

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Queens Museum Presents Alexandria Smith: *Monuments to an Effigy*

The first solo museum show by Queens Museum Jerome Fellow Alexandria Smith whose new, immersive body of work honors the unsung voices of women who have been silenced throughout history, in response to local histories in Flushing, Queens.



Image: Alexandria Smith, *GloryGlory...*, 2019 (detail). Mixed media collage installation on canvas and wood. Courtesy the artist.

Exhibition dates: April 7 – August 18, 2019

Public opening: April 7, 1 – 5 PM (Performance by Alexandria Smith, Liz Gré and Maurisa Mansaray: 3 PM)

Queens, NY (April 7, 2019) — Queens Museum-Jerome Foundation Emerging Artist Fellow Alexandria Smith takes the histories of The Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground and the Macedonia A.M.E. Church in Flushing, Queens as points of departure for her exhibition *Monuments to an Effigy*.

In the mid-late 19th century, The Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground was a burial space for African Americans and Native Americans. Parishioners of the nearby Macedonia A.M.E. Church, a landmark for Flushing’s historic African American community, were among those interred at the burial ground. The last burial took place in 1898, and in the 1930s, the Parks Department paved over the site, building a playground in 1938. But due to the tireless work of many community activists, the site was recognized for its original purpose in 2006 and is now a meditative area that respects the hundreds still buried there.

Smith’s practice explores narrative, memory, and myth through the lens of the Black female form and psyche. *Monuments to an Effigy* evokes an altar or commemorative space where the artist responds to and imagines the stories of those who were buried at the site. Of the

four marked gravestones discovered from the burial ground, only male members of the Bunn and Curry families are listed. Smith's work honors the unnamed women laid to rest at The Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground and those who participated in the Underground Railroad in the area, which included the Macedonia A.M.E. Church.

"The importance of the Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground's history isn't just relegated to people that share a similar ethnic background but is universal in that it impacts our understanding of the world that we live in," says Alexandria Smith. "The danger of telling one single story lies in the erasure of others' stories."

Smith's fragmented characters, landscapes, and architectural surrogates pay tribute to these histories by rooting or lifting themselves in space. Eyes, pigtails, masks, limbs, breasts, and fingers either sprout from the ground or defy gravity. The works, installed in pairs or doppelgängers, embody a complex and often divided sense of self across generations where Smith asks, how can we rectify the stories that have been erased? The symbols in *Monuments to an Effigy* are both ancient and otherworldly, as the artist channels the ancestors whose stories continue to be reclaimed and reimagined.

A cornerstone of the exhibition is *At Council; Found Peace*, a composition by Liz Gré in collaboration with Smith. This piece, incorporating cello, soprano, and spoken voice, combines the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks with gospel tonality and explores the process of seeking guidance from those who came before. As Smith's work connects with the spiritual realm, her visions of Black women in moments of empathy, joy, and pain recognize the resilience and strength that will continue to shape history.

Alexandria Smith is a recipient of the 2018-2019 Queens Museum/Jerome Foundation Fellowship for Emerging Artists. Smith and fellow recipient, American Artist, were selected by a five-person selection panel consisting of Lumi Tan, Curator at The Kitchen, New York; Anthony Elms, Daniel and Brett Sundheim Chief Curator at The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Queens Museum's Director of Exhibitions, Hitomi Iwasaki; QM Assistant Curator, Sophia Marisa Lucas; and QM Assistant Curator for Public Programs, Lindsey Berfond.

Public Programs at the Queens Museum

April 7, 2019, 1 – 5 PM

The opening reception will include a live performance of *At Council; Found Peace*, featuring Alexandria Smith, Liz Gré and Maurisa Mansaray within Smith's installation. *At Council; Found Peace* (Liz Gré, 2019) is an original composition for cello, soprano, and spoken voice, written on the occasion of Smith's exhibition *Monuments to an Effigy*. The piece incorporates the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks with gospel tonality and explores the process of seeking clarity and guidance from those who came before: our mothers, our ancestors, our heroes and predecessors that thrived and persevered in another time.

Alexandria Smith (b. 1981, Bronx, NY) earned her BFA in Illustration from Syracuse University, an MA in Art Education from New York University, and an MFA in Painting and Drawing from Parsons The New School for Design. She has exhibited her work in solo and group exhibitions at venues such as deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum Lincoln, MA

(2019); Boston University Boston, MA (2018); MASS MoCA North Adams, MA (2018); The Union for Contemporary Art Omaha, NE (2017); Yale School of Art New Haven, CT (2016); International Print Center New York, NY (2016); Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture New York, NY (2015). Smith is the recipient of numerous awards including a Pollock-Krasner Grant and the Virginia A. Myers Fellowship at the University of Iowa. She has been an artist-in-residence at MacDowell, Bemis, Yaddo, LMCC Process Space Residency and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. From 2016-18, Smith was co-organizer of the collective, Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter (BWA for BLM).

Funding and Support

The Queens Museum/Jerome Foundation Fellowship Program for Emerging Artists in New York City is generously supported by the Jerome Foundation. Major funding for the Queens Museum is generously provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, the Lambent Foundation, the Lily Auchincloss Foundation, Inc., the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, and the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation.

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About the Queens Museum

The Queens Museum in Flushing Meadows Corona Park features contemporary art, events of hyperlocal and international impact, and educational programs reflecting the diversity of Queens and New York City. Changing exhibitions present the work of emerging and established artists, both local and global, that often explore contemporary social issues, as well as the rich history of its site. In November 2013, the Museum reopened with an expanded footprint of 105,000 square feet, a soaring skylit atrium, a suite of daylight galleries, nine artist studios, and flexible event space. The Museum works outside its walls through engagement initiatives ranging from multilingual outreach and educational opportunities for adult immigrants, to a plethora of community led art and activism projects. The Museum's educational programming connects with school children, teens, families, seniors as well as those individuals with physical and mental disabilities. The Queens Museum is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

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