HOUSTON CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY CRAFT

META-FORMATION: NEW CONNECTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY BLACKSMITHING

FALL EXHIBITIONS 2020

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META-FORMATION: NEW CONNECTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY BLACKSMITHING

Blacksmithing is an ancient practice that dates back to the Bronze Age (3300 – 1200 BCE) and encompasses metalworkers who forge iron or steel to produce utilitarian works, from iron gates to kitchen utensils. The backbone of the field is forging, a method of production that shapes metal using localized compressive force and is categorized by the metal's temperature—cold, warm, or hot—at the time force is used. However, the role of this historic trade has expanded over the years. Today, metalworkers combine traditional forging techniques with other fabrication processes, broadening the interpretation of blacksmithing.

Meta-Formation: New Connections in Contemporary Blacksmithing is a snapshot of some of today's most skilled and innovative contemporary metalworkers. The exhibition is organized by metalworker and designer Rachel David in collaboration with HCCC Curator Kathryn Hall and was juried in part by jeweler and metalsmith Andy Cooperman, sculptor Hoss Haley, and curator Sarah Darro. Focusing on the various attributes that characterize contemporary blacksmithing, the show exemplifies a wide range of artistic expression, while embracing approaches that go beyond traditional techniques. Displaying everything from sculpture to functional wares, the exhibition was informed by a juried open call, coupled with a selection of invited submissions.

To learn more about the exhibition through videos and text about the artwork, please visit crafthouston.org/exhibltion/meta-formation.

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Cover: Johannes Postlmayr, Detail of *Distorted Geometric N°1*, 2017. Steel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by the artist.

META-FORMATION: NEW CONNECTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY BLACKSMITHING

La herrería es una práctica antigua que se remonta a la Edad del Bronce (3300 - 1200 a.e.c.) y abarca a los trabajadores del metal que forjan hierro o acero para producir trabajos utilitarios, desde puertas de hierro hasta utensilios de cocina. La columna vertebral del campo es la forja, un método de producción que da forma al metal mediante la fuerza de compresión localizada y se clasifica según la temperatura del metal (fría, tibia o caliente) en el momento en que se usa la fuerza. Sin embargo, el papel de este comercio histórico se ha ampliado a lo largo de los años. Hoy en día, los metalúrgicos combinan las técnicas tradicionales de forja con otros procesos de fabricación, ampliando la interpretación de la herrería.

Meta-Formation: New Connections in Contemporary Blacksmithing es una vislumbre de algunos de los trabajadores metalúrgicos contemporáneos más hábiles e innovadores de la actualidad. La exposición está organizada por la metalúrgica y diseñadora Rachel David en colaboración con la curadora de HCCC, Kathryn Hall, y fue jurada en parte por el joyero y orfebre Andy Cooperman, el escultor Hoss Haley y la curadora Sarah Darro. Centrándose en los diversos atributos que caracterizan la herrería contemporánea, la exposición ejemplifica una amplia gama de expresiones artísticas, al tiempo que abarca enfoques que van más allá de las técnicas tradicionales. Mostrando de todo, desde esculturas hasta artículos funcionales, la exposición fue informada por una convocatoria abierta con jurado, junto con una selección de presentaciones invitadas.

Para obtener más información sobre la exposición a través de videos y texto sobre la obra de arte, visita crafthouston.org/exhibition/meta-formation.

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IMPROVISATION AND EXPERIMENTATION

Contemporary metalworkers exhibit a meta-focus on what their discipline can do with iron. They explore how the interplay of their hands, the forge, and industrial technologies can shape metal. Today's metalworkers continue to test their material's limitations as well as experiment with the tension between precision and chance as metal transitions from hot to cold. **Mike Rossi** embraces the unpredictability of inflating steel with compressed air, a technique he learned from renowned blacksmith **Elizabeth Brim**. He transforms flat and angular cuts of sheet metal into flexible surfaces that stretch, wrinkle, and fold after he removes his welded forms from the kiln and inflates them with compressed air. Demonstrated by his *Distorted Geometric* series (2017-2018), **Johannes Postlmayr** utilizes the force of a hydraulic press to create his own interactions with chance. He first mills and cuts steel into tight geometric patterns before allowing a hydraulic press to distort the steel. This machine exerts intense pressure while the material is hot, creating patterns that expand from their core, enticing our sense of touch. In *Ductile Compression 10* (2015), **Joshua Goss** mimics the friction and pressure that gravity imposes on Earth's topography over time. Much like layers of the earth, each piece of recycled carbon steel, stainless steel, and bronze that Goss utilizes has its own history of use, through evidence of wear and its interaction with its environment. When Goss heats up and compresses the layers of metal, each layer responds to the temperature and friction in unique ways, allowing the eye to distinguish the striations of material.

