



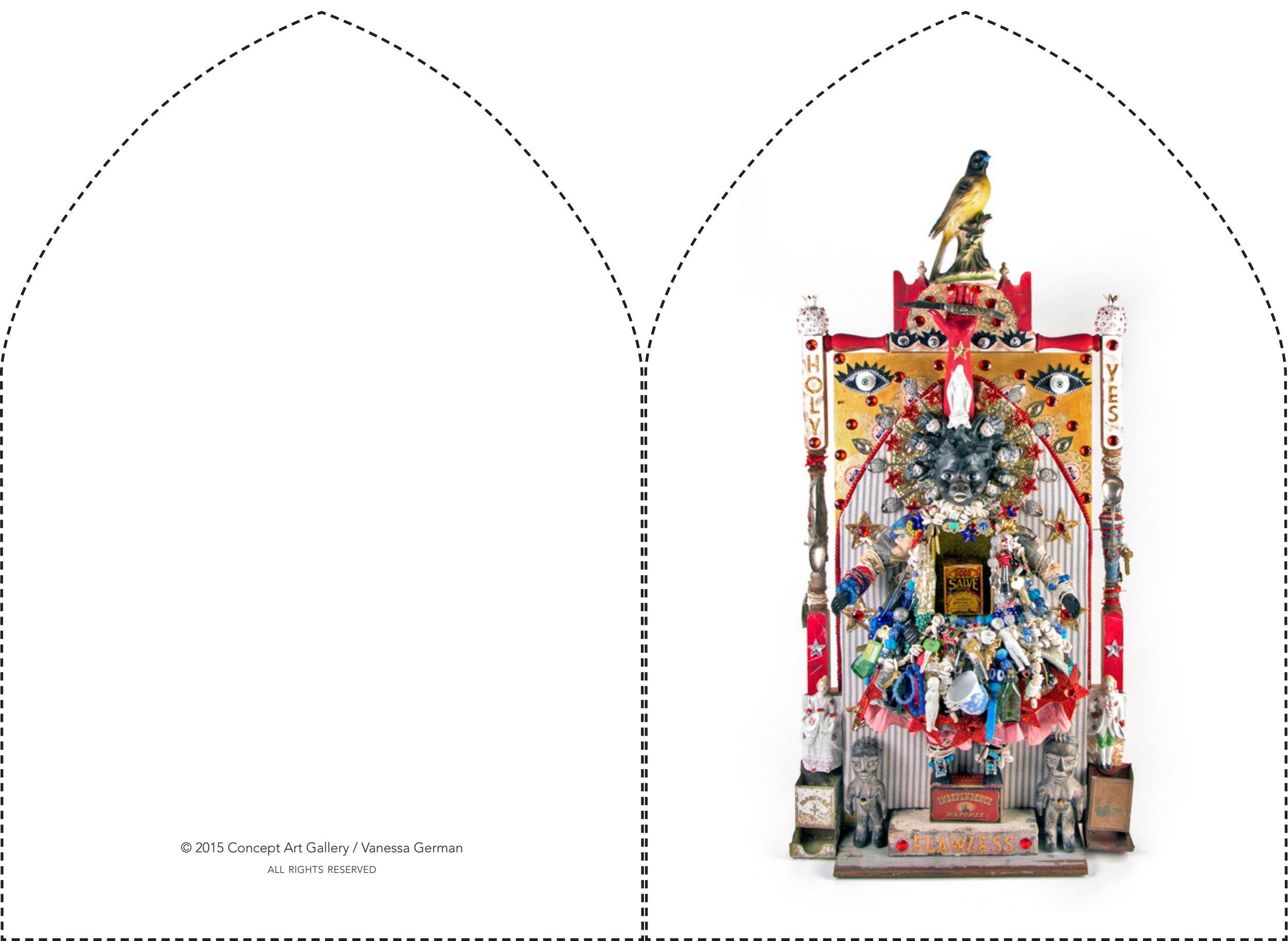
THE
VANESSA
ORDINARY
GERMAN
SACRED

THE
VANESSA
ORDINARY
GERMAN
SACRED

poems

paintings

sculptures



© 2015 Concept Art Gallery / Vanessa German
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Vanessa German's
Ordinary Sacred: the Power of Icons

The first words that come to mind upon seeing Vanessa German's *Ordinary Sacred: Black Madonna*, icon, object, collage, glitter, bottle cap, prayer.

