SCULPTURE @Sylvester Manor

Paradise Lost

Curated by Tom Cugliani

June 14 - Sept. 14, 2025

Ariel Adkins
Bill Albertini
Roisin Bateman
Marta Baumiller
Catherine Brigham and the Students of the Shelter Island Union Free School
Pam Brown
Walter Channing
Andrea Cote
Pierre Cote
Sherry Davis
Robin Gianis
Sandi Haber Fifield
Erica-Lynn Huberty
Ella Mahoney
Stephanie Needham
Jeffrey Pegram
Ned Smyth
Aurelio Torres
Allan Wexler
Anne Marie Waugh, Michelle Whittaker, & Neisha Terry Young
Marianne Weil
B. Wurtz

SYLVESTER MANOR
80 NORTH FERRY ROAD
SHELTER ISLAND, NY
www.sylvestermanor.org

Sculpture @ Sylvester Manor is delighted to announce its second annual summer exhibition, ***Paradise Lost***, an ambitious outdoor presentation of sculpture and installation art sited in the historic landscape of Sylvester Manor on Shelter Island, NY, featuring 23 artists working on the East End of Long Island.

Following the resounding success of the inaugural 2024 exhibition—which drew over 2,500 visitors—Sculpture @ Sylvester Manor has been awarded a $25,000 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), recognizing the project's cultural significance, its illumination of the entwined Indigenous, European, and West African histories rooted in this landscape, and its continued resonance with artistic imagination today.

Curated by Tom Cugliani, a veteran of the contemporary art world, the 2025 exhibition draws inspiration from John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, a retelling of the biblical Fall of Man exploring the themes of free will, obedience, rebellion, pride, the nature of good and evil, and redemption through grace. As Cugliani explains, "The complexity of Milton's poem both reflects and is contextualized by the political, social, economic and religious upheaval of the mid-17th century. The nature of the turbulent events that brought Nathaniel Sylvester to Shelter Island in 1651 continue to figure powerfully in the moment we are living in today."

Introduction

"Knowledge forbidden?
Suspicious, reasonless. Why
Should their Lord
Envy them that? Can it be a sin
To know?
Can it be death?"

—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Paradise: from the ancient Persian "pairidaeza,"meaning an enclosed garden or parkland. Over time, it later came to be equated with the Garden of Eden or a state of idyllic perfection.

Sylvester: from the Latin "silva," meaning wood—woodland. By extension, it implies a deep connection with nature and all that it represents: beauty, mystery, etc.

The recorded history of Shelter Island dates to 1637, when King Charles I granted the land together with parts of the North and South Forks and Connecticut to William Alexander, 1st Earl of Stirling. After changing hands twice, the island came into the possession of Nathaniel Sylvester in 1651. An Anglo-Dutch merchant, Sylvester settled his family here and established a provisioning plantation to support a sugar plantation he and his brother Constant operated in Barbados. Both plantations exploited the labor of enslaved Indigenous and West Africans to build the nascent colonial economy and wealth of the Sylvester family.

The mid-17th century was a time of profound political and social turbulence both in Europe and the New World. In 1649, following a decade long civil war, King Charles I was executed for treason by a Parliament aligned with the Puritan cause, and a republican government led by Oliver Cromwell came to power. At the same time, England was in military and economic conflict with the Dutch over trade and land in Europe, the Caribbean, and in colonial America. Religious intolerance flourished in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, where the once-oppressed Puritans who had fled England for religious freedom, now persecuted members of Society of Friends, resulting in the execution of Quakers who dissented the authority of any entity before God.

It is in this climate of strife and discord that Nathaniel Sylvester, himself a Quaker sympathizer, arrives on Shelter Island.

Following the restoration of the monarchy, John Milton, an ally of Oliver Cromwell and the republican cause, was imprisoned for his revolutionary and seditious pamphleteering. Blind and socially marginalized, he was released in 1660, finally publishing *Paradise Lost* in 1667. The poem reimagines the dramatic fall from grace of the rebellious archangel Lucifer (Morning Star and bringer of Light), who defies the authority of God and is expelled from Heaven into the vast chaotic firmament of Hell. As Satan, he tempts Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge in Paradise, conferring on them free will, self-determination, mortality and the promise of salvation for original sin.

Paradise Lost is more than a biblical retelling. It is a profound allegory for the lost utopian society Cromwell sought to establish in England, a Commonwealth that privileged its people above the monarch, and the cost of challenging divine—or royal—authority. The first English epic poem written in blank verse, Milton's masterpiece influenced generations of writers and philosophers, from the French Enlightenment to the American Revolution and beyond.

Today on Shelter Island, we look to contemporary artists to reexamine "Paradise Lost," through socio-political and environmental lenses. If we could but behold *Manhansack Aha Quash A Womak*—An Island Surrounded by Islands—before the 1637 land grant, before the arrival of the Europeans, before the expulsion of the Manhansett, we would proclaim it an Edenic paradise. Paradise Lost depicts the end of a heavenly paradise and the advent of original sin upon humankind. Sylvester Manor, built on foundations enslavement and erasure, obliges us to confront the legacies of slavery, America's own original sin. Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise by God—as we witness the manifold ways climate change is harming our beautiful world, are we today on the cusp of a man-made expulsion?

It is all too apparent what a loss of this magnitude could portend.

"Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you got 'till it's gone?
*They paved paradise and put up a parking lot"**

—Tom Cugliani, Shelter Island, June 2025

*Joni Mitchell "Big Yellow Taxi"

Sherry Davis

The Woven Gate
2025
Media: Upcycled waste material (denim, wire, inert invasive plants, etc.),
Steel round bale livestock feeder
Diameter 96 x 48 in.

Curator's notes

The entrance to the exhibition *Paradise Lost* lies just beyond the now derelict remains of a picket fence and gate once opening onto the formal garden of Sylvester Manor. Sherry Davis's monumental work, *The Woven Gate*, a piece that deftly cross-references the disciplines of art, architecture, fashion, writing, and weaving now stand at this threshold.

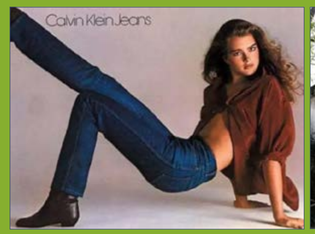
Weaving is considered one of the most ancient forms of fiber adaptation to the human body, one that arises directly from the practice of human grooming. Interestingly, it is from the craft of weaving—in Latin *texere*—that the word "textile" draws its etymological roots, and hence the word "text," involving the weaving of words into a fabric of language.

