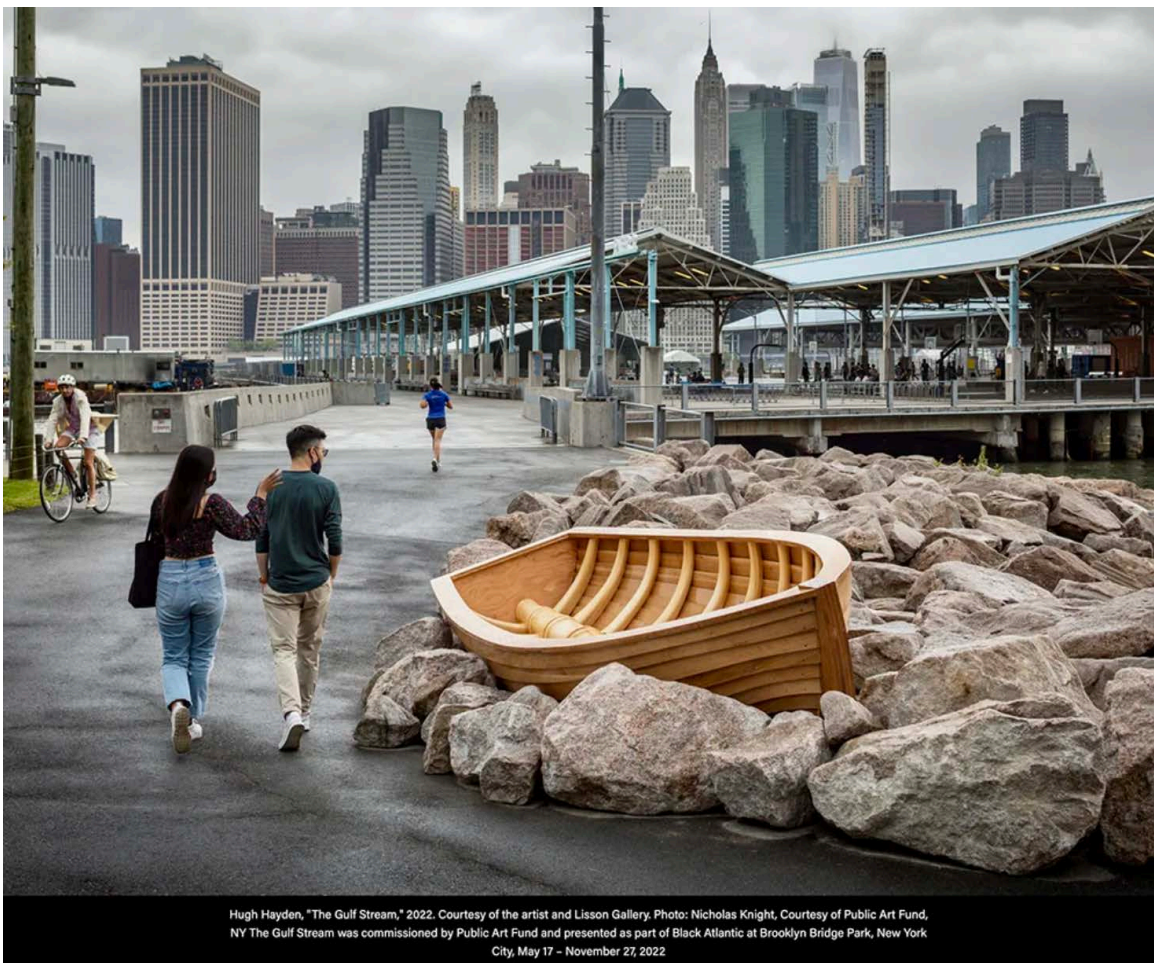




Public Art Fund Unveils ‘Black Atlantic’, Along Brooklyn Bridge Park’s Waterfront

