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Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art announces Vanessa German as the recipient of the 2018 Don Tyson Prize
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BENTONVILLE, ARK.- Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art announces Vanessa German as the 2018 recipient of the Don Tyson Prize, a \$200,000 biennial award for outstanding achievement in American art. Tyson Foods chairman, John Tyson, along with Crystal Bridges founder and board chair, Alice Walton and Crystal Bridges curator, contemporary art, Lauren Haynes presented the prize to German at the Art House in Homewood, Pa. on Monday, December 17.

Crystal Bridges began taking nominations for the Don Tyson Prize in early 2018 for organizations and individual artists working in any medium anywhere in the US. A national jury of museum peers and art historians reviewed the applications and selected German, recognizing her artwork as pushing boundaries and taking risks in the field of American art, as well as positively impacting her community through art experiences.

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“The Don Tyson Prize recognizes Vanessa for changing the way we experience art and exploring transformation through art and advocacy,” said John Tyson. “The impact she’s had and the work she’ll continue to do honors the memory of my father Don, for whom the prize is named. Like Vanessa, he believed in the power of art and in the American spirit.”

“I am honored to have been selected for the Don Tyson Prize,” said Vanessa German. “Art has been transformational in my life, particularly in confronting and contending with the dimensional violence of racism. I create art works, experiences and spaces of social healing, connection, and expression. This award not only allows me to deepen my studio practice and anchor the Art House, but it also provides an opportunity to pay it forward and continue the work of my mother, Sandra German, who affirmed the lives, activism and creative power of those around her.”

One way German plans to use the award is through a project called the “Museum of Resilience.” German describes the project as “located within the community of the Art House, the museum will be a public place that draws on the concept of the Art House to celebrate the transformative power of creativity in the lives of black women, trans women, single mothers, and their children, while simultaneously resisting the violence of gentrification.”

Vanessa German is an American sculptor, painter, writer, activist, performer, and poet based in the historic neighborhood of Homewood, in Pittsburgh, which has been the home to luminaries of jazz, art & literature from Billy Strayhorn, Ahmad Jamal, Tina Brewer, and John Edgar Wideman. Homewood has also been described by MSNBC as “The Most Dangerous Neighborhood in America.” German’s community is the driving force behind her work. As a citizen artist, she is a vigorous advocate for children, creating safe spaces for artmaking amid violence. In recent years, she launched the Art House where she hosts neighborhood children, women and families to create beauty through art and build self-esteem. Before German acquired the current Art House, she lived in another row house not far away. She would often work on her sculptures on the front porch where she could spread out with her tools and materials and enjoy the fresh air. Neighborhood kids would curiously watch, and eventually started to participate. German started sharing her materials and encouraging them to make art.

She also creates elaborate sculptures of African American “power figures” crafted from found objects that confront violence and systematic racism. Some of these sculptures were featured in the 2014 exhibition, State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now. Her work has been exhibited widely and is in collections all over the country. She has been featured on CBS Sunday Morning, NPR’s All Things Considered, and O Magazine. German will also be featured in a documentary film on State of the Art, debuting nationally on PBS in April, 2019.

“Vanessa’s work is inspiring, socially relevant, and continues to have a great impact, not only on the Homewood community, but the contemporary art world as a whole,” said curator, contemporary art, Lauren Haynes.

Crystal Bridges has acquired German’s works: Souvenir of Our Trip; White Naptha Soap or, Contemporary Lessons in Shapeshifting; and Artist Considers the 21st Century Implications of Psychosis as Public Health Crisis or, Critical/Comedic Analysis into the Pathophysiology of Psychosis. German will

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also give a talk at Crystal Bridges on April 24, 2019 as a part of the museum's Distinguished Speaker Series.

The Don Tyson Prize was originally established in honor of the late Don Tyson, former chairman and CEO of Tyson Foods. The Tyson family's interest in American art began with Don Tyson's love of traditional American Western art, which he began collecting in the 1960s. His son John Tyson, current chairman of Tyson Foods, is also an avid collector, and has significantly expanded and diversified what has now become the Tyson Foods corporate collection. John Tyson is also a member of Crystal Bridges' board of directors.

In 2012, Crystal Bridges received a \$5 million endowment from the Tyson family and Tyson Foods, Inc., to establish the Tyson Scholars of American Art program and the Don Tyson Prize. Tyson Scholars is a research and residency program that helps promote the study and understanding of American art. In recent years, the prize was endowed with an additional \$5 million commitment from the Tyson family and Tyson Foods, Inc. German is the second recipient of the award; in 2016, the inaugural prize was awarded to the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.