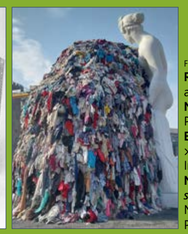
In *The Woven Gate*, Davis weaves strips of shredded denim through the armature of a re-purposed modular livestock barrier, now stood on end as a sculptural frame. Davis sources the denim material from charitable organizations, and methodically deconstructs it, tearing it into strips in a physically demanding process she undertakes with the assistance of volunteers. The repetitive acts of tearing and weaving recall the Process Art of the 1970s exemplified by artists such as the German-born American Eva Hesse. *The Woven Gate* is firmly situated within this practice, one where the method of the making is central to work, and is evident in the visual rhythm of the final result.

Denim carries a deep cultural resonance. Though now ubiquitous, its origins are in the town of Nîmes, France, where it was first produced as work cloth for laborers in the 17th century. From France it migrated to the American northwest where Mr. Levi and Mr. Strauss manufactured dungarees to clothe the influx of spectators, miners, and laborers from around the world who thronged to the California Gold Rush in the 1840s. As is often the case with what originates as Utilitarian Low, denim eventually ascended to Fashionable High as re-branded by designers like Calvin Klein and Gloria Vanderbilt, conferring both style and status on the humble fabric. The pendulum has since swung again and today denim represents democratic global universality, accessible and worn world-wide.

In Davis's hands, denim becomes a cultural artifact. Once a by-product of capitalist cultural imperialism, it is now also a signifier of one of its unintended consequences: population migration. *The Woven Gate* invites viewers to consider displacement and diaspora, the flotsam and jetsam of disrupted lives, and the cyclical nature of life and death. It serves as a kind of portal defining the liminal space between worlds and lived experiences. This is a theme that re-occurs in socially engaged contemporary art, notably present in the work of the Italian artist Michelangelo Pistolleto, a proponent of the Arte Povera Movement, who similarly explored the interplay between materiality and meaning.

The Woven Gate also evokes the architectural tradition of the Chinese Moon Gate—a circular opening that mediates the transition from the public street into a private courtyard, a place of refined intention preceding a residence. The moon symbolizes harmony and balance, as well as fertility and creation, aspects associated with the feminine principle. In this context the *Gate* becomes a passageway into a space of contemplation, privacy, and domestic intimacy: a kind of paradise.





FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Richard Avedon, Calvin Klein Jeans advertisement, 1980.
Moon Gate at Canglang Pavilion, China. Photograph by 猫猫的日记本, Wikimedia.
Eva Hesse, *Accession II*, 1969, 30.75 × 30.75 × 30.75 in. Galvanized steel and vinyl, Detroit Institute of Arts.
Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Venere degli stracci (Venus of the Rags)*, 1967/2023, Piazza Municipio, Naples, Italy, 2023 ©Michelangelo Pistoletto. Photograph by Lollinaa, Wikimedia.

Erica Lynn Huberty

New Eden Awaits
2025
Media: Silk, muslin, woolen rope
Dimensions variable

In 1667, sixteen years after Nathanial Sylvester contracted his purchase of Shelter Island, John Milton published his epic poem, *Paradise Lost,* following decades of incubation.

Milton's verse is shot through with original language —unsurprising in a masterwork that broke ground in so many ways—the first English language epic poem to be composed in blank verse using iambic pentameter, the first to reimagine the creation myth through the fall of the rebel archangel Lucifer, and the first to reframe the story of original sin and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden as a complex drama of cosmic consequence. Milton's influence on the English language is extraordinary: he introduced over 630 new words into usage, including *pandemonium, satanic, horrent*, and even *fragrance*.

Down a long corridor framed by tall perfumed boxwood (although some liken its fragrance to cat piss), the visitor arrives at a hedge festooned with ribbons and ropes. These colorful strands, fashioned from small lengths of silk sewn to muslin, are inscribed with words drawn from *Paradise Lost* and John Milton's life and times. Selected and hand-lettered by Erica-Lynn Huberty—herself a published author—some words are original to the poem while others echo Milton's commitment to personal and political self-determination, such as *Free Will* and *Choice*. The optimism of Huberty's title—*New Eden Awaits*—implies a hope for a utopian social order, a vision Milton passionately espoused until it ultimately failed with the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

A note about the hedge: this is no ordinary boxwood—legend holds this hedgerow is a direct descendant of the original boxwood brought over by Sylvester from England in 1651, the first ever planted in America.

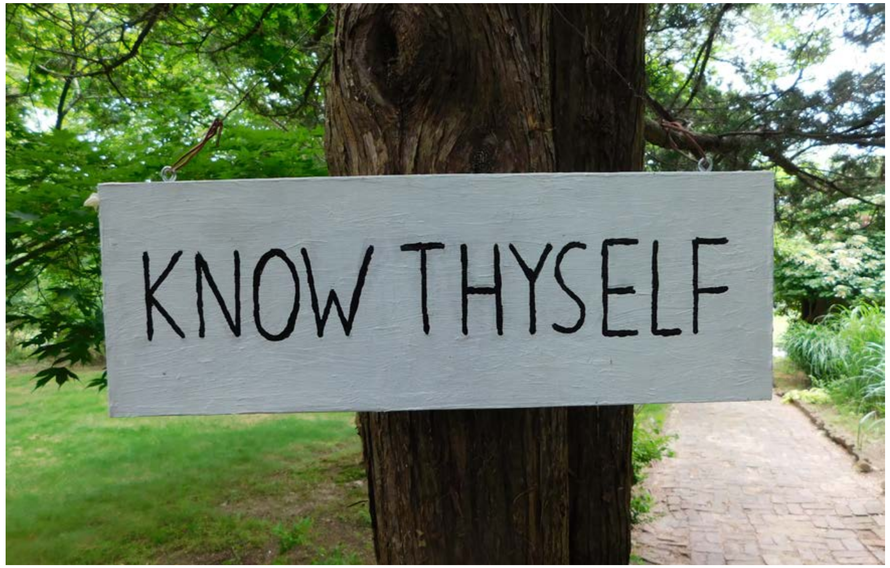
The use of sacred language has appeared in Western art before—usually upside down and, similar to Huberty's work, in ribbons—but always secondary to the Christian visual iconography that illustrated faith to a largely illiterate Catholic population, in contrast to Judaism and Islam, where text and teaching are integral to practice. It was not until the Protestant Reformation that the written word came to be privileged over imagery—especially within the Puritan movement led by Oliver Cromwell, in which Milton played an active and influential role.

