

Some years ago I made a series of small sculptures based on gay pride floats. I lived in Chicago at the time, and around 6 a.m. on the morning of Chicago Pride I saw several empty floats being transported to the parade site. It was simultaneously humorous and tragic to witness these lonely floats waiting to be animated by queer performers, as though they were anticipating the event to come. But what struck me most of all was that these floats were the hidden and unacknowledged material support for the performance; they were what, in the end, would make the unfolding of queer community possible. The late queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz has an essay about the queer performativity of stages in gay clubs that gets at a similar idea. Muñoz (2006) talks about the way stages register the trace of performances that have departed and those that are to come; they are containers that enable queer survival and that open us to queerer futures still on the horizon. One of my motivations as a fibers artist is to allow us to see the material supporting infrastructures for queer-feminist survival. After all, queer lives and sexual practices, like craft-making, often rely on do-it-yourself strategies of creativity; there is no guidebook or inherited cultural road map for lives lived outside of normative structures. These are the things we have to create ourselves.

Because of my interest in the (often invisible) effects of material support, my work is invested in probing labor and power relations. I am interested how associations between craft practice and feminized labor have led to the marginalization of craft within contemporary art. I call attention to these connotations by using outmoded craft practices (such as macramé) and vernacular materials (such as sculpey) that reference the domestic “hobbies” of housewives. My installation *Frosted Pink Lipstick Smear Across His Face* (2009), for example, emerged out of research I did into the genealogy of the term “chintzy” and its contemporary connotations with bad taste, tackiness, and the poorly made. I was interested in how each of these terms were coded ways of disparaging the associations between chintz and femininity. In the course of my research, I discovered that the colonial influx of this textile into Europe threatened the livelihood of the European textile mills, and around 1721 both the French and the English declared a ban on chintz imports. It was so severe that women were literally accosted on the streets if

they were seen wearing the cloth. This work is thus partly about challenging the politically loaded attachments that come with our inherited conceptions of good and bad taste. Of course, I am also thinking of this piece – and other similar pieces – as an engagement with the broader colonial legacy of textile production and circulation. Indeed, I would suggest that my art explores “the domestic” in a double sense. On the one hand, my sculptures utilize materials (such as chintz) that are widely associated with domesticity and femininity. On the other, these materials have historically played a role in colonial power relations, and they therefore have participated in both delineating and expanding the “domestic” reach of the nation-state. Research is thus at the heart of my process as an artist: whenever I discover a new material that I want to work into an installation, I spend a great deal of time tracing its journey over time and space. I am interested in the social lives of materials, the lines of force that they exert in the world, and how they are interwoven within local and global geographies of power.

I claim for this work – for all of my work – a maximalist aesthetic. Maximalism is a term used in literature, visual art and music that describes artistic production that celebrates richness and excess, and is sometimes characterized by decoration, sensuality and fantasy. For me, maximalism is about conveying, through an abundant use of colorful materials, the enormity and messiness of feeling in the face of the political structures that oppress marginalized people, particularly queer and transgender people. Much textile artwork tends towards a quieter, subtler aesthetic: one that accentuates the delicacy of cloth and textiles. Against this tendency, I employ a direct form of address. I want my installations to scream at you much like the prototypical 1970s militant feminist screams at you! Much of my work is therefore in your face about its queer political commitments, such as with my large-scale installation *The Enormity of Lesbian Grief* (2014), which takes the form of an oversized tissue box constructed from “found” wedding dresses sewn with beading techniques generally employed in French couture. This work is, in part, a reflection on the recent “victories” of gay marriage, and the failures of the mainstream gay and lesbian movement to find support systems for alternatives to hetero-patriarchal family formations. I follow the queer theorist Ann Cvetkovich in conveying a sense of lesbian “public feeling” that stems from trying to survive in a world inimical to

one's survival. At the same time, this installation offers the power of humor and laughter as a defense against hegemonic political structures. The maximalist tendencies in my work also come through in (slightly) less directed ways, registered in the materials I use and in the perverse provocations of my sculptural forms, many of which evoke genderqueer bodies and sexual practices. Phallic and labial forms dominate my work, as do references to strap-on harnesses, cock rings and other fetish ornamentals as in the *Beads series* (2015) and the *Pensile Arrangement series* (2013). While many of the pensile arrangements I create use the softness of textiles to subvert the tendency towards hard and erect phallic forms in the sculptural tradition, works such as *Bush* (2011) and *Ways of Being Done and Doing* (2011), in their overabundant use of floral imagery, are a queer play on much 1970s feminist "cunt" art and its direct citation of vaginal imagery. These works humorously embrace the failure of queer prosthetics to "live up" to or emulate naturalized genitalia.

This emphasis on queer failure brings me back again to the stage; in particular, to the way that my artworks foreground and deconstruct the front stage-backstage relationship to underscore the material constitution of gender. Indeed, I view my sculptures as drag performers as much as still objects or figures. This is why the bases and supporting structures for my sculptures play as much of a central role in their construction as the more decorative embellishments that masquerade on the surface. I have no interest in establishing a binarism between surface and depth; instead, I want to upend this relation such that the support appears to be spilling out, and merging with, the surface. I have been interested in drag and pageantry for many years, but the strongest influence on my work is Californian drag troupe the Cockettes, who were known for their unpolished, trashy, homemade and DIY aesthetic. I want my work to reference this aesthetic, rather than high-end glam. Besides this aesthetic, the Cockettes are influential to me in the way that they yoke together craft practice, drag performance, and queer community. In her important scholarship on the troupe, art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson explains the entanglement of queer drag with community crafting, of which the Cockettes are one example,

queer drag and craft are closely aligned, parallel practices: historically, drag queens and kings alike... have had to stitch and make their own clothes... Large shoulders, poorly scaled-sleeves, ill-fitting crotches, or the simple desire to amp up a garment and make it own's own...are often learned by doing and passed down through mentorship, example, and demonstration. Here the logic of crafted production – and of reproduction – is not hereditary but is instead managed within the queer kinship of shared affiliation and activity (Bryan-Wilson, 2012).

Like these drag acts who used thread and cloth to create their own communities and worlds, I view my works as themselves members of a dynamic queer community; as modeling, in variously exorbitant forms, other ways of being, knowing and relating.

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