The Christian tradition of icon making was a central debate for the early churches. Those who followed the commandment about "graven images" literally objected to the emerging tradition of depicting Jesus, Mary, and the various saints in art. It was particularly troubling to them that religious icons of these folk were used in liturgical and prayer practices, to a point that the objet d'art themselves were being considered spiritual or sacred objects. Some argued that Jesus Christ, the physical incarnation of God, was himself an "image" of the sacred, a physical representation of God, the Mystery, the Unseeable.

The argument that images, that art, can be sacred, rests on the notion that material objects, human made things, can contain or project the unseeable, untouchable holiness of Love, Mercy, Justice, and Peace. Part of the reasoning behind this idea is that icons were made with this specific intention, that the hands of the makers were painting, assembling, and carving with devotion, prayer, and openness to God. There is even a tradition within iconography called "acheiropoieta" which means "not made by (human) hands." This tradition attributed partial

creation of icons to heavenly inspiration, similar to the way God infused holy texts with meaning, God could also sanctify, or make sacred, holy objects assembled in our world by human hands. These objects then took their place in the world to exist as a focal point for the prayer and reflection of the looker.

Vanessa German's icons emerge from cereal boxes, ironing boards, torn envelopes, and skateboards. Vanessa has said that her making is an act of prayer, an act of love, an answer to the violence she has witnessed and the trauma that sets in as a result of that witnessing. These are ordinary objects, things we throw away after they are immediately useful to us. Rather than seeing them as trash, or objects that are simply functional, Vanessa revitalizes, re-purposes, resurrects, redeems these objects. This de-contextualizes these everyday objects, and they become radical encounters with beauty. Vanessa awakens us to the sacred opportunity we have as humans, not just to make artifacts, but to shape, to impress upon the material world that inexpressible, mysterious, divine reality that is love. Just as Vanessa can turn a cereal box into a Madonna, love can turn pain and trauma into beauty. Vanessa's work isn't just a call to love, it's a reminder, a sign, an altar, an icon, a sign of the fact of love and what love can do.

— R/B Mertz, poet

**THE
VANESSA
ORDINARY
GERMAN
SACRED**

this is my language and it is cancer center foreclosure
grief 17 demolished houses dumpsters full of her sacred
things and thieves breaking in through the front door
64,000 missing black women in America. 243 kidnapped
black girls bodies like old dollar bills passed for smokes or
cattle herded or just a fuck nothing new here. this here is
a year of not dying. paintings prayers grammatically loose
archives of 3 murders 5 hour vigil over dead bodies love
fervent as a Tuesday afternoon at the ARThouse.love big
as holding space to die in. and rage. and the blues. and
2more demolished houses. cruel women with their hands
and sneers on my mother's dying body.mommy giving up
the ghost. 3 hospitals. black lives matter. 74.murders. all
of the ways yo feet are the most graceful tools of survival
and. 5 funerals.7. guns.8. protests.1tiara. no one talks about
her. more than.art.redemption through line. kitchen table
resurrections. the language yo soul has for a new justice
of body and breath and these are consonants speaking in
tongues through my fingertips.

this here is a year of not dying.



december 21 • 2014
11am

i never
actually
believed
you. when
you told
me that
my wings
were
chains.
i was
already
flying.

december 18 • 2014
8:39 am

we'd been discussing. the corpse road in west africa. the route of grieving. how for the funeral. the hole would already be dug. and the greiving would be public and would take up the entire walking road route. with the body. the wailing. stomping. singing. the grieving. the language you cry in. all there. in the dirt and in the trees in the bird's mouths. making a living fog around the mourners. she said. the grieving would not begin at the gate. this she says is important for so many reasons. you are connected to your dead. your ancestors are not this illusory trivial idea. they are the all-the-ways. they speak mother tongue the language of your soul. the sphere of connection is all-the-ways. you sing the language you cry in at birth and at death. and everything knows this. and then she goes on to speak about the unmarked graves at cotts field plantation in south carolina. and the heyward plantations cemeteries— which were everywhere cuz heyward owned half of the original slave population. Half. back to the unmarked graves. folks buried there into the late 70's. the flattened coffin shaped depressions in a copse of trees. No road. No gate. No place to walk it or sing the connecting songs because. the plantation was a ruined world. this she says in response to the young man's body being found on singer place. in the car in the parking lot. on the sidewalk. on the black top. raising the lantern we said. the grief is stuck between the walls. is loose in the rice fields. no corpse road. no binding songs. but she says. everyone. must be sung for. there are so many middle passages. so many bones to sing for. requiem.



