

## 'Vanessa German; The Rarest Black Woman On Earth' At Mount Holyoke College Museum

SOUTH HADLEY, MASS. — A new exhibition, "vanessa german — The Rarest Black Woman On The Planet Earth," will be on view at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum (MHCAM) through May 28, 2023. Featuring video and sculpture by the artist, activist, performer and poet vanessa german\* (b 1976), the exhibition navigates ancestral memory and the contemporary landscapes of race, politics and the pandemic with a uniquely powerful and profound approach.

The genesis of the exhibition is german's response to the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum, an early Twentieth Century cabinet of curiosities at Mount Holyoke College. The collection, ranging from Lakota Sioux beadwork and a merchant ship's carved figurehead to Nineteenth Century folk art portraits, dinosaur tracks and Samurai swords, is an impressive and unwieldy trove of more than 7,000 fascinating objects. Skinner, a local silk magnate and philanthropist who spent a lifetime acquiring objects from around the world, left his museum and collection to Mount Holyoke in a 1946 bequest.

German began with a question: "How do we decolonize a thing, a museum, a

collection?" Her answer, captured in a moving video titled *vanessa german is The Rarest Black Woman On The Planet Earth*, turned into an emancipatory endeavor: to touch every object in the Skinner collection. In this way, the artist felt that the story of the Skinner Museum could be reanimated and retold.

The artist explains that through her touching every Skinner object, "I own the story of the Skinner Museum. We own the truth that more than one thing is happening at the same time, in the same place. And, then into the future of future past, all points in space and time are connected. Everything is touched."

Through this process, she discovered that holding some of the objects created profound feelings: when she held pieces of Stonehenge and the Great Pyramid of Giza, she was moved to tears and began to shake as if the objects were offering her a spiritual message.

Inspired by the Skinner collection, german decided to create her own museum, a sacred space of healing. First, german invited the Mount Holyoke community to join her in the creation of a body of work that would focus on the topic of emancipation. With MHCAM student

interns, german created a series of prompts and calls for materials on campus. Thought-provoking questions were asked, such as "What do you need forgiveness for?" and "What are you currently learning and un-learning?" Posters and collection stations were installed across campus to gather written responses and personal objects and clothing, which resulted in an outpouring of words and belongings. german then incorporated the anonymous written responses and objects including boots, figurines and jewelry to create all the artworks for the exhibition. The result is her mixed-media installation titled "Museum Of Emancipatory Objects," which includes more than a dozen of the artist's iconic power figures and other assemblages.

"The Rarest Black Woman On The Planet Earth" also features photographs taken by Laura Shea, the MHCAM's photographer, who documented the artist's progress, capturing meaningful moments of german with many of the objects she encountered. In addition, visitors are each invited to take home a small offering from the artist, a piece of rose quartz, a mineral associated with unconditional love and healing.



Photograph of vanessa german at the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum, December 1-2, 2021 and February 23, 2022. Photo Laura Shea.

\*lowercase letters are the preference of the artist

The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum is at 50 College Street. For information, 413-538-2245 or [www.artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu](http://www.artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu).

## National Gallery Of Art Acquires Mariano Rodríguez Painting

WASHINGTON DC — Mariano Rodríguez (1912-1990) was a major figure of the Vanguardia (Cuban avant-garde), a multifaceted group of artists who were deeply committed to forging a modern Cuban art in the first half of the Twentieth Century. He was part of the second generation of artists who absorbed and transformed global art movements to express Cuban national culture. The National Gallery of Art has acquired Rodríguez's "Reunión



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