Johannes Postlmayr (Austria), *Distorted Geometric N°4*, 2018. Steel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by the artist.

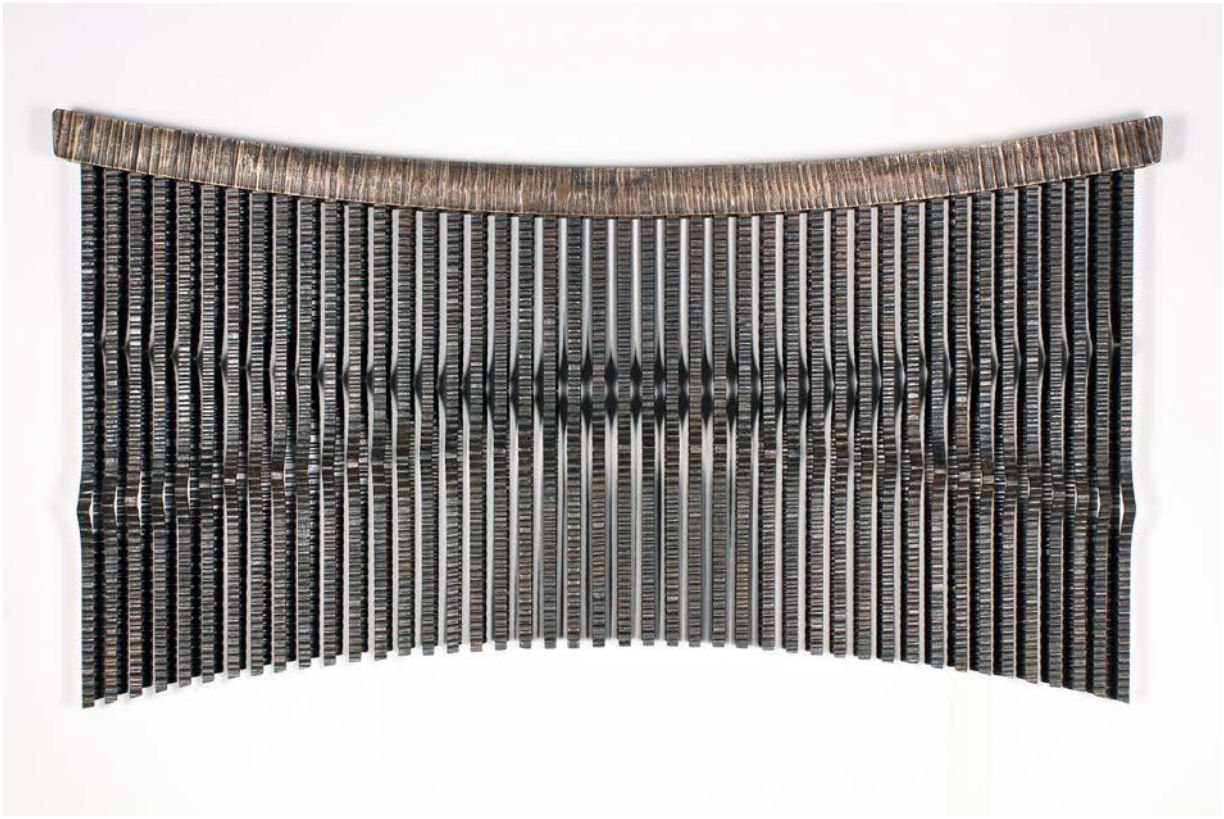
Mike Rossi (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), *Ansible*, 2019. Inflated steel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by the artist.