Brooklyn Bridge Park, Public Art Fund



Hugh Hayden, "The Gulf Stream," 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery. Photo: Nicholas Knight, Courtesy of Public Art Fund, NY The Gulf Stream was commissioned by Public Art Fund and presented as part of Black Atlantic at Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York City, May 17 - November 27, 2022

Today, Public Art Fund unveiled a group exhibition at Brooklyn Bridge Park, co-curated by artist Hugh Hayden and Public Art Fund Adjunct Curator Daniel S. Palmer. This is the first time in his career that Hayden will take on the dual role of artist and co-curator. Titled **Black Atlantic**, the exhibition brings together new site-responsive artworks by Leilah Babirye, Hugh Hayden, Dozie Kanu, Tau Lewis, and Kiyan Williams. Their commissions, wide-ranging both materially and conceptually, create an exchange of ideas among artists of a similar generation that proposes an open, multifaceted, and heterogeneous idea of identity in the United States today. The exhibition will be on view from May 17 through November 27, 2022 throughout Brooklyn Bridge Park.

“There’s magic and agency involved in creating a work of art by hand. In conceiving this exhibition, I was drawn to the idea of assembling a group of sculptors whose practice involves material exploration and an element of the handmade. It speaks to the idea of materializing a vision for the future and crafting your own identity,” **says artist and co-curator Hugh Hayden.** “*Black Atlantic* will illustrate a counterpoint to a monolithic perception of Blackness, and is reflective of the multitude of ways in which individuals can create a new vision within the context of American culture that is expansive, malleable and open to all.”



The historic Brooklyn waterfront served as a colonial-era ferry landing, active maritime harbor, and a vital shipping port through the 1970s. It was part of the network linking the continents of Africa and Europe with the Americas and the Caribbean. *Black Atlantic*—titled after the book by Paul Gilroy—explores these threads of connection and highlights the complex identities that have developed through the exchange of culture and ideas over centuries along transatlantic routes.

“*Black Atlantic* brings new site-responsive works by Hugh Hayden, Leilah Babirye, Dozie Kanu, Tau Lewis, and Kiyon Williams to the broad public that visits Brooklyn Bridge Park,” says **Public Art Fund Adjunct Curator Daniel S. Palmer**. “The exhibition grew from my conversations with Hayden about his own work to encompass the perspectives of each of these five artists. With its rich history and views of lower Manhattan, New York Harbor, and the Statue of Liberty, the site is an especially resonant backdrop for the exhibition.”

Hayden, Babirye, Kanu, Lewis, and Williams represent a generation of makers who came of age in an era of intense globalization and digital connectedness. They share a commitment to material exploration, a fusion of the contemporary with the historical, and processes of making and fabrication that include working by hand. Together, their commissions for *Black Atlantic* reflect a multiplicity of experiences and insights into global identity and culture.

