



vanessa german

citizen artist, **or**, the good citizen, **or**, an illustrated history of the United States of America, **or**, i am not safe here, am i? **or**, the physical, psychological analysis of the people's living history of these _____ States of America, **or**, how i got over, **or**, the African Guide to Dancing on Rivers, **or**, 21st Century tactical survival guide for -----people and the people who love them, **or**, how to keep from being killed on a city street corner, **or**, i made the future by hand, **or**, a catalog of treasures from the library of tar baby, **or**, making medicine, **or**, i am not safe here, am i? **or**, tactical, material survival in the age of _____, **or**, please do not shoot me if i show up on your doorstep after a car accident looking for some help, **or**, what i have done instead of disappearing, **or**, sometimes i want to kill you, **or**, make nice!, **or**, how come that man in Detroit shot and killed that ----- woman, and all she did was be -----, **or**, i am not safe here, am i? **or**, sometimes i die inside and then i am resurrected, **or**, leon russell, **or**, oscar grant, **or**, god forbid, **or**, _____, **or**, ----- romance, **or**, _____, **or**, everything, everything, everything, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.



photo by brian cohen



photos by heather mull



sometimes when i am in my studio, i see my ancestors. four or five of them, women and men simultaneously, or something not like that at all. a mix of water and human beings, i'm not certain, but certainly worthy of being prayed to, and listened to. which i do. when i am in my studio surrounded by the deep and vast everything, that is my heart and my imagination and the axis of these thoughts in constant rotation with the present world, the past world and the future world. i am making, not just these figures, but i am making my world safer, i am opening up a vein of healing to relieve some of the pressure that the past places on the present. i am praying into the future. might i dare say, yes, making the future, telling the past who and what it was and then divining a route forward that bears open the breadth of liberty for all human souls. and then sometimes when i am making i am grieving too. i am wrestling with the living weight of sorrow, the hand-me-down sorrows that have come from my mother's mind and her mothers, mother's minds. and souls. and hearts too. i am making it possible for myself to be myself. i am settling debts with my own sorrow and i am standing up in the continued reckoning of instinct. i am playing and loving. and listening to the voices that are fingers pointing in my soul. and i am praying also. i am fitting the puzzle pieces into new puzzles, with new doors.

"citizen artist"; thinking about who we are, what we have to give and how this makes up the world we live in. betraying every previous boundary. citizen, artist, citizen—home, product, work, love, community—love. and then the creative wherewithal to make new places where the human being, the earth, the community might thrive in full excellence, justice and peace.

— vanessa german, citizen artist

ConceptArt
Gallery

vanessa german : citizen artist

january 9 - february 8, 2014

What really excites us (and we suspect others) about Vanessa German's work is its potent resonance. She creates uniquely personal and highly poetic assemblage sculptures. Vanessa is able to do this without any of the sentimentalism that might undermine the force of her statement. Her sculptures speak of the African American experience in America, urban life, racial profiling and the myth of the American melting pot. These sculptures operate on so many levels, both overt and subconscious that seeing her work is an illuminating experience. This exhibition is one of our most exciting in over 40 years as a gallery and we are thrilled to be able to share it with Pittsburgh.

We've been watching Vanessa from afar for many years now. Her work is a powerful force emanating from her adopted neighborhood of Homewood. When our colleague Graham Shearing included one of her Power Figure sculptures in his memorable Kunstkammer during our 40th Anniversary Exhibition in 2012, he planted a seed that has grown into this one-woman exhibition.

It was a revelation for us to see her working space and the accumulation of stuff that she later synthesizes into these highly resonant works. Each of the figures included in this exhibition embodies some element of past, present, and future. The antique

(white) dolls that become morphed into powerful (black) totems get dressed in bits and pieces of the past. Detritus, flotsam and jetsam of another time are carefully collected and stored away in color-sorted, object-specific Tupperware boxes until inspiration hits. She creates skirts of matchbooks and shells, of oil cans and teacups. Breastplates are created out of collections of nails and locks and hairpieces are mounted with birds and ships. Added to this, she creates prayer beads with bits and pieces of fabric and invites the children that congregate at her Art House to make their own small rolls, filling them with their prayers and dreams for the future.

