

# vanessa german

**Breathe from the  
Diaphragm:  
our eyes are in  
our lungs.**

**September 2 - November 1, 2025**

ROWAN UNIVERSITY  
**ART GALLERY  
& MUSEUM**





**vanessa german** is a citizen artist working in sculpture, performance, and communal ritual to cultivate spiritual models for transforming human experience. Her sculptures are as much defined by their tangible elements as their transcendental properties, a combination which the artist describes as the ingredients of her work. Since the early 2010s, she has assembled ritualistic structures known as power figures using glass, beads, gemstones, nails, wood, and other objects. Whether mineral crystals originating in the earth millennia ago, or cobalt blue bottles resembling those used in bottle tree traditions for generations, every object chosen by german channels frequencies that span its entire existence. Guided by her own creativity, imagination, and curiosity, german follows her intuition about the capacity for objects to tell stories, creating sculptures that resonate deeply with those who encounter them. After many years running a community studio, garden, outdoor theater, and artist residency called ARthouse in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, german (born 1976) now lives in Asheville, North Carolina. She has received numerous honors, including the Joyce Foundation Fellowship, Heinz Award for the Arts, Don Tyson Prize from the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Jacob Lawrence Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant. Her solo and two-person exhibitions include at the NSU Art Museum, Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago, Mulvane Art Museum, Mt. Holyoke College Art Museum, The Frick Pittsburgh, Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia, Flint Institute of Arts, Figge Art Museum, among many other. Her work is in the collections of the Ackland Art Museum, Akron Art Museum, Carnegie Museum of Art, Crocker Art Museum, Denver Art Museum, Everson Museum of Art, Figge Art Museum, Flint Institute of Arts, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Montclair Art Museum, Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Contemporary Art, Pérez Art Museum Miami, Speed Art Museum, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, and Wichita Art Museum among others. She has been represented by Kasmin Gallery since 2021.





***Breathe from the Diaphragm: our eyes are in our lungs*** offers respite from the volatility and injustice of today's world with work that focuses on selflessness, love, and the alignment of heart and mind. Pulling from precolonial and African diasporic traditions, particularly those of her ancestral Kongolesse lineage in Central Africa, german's anthropomorphic sculptures employ mineral crystals, beads, glass, and many found objects that allude to the symbolism of *Nkisi N'kondi*, or Power Figures, which are believed to be spiritually charged figures used for healing, protection, and justice. The blue accents in the exhibition complement the healing energies of the work with its chromatic link to water.

As the artist reflects: *"There is something magnificent and perfect about water. We can access what's within us to heal from the physical, spiritual, and intellectual harm of an unjust world."* Blue becomes a symbol not only of life but of the boundless inner reservoirs of resilience and restoration. Echoed in the title for this exhibition is the practice of deep diaphragmatic breathing, a meditative act and metaphor for grounding and release. This physical focus mirrors the broader spiritual journey the work invites: a return to the self, to ancestral wisdom, and to a holistic sense of being. *Breathe from the Diaphragm* becomes a space of quiet resistance and a site where art, spirit, and breath unite.

Mary Salvante  
Director & Chief Curator  
Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum











## Acknowledgements

Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum is honored to present this exhibition and we greatly appreciate the assistance of the artist Vanessa German on the selection of the work and exhibition layout design. Special thanks to German's artist liaison, Samantha Rees, and her gallery Kasmin, New York. Additional thanks go to our Gallery Coordinator Kristin Qualls, our Art Installers CJ Stahl and Nathan Dixon, and our Student Assistants Eva Castaldi, Leila Hewitt, Allison Hillman, and Jaylah Ross for their support. This exhibition was made possible in part with funding from the New Jersey State Council of the Arts and is a Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum production curated by Mary Salvante, Director and Chief Curator, Rowan University Art Gallery & Museum.

Photography courtesy of Constance Mensh.

Artworks courtesy of the Artist and Kasmin, New York.

Front Cover:  
*Mama's Boy*, 2024

Standing in the doorway watching her get dressed, the scent of her freshly bathed brown skin, love, heat, tenderness, desire, rose quartz, a healing frequency in the shape of a steel drum, the steel drum, found polyester quilt, beaded glass trim, wood, a heart stone, plaster, plaster gauze, just wanting to go at it soft in the world, gold swan planter. 70 x 28 x 34 inches

Image courtesy of the Artist and Kasmin, New York

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