

UNION

“sometimes.we.cannot.be.with.our.bodies.” Vanessa German, 2019



“sometimes.we.cannot.be.with.our.bodies.” is a multimedia installation that originated at the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, PA and was reimaged at The Union for Contemporary Art. In the artist’s own words, “this work is a dimensional living reckoning. the living reckoning is bold, eruptive, disruptive work against systems & pathologies that oppress & subvert overt & covert violence onto & into the lives & humanity of marginalized people on this land.” To accompany this installation, Vanessa German led a “ritual reckoning” — a two-mile procession in honor of Will Brown and other people of color whose lives have been lost to violence. German and seven local performers walked silently to the front steps of the Douglas County District Court and performed a goodbye ritual song inspired in part by Mende birth and funeral rites.

“this work is a dimensional living reckoning.”

Meet the Artist!



Vanessa German is a visual and performance artist based in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Homewood. Homewood is the community that is the driving force behind German’s powerful performance work, and whose cast-off relics form the language of her copiously embellished sculptures. As a citizen artist, German explores the power of art and love as a transformative force in the dynamic cultural ecosystem of communities and neighborhoods. She is the founder of Love Front Porch and the ARHouse, a community arts initiative for the children of Homewood. German’s work is in private and public collections and has been exhibited widely. She has been the recipient of several awards and prizes. German is represented by Pavel Zoubok Gallery in New York, NY

Found Object Portrait

In her artwork, Vanessa German uses found objects to create forms. This activity invites you to assemble a portrait using household items.

<https://www.u-ca.org/exhibition/sometimes-we-cannot-be-with-our-bodies>

Suggested Objects:

Small toys

Utensils

Art supplies

Grooming products and tools
Decorations

Office supplies

Food containers

Jewelry

Clothing

Items from nature



1. With permission from your parents or guardian begin collecting objects for your artwork, using the suggestions on the left.
2. Clear a space where you can work on arranging your items into a self portrait or a portrait of someone you know.
3. When you're finished take a photo of your arrangement to document your artwork. Share your finished work with your family and friends. Discuss your experience using the following questions:
 - Why did you use the objects you picked?
 - What was fun about making this artwork?
 - What was challenging about making this artwork?