i come to do
i come to do
and i have a
i have my ha
i have a hatc
i am on whe
i am a rage
so let me in
let me in at t
with my gun
i am a cannon
and i have se
let loose the
safe here.

And I believe
available in

VANESSA GER

VANESSA GERMAN

JUNE 9 – SEPTEMBER 4, 2016
WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART
i come to do a violence to the lie

and i have a gun and i have my lips

i have hands and i have a claw tooth hammer

i have a hatchet and i have my nails

i am on wheels and i rage the rage

so let me in at it

let me in at the lie

with my gun hatchet love rage red red heart blistering soul

i am a cannon i will go in at it with my teeth

and i have seen the bodies and i have called out the night sky

let loose the military of my soul i am coming for the lie is not safe here.

we. come up the bones. we. eat in dust. we.

the bleeding red of it. seething. sweet. bleeding.

And I believe in the power of _____ .there iz nothing else available in this universe that iz useful.

VANESSA GERMAN
One day when, taking a break on the porch from my sculptures, I heard a round of 21 gunshots. I waited. I grieved. I worried for my neighbors, my students, the victims, the shooters, their families. I noticed the signs for political candidates in the yards around me and I thought maybe I could do something. Out on the porch, I began printing yard signs that encouraged peace and nonviolence with messages like “Stop Shooting: We Love You” and “No Guns: Keep Summer Fun.” I began distributing them around the neighborhood to friends and community members who, like me, saw this as an opportunity to say “STOP!”, not with judgment, but with love.

—VANESSA GERMAN

Since 2007, artists who live where crime, drugs, and guns abound have personal connections with their experiences, in 2007, Vanessa German became an artist. All artists with historical traditions of Western art—objects that evoke, protect, or performative, speak to beauty, truth, and love.

To make her sculptures with baby-doll heads and simple materials, build different handmade objects. German refers to the aforementioned objects like baby-doll heads with string, yarn, cowrie shells, tar, and “child” with its arms astride a giraffe.

The incorporated baby-doll heads, cart and “child” signal a broader message. Since 2007, artists who live in neighborhoods where crime, drugs, and guns abound have personal connections with their experiences, in 2007, Vanessa German became an artist. All artists with historical traditions of Western art—objects that evoke, protect, or performative, speak to beauty, truth, and love.
Since 2007, artist Vanessa German has lived in the Homewood section of Pittsburgh, where crime, drugs, and gun violence continually wreak havoc on the historically African-American, urban community that was recently labeled “America’s Most Dangerous Neighborhood.” Gun shots can be heard day and night, and many residents have personal connections to the victims of violence. In response to her first-hand experiences, in 2012 German started ARThouse, a place where young, local children can be artists. Alongside them, German creates her inspiring sculptures in the tradition of West African power figures called minkisi (nkisi, singular)—divine protective objects, thickly encrusted with nails, beads, shells, bones, and found objects that evoke suits of armor. The sculptures often feature medicinal materials packed in resin in their heads, or in boxes projecting from their abdomens and sealed with mirrors. Bearing mystical forces meant to eradicate evil, German’s updated versions of the enigmatic, ritualistic African power figures embody a similar performative, spiritual, and affirming function.

To make her sculptures, German begins with standard doll parts. The traditional baby-doll heads are layered in plaster and gauze to emphasize unique features and build different hair styles. After applying numerous coats of black tar and inserting a cowrie shell for the lips, German uncovers the character of each face by removing some of the tar with mineral spirits. She paints the whites of the eyes and, finally, sets a rhinestone in each pupil to bring light to the eyes and life to the figure.

German refers to the second step as “dressing” the sculpture, which includes the aforementioned components of the African power figures, plus an endless array of other objects. Discarded clothes, sheets, towels, and cutting quilts are bound tightly with string, yarn, or ribbons into the many cocoon forms that make up the dresses of German’s brigade. Strings of buffalo teeth, buttons, keys, and padlocks encircle each figure. Close inspection reveals details representing particular attributes, such as squirt guns, statuettes of saints, or outdated Blackberries, to name just a few. Whether old or new, found or constructed, purchased or donated, hundreds of elements bring powerful individual personalities to the sculptures. Elaborate headdresses sometimes incorporate additional figures, as in Lessons On How to Ride the Eagle, in which a “child” with its arms spread wide rides an eagle on the head of a larger figure astride a giraffe.

