

**Sanford Biggers** (b. 1970 in Los Angeles; lives and works in New York City) has made installations, videos, and performances that have appeared in venues worldwide including the Tate Britain and Tate Modern in London; the Whitney Museum, the New Museum, the Apollo Theater, and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art; as well as institutions in China, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Poland, and Russia. A solo exhibition at Monique Meloche Gallery, in Chicago, opens on September 15, 2018. The artist's works have been included in notable exhibitions such as: *Prospect.1* New Orleans biennial, *Illuminations* at the Tate Modern, *Performa 07* in New York, the Whitney Biennial, and *Freestyle* at The Studio Museum in Harlem. His works are included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Walker Art Center, Whitney Museum of American Art, Brooklyn Museum, Bronx Museum of the Arts, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the new Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama. An outdoor exhibition of his public sculpture continues at Sculpture Milwaukee through October 21, 2018. He has received numerous prestigious awards including the American Academy in Berlin Prize, New York Foundation for the Arts Award, the Lambent Fellowship in the Arts, and the Rome Prize in Visual Arts at the American Academy in Rome. In 2018 he received the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Art. Biggers is an Associate Professor at Columbia University's Visual Arts program.

*Sanford Biggers* is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Lisa Melandri, Executive Director.

The exhibition and catalog are generously supported by the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation, Dr. Daniel S. Berger, Hedy Fischer and Randy Shull, and Christy and Bill Gautreaux. The Artist Talk is generously supported by the Robert Lehman Foundation.

*Sanford Biggers* will travel to the Chazen Museum of Art at University of Wisconsin-Madison in the summer of 2019.

## Related Programs

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### Artist Talk: Sanford Biggers

Thursday, September 6, 6:30 pm

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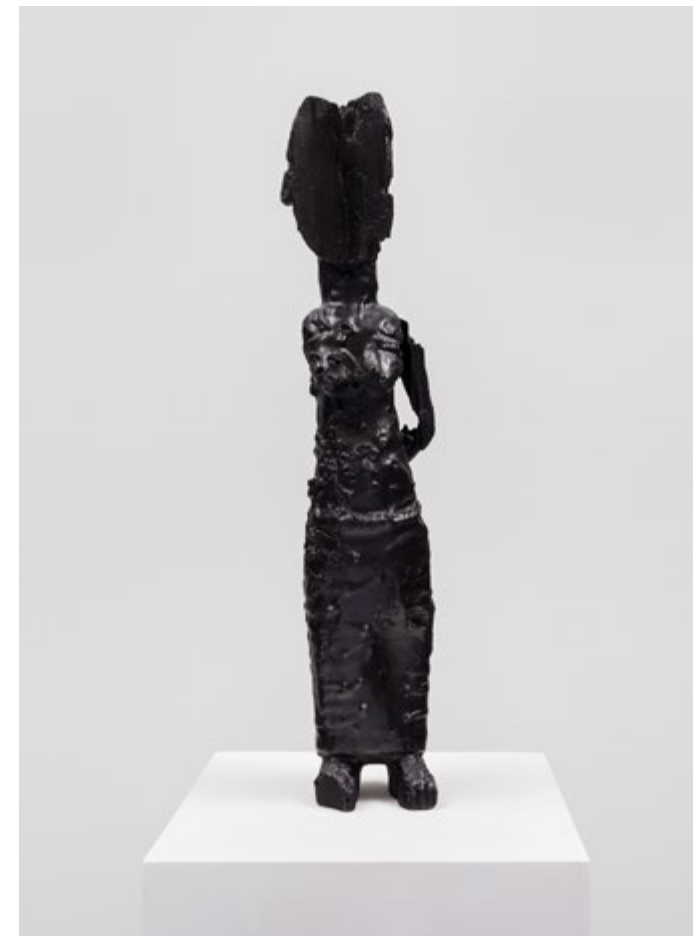
### RE: Black Visual Mourning

Wednesday, October 10, 6:30 pm

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A full-color, 52-page, illustrated catalog will accompany the exhibition, with contributions by Lisa Melandri and Kahlil Gibran Muhammad, among other authors. The catalog is produced by Lucia | Marquand, Seattle.

# Sanford Biggers



Sanford Biggers's practice encourages meaningful dialogue around history and trauma in America. This exhibition includes eight works related to his *BAM* series, begun in 2015, in which Biggers seeks to memorialize and honor unarmed black victims of police gun violence in America. Through sculpture, video, and paintings he brings to light the pain these acts have perpetrated upon society, but also points to the wider human condition and a desire to transcend.