august 30 • 2014

the last time i saw tina. she spent an awkward and inordinate amount of time trying to console me after the death of my mother. she hugged me. and held me close. a minute longer than i had the comfort for-- because i didn't know what to say to her. she warmed me with stories for memories for comfort for the heart when words would not do. she said. i heard your mom was really special. and then. she kept on. encouraged me. i was still. kind of awed. and speechless. and then there is the fact that she only ever loved. which is what i saw the witness of. such tenderness and love. and sweetness. is it overstated? when in memory i go back to see her-- she is always kind. and helpful. and smiling. and proud of the people she loved. so then now. how to make sense of this. 3 men. guns. terror. horror. and how. what prayer to pray? and what then if. her love. if all of the love. that she was. and generated and moved in on a daily basis. all of the ordinary every day. baby. love. mama love. family love that she inhaled and exhaled. leaves from her earthly body and rises up into the air around us. into the very atmosphere that she was gunned down in. and makes of itself an instrument of destruction. an instrument of wise and prophetic destruction moving through the air. and decimating the same spirit of _____ and hate and cruelty that gave rise to the very weapons that were aimed against her. yes. what if that love itself. becomes.

a new. and another kind of force all together what if it left. her body. her heart. her eyes. and it rose up to join forces with all of the other lost love- and then what if this cascade. this cavalcade of love. as though an air bound army platoon. with body and being all of LOVE takes up. takes up around us. a massive new force. a massive overtaking of spirit-- with its force like a giant weather system. and then everywhere it goes. people stop what they are doing. and they are taken up with a sob. they are shaken with a weeping. everyone. gas station attendants. college professors. wal'i's, actors, doctors. DC cab drivers. a slow start. and then a collective grieving. a spontaneous and infectious eruption of great care. as in the lending of arms and hands for comfort. as in the spontaneous street corner formations of choirs. humming. singing whatever songs are known. and then this weather-like system of love. will continue to move through every living thing. and then. there will come the mass making of amends. and artists will be tasked with being grand conduits. and everyone will take wednesdays and fridays off work to take dance lessons for the collective dance production of a new and global cross disciplinary work of art called --- forgiveness --- and it will take a lot out of us. and the love will continue to move. on and on and through us. and trayvon will be remembered. and all of the nameless will be given tribute and. and and and=



december 9 • 2014

you are not alone.
i am awake with you.
and this love is
everywhere you are we
are whole and broken
simultaneously we are
blue and the oldest thing
there ever was and brand
new at the same time.
profoundly vulnerable.

december 5 • 2014

go in ferocious. make the eye contact.
make the eye contact and tell every
sister you see that you Love her.
say,i love you.find every embrace
and meet it like yo skin to the fire
because it is. wear yo best dress. if you
have a tiara wear it in honor of Tearia
Whitehead. and when the hecklers ask
you why you are protesting. ask you
why you are laying down in the street.
tell them. that you have come to do a
violence to the _____ lie. tell them that
you have come to have at the Lie with
every justice in yo skin. be there with
the justice in yo body like a new rage
at the summertime club. i am finding
my love and my rage right up next
to eachother. my tears and my fists
kissing climbing down the ladder in
my own throat.



July 8 • 2014



for how when we were in Louisiana. we walked down bourbon street. and first thing we saw was. a man knock a man out. cold clocked to the head. then down on the ground. the drink and the bodies. the sloshing and the stupefied feet looking for a place to land. and then in the morning to a plantation. sugar cane. sweet. gold. sugar. blood. diabetes runs like jesse owens through my family. slave cabins. and cheap 16 and 17 year old girls from the slave market. because the woman. yes. woman. who ran the plantation. couldn't afford to buy enough slaves to work the cane to brown sugar so she bought 5 girls and bred them for. 20 or so years. and their descendants lived in the retrofitted slave cabins until 1977. today. they live across the street from the plantation. in little metal siding houses. still working cane. sugar. and the mississippi river.