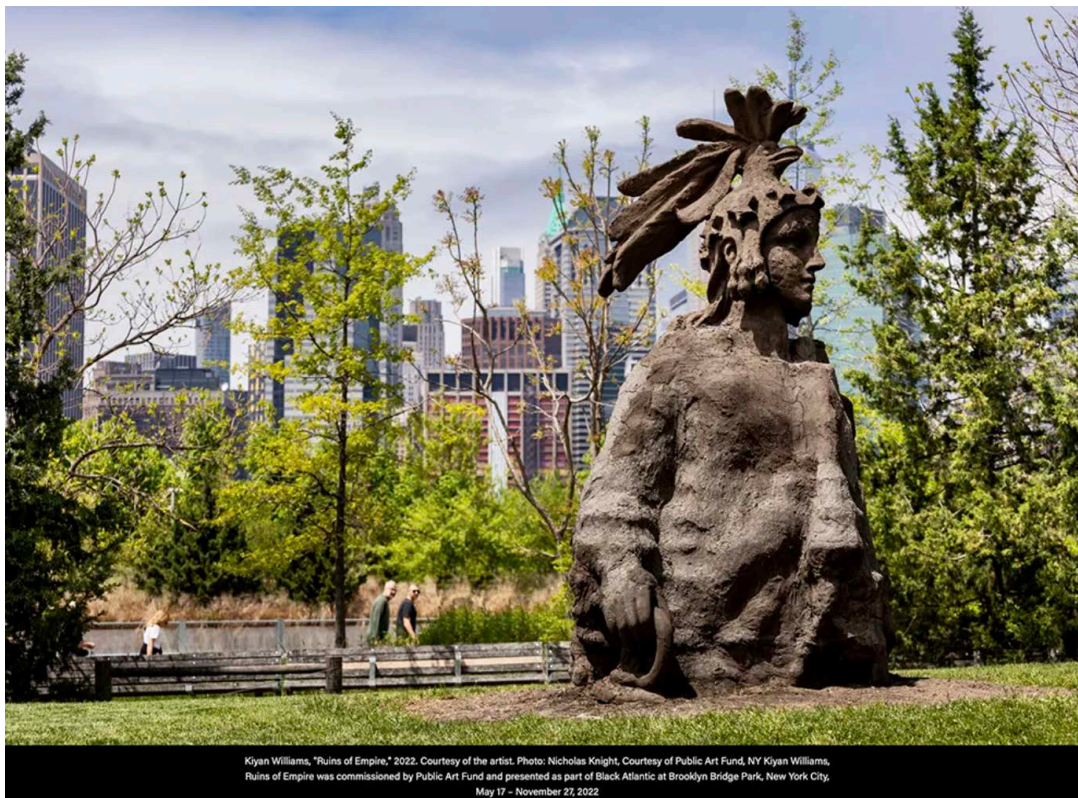


Leilah Babirye, "Agali Awamu (Togetherness)," 2022. Courtesy of the artist, Gordon Robichaux, NY, and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo: Nicholas Knight, Courtesy of Public Art Fund, NY. Agali Awamu (Togetherness) was commissioned by Public Art Fund and presented as part of Black Atlantic at Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York City, May 17 – November 27, 2022

ARTWORKS

Hugh Hayden, *The Gulf Stream*: Hugh Hayden's resonant new sculpture will be located on the pathway near the southern entrance of Pier 2. As if washed ashore, it will be placed against the large rocks along the bank of the East River and New York Harbor. Titled *The Gulf Stream*, it directly refers to two related paintings: Winslow Homer's 1899 canvas of the same name, which embodies a lone figure at sea in distress, and the response by Kerry James Marshall in 2003, depicting a more leisurely scene of a group harnessing the elements in control of their own destiny. Returning to these canonical paintings, Hayden remixes the historic artworks by working with different species of light and dark wood to create a sculptural carcass that is simultaneously a beached whale and a wrecked dinghy. A whale's rib cage sculpted from cedar fills the interior of the oak hull, and is composed of 12 pairs of ribs, the same number as in a human skeleton. Thus Hayden's *The Gulf Stream* becomes both a boat and a body, an empty vessel whose unknown passengers have made it safely to shore or been swallowed by the sea.

Leilah Babirye, *Agali Awamu (Togetherness)*: Leilah Babirye will present two groups of totemic sculptures located on opposite ends of Pier 1 along the water. Rising to nine feet in height, the five hollowed tree trunks are adorned with welded metal and found objects evoking jewelry and personal ornamentation that gives each figure a unique character. Babirye has carved each sculpture using traditional West African techniques that she learned in her native Uganda, before fleeing homophobic persecution and seeking asylum in the United States in 2015. Her new artworks will be in dialogue with the vistas across the East River; a group of two sculptures at the south end of Pier 1 will frame the Statue of Liberty, while a group of three sculptures at the north end of the pier echo the Manhattan skyline visible behind them. These monumental totemic figures come together to represent a chosen, queer family, whose visibility in public space is a beacon of empowerment.



