

The Rollins Museum of Art Welcomes La Vaughn Belle's *The House that Freedoms Built*  
On View September 12, 2026



*Installation, La Vaughn Belle: The House that Freedoms Built at Cooper Hewitt  
November 2, 2024 through August 10, 2025*

**March 11, 2026 – Winter Park, FL – The Rollins Museum of Art** is pleased to announce that a significant installation by Saint Croix artist **La Vaughn Belle** (b. 1974, Tobago): ***The House that Freedoms Built*** will be welcomed to campus and situated outdoors as part of a dynamic two-year series of artist installations and interventions that explore architecture and the built environment through various media and by raising questions about physical space. The series begins with Belle's *The House that Freedoms Built* and will conclude with a commissioned work for the Rollins Museum of Art's new facility, opening in early 2028.

Commissioned by Powerhouse Arts, *The House that Freedoms Built* debuted as part of the Smithsonian's Design Triennial at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, in New York in Fall 2024. The piece will be displayed only the second time when it arrives on the Rollins College campus

on **July 24, 2026**. The timing of its display coincides with America 250 celebrations that commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> signing of the Declaration of Independence. Based on the island of St. Croix – part of the United States Virgin Islands since its formal transfer from Denmark on April 1, 1917 – Belle explores the colonial history of the Caribbean through her practice, which is grounded in archival and archaeological research.

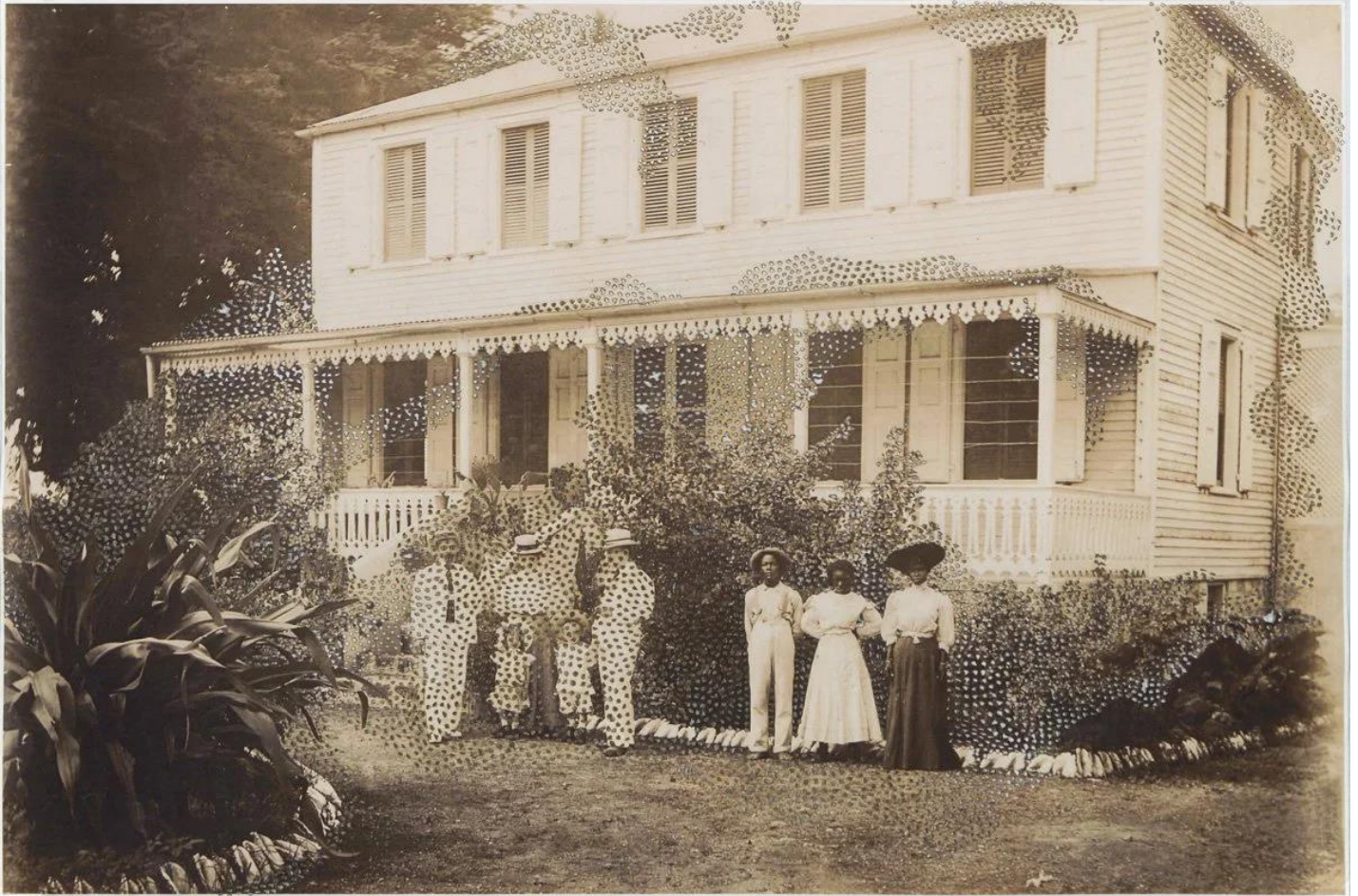
“*The House That Freedoms Built* asks what it means to inhabit freedom, not as an abstract idea, but as something we negotiate every day through space, through our bodies, and through community. Like the sculptures themselves, freedom is not solitary. It is something we build in relation to one another. That also makes it fragile, but fragile in a powerful way, because it requires tending, even devotion. At Rollins, where the museum sits within a living campus, I imagine the work in conversation with students who are also figuring out how to inhabit themselves in the world intellectually, ethically, and socially. I hope it sparks questions about how we construct a sense of home and how we come to belong to the places and histories that shape us,” says Belle, who will participate in related programming on the Rollins campus in the month of November.

