

AMARYLLIS DEJESUS MOLESKI'S PRACTICE HONORS HER ROOTS

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AMARYLLIS DEJESUS MOLESKI's work seems to exist within an ethereal realm. Drawing from ancient art forms from far-reaching areas of the world, DeJesus Moleski's practice, which includes drawing, installation, and performance, embraces the ways in which we communicate universally. She is keen to work through feelings of indecisive, always pushing her practice forward through both the good and the bad. DeJesus Moleski is based in New Haven, CT.



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Tell us a little bit about yourself. Where are you from and when did art first enter into your life?

I grew up very nomadically, moving around my whole life on the American East Coast, South, and Midwest. Growing up in a constantly shape shifting landscape really impacted my little kid brain and also tethered my arts practice to interests in perception, multiplicity, bewilderment, and magic.

I'm pretty convinced that art entered my life because my mom is a badass. Moving around so much meant that we couldn't have much of an accumulation of belongings, but somehow she made sure there were posters of R.C. Gorman's art in our apartments. He is a native artist who makes watercolors of these thick, giant brown women. (!!). Looking back that definitely made an impression on me, and later in my art.

Also, as soon as I could I had a library card. This meant that no matter where we lived, I would have free AC in the summer time and a whole universe of stories that connected my present to the past, and the future, and most importantly to that which hadn't yet been.



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What art movements most inspire you?

The Afro Diaspora; the movement from Unity to Multiplicity [Edouard Glissant].

The Queer Underground; 38,000 BC – Present

Sympathetic Magic. The drawing lineage of Ancient Egypt.

The Caribbean Surrealists

The Quilters of Gees Bend

Comics; 38,000 BC – Present

The Naive and the Intuitive artists of every undocumented movement in Art History

The violet in-between and classed landscapes of the Impressionists

Bisabuela's Cliká

Can you tell us about your process? How do you go about creating a work?

I use materials that are classed as femme, foolish, too much, and disposable; sequins, mirror, beauty supplies. In the lineage of drag and carnival, I re-claim these materials and let them take up space and ritual significance. For the past year I've centered light, mirror, and video as my primary materials. My main exploration has been around how I can have flamboyant material objects produce the ephemeral lighting conditions under which that object is seen. Sequin refracts video content into illegible constellations, mirrors bend white light into rainbows.

My process always begins with the commitment to show up, especially when I don't know what I'm doing. Material experimentation is a big part of how I begin, and most of it doesn't amount to anything I would want to show people lol. But I've learned that I have to do it. A lot of listening to music and trying to make rainbows in the dark.

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What themes does your work address?

My work is an ongoing practice of tending to the in-between and those that know the trouble and pleasure there. In everything I make, I am experimenting with how to articulate the conflation of celebration and mourning when being racialized, liminal, and alive. Within this experience, there is a breaking point where something that is painful becomes amusing. Whether through drawing or light, image or installation, I explore and intuit that breaking point.

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Imagery and symbolism play a large role in your work. How do you decide what to depict or include in your work?

My interest in imagery and symbolism comes from an understanding that pictures have always been used to communicate what we either don't yet have words for, or when we are communicating without a shared language. One of my first encounters with this were my fathers letters from prison. Locked up on and off throughout my childhood, he would arrange for some of the artists he was incarcerated with to draw cartoons on the envelopes he sent me. More than the letters themselves, the drawings were what communicated an experience we didn't have the right words for. I draw this way too. I am almost always drawing with a grief and pleasure for where language has failed.

I see my drawings as one ongoing project, wondering if repetitious symbols and communication through images can slip between the stubbornness of our words and shift our collective perceptions of being and belonging. What would our livelihoods be like if we inherited a Femme Genesis? I make large scale drawings and gouache paintings on paper that anchor that queerness as a spiritual center. They utilize the scroll as a format to conjure ancient texts, and reference comics as a tether to the present. Rather than with gold leaf, they are illuminated with synthetic fluorescents, metallics, and iridescence to refuse a naturalizing aesthetic of the universe. I am influenced by Understanding Comics and Scott McCloud's writing on Iconic Art, and my figures are drawn with the intention of creating a visual language that alters our baseline symbols for being human. These images ping pong between the unremarkable and the miraculous: Femme gods hoop in high ponytails and slam dunk a gradient moon. Big boned cartoon strippers in silver thongs make an arched void for the girls to sharpen their weapons in a midnight rain.

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You also work in installation art. What does this part of your practice allow you to do that you can't accomplish in the 2D realm?

I always knew that I wanted to move into the realm of installation and performance. I figured, if comics were an essential part of my practice, cosplay would be my next step. I started with using my drawings as blueprints for objects, but then I took a class on color with my mentor Byron Kim that really shifted the kind of experimentation I was doing in my studio. I began to understand color as this constantly shapeshifting thing that we are obsessed with fixing but that can never be fixed. The more you look at how color works, the more it falls apart. It holds a perception of our world together and simultaneously destabilizes it. Looking at color in light vs color in material became central to my work. It became a way to make through all the questions I have in my 2-D work without being bound to representation. In my installation work I am experimenting with color as light, dispersion, refraction, and reflection as a way to explore mixedness, diaspora, displacement, and something like wonder.

I am playing with the spectrum of value and the value of light, understanding the darkness to be of equal importance towards all acts of illumination. I make immersive light installations that, similarly to a dance club or dark cave, favor bewilderment and sensuality as a way to shift how our bodies exist and are perceived.

My drawing practice reflects a day-to-day experience of having a body that is an infinite site for an others projections of fear and fantasy. Flattening my figures with marker and closed lines, I am removing spatial detail to create a subliminal space for the viewer to insert their own experiences as "human being".



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What is next for you?

For the next month I'll be a resident at the Fire Island Artist Residency. I can't wait to make work in and around the Ocean. On the Island, I'll get to focus my practice in sunlight, moonlight, firelight, and the wild reflectivity of a body of water.

Mainly though, regenerating my intuition.



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