

Hostler Burrows x HB381

Taher Asad-Bakhtiari, Zimra Beiner, Anne Brandhøj, Frida Fjellman, and Sigve Knutson

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Opening Reception: Friday, June 27, 6–8 pm

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HB381 is pleased to announce *Hostler Burrows x HB381*, a group show of works from Hostler Burrows' contemporary program. Featured artists will include Taher Asad-Bakhtiari, Zimra Beiner, Anne Brandhøj, Frida Fjellman, and Sigve Knutson.

Artisans and designers producing for the home, whether as textile designers, glass blowers, woodworkers, or ceramicists, have long had to traverse the thorny boundary between applied arts and fine arts. It is a distinction that arguably emerged in the 17th century when the *beaux arts* were severed from other more manual and utilitarian forms of labor. Cleaving to lofty intellectual ideals, the fine arts consolidated around conceptual and emotional expressions of individuality; meanwhile, limited-run furniture designers and craft-based artisans offered an alternative to the industrial practices with their reliance on mechanical reproduction. As factory assembly developed its own verticals for production and distribution, carefully handcrafted pieces of design were conferred a status at once spiritual and honest, direct and functional — qualities advocated for by Arts and Crafts leaders like Ruskin and Morris.

There is, of course, a blatant artificiality in partitioning art from craft from design, with artisans and fine artists transgressing these barriers freely; nevertheless, the applied arts offer a picture of how artists draw from and contend with domesticity, collective authorship, and global vernacular traditions, rooting modern visual culture in an alternative legacy more often found outside of museum and gallery walls. These practices, what design historian Tanya Harrod has termed “lost modernisms,” flourished on the margins of the art world and in the home, maintained in the hands of artists and craftspeople who found satisfaction in the process of making. They embodied a stance toward living *with* art that puts down roots in the quotidian rhythms of our familiar daily routines.

The artists and designers in this exhibition invoke the luminous boundary between visual wonder and the workaday, inviting prosaic forms — flat-weave rugs, table lamps, and plant stands, to name a few — to quiver with the particular hum of the handmade. They offer a philosophical meditation on objects as vehicles for comfort, utility, desire, and rumination.

In Zimra Beiner's rough-hewn and organic stoneware plant stands, clay mimics botanical latticeworks and woven basketry. Beiner, a graduate of Alfred University's renowned ceramics program, dwells on the tactile qualities of work-in-progress, offering up pooling glazes and brambles of interwoven stoneware. The works appear distinct from different viewpoints as though refusing to settle into a singular solid form. Rather, through accumulation and a loose handling of rolled clay coils, Beiner evokes an almost gothic excess of ornament, not unlike

that found in weathered stone cathedrals or on the ivy-encrusted facades of buildings. Craft has often been positioned as a rejoinder to factory assembly lines; here, drawing out that distinction, the standardization of industrial production is confronted with an oozing, amorphous monolith to the imperfect, unfinished process of becoming, something entirely outside of mechanical logics.

A graduate of the Design Academy Eindhoven in the Netherlands, the Norwegian sculptor Sigve Knutson embraces raw materiality and foregrounds simplicity of form in his ceramics, which resemble whittled wood, roughly carved stone, and sprayed concrete. At the core of his practice is an enthusiasm for amateur skill-sharing of the sort passed around online on home construction YouTube channels and in DIY chat forums. Shotcrete, a sprayed application of concrete used in architecture and engineering projects, gives its title to Knutson's series, which reinterprets the technique in an innovative application of pigmented unglazed stoneware. Yet the intentionally rudimentary idiom Knutson bestows on his sculpture also recalls ancient technologies and early human constructions, whether earthen huts, cuneiform writing systems, or handmade tools. Knutson is particularly interested in intuitive and spontaneous forms, collecting an archive of gestural doodles as reference material before diving into the more laborious act of sculpting his monumental works in clay. As such, the instinctive gesture remains at the forefront of his approach: "I just try to make objects with a few steps as possible," Knutson notes.

The Swedish glass artist Frida Fjellman was born into a family of craftswomen (both her mother and grandmother were weavers) and was trained in ceramics under Rörstrand's famed Inger Persson. Later, at the Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts, and Design in Stockholm, she encountered blown glass, pursuing the skills of the trade at various glass centers in the United States, including the Pilchuck School of Glass and the Corning Glass Center. All the while, Fjellman continued to move fluidly between ceramics and glass. The artist revels in the jewel tones and vibrant colors afforded by her materials, composing a hypnotic spectacle with hanging glass prisms, draped brass chains, and elaborately sculpted argon and neon lights. In 2019, she filled one of the historical rooms at Manhattan's Park Avenue Armory with twisted glass tubes electrified a brilliant blue as though two bolts of lightning had simultaneously sparked from the ceiling. In a similar gesture, her series of *Dreamy Gas Cloud* lamps, shown here, seem to bubble from their turned wooden bases as though still in a semi-molten state.

Taher Asad-Bakhtiari's kilim and gabbeh weaves draw from the wellspring of collective labor within the Middle East's tribal communities of weavers. Blending traditional techniques from nomadic artisans in Iran and Afghanistan with his own stylistic innovations, he expands the boundaries of the medium with elegant triangular and linear patterning. By allowing air and light to permeate through sections of open warp, his weaves take on a lace-like quality, poetically subdividing space as they hang and sway pendulously. Asad-Bakhtiari continues a family legacy of artistry (his great-aunt was the extraordinary sculptor Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, whose mosaic reliefs mesmerized through geometrically-arranged mirror fragments) and his family name is derived from the Bakhtiari Lur tribe, whose woolen camel bags, blankets, and rugs have been collector's items for generations. Not surprisingly, his shimmering *Tribal Weaves* with their exposed warps and banded geometries honor the

longstanding traditions of his ties to family and community while tweaking those traditions with his own aesthetic sensibility.

Allowing the cycles of growth and decay inherent to natural materials to guide her hand, the Danish artist and woodworker Anne Brandhøj observes the delicate fracturing of wood grain and the distinctive silhouettes of branches extending from a trunk before determining the outward form of any one of her carved wooden works. Often, she produces undulating sculptural reliefs that abstractly reference the kind of repetition found in the seasonal growth cycle and the recurrence of specific forms in nature; at other times, she designs her side tables and wall shelves to render visible a particularly evocative moment in the timber: a split opening up the trunk's interior textures, the gyre of a burl, or a complex network of lines gathered in the grain. Using primarily offcuts of timber — oak, Douglas fir, walnut, and numerous other species — Brandhøj assiduously processes the wood herself, overseeing the entire transmutation of material from living matter into dynamic, sculptural form. Her regard for her material throughout the process is evident in each of her finely carved objects, which exhibit a curious weight and presence all their own.