Hail Mother

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HAIL MOTHER
SYDNEY WALTERS · MARCH 9-13

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SYDNEY-WALTERS.COM
Sydney Walters  
Artist Statement  
Committee Review  
March 10, 2020

My work disrupts two kinds of power: gender roles in religious practices, and the perceived power of a ritual object. Constructions of gender and power are thrown onto a stage and cast in a sincere parody that ultimately liberates underrepresented people to perform with agency.

My larger-than-life figures examine who holds power in religious institutions. The figures challenge the intelligibility of their identity because she/they are dressed in religious regalia. In Western Catholicism, maleness is the pre-requisite for priesthood. These church leaders are distinguished by wielding specific religious regalia: i.e. the Ring of the Fisherman, Episcopal gloves, and globus crucigur. I visually transpose these religious relics on to women, thus marking her or them, rightful authorities in these same spiritual practice. Maleness is so normal in religious leadership that presenting a “woman in drag” or “transvestite Jesus,” challenges the normative structure of male leader and presents images luxuriating in the freedom of gender non-conforming religious expression.

_Hail Mother_ is a truncated account of objects moving swiftly from sacred to commercial, thus dismantling their precious power and replacing it with commercial power. In _Hildegard of Bingen_, I translate a minimized map of her piece _The Co-Creator and Mother of the World_. This 12<sup>th</sup> century illustration transforms a reverent and symbolic mapping of Christ’s body to a yellow neon sign. Likewise, _Mary as Sofia, Mary as Sofia, Mary as Sofia..._, is an image of a crown
plucked from an ancient illuminated manuscript of Sofia, the feminine Holy Spirit embodied in the Virgin Mother. Repeating this crown in blue neon suggests the repetition of production and the cheapening of precious objects. The objects that were the signifier of male power as shown in the first body of work, are now consumerist objects, losing all semblances of preciousness and holiness.

Despite the sudden evolution of power by means of parody, it is a sincere parody nonetheless. *Hail Mother* retains a title nested in 14th century phrase: “Hail Mary.” It is a plea, a penance, a ritual, a pardon, a blessing. My work operates as a parody to expose the resilient backbone of women holding these rituals, and the world, together. By reckoning our proclivity to perform, it ultimately liberates those far removed from authority, to invest their body with meaning and power.