it runs in my family. and then back to bourbon street the next night. i watched a man turn himself into a unicorn on stage. he danced to that song. wrecking ball. and literally. donned the costume of a unicorn. after the show i asked him. did you dream that. you would become a unicorn on stage? very seriously he shook his head and said. no. i. am. a. unicorn. and then we left bourbon street. because it was so crowded. and i wondered how to go about it. if someone had a gun on that street. this is my ptsd showing its face. and would we all go. how fast could we run. if someone started shooting. because. alcohol and late june heat sometimes make people think that they ought to just go out into the street and kill each other. i told the sisters. i'm going back to the hotel. i don't like the way this feels. and how then in the morning. i saw that one hour after we left the street that is literally named after sloshing. 9 people were shot. and i watched the security camera footage. and how people ran screaming. and how somehow you've got to reckon this with your system. the 21st century. technology. i phones and shelter-in-place orders. how from the plantation to the airplane to the Mississippi River to the street made for sloshing to the hotel to the street again to St. Louis #1 where we were warned off of the queens gravesite because it was right next to the projects. i was like. what were we supposed to be afraid of.. the projects or the people who live in the projects. every where we went there was a crime scene. crime scene waiting to happen. me wondering where do we go if some=

november 18 • 2014



started painting these during those too long days sitting waiting with my ma at the cancer center. the way that that kind of waiting taps yo bone marrow n makes yo legs withered for the dance. and i spent a lot of time thinking about healing. thinking about the inside of the inside of the inside. and then there is how a healing is a doing. an utterly complicit happening. a creativity. a quiet place between yes and yes and the certain,

exacting no. and how one ought not get in the way of the thing. 4 black madonnas on handmade sugarcane paper from louisiana. patience. courage. hope. clarity. may peace be with you. If things start to feel small and closing in on you. may you be reminded of the stars. the grand and intimate connections between us all. carbon. hydrogen. circulatory systems. and love. the great and unutterable humbling.



november 6 • 2014

the way art is survival.the way
that sometimes only love.
imagination.and laughing make
sense.the way I'd be.positively
under.the jail. without.art. on
the tv. news. breaking shit all the
time. how mommy taught us to
making living prescriptions. for
soul-sustainability. not requesting
government permission to be
as vibrantly, expansively human
as the miraculous constellation
of our cells (interstellar) can
muster. loving you through the
sorrow. grief and crazy. loving
you. holding you in the best,
(indescribably) holy places.
forgiveness abounds. courage
stands up in the spine and
hands. ordinaryness is divine
mastery. loving the one.of us.



september 4 • 2014

one glove. black madonna. for Whitney. who i still cry for. and miss. like last night when that song. didn't know my own strength. came on. and how me and my _____. were reminiscing upon. the depths of my own naivety. and how i was a different person before. i was attacked. several years ago. and what that does to your _____. how even after i got to the place where i was good. to leave the house again. and thought that i was. over it. here. now. i keep finding. these rooms. filled with all the ways i use to be. seemingly seamless doorways. in the walls of my soul. etched of a million little incremental internal shifts. and then. parts of my own smile start to look. foreign. when i look back at pictures. this is what i am thinking about today. if you've ever been attacked. assaulted. gone through— not only the violation and the reckoning. but the return of your own. decisive. sweetness. this black madonna is for us. because. perhaps. we didn't know. our own strength. perhaps. there was a time. when. we doubted everything. and fought back anyway. Whitney didn't _____. she's still singing and rising. (and. lastly this. be a ferocious friend. decide when. you will. rise up. and bare your teeth and take out yo' jack-knife for your _____.) today. we get the black madonna for our souls.



december 26 • 2014

last week. when you'd left for work. and i was in your house all by myself. with the boxes and the cat and your wi-fi signal. i used yo internet to play videos of my favorite songs and then. i. danced around yo house like someone wit a julliard degree street dancin for food money or something kin to an excorcism for trauma. and i danced everywhere. in yo kitchenette with the dishwasher going on in the background. thru that little sliver tooth of a hallway that is mostly just the space between the front door and the bathroom where i danced in yo resurfaced bath tub channeling kyle Abraham bill t jones Carmen de la and that Haitian voodoo queen/

