

# What We Long For

## Gardiner Museum Community Arts Space 2019 Full-Length Curatorial

**“How would we organize and move our communities if we shifted to focus on what we long for and love, rather than what we are negatively reacting to?”**

This question, posed by social justice facilitator adrienne maree brown in her upcoming publication, [Pleasure Activism](#), touches on how pleasure has emerged within community organizing circles as a necessary means of realizing new narratives at the intersection of collective healing and social change. For brown – who builds on the work of Black feminist thinker Audre Lorde and science fiction novelist Ursula K. Le Guin – there is an urgency for our shared imaginaries to allow both justice and pleasure to co-exist as a counterpoint to calling out, gas lighting, exhaustion, and burnout.

Similarly, within contemporary ceramics, female artists like Arlene Shechet and Simone Leigh use clay to explore pleasure, beauty, and survival within and outside of feminist legacies. Looking back to the ancient production of vessels, tools, and the prevalence of female figures – especially within African, Caribbean, and Indigenous cultures – suggests female-dominant labour has been central in some contexts and not others. Given that ceramics are one of the most efficient ways to analyze historical material cultures, clay allows us to see the absolute presence of ourselves and others.

If ceramics then can also be considered a site for community building, American teacher, potter, and poet Mary Caroline (M.C.) Richards stands out for her approach to pottery as a medium for holistic, participatory experiences. Richards played a pivotal role in shaping craft discourse with her 1964 book, [Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person](#). The philosophical text uses clay as a process for realizing the metamorphic potential of the self in the creative act. Today, scholar Jenni Sorkin and others are reassessing Richards’s performative methods in craft – in particular, an emphasis of the lived experience – for the ways it pioneered ceramics as a socially engaged artistic form. Indeed, her belief in the potentialities of inter-relationships and “presencing” in craft seem both timely and relevant.

Community Arts Space 2019 builds off of brown and Richards in order to seek similar inquiries into “What we long for”. The 2019 summer programming cycle aims to showcase works that engage with pleasure activism, community healing, counter-archives, survival tools, racialized materiality, transformative justice, the differences between community and institutional memory, and how craft can be a site for both acknowledgement and action. How do we take care of ourselves, as well as each other?

We look to female artists like M.C. Richards as role models, whose pottery, poetry and teaching helped shape craft discourse as a site for personal and emotional growth. “This clay has a majesty which illuminates our most timorous efforts. For this reason even our crude expressions have their charm and magic,” Richards wrote in *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person*. “There is a mercy here, and a transformation in which one shares.”

[Download the Community Arts Space 2019 Request for Proposals](#)