“La Vaughn Belle’s work surfaces overlooked narratives and, in doing so, expands our understanding of history while raising important questions about our relationship to objects, places, and the past. *The House That Freedoms Built* will invite our community to pause and reflect on freedom in its many forms—how it is imagined, constructed, and experienced across time and place,” said Leslie Anderson, Bruce A. Beal Executive Director of the Rollins Museum of Art.

The installation will be accompanied by two newly acquired photographic works from the artist’s *SWARM* series, which altogether consider notions of home, freedom, and belonging, dovetailing with an exhibition titled *To Imagine a Home*, opening September 12, 2026. Curated by RMA’s Gisela Carbonell, *To Imagine a Home* studies how spaces and structures influence us and explores the many, often complex ways we connect with the spaces we live in. All works are derived entirely from the collection and include additional by Allen Fireall, Emilio Sánchez, Pepón Osorio, Yinka Shonibare, and Becky Suss. Marking a transitional moment for the Museum as well, this is one of the final exhibitions RMA will host at its original “home” before completely moving facilities in 2028.

***The House that Freedoms Built*** explores the history and legacy of colonialism in the Caribbean, particularly on the island of St. Croix, which was a Danish colony for 200 years before becoming a United States territory. The architectural design and its distinctive motifs are inspired by 18th-century houses built by formerly enslaved people and by the stories of struggle, survival, and resistance that Belle uncovered in her research. Her artistic interpretation of the visual reminders of this history honors communities whose stories may otherwise be forgotten. *The House That Freedoms Built* invites viewers to learn about this history and reflect on how the legacy of colonization continues to impact social and cultural paradigms today.

The installation contains three white houses with pitched roofs; each roughly 9-foot tall, 8-foot long, and 7-foot wide. Each is a nod to homes found in the town of Frederiksted in St. Croix, US Virgin Islands, and more specifically inspired by the shapes of 18th-century houses built by formerly enslaved people of St. Croix. The artist used an architectural embellishment known as fretwork to create the elaborate patterning effect on the structure’s walls and slanted roofs. The designs are carved into the surface, cutting away the negative space. If you touch the structure, you might feel the geometric shapes’ curvature, twisting along the façade. From a distance, the structures could look like they are made of lace or lattice.



La Vaughn Belle *SWARM (005\_23)*, 2023, Cuts and burn on printed photographs, 24 x 36 in. (30.5 x 42.5 in. framed)

*Swarm* is a series that utilizes images from the Danish colonial archives of the Danish West Indies and transforms them by making hundreds of cuts and burns into the printed photographs. The amorphous interventions into the photographic image penetrate time and space while transforming the colonial hierarchies of the constructed image.

