

Helen Maurene Cooper
Artists Statement
Other Waters: the Aquatic Valley

I have spent the last eight years developing bodies of place-based photographs in the city of Chicago where I live. I am the long distance runner of photography, I am invested long game and spend many years developing relationships, connections and community. It is this patience alone that gave me access to west side nail community and south side prom girls. While I center my work thematically and aesthetically around adornment, I use decoration as a foil to discuss class, race and feminism.

In 2015 I began to research communities that fit my interests in adornment and were in locations where I don't have daily access. I knew that I wanted to work with a multi generational female community that had no biological ties. My research led me to the central gulf coast of Florida and the historic Weeki Wachee Mermaid show. Mermaids and mermaid performers are scattered about social media and run the gamut from fan girls to part time aquarium performers. But the still strong Weeki Wachee mermaid show is a staple of old Florida roadside attractions. Performers swim three shows a day, 20 feet under water in an ice-cold spring, wearing mermaid tails.

The Weeki Wachee Mermaid Show is a relic of pre-Disney entertainment, a tourist destination, established by Newton Perry, in 1947. Perry built an underwater theater directly into side of the spring, submerged two airlocks and developed air hoses so swimmers could free-dive 20 feet down. Local young women were trained to stage synchronized swimming routines and acrobatics.

Small town politics has restricted my access to work with current performers on the fair grounds, but I have been able to find many former mermaids still living in the community who would work with me. Over the course of several trips, my access grew, and with help, I was able to build a network of women ranging in age from 21 to 66. Authentic Weeki Wachee mermaids were paramount to the project, as I asked my models execute poses only a trained and seasoned underwater athletes could hold.

Other Waters: the Aquatic Valley, investigates the place-based narrative of roadside America, rural community, fantasy and the reality of the aging process.

Helen Maurene Cooper

Helen Maurene Cooper's practice emphasizes community engagement with her uses of numerous photographic processes. She uses installation and publication to connect and build relationships, explore feminism, entrepreneurship, small economies, the power of adornment, and intimacy.

Since 2008, her work has been focused on place-based exploration, specifically within beauty-centered communities in Chicago. Subjects have included custom made prom dresses, drag queen culture, and the specialty minority-owned nail businesses of Chicago's west side. Most recently, Cooper has exhibited her work about prom culture on Chicago's South Side at the Arts Incubator through the University of Chicago with her collaborator, fashion designer Suzette Opara. Other recent solo exhibitions include Bert Green Fine Art (Chicago), The City Gallery through the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and the Chicago Artists Collection as well as site specific installations at Nalicious and Polished Salons in Chicago. Recent selected group exhibitions include, The Soap Factory (Minneapolis), Girls Club (FT. Lauderdale), Vue: National Contemporary Art Fair (Dublin), Ireland, Claremorris Gallery (Ireland) and Blue Star (San Antonio).

She has received funding for exhibitions through the University of Chicago, and from the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs to complete her upcoming monograph *Paint & Polish, nails on the West Side*. Her work has been reviewed by the Chicago Tribune, New City, International Forum for Contemporary Visual Arts, New York Photo review, and Temporary Art Review.

Helen Maurene Cooper

Resume

Born 1980

Lives and Works in Chicago IL

Education

School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago IL, Master of Fine Arts, Photography May 2007

Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, Bachelor of Arts, Photography and Africa and African Diaspora Studies, May 2003

Solo And Two Person Exhibitions

(** Denotes Baccara, collaboration between Helen Maurene Cooper and Madeleine Bailey)

2016

Other Waters: the Aquatic Valley, Bert Green Fine Art, Chicago IL

Runway to Reality, with Suzette Opara, Washington Park Arts Incubator, Chicago

Polish, Polished nail salon (site specific and commissioned work with custom photographic wallpaper), Chicago IL

2014

#Nailbait, Nailicious Salon (site specific and commissioned work with custom hand drawn wallpaper), Chicago IL

Raiment in Horto, Bert Green Fine Art, Chicago IL

2013

Hard Candy: Stiletto and Square with special guests Naughty Nail'z, Alan Design, Chicago IL

Public Art Billboard, Junk and Jam, Michigan and Van Buren St. Metro, (Department of Cultural Affairs), Chicago IL

Nailed: Handwork, City Gallery at the Water Tower, (Department of Cultural Affairs), Chicago IL

** Thirteen Ways, Chicago Artists' Collation, Chicago, IL

2012

** White Noise Syndrome, Electricity is Magic Gallery, Toronto, ON

2010

Bedazzled: selections from Hoodwink & Hard Candy, Midwives Gallery, Philadelphia PA