Kiyan Williams, "Ruins of Empire," 2022. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Nicholas Knight, Courtesy of Public Art Fund, NY Kiyan Williams, Ruins of Empire was commissioned by Public Art Fund and presented as part of Black Atlantic at Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York City, May 17 - November 27, 2022

Dozie Kanu, *On Elbows*: Dozie Kanu will set a stage with two related sculptures on the Granite Terrace at Pier 3. Titled *On Elbows*, the new installation aims to bring private thoughts into public space, showing the transformation of the psyche. Inviting audiences to sit, a concrete chaise lounge—resembling one traditionally associated with psychoanalysis—will be perched on Texan Wire Wheels, recalling Slab car culture that originated in Houston, Texas, the artist’s birthplace. Close by, a vessel holding a dark liquid pulses to the rhythm of a heartbeat, suggesting the processes of the unconscious. To Kanu, there is a delicate balance between the mind of the individual and the collective unconscious. *On Elbows* creates a space to contemplate this tension and our psychic vulnerability.

Tau Lewis,

We Pressed Our Bellies Together and Kicked Our Feet, We Became Something So Alien That We No Longer Had Natural Predators

We Watched Humankind Evolve as We Absorbed into the Sea Floor, the Moon Stared Down at Us and Told Us the Earth Had a Heavy Heart

We Wondered If the Angels Had Abandoned Us, Or If They Simply Changed Shape Without Letting Us Know. Every Night Creatures Vanished, Every Morning Strangers Would Arrive: Embedded into the landscape adjacent to Pier 2 and the Greenway, Tau Lewis’ commission comprises three six-foot-wide iron discs with detailed surfaces created through a process of sand-casting. Growing out of Lewis’ crinoid studies started in

2019, the intricate designs are inspired by these ancient sea animals. Still found in the Caribbean Sea today, crinoids or sea lilies and feather stars date back to about 300 million years before dinosaurs and physically resemble sea plants like coral with five-way symmetry similar to the starfish or sand dollar. Billions of fossil fragments can be found on shores of both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and no two star designs are exactly alike. Placed on the sloping lawn and protruding subtly from the ground towards the river and Atlantic, Lewis' three cast disks will also incorporate figural elements as well as West African Adinkra symbols. As if they were fossilized and preserved in the Atlantic for millions of years, the grouping will ruminates on the wandering of the ancient sea animal, the scattering of their fossils, and their coexistence with Black bodies throughout the diaspora. Each disc will act as a visual poem or map, contemplating the ocean as an illimitable black geography, and recounting the stories ingrained in the crinoid.

Kiyan Williams, *Ruins of Empire*: Situated on the Pier 3 Uplands, Kiyan Williams' *Ruins of Empire* evokes the form of the Statue of Freedom, a historic bronze and platinum sculpture that sits atop the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington D.C. Conceived as symbols of independence and protection, both the landmark building and monument were constructed in part by enslaved people of African descent, with the statue being raised during the height of the Civil War. Williams has reimagined the Statue of Freedom as a decaying, mud-covered ruin that is partially buried in the ground. The earthen sculpture is embedded with architectural debris, sandstone, from the original U.S. Capitol building. *Ruins of Empire* looks out across the East River to the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of democracy, unveiled some 20 years after the Statue of Freedom.

Black Atlantic is co-curated by artist Hugh Hayden and Public Art Fund Adjunct Curator Daniel S. Palmer.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Leilah Babirye (b. 1985, Kampala, Uganda) is an artist and activist who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She studied art at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda (2007–2010), and participated in the Fire Island Artist Residency in 2015. The artist fled her native Uganda for New York in 2015 after being publicly outed in a local newspaper. In spring 2018, Babirye was granted asylum with support from the African Services Committee and the NYC Anti-Violence Project. Throughout her multidisciplinary practice, Babirye transforms wood, ceramic, found materials, and

paint into figurative subjects that address issues surrounding identity, sexuality, and human rights. Babirye explores the diversity of LGBTQI identities and endows each subject with regal dignity and expressive, tactile beauty. Recent exhibitions include *Ebika Bya ba Kuchu mu Buganda (Kuchu Clans of Buganda)* at Gordon Robichaux New York and Los Angeles and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; *Flight: A Collective History* at the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY (curated by Serubiri Moses); *Stonewall 50* at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas; and at Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens, NY where she presented two monumental sculptural commissions.



