

For Immediate Release

Public Sculpture Reveal: I AM QUEEN MARY

Opening Reception: Saturday, March 31, 2018, 1-2 pm

The Royal Cast Collection (Danish West Indian Warehouse): Toldbodgade 40,
Copenhagen

“I AM QUEEN MARY: monument of a rebel queen challenges Denmark’s forgotten colonial past”

Danish artist Jeannette Ehlers and Virgin Islands artist La Vaughn Belle have teamed up to create a monumental public sculpture entitled **I AM QUEEN MARY** to be revealed on Saturday, March 31, 2018 at the Danish West Indian Warehouse in Copenhagen. Both leading artists of their respective countries have together created the first collaborative sculpture to memorialize Denmark’s colonial impact in the Caribbean and those who fought against it.

On the end of the centennial year commemorating the 100th anniversary of Denmark’s sale of the Virgin Islands to the United States in March 1917 this public sculpture project challenges Denmark’s role in slavery and commemoration of its colonial past. **“It takes a statue like this to make forgetting less easy. It takes a monument like this to fight against the silence, neglect, repression, and hatred,”** says Henrik Holm, Senior Research Curator at the National Gallery of Art, **“Never before has a sculpture like this been erected on Danish soil. Now, Denmark is offered a sculpture that addresses the past. But it is also an artwork for the future.”** **“I Am Queen Mary”** tells a hidden and incredibly important story about how the enslaved and colonial subjects resisted Danish colonialism. Even today, human rights activists like Queen Mary are the ones who take tremendous risks to bring change that benefits people living under oppression and poverty throughout the globe. **We know that from our work to support them.”** Tim Whyte, Secretary General, ActionAid Denmark

Ehlers says, **“What’s unique about this sculpture is not only its size and thematics but that it was not commissioned. It is we, two artists, who are pushing into the public space”**. The project represents a **“bridge between the two countries”**, Belle explains, **“It’s a hybrid of our bodies, nations and narratives. It extends the conversation beyond the centennial year and gets people to really question what is their relationship to this history”**.

The figure representing the rebel queen Mary Thomas is a hybrid of the two artists' bodies created using 3D scanning technology. She emerged as the most popular leader or "Queen" of the 'Fireburn', the largest labour revolt in Danish colonial history. The torch and cane bill in each hand reference the resistance strategies used by the colonized in their struggles for freedom. The seated pose recalls the iconic 1967 photograph of Huey P. Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party. The plinth incorporates coral cut from the ocean by enslaved Africans gathered from ruins of the foundations of historic buildings on St. Croix.

A site-specific intervention, ***I Am Queen Mary*** occupies the waterfront by Copenhagen's West Indian Warehouse that stored sugar, rum and other goods produced in Denmark's former Caribbean colonies. It currently houses the Royal Cast Collection of over 2,000 white plaster casts of sculptures.

The project creates a dialogue around the impact of colonialism and demonstrates how artists can be leaders in this conversation. This temporary sculpture is the first part of an endeavour to raise a permanent bronze monument in the same location.

The opening reception for ***I Am Queen Mary*** takes place Saturday, March 31, 2018 at 1-2 pm in the Royal Cast Collection with invited speakers from Denmark and the Virgin Islands.

I Am Queen Mary is realized with the generous support from Beckett-Fonden, the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces, the Municipality of Copenhagen, the Wow Factory, Statens Museum for Kunst and 3D Printhuset.

Artist Bios:

La Vaughn Belle is a multidisciplinary artist from the Virgin Islands. Her work borrows from elements of architecture, literature, history, archeology and social protest to create narratives that challenge the colonial process. She is best known for her work reinterpreting the material artifacts of colonialism and uses her work to create a form of alternative archive that challenges the colonial narrative. She has exhibited her work throughout the US, Europe and the Caribbean in such institutions as the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, El Museo del Barrio, NY, Arts of the Americas Museum, Washington, DC and the Royal Library of Denmark and the Centro de Wilfredo Lam, Cuba.

www.lavaughnbelle.com

Jeannette Ehlers is a video, photo and performance artist based in Copenhagen, Denmark. For years she has created artworks that delve into ethnicity and identity inspired by her own Danish and Caribbean background. Her pieces revolve around big questions and difficult issues, such as Denmark's role as a slave nation—a part of the Danish cultural heritage, which often gets overlooked in the general historiography. She has exhibited and performed in such institutions as AROS, Aarhus, Denmark, the Museum of Latin American Art, Los Angeles, the International Slavery Museum, Liverpool, the McKenna Museum of African American Art, New Orleans, Nikolaj Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center, Denmark and the Pérez Art Museum, Miami.
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