Joshua Goss (Greeley, Colorado), *Ductile Compression 10*, 2015. Carbon steel, stainless steel, bronze. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by the artist.

ILLUSION AND OP ART

One theme embraced by contemporary metalwork is optical illusion, a playful way to deceive the eye by appearing to be other than it is. **Colby Brinkman**'s *Fluctuation Portal* (2020) is a form of op art, an abstract art form that produces the illusion of movement through the combination of line and color. In this piece, he draws on the *moiré effect*, which creates the appearance of movement by placing patterns of similar lines and shapes closely together. **Brad Nichols**' *Guinea Pig* (2018) looks to be made from a cast metal mold; however, he creates his sculptures through welding, a process of heating up metal to its melting point and then forging it with a hammer. Inspired by African standards of economic vitality, **Tiff Massey** plays with scale in her work *Spring Prototype I* (2017), a preliminary model—called a prototype— for a larger-than-life public sculpture. This work depicts a spring, a Black cultural symbol of an infinite spiral, made to adorn Detroit in celebration of the Black community's contributions to her hometown. **Warren Holzman** masterfully uses a combination of *repoussé*—a technique that uses a hammer to shape metal from the back side of the metal to create a low relief, and *chasing*—a technique that shapes metal by hammering the material's front side to create realistic portrayals of animals in his furniture.

Tiff Massey (Detroit, Michigan), *Spring Prototype I*, 2017. Steel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by the artist.



Clockwise from left: **Brad Nichols** (La Crosse, Wisconsin), *Guinea Pig*, 2018. Forged and fabricated steel, paint. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Ron Regan Photography. **Warren Holzman** (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), *Joke Chicken*, 2020. Forged steel, brass, electroplated nickel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by the artist. **Colby Brinkman** (Austin, Texas), *Fluctuation Portal*, 2020. Carbon steel and silicon bronze. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by the artist.

ORNAMENTATION AND SURFACE DESIGN

The history of blacksmithing includes a rich array of ornamentation and surface design used in the decoration of architecture and functional objects. Recognized as a female pioneer within a male-dominated field, **Elizabeth Brim** forges sculptures inspired by traditionally feminine imagery from lace to pearls. In *Scroll* (2015), Brim demonstrates her masterful ability to forge and shape the classical architectural motif into a three-dimensional sculptural form.

David Barnhill and **Seth Gould** draw on ancient Japanese forging techniques to create striking patterns. Barnhill's *Emulation of Shaomi Katsuyoshi* (2017) pays homage to the Meiji era (1868-1912 CE) metalsmiths, known for skillfully creating ornate surface patterns using a technique called *mokume gane*, meaning wood grain metal. Historically, in Japan, mokume gane objects signaled wealth and prestige because of the skillful technique that fuses several different layers of precious metals together to create metallic patterns.

Inspired by 18th- and 19th-century locks, Gould uses a traditional Japanese overlay technique called *nunome zogan*, meaning woven cloth inlay. In *Indicator Lock* (2020), Gould uses a chisel to make a crosshatch pattern, pushing 24k-gold wire into to produce his surface design. This geometric pattern serves a clever purpose beyond its decorative function: if the lock is not secured using the correct sequence, the misaligned pattern alerts the owner of a potential intruder.

Seth Gould (Bakersville, North Carolina), *Indicator Lock,* 2020. Wrought iron, steel, 24k gold. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by artist.

Elizabeth Brim Penland, North Carolina), *Scroll*, 2015. Forged steel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Robin Dryer.

David Barnhill (Malone, Wisconsin), *Emulation of Shaomi Katsuyoshi*, 2017. Copper and nickel (mokume gane). Courtesy of the artist. Photo by the artist.

ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

The vocabulary of architecture, design, and blacksmithing go hand in hand, as each discipline considers proportion, shape, and scale. Metalwork, often the skeletal support of architecture and interior design, is a framework that translates the idea of a building from a blueprint into a three-dimensional form. It's metalwork like rivets and bolts that hold together the components of a lighting fixture or a door knob.