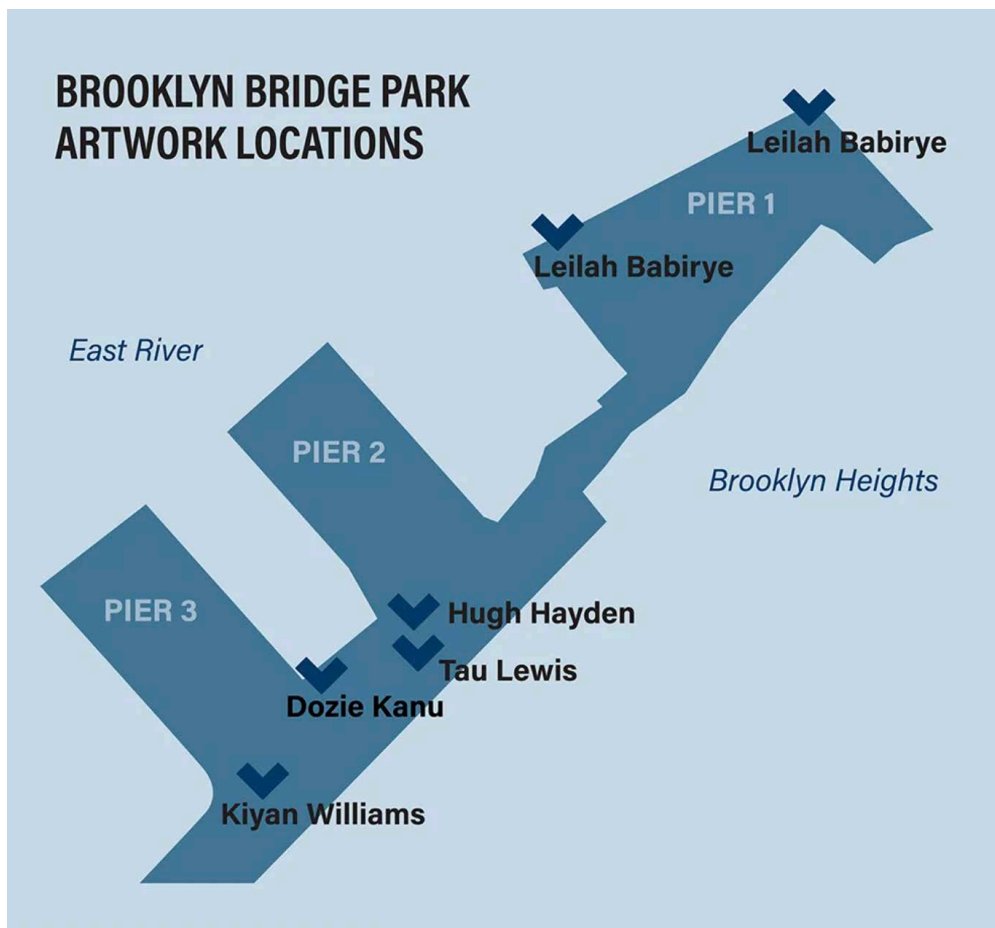
Hugh Hayden (b. 1983, Dallas, Texas) considers the anthropomorphizing of the natural world as a visceral lens to explore the human condition. Utilizing wood as his primary medium, Hayden transforms familiar objects through a process of selection, carving and juxtaposition to challenge our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the environment. Working with objects loaded with multi-layered histories as varied as discarded trunks, rare indigenous timbers, Christmas trees or souvenir African sculptures, he often combines disparate species, creating new composite forms that also reflect their complex cultural backgrounds. Hayden lives and works in New York City; he holds an MFA from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Architecture from Cornell University. Hayden's recent solo exhibitions include *Huey*, Lisson Gallery, New York; *Boogey Men*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; and most recently, *Brier Patch*, commissioned by Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York.