Text and language have long held status within contemporary art. The collaborative group Art & Language employed text and images as both critique and medium; Conceptual artists such as Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, and Jenny Holzer elevated text to visual parity with imagery; and Ian Hamilton Finlay carved Enlightenment-era philosophy and fragments of poetry into his outdoor works, blending nature, language, and thought. Here, Huberty is creating an extension of these practices. Her installation is an ornamentation that resides somewhere between concrete poetry, still life, and an earth work—a terrain that is being explored here, possibly for the first time.

Jan van Eyck, *The Annunciation*, 1434-36, Oil on canvas transferred from panel, 35.5 x 13.44 in., Andrew W. Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

B. Wurtz

Untitled (Know Thyself sign #1, #2, #3)
2025
Wood, acrylic paint, screw eyes, wire
Each 6 x 16 x ¾ in.



In the rarified world of contemporary art, B. Wurtz is an iconoclast. His work embraces the flotsam and jetsam across the everyday—trash, scrap from the street, and even the drain in the bathtub. Out of this sea of discarded cultural ephemera and byproducts, B. Wurtz has created a body of work that speaks to the present moment and the human condition—a kind of Rosetta Stone of contemporary culture.

Included in our exhibition *Paradise Lost* are three identically painted signs, installed by B. Wurtz in three different locations. Each simply reads, KNOW THYSELF.

We come upon the first sign after being metaphorically expelled from the garden of Sylvester Manor. It follows Erica Lynn Huberty's installation *New Eden Awaits*, which draws from the language of Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost*. In Milton's retelling of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the forbidden fruit they eat bestows knowledge, mortality, and free will to humankind. In this moment, humanity moves from predestination to self-determination. Within this context, Wurtz's sign can be read as both an exhortation and a provocation. Not unlike Alice in Wonderland, who is commanded to EAT ME, we are now clearly instructed: KNOW THYSELF. Having just navigated through Huberty's evocation of Milton's moral terrain—innocence, good vs evil, choice, pandemonium—we are left to consider just how much of our existence is self-determined.

The second KNOW THYSELF sign appears on a drive that leads us to a small cemetery, where an entablature commemorates the founders of Shelter Island, the Sylvester family, and the Quaker Martyrs executed for dissent by the Puritan-led majority of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The entablature, erected in the late 19th century by the Horsford descendants of Sylvester, was intended to ennoble their lineage and position them among the ranks of landed gentry. Here, KNOW THYSELF challenges us by questioning our socio-economic and political conscience.

John Tenniel illustration for Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland," undated.

In the 17th century climate of Puritanical fundamentalism, convictions of faith, symbolized in the Christian faith by the innocent lamb, were sometimes subverted and wielded as weapons against religious dissent. In this setting, KNOW THYSELF challenges us to know where we stand within the great Social Contract that binds us together. Should we be content with our status in the world, or strive to better ourselves? Are we prepared to make sacrifices in accordance with our conscience, or behave with indifference when confronted with injustice? As memorialized here at the Quaker Monument, the ultimate sacrifices of the Boston Martyrs—Marmaduke Stephenson, Mary Dyer, William Robinson, and William Leddra—have achieved immortality through their historic act.

The third KNOW THYSELF sign is positioned at the exhibition's exit. If the first was an exhortation and the second was a challenge, the third iteration prompts reflection. If the journey through the exhibition has led to deeper awareness—if it has encouraged meditation on the intersections of art, landscape, and history—then perhaps we leave changed. Perhaps we have taken a step toward greater self-knowledge, seeing the world just a little differently than we did upon entering.

Sandy Haber Fifield

Rooted Memory
2025
Plexiglass, archival pigment prints
Dimensions variable

In *Rooted Memory*, Sandi Haber Fifield has engaged an old ornamental plum—or perhaps a cherry tree—as an armature, like a dress-makers dummy. She has expertly arranged and affixed a series of transparent plexiglass panels and an archival pigment print around the torso, and skirted the feet –- the roots of the tree— distracting us momentarily from visually processing what would otherwise appear to be a tree hovering in an amputated state, close to death.

The age of the tree dates back to the time when Sylvester Manor underwent considerable changes in 1908, bringing modernization and expansion to the estate. Numerous specimen trees were imported and planted in the landscape by Cornelia Horsford, a descendant of Nathaniel Sylvester, to create a more refined "manorial residence," moving Sylvester Manor up the social ranks from a working farm to a summer residence more aligned with the nearby Dering Harbor cottages of the privileged. Haber Fifield's interventions are consistent with this embellished sensibility, a signature of the Edwardian period.

Among the panels is a photographic image of the tree in full bloom in early spring, announcing the change of season. In this state, the tree assumes an anthropomorphic personality: persistent, assertive, and flamboyantly demanding our attention. Haber Fifield's additions lyrically amplify this performance, adorning the tree as if dressed for an occasion.

Conversely, the photographic image juxtaposed with the inorganic plexiglass and the tree's decline reminds us of the cycles of nature and thus the passage of time, and of all the images we collect to clock our mortality.

Metaphorically, Haber Fifield's additions of plexiglass—a hard-edged industrial material—and of photography in the context of an ancient tree's organic form, can be interpreted as the cultural collision of a digital evaluation of the remote past with the span of history embodied in the life of the tree. This stands in sharp contrast with the rose-tinted lenses through which we at times romantically prefer to interpret history, fixed permanently in sepia-toned nostalgia. Ongoing archaeological research continues to unearth the disparate, stratified histories encoded in this site, revealing centuries of erasures and additions, leading us to face a complex and uncomfortable legacy. This legacy of what has been hidden, altered, or lost can be difficult to reconcile with the enchanting allure of this estate, but Haber Fifield's *Rooted Memory* abstractly and figuratively re-captures this contradiction.

Jeffrey Pegram, 1 of 2

Traditional (Eyahay Nakoda – Respect) 2025

Click LINK
for AUDIO

Traditional (Âde – Value Your Dad) 2025

Click LINK
for AUDIO

Jeffrey Pegram is an interpreter and creator of Indigenous music. As an educator and member of the Tsa la gi (Cherokee) Nation, Pegram has performed and preserved Native musical traditions across educational institutions and performing arts venues worldwide.

Pegram's contribution is four works of sound, three of which are installed in juxtaposition to markers of European colonialization. His pieces are activated via QR codes displayed alongside monuments from the Sylvester family's custodianship of the land and they invite reflection on the layered history of Shelter Island.

