicly for the first time, alongside works by his students and colleagues including Dan Concholar, Dale Davis, John Outterbridge, Mark Steven Greenfield, Noah Purifoy, Joe Sims, and Charles Dickson. Featuring 20 of his ceramic, mixed media sculptures and assemblages, the exhibition is guest curated by jill moniz.

"I am thrilled to present John Riddle's work at Craft Contemporary. His love of 'making'—of the materials themselves and the stories they tell—is inspiring and reflects the museum's commitment to these ideas and practices," said Suzanne Isken, executive director. "I am similarly inspired by John Riddle's commitment to and activation of the communities he lived in and the artists he worked with, which dovetails with our museum's goals and community building efforts."

IMAGE: John Riddle, *Untitled*, 1973, welded metals, 4 x 1.5 feet  
Courtesy of Aaron Payne Fine Art. Collection of Vaughn C. Payne, Jr. MD Family Collection.  
Photo: Melanie Aron.



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A master of multiple mediums, including iron works, ceramics, and painted assemblages, Riddle capitalized on his obsession with materials and their inherent languages to tell his own story, as well as to reckon with a collective history.

Riddle was devoted to a narrative practice long before it was accepted in contemporary art circles. He elevated ceramics and assemblage as art forms and practices that were tied to creating awareness and developing a visual language that might resonate with viewers beyond the lexicon of modern sculpture. Riddle's art, often made in collaboration with others, was politically charged while never sacrificing aesthetics.

"Riddle was committed to building an expressive visual language of black masculinity and black love, creating an immersive experience with large and small scale works. In this way, he was ahead of his time as an artist who recognized the value of converging allegory and personal narratives with lush aesthetics," said moniz. "He was a master of infusing material with meaning."

For Riddle, art contained the means and materials to claim social space for ideas, impulses, and aesthetics of black Americans. *The RIDDLE Effect* highlights this narrative, honoring Riddle's expressive practice as a keystone for artists of all media to explore their own stories through art in Los Angeles. Contrary to conventional ideas from the art historical canon, Riddle considered himself a conceptual artist because his ideas and titles always preceded his attempts to realize objects.

A native of Los Angeles, Riddle served in the U.S. Air Force from 1953–57. He received his associate degree from Los Angeles City College, then earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in education from California State University, Los Angeles. His first solo exhibition was in 1968 at Los Angeles' Brockman Gallery in Leimert Park.

Riddle was passionate about his community and imparting knowledge to the next generation. He was a founding member of Black Arts West, a loose collective of black artists living and working on the West Coast. He was a ceramics teacher at Los Angeles and Beverly Hills High Schools and taught in Charles White's Tudor Arts Program, which exposed arts to black youth, some of whom developed careers as artists and are included in *The RIDDLE Effect*.

Riddle moved to Atlanta, Georgia to teach at Spellman College and serve as executive director of the Neighborhood Arts Center from 1976–1981. He was Assistant Director of the Atlanta Civic Center for 15 years



IMAGES (Top to bottom): Top: John Riddle, *A Magnificent Stroke*, 1973, welded metals, 7 × 10 feet. Courtesy of Aaron Payne Fine Art. Collection of Vaughn C. Payne, Jr. MD Family Collection. Photo: Melanie Aron. Bottom: John Riddle, *Panthers*, ca. 1970, welded metals, 20 × 14 × 17 inches. Collection of Dale Davis

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until he retired in 1996. Riddle returned to Los Angeles in 1999 to become Visual Arts Curator at the California African American Museum (CAAM). During his tenure as professor, director and curator, Riddle continued to make art including sculpture, collage and paintings. His work was included in multiple exhibitions in galleries and museums and garnered recognition through inclusion in collections nationwide.

Riddle died in 2002. Following his death, CAAM organized the commemorative exhibition *Tribute to John T. Riddle, Jr.* that featured more than 30 of his artworks.

## ABOUT THE CURATOR

Guest curator moniz holds a doctorate in cultural anthropology from Indiana University. She worked in community engagement at Museum of Latin American Art before becoming head curator at CAAM. moniz served as curator to Dr. Leon O. Banks, a founding trustee of the Museum of Contemporary Art, before returning to curate large-scale exhibitions including *Work Over School* at Craft Contemporary, *Signifying Form* at The Landing Gallery, and *Serpentine Fire* at Quotidian, her project space in downtown Los Angeles. Her interest in Riddle stems from their mutual work at CAAM and her mission to make space for artists with radical practices. At CAAM, moniz accessioned several of Riddle's *American Dream* series, works that would influence her focus on abstract, three-dimensional narrative art.

## RELATED PUBLIC PROGRAMS

An opening reception for *The RIDDLE Effect* takes place on June 1, 2019 from 6-9pm. The reception is free for Craft Contemporary members and open to the public for a \$12 entry fee.

**IMAGES (Top to bottom):** Top: John Riddle, *Ship*, ca. 1970s, metal on wood, 24 × 24 × 12 inches. Collection of Bill and June Pajaud. Photo: Melanie Aron. Bottom: Dan Concholar, *The Divine Target*, nd., mixed media, 48 × 48 inches. Courtesy of Aaron Payne Fine Art. Collection of Vaughn C. Payne, Jr. MD Family Collection. Photo: Melanie Aron.



Located on Los Angeles' historic Miracle Mile since 1965, Craft Contemporary reveals the potential of craft to educate, captivate, provoke, and empower. With a focus on contemporary art made from craft media and processes, Craft Contemporary presents dynamic exhibitions by established and emerging artists and designers who are often underrepresented in larger art institutions. Through a robust roster of regular programs and events, Craft Contemporary offers creative opportunities for the public to participate in hands-on workshops led by professional artists. Craft Contemporary cultivates an environment for people in Los Angeles to deepen their relationship to art, creativity, and one another.

LOCATION: 5814 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036

ADMISSION: FREE every Sunday

REGULARLY: \$9 for adults; \$7 for students, teachers, seniors; free for Craft Contemporary members

HOURS: Tuesday - Friday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Saturday & Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; closed Mondays. Every first Thursday of the month, extended hours 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.