



BONNIE COLLURA

MUTABLE BODIES

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H A L L W A L L S

CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

MAR 18 — APR 29, 2022



Rebuke (Two Months Until Fifty), 2020
wood, steel, foam, fiberglass cloth, hydrostone, urethane plastic, fabric, thread, paint, chair legs, furniture dolly
88H x 60W x 32D inches

With contemporary forms of sculpture, a prevalent question for me is often whether the work in question effectively achieves a “thingness.” Thingness is an esoteric catch-all—okay, a made-up word—that folds in notions of inventive material usage, iconoclastic form-making, and subjective content into a work that is resolutely unto itself, unique among other sculptures and containing the unexpected spontaneity we hope for in forms of contemporary art. Effective thingness imparts a sense of unique expression, an entity we could not anticipate but is now before us, undeniable in form and resolute in itself.

The work of Bonnie Collura achieves its particular thingness as a direct outgrowth of her own self-description as “part director, part fabricator, and part weird scientist.” As a hybrid-maker, Collura makes hybrid things. Within her work are recognizable elements of classic pre-modernist statuary, the posturing of figures and their limbs in emphatic gestures. But these nods to traditional statuary are challenged by the complexity of materials and material approaches employed in the realization of wilder gestural moments and unexpected outgrowths of form. This exploration of figurative characteristics is frequently complicated by the mad scientist texture, wherein whole entities are sometimes cobbled together as though built from the remnants of various grave robberies.

Collura’s work, though sometimes larger/smaller than life-size, is centered on the body in a scale we can generally relate to ourselves. Even her abstracted forms imply the body through their expressive undulations. And the body, to Collura, is never a static object. It is consistently

in flux—always in a state of becoming. It’s a challenging depiction in sculpture because form is usually always fixed somehow and it is here that Collura’s deft manipulations of materials and processes finds its most eloquent resolutions. If her works are figurative, they are “figurative-fluid,” their appearance sometimes shifting wildly depending on one’s perspective. They achieve the admirable trick of being fixed physical forms that simultaneously remain in a state of transformation.

Collura’s phantasmagoric iterations of the figure springboard from the presumed redundancy of figuration as a contemporary form into a space where statuary iconography meets with all the wild hybrid possibilities that seek to dismantle it. In doing so, the works function as effective platforms to investigate cultural, commercial, political, and spiritual presumptions embodied in the figure. They manage the neat trick of seeming vaguely familiar and recognizable while remaining utterly iconoclastic and alien. This duality serves to continually reiterate the sense of possibility they embody.

Sewn elements, cast elements, and carved elements are often forced into spaces where they must effectively play with each other—sometimes in adjacent works, sometimes within a single work. *Guardian Blue*, a suspended tangle of sewn fabric, hangs with a world weariness belied by its shimmering, colored surfaces. *Matriarch/HeavyMetal/Jesus*, a solid aerated silver form ascending from its base, undulates as glamorously as the fabric work. They are uniquely distinct in material but share formal properties, shapes, and modes of expression.

Rebuke (Two Months Until Fifty) combines fabric with sculpted and cast elements, steel, and wood in Collura's most aggressive mixture of form and material. It is an ultra-hybrid among hybrids—appropriately so, as it expresses ruminations on aging and self-transformation, an acknowledgement that we are rarely the singular persona we aspire to and instead are entities comprised of accrued moments and experiences. It may even feel—as it appears in Collura's sculpture—that we are barely holding it all together. Innards exposed, portions visibly glued together, seemingly fragile in every direction, supported on a wooden pedestal—we have every reason to anticipate an imminent collapse, but the sculpture rebukes that threat through its posture of persistent endurance.

The hybrid nature of Collura's forms also offer up multiple emotional cues. There may be a jocular humor to their overall physical resolutions, but within this, there are pockets of sadness, tragedy, and even locations of ennui. The wild emotional arcs within the works track with their undulant physicality as more opulent shapes collide with rough and tumble articulations. There is a rollercoaster of emotional states that equates with the emphatic juxtaposition of forms. This complexity of emotion exists even in the simplest of her works. *Empire*, a modestly-scaled work from which a golden "arm" arises from a swirl of multi-colored fabric with a cherubic smiling figure embedded in it, uses a hand gesture that alternately alludes to Michelangelo's *Divine Breath* or an extended middle figure, the complexities of "empire" embodied in the simplest posture.

