



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 21, 2016

Media Only: Taryn Bunger, (860) 838-4081
taryn.bunger@wadsworthatheneum.org

“Vanessa German / MATRIX 174” to Confront Social Issues of Race and Violence Beginning June 9 at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art will feature Pittsburgh artist Vanessa German’s exhibition “i come to do a violence to the lie” in the 174th installation of its ongoing MATRIX contemporary art program, from June 9 – Sept. 4, 2016.

Vanessa German lives in the Homewood section of Pittsburgh, where crime, drugs, and gun violence continually wreak havoc on the historically African-American urban community, and where many residents have personal connections to the victims of violence. In response to her life experiences, German creates inspiring sculptures in the tradition of African “Nkisi” power figures, divine protective objects thickly encrusted with nails, beads, shells, and found objects that evoke suits of armor. Housing mystical forces to eradicate evil, German’s enigmatic contemporary variations of the ritualistic sculptures embody a performative, spiritual, and affirming function. One such sculpture, German’s “Tar Baby on Pig with ‘N’” formed from tar, hand-wrought beads, cloth, spark plugs and other found objects, entered the Wadsworth Atheneum’s permanent collection in 2014 as a gift of Linda Cheverton Wick.

“It is a privilege to present Vanessa German’s timely and socially conscious exhibition as part of the MATRIX program,” says the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art Patricia Hickson. “Vanessa is a truly multi-dimensional artist whose work will meaningfully engage not only museum visitors, but the larger Hartford community.”

MATRIX 174 will transform the Bunce Gallery into an underground excavation site, with strings of bare light bulbs minimally illuminating a powerful female army of approximately 30 of German’s black figurative sculptures installed in military formation on an earthen floor.

The presentation was inspired by the 1974 discovery of an estimated 7,000 terra cotta warriors and horses buried near the 2,000 year-old tomb of Chinese Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (died 210 B.C.). Like the army of the self-proclaimed first Emperor of Qin, German's female soldiers display remarkable individuality and perform specific protective and support roles through the rites of passage from birth, to death and rebirth. German's soldiers confront the agents of racism, violence, and police brutality. In her signature prose, she describes them as "an army of healers. an army of weepers. An army of protectors. Armed and dangerous upon the lie." She defines their role in "a sustained accumulation of destruction to the vicious and debilitating compendium of hate, lies, and murder; the shapeshifting nature of the weapons aimed against my very flesh and soul. (i do not have to tell you that ___ black lives matter.)"

Artist Residency

German will complement her MATRIX 174 exhibition with an artist residency, which beginning in May will take her into Hartford Public Schools to work closely with students, encouraging creativity through dynamic art workshops in both assemblies and classroom settings. In July she will return to Hartford, where she finds parallels to her own Homewood neighborhood in terms of racism and gun violence, for summer sessions with community groups including True Colors, Real Art Ways' Park Art, Billings Forge Community Works, and the Wadsworth Atheneum's Summer Community Studio.

Public Programs

An exhibition opening reception on June 8 will feature a performance of German's signature style of spoken word opera, a hybrid of spoken word poetry combining the theatrical elements of hip hop, African storytelling and opera. Tickets are \$15/\$10 for museum members, and will be available for purchase online at www.thewadsworth.org. German will join Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art, for a gallery talk June 10 at noon. Gallery talks are free with museum admission and meet by the Museum Shop. Juneteenth Family Day: Power and Identity on June 11 from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. will explore MATRIX 174 and invite visitors to share a private moment with the artist in the performative interaction "Eye Contact is an Act of Love," followed by a procession of poetry, music and dance. Museum admission is free during Juneteenth Family Day activities.

Exhibition Credit

The MATRIX program is generously supported in part by Jeffrey G. Marsted and Marcia Reid Marsted, Carol LeWitt in honor of Andrea Miller-Keller, as well as the current and founding members of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's Contemporary Coalition. Funding for MATRIX 174 is also generously provided by Francis H. Williams and Keris A. Salmon, Pavel Zoubok, and the Ostrow family. Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign and the Department of Economic and Community Development, which also receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

About MATRIX

Founded in 1975, the Wadsworth Atheneum's MATRIX series of changing exhibitions of contemporary art was a groundbreaking program, the first of its kind to display the newest work by national and international contemporary artists in dialogue with the storied collections and exhibitions of a largely traditional encyclopedic museum. Since its first exhibition, MATRIX has shown over 1,000 works of art by more than 170 artists. For many distinguished artists—including Richard Tuttle, Neil Jenney, Jon Borofsky, Daniel Buren, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Nancy Spero, Louise Lawler, Barbara Kruger, Gerhard Richter, Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems and Glenn Ligon—their MATRIX show at the Wadsworth Atheneum was their first solo museum exhibition in the United States.

About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Founded in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is the oldest continuously-operating public art museum in the United States. The museum's nearly 50,000 works of art span 5,000 years, from Greek and Roman antiquities to the first museum collection of American contemporary art. The Wadsworth Atheneum's five connected buildings—representing architectural styles from Gothic Revival to modern International Style—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn. Hours: Wednesday – Friday: 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Admission: \$0 – 15; discounts for members, students and seniors. Free “happy hour” admission Wednesday – Sunday, 4 – 5 p.m. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

###