Vanessa German manages to mystically balance poetry and subject matter to create work that explores African American history, the current state of race relations, and what one Citizen Artist can do to call attention to the state of her distressed neighborhood. We are grateful for the opportunity to exhibit this work in her hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Sam Berkovitz and Alison Brand Oehler

Concept Art Gallery



detail: The Derivative Negress Once Again Makes a Mockable,
Public Spectacle of Her Grief (page 2)

about vanessa's sculptures:

the figures are made of tar, old baby-doll parts, wood, metal stakes, plaster gauze, wood glue, cowrie shells, black pigment, rhinestone, newspaper, plaster and cloth.



detail: Kitchen Stove Power Figure, (For Beauty and Resilience) (page 4)

about homewood beads:

homewood beads, which are present in many of her sculptures, are made of cloth, newspaper, twine, rag rugs and the seeds that fall from the trees in the Homewood district of Pittsburgh.

Vanessa German's Pittsburgh neighborhood of Homewood is both the material and substance of her art. It is the community whose words inspire her powerful performances, and whose cast-off relics form the language of her copiously embellished sculptures. These enigmatic child-figures, literally and figuratively rebuilt from the fragments of other children's dolls, are at once seers, protectors, gatherers and keepers of the family histories. They are where German's activism and poetry come together, the poetry of words and the poetry of things. Drawing upon the richness of black experience, her work simultaneously engages a cross-cultural tradition of encrusted bodies and objects, whose ritual functions point to the cycles of birth, death and rebirth. In the interwoven strands of her work, Vanessa German has gathered around her an army of children, both real and of her own making, who collectively stand up for kindness, dignity, and for justice.

Pavel Zoubok

Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York



detail: The White Naphtha Soap, or, Contemporary Lessons In Shape Shifting (page 12)

the sculptures of vanessa german

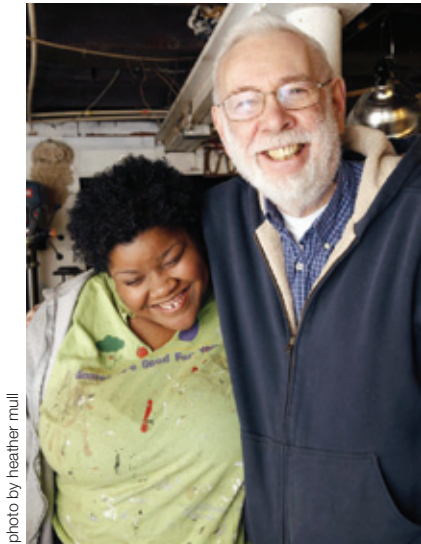


photo by heather mull

When assessing a work of art, virtually anyone begins by attempting to relate it to what they know. What is it like? Into what category does it fit? So it is with Vanessa German's work.

With her arresting sculptures, it is easy to place them in the category of art produced by an African American woman. After all, nearly all are black female dolls. And that categorization might be reinforced should you hear her describe sometimes stomach churning encounters with local police or her pain over seemingly nightly killings of the young in her Homewood, Pennsylvania

neighborhood, where block after block of houses and apartments are boarded up or no longer there at all. Sadly, Homewood is repeated in far too many urban settings in the U.S. In all of these places, inchoate anger is a seething constant in the face of prejudice that pervasively devalues the lives of African Americans. I've heard her explain the source of one doll that my wife and I particularly like, a piece that memorialized the hundreds of thousands of sickened or dead Africans dumped overboard like garbage from centuries of slave ships sailing westward to the Americas.