Dozie Kanu (b. 1993, Houston, Texas) is based in Santarém, Portugal. His research focuses on a concept of sculpture that looks at the production of objects in which a tension between their use and their history, memory and materiality is embedded. Kanu's visual language criticizes western art history canons, subtly and elegantly revealing narratives involving colonialism and identity, focusing on their diasporic condition. Selected exhibitions include: *Midtown*, organized by Salon 94 and Maccarone Gallery, Lever House, New York, 2017; *FUNCTION*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, 2019; *Transformer: A Rebirth of Wonder*, 180 The Strand, London, 2019; *Recoil* (with Cudelice Brazelton IV), International Waters, Brooklyn, New York, 2020; *Owe Deed, One Deep*, Project Native Informant, London, 2020; *Enzo Mari*, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Triennale Milano, 2020; *Crack Up - Crack Down*, Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw, 2020; *value order [gentrify. pt]*, Galeria Madragoa, Lisbon, Portugal, 2021; *to prop and ignore*, Manual Arts, Los Angeles, California, 2021.

Tau Lewis (b. 1993, Toronto Canada) lives and works in New York City. She has exhibited in museums and institutions, including National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON; MoMA PS1, New York, NY; New Museum, New York, NY; Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield, UK; College Art Galleries, Saskatoon, SK; Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, ON; the Art Gallery of Mississauga, Mississauga, ON; and the Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, ON. Lewis' work has been acquired to the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Library Collection, New York, NY; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON; Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, Miami, FL; Grinnell College Museum of Art, Grinnell, IA; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; and Prospect 5, New Orleans, LA. She will present a forthcoming solo exhibition at Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany.

Kiyan Williams (b. 1991, Newark, NJ) is a visual artist and scholar who works fluidly across sculpture, performance, video, and 2D realms. They are attracted to quotidian, unconventional materials and methods that evoke the historical, political, and ecological forces that shape individual and collective bodies. Williams frequently collaborates with earth, dirt, and debris as material and metaphor to unearth obscured histories and imagine decolonial and fugitive futures. Williams earned a BA with honors from Stanford University and an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University. Their work has been exhibited in New York at the Brooklyn Museum, SculptureCenter, The Jewish Museum, Socrates Sculpture Park, Recess Art, and The Shed. Williams' work is in private and public collections including the

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. They have forthcoming solo exhibitions at Lyles and King, New York, and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.



VISITING THE EXHIBITION

Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation is the not-for-profit entity responsible for the planning, construction, maintenance and operation of Brooklyn Bridge Park, an 85-acre sustainable waterfront park spanning 1.3 miles along Brooklyn's East River shoreline. As steward of the park, BBP has transformed this previously deteriorated stretch of waterfront into a world-class park where the public can gather, play, relax, and enjoy sweeping views of New York Harbor. The self-sustaining park was designed by the award-winning firm of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc. and features expansive lawns, rolling hills, waterfront promenades, innovative playgrounds, a greenway, sports facilities, and the popular Jane's Carousel. BBP serves thousands of people on any given seasonal day, who come to picnic, walk their dog, play soccer, jog, bike, or roller skate. Brooklyn Bridge Park is a signature public investment for the 21st century and will be an enduring legacy for the communities, elected officials, and public servants who made it happen.

Black Atlantic will be on view from May 17 to November 27, 2022 at Brooklyn Bridge Park, Extending across Piers 1,2, and 3.

#BlackAtlantic

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