Traditional (Respect)

Beside the Manor House is a corroded cannon mounted on a wooden carriage and pointed at the waterfront. The obvious conclusion is that it is a relic of more uncertain times. Little is known about its origin, and speculation remains as to whether it was ever fired, possibly during the Revolutionary War or the War of 1812, when the Sylvester family sought refuge in Connecticut. Regardless of its history, it remains a powerful symbol of the military advantage European settlers had over Native peoples. Contemporary accounts suggest that the 1653 transfer of Manhansack Aha Quash A Womak, *An Island Sheltered by Islands*, from the Manhansett to Nathaniel Sylvester, was contracted peacefully.

Traditional (Value Your Dad)

Deep in the old Growth Forest, beside a vernal pond, a small circular patch of ferns marks the crossing of long-disused trails. For millennia, the spirits of the past sustained life here, and this land was a vibrant hunting ground for small game, fowl, deer, and shellfish. Although the recorded history of Shelter Island may start with a land grant from Charles I in 1637, the Manhansett had established a thriving trade economy with the neighboring Algonquin for over a millennium. Those who were not enslaved by the Sylvester family eventually left Shelter Island, possibly comforted by the belief that the land, a gift from the Creator, could not truly be bought or sold.

Jeffrey Pegram, 2 of 2

Contemporary (NYC Connection – Smooth Groove) 2025

Click LINK for AUDIO

Traditional (Dââginabino – Love Harmony) 2025

Click LINK for AUDIO

Contemporary (Smooth Groove)
The stele standing upright on the lawn to the right of the drive presents an imposing presence to approaching visitors, yet it reads as vernacular as a yard-sale sign on the roadside. A closer inspection reveals a deeply incised cross in the upper left corner, prompting questions about provenance and authenticity. I later learned that this standing stone was placed here by the Horsford descendants of the Sylvester family, to perpetuate the legend of a Norse presence on Shelter Island in ancient times. As enchanting as I may find it, this legend is simply wishful thinking. An alternate legend holds the stone to be a marker for the spot where an enslaved man called Isaac died after a life of indenture to the Sylvester Family. The incised images of ships that Isaac made as a boy have survived to this day in the timber of the Manor House attic.

Traditional (Love Harmony)
Pegram's final sound installation is located in the formal garden, which was designed in the style of Edwardian-era "garden rooms." Once a rose garden—its layout still evident in the central rondel and the surrounding depressions where roses once grew—this space is now anchored by a statue of Flora, the Roman goddess of abundance, fertility, and the coming of spring. Often associated with the rose, Flora is also a symbol of love and purity. Yet beneath this veneer of neoclassical refinement—the ultimate Europeanization of the Native landscape—lies a more complex history. The statue stands near the site of a vast animal slaughter pit, uncovered by recent archaeological excavations. This estate originated as a provisioning plantation supporting a sugar enterprise in Barbados, run by Constant Sylvester, Nathaniel's brother. By the 19th century, all visible traces of this industrial complex had been replaced with a designed landscape, a pastoral idyll of landed gentry.

On reflection, what remains compelling today is our ability to see past the fabricated monuments, reshaped landscape, and the curated legends that erased Shelter Island's pre-colonial history.

The entablature commemorating the Sylvester family in the cemetery was installed by the same Horsford descendants who placed the "Viking" stele on the grounds. The family coat of arms emblazoned on the stone is also likely invented, as Nathaniel Sylvester was a merchant in trade, not an aristocrat. The monument stands as a place holder for the Sylvester family because, as likely members of the Society of Friends, they would eschew conventional burial in graveyards, leaving their resting places unknown.

These monuments were erected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period marked by a surge of Centennial nostalgia and new waves of immigration. The Sylvester descendants reinforced their American patriotism by elevating their European family lineage through the architectural reimagining of the Georgian Manor House, the expansion of the Colonial-era Garden into parterre rooms, and the creation of a pastoral meadow lined with specimen trees leading to the property. All these interventions are the patrician markers of elite status in a remade landscape, erasing the island's deeper Native and cultural history. Pegram's sound works enable us to look past the aestheticized beauty of this constructed setting and confront the eradication of something truly precious—a new world Arcadia that Europeans would consider Paradise in any other context except colonization.

Marianne Weil

A Crucible for our Times
2025
Clay, straw, vines, reeds, shells, bamboo
48 x diameter 36 in.

A long-time resident of the North Fork, Marianne Weil has spent extended periods abroad, particularly in Italy, where she has worked with bronze casting foundries and the glassblowing factories of Venice. Both glass and bronze, often masterfully combined within a single artwork, are central to Weil's practice. Their opposing properties of inflexibility and opacity versus fragility and transparency are reconciled through her process, achieving an evocative and unanticipated community.

As expressed in this otherwise hand-built sculpture, *A Crucible for our Times the artist* engages with a series of layered dualities embedded within the form and meaning of the crucible itself. In bronze casting, a crucible is the vessel that transforms solid metal into liquid. In this sense it is also understood as a process of refinement, of purification, where impurities are separated and discarded. It also evokes the feminine body as a receptacle for gestation and transformation. In antiquity, this form was commonly used for storing wine and oil, as well as serving as a funerary urn—a kind of capsule mediating the passage between life and death.

This dual function—as both a protective vessel and an agent of transformation—speaks to the complexity of symbolism inherent in unpeeling an artwork. Further deepening this layering, Weil's title, *A Crucible for Our Times*, deliberately quotes Arthur Miller's 1953 drama *The Crucible*, an allegory based on the McCarthy-era trials conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Set in 1692 in Puritan-founded Salem, Massachusetts, *The Crucible* dramatizes a group of adolescent girls whose episodes of inexplicable hysteria are manipulated in order to accuse innocent citizens of witchcraft. Miller's play follows the trial and conviction by Puritan elders who sentenced the accused to death.

In this context, the crucible becomes a metaphor for a system of ideological purification: how the powerful eliminate their socially or politically undesirable waste material. Written in the wake of World War II, Miller's play also served as a chilling reminder of the Nazi genocide resulting in the extermination of millions of innocent lives across Europe. Weil's work subtly engages with this legacy of ideological extremism and the crucible's dual potential for pure refinement and destructive purification.

The cautionary tone of *A Crucible for our Times* is deeply resonant in its inclusion in this exhibition. The Quakers who once sought refuge on Shelter Island from the religious persecution of the Puritan-held New England colonies became themselves victims of a religious fundamentalism that found their dissenting beliefs intolerable. By the mid-17th century, Puritan adherents, some of whom had earlier fled England in pursuit of religious freedom in the colonies, had overthrown the English monarchy and, under Olive Cromwell, instituted a parliamentary system of rule. Ironically, it is these same Puritans who executed the Boston martyrs Marmaduke Stevenson, Mary Dyer, and William Leddra, whose names appear on the Quaker Memorial just up the drive from here.