To create his *BAM* sculptures, the artist begins with an African figurative sculpture—whether of authentic or dubious origin—acquired during his travels. The figure

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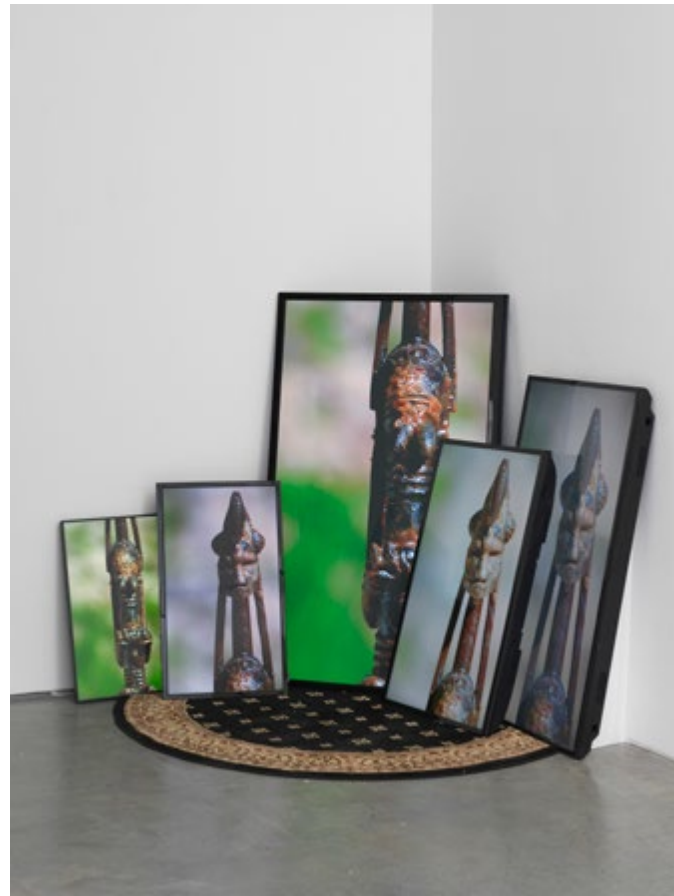
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(Left) Sanford Biggers, *BAM (for Sandra)*, 2016. Bronze with black patina, 19 × 4 × 5 inches. (Right) Sanford Biggers, *BAM (for Terence)*, 2016. Bronze with black patina, 14 ½ × 4 ½ × 4 ½ inches. Edition 1 of 3 + 1 AP, unique. Both courtesy the artist; Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago; Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen; and Massimo De Carlo, Milan/London/Hong Kong. © Sanford Biggers.



## Audio Tour

Visit [camstl.org/audio](http://camstl.org/audio) or ask for an iPod at the front desk to hear directly from the artist and curator on the audio tour.



Sanford Biggers, *Infinite Tabernacle*, 2017. HD video installation, carpet, 4:26 minutes. Courtesy the artist; Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago; Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen; and Massimo De Carlo, Milan/London/Hong Kong. © Sanford Biggers. Photo credit: Object Studies.

is dipped in wax and taken to a shooting range, where Biggers directs the re-sculpting of each with gunshots. The artist then casts the re-sculpted figure in bronze—an historically noble and weighty medium. For Biggers, this process bestows honor to the damaged figure, allowing it to become a “power object” worthy of veneration, and the victims to be realized as symbols of power and endurance. Through these works, Biggers points toward recent transgressions in American history and elevates the stories of specific individuals in order to combat historical amnesia: in this exhibition sculptures are named after Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Terence Crutcher, and Jordan Edwards. *BAM* not only brings to light the pain of these individuals, their families, and of society, but also aims to create a platform for thoughtful discussion.

The multi-channel video installation *Infinite Tabernacle* features images of the original wooden figures being riddled with bullets, as well as the playback of the ballistic sculpting in reverse and at different speeds. As the title suggests, the work serves as a sanctuary for the reconvened figures. The overall effect touches on a theme that Biggers explores throughout his practice: the cycle of life, death, and transcendence.

Biggers acquires and alters antique quilts, calling the resulting artworks paintings. Each painting on view includes an image of an African figure; in two instances, directly representing the *Seated Warrior* sculpture on display in the lobby. In contributing his own imagery to these often encoded patchwork quilts, Biggers, in effect, collaborates with the unknown quilters and forms a dialogue between them, himself, viewers, the past and present.

