Lezley Saar is an artist. Did you ever consider doing anything else before deciding to focus on art?

When I was younger, I thought about being a writer. My father was a teacher, so I was always steeped in books and writing. But in college, I realized I was more interested in the visual aspects of communication. I did a dual major: fine arts and art history. I just think, at the end of it, I felt I was better suited to making art than writing culture. I worked with Dr. Samella Lewis and was looking to be an art historian specializing in the African diaspora and non-Western culture. I spent going with my mother to salons and going through these ingredients strip the hair of what makes it curl. Early on one of the patterns because it reminded me of African scarification, which in some ways is an external biographer, telling us who you are married to or what group you belong to. I look at a lot of images of women from the Black Panther movement with their Afros and fists raised and then contemporized the hairstyle to say we're still fighting the same movement with their Afros and fists raised and then dancing, removing the social shackles and all the pain we are carrying around. But it's still a painful piece in my eyes. I basically felt that it was OK to express being furious. Since then, with Trump and the white supremacists, things have gotten harder because we can no longer remove the shackles. There is no easy way to express pain and anger.

Do you think about that contradiction?

Yes [laughs]. I'm a little obsessed with hair. I think part of it is eating the "lye" or "lie," trying to separate herself from her African-American ancestry. And much of my young life was being biracial and very fair-skinned, to the point of being perceived as being more of a social biographer, telling us who you are to me. But it's been harder to express that. I think it's always about a balance, and that comes back to the Yoruba goddess Yemoja. These figures are defiant but tender; they are beautiful warriors. The title refers to the old-school hair straightening process? Yes. The word "conked" has different connotations depending on where you are in the world and your background. There is no right or wrong way to pronounce or spell it. "Conked" can have an Egyptian or African-American connotation, for example. It can also refer to the historical practice of straightening natural hair. The title "Conked" references the process of hair straightening and the cultural and historical significance of this practice.

Your new sculpture for Pomona shows Yemoja, the Yoruba water goddess who is often depicted as a beautiful, nurturing figure. Yemoja crops up in my work a lot. I first discovered her when I was working on a series of broadsides where people would print out a poem and sell you "Purple Urkle." When I was in high school, I remember doing a mixtape for the show, "Angry Feminists Arm Themselves With Art." The title refers to the old-school hair straightening process? Yes. The word "conked" has different connotations depending on where you are in the world and your background. There is no right or wrong way to pronounce or spell it. "Conked" can have an Egyptian or African-American connotation, for example. It can also refer to the historical practice of straightening natural hair. The title "Conked" references the process of hair straightening and the cultural and historical significance of this practice.

Yes, there is a lot of research involved in my work. Currently, I'm working on new pieces for the Pomona College campus, commissioned by the Benton Museum of Art there: "Imbue," a 12-foot-tall bronze evoking the title refers to the old-school hair straightening process? Yes. The word "conked" has different connotations depending on where you are in the world and your background. There is no right or wrong way to pronounce or spell it. "Conked" can have an Egyptian or African-American connotation, for example. It can also refer to the historical practice of straightening natural hair. The title "Conked" references the process of hair straightening and the cultural and historical significance of this practice.

For your "Imbue" show in 2018 at L.A. Louver, you turned to my African-American ancestry. And much of my young life was being biracial and very fair-skinned, to the point of being perceived as being more of a social biographer, telling us who you are to me. But it's been harder to express that. I think it's always about a balance, and that comes back to the Yoruba goddess Yemoja. These figures are defiant but tender; they are beautiful warriors. The title refers to the old-school hair straightening process? Yes. The word "conked" has different connotations depending on where you are in the world and your background. There is no right or wrong way to pronounce or spell it. "Conked" can have an Egyptian or African-American connotation, for example. It can also refer to the historical practice of straightening natural hair. The title "Conked" references the process of hair straightening and the cultural and historical significance of this practice.

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