

Allison Janae Hamilton, *Seven Champions of Peculiar Engagement*

During her graduate studies, Allison Janae Hamilton (American, born 1984) came across a photograph (since lost) of Black American soldiers fencing. The artist was struck that these individuals risked their lives to defend their country, yet upon returning home, they found that their station in society had not improved. Hamilton began purchasing vintage metal and leather fencing masks at thrift stores, yard sales, and online. These relics sat in her studio for many months as the artist tried to determine how she might use them. Over time, Hamilton noted that the masks took on lives of their own and she began to see them as witnesses, both to the present moment and to historical narratives that she could never fully access. Adorning the masks with an array of natural and manufactured materials, Hamilton creates fierce, mythic characters that grow from the bounty of the earth.

Seven Champions of Peculiar Engagement is Hamilton's first work to incorporate multiple fencing masks. She began making this installation in her New York City studio in 2019. When the COVID-19 pandemic started, Hamilton relocated to North Florida, where she was raised and still has family. In the intervening period, the artist noted a shift in her material interests. Having left the concrete environs of the city, she reintroduced herself to a place that had been so familiar to her during her youth by spending time exploring the landscape. The colors and textures of her surroundings began to seep into her work, exemplified by this playful and unexpected grouping.



Allison Janae Hamilton (American, born 1984), *Seven Champions of Peculiar Engagement*, 2020, vintage metal and leather fencing masks, rooster feathers, pheasant feathers, guinea fowl feathers, vintage marble grapes, sola wood, horse hair, metal, and resin, dimensions variable, Museum purchase with funds from the Rose Marie Baumgarten Art Endowment Fund, 2022.8.a-g. Photo: Colin Conces