

Ceramics x Fiber:
the National Council of Education for the Ceramic Arts in Detroit

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An interview with Jessika Edgar and Katie Shulman

March 23, 2026



Left: Mark Vander Heide. Right: John Vanderheide

The National Council of Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and improving ceramic arts through education, community-building, research and creation. They offer programs, events and publications to support those working within the field, and have chosen Detroit as the location for its 60th Annual Conference. From March 25th to 28th, speakers, panelists, exhibitors and guests of NCECA will explore experimentation and conceptual frameworks that are being implemented by contemporary ceramicists around the world. While this international ceramics conference takes place downtown, a concurrent exhibition showcasing collaborative installations by local artisans will be on view in Milwaukee Junction. Organized by ceramicist Jessika Edgar and fiber artist Katie Shulman, *Ceramics x Fiber* will span the first two floors of the Detroit Design District’s Boyer-Campbell Building with “sixty artist pairs—each consisting of one ceramic artist and one fiber artist—that were thoughtfully matched to establish new cross-medium connections”.



Left: Noel Burkhardt. Right: Jessie Rice

Left: April D. Felipe. Right: Jeremy Noonan

Runner Magazine: Jessika and Katie, have you collaborated on exhibition making before, or is this your first time working together?

Katie Shulman: I like the way you phrased that question– ‘exhibition making’, because that feels a really accurate way to describe the process Jessika and I have engaged with to imagine and execute this curatorial project: it’s felt very active, dynamic–almost physical. Jessika and I met and decided to collaborate on the very same evening over dinner. From a single meeting, we conjured and subsequently executed a really ambitious and inclusive opportunity for our creative communities.

The conceptual and material core of our exhibition, *Ceramics x Fiber*, is the creation of new relationships between creative practitioners in Detroit. Importantly, Jessika and I have engaged in the same negotiation we are asking of the participants: our process of exhibition making over the past 9 months started with relationship making. I am so glad the two of us decided to take this giant leap of faith, because, for me, working with Jessika has been an absolute dream.

Jessika Edgar: We met less than a year ago! It is amazing what one conversation can conjure! While it has been a ton of work, this experience has been delightful! We jumped in feet first, but we managed to create an exhibition, a collaborative installation, and a creative partnership.

RM: You have curated more than 100 artists into this exhibition at Boyer-Campbell Building. What was your process of selecting these artists to be featured during the NCECA conference in Detroit? And your process of creating the artist pairs... was it intuitive or based on certain criteria or rules?

KS & JE: The idea for this show came about from a shared desire to create an additional opportunity for local artists. We immediately connected over the fact that NCECA’s presence in Detroit would create a truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Detroit-based artists: NCECA draws thousands of people to its conference city each year.

Craft-based practices are always grounded in community, in sharing knowledge, resources and opportunities, so, we decided our show could act as a mechanism to expand the boundaries of the local ceramics community in Detroit by inviting makers based in another medium, fiber, to engage in cross-medium conversations.

The single most important part of the call and subsequent selection process was that a ceramicist and fiber artist would be paired together to initiate these conversations. Our pairing process started by investigating possible connection points between mediums presented by the artists who applied and ended by making matches we thought could be challenging, fruitful, and potentially long lasting.

Our considerations in making pairs were threefold: first we looked for formal and conceptual similarities in the submissions, but only finalized a match that attempted to honor the kind of collaboration artists were seeking—information we collected as part of the application process.

RM: Jessika, would you tell us about your background and describe your work as a ceramicist?

JE: I grew up in Massachusetts and then moved to Southern California as a teenager- I went on to pursue a BA in Art from California State University Northridge. I moved to Michigan in 2009 to pursue my MFA at Cranbrook Academy of Art. I left Michigan to pursue my career as an artist/educator. I moved around a bit before spending 5 years as an Assistant Professor at New Mexico State University and then coming back to Michigan in 2018 to work at Wayne State University where I am currently an Associate Professor and the Area Coordinator of Ceramics.

I started working in ceramics about 20 years ago while in undergrad, and at that time, I was mainly interested in making functional works on the wheel; I was very focused on craft and the technical challenges of working with clay. Now, my work manifests as large-scale abstract sculptures that pull reference from popular culture ephemera and media imagery especially related to gender, beauty, and material desire. I am still very focused on craft, but from a more conceptual perspective; I utilize “crafty” materials, not just clay, but mixed media that includes faux fur, acrylic pearls, Mod Podge®, and glitter.

RM: Katie, would you tell us about your background and describe your work as a fiber artist?