Today, the term "witch hunt" is back in public discourse, used to connote politically driven persecution. It is an ironic twist that "witch hunt" now speaks to both the systematic purification of social subversives and the unjust, unlawful persecution of those simply expressing dissent. This dichotomy, present in the work's title and inherent in its material, enables the visitor to appreciate how language, mediated through ideas and materials, is rendered visually in artworks of social conscience.

Photos of Quaker Memorial courtesy of Sylvester Manor.

Allan Wexler

Protector/Collector
2025
8 umbrellas, copper tubing, valves, garden hose
Dimensions variable

Allan Wexler's upside-down installation of umbrellas is the first of several inversions in *Paradise Lost*.

The art-historical precedent for this work lies in the conceptual works of Marcel Duchamp who first introduced the concept of the "ready-made" into the construct of sculpture, redefining the practice forever. Like Duchamp's *Fountain*, Wexler's *Protector/Collector* is simply an object re-positioned to reveal an unintentional meaning. In both works, the secondary subject is liquid—in Duchamp, it is a urinal that becomes a fountain, while Wexler's umbrellas, turned upside down, become vessels that collect rainfall.

René Magritte, *Les vacances de Hegel (Hegel's Holiday)*, 1958, Oil on canvas, 23.75 x 19.75 in., Private collection.

It is also possible that Wexler's' piece nods, consciously or not, to *Les Vacances de Hegel* (1958) by Belgian Surrealist René Magritte. Magritte's painting pays homage to Hegelian dialectics by illustrating a paradoxical set of objects—a water glass balanced atop an umbrella. Here the two incongruous functions, namely to collect and repel water, are drawn together in a surrealist grafting of opposition. Wexler has simplified this discourse through imagistic inversion.

Water—its use, misuse, pollution, and scarcity—is an urgent concern for life on Earth, both now and in the future. We know that life emerged from water and light, and that with the absence of either life on Earth cannot endure. We are all also acutely aware of how the human exploitation of natural resources has already caused profound imbalances in environmental sustainability. Water, perhaps the most essential of these resources, is increasingly politicized and privatized—its availability is no longer in alignment with projected need. In proposing a solution, Wexler's piece is as indebted to Surrealism as it is to the absurdity of Marie Antoinette's suggestion regarding the scarcity of bread: to collect water by inverting the instrument that repels it.

"Water, water everywhere," famous in the *Rime of The Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, provides a literary through-line for this paradox—where water is abundant, yet undrinkable, making life unsustainable, a metaphor for how human exploitation can turn abundance into depletion and, ultimately to unsustainability. You only have look at the disappearing rain forests or take a deep dive into *Paradise Lost*.

Finally, Wexler's title, *Protector/Collector,* raises an open-ended question: does the act of collecting imply stewardship and safeguarding of resources? Or does it risk becoming an act of over-extraction, ultimately undermining the very protection it seeks to achieve?

Marta Baumiller

Portal Kaleidoscope
2025
Copper clad wood, mirror, steel, ceramic, shell,
72 x 48 in.

We can easily mistake this sculpture for an instrument of surveying—but not in a way that is detrimental to our enjoyment of it. The *Portal Kaleidoscope* is an interactive piece that is completed only with the viewer's participation. Unlike the conventional kaleidoscope, Baumiller's apparatus is more like the three mirrored teleidoscope, an instrument of exploration.

As part of her series entitled *Altered Perceptions*, the artist aims to demonstrate how our understanding of the environment is more or less advantaged by conditions such as light and our relative position to the landscape.

The Greek etymology of the word kaleidoscope provides an instruction of the device: one through which to "view beautiful form." Looking through the larger opening, we observe the fragmented splintering of space within the three-walled cone. The image of any moving object passing by the smaller aperture is de-constructed through multiple refractions. Thus the kaleidoscope reveals a version of the landscape in an altered iteration. The truth remains however that, when observing the real world, we tend to believe our eyes, whereas this work allows the viewer to imagine seeing things as a set of variations, as in a musical expansion on a theme.

In photography, we can never assume that the instrument (the camera) is a reliable recorder of the truth. The camera has a huge capacity to distort while pretending to be an honest agent. Similarly, Baumiller's work questions the trustworthiness of the instruments that mediate our perception. In this time of Artificial Intelligence, this attention brings a reasonable amount of concern.

Pam Brown

Flower Power 2024
Sheet metal, paint
Dimensions variable

Pam Brown's *Flower Power* is a striking installation of seven stylized flowers standing like receptors of solar energy, crafted out of industrial material and mounted on poles along the Gardiner's Creek shoreline. Their monumental scale and manufactured composition assert a sense of "power" that stands in deliberate contrast to the organic delicacy implied by "flower." This juxtaposition creates a bold statement of permanence and strength in contrast to a flower's inherent fragility and transience.

These sculptural flowers are emblematic of two defining movements of the 1960s: Andy Warhol's iconic 1964 Flower series are an expression of beauty and the transient nature of life through the lens of mass reproduction and commercial image appropriation, the cornerstones of Pop Art. Equally important to understanding the cultural revolution of the 1960s, Flower Power came to symbolize a movement of non-violent resistance. Coined by Allen Ginsburg in 1965 as a response to the Vietnam War, Flower Power espoused the philosophy of nonviolent, passive protest rooted in the American Civil Rights movement and India's 1930s campaign for independence from Great Britain. With its focus on peace and love, Flower Power became to define the hippie generation and counter-culturalism, codified into the received taste in contemporary musicals like *Hair* and *Godspell*, and Peter Max's psychedelic poster art.