Hard Candy, President's Gallery Harold Washington College, Chicago IL

Recent works by, Helen Maurene Cooper and Maria Gaspar, O' Conner Gallery, Dominican University, River Forest, IL

2003

Sister Sister, Senior Thesis Show, Bard College Annandale-On- Hudson, NY

Selected Group Exhibitions

(** Denotes Baccara, collaboration between Helen Maurene Cooper and Madeleine Bailey)

2016

Nails site specific photography installation, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago IL

2015

Terrain Biennial with Sarah Beth Woods, Oak Park IL

Feminism (n.): Plural, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago IL

Esthetic Theory, Girls Club, Ft. Lauderdale, FL

The Party's Over, Soap Factory, Minneapolis MN

2014

Christmas show, Claremorris Gallery, Claremorris Ireland

Vue, National Contemporary Art Fair, Dublin Ireland

Avian Spirits, Brush Wood Center at Ryerson Woods, Deerfield IL

Nails with Sarah Beth Woods at the Feminist Parking Lot, Free Art School UIC, Chicago IL

South Logan Arts Coalition, Milwaukee Avenue Arts festival, Chicago IL

2013

Level Eater 3.5, Co-prosperity Spear, Chicago IL
American Dream: (W)holy Grail, Studio Flats, curated by Tricia Van Eck, Chicago IL
Inventory, Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst IL
**Embody, Design Cloud, Chicago, IL
Faculty Exhibition, Elmhurst College, Elmhurst IL
2012
** Preview Exhibition, Bolt Residents, Chicago Artists' Collation, Chicago, IL
Faculty Exhibition, O'Conner Gallery, Dominican University, River Forest, IL
2011
Romantic Notions, Los Caminos Gallery, St. Louis Mo
New acquisitions, Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst IL
Mixed Messages, Antenna Gallery, New Orleans, LA
Collectors Guide to New Art Photography, curated by Vanessa Kramer, Chelsea Art Museum, NY, NY
Remember Then..., Center for Government and International Studies, Harvard University, Boston, MA.
The Collective, David Weinberg Gallery, Chicago IL
2010
This is Not a Photo Show, Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, TX
Art Chicago, David Weinberg Gallery
Alumni, Noelle Allen, Helen Maurene Cooper Amy Mayfield, & Michael Ratulowski, David Weinberg Gallery, Chicago IL
Trying Them On, Andrea Robbins and Max Becher, Michael Bühler-Rose, Helen Maurene Cooper & Claire Beckett.
Hendershot Gallery, New York, NY
Four Names, Helen Maurene Cooper., Grant Ray, Eric Bessel, Barbara & Barbara Gallery, Chicago IL
2009
December Group Show, Clare Morris Gallery, Clare Morris Ireland
Deep. Down. Dirty, Antenna Gallery, New Orleans LA
Harvest, Heaven Gallery, Chicago IL
Acting 201: An intuitive & Imaginative Exploration of Text, Midwives Gallery, Philadelphia PA
Faking It?, Highland Park Art Center, Hyland Park IL
2008
Protagonist-Contemporary Art from America, Helen Maurene Cooper, Jenny Kendler & Alisha Wessler Claiemorris
Gallery, Clare Morris, Ireland
31 Under 31, Young Women in Art Photography, Third Ward, Brooklyn NY
Faculty Exhibition, President's Gallery, Harold Washington College, Chicago IL
2007
Unnatural, Estudio Tres, Chicago IL
This is Not a Self Portrait, G2, Chicago, IL
Wicked & Wise, Mid-American Print Council, Murray State University, Murray KY
Our/Are, MFA Thesis Show, G2, Chicago, IL
Group Show, New Century Artist Gallery, New York, NY

Additional Education And Independent Study

George Eastman House, Digital Negative and Salt Printing, March 2016
George Eastman House, 35MM Daguerreotype July 2014
George Eastman House, Dry Plate Gelatin, May 2014
France Scully Osterman, Ambrotype and Tintype: Collodian Process, Rochester New York, August 2013
Goethe Institute, Berlin Germany, July 2002
West African Research Center WARK, Dakar Senegal, January 2002
Middlebury College, German Intensive Language School, July 2001

Awards, Honors And Residencies

Individual Artist Grant, Department of Cultural Affairs Chicago, for artist monograph: Paint & Polish, 2016

