

Alison Saar *Sweet Life*

15 May – 11 July 2025

38 avenue Matignon
75008 Paris



Mutiny of the Sable Venus, 2024

Relief print on seed sack, edition of 4, 160 × 97 cm

© Alison Saar. Courtesy Galerie Lelong

Galerie Lelong is presenting *Sweet Life*, the first solo exhibition in Europe by American artist Alison Saar, whose poetic yet critical approach explores the complex history of sugar cane in America and its links to Africa and Europe. Through a series of sculptures, paintings and prints, the artist unfolds a visual narrative in which the bitter irony of the title underlines the brutality of the historical reality it evokes: European and American prosperity built on the exploitation of deported African populations.

For several decades, Alison Saar has been drawing on historical archives, popular imagery and cultural traditions to explore the mechanisms of memory and the transmission of diasporic narratives. In *Sweet Life*, she looks at the history and representation of the sugar trade from the 17th to the 20th century, drawing on a variety of sources – illustrations in cookery and manners books, advertisements, etc. – that reveal the paradoxes of an industry that was both synonymous with refinement and rooted in the violence of slavery.

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For this exhibition, the artist has produced a body of work combining different techniques and materials. Wooden sculptures covered in metal and other objects show the pride of rebellious women, while white ceramic sculptures depict busts of women scarred by violence, and paintings on wood or jute and textile prints add to this exploration of the traces left by the past. Mischievously entitled *Citizen Cane*, a large female figure wearing a belt of machetes revisits the iconography of the triangular trade punctuated with revolts. Another work, *Lait Sucre*, depicts a pregnant woman sculpted in wood and bathed in an intense dark blue light, and questions the role of women in this story of servitude and resilience.

Known for her materialist approach and her expressive use of recycled materials, Alison Saar has been developing a sculptural and graphic practice over the last forty years that engages with mythology, Caribbean folklore, the history of blues and jazz, and the experiences of black women in the United States. Born into a family of artists, she is the daughter of Betye Saar, a leading figure in the Black Arts Movement. Her work has been exhibited in many prestigious institutions, including MoMA (New York), the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York) and the Smithsonian American Art Museum (Washington). Several of her sculptures have been installed in public spaces in the United States, and in 2024 the work *Salon* was inaugurated in the Aznavour garden in Paris to coincide with the Olympic Games.

Born in 1956, Alison Saar lives and works in Los Angeles.

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