Yes, the African American heritage of Vanessa's pieces is inescapable. Yet there is much more. Her dolls stand foursquare, erect, feet apart, and most are lavishly bedecked

with exuberant garb that commonly comprise collections of trinkets or advertising tins that she seeks out wherever she goes. Whatever these encrustations represent--armor against a brutal world or quiet comment on rampant commercialization—they layer her figures with an over the top visual richness. Most of her dolls stand astride support elements ranging from crates to tricycles to animal figures, often one atop another. They are vivid, bold, and assertive; they will not be ignored.

I feel in these depictions a determination to deal with her environment and exert control. In Vanessa, the agony so prevalent in her environment has engendered not despair or disillusion, but engagement and hope. Two years ago she wrote, and printed, and distributed posters with the simple words, "Stop Shooting, We Love You," now seen in many parts of Pittsburgh. And near her house she has started an Art House where the local children flock to find color, life and love, and encouragement.

Her sculptures carry with them all of this context...an immersion in reality coupled with commitment and action to influence what she can. Yes, there is the angst of the African American experience of past and present in her work. But much more. A dominant feature of her sculpture is the eyes of every piece: all are intense, looking forward and far away into the distance, or could it be, into the future. Her work is full of ambiguities. And this is an important part of their power. There is no didacticism; the viewer must bring him or herself to the experience.

Robert Brandege

Retired Consultant, Writer, Passionate Art Collector & Designer of Furniture



You Bring Out the Savage in Me #1

model ship, old keys, silk quilt, twine, wire, homewood beads, hope, the liberty of flight, the weightless bones of sorrow, the sensation of rising up, radio flyer toy car—made in china, and bird salt shaker.





The Derivative Negress Once Again Makes a Mockable, Public Spectacle of Her Grief

skate board, keys, buttons, twine, wire, large sea shells, enamel wreath, old doll parts from the bombed out doll factories in germany circa 1860-1930, cell phones, homewood beads, old jewelry, something about the innate value—the popular notions on—the value of the blackness, the black body, a story about the holocaust of black children, salt and pepper shaker birds, how it seems like we were just expendable, made for death, made to be dying on the street corner, like, isn't this just obvious, like, isn't this what the black body is for, and then, how much asserting must i do, when is it done?



Sentinel First Aid Kit, or, Going to the Altar of the Soul and Coming Back Up With Freedom for Your Everyday Mind

old drawer from a table not living anymore, 100-year-old black clothespin bell, Virgin Mary holy water glass jar, ceramic figure of little black girl, sentinel first aid kit tin, tack box, image of Delia the Slave, farm house pulley, cloth, twine, the holiness of deep observation, homewood beads, music box to play: *Let It Be*, toy tea set, toy gun in a cage, spoons for the scooping up of love, bird salt and pepper shakers, black pigment, the reality that you must go on, nails, red padlocks.





Kitchen Stove Power Figure,
(For Beauty and Resilience)

small toy kitchen stove, homewood beads, toy noise maker, carved wood pig, mirror, sweet anger, lion, cloth, twine, white chalk figure, padlocks, wooden box, New Orleans Mammy bell, bird salt and pepper shaker.



A Souvenir of Our Trip

baby high chair, decorative wood watermelon slice, model ship, “velvet” tobacco tins, cloth, twine, wood, glue, keys, cowries, black pigment, metal stakes, 3rd generation colonial african figure made in China: first made of wood in Africa in the 19th Century to represent the figure of the new man to the land, second made of wood in the 20th Century, in Africa, inspired by the original carvings, but made in kind of a street factory scenario, with carvers making lots of figures for tourist trade, to look like genuine old african colonial figure—but not, they’ve added a chemical to age the sculpture, and then buried the figure in the ground to make it look, “authentic” and “found.” i “found” this colonial figure made of molded resin in a strip mall, it is made in China.