KS: I’m originally from the East Coast—the Washington DC area— but attended the Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design at the University of Michigan, where I received my BFA. After graduating, I left Ann Arbor and returned to the East Coast, settling in New York City, where I spent a number of years working in Arts Administration at various non profit art centers.

Eventually, I decided to head back to school to pursue an MFA in Studio Art. I moved upstate to attend Syracuse University and it was there that both my fiber and ceramics education really started. My previous studio work, which had centered in printmaking, completely shifted. I started using textiles and fiber-based construction techniques to create sculptures and installations. I also met my husband at Syracuse. He was there studying ceramics and actually took me to my first NCECA conference in Minnesota in 2019.

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Left: Steve Glazer. Right: Diane Nunez

Left: Margeaux Claude. Right: Joey Quiñones

We relocated to Detroit in 2021 with the hope that this city would provide us both with opportunities that would allow us to continue to build our respective creative practices. I very quickly recognized something very unique about this place: there is room to build new things and a willingness in the creative community to engage with new ideas.

So, in 2022, I founded Fiber Club* a network of artists and creative practitioners working in the Detroit metro area. Some of Fiber Club*'s achievements include three continuous years of monthly meetings, two large-scale, inclusive exhibitions for Detroit Month of Design, programmatic collaborations with The Shepherd, The University of Michigan Gifts of Art Program, Buffalo Prescott and Ferndale Public Library. Fiber Club* has introduced me to amazing artists and community members. I'd like to give a special shout out to my friend and incredible collaborator, artist Meg Morley, who has kept Fiber Club* alive and well through the birth of my two children and the ups and downs of managing a community that is completely sustained by volunteer efforts.

Community building is an important part of my art practice, the other is my studio work, which considers the postpartum body. I explore pregnancy loss, birth and lactation through fiber-based processes and material manipulation, resulting in fleshy and abstract sculptures and installations

RM: What are some things to look forward to that are happening in Detroit during the NCECA Conference?

JE: I have been working as an NCECA On-Site Liaison, alongside Ebitenyefa Baralaye and the NCECA board and staff, for the past two years preparing for NCECA. I am so thrilled that it is finally time to welcome this international audience of over 6000 people to Detroit! In addition to 4 days of conference programming at the Huntington Place Convention Center, there are over 75 NCECA Exhibitions around the city (and even more pop-ups)!

You can see the NCECA Exhibition Listings [here](#).

RM: Detroit has always been progressive when it comes to arts and crafts, and it is clear that the local arts and crafts community in Detroit continues to be abundant. Are there any qualities amongst the Detroit ceramic and fiber art community that stand out as unique to this city?

KS & JE: We are struck by this community's desire and willingness to experiment and take risks. We are asking artists to spend time building a new relationship, which is an inherently risky pursuit, but it becomes even more precarious when paired with art making, which is a time and resource consuming endeavor. To spend both time and resources working towards something new under these conditions feels really unique to this community.

Additionally, the desire and excitement we have witnessed from these artists to install in a space (The Boyer Campbell Building in the Detroit Design District) that is specifically non-commercial and calls upon artists to be experimental, open to problem solving during the installation process is also notable.

We would be thrilled for our show to inspire people with access to unique or industrial spaces around the city to make those venues available for creative projects—Detroit's artist community is eager and motivated to practice in public.

RM: How has this experience as curators shaped how you see the work of the local community, or how you see contemporary craft overall?

KS & JE: This experience has highlighted the collaborative spirit and generosity of this local community. It's clear that there are so many ideas that deserve space and resources to come to fruition and we are hopeful that these new creative relationships will seed and grow into additional opportunities.

KS: I hope readers will notice that I didn't describe myself as a curator when I answered your question about my creative background. Additionally, I want to underscore the genesis of this collaboration with Jessika: it came together after one conversation! One meeting!

I think both of these facts, taken together, can dismantle any sort of permission structure members of our creative community might feel is present in Detroit. What I've personally learned over the past few months is the only thing you really need to make something amazing happen is a great partner. I think this realization is key to ensuring that this city could be one of the best places to live and work as an artist. I really think it could be, especially if we focused on making more for our community.

Ceramics x Fiber will be on view from Tuesday March 24 to Saturday, March 28, 2026 at the Boyer Campbell Building, 6540 St. Antoine St, Detroit, MI 48202

And the National Council of Education for the Ceramic Arts 2026 conference will take place from March 25 - 28, 2026 at Huntington Place Convention Center, 1 Washington Boulevard, Detroit, MI, 48226

<https://nceca.net/>

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