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CHRIS FRANCIS: SHOE DESIGNER

May 24 – September 6, 2015

Experimental shoe designer Chris Francis pushes the boundaries of handmade shoemaking by combining global traditions with Constructivism, street art, and high fashion



Untitled, hand-carved and hand-painted/dyed fruit crate, cigar box wood, leather, printed woven textile, skin tassel, natural glue, linen, nails, 2014. Photo: Noel Bass



Untitled, hand-painted vegetable tanned leather, leather and pressed board mid-sole, cheesecloth, steel, hand-shaped wood platforms, nails, natural glue, zippers, 2015. Photo: Noel Bass

LOS ANGELES — The Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) presents **Chris Francis: Shoe Designer**, the first solo exhibition of self-taught shoemaker and designer, Chris Francis. The exhibition will display 40 pairs of radically sculptural, yet functional, pairs of custom-made shoes that chart the artist's journey toward becoming a self-studied shoemaker within the closely guarded shoe industry. Chris Francis will be in residence at CAFAM during the entire course of the exhibition, creating shoes using hand tools, vintage machinery, and a range of materials. The exhibition has been curated by Holly Jerger, Senior Curator of Public Engagement at CAFAM. It will be on view May 24 through September 6, 2015.

Shoemaking was a traditional handicraft until the 19th century. Shoemakers would meticulously measure the customer's foot and create a custom model, known as a last, as the basis for shoe construction. To meet the demands of mass production during the Industrial Era, shoemaking became almost entirely mechanized with workers trained only for one specific task or machine. Bespoke shoes in present times have become an unattainable luxury item for most people.

Francis set out to become a shoemaker and designer five years ago, but was unable to get an apprenticeship within the shoemaking community in Los Angeles. He sought out the older, immigrant shoemakers who still have shops in the city, and ended up buying their old shoemaking machines and tools to learn the trade for himself.

For Francis, creating bespoke footwear is a matter of connecting with both the wearer and his own creative reservoir. As a former art student, graphic designer, and carpenter, Francis deftly applies the skills he has learned in each of his trades to his shoemaking craft. Some shoes in the exhibition refer to the raw, urgent graphics he created for labor unions, while others reflect the elegant geometries of Cubism and Russian Constructivism, or his exploration of global shoemaking traditions. Most recently, he has also created a few pairs of experimental shoes that bring the anatomy of the shoe to the surface.

Francis actively pushes the boundaries of what a shoe can be. "Not a lot of people see shoes as art, they mainly see shoes as product," says Francis. "It's as much an art as painting or sculpture. You can express emotions and ideas through shoes."

A constant concern for Francis is the division of labor inherent in the shoe industry, where designers are glorified, while makers receive no recognition and low pay. Francis takes on both roles and uses his work as a tool to demonstrate the intelligence, time, and skill needed to create an object by hand.



Untitled, hand-painted leather, hand-painted EVA rubber, leather sole and mid-sole, natural glue, 2015. Photo: Noel Bass



Untitled, leather, found plywood, screws, washers, paper, canvas, rubber 2015. Photo: Noel Bass



Chris Francis in his studio, 2014. Photo: Brilliant Collective (Betsy Winchell/Jennie McGuirk)

“Chris exemplifies CAFAM’s mission with his dedication to the hand-made, innovative approach to material and form, and commitment to disseminating this little-understood craft,” according to curator Holly Jerger. “We are thrilled that our visitors will be able to meet Chris, see him making, and gain an intimate understanding of his work and process.”

Committed to preserving and passing on this handicraft to future generations, Francis wishes to make shoemaking accessible and visible. In order to demystify the process, Francis will relocate his workshop to CAFAM’s ground floor during the exhibition. His hope is to build community around handmade shoes and provide resources for others to gain this knowledge.

An opening reception for Chris Francis: Shoe Designer will take place on Saturday, May 23 from 6:00 - 9:00 p.m. The reception is free for CAFAM members and open to the public for a \$12 admission fee.

This exhibition is made possible by the support of the Antonia and Vladimir Kulaev Cultural Heritage Fund, Inc. Additional support is provided by Saderma, Inc.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

CAFAM will offer exhibition-related workshops and events in conjunction with the exhibition, including CraftLab family workshops on the second Sunday of each month from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.

May 26 – September 6 | Regular museum hours

Chris Francis in Residence

For the duration of *Chris Francis: Shoe Designer*, Chris will be relocating his shop to the museum.

Sunday, June 14 | Drop in between 1:30-3:30pm

Shoes into Sculptures

A CraftLab Workshop: Fun for the whole family!

\$7 adults/\$5 children/ Members FREE

Bring in a pair of old shoes and join shoe designer Chris Francis to take those shoes apart, learn how they are made, and turn them into a funky sculpture inspired by Chris’ exhibition.

Situated on historic Museum Row since 1973, the **Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM)** is an invaluable contributor to Los Angeles culture, exhibiting current artists with intriguing perspectives and distinctive practices. Exploring the leading edge of craft, art, and design, CAFAM gives audience to diverse makers and artists whose work is often not represented in larger art institutions. The museum is a place to see art and make art — all under one roof. CAFAM coordinates a robust roster of hands-on workshops led by professional artists and makers. The intimate, atypical museum space and independent spirit at CAFAM combine to create an atmosphere of excitement and innovation, where people in Los Angeles deepen their relationships to art, creativity and one another. For more information, visit www.cafam.org

Location: 5814 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036

Admission: FREE every Sunday

Regularly: \$7 for adults; \$5 for students, teachers, seniors, and veterans; free for CAFAM members

Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Saturday & Sunday, 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.; closed Mondays. Every first Thursday of the month, extended hours 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.