“The *Swarm* series and *The House That Freedoms Built* come from different moments in my practice, but they are connected by a shared concern with how freedom is negotiated inside restrictive structures, and how alternative sovereignties are made. *The House That Freedoms Built* is grounded in architectural history and material culture. It looks at colonial structures not only as instruments of control, but as sites where people forged other ways of living, caring, and imagining themselves into the future. The work attends to the evidence of labor, care and imagination and treats architecture as both a record of constraint and a container for resistance. The *Swarm* works approach the question of sovereignty from a different register. Like *The House That Freedoms Built*, *Swarm* is also creating an alterarchive, a space that not only challenges institutional archives, but alters them while positioning another kind of narrative authority. *Swarm* operates through gesture, erosion, and surface intervention. The acts of cutting and burning function as a way of testing the limits of the image, allowing the surface to be slowly undermined and re-mapped. I often think of these marks as behaving like a swarm of termites. In this way, the cuts and burns are creating openings, passages, and irregular clearings that loosen an otherwise rigid narrative structure. This series proposes a speculative cartography of both rupture and possibility.” – La Vaughn Belle

## ABOUT THE ARTIST



**La Vaughn Belle** (b. 1974, Tobago) is a multidisciplinary artist based in Saint Croix, US Virgin Islands whose work focuses on the often-forgotten colonial narratives embedded in the architecture and material culture of contemporary society. Her practice frequently centers on the Caribbean island of Saint Croix—long claimed as a territory by various European nations, including nearly 200 years as a colony of Denmark, before being sold to the US in 1916. For the entryway to the museum, Belle designed three structures inspired by the shapes of 18th-century houses built by formerly enslaved people who negotiated their freedom and were allowed to settle in Christiansted, Saint Croix. The architectural embellishment known as fretwork adorning each structure is a nod to homes in the town of Frederiksted. The community was the site of the 1878 Fireburn rebellion, an important labor revolt that resulted in much of the town being destroyed. Residents added these fretwork designs to their houses during Frederiksted's reconstruction. Through thoughtful engagement with St. Croix's architecture and history, Belle not only honors the legacy of resilience and creativity on the island but also invites viewers to reflect on the complex narratives of colonization and cultural heritage that continue to shape contemporary society.

*Portrait of La Vaughn Belle, Courtesy of the artist.*

## ABOUT THE ROLLINS MUSEUM OF ART

The Rollins Museum of Art offers always-free admission to rotating exhibitions, dynamic public programs, and access to an extensive permanent collection of more than 6,000 objects spanning antiquity to the present. The collection includes a world-class global contemporary art collection, the only European Old Master paintings in the Orlando area, and a significant holding of American art. Contemporary works are also on view at The Alford Inn at Rollins, a nearby philanthropic boutique hotel whose proceeds support student scholarships. In 1981, the museum became Florida's first accredited college museum and remains one of only four museums in greater Orlando accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. For additional information, call 407.646.2526 or visit [www.rollins.edu/rma](http://www.rollins.edu/rma). "Like" the RMA on Facebook and follow on Instagram @rollinsmuseum.

## ABOUT ROLLINS COLLEGE

Founded in 1885, Rollins College is Florida's oldest recognized college. Located in Winter Park, near Orlando, Rollins is consistently ranked as one of the top regional universities in the South by U.S. News

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& World Report. In addition to full-time undergraduate programs in the College of Liberal Arts, Rollins offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs for working adults through its evening program at the Hamilton Holt School and graduate business degree programs through its Crummer Graduate School of Business, which has been ranked a top MBA program by Forbes and Bloomberg BusinessWeek. Rollins serves approximately 3,127 degree-seeking students annually. For more information, visit [www.rollins.edu](http://www.rollins.edu). "Like" Rollins on Facebook and follow on X @RollinsCollege.

### **Museum Location**

Rollins Museum of Art, Rollins College  
1000 Holt Avenue, Winter Park, FL 32789  
407.646.2526

### **Museum Hours**

Tuesday and Thursday: 10am-7pm  
Wednesday and Friday: 10am-4pm  
Saturday-Sunday: 12-5pm  
Closed Mondays, major holidays, and during installation periods

### **Alfond Inn Location**

The Alfond Inn at Rollins College  
300 East New England Avenue  
Winter Park, FL 32789

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