Contemporary metalworking draws inspiration from design history to encourage different avenues of thinking. **Aaron Brinson**'s sculpture uses the language of design as a metaphor for communal progress, as seemingly opposing components work together as a unified structure. As if floating into orbit, Brinson's futuristic sculpture uses rivets to bind together a series of fragmented spheres and tapers that gain strength when joined together as a support system, a symbol for how thriving communities must rely on each member to succeed. **Andrew Hayes** plays with common perceptions of materials by challenging the way we think about their function. In *Chevron* (2019), he deconstructs the pages of a book. When unbound, the reclaimed pages shed their original meaning and work in harmony with the steel to create the V-shape of a chevron pattern. In their sculptures, **Sachi Nasatir** deconstructs influential and recognizable forms to the point of abstraction. In *Untitled* (2020), they play with scale by drawing inspiration from the form of a syringe. When scaled-up, the nested cylindrical forms resemble Art Deco proportions of the 20s and 30s. **Adam Shirley** also uses abstraction, referencing the minimal still lifes of 20th-century Italian painter and printmaker Giorgio Morandi in his *Bellini Tray* (2015). Shirley leaves his sculpture open to interpretation by refining the still life of domestic objects down to an organic composition of an oval with pinched cylinders that shoot up from its base.

Adam Shirley (Farmington Hills, Michigan), *Bellini Tray*, 2015. Steel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by PD Rearick.

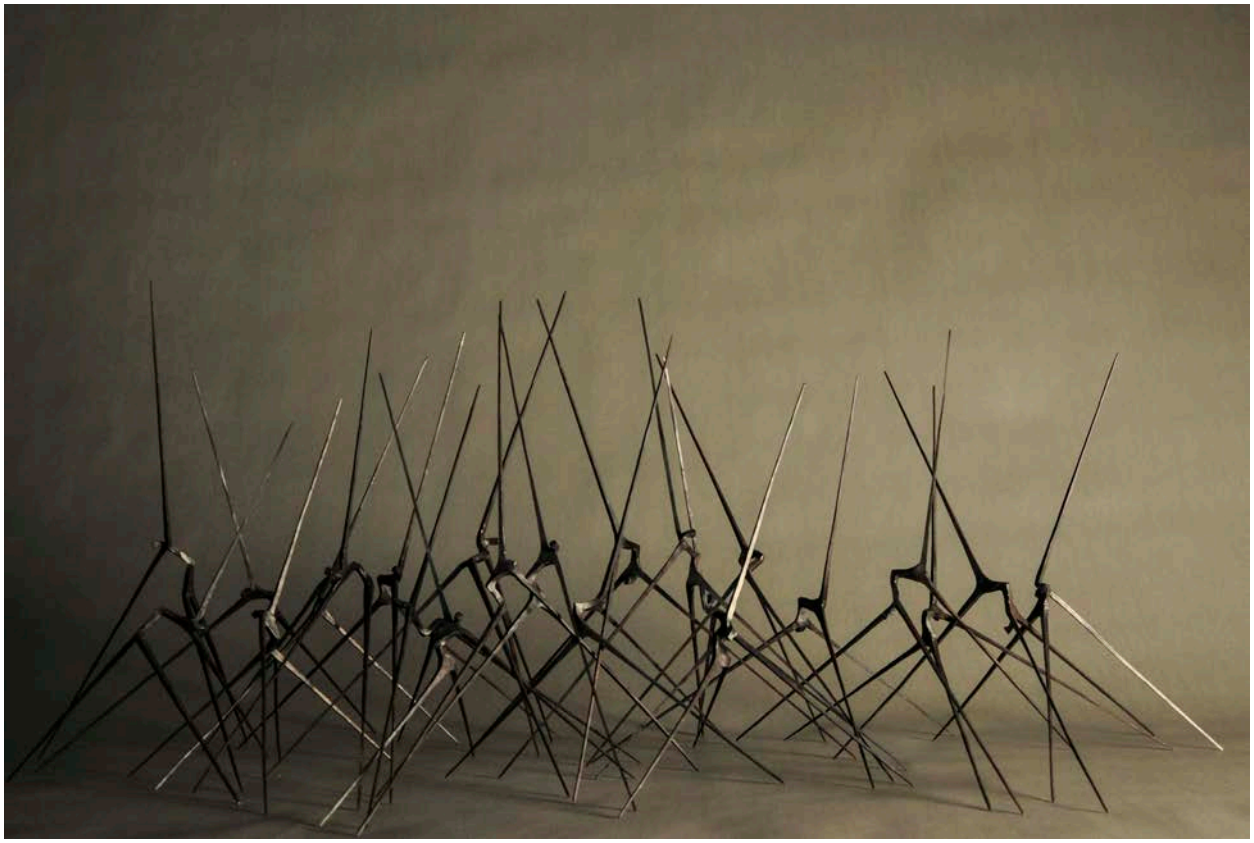
Top to bottom: **Sachi Nasatir** (Picayune, Mississippi), *Untitled*, 2020. Mild steel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by HCCC. **Aaron Brinson**, *Converge*, 2020. Mild steel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by HCCC. **Andrew Hayes** (Asheville, North Carolina), *Chevron*, 2019. Fabricated steel and book paper. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Steve Mann.