### The Code-Switcher

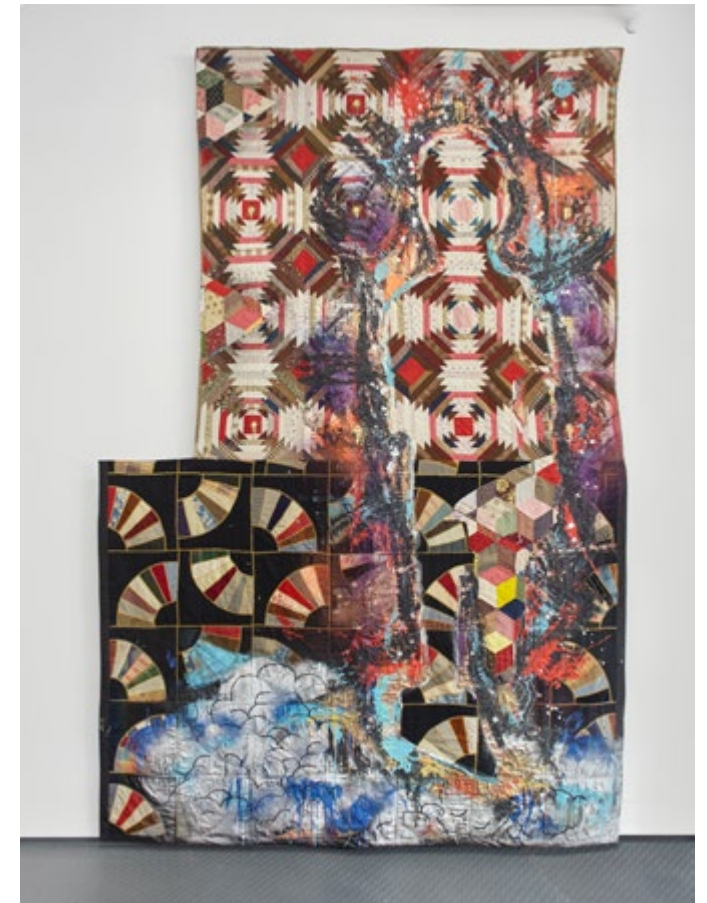
Sanford Biggers is an inquisitive artist who synthesizes such widely varying interests and influences as jazz, Japanese Zen Buddhism, Caribbean Vodoun, and Sacred Geometry. Biggers reconciles these disparate practices, creating contemplative, often transportive artworks that provide a different understanding of history in relation to our current moment. At the core of his practice is a righting of American history on a material level. Often working with objects of the African diaspora—masks, figurative sculpture, and quilts—Biggers has said, “As interested as I am in found objects, it’s also about the transformation of the object, doing another process or action that acknowledges its found nature but also puts something new into it.” The artist encodes different meanings onto symbols and objects, creating the potential for transcendence through metamorphosis. Just as objects and people code-switch, history, too, is subject to time and is subsequently unfixed and malleable. This is where Biggers sees the potential for transcendence through transformation.

Biggers grew up in Los Angeles, attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, and after graduating in 1992 he spent time abroad, including living in Japan where he taught English for three years and steeped himself in Japanese Zen Buddhism. Biggers has acknowledged the strong linkages between Buddhism and African and African American traditions—most notably, the idea of flow and the embracing of the unknown and ephemeral. In *Infinite Tabernacle*, the artist connects the cyclical nature of life, death, and transcendence to the historical pattern of brutality against the black body. The artist offers moments of flickering transience in which the once bullet-riddled African sculptures come back together in reverse only to be slowly disfigured again. Here, the artist underscores the fragility and ephemerality of the human condition.

In the three paintings on view, the artist creates a continuum of past and present by incorporating his own imagery and meanings onto the historical patchworks. Antique quilts are rumored to have played a role in the Underground Railroad. They provided communication: their pattern, color, or how they were folded over a bannister or windowsill conveyed

information to escaping slaves, indicating safe houses and the paths north to freedom. The artist has said of these quilts, “Some have already been altered and re-contextualized by subsequent owners and I see myself as a late collaborator, contributing to their history and function in this present moment... It’s very much like history itself, a patchwork of experiences, perspectives, and reportage...” By including images of a *Seated Warrior* figure in the paintings on view here, Biggers creates a dialogue between history and the black body. Central to Biggers’s practice is the potential of coded objects to transform our experience and understanding of the human condition. In Biggers’s musical film *Moonrising* (2013)—featuring a soundtrack by his multimedia band Moon Medicin, and on view in the exhibition—we see a series of black men making their way through a wooded landscape, dressed in feathered costumes, hooded sweatshirts, worn quilts, and grotesque masks. With narration from Harriet Tubman’s biography, *Moonrising* makes reference to the history of the Underground Railroad, and is linked to concepts found in Biggers’s quilt paintings.

The artist considers two of his primary materials to be history and dialogue, and emphasizes visitor interaction and participation as part of the process of completing his pieces. “My work is very process-oriented. There is a performance aspect in the creation and the viewing of the work. I am always considering how the audience will activate or interact with the work, and more importantly, how to capture the residue of that interaction.” So while Biggers layers meaning on symbolic objects such as the *BAM* sculptures, and builds a space for dialogue, he relies on visitors to activate, challenge, and expand on these ideas. The artworks are not static, but rather shift and change with the passing of time and collaboration of viewers.



(Top right) Sanford Biggers, *Shepherd*, 2016. Glitter, tar, acrylic, spray paint, assorted textiles, antique quilts, 119 × 79 × 3 inches.

(Bottom right) Sanford Biggers, *Pink Seated Warrior*, 2017. Antique futon cover, various textiles, sequins, 58 × 39 inches.

Both courtesy the artist; Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago; Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen; and Massimo De Carlo, Milan/London/Hong Kong. © Sanford Biggers.