The Shipment

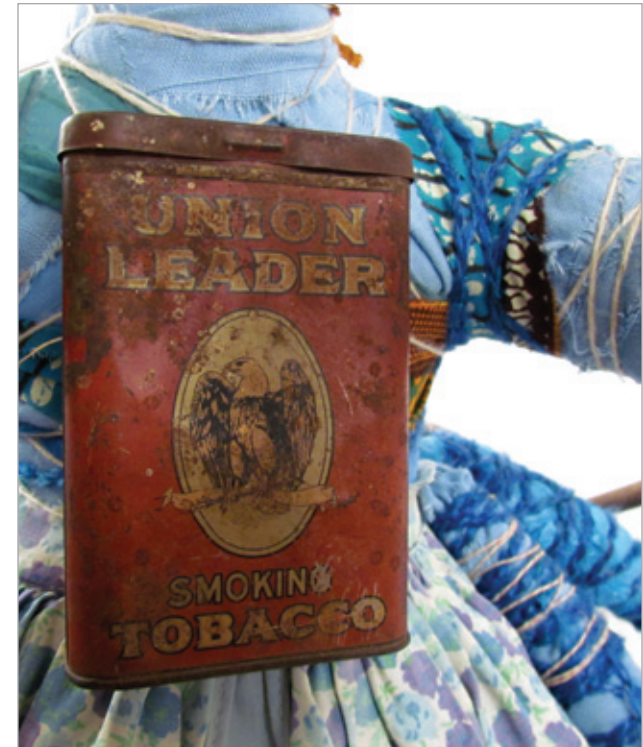
ward mackey biscuit box, shelf sitting zebra, decorative wood watermelon slice, homewood beads, globe clock, hand mirror, love the shape of togetherness, rage, sorrow blue as deep, deep, water, true blue tobacco tin, bird salt and pepper shaker, enamel wreath, gold ceramic hand, cobalt blue glass bottles, Res-Q-Pack inflatable life preserver, mirror, garden blue bird, old porcelain rider on horse figure from the bombed out german doll factories, cell phones, power supplies and love.



Power Figure in Matchbooks and Blues, or,
How to Keep From Setting Fire to Yourself or
a Thing

wood vanity top, carter's blue black ink jar, hand mirror,
matchbooks, justifiable rage, nails, blue beads, cowrie
shells, keys, twine, wire, cloth, internalized rage, sorrow,
black beauty book, 3 porcelain figurines, metal bird salt
and pepper shakers.





Snowdrift

snow drift shortening container, wood, american flag, old doll parts from bombed out doll factories in Germany, homewood beads, old scooter, and the way it feels to not really belong, but going on in anyway, love. union leader smokin' tobacco tin, blue bird atop the head. a blues for the minds, imaginations, and bodies or little black girls, this quote from the Jim DeRogatis Village Voice article on R. Kelly: DeRogatis speaks frankly and explicitly about the many disturbing charges against Kelly and says, ultimately, "The saddest fact I've learned is nobody matters less to our society than young black women. Nobody."



Parade to the Baptism

homewood beads, wood from my old homewood house, wood from some houses that are no longer there, just the ghosts of places that once were. crossing police tape to get things off the ground. leather zebra, hand mirror, skateboard, model ship, bird salt and pepper shaker, forgiveness and reconciliation and reparation all at the same time, yes, yes, i know, porcelain Marie Antoinette figurine, old silk quilt, old paint brush good for paint, but also good for sweeping small broken things up, the ever-present sensation of being African, rotary phone dialing disc, keys, antique lace, sorrow, the shape of sorrow in a skirt, and hope.





Rooms

wooden kitchen cutting board, metal skate, decorative shelf sitting native, carved wooden elephant, spice cupboard, retired key fobs from the bedford springs hotel, french and italian key chains from the 1960s and 1970s, the sense that someone's riding in my soul, that there is travel to be done within one's soul, and how this isn't even up to me. the truth of the boat ride. the truth of the cargo, of being cargo, the remnants of "the shipment" in my soul, porcelain "rooms" sign, Virgin Mary baptismal font, hand mirror, silver coffee creamer, blue turkish evil eye beads, the idea the past is inescapable, there is journeying to be done, redemption to be had, liberty to be claimed in the adventurous pursuit of, toy ship.



