

FORT GANSEVOORT

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Fighting the world view that "nobody cares"

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Vanessa German has been called an activist. Thinking just of her artistic merit and her ability to redirect the thinking of her audience, she is that. But outsiders easily ascribe that word to people who make efforts that would be much less remarked upon in a "safe" neighborhood.

The performance artist and sculptor will be performing Friday at the Pavel Zoubok Gallery, 531 W. 26th St., in New York, where her show "Homewood" has been up since mid October. It closes on Nov. 9.

Her activism is what the mainstream would consider quiet. She is an educator. One of her projects is the Art House, a city-owned building in which she oversees children who come after school to make art several doors from her own house in Homewood. She cleans illicit detritus from around it before anyone shows up.

Her art is not quiet if you spend time with it. It is laden with the stuff of every day life and the stuff of everyday life where she lives, including intangibles.

Her description of "Self Portrait" goes like this: *"Old masted model ship, oil tin, tar, black pigment, white pigment, blue spray paint, cell phones, twine, wire, toy alligators, toy guns, toy hand cuffs, toy boats, pistol key chains, in honor of the ocean, blue iron, 3 birds as thought caught and killed, 2 ceramic horses, blue beads, blue bottles, wooden ashtray feet, my mother's mother was Cherokee, my father's mother's mother was Native American -- her name was Hattie McWoodson, carved wood souvenir head of little girl from Africa, no conclusions to be drawn, porcelain doll heads from bombed out doll factory in Germany, souvenir clock brought back from Versailles in France, hearts, beads, buttons, twine, keys, the sense of drowning, the fight to stay afloat, tears, blue cloth, wire, wood, plaster, wood glue, wooden stand."*

When I interviewed her recently for my Walkabout column, which is scheduled to run in the Post-Gazette next Tuesday on page 2, she talked about her campaign to prove kids wrong when they say "Nobody cares."

In talking to and instructing children, she hears that mantra often: "They say, 'Nobody cares,'" apropos of nothing and everything, she said.

She is trying to prove to the Westinghouse High School Band that people do care. The band had raised about \$6,000 of \$20,000 it needs to stay afloat. The indiegogo campaign at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/help-the-westinghouse-bulldogs> has just a few days to go.

She is actively promoting the campaign to help the band buy instruments and uniforms by offering art

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and performances to people who donate.

"I will make you a handmade, hand painted dress if you donate \$150 to the Westinghouse Bulldog Band indiegogo campaign," she wrote on Facebook.

"Would you like this sculpture?" she wrote in another post. "I am gifting this new sculpture to some generous soul who donates to the Westinghouse Bulldogs Band indiegogo campaign. This sculpture is called 'stop crying already, sing a song.'"

She had 22 names in the hat and one person's name in it 10 times in a drawing for the sculpture.

If the band fails to raise the money, it wouldn't prove that nobody cares. Lots of organizations for which people have cared greatly in the past are experiencing the affects of frugality these days. But it would be fodder for an already pretty intransigent world view.

"It hurts my heart," she said. "I think about that in Homewood as a whole. I see so many kids who are hard, kids who think that whatever people think about Homewood is true of them too."