

Artist Statement

Max Colby (b. 1990, American) examines popular cultural codes and symbols embedded in mundane materials. Her practice spans sculpture, installation, drawing, painting, and collage. Her work explores transfiguration and tensions between love and death; celebration and mourning; materiality and abstraction.

Colby's sculptural work bears initial reference to ceremonial assembly, funereal objects, and altars. In material, she parodies colonial and imperial American aesthetics, a framework she subverts through humor and assemblages of excess. What culminates are transfigurations of symbols towards abstract portals, gateways, and unknown objects, allowing for expansive possibilities past known categorical approaches to the body and a desire for rites to solidify them.

The artist questions categorical fixity, seeking breaks beyond normative structures making work which instills a sense of non-place, non-home, and expansive potentiality. Colby's work challenges these broad desires from a trans subjectivity. In a predominantly abundant application, she inserts evidence of life, calls for celebration, commemoration, in the face of antagonistic consumptions and expulsions of [trans] bodies.

Biography

Max Colby (b. 1990, American) lives and works in New York City. In 2012, she received a BFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University. She has completed residencies at the Museum of Arts and Design, the Wassaic Project, MASS MoCA and a Leslie-Lohman Museum Fellowship. In support of her installations and sculptural work, Colby has received numerous research and project grants from Foundation for Contemporary Arts and YoungArts, among others. Colby has exhibited at institutions including Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, the Des Moines Art Center, the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art and Storytelling, Wave Hill, and Museum Rijswijk. In 2022 Colby exhibited a campus-wide public commission at Rockefeller Center presented by Art Production Fund. She has since presented solo exhibitions at Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Los Angeles, CA and Aicon Gallery in New York, NY.

They Consume Each Other

They Consume Each Other is one of Colby's most recognizable works – a fantastical, large-scale installation of over 40 sculptures created between 2018 and 2021. *They Consume Each Other* bears reference to altars, vigils, and ceremonial assembly. From the base of each sculpture (invoking rituals such as the bearing of rings at a wedding or a coronation crown ready to be used), a form arises with phallic undertones, erect and oversaturated with floral reproductions, beading, and found materials, stirring feelings of comfort, ignorance, and bliss. Through material, she parodies colonial and imperial American aesthetics, a framework she subverts through humor and assemblages of excess.

One of the primary questions of Colby's work is in questioning categorical fixity. By doing so, *They Consume Each Other* seeks breaks beyond normative structures, instilling a sense of non-place, non-home, and expansive potentiality. What culminates are transfigurations of symbols (namely of altars and vigils) towards abstract arrangements and unknown objects, allowing for expansive possibilities past known categorical approaches to the body and a desire for rites to solidify them.

Shrouds

Max Colby's recent body of sculptures, *Shrouds*, explores celebration and commemoration; death and love; materiality and abstraction. The title, *Shroud*, contains multiplicities. As an expansion of Colby's interest in ritual, mourning, and commemorative aesthetics, *Shroud* (reinforced by the scale of works) references a burial wrapping. In its active interpretation, *Shroud* indicates the ability to cloak, obscure, and remain opaque. What culminates in Colby's work are transfigurations of both meanings towards abstract portals, gateways, and unknown objects, allowing for expansive possibilities past known categorical approaches to the body and a desire for rites to solidify them.

Through an investigation of the body and commemoration through funereal ritual objects, *Shrouds* open dialogues on violence though more importantly, celebration. In material use, Colby parodies colonial and imperial American aesthetics, a framework of mundane violence she subverts through humor and assemblages of excess. The artist's abundant applications insert evidence of life and calls for celebration and commemoration in the face of antagonistic consumptions and expulsions of [trans] bodies.

Elegies

Max Colby's *Elegies* are fantastical portraits of a cultural relationship to death and memorial. By subverting symbolism of commercial funeral wreaths, Colby engenders dialogues on value, merit, and commemoration through an exploration of aesthetics. Utilizing contemporary American materials found globally, Colby provides rearrangements of ceremony and ritual which are at once fantastical and mundane. Each work becomes a portrait belonging to no one, transfigured beyond the object of funereal wreaths and towards unknown, non-places and reflections.

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Pretend That You Love Me –

Max Colby's recent series of collages, *Pretend That You Love Me –*, shifts her ongoing focus on topics of memorial, commemoration, and death, towards love. In exploring symbols, aesthetics, and the language of love produced in mainstream culture as fragile pleas, the artist parodies them. Referencing the 1996 hit 'Lovefool' by The Cardigans in the series title, *Pretend That You Love Me –* questions notions of artifice in social creations of "love" through the banal and mundane channels of pop culture. Comprised of valentine's day cards from the mid-20th century, hallmark imagery, and contemporary stickers, crystals, and flowers, Colby expands upon her ongoing investigation in materiality as a container for normative social constructs and as such, mundane violence. Reflecting on personal experiences and ideas of love and lovability, Colby's collages constitute kinds of love letters to herself, absurdly abundant and superfluous. Continuing her exploration of self- and cultural portraiture through symbols, *Pretend That You Love Me –* is a rich new dimension to the artist's expansive practice.

Looking at her practice and its investigative themes, *Pretend That You Love Me –* shifts towards a meditation on death and love as sisters; mirrors; mutually constitutive. This informs her interest in aesthetic, social, and cultural constructions which inform understandings of love and death; celebration and mourning; materiality and abstraction. By destabilizing symbols of mourning or burial in her sculptural work, she transfigures objects to fantastical portals, mirrors, and unknown spaces. Conversely, with symbols of love, she mutates love letters into drowning cries. Her work's abstraction allows for expansive possibilities past known categorical approaches to the body and a desire for rites to solidify them.

Paintings (2020)

Max Colby's series of gouache paintings from 2020 are set on top of contemporary sticker collages. Each painting is derivative of an historic Crewel embroidery, a popular embroidery technique and aesthetic seen primarily in Victorian England and Colonial America. The works Colby references (pulled from public collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) feature primarily floral and landscape content, highlighting the prominent role that creating an updated geography through "natural history" was in justifying imperialism. Further complicated by the role embroidery had in these periods as a critical, refined element of a young girl's education, Crewel embroidery allows us to consider the role of aesthetics in many social constructions such as taste, class, gender, craft vs. fine art, and utility.

The original makers of the referenced embroideries are credited in the title of each work. These paintings reinforce the influence research on Crewel and colonial American embroidery have had in Colby's practice over the past 10 years. This research parameter introduced much of the language she has built around material use. She continues to return to this subject to make work as studies in between large-scale projects.

Drawings (2021 & 2023)

Colby's drawings in pen, ink, and/or marker are a common point of return in her practice which she has addressed in series created in 2021 and 2023. Her drawings are derivative of historic Crewel embroideries, a popular technique and aesthetic seen primarily in Victorian England and Colonial America. The works Colby references (pulled from public collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) feature primarily floral and landscape content, highlighting the prominent role that creating an updated geography through "natural history" was in justifying imperialism. Further complicated by the role embroidery had in these periods as a critical, refined element of a young girl's education, Crewel embroidery allows us to consider the role of aesthetics in many social constructions such as taste, class, gender, craft vs. fine art, and utility.

For over 10 years, this highly specific cultural and aesthetic reference has functioned in Colby's practice as a starting point for considering parameters on research, materials, and the dialogues they are imbued with. An early entry point for rich material uses on paper as well as sculptural application, Colby continues to return to the subject when in between large-scale sculptural projects to ground herself and refine visual language. Colby's recent drawings provide an often-unseen glimpse into how works on paper function in her dimensional practice.