Tar Baby Music Box

victorian feather christmas tree base with music box, metal bird salt and pepper shaker, mexican wood cat, hand mirror, woman's face lamp base, homewood beads, toy cars, shells, cloth, twine, small found wood African Mask, mop head as petticoat, found vintage silk flower petals, keys, buttons, old jewelry, sucrets container, hope, beauty even though they say it is ugly, and love.





The White Naphtha Soap, or, Contemporary Lessons In Shape Shifting

proctor and gamble white naphtha soap box—for shipment, cell phones, vanity mirror, hammer, old german doll parts from the bombed out factories, keys, cowrie shells, beads, buttons, homewood beads, old jewelry, column bases from front porches that are no longer there, carved wood elephant, the way that when i was a little girl the only thing that i wanted to be more than an artist was—white, and how i didn't even know why i wanted to be white, i just did, and short of bleaching myself, i did everything in my power to take on the available markers of whiteness, precious porcelain french-like figurines, a “piano baby,” equity superbell repeater alarm clock, white star chalk in the box—for chalking it up, for chalk marks around the body, for facials, for inducing fever, toy guns, old jewelry, power switches, rage, yes, there is always the idea that violence is just a second or two away from any benign moment, toy flint lock gun, watermelon bowl stuffers, and baby shoes.



Going on a Trip, or, A Blues for Mental Illness
 Born of the Evening News, or, The Derivative
 Negress Takes a Dive

model ship in blue, old beaded hand bag coming undone and rusty, child's chair from the old georgia pencil company, beads, old and new jewelry, a slew of tiny cheap things made in china and then spray painted blue, keys, cowrie shells, edgeworth tobacco tin, royal blue clothing dye, clothes pins, cloth, twine, old beaded ball gown, cell phones, homewood beads, love in the shape of not giving up, even though i've wanted to, time and time again, very small violin for to play the swan song, blue bottles, pad locks, wire, space for to hold the pain to be eased by the sight of this, to be made to be soothed.





Play Things

black face bottle opener, the shape of getting on to go on, the power of the creative spirit reflective in the liberating hairstyles of young black women, racism, the pain of living with injustice and being always expected to just smile, and take things, and make nice, and act like since we all know that it exists—it's just ok, porcelain figurines, skate, carved wood foot as ashtray, propellor, black box turned upside down, american flag made into tiny doll clothes, cowrie shells, mop head as petticoat, button christmas ornaments as hair adornments, liberty through everyday creative expression, love. love. love and more love.



Cocomalt, or, Delicious and Nutritious
found carved wood African head, cocomalt tin.



HOMEWOOD & VANESSA & ART & LOVE by Jennifer Nagle Myers

Part 1: The Place

Vanessa's house stands out like a shrine. On the avenue of abandoned buildings, her house shrieks "I am a home!" It radiates a frequency of color, art and imagination that spreads to the Art House next door. I have reached Vanessa's world. If we could become infected by this contagion of love, we might all be healed.

The yard is full of signs: "Stop Shooting ♥♥♥ We Love You," "No Guns – Keep Summer Fun," and the simple and powerful "Trayvon." I am reminded, I remember, I am awake. She printed thousands of these last summer and they caught like wildfire in the front windows, yards, and doorsteps of an entire city. Now I'm standing on Love Front Porch, a place so famous it has its own website and ad campaign. A Contemporary Power Figure holds the porch, watching the street. I smile: how funny and generous to see this sculpture here when she could be so many other places including The Smithsonian Museum of Art, Pavel Zoubok Gallery in New York City, Sudaram Gallery in Beijing, China, on tour in Europe, or in the home of a wealthy art collector. I realize she is needed here. She keeps lookout on an avenue where children shout "Miss Vanessa! Miss Vanessa!"; cars go too slow and too fast; grandmother's patrol; children get on and off the school bus; and a dealer speaks nonsense to zombies on warm nights. The sculpture stands as Eternal Witness without once blinking her eyes. She is a declaration and a guard-dog, a symphony and a sister. She says a 24/7/365 prayer for Hamilton Avenue to suddenly be covered in pink rose petals and jazz.

