

Forms of Influence

The Cockettes, a psychedelic theatre group founded out of a commune located in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, performed electric, surreal, and avant garde plays in the 1960s and 70s. Their work prominently displays and challenges low-high class divisions and fringe cultures pushed out of upper-class straight cisgender society. Their art did not come of out what would be considered the high-society art world, instead their outfits were scavenged, made, and altered. The Cockettes, with their intricate handmade costumes and play sets, were heavily

involved in utilizing craft and played with gender and sexuality in a free flowing way.



Their participation in the avant garde furthers the ideas, ideologies, and aesthetics of camp and drag. Rather than thinking of drag as we might today, the Cockettes treated everything as drag,



everything piece of clothing as a performance of



gender. "His [audience member and poet Allen Ginsberg] remark highlights the crucial role of the imagination and of

dress in attempting to push open a space for fluid sexual openness—or what is now called genderqueer, though that was not the term used at the time. Instead, Hibiscus [The Cockettes' founder, pictured above on the left] was a touchstone for a nascent neologism—genderfuck," (Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray, Art and Textile Politics*, 47).

I tried to encapsulate some of these themes into my own work. It would seem out of place to present any pieces in a white starkly clean art gallery as we have for our previous projects, so instead I opted to create a sort of stage, one full of colors and textures, in which I would present my work. I was intrigued by ceramicists like Matt Smith, an artist interested in how otherwise neutral materials like clay are molded into objects collected and curated by museums, looking how their meanings and impacts are molded and changed. I am interested in objects and art like those of The Cockettes, ones that would not have been shown in museums or may not have even considered art by the guarded, high-class art world at the time.



I hand built all my objects. I started out making the head shaped vase with paper clay which would later hold an explosion of plants. The smaller, round table is also made out of paper clay with the hollow legs molded around a rolling pin with a final texture encapsulating my fingerprints within the piece. The legs and



table top were fired separately, painted with acrylic paint, a glossy topcoat sealant, and adhered together with super glue. On it I placed a ceramic container I made using paper clay and overlapping hand painted glaze. I debated using a stencil, but the crisp lines that creates opposes the free

flowing form of The Cockettes and my project. I made larger table originally out of concern that the ceramic table might not be weight



bearing. Using my neighbor's scrap wood and old furniture, paper mache, acrylic paint, and a



high gloss topcoat sealant, this piece was created with a method similar to how The Cockettes made their outfits and stages with similar materials to those they would have had access to. It was important to me to add textures, depth, and dimension to my pieces and area where they sit.



Textile art and craft were concepts featured heavily in the Cockettes as well as among other artists I took inspiration

from, like Grayson Perry, so I chose to incorporate this within my final as well.





Full set view



Head vase
Paper clay and glaze
8 x 10 inches



Ceramic side table
Paper clay, acrylic paint, high gloss sealant, super glue
10 x 17 inches



Accent rug
Wool yarn and monk's cloth
18 x 20 inches



Ceramic tin
Paper clay and glaze
5 x 4.5 x 3.5 inches



Trio of sliced fruit jewelry tins
Air dry clay, acrylic paint, high gloss sealant
1 x 5 inches
3.5 x 4.5 inches
2.5 x 4 inches