The incorporated pedestals of the sculptures are in the form of vehicles—like carts, tricycles, and scooters; furniture—like tables, chairs, and stools; or food containers—like biscuit tins and apple crates. By using a palette that is primarily red, white, and blue, German intentionally refers to the heroic colors of the American flag and “the [country’s] story of blood, peace, and illumination.” But these colors also signal broader meaning for the artist, as indicated by the title of each work. Red
of Pittsburgh, historically a city's Most Many residents' first-hand many residents' first-hand experiences in the —divine and found materials are bound tightly and sealed. The work. Red and white are the colors also American flag work. Red
VANESSA GERMAN, RED RED RED FOR THE RAGE, BLOOD AND DESIRE (CENTER FIGURE), 2016.
MIXED MEDIA. COURTESY OF VANESSA GERMAN AND PAVEL ZOUKOV GALLERY, NEW YORK.
PHOTO: HEATHER MOLL
represents blood, love, desire, and rage, as in red.red.red for the rage, blood and desire. White stands for liberty and ghosts, as in black on white swan. And blue symbolizes water, the Middle Passage, living truth, trauma and grief, the psychosis of enduring oppression, and the healing language of music, as in i come to do a violence to the lies of ugly. These fierce and complex all-American figures are simultaneously entrenched in the safety of home and prepared to strike out in the call for justice.

For MATRIX 174, German has transformed the gallery into an underground excavation site. Minimally illuminated by several strings of bare light bulbs, a powerful, all-female, black army of approximately thirty figurative sculptures is installed in a military formation on an earthen floor that magically shimmers with a dusting of gold. The artist notes, “i am thinking about that cavern of clay soldiers, the chinese space that was a burial chamber. i am thinking about creating a movement. a cluster of power figures in this manner, to be displayed as though soldiers.” The presentation was inspired by one of the most remarkable archeological discoveries of our times—the massive configuration of an estimated 7,000 terra-cotta warriors and horses buried near the 2,000-year-old tomb of Chinese Emperor Qin Shi Huang Di (died 210 B.C.E.), which were uncovered in northwest China in 1974. Like the self-proclaimed first Emperor of Qin, German’s female soldiers display remarkable individuality and perform specific protective and supportive roles within the community (or dynasty) that relate to rites of passage from birth, to death, and rebirth. The artist explains, “this work is an uprising. i am imagining. mothers and daughters in a state of deep refusal so momentous. that it is a withering destructive force to the systems and structures that bind and constrain their very liberty.”

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 freedom and my very matter.”
against my very flesh and soul. (I do not have to tell you that black lives matter.) German invokes the names of the many black lives lost to senseless violence, primarily at the hands of the police. The innumerable victims include Tamir Rice (2014), LaQuan McDonald (2014), Eric Garner (2014), and Sandra Bland (2015). Each has been cited in German’s prose, which engages directly with the Black Lives Matter movement that was created in 2012 after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer, neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman. To further the dialogue concerning guns and violence, locally and nationally, German created additional lawn posters featuring “trayvon” and “We Stand by Jordan Miles,” an eighteen-year-old Homewood man who was beaten by police in 2010.

And blue
the psychosis of
do a violence
simultaneously
for justice.

But in her MATRIX to unite and heal of my heart of love is the process, the rises from the soil...
But in her MATRIX installation, *i come to do a violence to the lie*, Vanessa German aims to unite and heal the community: “I am thinking about the power of love. For how inside of my heart of love, all of my ancestors are present....this army is ancestral....and love is the process, the product, and the way. and it is infinitely reproducible. and all of this rises from the soul.”