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The first place Vanessa has ever loved is Homewood. I am certain there is no other place or people more inspiring to her in this world. The place is a revolving juxtaposition. Rachel Maddow called it "one of America's most violent neighborhoods," while past residents include Andrew Carnegie, Billy Strayhorn, Italian, Irish, and German immigrants, and the progressive new mayor of Pittsburgh. It is a historic neighborhood, with a rich legacy of diversity. In the 1950s, in an equally historic neighborhood called The Hill District, the city displaced 8,000 people to build a civic arena. Many moved to Homewood, attracted by the moderate rent prices, and the demographics shifted quickly. With more brown faces than white, the white faces moved away. Shortly after, while Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the second story of his Memphis motel balcony, a single shot was fired into his right cheek. It broke his jaw, neck and several vertebrae while travelling down his spinal cord. His jugular vein was severed and his necktie ripped completely off his shirt. Riots broke out across Homewood; a fuse had exploded in people's hearts. Finally the pain was too much. A whole business district collapsed. Crack arrived in a hurry. Gangs followed in a wave of sadness, disease and death. Revitalization took root, homes were rebuilt and businesses re-established. People did not lose heart. This resiliency was love-in-action, the work of a deep and profound community. But the scars are quickly visible, and Homewood has experienced trauma that is more commonly associated with a warzone than an American neighborhood.

Vanessa answers her door pushing two small dogs out of the way and soon we are in her studio, downstairs in the basement. My eyes widen on the thousands of objects orbiting her solar system. A short list: German dolls from a bombed-out factory; watches from all over the world; seashells big and small; nails; cans of tar; brushes; hundreds of locks; thousands of keys; a whole wall of white dolls stacked on top of each other, their feet sticking out; wood; plaster; hair; toy guns of all make and model; beads including prayer beads, handmade beads, found beads, discovered beads, sent beads, beloved beads, forgotten beads, swaddle beads; spoons; American flags; matchboxes; rusty tins; scales; mirrors; handmade African figurines ; and a box of White King Soap.

These are the planets, and Vanessa is the sun. They orbit until falling into poetic formation as the next Contemporary Power Figure. They are labeled as such because they embody the same benefits that African Power Figures have done for centuries throughout Congo and Nigeria: to provide assistance with specific personal or communal challenges, such as protecting the sick against misfortune, healing the sick or wounded, and even bringing justice to a criminal. Figures are carved and imbued with magical powers that are added as "power ingredients." These can include plants, feathers, rocks, bones, ash, and other organic materials and the combination used is what creates the power. Vanessa is our modern-day Nganga – our ritual specialist – who brings these forms to us so that we may experience a healing and a transformation. She updates this practice by including the objects of our post-colonial history and present-day lives: from carved African figures to tins of Snow White Skin Cream to electrical outlets from the hardware store.

The figures radiate outwards from the interior structure of a white doll-turned-tar baby. Gravity is consistently defied as these women stand on the most incongruous of supports: an alligator on a skateboard; an eagle on a miniature box; a blue horse on a red level on a rusty old scale; all manners of uncertainty and wonder. The women float and are grounded – at home in both worlds – balanced on a single brown toe and carrying the weight of the world. I think of Vanessa, reminded that you cannot separate one from the other. She is, herself, a living and breathing Contemporary Power Figure. On this day, 10 figures are in various stages of being "dressed" and assembled. These will soon be part of a solo exhibition. "My favorite part is seeing the face emerge," Vanessa says. She layers them with tar and works away until they become real. Lips are shells and eyes lately have been dotted with diamonds. Dark pupils now full of light. Everything here is symbolic and even the air resembles metaphor. These figures answer to the present and the future by planting themselves firmly – nearly burying themselves completely – with the weight of an angry, soulful, and nearly unbelievable past.

