



COURTNEY NICOLE, *Just Breathe*, 2017
Wood, paper, ink, aerosol paint, glue, charcoal, Approx. 8in x 8in

WOMEN'S WORK

ART EXHIBITION: SP/N GALLERY | **MARCH 30TH-APRIL 21ST, 2018**

These artists, working in a variety of mediums, create alternative views or counterpoints to some of the persistent cultural measures of women's value to society through their upending of conventions or outright production of their inverse. Their approaches address gender identity, activism, and resistance to cultural stereotypes as they communicate new possibilities through humor and visual invention. From the embrace of soft and tactile materials to the adoption of technology, their explorations of photography, sculpture, painting, social practice, and video remain accessible and innovative. Exhibiting artists include Chesley Antoinette, Jessie Budd, Colette Copeland, Rachel Muldez, Courtney Nicole, Victoria Oliva, and Libby Rowe.

RECEPTION
Friday, April 6th, 6:30-8:30 pm

ARTIST PANEL DISCUSSION
Friday, April 6th, 7:30 pm

With Participating artists: Chesley Antoinette, Colette Copeland, Rachel Muldez, and Libby Rowe.



WOMEN'S WORK

Curator: Marilyn Waligore

In her video *Bearding*, Colette Copeland explores the role of the hairdresser or “barber-rette.” In her studies of “the Victorian woman and THE MAN” she pushes the contrast between societal expectations for the dainty 19th century woman, and activities that become transgressive. The infamous self-portrait from the late 1800s staged by photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston demonstrated her occasional defiance of the strict rules of the era; women in polite society should not consume alcohol and cigarettes, nor expose their petticoats.¹ By expanding the adoption of 19th century costume beyond the wig and satin frock to also include the beard, Copeland questions notions of masculinity and femininity as defined by body hair, and in particular facial hair. Copeland’s alternate persona has her work cut out for her as she engages in the process of shaving and trimming men’s facial hair, to include attention to the mustache. This play on gender recalls Dada artist Marcel Duchamp’s vandalization of Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*. However, although hair salons may serve both men and women, the traditional barber shop tends to remain a male domain.



COLETTE COPELAND, *Bearding*, (c) 2017
Directed and Edited by Colette Copeland,
Videography by Richard Bailey, Starring Adam W.
George and Colette Copeland, Music Composed
and Performed by Dallin B. Peacock

“For Oliva, women’s work represents ongoing political struggles, and women’s engagement within them.”

Further exploring the historical context that informs the creative process, Chesley Antoinette reflects on women’s activities involving fashion and beauty. Through both work and creative play, hair stylists engage in sharing cultural experiences with their clients while also exchanging personal histories. Her *Headwrap 1* includes interwoven printed fabric, covered by white and black leaves. A sprig protrudes from the top. Dark bands of fabric undulate in between the golden patterned folds. This headwrap includes twists and turns, which will turn heads. She shares engagement in this art form through social practice, namely Heart of the Headwrap workshops, which teach “women and girls about the 1786 Tignon Law of Louisiana, a law organized to oppress affluent women of African descendant through the head wrap” with the goal to increase “self-confidence through self-identification with the head wrap while taking into account the history.”² Elevating the process of personal decoration to sculptural form, she replaces conventional materials (wood, stone, metal) with decorative fabrics, while focusing on the relationship between the everyday and cultural traditions.



CHESLEY ANTOINETTE, *Lafayette*,
2018, 4” x 6”, digital print,
sculpture, textiles, 11” x 17”



VICTORIA OLIVA, *For Equity*, 2017,
archival pigment print, 24 x 16 inches

Victoria Oliva references activism through her image series "Prayers" to generate a celebration of identity and affirmation of the self. In *For Equity*, Oliva borrows the format of religious stained glass or votive candles to lend her sitters a status comparable to that of sainthood, a position that her activists have acquired through dedication to their cause. A halo surrounds each of her subjects as they serve as a representation of the need to address issues of racial and gender inequality. Text embedded within the frame affirms a solidarity, along with a challenge to bullying and an embrace of difference. A rainbow occupies the outer rim, acknowledging the use of the spectrum as a symbol for inclusion. The figure, slightly elevated in the frame, returns our gaze with self-confidence. With short cropped hair and feminine features, the sitter appears androgynous. The glowing color within her "Prayers" series "symbolizes [...] light in a never-ending darkness."³ For Oliva, women's work represents ongoing political struggles, and women's engagement within them.

Libby Rowe's *feminization* investigates stereotypes of femininity in response to lived experience. Through her series "Pink," she prioritizes the symbolic value of color. As Rowe states, "In pink, I bring together anatomy lessons with intentionally charged imagery and text to produce a new forum of discussion on what it is to be a woman- physically, socially, and psychologically."⁴ Her six-foot-high self-portraits reveal the masculine and feminine sides to her personality, while also referencing how society seeks to define female behavior. She notes, "I see the ideals of the fifties feminine identity as an alter ego of sorts to my own feminist existence."⁵ Rowe's "work" involves her engagement in performance with gallery visitors in the context of her #ImWithLibby social media project. Gallery goers can pose with the artist's cut-out, full-size photographic image, or with the artist in the gallery. Like a politician seeking a personal connection with her voters, Rowe distributes pink buttons emblazoned with her image, which are sprinkled with a texture of tiny black polka dots. Rowe explores a hyper-femininity, constructed by culture to constrain women's actions. By acknowledging that this adoption of a feminine persona is clearly a masquerade, a facade, she points to its failings.

