

Artist Statement

I am interested in the unnerving possibility of multiple meanings, dual perceptions, and limitlessness in the seemingly binary. Drawing repeatedly allows me to fully understand objects in space, while defining and redefining my own racial landscape.

For me, racial identity has neither been instantly formed nor conjured in isolation. Rather, identity entangles memory: actual and revisited, cultural and historical, individual and collective. Through the dissolution of dichotomies and exploration of language, this work recalls moments in the formation of my racial identity. And each re-worked mark is yet another attempt to navigate the binary paradigm of race in the American South.

Each new body of work borders on an obsessive preoccupation with language—its ability and inability to negotiate a way of being in the world. But I have found in my practice a delight in these obsessive preoccupations. And in the solutions they slowly, ever so slowly, but inevitably offer.

Project Statement

Collins' Featured Artist Project is centered around *America: A Hymnal*, an artist book made up of 100 versions of *My Country 'Tis of Thee* from the 18th-20th c. Since its debut by the Rev. Samuel E. Smith on July 4, 1831, the lyrics of *My Country 'Tis of Thee* were re-titled and re-written at least one hundred times. Each re-writing in support of a passionately held cause—from temperance and suffrage to abolition and even the Confederacy—articulates a version of what it means to be American. In its many lyrical variations, *America: A Hymnal* is a chronological retelling of American history, politics and culture through one song. Additional works included in Collins' Featured Artist Project are from her *Conronym* series, altered dictionaries and encyclopedias, each refusing in its own way a singularity of meaning.

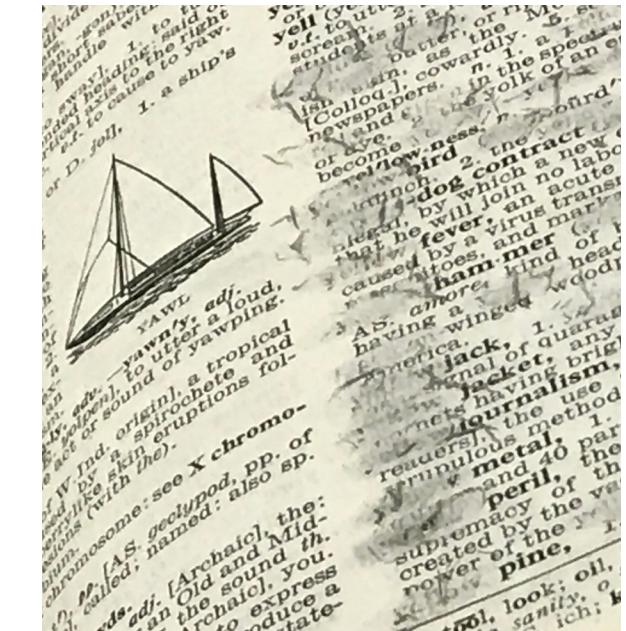


America: A Hymnal, 2017

Bio

Bethany Collins is a multidisciplinary artist whose conceptually driven work is fueled by a critical exploration of how race and language interact. In her *Conronym* series, for instance, Collins transposes definitions from Webster's New World Dictionary of American Language onto American Masters paper, then aggressively obscures much of the entries with an eraser. What remain are specific snippets of meaning that are poetically charged through their isolation, as well as the crumbled paper bits left behind by her erasing. As Holland Cotter noted writing in The New York Times, "language itself, viewed as intrinsically racialized, is Bethany Collins' primary material."

Her works have been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions nationwide, including the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Drawing Center, the Wexner Center for the Arts, and the Birmingham Museum of Art. Collins has been recognized as an Artist-in-Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem, the MacDowell Colony, the Bemis Center and the Hyde Park Art Center among others. In 2015, she was awarded the Hudgens Prize.