Part 2: The Exhibition

In New York for Vanessa's solo exhibition at Pavel Zoubok Gallery, I stand before twenty Contemporary Power Figures. They want to speak and I am there to listen. Our conversation is about their journey, not the 370 miles from Pittsburgh to New York, but the longest and most dangerous passage they took before their face and soon after a whole body emerged in Vanessa's hands. In one voice I hear: "We are the recovered souls."

I slowly move among them, gathering their stories in my notebook like fruit in a basket. I hear about the birth and the death, the hangings, the suicides. I am told that the captor was not always male. I am confronted with my own reflection. It is white. There is a woman who was thrown overboard naked. Her sister jumped in and they sunk together to a dark Atlantic floor. A woman escaped kidnapping by riding off on a lion's back. A miracle returned life to a baby when the mother's salty tears turned to fresh water and quenched his thirst. As I listen, the timeline escalates between pre-history and this moment. Some of these women never returned, some are her neighbors, one is Vanessa herself.

Reality Check To Call Police Use This Phone, 2013 is a mixed media assemblage of a woman from Homewood trying to get through to her police officer. The phone is disconnected, a black cord dangles. In Homewood your calls don't always get answered. It's generally better to call a friend living in another zip code, have them dial in the emergency for you, Vanessa mentioned to me once. She said it as naturally as saying the sky is blue, but you could sense a deep anger boiling. The inequity that eats away at a community treated that way is corrosive and wants naturally to turn to rust and rage. It is work to find love when there is so little justice. It is work to live in a city continually rated as "most livable" when your neighbors are being shot and your school system is failing its most beautiful children each year. It is work to see Jordan Miles beat so many times his face changes shape at the hands of three white police officers, and still carry love.

At the woman with the ship balanced on her head, I kneel. I am praying or receiving a prayer. The three-masted vessel rests, weightlessly, on top of a beautiful black bun of hair. Two disturbing white porcelain heads bloom from the left and right of her forehead. A watch has stopped keeping time where her heart would be. Her left hand holds an iron, her right hand a mass of dead birds. Her dress is made of everything blue: guns, electrical sockets, buttons, keys, rope, swaddle beads, locks, horses, fear, sadness, confusion, beauty, uncertainty, power, the blues. She stands on an old container that houses a carved African figure, an ancient naked Power Figure. It sits in shadow, while above it towers its contemporary younger sister. I glance at the title: *Self Portrait of The Artist with Physicalized Soul*, 2013.

I am unsteady. We have all been here before.

The past is present. Look me in the eye.



photo by Heather Mull

*Reality Check To Call Police
Use This Phone*

2013

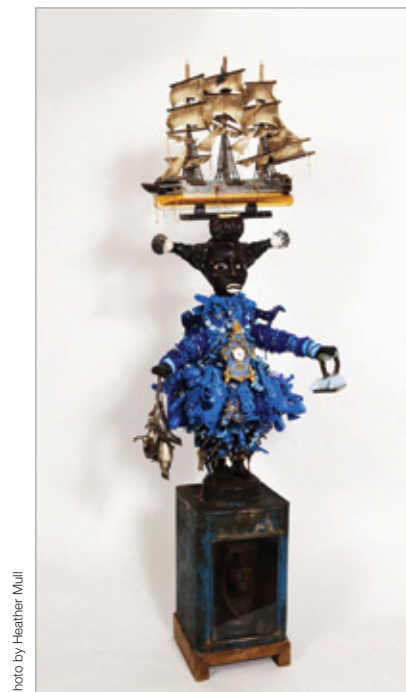


photo by Heather Mull

*Self Portrait of The Artist
with Physicalized Soul*

2013

Part 3: The Message

Back in Pittsburgh, I go see Vanessa perform one morning in a church.

The topic is bravery. It is November 15th, 2013.

Whatever denomination becomes confiscated. We are in the Church of Vanessa now.

