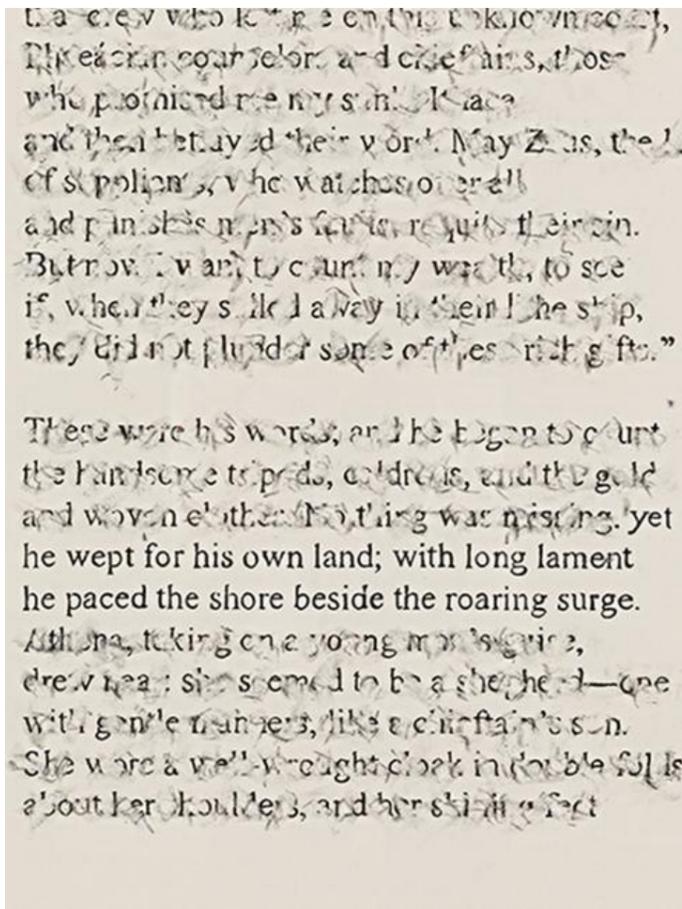


Frist Art Museum Presents Bethany Collins: Evensong

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Bethany Collins. The Odyssey: 1990 / 1851 / 1980 / 2002 / 2000 (detail), 2020. Graphite and toner on Somerset paper, 44 x 30 in. each. Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago. © Bethany Collins. Photo: Evan Jenkins.

The Frist Art Museum presents Bethany Collins: Evensong, an exhibition of multimedia works—including paintings, drawings, prints, an artist's book, and wallpaper—that explores the historic intersection of language and race. Organized by the Frist Art Museum, the exhibition will be on view from June 11 through September 12, 2021.

In her conceptually driven practice, Chicago-based artist Bethany Collins (b. 1984) mines official publications—from dictionaries to newspapers to government reports—to find words or phrases that reflect a cultural ethos, particularly those related to racial and national identities. "The Frist is pleased to be presenting a selection of this increasingly in-demand artist's timely work. After the 2016 presidential election, Collins deepened her study of past texts in an effort to better understand the present great divide," said Frist Art Museum senior curator Katie Delmez. "This exhibition explores the complicated relationship of a person with her homeland."

To create many of the works on view at the Frist, Collins painstakingly reproduced selected texts through various means, such as blind-embossed printing, laser cutting, or tedious handwriting, and then manipulated the final form in some way. "By altering existing documents, Collins critiques the accuracy of the historical record and highlights the suggestive power of words," said Delmez. "Often intentionally hard to read, Collins's creations also offer commentary on the insidious nature of systemic inequities."

A focal point of one gallery at the Frist will be a newly produced artist's book containing 100 iterations of "The Star Spangled Banner," originally written by Francis Scott Key in 1814. Different versions have been written over time to support various political or social causes—from abolition and the Confederacy to temperance and suffrage. The lyrics of each remain visible, but the artist used a laser to cut out the musical notes—the unifying melody across all versions of the song. The many reinterpretations of the national anthem suggest that there are multiple and dissenting ways to express patriotism, as well as dissatisfaction with the status quo. Since 2016, Collins has also examined translations of Homer's epic poem The Odyssey, which recounts the ten-year journey of the warrior Odysseus after the Trojan War. "Collins was especially interested in Book 13 of the ancient text of exile and homecoming, which describes the sense of estrangement and unfamiliarity Odysseus felt on returning to his homeland," said Delmez.

The concept of homeland is a recurring theme in Collins's practice. Born and raised in Montgomery, Alabama, and trained at the University of Alabama and Georgia State University, she has deep ties to the southeastern U.S. Since graduate school, though, she has lived in northern cities such as New York, as well as Chicago where she now resides. Her relationship to the region of her upbringing—and her connection to the country as a whole—is one fraught with conflicting emotions. This is expressed in the screen-printed and flocked wallpaper I cling to you in sunshine and in shade (2020), which features silhouettes of botanical specimens mentioned in a 1965 translation of The Odyssey, as sourced from the Alabama Herbarium Consortium.

In a separate series related to the concept of homelands, blind-embossed prints of classified ads placed by formerly enslaved people looking for lost family members after the Civil War speak beyond the displacement they experienced to the separation of families at the U.S.-Mexico border under the previous administration. "We had originally planned to present Evensong last summer, during the lead-up to the presidential election," said Delmez. "Appropriate as that timing would have been, the historic events of 2020 have made Collins's work arguably even more relevant during this period of division—perhaps unprecedented since the Civil War—when true patriotism and love of country may mean making room for dissent."