elementary school teacher we always just called. marie. and then there is the matter of yo wood floors. all that old knotty oak and how the bad spots was replaced by new milled calloused-free easy going oak. but ain't no foolin' nobody cuz the patches of new look like islands of new skin on a sea of scars. All this to say. i have danced everywhere in yo loft apartment. bedroom bathroom kitchen countertops sofa chair. all of that open space. i became a tunnel of light. a chariot with size DD breasts. swinging. every incarnation available to me. i danced _____'s breast cancer away. i danced requiem for Eric. n Tamir. n 64,000 missin dark girls no one kin even seem to get even moderately worked up about. myself included. why? and then more dancin. .breathless n defying gravity. i danced mean and some nasty and even held my leg over my head like a turn signal to the gods. cuz. i kin do that. all the while dancing. dancing. i held in the hot fire of my minds eye. my lgbtq brothas sisters and gravity defying beings from Uganda and Nigeria. in my minds eye. i held them like. a still born baby brought back from the dead. this information is for you to know. that yo place might be feelin different. might still be sizzling when you wake up in the morning from moon snatching foriegn tongue speaking dreams filled with weightless flight n perfect comebacks to sneer faced mean women. i just wanted you to know. should you get light headed n loose waisted at the kitchen counter. know. that the vibrations you feel up the fronts of yo thighs. are no figments of yo imagination. they are just remnants of my dance.

July 3 • 2014

this for when. i forget what
courage is. this for. how it be
when. i. don't know. which
eyes to look at my own
self with. this for when. the
naysayers click their clacking
and go on caterwauling in
parade. this. for when. the
sorrow. stumps my own
mouth. this for when. i forget.
the water that i come from.the
breath which breeds me the
soul from which i am a splint
of fire. this. for deep. deep.
courage. the size. of two
universes put together. may it
be with you and of you. as you
call it up.i call it up.





June 5 • 2014

it has been a fruitless endeavor to try to contain my hands from the drawing and painting of the black madonna i have gone to the wall with her to the table with her she is possessing me so do not be surprised to see that i have even drawn and painted her on the organic lemonade container on the envelope of the sewer bill on 5 pairs of old old lady church gloves. here. for you. this look at these hand painted odes this way that love is all at once about possession and surrender and that everything that the soul needs is found here

november 25 • 2014

I love your fires. your rage is as gorgeous as 1976. i am not confused. i watched a father's body lay in the street for 4 hours in front of one of my favorite places in the world. i watched the police open a dead man's hand with a stick and then laff at a porn pic. if i had a flamethrower. and then there is the way that i keep trying to describe to my own self the sound of a body falling dead weight to a porch floor. and how come no one can explain this. i am not a safe place for you to put your old cobwebby racism. go on with yourself. mistake not the volcano of love for anything other than clarity. when i see fires. i smile and thank god that someone has the courage to burn_____ down on behalf of the Future. i am all for new growth.





June 29 • 2014

i wish that at the cancer center they had therapy arts like they have therapy dogs walking around to make soft and tender with people. i wish they had therapy arts like. maybe you know. kyle abraham could come and walk around the waiting rooms. which are the football fields of waiting rooms at these cancer centers. and then he could walk up to people and say. would you like a dance today. and people could say oh. yes. please. dance. for me today. and kyle could say. yes ma'am and what word/way would you like me to dance for you today. and then the person could say. please dance for me a healing for my bitter broken heart that is still angry as shards of broken glass to my husbands inattentions and hard touchings. and then kyle would deep breath these words in and then dance them about the person in a silence. with some eye contact. only just dancing it as a way of surrender. dancing it as an elevation from the body a submitting of everything earthly

and eternal. and maybe if not kyle. then a dancer from Ailey. or that woman who danced for the New York Ballet-- or was it the american ballet theater. that woman who when she danced. even her husband said. i do not recognize her. i know that she is the woman that i married. but when she goes on stage to dance she disappears and emerges simultaneously she is not ever as i've known her. she is not my wife. she is god's she is all her body. all celestial. everything recognizable and unrecognizable simultaneously. and this woman could come and dance too. just walking around taking dance requests. for how it is when you can get lost inside of someones art. for how it is like when sean jones plays the trumpet and the trumpet and the man disappear and all that is available is that which has no language only floats and jives around your face like colors. investing and impregnating all of your organs. what if art was always a part of healing. and not a strange thing that drs. responded to by saying. well. that hasn't been studied. or. the research is still out. i believe in the power of art. like how it is to listen to jesyce norman singing the french national anthem. how it is that when i watch some artists i watch their souls singing their souls reaching up and out and through them but not just their souls something else internal from the innards of the most original of all things. like light and darkness and plant leaves. and water. i want art therapy artists to walk around the cancer center. and make themselves of the moment a transcendent and transformative air. there. and inside the breath and organs of all with the eyes to see to feel to breathe it and be there inside of it with them. i lift this up.=