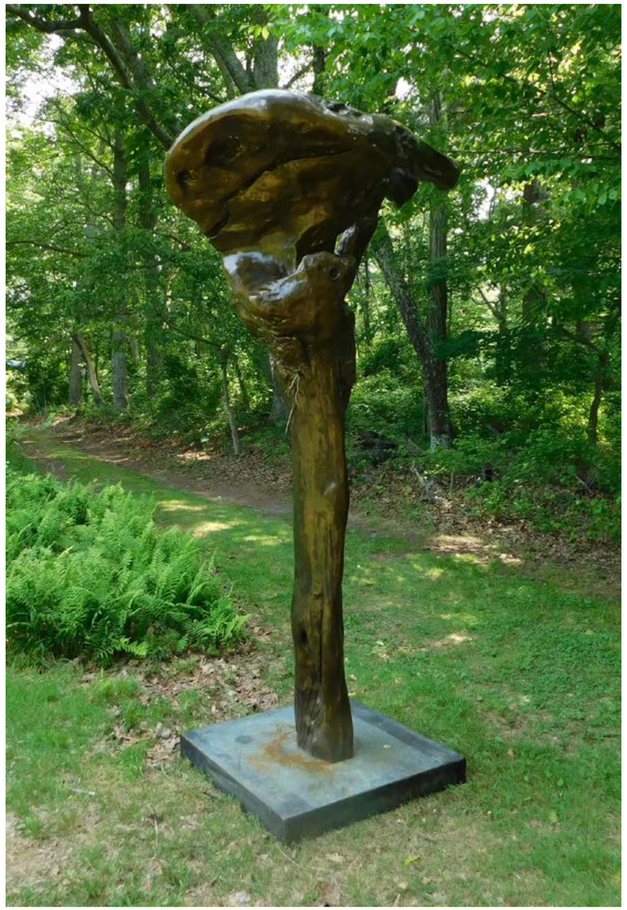
An earlier expression of passive resistance, and relevant to Shelter Island history, can be found in the Quakers' commitment to peaceful reconciliation and the nonviolent challenge to injustice. In the 17th century, members of the Society of Friends faced intense persecution in both England and in the Puritan-led Massachusetts Bay Colony. For a time, a small number of Quakers found refuge here on Shelter Island, under the protection of Nathaniel Sylvester. However, several were later martyred on Boston Common in 1660. Today, the Society of Friends continues to hold meetings here at Sylvester Manor, a historic site of American Quakerism and its enduring commitment to pacifism.

Flowers have been encoded with significance throughout cultural history. Long before Flower Power emerged as a cultural force, the tall sunflower was a coded signifier of a subversive ethos. Its bold form and pursuit of the sun became an important symbol for the Aesthetic Movement (1860-1900), which celebrated beauty, sensuality, and art for art's sake. Oscar Wilde famously embraced it as his own emblem of aesthetic flamboyance and transgressive rebellion, often sporting one in his lapel.

Perhaps the most powerful association of the flower as an icon lies not in socio-political or art-historical references but in the Buddhist representation of the lotus: endowed with enlightenment, purity, and spiritual awakening, it rises from muddy waters to cleanse the soul and attain a higher state of consciousness—an eternal counterpoint to the fleeting nature of the fragile flower.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Marc Riboud, *The Ultimate Confrontation: The Flower and the Bayonet*, 1967.
Andy Warhol, *Flowers*, 1964, Offset lithograph, 21.94 x 21.94 in., Museum of Modern Art.
Charles Kendrick, illustrator, *Ye soul agonies in ye life of Oscar Wilde*, 1882.

Ned Smyth



1-5
2018
Cast bronze
96 x 56 x 28 in.
Edition 1/5

Ned Smyth's life-size bronze cast of an upside-down tree sits at the fork in the drive. One path leads around a meadow while the other into the woods.

At first glance this could be mistaken for a monumental sculpture of a human bone, specifically the femur, but our eyes quickly re-adjust to seeing the anatomy of nature in an unnatural state of disorder.

The inversion of nature is a subject of interest to contemporary artists. In 1998, Canadian Rodney Graham made a series of inverted trees, his *Welsh Oaks #1*. It is one in a series of black and white photos that brought a lot of attention to the artist. Ugo Rondinone's 2023 exhibition *bright light shining*, at Barbara Gladstone Gallery, featured monumental cast bronze trees inverted to suggest lightning. Here the metaphor of oppositional forces is manifest in the simple turning of an object on its head.

Smyth's *1-5* is far from the only artwork in this exhibit to upend our expectations. Indeed, it seems to thematically reinforce a leitmotif that suggests that the world is a dystopic place. As such, the inversion here even correlates with "The Upside Down" of Stranger Things—a place of unnatural distortion and irrational circumstances.

Elsewhere, present in the exhibition, Allan Wexler's *Protector/Collector* and Pierre Cote's *Ascension/ Descension* both express a dichotomy of tension.

The metaphor of dislocation is further evident in Bill Albertini's *Pipe Dream System: Through a Glass Partly*, which conjures delusion and obfuscation.

Smyth adds to this mix the incontrovertible assertion that the natural world has been turned on its head—his work may seem prosaic, but the consequences of the vision are not: wildfire, torrential rainfall, drought, earthquake, tornado, and hurricane have all become regular features of climate change. The world is far from the place envisioned in any creation myth. It is a place that has been undone—turned upside down and inside out.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Rodney Graham, *Welsh Oaks #1,* 1998, Black and white photograph
48 x 36 in., Edition of 7, © The Estate of Rodney Graham. Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York.
Ugo Rondinone, *Glorious Light*, 2023, Painted bronze
171.5 x 240 x 127 inches©Ugo Rondinone

Ella Mahoney

Island Sheltered by Islands
2025
4 banners
Ink on poly-silk
Each 72 x 84 in.

We sometimes forget that the English, in their ambition for global domination, created an initial blueprint for empire close to home. Nearby Ireland was their first foray into colonization, an endeavor begun during the Norman conquest that increased in violence and scale under the Tudor monarchies of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I in the 16th century. The English seized Irish lands and, just as brutally, they sought to eradicate the identity of Irish heritage: their culture, language and faith. This systemic erasure not only attempted to eradicate their Gaelic identity, but it also implied that the Irish themselves were inherently inferior and that through cultural sanitization, something dirty was being expunged, thereby establishing prejudicial beliefs that persist in peoples of differing origins to this very day.

The business of genocide is unrelenting but proved an effective template—in only a few decades, an increasing number of Europeans started to arrive in North America. Armed with military superiority and more than a few infectious diseases wrapped in blankets. Distributed by Lord Amherst, who was rewarded with a college and a town named after him, historians now believe that several communities of Native Algonquins in Southern Massachusetts were eradicated though contagious infections.

Today, four banners draped above the drive through the woods intone the line from a Wôpanâak prayer:

Manut Wanah
Neekônâhuckeek
Kutâputunumuw wuchee
seep8ash –
Kutâputunumuw wuchee
anaquhsak
Kutâputunumuw wuchee
Kuhtanash
Anunumâuneân nâmunat
Weepee wuneekuk

Creator and ancestors
Thank you for the rivers
Thank you for the sky
Thank you for the stars
Thank you for the ocean
Help us to see only what is good

Ella Mahoney, herself a member of the Wampanoag tribe of Gay Head, has created images to accompany these four invocations of gratitude to the cosmos and to the waters. The first banner features this prayer inscribed alongside a representation of *Manhansack Aha Quash A Womak*—the Manhansett name for Shelter Island: An Island Sheltered by Islands. The name itself serves as a reminder of how far away we have strayed from the indigenous point of reference to honor the creator through safeguarding the land. This follows the belief that our role is custodial, not proprietary, that the land cannot be owned.

