

## FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE

### There, There: Healing Dolls as Solace in an Off Kilter World

Erika Cleveland

January 19 – March 2, 2019

Opening Reception on Saturday, January 26, 2019, 6.30-8.30PM

Artist Erika Cleveland uses the term “doll” in her work because she believes there is something unique about the word doll- humble, simple and yet powerful. Dolls have been around since the beginnings of humankind. They hold considerable power for us; they are our companions and they reflect us back to ourselves. Dolls can heal us physically, spiritually and emotionally.

In this solo show at WAS gallery, Cleveland explores various themes through mythology, folk tales, religion, spirituality and her personal dream symbolism. A central theme is the power within the female body, including the way this power is deeply rooted in nature. Darker themes such as loss, sadness and fear alternate with the playfulness of fauns, forest creatures and elves. The dolls express the dualities of life in the way they shape-shift and transform, for example through the medium of the folk art form called flip dolls. Like votives, amulets or talismen throughout history, dolls provide a focal point for healing and meditation.

Erika Cleveland is a healing doll artist. She makes her dolls at the Jackson Art Center in Washington, DC. Graduate of the Boston School of the Museum of Fine Arts, with a fine arts focus, Cleveland discovered sculptural needle felting five years ago, the method by which she creates most of her dolls. The healing aspect of Cleveland’s dolls also has its roots in her training as an art therapist (Masters in Art Therapy, NYU, 1985.) Sculptural needle felting is a technique in which colored wools are pierced with barbed needles, weaving strands of wool together in a way that is surprisingly strong and durable. Recently, she has begun to combine needle felting and soft sculpture.

Cleveland is interested in engaging in a conversation with community through her dolls. This conversation has included “Materialized Magic: Mythical Creatures in

A Yarn Artistry Habitat,” (2015-16) and “Revisioning the Flip Doll: Exploring Our Connections,” (2015-18.) In the first grant-funded project, (Materialized) Cleveland collaborated with another fiber artist to engage the community (children, the elderly, artists and others) in felting, crocheting and knitting, to create a gallery installation for the artists’ life-sized felted and crocheted “creatures.” In the second, (Revisioning,) also grant-funded project, Cleveland worked with women at N. Street Village in DC, making flip dolls, which were then exhibited at a professional gallery.

Image: Erika Cleveland. "Facing Fears". Flip doll, one of two sides. Sculptural needle felted, soft sculpture and mixed media. 42 x 17 x 8 in. 2017