

Oakland Museum of California

CONTACTS:

Lindsay Wright, 510-318-8467

lwright@museumca.org

Claire Cornell, 510-318-8483

ccornell@museumca.org



OAKLAND MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA ANNOUNCES NEW EXHIBITION CELEBRATING EDITH HEATH, DESIGNER AND FOUNDER OF ICONIC MID-CENTURY BRAND HEATH CERAMICS

Edith Heath: A Life in Clay Showcases the Life, Craft, and Enduring Legacy of Heath, With More Than 50 Pieces of Heath Ceramics, Clay Samples, Intimate Photographs, Documentary Video, and Personal Memorabilia

Exhibition on view in OMCA's Great Hall June 27, 2020–January 3, 2021

(OAKLAND, CA) February 27, 2020—This summer, the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) will explore the legacy of **Edith Heath, one of the most influential and enduring designers of the 20th century**, in an original exhibition opening June 27, 2020 in the Museum's Great Hall.

Edith Heath: A Life in Clay will introduce visitors to the **designer, entrepreneur, and scientist behind the iconic brand Heath Ceramics**, surveying the life and career of Edith Heath (1911-2005). Heath was revolutionary in her idea to reject traditional white clays in favor of earthy, locally-sourced California clays, **designing a new style of everyday ceramics** that was **made to endure** and **deeply expressive of California's land and lifestyle**.

Curated by OMCA Curator of Photography and Visual Culture Drew Johnson, guest curator Jennifer Volland, and OMCA Experience Developer Christine Lashaw, the exhibition includes more than 50 early hand-thrown and early production pieces, architectural tiles, clay and mineral materials, intimate photographs, documentary video, personal letters and memorabilia, a biographical and historical timeline, touchable objects, and more.

"Edith Heath transformed our notion of 'good design,' pioneering a new aesthetic of natural, stylish yet functional products made from local materials and designed to endure," said OMCA curator Drew Johnson. "As an **icon of quintessential California design** who lived and worked in Sausalito and San Francisco, OMCA is excited to share the extraordinary story of Edith Heath's life and legacy."

"What began as a rebellion against imported white clay more than fifty years ago is now a **modern-day classic**," added guest curator Jennifer Volland, who has researched the life of Edith Heath since 2014, serving as an editorial contributor on *Edith Heath: Philosophies* and

consulting producer on the award-winning documentary *Heath Ceramics: The Making of a California Classic* (KCET Artbound, 2019). “Edith Heath has **forever changed the cultural landscape of American design** through Heath Ceramics. Countless people have brought Heath dinnerware and tile into their homes, and we are excited for OMCA visitors to get to know the **fascinating and inspiring artist behind these ubiquitous designs.**”

Edith Heath: A Life in Clay will examine Heath’s **technical experimentations with native California clays and glaze formulas** as she rebelled against imported white clays—what Heath referred to as “gutless”—embracing instead clays that were expressive of the region. Heath’s **love of natural landscapes** not only shaped the earthy quality of her designs but also inspired her to seek out California clays that were not traditionally used for fine dinnerware. A self-trained scientist, Heath **continually experimented with clay glazes and firing techniques**. Visitors will view Heath’s early hand-thrown pottery, clay and glaze tests, raw clay and mineral samples, and interactive features including touchable objects and the opportunity for visitors to design their own wall patterns with tile.

Another section will consider Heath’s **rapid commercial success** as the business owner of Heath Ceramics, **driven by a desire to create stylish, affordable, and enduring products**. As her ceramics practice grew from hand-made operations to large-scale commercial production, Heath remained committed to her **fundamental goal of creating the best-designed, highest-quality products for the greatest number of people**. This section will contain photographs and video of Heath’s production process, tools, early tile samples, a wall of architectural tiles, and touchable objects, including molds and comparisons of hand-thrown and mass produced ceramics.

The exhibition will also explore how Heath Ceramics came to **embody and define a distinct California aesthetic** as Heath tapped into the post-war California lifestyle. As many mid-century Americans become more eager to celebrate the pleasures of domestic life, Heath recognized how contemporary dinnerware—from oven-to-table-ware to large barbeque platters and casserole dishes—could embrace **California’s relaxed, indoor/outdoor lifestyle**. This novel approach resulted in new dinnerware lines that **better reflected the regional attitude and became an instant classic**.

A final section will reflect on Heath’s enduring legacy as her products and values continue to resonate with consumers and designers alike, as the company enters its 72nd year in business. **Both a scientist and an artist, perfectionist and experimenter, rebel and visionary**, Heath’s extraordinary accomplishments continue to **inspire California lifestyle and design today**.

Edith Heath: A Life in Clay will be on view in OMCA’s Great Hall from June 27, 2020 to January 3, 2021. There is a \$5 charge for this special exhibition in addition to regular Museum admission.

Edith Heath: A Life in Clay is supported in part by the Oakland Museum Women’s Board.

