

Lesley Dill

# Wilderness

LIGHT SIZZLES AROUND ME

An ambitious new show from the Maine-raised, Brooklyn-based artist explores the power of language, the one-sidedness of history, and the wildness inside each of us



Lesley Dill, a mixed-media artist whose works are in the collection of over 50 museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, has just completed a new monumental exhibition a decade in the making. *Wilderness, Light Sizzles around Me* travels to Bates College of Art after its debut this summer at the Figge Art Museum in Davenport, Iowa.

Dill, who was raised in Falmouth, Maine, and graduated from Waynflete School in Portland, continues to be influenced by New England's past, to which she is deeply connected by ancestral roots dating back to early-seventeenth-century colonial America. As the 71-year-old artist told the *New York Times* in April 2020, when she was still very much buried in the hundreds of yards of fabric that would come to form the pieces in this show, "My theme is the theme of the

original European-American settlers and their almost Biblical sense of wilderness as a fear of the unknown. It was a place of the devil, where dangers—whether from Native Americans, wild animals, or starvation—lay to be conquered, to be controlled."

Inspired by the poetry and prose of early American social activists, religious crusaders, and Native American leaders, Dill has created larger-than-life sewn-cloth figures and embellished them with words and symbols drawn from each person's writings and experiences. Figures of the abolitionists John Brown and Sojourner Truth, the Shakers' founder Mother Ann Lee, and the Sauk leader Black Hawk, among others, suspend from the ceiling and are surrounded by hand-painted, two-dimensional banners that further flesh out their stories.

Dan Mills, the director of the Bates Museum of Art and the lead curator for the Bates show, describes Dill as "giving voice to people who didn't necessarily seem to be

given a lot of voice in our history in terms of our historical texts." He goes on to describe Anne Hutchinson, who lived from 1591-1643, and was the Puritan wife and mother of 15 children. Hutchinson became an outspoken and charismatic speaker on her personal religious beliefs. She had visions and began preaching from her home, which, as Mills describes, was taken as insolent behavior by the religious structures and the male leaders at the time. "She was put on trial and banished from her community. She was known as the American Jezebel—which is really declaring devilry—because she spoke her words from her spiritual experiences to those who wished to hear it."

Dill gives voice to Hutchinson and others, with works that explore the power of language, the one-sidedness of history, and the wildness inside each of us.

**Lesley Dill: *Wilderness, Light Sizzles around Me* will be on view from January 21 to March 19.**

◀ *Omnipotence Enough (Emily Dickinson)*, 2017, oil paint on fabric, wooden yoke, and shoe lasts, 103 1/4" x 42.5" x 5".



▲ *The Wilderness Tattoo (Hester Prynne)*, 2017, fabric, thread, Cinefoil with gold leaf, ink on wooden base, 86" x 55" x 55".



▲ *Sister Gertrude Morgan*, 2021, acrylic paint, hand-cut paper, thread on cotton fabric, satin, plastic sheeting, wooden yoke and shoe lasts, 100" x 42" x 6".



▲ *Revelator (Sojourner Truth)*, 2021, oil paint, thread on fabric, wooden yoke and shoe lasts, 103.5" x 37" x 3".

# SHOWCASE

BY RACHEL HURN



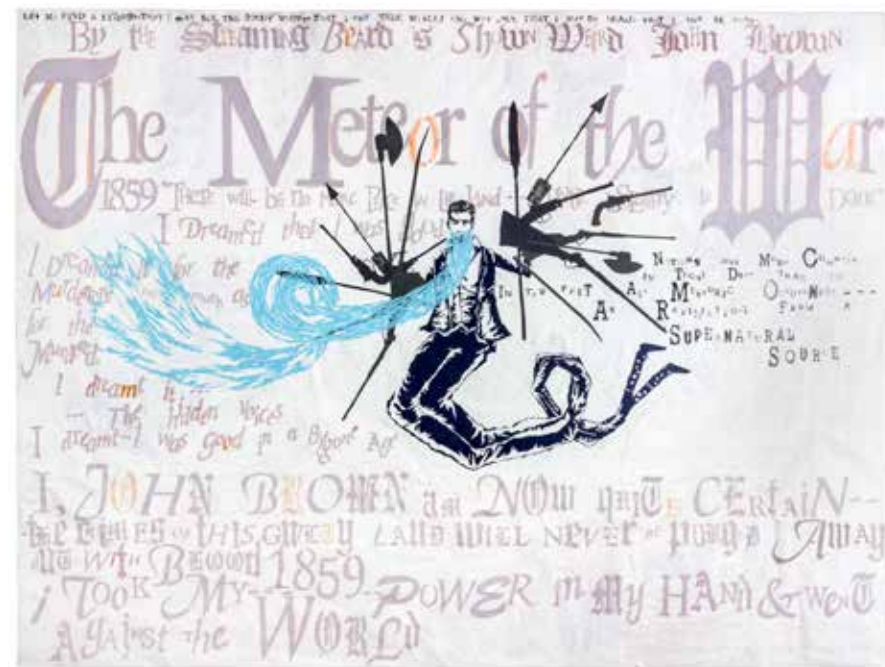
▲ *Dred Scott*, 2021, acrylic paint on cotton fabric 100" x 60".



▲ *Black Hawk*, 2021, hand-cut paper, acrylic paint on cotton fabric, 100" x 60".



▲ *Written by Her Own Hand (Mary Rowlandson)*, 2017, oil paint, thread, paper on Tyvek-backed fabric, 82.5" x 59.5".



▲ *John Brown: Meteor of The War*, 2017, oil paint, acrylic paint, hand-cut paper, and thread on fabric-backed paper, 62" x 84".



▲ *Jonathan Edwards: Purity*, 2018, fabric, thread, balsa wood, ink, 14" x 9" x 2".