



## FUTURE OF CRAFT

*Please tell us how you imagine craft as a field now and in the future and how you see your practice in craft's trajectory, or the trajectory of your specific disciplines?*

As social boundaries are being renegotiated in response to a rapidly changing society, cultural exploration has become more fluid, interconnected and multi referential. Artists draw from ever-evolving concepts of materiality, envisioning new ways for materials to be used while incorporating cross-cultural and historical signifiers.

The trajectory of my practice began with the understanding that making art was a way to channel energy and emotions into something productive, away from the racism that was making me sick, toward finding and re-inventing myself. Artmaking introduced me to the idea that my world connects with other worlds, that growing up in urban America, where softness was weakness, somehow that vulnerability was an opening to imagine new worlds. Craft, or the process of mastering a practice, was a way of shaping my own reality where I could be true to myself beyond the assumptions of others. It empowered me to make work outside of what is expected of me by either white or black people, to foster my own way of learning, while at the same time studying Eurocentric art concepts and aesthetics.

The field of craft, the discipline of making, is a natural primal impulse. As an African-descendant, I wonder how many of the contributions by my ancestors are overseen or taken for granted. Artmaking with a supposedly Western provenance is in reality much older, but refashioned into new forms, re-emerging as installation art, performance art, "ready-mades," found-object-art, assemblage-art, even collage. From a certain perspective they existed before the Western world conjured them into existence, cultures appropriated and re-contextualized, and the originators forgotten or discredited.

My practice in craft's trajectory is based on assigning new roles to the various elements in my work (beads, fabric, string, etc), suggesting contemporaneous ways to incorporate ideas into a multi referential global context. I think my practice fills a singular void in the sense that it reveals this multi-dimensional understanding of history, craft and creativity. I resist the idea of "elevating" my work from craft to a level of "fine-art," these categories are Western and hierarchical, in some ways meant to be pejorative, evoking craft versus fine art, fine art versus indigenous traditions.

A material (beads) I use is manufactured in the Czech Republic, but many assume that the beads came from Africa, the way black culture transforms foreign material culture, africanizing and indigenizing it, and making it a part of its own system. There's a rhythmic syntax at the core of the various manifestations from the African diaspora while at the same time not speaking for the whole group because singularity is inevitable and undeniable but somehow there are connections, roots, there's a spirit, a soul-force, a presence... which I consider all part of my practice in craft's trajectory.

- Leonardo Benzant