The complexities of empire unintentionally rise to the surface of *On Target*, a work Collura has been sewing and repurposing since 2018. Originally conceived as a quilted wall piece, it sits in the gallery as a slumped pile of yellow and blue fabric on a short pedestal, displaying the bright colors that have only recently become symbolic with oppressed peoples struggling to remain free. It is an accident of fate that the work now expresses this sentiment but it's certainly an immediate and undeniable point of reference for the contemporary viewer. It is a reminder that meaning is never fixed. *On Target* is specifically indicated by the artist as a work with no fixed position but one that people are encouraged to reposition into various compositions. It is, in this way, the embodiment of the states of flux and possibility suggested by Collura's other work.

Bonnie Collura makes works resplendent in their thingness. Unexpected forms that startle the viewer upon first glance and flesh out that first startling look the more the viewer engages with the work—whether through prolonged consideration or the simplest alteration of perspective. They impart a seemingly perpetual newness—though most are obviously fixed in form, they nonetheless evoke an ever-changing self. Or the pining for such a self. They embody an eagerness for transition—consider how many works are on wheels and ready to move. At the heart of it is the notion that they and we are states of being. Plural. Containing and offering multitudes.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator



Fortuna (Woman), 2018
wood, steel, cast hydrostone, oil based clay, aluminum shim, expandable foam, cut and twisted Santa lawn ornament
66H x 19W x 21D inches
photo: Amir Masoud Agharebparast



Guardian Blue (one of four Color Codes), 2018

Quilted, repurposed fabrics, thread, zippers

85H x 22W x 11D inches

photo: Amirmasoud Agharebparast



Matriarch/Heavy Metal/Jesus (front view), 2018.
Steel, wood, urethane plastic. Hydrostone, Mylar, foam, fiberglass cloth, quilted fabric, thread, nails, paint.
108H x 47D x 48W inches
photo: Etienne Frossard



Grumpy/Wrath/Patience (from the Seven series), 2022

Steel, wood, cast plastic, urethane foam, resin, pigment

63H x 29W x 30D inches

Pedestal fabrication: Matthew Olson, photo: Biff Henrich



Sneezy/Envy/Kindness (from the Seven series), 2022

Steel, wood, fabric, cast plastic, foam, hydrostone, paint, resin, fabric, found items

96H x 34W x 36D inches

Pedestal fabrication: Matthew Olson, photo: Biff Henrich



On Target (necessary alterations), 2018–2022

Repurposed fabric, thread, quilt batting

28H x 24W x 24D inches (Dimensions variable)



Empire, 2022
Wood, steel, cast plastic, paint, quilted repurposed fabrics, thread
53H x 22W x 21D inches
photo: Biff Henrich

Bonnie Collura's multi-media sculptures, figurative textiles, and outdoor works have contributed to the dialogue of contemporary sculpture for over twenty years in exhibitions spanning the United States, France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, and India. Reviews of her work can be seen in the New York Times, The New Yorker, Art Forum, Art in America, Art News, Art Net, Flash Art, BOMB magazine, Beautiful Decay, Tema Celeste, Sculpture Magazine, and numerous print and on-line publications. Holding a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Virginia Commonwealth University (1994) and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Yale University (1996), her work and research platform is the recipient of several honors, including a 1997 Emerging Artist Award from the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, a 2005 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, a 2010 MacDowell Colony Fellowship, and six research grants from Penn State University.

Toggleing a rigorous studio practice with a dedicated teaching career has led to an investment of art's purpose through a younger generation in the classroom. This engagement has brought countless interactions which have enriched her life immeasurably. In 2021, she was the recipient of a prestigious Outstanding Educator Award from the International Sculpture Center.

Currently, Collura is a Full Professor of Art (Sculpture) at Penn State University teaching in the School of Visual Arts, College of Arts and Architecture. Prior to her appointment at Penn State she taught at Yale University, Columbia University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Rhode Island School of Design, Tyler School of Art, University of the Arts, and Parsons The New School for Design. She lives and works in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania with her husband, Matthew J. Olson and their extraordinary cat, Louise Bourgeois.

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BONNIE COLLURA

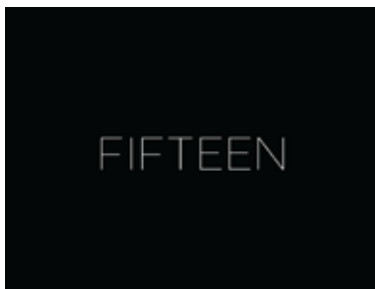
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Tremendous thanks to John Massier for the invitation to show work at Hallwalls, and Ed Cardoni, and for their insight, feedback, and humor while planning the exhibition. Thank you to Dakota Chun, Rebecca Wing, Bill Sack, and Biff Henrich for their skilled help installing and documenting the show. Fabrication costs for new work was made possible through a Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant. Travel costs have been supported through a Penn State School of Visual Arts faculty travel grant.

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