

## MAGGIE CROWLEY | *Comb* | January 22 - March 4, 2023

On January 22nd, Devening Projects proudly opens the first solo show at the gallery of Chicago artist Maggie Crowley. An opening reception takes place from 3 to 5pm on Sunday; the exhibition continues until March 4th.

*Comb* is a great title for this show. A verb and a noun, the word suggests both an untangling and the means to do so. It suggests a desire to order and search; in another sense, to maintain and metabolize. Crowley approaches this idea by allowing the viewer to “comb through” a series of delicately produced and carefully delivered silk paintings, welded metal armatures and site-specific interventions. Doing so, one encounters the artist’s reflections on closely observed fragments of life events and the physical manifestations of objects, observations and memories. Disparate things such as clothing, nail clippers, a receipt and a chainsaw chain are braided together, pointing at importance or at the very least hinting at some invisible system. As one looks more closely, the images, objects and intense shifts in scale suggest moments of significance in Crowley’s life. Sometimes woven into their material support or just elusive enough to disappear, these visual notes—once discovered and identified—are the means through which one begins to sort, interpret and ultimately arrive at the most compelling destination. This process may be familiar to anyone in the company of an artwork, but with Crowley’s work, there is little or no hierarchy guiding the process. The viewer takes cues from the artist and weaves together something that grants access to not only Crowley’s physical and psychic experience, but also the means to discover their own.

In *Comb*, Crowley’s materials and construction methods reflect her history and the legacy of her upbringing. Skillful labor and pride of hand work is seen in the painted silk veils and welded steel supports, often interlocked to function as a single work. The raw metal against the delicate silk brings a heightened awareness to the properties of both. Similarly, dissonance in the imagery—sometimes yardwork, sometimes a ballpoint pen—dissolves any linear read of the work. Raised by a hairdresser and a welder, Crowley is sensitive to the intimate process of craft and care for material. As she says in her exhibition statement:  
*“...the language of cosmetology and iron work inform my materials, imagery and hanging systems for painting. A silk substrate recalls the cape worn at the hair salon as well as the theatrical performance of the hairdresser. Silk also behaves like human hair. Trade materials such as angle iron, threaded rods and other ferrous metals are arc welded to create non-traditional frames. This combination speaks to my research interest in bodily intelligence and the complexities between vocation and intellectualism.”*

*Comb* should not be seen as a distillation of an idea; too many wonderfully eccentric components are distributed within and throughout the exhibition to suggest anything resolute. What can be said with certainty is that the experience of sifting through and discovering bits and pieces in the work moves the audience to consider how their own life and history can inform a strong legacy.

Maggie Crowley (b. 1987, Ottawa, Illinois) received her M.F.A. from the University of Chicago in 2013, her M.A. from Eastern Illinois University in 2011 and her B.S. in Education from Illinois State University in 2009. Crowley has exhibited in numerous venues including the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, the Hyde Park Art Center, Area: Lugar de Proyectos in Caguas, Puerto Rico, and the Cue Foundation in New York City. In 2020 and 2022 Crowley was awarded individual artist grants from the Illinois Arts Council. In 2021 Crowley was awarded a fully funded residency at the Ox-Bow School of Art and Artists in Saugatuck, Michigan. In 2022 she was a recipient of the Jarislowsky Foundation’s Emerging Artists award with a fully funded residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in Banff, Canada. Since 2016, Crowley has co-directed Produce Model Gallery in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago.