

TWO COATS OF PAINT

Award-winning NYC blogazine, primarily about painting



UNCATEGORIZED

Caroline Wells Chandler and the in-between

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Guest Contributor **Loren Britton** / First of all, where are we? Am I dreaming? Do swimmers swim underwater and I am looking at them in an aquarium, where they cascade like a school of fish over head? And their skin, are they human? How bad is their sunburn, do these bois (Chandler's term for the figures) always smile? Or are they putting on a show for me, like the Rockettes?

[Image at top: **Caroline Wells Chandler**, *Freestylin*, 2016, hand-crocheted, assorted wool yarns, installation view, Lord Ludd, Philadelphia.]



Caroline Wells Chandler, *Frostina*, 2016, hand-crocheted, assorted wool yarns, 72 x 92 inches.

As I spend more time with Caroline Wells Chandler's *Freestylin* crocheted works there is a space that is opened up in between me and the bois, I'm seeing myself in them, we are the same size. In the space between myself and these flat physical print-like swimmers, I identify with them, there is a electric transformative moment of comparison; this collapses my self in relation to the dispersion of these swimmers. This mythic opening calls to the in-betweenness of these bois. Everything about them is in frozen transition, their skin shifts color as their arm warmers creep up their arms, their socks change color to create a triangle tip for the toe. Do I see everyone or are some of the bois completely underwater?

When in looking at the work do I name these figures as bodies? Boi-dies? Chandler's re-casting of these figures as severed torsos and legs cuts out the murky private area. When do we name what we see, and what does that naming say about us?



Caroline Wells Chandler, *Beach Bums*, 2016, hand-crocheted, assorted wool yarns.

Looking away from the swimmers for a moment I look around and begin to wonder about the relationship between the *Freestylin*, the *Beach Bums*, and *Big Red (The Bather)*? *The Bums* and *Big Red* have made it out of the "water." They have fully materialized into being, and can make (boi?) friends and wear hats. They are no longer stuck in the murky impossibility of having no middle. They have become something more like you or me, if we were seven feet tall. In **Judith Butler's ideas of becoming** she proposes that we are never fully arrived, we are always on our way to becoming and if we are to look at Chandler's work through this lens we can accept that will never see the whole story, nor is it for us to have. The displacement that is at work here routes us to ideas of the surgically transformed trans* body. Re-routing Chandler's viewer from any ideas of a "normative" body, we encounter figure after figure with top surgery scars as well as veiled rainbow underwear/genitalia.



Caroline Wells Chandler, *Big Red (The Bather)*, 2016, hand-crocheted, assorted wool yarns, 11 x 4 feet.

Turning my attention back to the *Freestylin* swimmers, I register these figures as body and then become aware they they don't have bubbles in their stomach from the ginger ale they just drank like I do. As I envy their manic sticky sweet stasis, these crocheted drawings transform again and become goosebumps over the skin of the gallery wall. As my questions continue to unfold, I lose my relationship to the figure ground: I am the figure, the drawings are the ground, the drawings are the figure, the wall is the ground, the gallery is the figure, art history is the ground.

Taking on *The Bathers* by Paul Cezanne, Chandler has re-invented these figures in a series of figures he describes as "queer bathers" that we see them in the *Freestylin* works for this show. By reinventing these art historical figures, Chandler is queering that art history and queering it specifically in Philadelphia, home of the Liberty Bell.

In this auditory city, Chandler's work rings out that trans* and gender non-conforming bodies are normal. I am struck by the overwhelming feeling of celebration. What does it mean to celebrate a queer body in a homonormative art world? What does it mean to present smiling faces with top surgery scars? Through the presence of these crocheted scars the motif of presence and absence arises. These bois used to have breasts, now they don't. This uncanny presence of Chandler's work and I am called to question any assumptions that I may make about the artists mythology. What do I actually know? And what am I bringing to my read of this work? Do their genitals become the wall? Do these figures live in the white gallery wall and their rainbow bright power has allowed for them to swim, heads and legs above through that passage perfect freestyle socked feet stroke?

Caroline Wells Chandler's work centers a celebratory trans* experience, and this position is infused throughout his exhibition "Beach Bois" at Lord Ludd Gallery.

"**Caroline Wells Chandler: Beach Bois**," Lord Ludd, Philadelphia, PA. Through March 6, 2016. Chandler's work is also on view at the **Spring/Break Art Show** through tomorrow.

About the author: A first-year student in the MFA program at Yale University, Loren Britton is an artist and co-founder of the curatorial project **Improvised Showboat**.