An Edenic paradise of reverence for the land and for the surrounding waterways, has all but been eradicated by a culture that values privatization and exclusion. Shelter Island today has evidently become a gated community defended by a moat, far removed from the Island Surrounded by Islands.

Ariel Adkins

Cocoon 2025
Mixed media, Tyvek
96 x diameter 144 in.

There is little in the approach to *Cocoon*, a sculpture of monumental scale by Ariel Adkins, that prepares the visitor for its impactful presence. Towering, like a Colossus from antiquity, the figure of a Victorian era woman materializes in the clearing of a disused stretch of the drive, flanked by parallel columns of trees. Comfortably nestled and entirely clad in the effervescent silver of spun silk, we at first understand *Cocoon* to symbolize an embryonic state of existence, poised between becoming and being.

A second glance shatters this impression, and we see this amputated figure in the opposite way; as a grotesque representation of a disembodied woman; headless and armless, she exists in a surrealist dream state, as in a film by Cocteau or Buñuel or in a painting by de Chirico. Disproportionate to either a rural landscape or an urban cityscape, and despite her exaggerated size, her presence feels spectral, like a ghost drifting through the trees.

Other references arising from the physical scale of the work come from equally diametrically opposing cultural sources: Adkins' creature recalls the living "curiosities" of the Victorian Era—giantesses who toured with P.T Barnums' circus. Astonishingly, Anna Swan a Canadian woman of that period, reached a height of 7'11" and weighted nearly 400 lbs; a heft consistent with *Cocoon*. It would be nothing short of astonishing to come across a figure—living or imagined - of this volume in this woodland setting.

A less discomfiting look back to history is the 1457 Piero della Francesca painting of the Madonna del Parto, now housed in the Musei Civici Madonna del Parto, Monterchi in Tuscany. I once made a pilgrimage —as many admirers of Piero do—to see this painting, and it remains one of the defining moments of a life in art. It is not impossible to see some similarities of Piero's Madonna and Adkins *Cocoon*, both sharing an unnatural bearing and a gown subtly parted to suggest a gestating womb. Adkins encourages the visitor to enter the sculpture—a kind of insemination. Once inside, the sculpture reveals itself as an architectural structure—indeed not dissimilar from the teepee's of the Western Plains, topped with an oculus to provide a skyward view.

Adkins describes *Cocoon* as a tribute to the generations of women who served as custodians of Sylvester Manor. Historically, it was a calculated strategy of the male Sylvester descendants to "marry up," thereby ensuring the estate's continued stability, until it eventually passed out of family hands to become the not-for-profit organization it is today.

In this light, *Cocoon* may embody a deeper complexity: the irreconcilable contradiction of privilege and mythmaking buttressed by generations of a de facto gentry and the cultural erasure of the land's original caretakers—a tension that continues to be uncovered by excavation and interpretation.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Unknown photographer, *Anna Swan*, ca. 1854-1879, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
Piero della Francesca, *Madonna del Parto (Our Lady of Parturition)*, after 1457, Detached fresco, Museo della Madonna del Parto, Monterchi.

Catherine Brigham and the students of the Shelter Island Free School K-12

Echoes of Place: Home and Belonging
2025
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

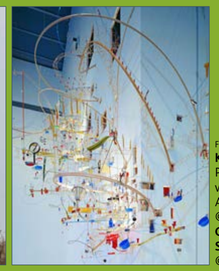
Originally an extension of his Merz-Life—a holistic environment where everything was a manifestation of the artistic imagination—Dada Artist Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau* evolved into a three-dimensional collage construction which originated in the artists' studio and escaped into his townhouse garden. The Dada movement, a post-World War I reaction to the atrocity of warfare and a rejection of the formal codification of Cubism, embraced absurdist associations explored through psychoanalysis, dream interpretation, and Jungian thought forming a platform upon which the Surrealists built their disjointed imagery.

Sadly for Schwitters, his *Merzbau*, created in Hanover between 1923 and 1937 was destroyed by Allied bombing in 1943 while he was in political exile in England. The piece, however, is legendary in the lore of Modern and Contemporary Art and lived on in the creative imaginations of artists and critics, influencing some of the most important post-World War II trends in art, including "Installation Art." In this tradition, the present work by Catherine Brigham and the K12 Students of the Shelter Island Free School District is a fine example.

Echoes of Place, Home, and Belonging features a nest-like object, is a three-dimensional collage situated in a clearing and composed of elements not conventionally associated with art materials—in fact they more consistent with the random industrial materials an osprey might weave into its aerie. Plastic, fabric, and ceramic are jumbled together here, and all are equally valid as sculptural material. This work recalls both the fabrication of "home" and, in the outside world, chaotic patterns of nature—the encroachment of invasive vegetation and competition for primacy in the landscape.

Among contemporary artists, perhaps the most acclaimed practitioner of a Schwitters approach is Sarah Sze. Her sculptural work, recently featured in a retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and currently on view at the Landcraft Garden in Mattituck, uses pedestrian objects from everyday life to create dynamic fluctuating environments that can be suspended in midair or shift from earthbound to airborne. The aesthetic of both Sze's work and the *Echoes of Place and Home*, both colorful and spontaneous, is drawn from the inherent character of their materials.

Ultimately, *Echoes of Place, Home, and Belonging* asks us to reflect on what is native and domestic. We are invited to read this loose construction as a metaphor for nest-building, family-raising, and a desire for social inclusion. The true content of the work lies not in the physical material but rather the memories—or "echoes"—it evokes. Like Proust's madeleine in *Remembrance of Things Past*, emotive triggers can be activated through sensory associations, unlocking our personal and collective pasts.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Kurt Schwitters, *Hanover Merzbau*, early 1930s, Paint, paper, cardboard, plaster, glass, mirror, metal, wood, stone, electric lighting, and found materials, Approximately 154.75 × 228.375 × 181.125 in. ©Sprengel Museum Hannover. Wilhelm Redemann.
Osprey Nest.
Sarah Sze, *Seamless*, 1999, Display at Tate Modern. ©Sarah Sze.

Robin Gianis

Terraces 1-8, Fire 1-5, Rosettes 1-2
2025
Fired clay
Dimensions variable

Robin Gianis works in series, building bodies of visually related pieces. Here, she has clustered them on native trees, borrowing the tree as a host, similar to the way an epiphyte orchid gloms onto an 'available' tree symbiotically. While serving as a support structure for the work, the tree also completes the work, alerting us to the intricate connections and rhythms between the natural world and the creative imagination.