Black and Blue Dictionary (Detail), 2014



Comprise, 1982

Works in the Exhibition

America: A Hymnal, 2017
Book with 100 laser cut leaves
6 x 9 x 1 inches
Courtesy of the Artist

Awful, 1968, 2017
Graphite and toner on American Masters paper
Diptych: 22 x 30 inches each
Courtesy of the Artist

Black and Blue Dictionary, 2014
Found Webster's New American Dictionary (1965) with "black" and "blue" terms erased
8 1/4 x 10 x 2 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the Artist

Colorblind Dictionary, 2013-2014
Found Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language with all color terms erased
9 1/4 x 6 1/4 x 2 5/8 inches
Courtesy of the Artist

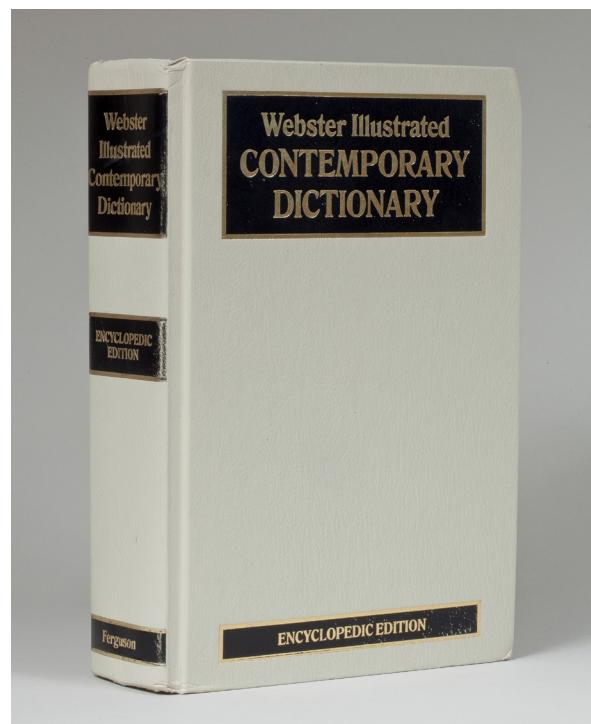
Colorless Dictionary, 2015
Found "Webster's Illustrated Contemporary Dictionary" (1988)
10 1/4 x 6 3/4 x 2 3/8 inches
Courtesy of the Artist

Comprise, 1982, 2017
Graphite and toner on American Masters paper
Diptych: 22 x 30 inches each
Courtesy of the Artist

The Encyclopedia Americana (U), 2017
Laser cut Encyclopedia Americana (in progress)
10 1/2 x 15 inches
Courtesy of the Artist



Awful, 1968, 2017



Colorless Dictionary, 2015

About the Center for Book Arts

The Center for Book Arts promotes active explorations of both contemporary and traditional artistic practices related to the book as an art object. Founded in 1974, it was the first organization of its kind in the nation.

About the Featured Artist Project Series

The Center's Featured Artist Project Series provides a critical forum for artists working primarily in the book arts to showcase a recent or cohesive body of work or create a site-specific installation.

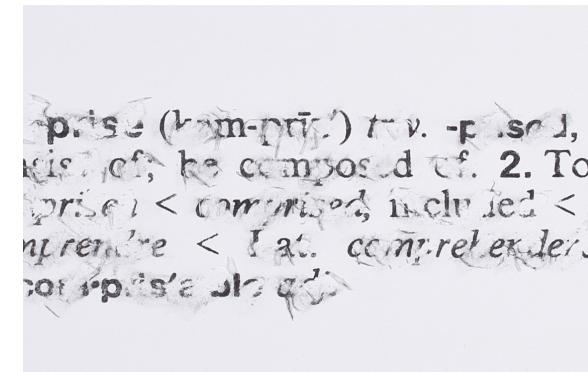


America a Hymnal, 2017

Support for the Featured Artist Project Series, a component of the Center for Book Arts' Visual Arts Program, is provided in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. Additional support for the Featured Artist Project, Bethany Collins, is provided by The Kaleta A. Doolin Foundation.

Bethany Collins: Occasional Verse

April 20 – June 30, 2018



Artist Talk and Reception June 8, 6:30 PM

Suggested admission \$10/\$5 members

THE CENTER FOR BOOK ARTS

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www.centerforbookarts.org