



Yinka Orafidiya's love of clay and her work with her community are fully engaged in helping us question perceptions to discover the truths and meanings embedded in making. Tall in stature and striking in appearance, Yinka recognized early on that misperceptions are not uncommon. While strangers, friends, and family might have seen her to be easily outgoing, she is more naturally a reflective introvert. Intellectually curious, studious, and proud of her family's vision of success, she excelled during her high school studies at William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia and was accepted into a prestigious Ivy League university where she studied chemical engineering. Nevertheless, working with clay was a significant part of her high school experience and she was not about to let go of its place in her vision for a future.



Following graduation from college, Yinka entered a career working as a research scientist in the pharmaceuticals industry. While this path was professionally challenging and rewarding, she couldn't help but think that something important was missing from her life. Shortly before her 30th birthday, she decided to pause her corporate trajectory and invest herself more fully in gaining the skills and knowledge to make ceramic art a major part of her life. A work exchange program offered at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia provided access to a rich environment for learning. Yinka was soon enough immersed in the community of learning there and she began to gain a vision of confidence as an artist working with clay. But, her vision and skill mastery didn't stop with objects, it started there and expanded into alternative ways to foster social connection and bring people together for community conversations.

Yinka had discovered a statistic stating that 1 in 4 people has been diagnosed with a mental health condition and many choose to struggle in silence rather than deal with the social stigmas and public misperceptions. To shed light on this issue, she proposed a socially engaged project that would merge her love of working with clay with an open community dialogue about mental health. Yinka's proposal was awarded an Art & Change grant from the Leeway Foundation. She met with Jeff Guido, the former exhibitions and residency director at

The Clay Studio, who was also one of the Onsite Conference Liaisons for NCECA's 2010 conference in Philadelphia. Jeff's enthusiastic response to Yinka's vision turned out to be a transformative moment in her self-vision as an artist. Her proposal for a project titled "All or Nothing" was hosted at The Clay Studio. For Yinka, this project changed everything. Observing and learning from the ways that others gained access to a sense of personal agency through objects created through her hands, Yinka began to understand that a functional pot could also be a conduit for connection and opening conversations that needed to take the place of silence.

A few years later, Yinka was among the first cohort of NCECA's Multicultural Fellowship which supported her participation in the conference in Providence. She recalls her initial sense of disconnectedness while sitting in the crowded room of the opening ceremony.. Just a day later, however, she found herself moved to step up to a microphone to make a comment about a panel she had just seen

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featuring Adriene A. Childs, Anthony Merino, Malcolm Mobutu Smith, and Shalene Valenzuela. While she doesn't recall the substance of her comment, the emotion of the moment remains vivid. Even more impactful was the unfolding of recognition and supportive comments that followed her through the remaining days of the conference. In hallways and presentation rooms and exhibitions, people that had witnessed her authentic moment approached her to express their appreciation for her comments.

Prior to the most recent conference in Pittsburgh, Yinka reached out to NCECA with an idea to bring together the cohorts of Multicultural Fellowship recipients from the 2015-2018 conferences. Working with NCECA Past President Patsy Cox and 2018 Conference Co-Liaison, Kate Lydon, the group gathered on the first afternoon of the conference at Contemporary Craft to view *Visual Voices: Truth Narratives*, the 2018 NCECA Annual Exhibition curated by Winnie Owens-Hart. This set a new tone for Yinka's conference experience. A few days later, she attended a brunch gathering initiated by 2015 NCECA Emerging Artist and recent Director at Large Roberto Lugo. "The energy in that room was remarkable," she shared, "The NCECA conference has given me opportunities to be in the right place at the right time and participate in thoughtful conversations." Connecting with Natalia Arbelaez, April Felipe, and Salvador Jiménez- Flores, Yinka is now a collaborator on an emergent initiative called *The Color Network*, an evolving concept that springs from a more senior generation of artists of color working with clay. Among the initiative's goals are to create an online community to support artists of color, an accessible online repository to post opportunities for diverse artists, and a place to connect with mentors to make the entire experience of artistic evolution more supportive.



Today, Yinka's day-to-day schedule is filled with an array of responsibilities. She tutors sessions she provides in math, chemistry, and physics for college students, and she pursues a strong commitment to her studio and community practice. Working as the studio technician and a workshop leader at the Allens Lane Arts Center, Yinka shares a communal studio where she produces her work and generates new ideas for creating communities of experience. Her work as an artist is not only dependent on her hours in the studio, but is also constructed on her time at the computer, phone calls, and meetings out of which new community partnerships germinate and take root. With support from the Independence Foundation, over the past year, Yinka has travelled to Ghana to work with women master potters. From this culturally immersive experience, Yinka has developed the project, *CRAFTING COMMUNITY: Africa to America*, through which she intends to transfer the experience of interconnectedness she felt among the Ghanaian women potters to other Black women in her local community through a series of collaborative pottery making. A public procession is being planned for pots that Yinka and her collaborators are making at Temple Contemporary (at Tyler School of Art) for an exhibition that will take place at the African American Museum in Philadelphia. The pots will be carried in a ceremonial walk from Temple's gallery to the museum for an opening reception and public celebration.

Yinka's experience reflects but one of the thousands of remarkable creative lives that NCECA exists to nurture. Through clay, we discover how engagement of body, mind and materials can shift our perceptions of ourselves, what occurs to us, and how we respond to our worlds and work. As we shape clay in our hands, we discover that we too experience transformation. NCECA exists to celebrate, deepen knowledge of, and appreciation for ceramic art, making it accessible to all of us all year. Please consider helping us to continue and extend the vibrancy of our field to support other visionary artists like Yinka by supporting the annual fund. An easy way to do this all year long is to become a sustaining donor. By contributing a small amount monthly - as little as ten dollars, or as much as you can, you can make a big difference in NCECA's evolution and continuity.

Visit www.nceca.net and click the DONATE link at the top of the page to make a one-time or sustaining monthly gift online. If you prefer to use a paper form or check, we are including an envelope for you to support the work of clay, connection, and creativity in our classrooms, our college and home studios, and our culture at large.