april 27 • 2014

love you dearly. loving you
with all the days. loving you
with all the breath. loving
you with all the hands all
the poems all the parks all
the sunroofs all the tulips
all the birthday cakes all the
cures all the dance parties
all the choirs all the hot
air balloons all the cups of
tea all the neighborhood
gardens all the hair styles
all the hopelessness all
the loveliness all the new
tennis shoes all the bones
all the hairs all the teeth all
the marrow all the nervous
system all the circulatory
system all the aorta all the
jugular all the fingers all
the toes all the irises all the
all the all the all the all the
all the all the loving loving
loving you dearly

.....

Black lives matter.
just.not.as much.
as yours. So. Every
Time That i tell You
that i love you, i am
taking a bite out
of the lie of your
worthlessness. i am
raging war with the
evil mouths and
vicious hands that
come after you.
Every Time That
i tell you that i love
you— i am breaking
the lie of your
worthlessness with
my soul.





may 14 • 2014

i am praying for you in the soft room of my heart where the beat gets its rhythm where the pulse gets its marching orders i am seeing and beseeching on your behalf i have laid out the rug and cleaned the table i go to the wall for you my palms are up my song is up my soul is two gold hands and they are up up up up for you we have woven a new cloth my love no matter of ill or sour shall make its way into your grin marrow or dancing shoes the naysayers have nothing to say the mean spirited are busy watching the afternoon clouds gather anticipating their own storm.but you.my love. you are .for .in .about. with .steeped. toe to cheek in the suite sweet prayer song so soulful it is the very sound of your own voice rescuing a sea of thank you's from the garbage pail.i am so grateful that you are here and alive and tho the day weighs molasses like in your marrow even the laughing children on the block are singing your praises.starling.darling.no thing will keep you from the miracle of your own ferociousness. from the miracle and might of your lion-like intentions.love rages and rages on and on



June 10 • 2014

and then there will be a cure for cancer. for all cancers. and all of the cancer centers from here to New Zealand and back again will be retrofitted into multi-level roller skating rinks with clear glass elevators and l.e.d. moodlighting that responds to the beat of the music. and there will be kissing booths in these 3, 4, 5, story roller rinks. kissing booths and taco stands. and intentionally warped floors that wing you around in thrills and spills into soft walls and the entire building will be powered by laughter and love the same way that ekg's work the building will transfer all of the heat and joy and laughter and furious giddiness into electricity. and so much giddiness and joy will be had that this roller

rink will be able to sell power back to the grid and then 400 coal fired power plants will go off line. and no one will miss those jobs. because the men and women who work in them will have many, many cancer centers to retrofit into not only roller rinks but new century elementary schools that are mostly just art and design and imagination centers with roller rinks in them and then scientists will discover that the power of learning through doing dancing creating singing writing and playing is just as powerful as laughing and roller skating so these new schools will simultaneously be the source of both their own power and a reinvigorated lawn bowling craze since there will be so much power mined from everyday creativity, learning, love and roller skating--- there go all of those natural gas wells and well pads--- useless save for this new lawn bowling craze which requires lots of hands on and hands in the soil to remediate the land with love and mushrooms and then there will be all those individually decorated lawn bowling accessories so no one will miss those fracking jobs because they'll be too busy taking their time and loving their children and roller skating and retrofitting and planting flowers and trees and rethinking ideas like borders guns anti depressants prisons and of course standardized testing. and all of this is thanks. to the waves of innovation inspired by a cancer-free humanity. this is my prayer. for you and for you and for you and for us=

This book was published in
conjunction with:

Vanessa German: The Ordinary Sacred

Presented by Concept Art Gallery
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
January 29 – February 28, 2015

Special thanks to:
Kaela Speicher, photography
Martha Wasik Graphic Arts Inc, design

