



Bonnie Collura

Prince

What does it mean when things merge? Heavily invested in making, my sculptures no longer only represent a fusion, but coax forth a collusion; collapse; conceal; reveal; rupture; resuscitation. When the key turns in the studio door, I become part director, part fabricator, and part weird scientist.

Slip sliding between these roles, I work from a patch-work of signifiers, physical material, and cultural references questioning presumed hierarchies from art history, pop culture, politics and consumerism. Each angle of my sculptures has a job to do: to pose questions and conclusions while a body turns in space. When this occurs, the viewer becomes essential in the gap between parts, as they collaborate towards the production of meaning.

To effectively capture circulation around a sculpture, emotional connectedness is key. Cast referential elements are embedded into finitely crafted surfaces to get a form that is simultaneously relatable and alien. While figurative sculpture in the 21st century is often considered redundant or obsolete, it fascinates me how we continue to fetishize the human body. Using the figure as a sculptural platform is purposeful, as it allows me to probe into a larger body (cultural, commercial, social, spiritual) while morphing between the statuary and the systemic.

Crash Test/Dubble Bubble/Sebastian, 2018

Steel, wood, hydrostone, machine plastic, expandable foam, chair section, fabric, inner tube, bracelet, zip ties, 74" x 44" x 44".

Photo: Amirmasoud Agharebparast.



Bonnie Collura: Prince

In her highly intensive studio practice, Bonnie Collura sees herself as part director, part fabricator, and part weird scientist. She slides between these roles, working from a medley of signifiers, physical material, and cultural references while questioning presumed hierarchies from art history, pop culture, politics, and consumerism. Bonnie Collura's sculptural installation Prince is part of an ambitious, episodic project that started in 2005 with funding from a John F. Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship. Since then, The Prince Project has taken the form of single sculptures and large-scale installations that critique our culture's pattern of repeating iconic characters, gestures, and polarizing traits to create heroes. Inspired by mythological characters and symbols from Greek antiquity to Mary Shelley's 19th-century novel Frankenstein, Collura gives these stories contemporary relevance by subverting the restrictive gender roles of the artist/creator legend. As a sculptor, she works with carved and cast pieces that are fitted or sewn together, combining disparate parts to make a formal and conceptual whole that is evolving yet cohesive.

In her ongoing project, Collura creates incarnations of a surrogate being, which she calls the Prince figure and has developed through a non-linear narrative. As the artist of this sculptural personification, Collura takes the role of creator, flipping the gender relationship of the Pygmalion and Galatea myth from Ovid's Metamorphosis in which a male sculptor desires an ideal female that he has made as an ivory statue. Collura interprets the Prince as an amalgamation of four archetypal male characters from history, religion, and popular culture: Jesus, St. Sebastian, C-3PO (the droid from Star Wars), and Abraham Lincoln. A unifying thread among these four figures is that each was left with an identifiable hole in his body, an opening that is associated with their martyrdom and reveals their fragility. At Smack Mellon, four solid, mixed-media sculptures represent each of these individuals as they gesture in response to four translucent counterparts that are made of sewn, silk organza and suspend from the ceiling like gossamer sheaths. By building both their bodies and shedding skins through sewing, the artist aims to rebuke tropes of the heroic male sculptor, as well as constructs that create patriarchal icons. Attempting to transcend her own personal impetus, Collura intends the work to evoke feelings of our collective hope, heartbreak, and history.

Gabriel de Guzman, Curator and Director of Exhibitions, Smack Mellon



Installation shot: Prince at Smack Mellon

Photo: Etienne Frossard

Fortuna (Woman), 2018

Wood, steel, cast hydrostone, oil based clay, aluminum shim, expandable foam, cut and twisted Santa lawn ornament

Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Amirmasoud Agharebpast

Collura's *Fortuna (Woman)* was inspired by Niccolò Machiavelli's 16th-century political treatise, *The Prince*, in which the Italian author often discussed virtù (virtue) and fortuná (fortune) in correlation. While Virtú concerns the politician's (or prince's) ability to adjust the temperament of the times to benefit what he feels is best for society, Fortuná refers to circumstances that are beyond the prince's control. Machiavelli describes Fortuná as an uncontrollable woman who the prince must learn to command to his political advantage. However, in Collura's project, the artist likens *Fortuná* to a force that breaks through a rigid patriarchal shell.





