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Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***Bethany Collins: Chorus* explores the intersection of race and language**



Bethany Collins, *Do you know them? (1898)*, 2018. Twice embossed archival newsprint, 9 x 6 inches each (9 x 60 inches overall). Courtesy the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago. Photo: Aron Gent.

July 3, 2019 (St. Louis, MO) - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis announces an exhibition of the work of multidisciplinary artist Bethany Collins, *Chorus*, as part of its fall season, on view September 6 through December 29, 2019. In Collins's work, language is both her subject and primary material—from dictionaries and classified ads to patriotic songs and bureaucratic reports. This exhibition offers insight into her unique practice—conceptually-driven work which explores American history and the nuance of racial and national identities.

Chorus is presented in two parts across CAM's galleries. The first grouping of works examine contrasting forms of reporting: a recent government document that attempts truth-telling clarity; a 1960s series of news stories that offer readers distractions from reality. *A Pattern or Practice*, an installation of ninety-one blind-embossed prints, features text from the U.S. Department of Justice report on the Ferguson police department. By reproducing the entire report—excluding the conclusion—through a blind-embossed technique, a delicate raised surface of letters is left behind, their elusiveness suggesting the slippage of language.

Another body of work features blind-embossed reproductions of the front pages of *The Birmingham News* from April 1963, during the height of Civil Rights demonstrations in the racially segregated city. Collins exposes the paper's decision to present alternative, mundane headlines while ignoring the violence against demonstrators. In this section of the exhibition, Collins shows where meaning may be found in the traces and residue of what is barely perceptible, or even invisible.

The second group of works relate to themes of mourning, the loss of loved ones or the loss of one's home. In *Information Wanted, 1893*, Collins reproduces collections of classified ads—published shortly before the end of the Civil War until the 1920s—

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by African Americans separated from family members by war, slavery, and emancipation. These ads are often brief—consisting of memories, a name, their loved ones' former owners, where they once lived—illustrating the shared experience of individuals. Printed in newspapers under such headings as “Do you know them?” and “Information Wanted,” the ads speak across time as family members seek to locate their loved ones in words that resonate today: “Help me to find my people.”



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Collins presents five of her panel works, three made for this exhibition, as part of her *Noise* series. Each panel contains obsessively re-written lyrics from American patriotic hymns, including “My Country 'Tis of Thee,” “You’re A Grand Old Flag,” and “Amazing Grace.” The artist selects lyrics that focus on notions of love within each hymn, then abstracts and renders the text illegible. The clustered text becomes a form of “noise” that prompts us to reconsider the meaning of the original lyrics, and larger ideas of national identity, national unity, and patriotism. The new panels, in shades of red, and their corresponding songs represent our highest ideals: what it means to love a place, to belong together, to be citizen, to be American. *Information Wanted, 1893* and *A Pattern or Practice* echo our consistent inability to meet those ideals—equal parts love letter and indictment.

Bethany Collins (b. 1984, Montgomery, Alabama, lives and works in Chicago) is a multidisciplinary artist whose conceptually driven work is fueled by a critical exploration of how race and language interact. As Holland Cotter noted 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, Wexner Center for the Arts, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, 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. She received her MFA from Georgia State University, and her BA from the University of Alabama.

This exhibition is generously supported by Paul and Dedrea Gray. The Artist Talk is generously supported by the Robert Lehman Foundation.

Bethany Collins: Chorus is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator, with Misa Jeffereis, Assistant Curator.

Related Events

Press & Patron Preview

Friday, September 6, 10:00–11:00 am
Join artists and curators for an exclusive introduction to the exhibitions. RSVP to Eddie Silva at 314.535.0770 x313 or esilva@camstl.org

Opening Night

Friday, September 6
Member Preview 6:00–7:00 pm
Public Reception 7:00–9:00 pm

Artist Talk: Bethany Collins

Thursday, November 7, 6:30 pm

All programs, dates, and times are subject to change.

About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis presents, supports, and celebrates the art of our time. It is the premier museum in St. Louis dedicated to contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, CAM provides a thought-provoking program that reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape. Through the diverse perspectives offered in its exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives, CAM actively engages a range of audiences to challenge their perceptions. It is a site for discovery, a gathering place in which to experience and enjoy contemporary visual culture. CAM is located in the Grand Center Arts District.