**PATRICIA HICKSON**
Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art
VANESSA GERMAN

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Institution</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Vanessa German/ MATRIX 174/i come to do a violence to the lie</td>
<td>Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Bitter Root</td>
<td>Northcutt Stelle Gallery, Montana State University Billings, Billings, MT</td>
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<td>Holter Museum of Art, Helena, MT</td>
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SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now</td>
<td>Jepson Center for the Arts, Savannah, GA</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Black: Color, Material, Concept</td>
<td>Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re: Purposed</td>
<td>Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, FL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>State of the Art</td>
<td>Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pittsburgh Biennial</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Glass Center, Pittsburgh PA</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Remix: Selections from the International Collage Center</td>
<td>Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, NY</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Art of Storytelling: Lies, Enchantment, Humor &amp; Truth</td>
<td>American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore, MD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ill Perceived</td>
<td>Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, Cleveland, OH</td>
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<td></td>
<td>African American Art 1950–Present</td>
<td>Smithsonian Institution, College Park, MD</td>
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AWARDS

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<tr>
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<th>Award</th>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Ronald H. Brown Leadership Award for Community Leadership</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Foundation and The Heinz Endowments, Creative Development Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Women and Girls Foundation Award</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>Inaugural August Wilson Center Fellow</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>Inaugural Green For All Fellow</td>
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PERFORMANCES

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<th>Performance</th>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>TEDxPittsburgh</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>The Summit Art Spotlight</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Creative Montage, Museums, Rally for Public Theater, Pittsburgh</td>
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WORKS IN THE ESTATE

All works are mixed media and created by Vanessa German, with the collaboration of German and Pavel Zobay.

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WORKS IN THE ESTATE

All works are mixed media and created by Vanessa German, with the collaboration of German and Pavel Zobay.
Born 1976, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Lives and works in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

PERFORMANCES
2015 TEDxPittsburghStatePrison, Pittsburgh, PA
2014 The Summit at Crystal Bridges, State of the Art Spotlight, Bentonville, AR
2013 Creative Mornings, Association of American Museums, Pittsburgh, PA

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION
All works are mixed media, various dimensions, and by Vanessa German, 2016. Courtesy Vanessa German and Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York.

Priscilla Rides Again
ed.red.red for the rage, blood and desire
Lessons on How to Ride the Eagle
Blessing of the Boats
trumpet song
dark syrup
No Water Cleanser
The Greater
sometimes i want to kill you #2
are you a good woman?
the secret of charm is color
outrage
sometimes you cannot see how beautiful i am because you keep looking at my face
i love you this much
black on white swan

ARTIST RESIDENCY
German recognizes parallels between her Homewood neighborhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Hartford, Connecticut, particularly in terms of racism and gun violence. She will be an artist-in-residence as part of her MATRIX project. Beginning in May, her residency took her into the Hartford Public Schools to work closely with students to encourage creativity through dynamic art workshops in all-school assemblies and classroom settings. Additionally, she will return to Hartford in July for summer sessions with various community groups like True Colors, Real Art Way’s Park Art, Billings Forge Community Works, and the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Summer Community Studio.

OPENING RECEP PERFORMANCE
Wednesday, June 8
5 pm | Exhibition View
6 pm | Performance
7 pm | Meet the Artist
$15/$10 for member

ARTIST TALK
Artist Vanessa German
Emily Hall Tremaine Center Fellow
Friday, June 10
12 pm
Free with admission

JUNETEENTH FAMILY EVENT
Power & Identity
Saturday, June 11
10 am – 4 pm
Free

Artist Vanessa German with visitors in Eye Co
followed by a process and poetry. In collaboration with the Center for Art & Culture

MAN
OPENING RECEPTION AND PERFORMANCE

Wednesday, June 8
5 pm | Exhibition Viewing & Cash Bar Reception
6 pm | Performance
7 pm | Meet the Artist
$15/$10 for members

ARTIST TALK

Artist Vanessa German and Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art
Friday, June 10
12 pm
Free with admission

JUNETEENTH FAMILY DAY

Power & Identity
Saturday, June 11
10 am - 4 pm
Free

Artist Vanessa German shares private moments with visitors in Eye Contact Is an Act of Love, followed by a procession of dance, music, and poetry. In collaboration with The Amistad Center for Art & Culture.

1 See Vanessa German’s web site www.lovefrontporch.com.
2 Homewood was labeled “America’s Most Dangerous Neighborhood” in the two-part series “Home Sweet Homewood,” on The Rachel Maddow Show, originally aired on MSNBC on 6 May 2011 and 26 May 2011.
3 Vanessa German quoted from an email correspondence with the author, 31 March 2016.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Vanessa German quoted from an email correspondence with the author, 16 October 2015.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.

WADSWORTH ATHENEUM
MUSEUM OF ART

600 Main Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06103
(860) 278-2670
www.thewadsworth.org

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.

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