

WIDEWALLS

Spotlighting the Histories and Realities of Black Womanhood in the US - Alison Saar Comes to L.A. Louver

Exhibition Announcements



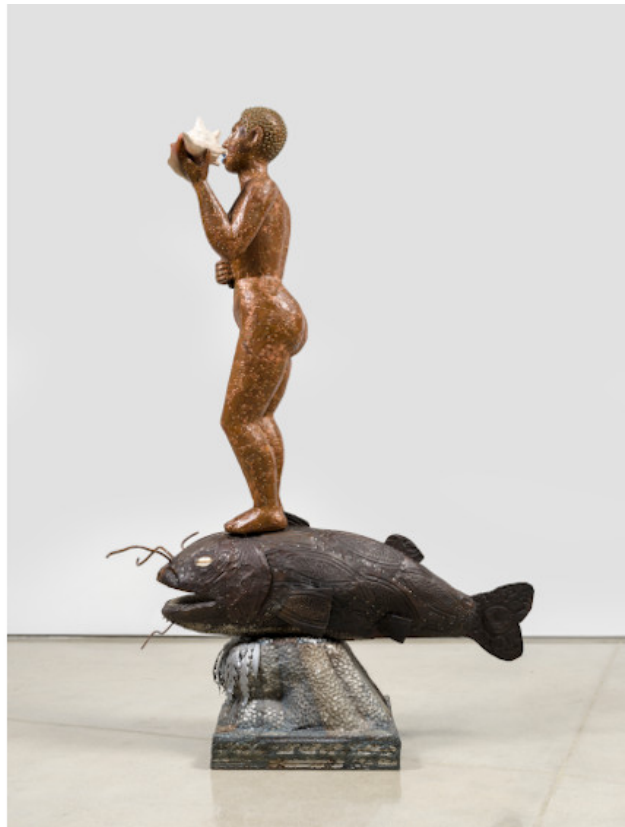
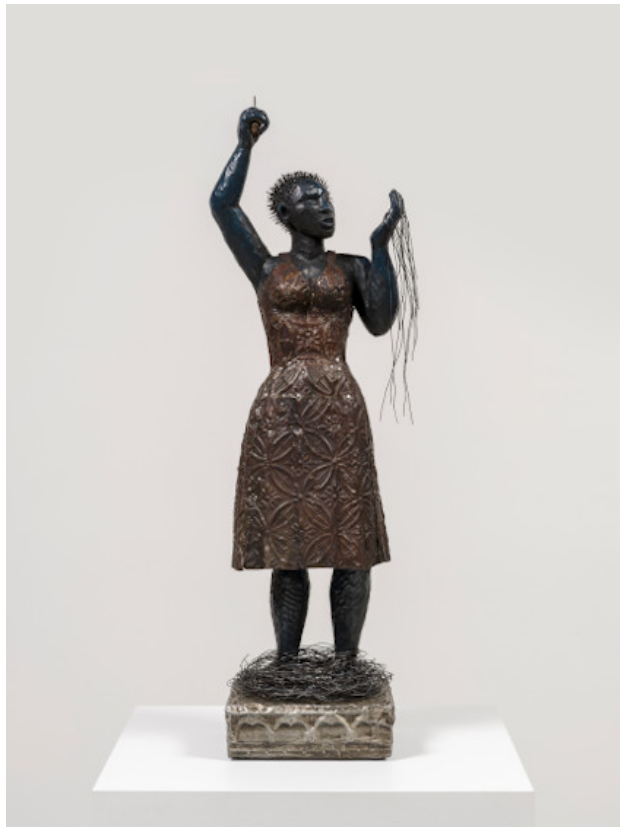
January 25, 2023

Balasz Takac

Influenced by different folk art traditions and working across a range of media, **Alison Saar** focuses on the African diaspora and black female identity in her practice. Her work is greatly influenced by both her mother, **Betye Saar**, an artist who has significantly contributed to the representation of the Black experience, and her father, **Richard Saar**, who is a painter and art conservator.

Growing up in such a creative environment must have been challenging. However, the home atmosphere soaked with important considerations of the legacies of the African diaspora and black female identity has made Alison the way she is as a person and an artist. By the mid-1980s, she became a **fully autonomous force** in the field, focused on her signature figurative style across media.

Her oeuvre is at large tackling the issues of gender, race, heritage, and history that seem to be constantly at stake in American society. Her latest body of work will soon be on view at L.A. Louver.



Left: Alison Saar - DeConkiefied, 2022. Wood, ceiling tin, wire, and found scissors 46 1/4 x 14 x 11 in. (117.5 x 35.6 x 27.9 cm) / **Right:** Alison Saar - Mutiny of the Sable Venus, 2022. Wood, copper, ceiling tin, shell, and found metal shapes and sickle 89 x 24 x 57 in. (226.1 x 61 x 144.8 cm)

A New Take an Iconic Image

Under the titled *Uproot*, this exhibition highlights the artist's exploration of racialized gender inequity and reproductive rights inspired by the images of **the Sable Venus** and the use of herbs used for abortion as a means of resistance and revolution.

Numerous scholars have agreed that the Sable Venus is one of the most perverse images of the transatlantic slave. It was initially launched as an illustration by painter Thomas Stothard for the third edition of Bryan Edwards' *The history, civil and commercial of the British colonies in the West Indies*, published in 1801. The image featuring a **nude Black Venusian figure** reminiscent of Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1485-1486) was made to misrepresent the Middle Passage, the infamous, forced voyage of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean.

