

ART

# Mobile art gallery showcases the work of Holly Bass and Maps Glover

Inside a shipping container, ‘Cosmic Garden’ features a video archive of two performance artists – one veteran and one up-and-comer

By Kriston Capps

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## **CORRECTION**

In an earlier version of this story, a photo credit misidentified the photographer who took the portrait of Holly Bass and Maps Glover. The photo credit has been corrected.

Green isn’t often the go-to color for lighting theatrical performances. For actors and dancers, warmer colors are more flattering. So the decision by area artists [Holly Bass](#) and [Maps Glover](#) to drape their joint showcase in verdant fabrics and lighting — staging the space like the inside of a hollowed-out cucumber — is a tell. “Cosmic Garden” is not a typical black box theater experience.

That much will be plain enough to visitors from the outside. The exhibition takes place in what looks like it could be a construction trailer, no different from the others on the same block in Navy Yard. Those who arrive looking for a more typical gallery pop-up will do a double take. Those who stumble upon it may guess they've stepped through a portal to an otherworldly plane.

And they would be right. The first in a two-part exhibition series, "Cosmic Garden" is a transporting presentation of performance art — an experience that's part retro, part surreal, and very much in line with past and present trends in Black performance work.

The show is a team-up by two of the city's leading performance artists. Bass is an established figure whose grueling acts of endurance include a recent seven-hour nonstop dance piece at the National Portrait Gallery. Glover is an emerging artist who often couples movement with extravagant visual installations. Both are fixtures in the gallery scene, although they also travel in dance, spoken word and other circles.

Their collaboration started with a phrase: "Double Rainbow," a mantra for this two-part program, which begins with "Cosmic Garden" in CulturalDC's mobile art gallery at Navy Yard and continues from Jan. 21 to Feb. 25 with "Prismms" at Transformer in Logan Circle. In lieu of the traditional ROYGBIV rainbow, Bass and Glover took as their inspiration the old test patterns — known as SMPTE color bars for the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers — that television networks used to help stations calibrate their broadcasts.

It's fitting source material for a largely archival exhibit. For "Cosmic Garden," Bass and Glover installed reels of past performances, half a dozen each, on screens inside the trailer. Glover's works are more recent, while Bass's works mostly date back to the early 2000s: video-recorded pieces that she recently digitized. The artists have leaned into the aesthetic of recovered video footage, displaying glitchy SMPTE color bars between each segment and bathing this impromptu sanctuary in the wan light of an old television set.

Works by Bass show off her considerable range as a performer. Her videos include excerpts from early works such as "Diary of a Baby Diva," a funny and engaging solo piece originally performed for the Fringe Festival in 2006, as well as a spoken-word tribute to D.C.'s reggae-punk fusion godfathers Bad Brains. Her contributions also include balletic dance pieces, including one in which she struggles on a Metro escalator as she and another dancer (Sharon Wittig) push, shove and elbow each other.

Six pieces by Glover include “Like, Like, Scroll,” a wry spoken-word piece set to jazz and recorded at Marvin in 2019, in which the artist extols the familiar act of doomscrolling on a phone. In another sequence — this one drawn from a memorable series of performances by Glover at Transformer in 2018 — he and artist Sifu Sun circle each other as viewers in the cramped gallery space hold their phones close while they try to record.

“Cosmic Garden” offers a full spectrum of Black performance modes. Looking at the videos as a whole, it’s fascinating to see where the artists’ practices overlap and where they diverge. Bass has a background in writing and dance, and over time her work has evolved from cerebral spoken pieces to intense durational art. Glover’s spoken-word performances intersect with Bass’s early storytelling experiments. But while she is usually using her body as her primary medium, Glover’s work is more immersive, incorporating his environment. The etchings and textiles that line the mobile art gallery are mostly his.

Artist duos like this one are a hallmark of performance art, and pairings with or between Black artists have recently been the subject of important shows. Last year, Brooklyn’s nonprofit Blank Forms gallery highlighted the atmospheric collaboration of experimental trumpeter Don Cherry and textile artist Moki Cherry, which defied genres and fully encapsulated their married lives. For Toyin Ojih Odutola’s drawing exhibit “A Countervailing Theory” (which traveled to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden last year), she asked sound artist Peter Adjaye to build a soundscape to accompany her visual world.

“Cosmic Garden” includes works that feature several other Black artists and performers, among them Jamal Gray and Ayodamola Okunseinde, so the exhibit is much more than a two-person show. In fact, the video-performance-installation pop-up is a launchpad for another work: a video piece on view in Transformer’s storefront window, beginning Dec. 10, that shows footage of people as they experience “Cosmic Garden.”

Considering this window piece, the forthcoming “Prismms” show at Transformer and the special mentor relationship between Bass and Glover, it makes more sense that the artists picked green for this project: They’re building something they want to see grow.

**If you go**

# Cosmic Garden

CulturalDC's mobile art gallery at the Yards, First and M streets SE. [culturaldc.org/cosmic-garden](http://culturaldc.org/cosmic-garden).

**Dates:** Through Dec. 18.

**Prices:** Free.

# Prismmms

Transformer, 1404 P St. NW. 202-483-1102. [transformerdc.org](http://transformerdc.org).

**Dates:** Jan. 21-Feb. 25.

**Prices:** Free.