Installation shot: Prince at Smack Mellon

Photo: Etienne Frossard



Matriarch/Heavy Metal/Jesus 2018



Crash Test/Double Bubble/Sebastian 2018



Golden Droid/Scout/C3PO 2018



Evening/Mortality/Lincoln 2018







Installation shot: *Prince* at Smack Mellon

Photo: Etienne Frossard



Installation shot: Prince at Smack Mellon

Photo: Etienne Frossard



Installation shot: Prince at Smack Mellon

Photo: Etienne Frossard

Matriarch/Heavy Metal/Jesus

Steel, wood, urethane plastic, hydrostone, mylar, foam,
fiberglass cloth, quilted fabric, thread, nails, paint
2018

Photo: Etienne Frossard





Installation shot: Prince at Smack Mellon
Photo: Etienne Frossard

Power

Wood, sewing scraps from *Abductor Red*, *Guardian Blue*, *Martyr Yellow*, *Creator Green*, casters
2018

Photo: Etienne Frossard





Skin of a Dancing Ghost: Jesus



Skin of a Dancing Ghost: Sebastian



Skin of a Dancing Ghost: C3PO



Skin of a Dancing Ghost: Lincoln

In the non-linear narrative of Collura's *Prince Project*, the color codes represent the life force by which the characters are guided. The artist has named them *Abductor Red*, *Creator Green*, *Guardian Blue*, and *Martyr Yellow*. They are incarnations of the four main colors which, when united, make up white light. In Collura's narrative, white light symbolizes a foundation of strength and a generator of multiple signifiers.

Guardian Blue, 2018

Quilted, repurposed fabrics, thread, zippers

Photo: Amirmasoud Agharebparast

Abductor Red, 2018

Quilted, repurposed fabrics, thread, zippers

Photo: Amirmasoud Agharebparast

Martyr Yellow, 2018

Quilted, repurposed, fabrics, thread, zippers

Photo: Amirmasoud Agharebparast

Creator Green, 2018

Quilted, repurposed fabrics, thread, zippers

Photo: Amirmasoud Agharebparast



detail: *Abductor Red*



detail: *Martyr Yellow*



detail: *Guardian Blue*





Prince is reviewed in the New York Times by Martha Schwendener!

February 12, 2019

"The word "patriarchy" once seemed like a worn-out term bandied about by 1970s feminists, but it's making a comeback as authoritarian leaders around the globe, and their followers, try to overturn any advances made by women. You sense the importance of this word in two terrific shows at Smack Mellon: Bonnie Collura's "Prince" and Rachelle Mozman Solano's "Metamorphosis of Failure."

Ms. Collura emerged in the '90s with post-Pop sculptures inspired by amusement park doodads, but she's recently gone soft, making human figures with found fabric and other materials. Several of her fiber sculptures are strung from the ceiling, creating an eerie suggestion of just what she'd like to do with some of her subjects. But her titles often refer to Christian martyrs (St. Sebastian, Jesus) and revered leaders (Lincoln), alluding to the complex nature of men cast as "princes." Complicated and anti heroic, Ms. Collura's work takes patriarchy down a peg (symbolically, at least)."

The full review can be seen at

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/12/arts/design/what-to-see-in-new-york-art-galleries-this-week.html>

Bonnie Collura lives and works in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania. She has had solo exhibitions at Kustera Projects, Brooklyn; 'sindikit, Baltimore; Kravets Wehby Gallery, New York; Claire Oliver Fine Arts, New York; Susan Inglett Gallery, New York; and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York. Collura has been featured in recent group exhibitions at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT; Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, WI; Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, OR; Trestle Gallery, Brooklyn; Flag Art Foundation, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Mixed Greens Gallery, New York; Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, Remagen, Germany, and Palmer Museum of Art, University Park, PA, among others. She is the recipient of a MacDowell Colony Fellowship, a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, six research grants from Penn State University and an Emerging Artist Award from the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art. Collura is currently a full professor at Penn State University, teaching in the School of Visual Arts. She received an MFA from Yale University and a BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Exhibition and label descriptions were written by **Gabriel de Guzman**, Curator and Director of Exhibitions at Smack Mellon. Partial funding of this project is due to a 2017 Penn State College of Arts and Architecture Individual Faculty Grant. This show consisted of 15 sculptures, 13 of which were made between 2017-2018. A sincere expression of gratitude goes to Smack Mellon, Katie Pack, Danielle Spewak, Amirmasoud Agharebparast, Geri Collura, Denis Collura, and Matthew J. Olson for their assistance with the fabrication, documentation, or installation of this work.

for further information, please contact bonnie@bonniecollura.com

www.bonniecollura.com