“Anything and everything that I know about bravery, I only know through love.”

“Love is the only creative, redemptive, transformative power in the universe.”

“Bad is determined by what you do, not by where you live.”

And suddenly, like thunder follows lightning, Dr. King enters the church.

The two souls sound together as she pulls from his sermon “Loving Your Enemies” delivered at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama on the 17th of November 1957. 56 years earlier, nearly to the day. In one voice they say: “Someday, somewhere, somehow, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chains of hate and evil and violence in this universe and love is the only way you can do that.”

This is the radical definition of love. It is all-things. It says: I know what has happened. Yes, I’m informed. I know you were the enemy. You maybe still are. I remember that day. I saw that blood. I stood at that grave. I was shot. I was the one killed. That was my own grave. And I am here to remind you: Love Your Enemies, still.

Vanessa decided long ago to live this way. She did it as a way to stay alive. As defiance to the norm; courage to the oppressed; freedom from fear. As song to sorrow; dance to depression; antidote to racism and white supremacy.

If we adults neglect her consistent message, the children do not. They show up every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday for a seat at the magnificent Art House. In this space they belong. They have paintbrushes and imagination and Vanessa says: “Yes. I believe in You. Go now, and paint. Go now, and draw. Go now, and sing. My belief in you won’t quit.”



Her art is her prayer. We should never underestimate this revolutionary possibility she sets before us, translated into so many exquisite forms: as sculpture; spoken word opera; community activist; and as woman fully alive.

If it is hard work to love your enemy, let it be more difficult to hate him. “There is nothing more tragic than to see an individual whose heart is filled with hate,” continues Dr. King in that same sermon. “For the person who hates, the good becomes bad and the bad becomes good. For the person who hates, the true becomes false and the false becomes true. That’s what hate does. You can’t see right.”

Let’s see right for the children who are waiting on us. They pass the time watching their paintings dry slowly in the cold, winter sun. They know how to love. Why don’t we?

Jennifer Nagle Myers is an interdisciplinary artist living and working in Pittsburgh, PA. Current work includes acting as Director for Pittsburgh Performance Actions; small sculptural work; printmaking; and as ongoing protest against fracking the county parks. Her work has been shown in galleries and museums across the US. She received her MFA from the University of Iowa, and her BA from Hampshire College.



vanessa german was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1976. She was raised in Los Angeles, California and Loveland, Ohio. She is a largely self-taught artist; the middle of five children, her mother, Sandra German, is a fiber artist, and her father is retired. She is based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's historic Homewood neighborhood. vanessa is an actress, playwright, sculptor, performer and educator. She has pioneered a performance style called Spoken Word Opera; a dynamic hybrid of spoken word poetry infused with the theatrical elements of Opera. She has written and performed several evening length Spoken Word Operas including, "root," "testify," and "fire" and been featured performer at The Vineyard Playhouse, The Three Rivers Arts Festival, and The August Wilson Center for African American Culture. She's been a featured performer at the International Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa, Pop TECH, Harvard, MIT, TED Women, and TED Education. German's sculptural work has been shown and exhibited in galleries and museums nationwide and is in several public and private collections including, The Progressive Collection, The Weisman Foundation, the American Visionary Arts Museum and the David C. Driskell Center. German is also the founder of Love Front Porch and Homewood's Art House, and the STOP SHOOTING, WE LOVE YOU yard signs. The Huffington Post noted her, "One of 30 contemporary art makers under 40 that you should know about." Her work is presently touring the nation in the Driskell Center's African American Art 1950-Present.

above detail: Tar Baby Music Box (page 11)

front cover: detail: Snowdrift (page 8)

back cover, top to bottom:

detail: Playthings (page 14)

detail: Parade to the Baptism (page 9)

detail: Power Figure in Matchbooks and Blues, or, How to Keep From Setting Fire to Yourself or a Thing (page 7)

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1031 S. Braddock Avenue • Pittsburgh, PA 15218 • 412.242.9200