

ArtReview

Andrea Carlson: "Prospect 6 Review: What Is an Exhibition's Duty to Its Locality?"

By Allison K. Young

January 23, 2025



Stephanie Syjuco, *Phantom Visions (The Lacustrine Village of St. Malo)*, 2024, wheat pasted digital print on paper. Courtesy of the artist

***The Future Is Present, The Harbinger Is Home* frames New Orleans as both a gift and lesson to the rest of the world**

To truly fathom Ashley Teamer's mixed-media collages *Claiborne: The Next Millennia* and *Claiborne at the Epoch* (both 2024), you need to view them up close and askew. The artist cuts, stitches and reassembles fisheye photographs of New Orleans's jubilant 'second line' processions into swirling visual sensoria. In these dizzying images, crowds of revellers weave through fractured glimpses of magnolia leaves, concrete columns and sidewalks. The collages reflect the vitality of their eponymous avenue as well as the infrastructural scar that plagues it: New Orleans's Claiborne, a primary thoroughfare and gathering place in the Tremé (America's oldest Black neighbourhood) lies beneath a hulking interstate bridge that has, for decades, blighted the area. These two works, on view at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, form part of a multivenue triptych: Teamer's sculpture *Tambourine Cypress* (2024) is sited in a narrow community park in the Tremé, wedged between the highway and its access roads. A twisting steel cypress tree topped with tambourines and wind chimes, its melodic peeling symphonises with the traffic noise of Claiborne and the sneaker-squeals of basketball players, to produce an intimate sonic portrait of a resilient neighbourhood.

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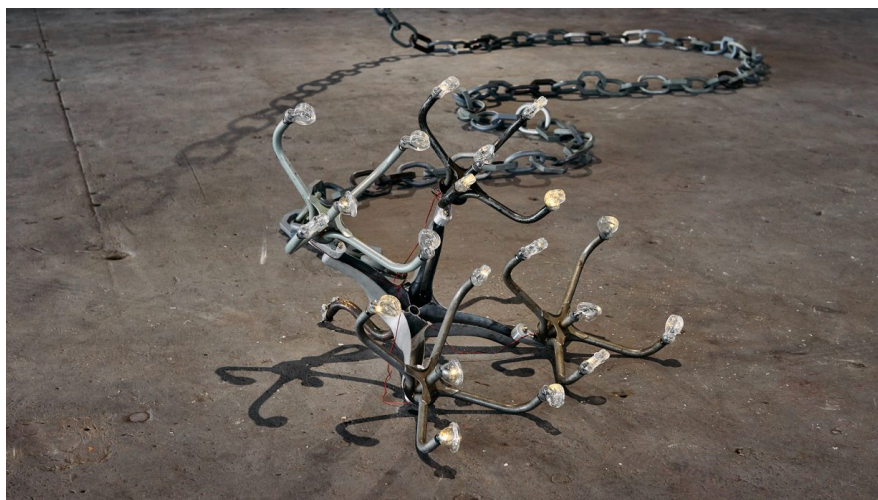


Ashley Teamer, *Tambourine Cypress*, 2024 (installation view, Lemann Park & Playground, Prospect 6). Photo: Alex Marks.
 Courtesy the artist and Prospect New Orleans

This kind of ambitious site-specificity represents the best of what a citywide exhibition such as Prospect New Orleans can offer, activating our sense of place so we may experience it anew. This sixth edition frames New Orleans as both gift and lesson to the rest of the world. Works by 51 artists occupy over 20 venues, spanning the entire Crescent City. At one geographic extreme, we traverse the levees at The Batture to see installations such as Andrea Carlson's *Trade Canoe for Earthdivers to Come* (2024), a vessel helmed by painted birds that pays homage to Indigenous trade routes and ecological knowledge – appropriately sited at a waterfront park where freight ships can be seen gliding downriver. At the other, we must cross parish lines to view 12 installations in the behemoth Ford Motor Plant in Arabi, where the air stings of molasses wafting from the nearby Domino Sugar Refinery; there, in Jeannette Ehlers's *Hoist and the Unseen: Journeys Through Tempests in Times of Hunger* (2024), long synthetic braids are thrashed by a wooden pulley wheel. The sculpture evokes the movement of goods through port cities like Copenhagen and New Orleans, while acknowledging the unpaid Black labour that has long bolstered Western economies. Elsewhere, artworks are nestled into music venues, parks, railroad yards and, of course, a few museums.

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Mel Chin, *Pool of Light* (detail, work in progress), 2024 (installation view, Ford Motor Plant, Prospect 6). Photo: Alex Marks.
Courtesy the artist and Prospect New Orleans

Prospect 6 is not easy to navigate. But neither is New Orleans, which makes the present edition feel refreshingly attuned to the city's meandering and improvisational cadence. Recurring '-ennial' exhibitions often struggle to convey their relevance to local audiences, as curators and artists 'parachute' in from elsewhere. Indeed, Prospect's commitment to New Orleans's arts community has been inconsistent since its founding, nearly two decades ago, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. It's therefore noteworthy that co-artistic directors Miranda Lash and Ebony G. Patterson are not newcomers to the scene: Lash was a curator at New Orleans Museum of Art and Patterson exhibited in Prospect 3. While inviting reflection on colonial histories and ecological crises, Lash and Patterson lean into etymological connections between the titular 'harbinger' (a foreboding omen) and 'harbour' (a port that provides a protective shelter). Undertones of loss and resilience are palpable across several projects: Stephanie Syjuco's public murals build on archival records of Saint Malo, a once-thriving fishing village founded in the eighteenth century by Filipino immigrants in coastal Louisiana, later destroyed by a hurricane, in 1915. At Sweet Lorraine's Jazz Club, L. Kasimu Harris exhibits photographs from his *Vanishing Black Bars & Lounges* series (2018-), which documents divey hangouts that have been hubs of Black cultural life for decades, many now threatened by gentrification. Tuân Andrew Nguyễn's film *Amongst the Disquiet* (2024) stages a multigenerational dialogue on diaspora and belonging among members of a Vietnamese American family that includes both political and climate refugees. And Hannah Chalew's sprawling sculptural installation *Orphan Well Gamma Garden* (2024), at the Contemporary Arts Center, conjoins scavenged pipes, live plants and single-use plastics into a dystopian, posthuman landscape.

Perhaps the lesson that New Orleans imparts can thus be found in the second line's coalescence of hope and grief, or scar-as-suture, as Teamer's triptych suggests. At Ford Motor Plant, Prospect veteran Mel Chin shows *Pool of Light, Work in Progress* (2024), a sculpture-in-progress whose completion was interrupted by the impact of Hurricane Helene in North Carolina, where his studio is located. A cascading chandelier formed of salvaged office chairs, the piece honours the unsung labour of wage workers. Yet in its current form, like New Orleans itself, it also serves as a beacon of resilience in the midst of sublime forces beyond our control.

The Future Is Present, The Harbinger Is Home at Various venues, New Orleans, through 2 February

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