

Natalia Arbelaez

Artist Statement

My practice has centered around research into my family ancestry. Research of my inherited history and my sub-culture in ceramics responds to a lacking of Latinx voices in the context of ceramic history and ceramic classes. I didn't see myself or my voice dictating where or what the ceramics field needed. As I have been making work about the need for people like myself (and my familial histories) to be preserved and included in history, I have begun to think about my community in the field of ceramics. Women of color, especially brown and Black women, are seldom included in history, collections, and positions in higher education. Using my research, voice, and art to bring attention to these disparities and at the same time adding these narratives to our collective is imperative.

As a past Artist in Residence at the Museum of Art and Design in New York, I have been researching my permanent collection, specifically the work of those who have played a significant role in the history of ceramics. MAD has a rich history and collection of ceramic art, from modern to contemporary. During this research, it was easy to find many Peter Voulkos and Paul Soldner pieces, but, without knowing specific names, like Patti Warashina and Katherine Choy, it was difficult to find work by women of color. But how do people who don't already know these names find these artists? I asked the MAD curators to compose a list of works included in the collection to facilitate my search for artists that are not regularly included in our narratives and history. This list included work by 11 women of color included in the collection. 11 women of color to the 11 pieces just by Peter Voulkos. My work aims to bring attention to these artists, while also bringing attention to the much-needed work that must be done to rectify this imbalance. I have been making a new body of work that is influenced by 5 ceramicists, all women of color from the MAD collection: from Patti Warashina for her attention to the human form, Sana Musasama for her historical research, Lucy Lewis for her historical influence, Margaret Ponce Israel for her New York connection, to Katherine Choy for her founding of the Clay Art Center, to which I am also linked. While this work aims to create documentation of these women that is meant to be circulated, it is also to state that these women belong in history.