

FORT GANSEVOORT

The New York Times

ART REVIEW

November 27, 2019

By Jillian Steinhauer

New York Galleries: What to See Right Now

Vanessa German

Through Dec. 21. Fort Gansevoort, 5 Ninth Avenue, Manhattan; 917-639-3113, fortgansevoort.com.



Installation view of Vanessa German's new exhibition "Trampoline: Resilience & Black Body & Soul." Vanessa German, Fort Gansevoort and Pavel Zoubok Fine Art

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Vanessa German's sculptures radiate energy. It comes partly from the accumulation of elements — sequins and fabrics, toys and knickknacks — that she layers and bundles onto found and dismantled dolls. The work is a dazzling display of how resourcefulness can feed abundance.

Ms. German, who deems herself a “citizen artist,” is interested in art as a form of healing and protection, especially for African-Americans. In Pittsburgh, she turned the building next to hers into the ARTHouse, where people from her predominantly black neighborhood can come and create. She credits her sculptures, which she calls “power figures,” with saving her from depression. They recall the Kongo people's nail-filled “minkisi n'kondi,” protective charms believed to contain spiritual forces.

The stars of her show, “Trampoline: Resilience & Black Body & Soul,” at Fort Gansevoort, are found on the second and third floors, where Ms. German's large figures pop and process against bright walls. In one, titled “The Runner, Run and Fight. Don't let your white friend's father touch your panties. Circle Running, Rape Proof, or Un-Rape-able?” (2019), a black girl with a silver glitter face and a skirt made of shoes leaps just out of reach of white ceramic hands. The threat of danger is palpable, but it's crosscut by a flicker of joy — she's making a break for it, running away, getting free.

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