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**TIFF MASSEY'S MONUMENTAL JEWELRY EXPLORES
CULTURAL APPROPRIATION, AUTHENTICITY, AND THE LEGACY OF "BLING"**

On view at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, June 1 – August 25, 2019

Tiff Massey: A Different World

June 1 – August 25, 2019

Front Gallery

Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

4848 Main Street, Houston, TX 77002

Exhibition Reception

Friday, May 31, 5:30 – 8:00 PM

The evening will also feature the opening of *Justin Favela: All You Can Eat* in the Main Gallery and open studios by the current resident artists. Beer generously provided by Buffalo Bayou Brewing Co.

Artist Talk with Tiff Massey

Saturday, June 1, 3:30 – 5:00 PM

Tiff Massey will give a brief overview of her work, influences, and multi-disciplinary artistic practice.

Hours & Admission

Open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 AM – 5 PM, and Sunday, 12 – 5 PM. Closed on major holidays. Admission is free.

(HOUSTON, TX) March 4, 2019 – Houston Center for Contemporary Craft (HCCC) is pleased to present *Tiff Massey: A Different World*, a solo exhibition by the interdisciplinary artist and metalsmith. The first exhibition of Massey's artwork in Texas, *A Different World* showcases three bodies of work that reference the material culture of nostalgic pasts, from 1980s hip hop to African hair braiding. Informed primarily by jewelry, Massey's diverse artistic practice deftly renders her observations on race and class in contemporary American culture.

The exhibition focuses on the artist's colossal steel sculptures of chains and rings, alongside intricately braided crimson neckpieces and accompanying portraits. Themes in the exhibition span cultural appropriation, authenticity, and the diasporic legacy of "bling." Guest curator and former HCCC Curatorial Fellow, Sarah Darro, comments, "*A Different World* reflects the intersectional interests of Massey's work in an immersive installation that emphasizes physical junctions and meeting points. Corners and thresholds in the gallery become potent spaces for her works, which themselves function as sites of critical dialogue about space, the body, and politics of race, class, and gender."

Borrowing forms from iconic Dookie Rope chains and four-finger rings, Massey mines the use of jewelry as an element of early hip-hop culture, relating "bling" to a legacy of adornment that traces back to African nomadic tribes and royalty. Informed by the 1980s Detroit of her youth, a period that lauded black culture, bespoke jewelry, and ostentatious personal adornment, Massey recognizes visual and physical weight as a principal

tenant of hip-hop jewelry, drawing attention to the wearer as well as reminding the wearer of the piece. She says, “Bling is audacious. It’s in your face. I’m using hip hop as a reference for the scale, for the weight of the work.” She learned to fabricate the illusion of weight in metal, using techniques like hollow-forming to achieve voluminous, architectural silhouettes in her jewelry. In her series, *Everyday Arsenal (2018)*, she further emphasizes this weight, bringing her jewelry to a monumental scale through massive steel reproductions of rings she designed for each of her fingers.

Massey approaches her artistic output like a social scientist. She is interested in what happens when people are adorned, the ways in which jewelry causes people to hold themselves differently and more confidently, and how jewelry functions socially as a technology of belonging. Chains are potent cultural symbols and, in hip hop, can signify affiliation with music labels and organizations, with members collectively owning and wearing particular chains. Massey explores this symbolism in her monumental 18-foot sculpture, *Facet (2010)*, in which diamond-shaped steel links, large enough for a person’s torso to fit through, are connected through an articulated chain. At this exaggerated scale, the artist explores how work can adorn landscape and speak to a community.

Massey is devoted to the exploration of material, in service of the conceptual themes that underpin her work. In her series, *Je Ne Sais Coiff (ongoing)*, she applies African hair-braiding and coiling techniques to wool, jute, and rope to create necklaces informed by tribal hair designs affiliated with royalty and wealth. By accompanying this work with stark photographic portraits of the white women who are wearing these pieces, Massey effectively broaches topics of ownership, bodies and hair, the performance of identity, and cultural appropriation.

A Different World showcases Massey’s diverse, conceptual approach to material and presents a unique opportunity for visitors to experience jewelry on a monumental scale, while exploring some of today’s most pressing social issues.

Tiff Massey: A Different World is curated by Sarah Darro.

About Tiff Massey

Artist Tiff Massey’s oeuvre is expressed in mediums as varied as metal, fiber, wood, and performance and in scales as varied as monumental sculpture, wearable adornment, and immersive installation. The Detroit artist earned an MFA in metalsmithing from Cranbrook Academy of Art, and her work, despite its wide range, remains informed by jewelry—drawing from its cultural history, processes, techniques, and materials. Massey’s work has been widely exhibited nationally and internationally, at venues including the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, the Society of Arts + Crafts in Boston, Craft in America in Los Angeles, Library Street Collective in Detroit, and Galerie Marzee in Nijmegen, Netherlands. She is the recipient of the prestigious Kresge Arts in Detroit Fellowship, *Michigan Chronicle’s* 40 under 40 Award, as well as the Best Time-Based Performance at SiteLab during Art Prize in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Massey has also participated in international residencies including the Red Bull Arts Residency in Detroit, Ideas City hosted by The New Museum of New York, and the Volterra-Detroit Foundation in Italy.

About Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

Houston Center for Contemporary Craft (HCCC) is a nonprofit visual arts center dedicated to advancing

education about the process, product, and history of craft. HCCC provides exhibition, retail, and studio spaces to support the work of local and national artists and serves as a resource for artists, educators and the community at large.

Located in the Museum District at 4848 Main Street, HCCC is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 AM – 5 PM, and Sunday, 12 – 5 PM. Holidays: Closed Easter, July 4th, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. Admission is free. Free parking is available directly behind the facility, off Rosedale and Travis Street. HCCC is three blocks south of Wheeler Ave. MetroRail station on Main Street.

HCCC is supported by individual donors and members and funded in part by The Brown Foundation; Houston Endowment, Inc.; the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance; Texas Commission on the Arts; the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kinder Foundation; the Morgan Foundation; Windgate Charitable Foundation; and the Wortham Foundation. HCCC is a member of the Houston Museum District and the Midtown Arts District.

For more information, call 713-529-4848 or visit www.crafthouston.org. Find HCCC on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @CraftHouston.

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