

# CHRIS SHARP

## Mark A. Rodriguez

*Forever*

07/20/24 - 09/07/24

Chris Sharp Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of New Mexico-based artist, Mark A. Rodriguez.

After a four year hiatus from exhibiting in LA, Rodriguez will present an entirely new body of work which revolves around the postage stamp, specifically the Forever Stamp. Introduced into circulation in 2007 in the US, the Forever Stamp possesses the unique quality of never expiring. It can always be used as a first class, one ounce stamp regardless of when it was purchased.

For this body of work, Rodriguez has created “frames” for the stamps, which exist somewhere between painting and sculpture. Fashioned out of sculptamold and then painted with layers of acrylic paint, the frames-cum-paintings playfully read like small, multicolored cumuluses, with uneven surfaces, as if they were organic forms or slabs of outsized cottage cheese. Approximately twenty times the size of the stamp, the artworks all but eclipse the stamps, reducing them to details, and almost become the subject of the work.

This is but one of the many contradictions or paradoxes discreetly woven into the dense conceptual fabric of these pieces, making them hard to even begin to fathom. Postal stamps in and of themselves bring into play a dizzying host of associations: Americana (the Liberty Bell, nature painting, celebrated public figures, holidays, government programs); the singular and the multiple; the ready made; value; image production; collecting, in all of its forms from the most pedestrian (philately) to the most soi-disant rarefied (art). Indeed, every feint or apparent extension of discursive territory that these works claim seems to complicate if not cancel out the one preceding it. For example, value. The original use value of the stamp (which is allegedly, hubristically eternal— the vanity of America, alas) is canceled out by its symbolic transformation into a work of art, where its value is multiplied and elevated into an abstraction. And yet this elevation necessarily entails the negation of the stamp’s philatelic value as a collectible, as the stamps are hinged within the artwork, traditionally conflating the stamp’s value as a result.

Their conceptual complexity aside, the objects themselves are weirdly beautiful; their formal attributes evoking whole histories of Los Angeles sculpture from Mike Kelley to Ken Price. The bright and nuanced palettes of the artwork would seem to be inspired by the palettes in the stamps, but they do not always correspond, and yet this decision does not seem aleatory. Despite the formal playfulness of the work, no decision seems arbitrary here— not even the title of the exhibition, Forever, whose deadpan, elegiac, and hyperbolic undertone is hard to ignore.

*Mark A. Rodriguez (b. 1982, Chicago, IL) lives and works in northern New Mexico. A selection of solo exhibitions include: Great Recession Drawings, Paul Soto, Los Angeles, 2020; Account, Paul Soto, Los Angeles, 2019; Earth Day AF, Park View, Los Angeles, 2016; Search. Connect. Move. Review, 5 Car Garage, Los Angeles, 2015; Cup or Lovers, Park View, Los Angeles, 2015; Exclusive Power Night, metro pcs, Los Angeles, 2014; ESQ., Gridspace, New York, 2014; 18 Double Rolls, Night Gallery, Los Angeles, 2013. Some recent publications include: After All is Said and Done: Taping the Grateful Dead 1965-1995. New York, Anthology Editions: 2022; Idea Art For Kids. Belgium, Zolo Press: 2020.*