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## **“CLUTCH CITY CRAFT” CHARTING HOUSTON VERNACULAR FROM STREETS TO SPACE**

On View February 28 – August 8, 2026, at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

**Clutch City Craft**

**February 28 – August 8, 2026**

Front & Main Galleries

Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

4848 Main Street, Houston, TX 77002

**Exhibition Reception**

**Friday, February 27, 6:00 – 8:00 PM**

The public is invited to kick off Go Texan Day and rodeo season at the opening reception of *Clutch City Craft*, an exhibition surveying the makers and material traditions that have shaped Houston. Guests are encouraged to come in their finest Houston western wear—including boots, buckles, hats, grillz, and lowriders—for a chance to take home prizes. Judging begins at 7:00 PM. The evening will also feature open studios by the current resident artists. Free and open to the public.

**Curator Tour**

**Saturday, February 28, 3:00 – 4:00 PM**

HCCC Curator and Exhibitions Director Sarah Darro will lead a tour of *Clutch City Craft*, offering behind-the-scenes insight into the makers, materials, and stories shaping Houston’s vernacular—from the infrastructures beneath our feet to the technologies that carry us beyond Earth. Free and open to the public.

**Exhibition web page**

<https://crafthouston.org/exhibition/clutch-city-craft/>

**Hours & Admission**

Open Tuesday - Saturday, 10 AM – 5 PM. Closed Juneteenth and July 4<sup>th</sup> during the exhibition’s run. Admission is free.

**(HOUSTON, TX) December 23, 2025** — Houston Center for Contemporary Craft (HCCC) is pleased to present *Clutch City Craft*, a major group exhibition examining the craft traditions and material cultures that have shaped Houston into one of the nation’s most formidable centers of making. Spanning both the front and main galleries at HCCC, the show features a wide spectrum of making practices, from the artists behind century-old, mosaic street signs to cowboy boot makers and fiber artists who design space suits and preserve the woven interiors of NASA mission control.

HCCC Curator and Exhibition Director Sarah Darro notes, “Drawing its title from the city’s emblematic nickname—earned during the Houston Rockets’ back-to-back NBA championship wins in 1994 and 1995—this exhibition uses *Clutch City* as both a cultural ethos and curatorial framework to examine how skilled craftsmanship underpins Houston’s industrial, social, and aesthetic identities.”

Although widely recognized as a global hub for energy, manufacturing, and aerospace, Houston also holds the highest concentration of working artists in Texas. *Clutch City Craft* frames this creative density as a direct extension of the city's culture of skilled making since its inception. The exhibition unfolds as a material journey—moving from roadways and civic infrastructure through SLAB lowrider car culture and bespoke adornment, including western wear and grillz, before culminating in the material innovations driven by Houston's energy and aerospace industries.

*Clutch City Craft* is curated by Sarah Darro, Curator & Exhibitions Director at HCCC. The exhibition is presented in concert with *Handwork: Celebrating American Craft 2026*, a national semiquincentennial initiative organized by Craft in America and the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum to showcase the central role of handmade knowledge in shaping American life.

### **More about *Clutch City Craft***

The first section of the exhibition presents Houston's built environment as an archive of skilled labor and cultural memory. Historic blue-and-white mosaic street signs—presented alongside preservation work by the **Blue Tile Project**—appear in dialogue with the robust brickmaking traditions of Freedmen's Town. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, formerly enslaved craftspeople transformed Houston's clay-rich soil into handmade bricks laid in Yoruba-derived patterns, forming both the physical and symbolic foundation of the Fourth Ward. New sculptural works by **Perata Bradley** survey these architectures as they remain, are erased, or persist through memory, while welded steel sculptures by pioneering Houston artist **Gertrude Barnstone** echo the serpentine forms and structural logic of highways and overpasses, drawing attention to the hidden frameworks beneath concrete and asphalt.

The exhibition then turns to energy and extraction. In the cast-glass work, *Recasting Houston*, **Norwood Viviano** renders the city's jagged skyline rising from a glossy, obsidian oil drum, binding Houston's relentless expansion to the material realities of crude oil and industrial modernity. Scaled from LiDAR-derived cartographic data, the work prompts viewers to consider how energy has shaped not only Houston but modern life itself, including the glassmaking industries that make the work's own materiality possible. This inquiry continues in ceramic works by **Anna Mayer**. Formed from local clay gleaned from drilling, flooding, and construction events, Mayer's works are fired in a handmade rocket kiln that makes visible the entanglement of heat, atmosphere, and energy infrastructure.

*Clutch City Craft* also explores the objects that traverse Houston's surfaces and circulate through its cultural imagination. This section of the show features a fully customized SLAB lowrider with bespoke upholstery and neon signage, as well as a maquette for a proposed public monument by **Phillip Pyle II**, which reimagines Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk* through the addition of golden automotive "elbows," or "swangas," the spoke-wire rims characteristic of Houston car culture. The section also includes a dedicated presentation of handmade, custom cowboy boots alongside carved-wood-and-stone boot forms by **Napoleon Aguilera** and silversmithing

traditions carried forward by second- and third-generation makers producing engraved, Western belt buckles and custom grillz, including new works by **Alam Lalani** (Grillz by Prince).

The exhibition culminates with Houston's aerospace legacy, foregrounding the often-overlooked craft labor that has made space exploration possible. Artifacts from NASA's archive—including spacesuit components, engineered textiles, and ceramic heat-shield tiles—are presented along with woven upholsteries produced for the preservation of Mission Control by Houston-based weaver **Mary Welch** and patterning studies developed by textile specialists contracted by the space program. Together, these materials underscore the centrality of skilled handwork to aerospace innovation.

### **About Houston Center for Contemporary Craft**

Celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2026, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft (HCCC) is a nonprofit arts center with a mission to inspire and connect people to the art and process of making. As one of the few organizations in the nation dedicated exclusively to fine contemporary craft, the Center's focus is on art objects made of clay, fiber, glass, metal, wood, and mixed media. HCCC showcases emerging and acclaimed artists in exhibitions, engages visitors of all ages with hands-on programming, and supports the development of working artists through artist residency and retail programs to serve as a dynamic hub at the intersection of craft and contemporary culture.

HCCC is open Tuesday - Saturday, 10 AM – 5 PM. Admission is free. Closed Juneteenth, July 4th, Thanksgiving, and December 25th – January 1st. HCCC is located in the Museum District at 4848 Main Street, three blocks south of 59. Free parking is available directly behind the facility, off Rosedale and Travis 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](http://www.crafthouston.org). Find HCCC on Facebook, Instagram, and X @CraftHouston.

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