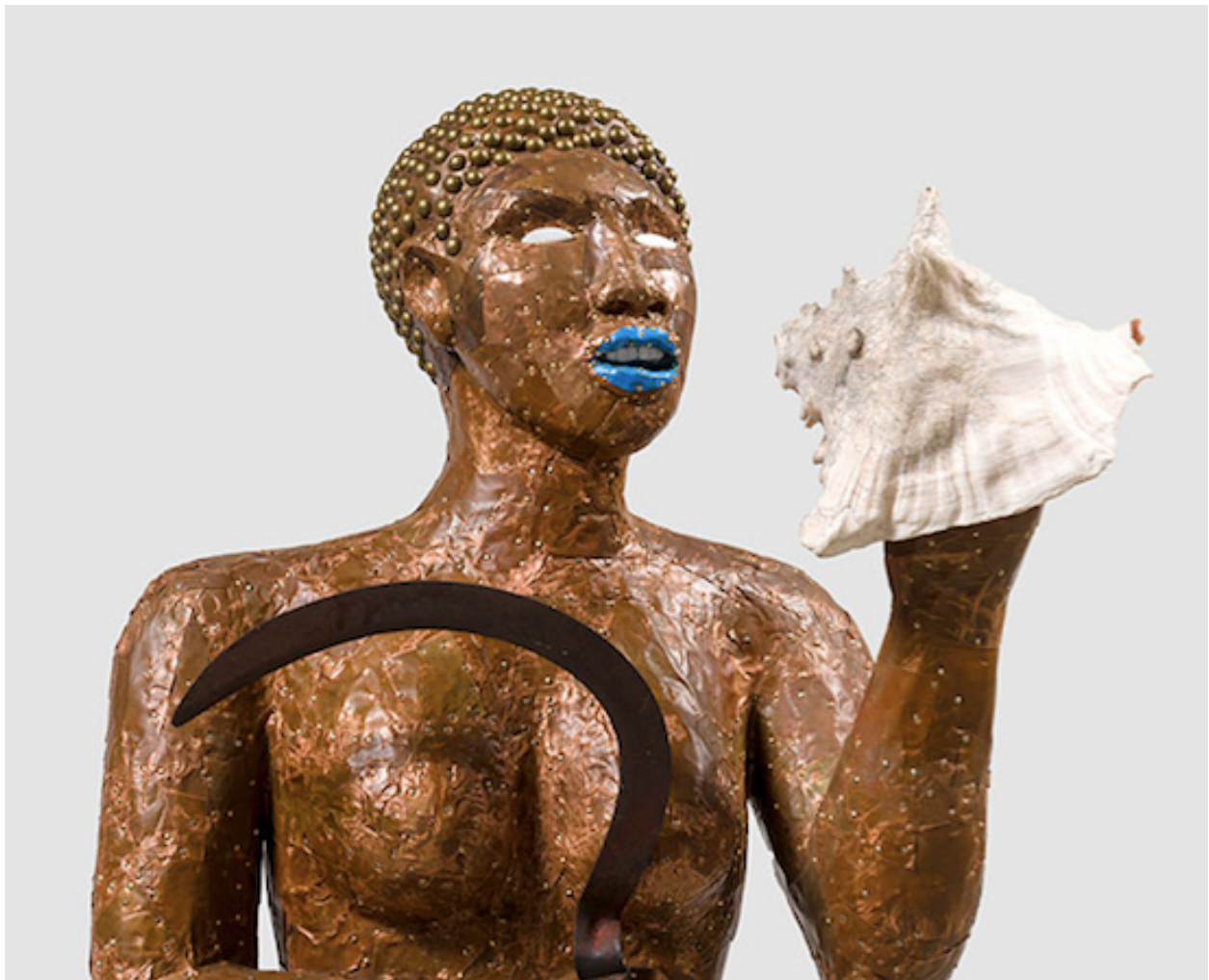


# artillery

## PICK OF THE WEEK: Alison Saar

LA Louver

by Lauren Guilford | Jan 26, 2023



Alison Saar "Mutiny of the Sable Venus," 2022 (detail). Image courtesy of the artist and LA Louver.

Alison Saar's diasporic deities are gestures of remembrance that honor the resilience of Black women. Reconfiguring and reclaiming the image of the *Sable Venus*, Saar depicts a series of women as spiritually charged warriors that are full of agency. This reclamation is described most directly in *Mutiny of the Sable Venus*, comprised of wood, copper, tin, and found materials. Saar's Sable Venus stands tall on the ridge of a catfish holding a conch shell in one hand and a machete in the other, unlike Botticelli's Venus, who floats nonchalantly in the cup of a seashell with her limbs coy and limp. Another two-dimensional work (*Uproot*), painted on a vintage cotton picking bag, depicts a woman growing out of the intricate roots of a plant, buds of cotton sprouting from her head. The woman's eyes are opaque with time and heavy with memory and wisdom. This biomorphic figure is reminiscent of the Greek mythological figure Daphne who turns into a laurel tree to escape Apollo's advances. Like Daphne, Saar's women transform themselves in order to survive.

Saar's work evokes layered histories and significations where politics of gender and race collide and engender transformation, reclaiming the sovereignty of Black women over their bodies. Some of the earthly elements in the works reference African herbalist practices that induce abortion—a mediation on the long and layered history of reproductive rights and the present political moment in which Black Women are disproportionately impacted. Saar asks us to remember the Black women who are a continued source of strength and transformation. This transformation is echoed in the poem *perched* by Evie Shockley:

i am black, comely,  
a girl on the cusp of desire.  
my dangling toes take the rest  
the rest of my body refuses, spine upright,  
my pose proposes anticipation. i pose  
in copper-colored tension, intent on  
manifesting my soul in the discouraging world.  
under the rough eyes of others, i stiffen.

if i must be hard, it will be as a tree, alive  
with change. inside me, a love of beauty rises  
like sap, sprouts from my scalp  
and stretches forth. i send out my song, an aria  
blue and feathered, and grow toward it,  
choirs bare, but soon to bud. i am  
black and becoming.

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