Individual Artist Grant, Department of Cultural Affairs Chicago, 2014
Stipend and honorarium, for Nailed: Handwork, Department of Cultural Affairs Chicago, 2013
BOLT, artist in residence as the collaborative Baccara with Madeleine Bailey, Chicago Artists' Coalition (with support from the Andy Warhol Foundation), Chicago, IL, 2012-2013
Fulbright Germany, Semi-finalist, Nostalgia & Gender Performance in Turkish Berlin, 2011-12
DAAD, Semi-finalist, Nostalgia & Gender Performance in Turkish Berlin, 2011-12
Chancellor Grant, Semi-finalist, Nostalgia & Gender Performance in Turkish Berlin, 2011-12
Fulbright Germany, Semi-finalist, Nostalgia & Gender Performance in Turkish Berlin, 2010- 2011
DAAD, Semi-finalist, Nostalgia & Gender Performance in Turkish Berlin, 2010- 2011
Institute for Cultural Inquiry Germany, Short List, Nostalgia & Gender Performance in Turkish Berlin, 2010-11
Ox-bow School of Arts, Saugatuck MI, Summer 2010
Harold Arts, Chesterhill OH, Summer 2009
Best In Show, Wicked & Wise, Mid-American Print Council, Murray State University, 2007
Leon Guggenheim Scholarship, 2005-2007
School of the Art Institute of Chicago, partial tuition grant 2005-2007
Jamie Lobar Research Prize, Bard College 2002

Adjunct Lecturer

Lake Forest College, Lake Forest IL, 2014
Introduction to Black and White Photography, Advanced Black and White Photography, Introduction to Digital
Elmhurst College, Elmhurst IL, 2012- Present
Multi Level Digital Photography, Introduction to Black and White Analogue Photography and Modern Art History
(Renaissance- 1975)
Dominican University, River Forest IL 2012- Present
Color Photography
School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago IL, 2007- Present
Continuing Studies, Introduction to Digital Photography, Digital Photography II, Advanced Digital Photography,
Photographic Lighting, Portrait Photography and Photography in Chicago: Historical and Contemporary works since
1950 (Art History).
Photography Department, Color Photography
Harold Washington College, Chicago IL, 2007- 2013
Introduction to Digital Multi Media, Advanced Digital Multi Media, Advanced Projects, and Art Appreciation
Wilber Wright College, Chicago IL, 2008- 2012
Introduction to Black and White Photography and Advanced Photography Projects
Olive-Harvey College, Chicago IL, 2007
Department of Humanities, Art Appreciation

Lectures And Panels

2016
Runway to Reality, in Conversation with Joy Bivins, Dr. Jason LaHood and Camille Morgan, Arts Incubator Chicago IL
Runway to Reality, Artist Talk with Hamza Walker, Arts Incubator Chicago IL
Community and Practice, North Park University, Chicago, IL
Paint & Polish, DePaul University, Chicago, IL
2013
Hard Candy, Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst IL
2010
Current Work, Palo Alto College, San Antonio, TX
AIR lecture, Oxbow, Saugatuck MI
Panel, The case for gender specific exhibitions in fine art photography, Next Art Fair, Chicago IL
Bedazzled, conversation with curator Elizabeth Smith, Midwives Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Hard Candy, Harold Washington College. Chicago IL

Helen Maurene Cooper and Maria Gaspar, O' Conner Gallery, Dominican University, Chicago IL, January 2010

Bibliography

Jill Hopkins on Vocloa. "Runway to Reality" March 24, 2016 <https://soundcloud.com/vocalo/runaway-to-reality>
Jess White on WBEZ's Morning Shift, March 25 2016. <https://www.wbez.org/shows/morning-shift/photographing-prom-culture-on-chicagos-south-side/4fbabf60-fb1c-44cd-a010-804a26bccae9>
Burr Di Mauro, Emilino. "Prom Meets Pageantry" South Side Weekly, April 5 2016
Weinstein, Michael. "Helen Maurene Cooper, Bert Green Fine Art" New City, October 1 2014
Ise, Claudine. "There is Nothing Cozy about MCA's Homebodies" Chicago Tribune, July 17, 2013
Foumberg, Jason. "Chicago's Fingernail Art Scene Has an Extravagant, Unique Style", June 08, 2013
<http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/C-Notes/June-2013/Nail-Art-is-Making-a-Comeback/>
Weinstein, Michael. "Helen Maurene Cooper, City Gallery" New City, July 2, 2013
Jullious, Britt. "Nailed it The history of race and class in Chicago's nail art" June 14, 2013, wbez.org/blogs/britt-jullious/2013-06/nailed-it-unique-history-race-and-class-chicagos-nail-art-107697
Barone, Laura Elizabeth. "Romantic Notions at Los Caminos," Temporary Art Review, November 11, 2012
<http://temporaryartreview.com/romantic-notions-at-los-caminos/>
Bennett, Steven. "Blue Star exhibit explores tension between art, artist, viewer," San Antonio Express-News, September 12, 2010
Morris, Jerid Reed. "Mother Country," San Antonio Current, September 8-14, 2010
Simblist, Noah. "This is Not a Photo Show," Daily Serving, an International Forum for Contemporary Visual Arts September 7, 2010
Weinstein, Michael. "Alumni/ David Weinberg Gallery", New City, March 8, 2010
Weinstein, Michael. "Helen Maurene Cooper/ Harold Washington College," New City, February 1, 2010
EEB. "Trying them on," New York Photo review, http://nyphotoreview.com/NYPR_REVS/NYPR_REV197.html
Weinstein, Michael. "Four Names / Barbara & Barbara," New City, January 25, 2010
Weinberg, Lauren. "Hard Candy, Art & Design" Time Out Chicago, February 8-10, 2010
Colberg, Jorg. Conscientious April 9, 2008 <http://www.jmcolberg.com>
Subjectify, April 8, 2008 <http://www.subjectify.blogspot.com>

