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Bridgeport Art Trail to highlight heritage in its 16th year

Connecticut Public Radio | By [Brandon Cortés](#)

Published October 28, 2024 at 1:15 PM EDT



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Ayannah Brown / Connecticut Public

Close up of *Ankhient Future* by Lyaba Ibo Mandingo at the Bert Chernow Gallery in Bridgeport, Connecticut on Oct. 23rd, 2024. This sculpture represents a spirit guide. The sculpture is made from Mahognay wood and has mahognay pods scattered around it to represent the Atlantic slave trade when Africans and mahogany fuel western Europe's economy.

The Bridgeport Art Trail is preparing to celebrate its 16th year in the city on Nov. 7. The art trail, hosted by [City Lights](#), brings together thousands of art lovers and showcases the creative heartbeat of Park City with heritage as one of the main themes.

One of the featured exhibits at the Housatonic Museum of Art, created by artist Lyaba Ibo Mandingo, explores the journey of Afro-Caribbeans migrating from the Caribbean to North America and Europe.

This exhibit underscores the significance of today's political landscape, according to Program Director Suzanne Kachmar.

"We feel that that's an important theme, especially in our political climate right now, when some people are being demonized and publicly ridiculed," Kachmar says.

The exhibit titled "Our We Journey" features a collection of 61 paintings that chronicle the African American and Caribbean diaspora, with artist Lyaba Ibo Mandingo drawing inspiration from Jacob Lawrence's iconic Great Migration series.



“This is an ode to Jacob Lawrence, one of my heroes and people I studied when I was studying painting in school,” Mandingo says. “So he did 60 pieces. I did 61 just to sort of challenge the next young person that will come along.”

Among the diverse exhibits, "Nuestras Memorias" by Chilean artist Carlos Biernnay showcases a haunting reflection on the dictatorship in Chile and the enduring impact of the Pinochet regime from 51 years ago.

Kachmar’s personal connection with Biernnay inspired her to share these vital narratives with American audiences and exhibit them at City Lights.

She emphasizes the importance of showcasing this exhibition to illustrate the consequences that can arise when there is not a peaceful transition of power.

Biernnay states that his goal is to evoke a sense of catharsis in the audience with this specific exhibit.

“We want to show the people the pain we suffer in there. We don't want to show anything that can be beautiful or pretty,” Biernnay says. “We want to just show the truth; what does it mean being under that condition of life.”

The Bridgeport Art Trail attracted over 7,000 attendees in 2023, and each year, the number continues to grow, according to Kachmar.

Biernnay and Mandingo express excitement about Bridgeport’s growth as a vibrant art hub and a place where people can gather, share, and appreciate art, much like in Europe and other parts of the world where art is deeply woven into the cultural fabric.

Mandingo notes that Bridgeport, as a rich melting pot of cultures, helps capture this essence by bringing together diverse identities, allowing them to be expressed and shared through art.

“I love that I feel that vibe here in this place, and it's cross cross racial, cross gender, cross age, and in this, that's what our community is,” Mandingo says. “ I don't think you could find a prettier pot than in Bridgeport when it comes to the different ingredients, you know?”

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