

The Virgin Islands Consortium

'I Am Queen Mary: Monument Of A Rebel Queen' To Be Unveiled In Denmark Today

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Danish artist Jeannette Ehlers and Virgin Islands artist La Vaughn Belle, have teamed up to create a monumental public sculpture entitled I AM QUEEN MARY to be revealed on Saturday, March 31, 2018 at the Danish West Indian Warehouse in Copenhagen, according to a release sent to The Consortium on Friday. Both leading artists of their respective countries have together created the first collaborative sculpture to memorialize Denmark's colonial impact in the Caribbean and those who fought against it.

On the end of the centennial year commemorating the 100th anniversary of Denmark's sale of the Virgin Islands to the United States in March 1917, the release says the public sculpture project speaks to questions surrounding Denmark's apology for slavery and the

commemoration of its colonial past.

"What's unique about this sculpture is not only its size and thematics but that it was not commissioned. It is us, two artists, who raised the money ourselves and are pushing into the public space," Ms. Ehlers said.

The project represents a "bridge between the two countries," Ms. Belle explained, adding, "It's a hybrid of our bodies, nations and narratives. It extends the conversation beyond the centennial year and gets people to really question what is their relationship to this history."

The figure representing the rebel Queen Mary Thomas is a hybrid of the two artists' bodies created using 3D scanning technology. She emerged as the most popular leader or "Queen" of the 'Fireburn', the largest labor revolt in Danish colonial history. The release did not explain why the bodies of Ms. Belle and Ms. Ehlers were chosen, as compared to historically significant figures.

The torch and cane bill in each hand reference the resistance strategies used by the colonized in their struggles for freedom. The seated pose recalls the iconic 1967 photograph of Huey P. Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party. The plinth incorporates coral cut from the ocean by enslaved Africans gathered from ruins of the foundations of historic buildings on St. Croix.

A site-specific intervention, I Am Queen Mary occupies the waterfront by Copenhagen's West Indian Warehouse that stored sugar, rum and other goods produced in Denmark's former Caribbean colonies. It currently houses the Royal Cast Collection of over 2,000 white plaster casts of sculptures.

The project creates a dialogue around the impact of colonialism and demonstrates how artists can be leaders in this conversation. This temporary sculpture is the first part of an endeavour to raise a permanent bronze monument in the same location.

The opening reception for I Am Queen Mary takes place Saturday, March 31, 2018 at 1-3 pm in the Royal Cast Collection with invited speakers from Denmark and the Virgin Islands.

I Am Queen Mary is realised with the generous support from Beckett-Fonden, The Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces, The Municipality of Copenhagen, Wow Factory and Statens Museum for Kunst.

La Vaughn Belle is a multidisciplinary artist from the Virgin Islands. Her work borrows from elements of architecture, literature, history, archeology and social protest to create narratives that challenge the colonial process, according to the release. She is best known for her work reinterpreting the material artifacts of colonialism and uses her work to create a form of alternative archive that challenges the colonial narrative. She has exhibited her work in the Caribbean, the USA and Europe. www.lavaughnbelle.com

Jeannette Ehlers is a video, photo and performance artist based in Copenhagen, Denmark. For years she has created artworks that delve into ethnicity and identity inspired by her own Danish and Caribbean background, according to the release. Her pieces revolve around big questions and difficult issues, such as Denmark's role as a slave nation—a part of the Danish cultural heritage, which often gets overlooked in the

general historiography. She has exhibited and performed worldwide.
www.jeannetteehlers.dk

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