THE HUMAN FORM

In many cultures around the world, ancestral narratives acknowledge blacksmithing as a life force. Iron, the essential material of blacksmithing, is also present in our own blood. Furthermore, these civilizations have held blacksmiths in high esteem because they forged art and technology together by transforming iron into powerful weapons, utensils, and sculpture. Within these histories, metalworkers have replicated the human form for religious totems, symbols of society, and art that demonstrates a high level of skill.

This tradition continues today. In *Tamama II* (2015), **Lee Sauder** uses his knowledge of smithing to sculpt the female form out of iron that he extracts from rocks that he collects. He uses an ancient process called smelting that utilizes a *bloomery*, a type of furnace that separates iron from other components. The *bloom*, a combination of iron and smelt, is then shaped while it is still hot. In *Skin Study #1* (2019), **Jon Shearin** tests the physical breaking point of sheet metal by stamping, stretching, and tooling steel, a material that is typically hard and rigid, to replicate the softness of human skin. World War I inspired **Will Maguire**'s *Contrary Man* (2016). His artwork represents the contradictory nature of war through hybrid angular figures that are part man, part *caltrops*—spiked metal weapons used to stop vehicles.

Lee Sauder (Lexington, Virginia), *Tamama II,* 2015. Bloom iron. Courtesy of the artist. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Top to bottom: **Jon Shearin** (Brooklyn, New York), *Skin Study #1*, 2019. Steel and aluminum. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by the artist. **Will Maguire** (Australia), *Contrary Man*, 2016. Forged steel. Courtesy of the artist. Photo courtesy of the artist.

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

Iron is a particularly strong and resilient material that has served many different purposes cross-culturally from silverware to weaponry. Today's metalworkers exercise skills drawn from the utilitarian history of metal to create innovative objects that possess contemporary relevance and a connection to the history of blacksmithing. **Zack Noble**'s sculpture, *Swage* (2018) references the lesser known object of a *swage*, a tool or die used to shape metal into a specific form, recognizing the craftsmanship that goes into making these tools. **Rachel Kedinger** harmoniously balances form and function through her tools that are built to last. In *Garden Tools* (2016), her handles are weighted to fit comfortably into a person's hand and include a loop to hang her objects when they are not being used. Adding value to these utilitarian objects, Kedinger demonstrates an attention to detail through her use of brass rivets that adorn the utensil and bind the steel together in an elegant manner. **Kest Schwartzman** draws on her skillful ability to create fantastical custom-fit masks for the skulls of small creatures while also representing how masks can be used for physical and psychological protection. In her work, skulls assume different identities as prey becomes predator, such as in *Falcon Mask for a Mink* (2018).

Rachel Kedinger (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin),
Garden Tools, 2016. Steel and brass rivets.
Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Mercedes Jelinek.

Top to bottom: **Zack Noble** (Asheville, North Carolina), *Swage*, 2018. Forged iron. Courtesy of the artist. Photo courtesy of the artist. **Kest Schwartzman** (Frederick, Maryland), *Falcon Mask for a Mink,* 2018. Stainless steel, bone, copper, glass jar; *Mink Mask for a Chicken,* 2018. Stainless steel, bone, brass, glass jar; *Chicken Mask for a Mole,* 2018. Stainless steel, bone, brass, glass jar. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by the artist.