Image Publications

Paint & Polish, NAILZ ON THE Westside: monograph by Helen Maurene Cooper, published by Leisure Press, 2016
Naughty Nailz, Topsy Magazine, August 2014
The Sate of Black Subcultures in 2st Century America, Vice.com, Brittney Jullious, July 13, 2014.
Collector's Guide to New Art Photography vol.2, Humble Arts, 2011
Daily Candy, Open Your Eyes to Humble Arts, March 12, 2010
Album Cover, Odawas, Into the Blue Depth, ODAWAS, Jagjaguwar Records, Winter 2009
Take the Handel, The Romance Issue, "Handful of Grail" p. 59-60, Fall 2008
Dirty Pop, The Body Issue, featured artist, South Side from, Birds of Appetite, and Summer 2007

Curation

Co-founder and director of Azimuth Projects
Azimuth Projects is nomadic curatorial project that partners with cutting edge Chicago chefs to bring foodie and art audiences together. Azimuthchicago.com
2014
Ordinance: Disposition of the Parts: Erin Chlaghmo and Allison Reimus at 2704 N. Whipple St. in Conjunction with The Graft Project at the Comfort Station, Logan Square, Chicago
Gaze, co –curated with Frank Marcurio, Ivan Lozano and Rob Bondgren with public program by David Getsy Swath, Patty Carroll and Jordan Martins with Hugh Amano, at 2704 N. Whipple Chicago
Saturated Landscape, Madeleine Bailey and Peter Cardone with Chicago Detours, at 2704 N. Whipple
2013
Almost Real, James Bullecci and Allison Grant with Naughty Nail'z, at 2704 N. Whipple Chicago

Gild, Jenn Wilson and Matthew Schlebum with Naughty Nail'z, at 2704 N. Whipple, Chicago
Flay, Kellie Romany and Noelle Allen, at 2704 N. Whipple, Chicago

2012

Black Mountain Side, Takshi Moro and Josh Reams at 2704 N. Whipple, Chicago

Punishment and Protest, Jason Dunda and Jaclyn Jakunski at 2704 N. Whipple, Chicago

Second Day Scenery, Stacia Yeapains and Morgan Sims at 2704 N. Whipple, Chicago

Spliced, moderated artist talk with Melika Bass and Jesse McLean at Apple Lincoln Park, Chicago

All Things Magical, The Alliance of Pentaphilic Curators, Isak Applin & Carl Barratta and Michael Garcia.

Sunday Dinner, lecture series Collaboration of Love, Sarah and Joseph Belknap. Sunday Dinner, lecture series

2011

Eco Ecology, The Endangered Series Print Project and Nina Barnett. Sunday Dinner lecture series

Destination Unknown, Alan Strathmann & Hui-Min Tsen, and Regina Mamou & Matt Griffin. Sunday Dinner lecture series

At Play, Mara Baker, Scott Jarrett, Brian McNeerney and Robin Juna, Innertran 650 w. Randolph, Chicago IL

Horizon Rising, Nina Barrett, Stephen Eichorn and Takeshi Moro, Point Bridge 217 N. Jefferson, Chicago IL

Outside Coming In, Carl Baratta & Oli Watt, Isak Applin, Jill Frank, Jennifer Ray, Regina Mamou, Tim Bergstam, Jennifer Wilson, Chris Bardley, Jaclyn Jakunski and Casy McGonagle. Hungryman Gallery, Chicago IL

2008

"68/08," Political, Social and Cultural Connections, co-curated by Helen Maurene Cooper and James Britt Jr., Roger Brown Study Collection, Chicago IL