

# ALISON SAAR

---

## Uproot

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 2022

25 January - 11 March 2023

Opening Reception  
Wednesday, 25 January 2023  
6 - 8 p.m.



*Mutiny of the Sable Venus*, 2022

wood, copper, ceiling tin, shell, found metal shapes, and sickle  
89 x 24 x 57 in. (226.1 x 61 x 144.8 cm)

**Venice, CA** – L.A. Louver is proud to present new work by Alison Saar. In this presentation, Saar employs historical memory and media as a lens through which to view the contemporary and delves deeper into the realities, histories, and layers of Black womanhood in the United States. Titled *Uproot*, this exhibition excavates the intersection of racialized gender inequity and reproductive rights, taking as inspiration images of the Sable Venus and the use of herbal abortifacients as a means of resistance and revolution. Comprised of sculptures and paintings, this will be the artist's eighth solo exhibition at L.A. Louver.

Scholars have noted that one of the most egregious and perverse images of the transatlantic slave trade is that of the Sable Venus. Most famously depicted in an illustration by Thomas Stothard, *The Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola to the West Indies* (1801), the Sable Venus is a disturbing misrepresentation of the Middle Passage, depicting a Black Venusian figure rendered nude in a composition reminiscent of Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1485-1486). As if this journey across the Atlantic was mythological or a subject appropriate for caricature, Stothard's depiction of the Sable Venus is surrounded by white cherubs and flanked by Poseidon hoisting a Union Jack. This fantastical image is reclaimed by Saar in her sculpture and the accompanying study for *Mutiny of the Sable Venus* (2022). A tribute to slave revolts, Saar's Venus is configured not only in the image of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* but also in that of Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830). She rides the smart, resilient catfish and holds in one hand a conch - a horn by which to issue a call to arms and a symbol of feminine fertility, creation, and environmental purification - and in the other, a machete, a tool for harvesting sugarcane repurposed as a weapon. This is not a figure passively superimposed into an already existing narrative, Saar's Venus is strong, active, knowledgeable, and vengeant. Channeling also the spirit of Yemaya, a water deity from the African diaspora who rules over reproductive health, the Sable Venus is now infused with protective and healing energy.

*Uproot*, 2022

108 x 27 x 4 inches

Charcoal and acrylic on vintage patched cotton picking bag and  
found hooks and chain

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 2022

## Media Contact:

Darius Sabbaghzadeh  
darius@hellothirdeye.comKyle Hinton  
kyle@hellothirdeye.com45 N Venice Blvd  
Venice CA 90291  
info@lalouver.com310 822 4955  
lalouver.com

Another primary leitmotif of the exhibition looks more pointedly at the issue of reproductive health in its references to and depiction of African American herbalism and self-induced abortions. Informed by sociological scholarship which examines the use of herbal abortifacients by enslaved people in the United States, Saar was inspired to bring attention to this historical occurrence by the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the Supreme Court, a decision which disproportionately and negatively affects women of color.

There is a long history, extending into the ancient past, of humans using herbs such as black cohosh root, mugwort, pennyroyal, cotton root and cotton root bark to induce abortions. Hung from the ceiling to show their double-painted sides and measuring nearly 9 feet tall, Saar's *Uproot* (2022) and *Plucked* (2022) depict this practice of ingesting aborticides to spare unborn children from a life of subjugation and violence. These paintings are rendered on vintage canvas sacks, patched by Saar, that were previously used for harvesting cotton. This indexical element demonstrates Saar's continued emphasis on layered histories through significant and intentional materiality.

A thematic continuation of and expansion upon Saar's previous work appears in *Congolene Resistance (bust)* (2022), *Shear'd* (2023), *Stubborn and Kinky* (2022), and *DeConkified* (2022). Drawn from the imagery of pomade containers, Saar celebrates the characteristics of Black hair that have been societally devalued as antithetical to whiteness and, especially, white femininity. Saar weaves multiple stratas of meaning here as these works relate into the theme of reproductive rights and health in their allusion to hair straightening products marketed to Black women that have been known to cause uterine cancer.

In *Uproot*, Saar proclaims the sovereignty of Black women over their own bodies. By reconfiguring historical forms and materials into vehicles for education and illumination, she pays tribute to the hardships endured, past and present, in what is ultimately a memorial to Black women's resilience, courage, and strength.

Alison Saar was born and raised in Laurel Canyon, California. Saar received her B.A. in studio art and art history in 1978 from Scripps College, Claremont, California. She went on to earn her MFA from Otis-Parsons Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design). At the beginning of her career, Saar was selected as a fellow of the studio program at The Studio Museum in Harlem (1982-3). She has received three fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1984, 1985 and 1988), and was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in 1989, the Flintridge Foundation Award for Visual Artists in 2000, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award in 1998 and the Joan Mitchell Artist in Residence in 2013. In 2012, the United States Artists Program named Saar one of 50 USA fellows. Select public works include: *Swing Low: Harriet Tubman Memorial* (Harlem, New York) and *Embodied* (Hall of Justice, Los Angeles, California), and *To Sit Awhile and Think*, a tribute to the playwright and activist Lorraine Hansberry (traveling, currently at Howard University, Washington D.C.).