List of Works

DAVID BARNHILL (Malone, Wisconsin)

Embers in the Night Sky, 2017
Brass 230, brass 260, nickel 752, copper (mokume gane)
Courtesy of the artist

Emulation of Shaomi Katsuyoshi, 2017
Copper and nickel (mokume gane)
Courtesy of the artist

PETER BRASPENNINX (Casanovia, Michigan)

There is Nothing New Under the Sun, 2016
Steel and copper
Courtesy of the artist

ELIZABETH BRIM (Penland, North Carolina)

Scroll, 2015
Forged steel
Courtesy of the artist

COLBY BRINKMAN (Austin, Texas)

Fluctuation Portal, 2020
Carbon steel and silicon bronze
Courtesy of the artist

AARON BRINSON

Converge, 2020
Mild steel
Courtesy of the artist

DAVID HARPER CLEMONS (Penland, North Carolina)

The Over Looked - Bread Basket No. 1, 2018
Mild steel, copper, brass, ash
Courtesy of Robert and Nancy Kipnis

Safe Passage, 2020
Mild steel and ash
Courtesy of the artist

ANDY COOPERMAN (Seattle, Washington)
Juror

Cinch (Wane), 2012
Bronze, sterling silver, brass, mild steel
Courtesy of the artist

Pedicel, 2014
Mild steel, sterling silver, 24 karat gold leaf
Courtesy of the artist

Pipette, 2016
Bronze, brass, copper, fine silver, steel, stainless, watch fragment, bone, metal leaf, fiber optic glass disk
Courtesy of the artist

MONICA COYNE (Whitethorn, California)

Ascending, 2018
Steel
Courtesy of the artist

MARIA CRISTALLI (Cle Elum, Washington)

Untitled, 2018
Forged steel and paint
Courtesy of the artist

RACHEL DAVID (Waynesville, North Carolina)
Juror

Bound Helical Table, 2020
Forged and fabricated steel, patina
Courtesy of the artist

Large Bound Cabinet, 2020
Forged, formed, and fabricated steel, patina
Courtesy of the artist

JOHN ERIANNE (Pompton Plains, New Jersey)

Nuclear Family, 2016
Steel and cement
Courtesy of the artist

JEFFREY FUNK (Bigfork, Montana)

Plutonic Plate, 2014
Wrought iron and altered granite
Courtesy of the artist

LISA GEERTSEN (Seattle, Washington)

Wide Open, 2018
Steel and copper
Courtesy of the artist

JOSHUA A. GOSS (Greeley, Colorado)

Ductile Compression 10, 2015
Carbon steel, stainless steel, bronze
Courtesy of the artist

SETH GOULD (Bakersville, North Carolina)

Indicator Lock, 2020
Wrought iron, steel, 24k gold
Courtesy of the artist

ADAM HAWK (Nashville, Tennessee)

Chimera #2, 2018
Forged and fabricated steel, acrylic paint
Courtesy of the artist

ANDREW HAYES (Asheville, North Carolina)

Chevron, 2019
Fabricated steel and book paper
Courtesy of the artist

Plane Study, 2019
Fabricated steel
Courtesy of the artist

HOSS HALEY (Spruce Pine, North Carolina)
Juror

Tangent, 2019
Patina on fabricated Cor-ten steel
Courtesy of the artist

Union 070519, 2019
Patina on fabricated Cor-ten steel
Courtesy of the artist

HOSS HALEY (Spruce Pine, North Carolina)

Juror

Union 071219, 2019
Patina on fabricated Cor-ten steel
Courtesy of the artist

WARREN HOLZMAN (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Joke Chicken, 2020
Forged steel, brass, electroplated nickel
Courtesy of the artist

Pig, 2018
Bronze repoussé and forged steel
Courtesy of the artist

Rat, 2017
Bronze repoussé and forged steel
Courtesy of the artist

ALEXANDER KAMELHAIR (Alpine, Texas)

Monument Study 01/ Thriving Monument, 2014
Iron, copper, wood
Courtesy of the artist

RACHEL KEDINGER (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin)