Courtney Nicole's mixed media works similarly reveal contemporary narratives that address women's experience. The twisted figural forms resist confinement within various apparatuses, as the figure pushes against striped enclosures. In *Just Breathe*, the figure, with protruding feet, labors to survive. The process of inhaling and exhaling appears to be facilitated or hindered by a handle-like tube



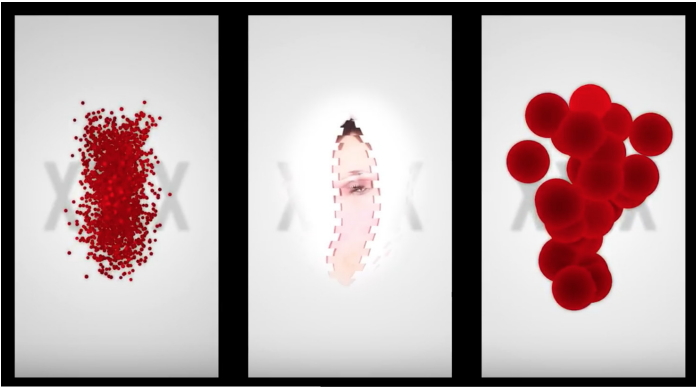
LIBBY ROWE, *Feminization*, 2008
archival digital images, digital video, 6.5' x 9' x 3", duration 9:36,

connecting the lower abdomen area to the center of the head, where a nose or mouth might be located. Yellow and orange bubbles float in the environment surrounding the figure, which is encased in a form resembling a furnace. The decorative bands at the neckline and lower hem of this "dress" resemble flames licking at the body. The undulating red lines suggest the coils of a stove top. This figure may be ready to explode. Courtney Nicole's characters locate a moment of solace or simply seek survival. Her whimsical figures belie a serious situation, in which the subject strives to gain access to the basic

“ The twisted figural forms resist confinement within various apparatuses, as the figure pushes against striped enclosures. ”

element of air, which is required for life. She depicts an expenditure of both physical and emotional effort, which occurs under duress.

Jessie Budd investigates media representations of the female body in her altered images of the self. In *Identity: Digital Self*, the video frames no longer reference the artist but instead address the reciprocity of the gaze. The distortions applied to fragments of the face within the videos are framed by a shape that echoes the human eye. A transformed eye peers out of the frame, returning the gaze. Red globules float within the field of white, hovering above a shadow image of a triple X, to reference female sexuality as well as gender. The cold, blue glow from the digital monitors affirms the distancing presence of technology. Meanwhile, the warm, blood-red color of



JESSIE BUDD, *Identity: Digital Self, 06*, June 17, 2017
Video and soft sculpture (yarn/fabrics), 5 ft by 6 ft. (Detail)

the yarn draws the viewer closer. These vibrantly colored, tactile elements connect to the physical presence of the observer, who stands safely outside of the frame, haunted by the representation of a disfigured body that bears limited resemblance to the idealized female form that usually dominates the screens of mass media.

“These artists affirm the power of women’s personal and collective experiences, women’s work.”

Rachel Muldez turns the notion of the beautiful on its head. Her constructions reveal attention to detail and care in construction, parallel to the production of lace or embroidery. However, the materials used—seeds, stems, bark—undercut the viewer’s expectations. Muldez embraces the delicate, which is conventionally deemed the arena of the female artist. Art historian Norman Bryson describes an assumed distinction between male and female artists, as shared by 18th century scholars. These differences were innate:

“modes of vision, decided between the sexes at birth: to the male, vision under abstraction, rising above mere detail and sensuous engagement to attain the general over-view; to the female, vision attuned to the sensuous detail and surfaces of the world, color and texture, rich stuffs and silks. For the male to be drawn away from abstraction towards the mode of female vision is for him to desert his sex.”⁶

Muldez’s comment on her working process demonstrates how she bridges the fragile while also addressing a larger cosmos. “I am drawn to materials with the potential of life such as seeds, sprouts, cocoons, and nests. [...] The sculptures that come of this process resonate with my



RACHEL MULDEZ, *Fission*, 2017, found wood and stem, mulberry bark, chia seeds dried and sprouted, cotton seed, 3.5”x4”x0.5”

evolving under-standing of our world and the study of other worlds, galaxies, and nebulas.”⁷ Muldez embraces both the detail and the larger view, to transcend lingering 18th century notions that artistic vision is gendered—perspectives which result in a lower valuation of female vision.

These artists affirm the power of women’s personal and collective experiences, women’s work. They expand our understanding of the possibilities for creative expression, and foster engagement in a critique of aspects of society that require further transformation. Ultimately, they envision new spaces for women to reflect upon their place in the world.

--Marilyn Waligore 2018

References

- ¹ Daniel, James C., Raymond Smock. *A Talent for Detail: The Photographs of Miss Francis Benjamin Johnston, 1889-1910*. New York: Harmony Books, 1974. 31.
- ² Antoinette, Chesley. *Special Projects: Heart of the Headwrap*. Cantoinette Studios, 2018. Web. 07 Mar. 2018.
- ³ Oliva, Victoria. *Artist Statement*, 2017.
- ⁴ Rowe, Libby. *Pink*. *Artist Statement*. 2008. Web. 07 Mar. 2018.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Bryson, Norman. *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990. 177.
- ⁷ Muldez, Rachel. *Artist Statement*. 2018. Web. 07 Mar. 2018.

ah.utdallas.edu

Gallery Hours: Mon. – Fri., 2 - 5 p.m.
UT Dallas, School of Arts & Humanities, 800 W. Campbell Rd., Richardson, TX 75080
For more information, call 972-UTD-ARTS or visit ah.utdallas.edu.
For assistance, call 972-883-2982 or Texas Relay Operator 1-800-RELAYTX.
UT Dallas is an equal opportunity/affirmative action university.