Whitewashing: Skin and Clay: Video & Photographic Series, 2019-20

Whitewashing: Clay and Skin is a photographic, performance, and video series that explores both the notion of whiteness and the performance of whiteness within historical and contemporary European and US Ceramics. The concept that there is a race of people who are white emerged within the European imagination during the Renaissance, continued to develop throughout the colonial period, and is still pervasive within contemporary thought. This series traces whiteness as a social construct within the European and US canon of representational ceramics.

In his nationally acclaimed book, Between the World and Me, Ta-Nehisi Coates, a preeminent writer on the state of race relations within the US, refers to a group of Dreamers who have painted themselves white. This statement can be interpreted both literally and figuratively.

Upon unearthing marble statues of classical antiquity, Renaissance archeologists were intrigued with what they perceived as white statuary, despite evidence that it was once heavily covered in polychrome. Throughout the following centuries, marble and porcelain replicas were left entirely white, as were many contemporary figurative works. This centuries-long whitewashing of representational art was synonymous with skin-whitening trends popularized within the Elizabethan Era and remaining prominent for centuries after. As the concept of purity, and its association with whiteness, emerged during the Enlightenment, so did the race among European nations for the recipe for porcelain. The European and US aristocracy, and military, along with representations of the Madonna and Child, were painted white in life and art, in order to reveal their leisure class status and to justify colonialist activities.