Garden Tools, 2016
Steel and brass rivets
Courtesy of the artist

Setting for One, 2018
Brass
Courtesy of the artist

BETSY LEWIS (Harrison, New York)

Sensorium, 2015
Sterling silver and steel
Courtesy of the artist

ZACHARY LIHATSH (Tucson, Arizona)

Bound # 1, 2018
Forged and fabricated steel, willow, black wax
Courtesy of the artist

Cyclical, 2018
Forged and fabricated steel, willow, black wax
Courtesy of artist

WILL MAGUIRE (Australia)

Contrary Man, 2016
Forged Steel
Courtesy of the artist

TIFF MASSEY (Detroit, Michigan)

Spring Prototype I, 2017
Steel
Courtesy of the artist

DANIEL MILLER (Waynesville, North Carolina)

Job Repentant at Llewellyn's Mill, 1996
Mild steel and wrought iron
Courtesy of the artist

SACHI NASATIR (Picayune, Mississippi)

Untitled, 2020
Mild steel
Courtesy of the artist

BRAD NICHOLS (La Crosse, Wisconsin)

Guinea Pig, 2018
Forged and fabricated steel, paint
Courtesy of the artist

ZACK NOBLE (Asheville, North Carolina)

Swage, 2018
Forged iron
Courtesy of the artist

JOHANNES POSTLMAYR (Austria)

Distorted Geometric N°1, 2017
Steel
Courtesy of the artist

Distorted Geometric N°2, 2017
Steel
Courtesy of the artist

Distorted Geometric N°4, 2018
Steel
Courtesy of the artist

PATRICK J. QUINN (Johnstown, Pennsylvania)

Moments, Thoughts, Actions, 2018
Steel and brass
Courtesy of the artist

DANIEL RANDALL (Cookeville, Tennessee)

Stanchion 1, 2013
Steel and wood
Courtesy of the artist

Stanchion 2, 2013
Steel and wood
Courtesy of the artist

MIKE ROSSI (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Ansible, 2019
Inflated steel
Courtesy of the artist

LEE SAUDER (Lexington, Virginia)

Tamama II, 2015
Bloom iron
Courtesy of the artist

KEST SCHWARTZMAN (Frederick, Maryland)

Falcon Mask for a Mink, 2018
Stainless steel, bone, copper, glass jar
Courtesy of the artist

Mink Mask for a Chicken 2018
Stainless steel, bone, brass, glass jar
Courtesy of the artist

Chicken Mask for a Mole, 2018
Stainless steel, bone, brass, glass jar
Courtesy of the artist

DAVID SECREST (Somers, Montana)

Untitled, 2020
Steel and wrought iron
Courtesy of the artist

JON SHEARIN (Brooklyn, New York)

Skin Study #1, 2019
Steel and aluminum
Courtesy of the artist

ADAM SHIRLEY (Farmington Hills, Michigan)

Bellini Tray, 2015
Steel
Courtesy of the artist

HALEY WOODWARD (Austin, Texas)

Inward, 2018
Steel
Courtesy of the artist

STEPHEN YUSKO (Lakewood, Ohio)

Reliquary Solitude, 2017
Steel, glass, wood, milk paint
Courtesy of the artist

Western Reserve, 2019
Wood, steel, milk paint
Courtesy of the artist

HOUSTON CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY CRAFT

About Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

Houston Center for Contemporary Craft (HCCC) is a nonprofit visual arts center founded to advance education on the process, product, and history of craft. Since opening in 2001, HCCC has served as an important cultural and educational resource for Houston and the Southwest, one of the few venues in the country dedicated exclusively to craft at the highest level. HCCC provides exhibition, studio, and garden spaces to support the work of local and national artists and educators. Visitors learn about craft by viewing innovative exhibitions, engaging with on-site resident artists, and participating in hands-on educational programming.

HCCC is supported by individual donors and members and funded in part by The Brown Foundation; Houston Endowment, Inc.; the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance; Texas Commission on the Arts; the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kinder Foundation; the Morgan Foundation; Windgate Charitable Foundation; and the Wortham Foundation. HCCC is a member of the Houston Museum District and the Midtown Arts District.

For more information, please visit www.crafthouston.org or call 713-529-4848.

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