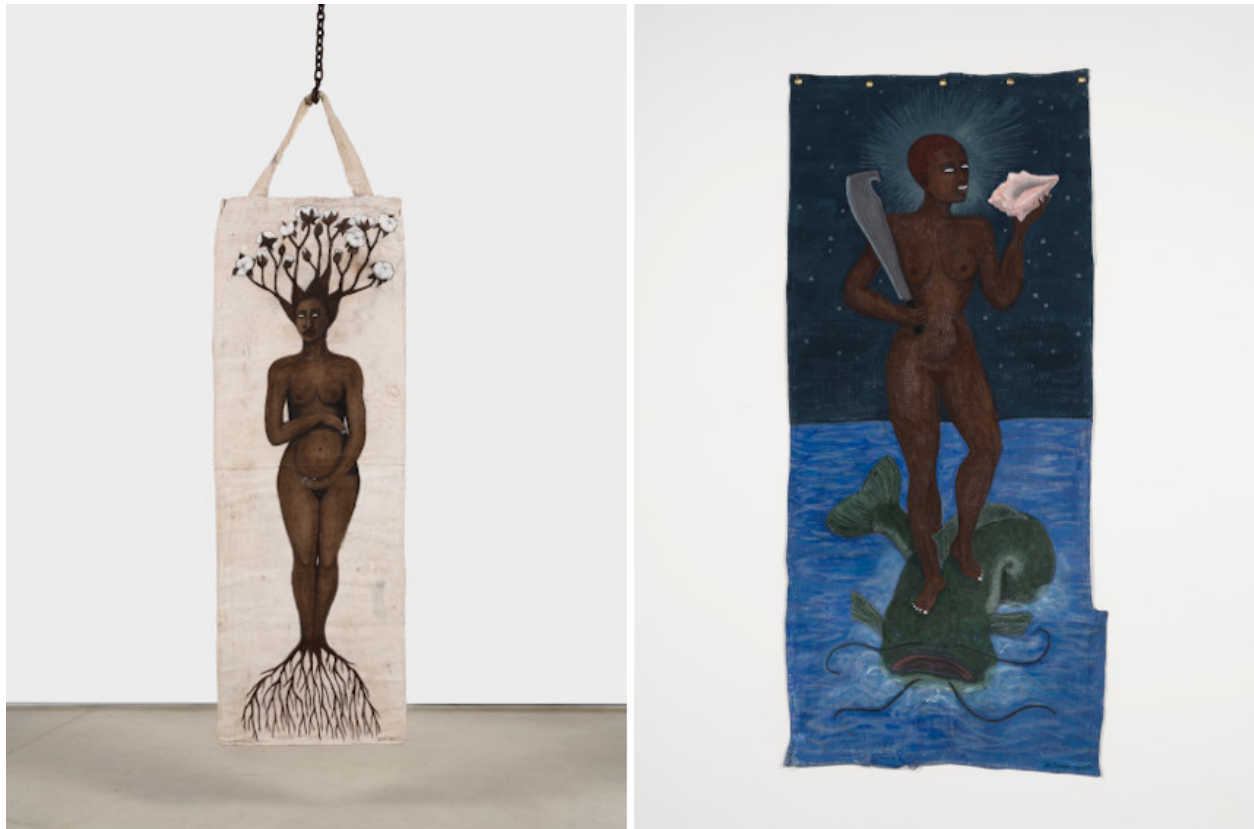


Left: Alison Saar - *Uproot*, detail, 2022. Charcoal and acrylic on vintage patched cotton picking bag, found hooks and chain 106 x 27 1/2 in. (269.2 x 69.9 cm) / **Left:** Alison Saar - *Uproot*, 2022. Charcoal and acrylic on vintage patched cotton picking bag, found hooks and chain 106 x 27 1/2 in. (269.2 x 69.9 cm)

Works on View

For the new painting and sculpture, *Mutiny of the Sable Venus* (2022), Alison Saar reinterpreted the mentioned historical image. The female figure rides the catfish and holds in one hand a conch and in another a machete, a tool used for harvesting. Saar's Sable Venus, thus, symbolizes **feminine fertility** and **environmental purification** while channeling the spirit of Yemaya, an African water deity in charge of reproductive health.

With the **levitating paintings** hanging from the ceiling, *Up-root* (2022) and *Plucked* (2022), the artist addresses the issue of reproductive health by taking into account the history of African American herbalism and self-induced abortions. The works *Congolene Resistance* (2022), *Kink Liberation Army* (2022), and *DeConkiefied* (2022), based on the imagery of pomade containers, give the nod to the beauty of Black hair that has been societally devalued.



Left: Alison Saar - *Plucked*, 2022. Charcoal and acrylic on vintage patched cotton picking bag, found hooks and chain 93 x 28 in. (236.2 x 71.1 cm) / **Right:** Alison Saar - *Mutiny of the Sable Venus (study)*, 2022. Indigo dye, charcoal, and acrylic on found seed sacks 84 x 39 in. (213.4 x 99.1 cm)

Alison Saar at L.A. Louver

Given the concept and brief descriptions of the works, it seems that the upcoming exhibition of Alison Saar will highlight stories and images that have been traditionally ignored. By taking a closer look at the aggressive exoticization and racialized abuse of Black female bodies, the artist **reclaims the history** and skillfully appoints the horrific consequences of centuries-old white supremacy.

Alison Saar: Uproot will be on view at [L.A. Louver](#) **from January 25th until March 11th, 2023.**

Featured image: Alison Saar - Mutiny of the Sable Venus (study), detail, 2022. Indigo dye, charcoal, and acrylic on found seed sacks 84 x 39 in. (213.4 x 99.1 cm)