UPCOMING

Hella Feminist: An Exhibition

Great Hall

April 25–August 23, 2020

Feminism. It’s a loaded word; as empowering to some as it is challenging for others. This

Spring, we take on this complex and timely topic with *Hella Feminist: An Exhibition*, celebrating the lesser-known stories of feminism here in Oakland and the Bay Area.

Spurred by the #metoo movement and recent wave of progressive political activism, feminism today has become increasingly about how race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual identity are interrelated, creating a movement that is more inclusive and more powerful than those that came before.

Organized around three core themes—mind, body, and spirit—the exhibition features fascinating historical artifacts, provocative contemporary artwork, and interactive elements. Showcasing everyday acts of resistance as well as historical flashpoints, *Hella Feminist* invites you to experience the concept of feminism in all its struggle, triumph, and hope; to re-think your relationship to the word and the ideas it represents; and to consider how all of us can take action to shape a more just future.

ON VIEW

You Are Here: California Stories on the Map

Gallery of California Natural Sciences

Ongoing through February 28, 2022

We all use maps in our everyday lives—to navigate public transportation, find places to eat, and visualize big data like weather patterns or political opinions. But have you ever considered the deeper stories maps tell us? In *You Are Here: California Stories on the Map*, you'll discover there's more to maps than meets the eye. Showcasing a diverse range of maps from Oakland, the Bay Area, and California—from environmental surroundings and health conditions to community perspectives and creative artworks—experience how maps can be a powerful tool to share unique points of view and imagine a better future. Explore new perspectives of familiar places through maps made by the community, and mark your own stories on the community map inside the exhibition.

Dorothea Lange: Photography as Activism

Gallery of California Art

Ongoing

Experience the iconic life and work of Dorothea Lange, world-renowned documentary photographer, with an expanded installation of her works in the Gallery of California Art. Through the lens of her camera, Lange documented American life with riveting photographs that captured some of the most powerful moments of the 20th century. Drawn from Lange's personal archive, which was gifted to OMCA over 50 years ago, and in response to the popular 2017 exhibition *Dorothea Lange: Politics of Seeing*, a number of newly added photographs will illustrate the power of photography as social activism. See how Lange's work continues to resonate with millions and inspire new generations of artists and activists.

Black Power

Gallery of California History

Ongoing

Uncover the history of the Black Power movements in California with a compelling addition to the Gallery of California History. In response to the widely-popular 2016 exhibition *All Power to the People: Black Panthers at 50*, this new installation will illustrate the creative ways black anti-racist activists in California supported their communities and challenged the U.S. government. Focusing on the example of the Black Panther Party, *Black Power* will bring to light the tensions between a culturally and socially progressive California and examples of economic racism and oppression in the state. This moment in California history will be represented through historic photographs, provocative objects, iconic posters, paintings and interactive prompts that encourage visitors to take action out in the world. Learn more about the Bay Area role in this national story, and the impacts this history continues to have today.

Question Bridge: Black Males

Gallery of California Art

Ongoing

Hailed as one of the Bay Area's Top Exhibitions by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Question Bridge: Black Males* returns to the Oakland Museum of California's Gallery of California Art. Immerse yourself in intimate videos—woven together and arranged to simulate face-to-face conversations between participants—among a diverse group of over 160 Black men across the United States. Hear these men answer each other's questions with exceptional honesty and vulnerability, and share stories, beliefs, and values in a personal portrayal of their lives. Encompassing themes of family, love, interracial relationships, community, education, and wisdom, *Question Bridge: Black Males* presents nuanced portraits of past, present, and future of Black men in American society. Listen, watch, learn, and start your own conversations with this profoundly moving installation.

A recent acquisition to the Oakland Museum of California's permanent collection, *Question Bridge* is an innovative and widely exhibited video installation from artists Chris Johnson and Hank Willis Thomas in collaboration with Bayeté Ross Smith and Kamal Sinclair. Joining the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Brooklyn Museum, OMCA is proud to acquire this groundbreaking and poignant work for its collection.

ABOUT THE OAKLAND MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA

The Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) tells the many stories that comprise California, creating the space and context for greater connection, trust, and understanding between people. Through its inclusive exhibitions, public programs, educational initiatives, and cultural events, OMCA brings Californians together and inspires greater understanding about what our state's art, history, and natural surroundings teach us about ourselves and each other. With more than 1.9 million objects, OMCA brings together its multi-disciplinary collections of art, history, and natural science with the first-person accounts and often untold narratives of California, all within its 110,000 square feet of gallery space and seven-acre campus. The Museum is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year as a leading cultural institution of the Bay

Area and a resource for the research and understanding of California's dynamic cultural and environmental heritage for visitors from the region, the state, and around the world.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) is at 1000 Oak Street, at 10th Street, in Oakland. Museum admission is \$16 general; \$11 seniors and students with valid ID, \$7 youth ages 9 to 17, and free for Members and children 8 and under. There is a \$5 charge in addition to general admission pricing for special exhibitions. OMCA offers onsite underground parking and is conveniently located one block from the Lake Merritt BART station, on the corner of 10th Street and Oak Street. The accessibility ramp is located at the 1000 Oak Street main entrance to the Museum. museumca.org

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