



i will never smile again

Date

2016

Primary Maker

Vanessa German

Medium

Mixed-media assemblage

Description

i will never smile again is one of the artist Vanessa German's signature life-sized female figures, which she assembles from a variety of found and newly created objects. In this case, the head and face are made of plaster, tar, cowrie shells, and the heads of ceramic figurines; items such as a broken Blackberry mobile phone, keys, and electrical receptacles hang like a collar around the neck and shoulders; the torso is a small blue cabinet; and the base is a vintage container for lard, placed on top of an upturned drawer. German's sculptures are inspired by nkisi power figures—sources of healing and protection for the Kongo peoples of central Africa—and by the terracotta warriors found in 1974 in the tomb of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China. Her figures, which she describes as "an army of healers. an army of weepers. an army of protectors. armed and dangerous upon the lie," are intended to serve a protective and healing role against such modern-day threats as hate, racism, gun violence, and police brutality. German is a spoken-word poet, activist, and self-styled "citizen artist" based in Pittsburgh. She is the founder of Love Front Porch and

the ARThouse, community arts initiatives for the children of her neighborhood. Members of her community assist her in creating the cloth bundles that are apparent in many of her works, including this one, where they have been placed in tiers around the figure's waist, creating a skirt. These bundles, too, hark back to the nkisi tradition, in which the act of tying the bundles is thought to bind harmful spirits and prevent them from succeeding in their evil acts. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017)

Dimensions

Overall: 85 3/4 × 29 × 24 in. (217.8 × 73.7 × 61 cm)