In this setting, it's not uncommon for trees to host a variety of guests and intruders including fungi, burls, mushrooms, insects, birds and small mammals, all of which contribute to the ecosystem's equilibrium. Whether the artist's intervention disrupts or deepens this dynamic is a matter of subjective opinion, however, in this case, Gianis suggests looking more closely at our ecosystem for a nuanced understanding of what's at work here.

It is difficult to summarize Chaos Theory in the context of visual art, but it offers a useful metaphor: beneath the appearance of randomness lies an order—a system of patterns, cycles and repetitions. Applied to art, it is manifest in the persistence of repetition, generally with an intention of achieving a state of perfection. However, this intention can be subverted by an unintended deviation, as though making a mistake is a function of trying to never make a mistake. The Minimalists can be cited as an example of repetition coded as a visual language. Agnes Martin comes immediately to mind.

Gianis's work reflects the repetitive forms and processes of the natural world. The Terraces and Rosettes of her installation are composed through meticulous shaping —stratified or radiant—mirroring the structured yet organic growth patterns of the forest, and woodland flora and fungi, and confirming a deep continuity between the natural world and the artist.

Yet, there is another dimension in play here: the intersection of high art and the culturally low. Nature-based motifs are easily copied and mass-produced, and for some, they may fulfill a decorative urge or confer an "artistic" sensibility. Personally, I am interested in these cultural anomalies. Art has long been in the service of design and fashion, and Nature has long been in the service of Art; and according to some (Oscar Wilde), the reverse is true: Nature is striving to achieve the perfection attainable only in Art.

We live in a world where information travels almost as fast as light, and AI could displace humans from humanity. But in the hands and minds of artists like Robin Gianis, hope endures. Her work reminds us that through creative engagement and reverence for the living world, something essential is preserved. Not all is lost.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Agnes Martin, *I Love the Whole World*, 1999. ©Estate of Agnes Martin. Collection of Tate Modern, London.
Ceramic flowers courtesy of Sylvester Manor.
Fungi photos courtesy of Sylvester Manor.

Pierre Cote

Ascension/Descension
2025
Fallen pine, steel support
Dimensions variable

Pierre Cote's work, *Ascension/Descension*, situated in the old Growth Forest, is composed entirely from felled trees which the artist has sawn into large sections and inverted so that the branches appear as appendages. These portions of the tree trunks have been arranged to form a sculptural installation that our eyes easily accept as the artist's deconstruction of nature to produce an alternate vision.

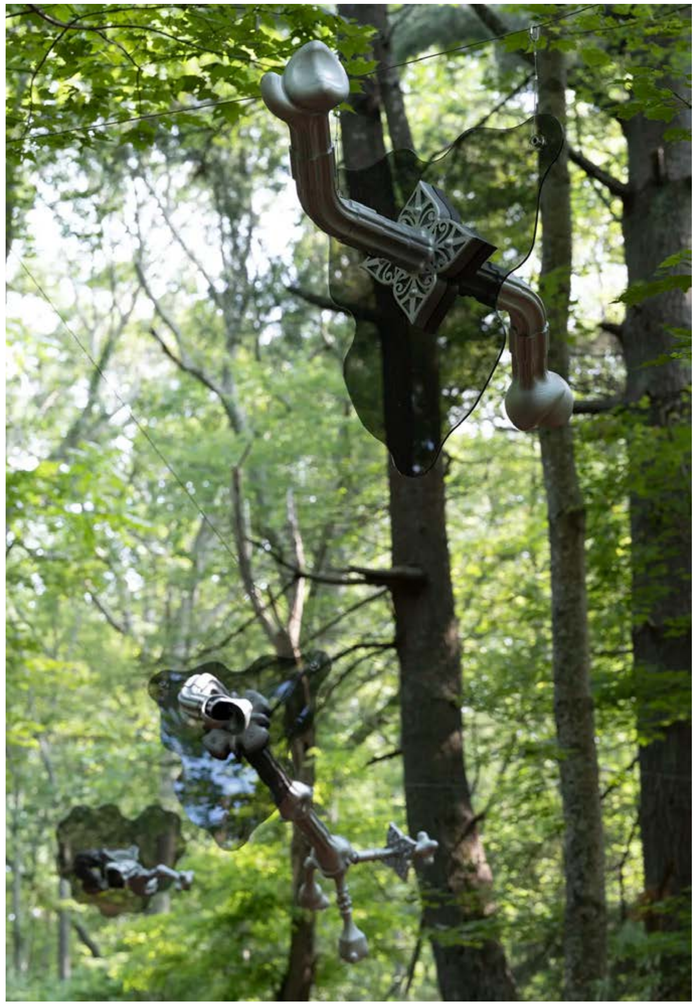
Pierre Cote's work recalls the practice of the renowned British sculptor David Nash, whose distinguished production is rooted in using trees in their natural state with very minimal intervention. Apart from the chainsaw and the blowtorch to add patina, Nash respects the intrinsic nature of the tree to lend context to his work. Nash, with Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy, is equally a proponent of Earth Works, where nature is both the subject and the medium, although of a slightly earlier generation.

Of collateral interest is the ancient belief that different trees embody different spirits, thus endowing them with aspects of the supernatural. Evergreens, for example, are associated with immortality. In the Old Testament, trees represent both Life and Knowledge, as in the Fall from Grace in the Garden of Eden. Conversely, trees also have come to assume attributes otherwise assigned to humans such as strength, flexibility, and endurance. Additionally, trees are, in equal measure, places of habitation and sanctuary for wildlife and a support structure for non-parasitic epiphytes such as bromeliads and fungi, so they carry a multitude of meanings.

In *Ascension/Descension*, the artist Pierre Cote evokes a duality central to the human condition: the tension between elevation and descent. The title itself suggests opposing forces—rising and falling—that are both metaphysical and physical. Ascension carries many religious, mystical, and political connotations, while descension may allude to decline, and even the weakest part of a celestial body. However, it is perhaps best not to impose too much interpretation on the work. Taken as a visual whole, we can easily see that what goes up must come down, and what falls may rise again.

David Nash, *Oculus Block*, 2010, Carved Eucalyptus, Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Photo by Jonty Wilde.

Bill Albertini



Pipe Dream System: Through a Mirror, Partly
2025
Plexiglass, 3-D printed parts, aluminum, stainless steel cable and hardware.
Dimensions variable

"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." Corinthians 13:12

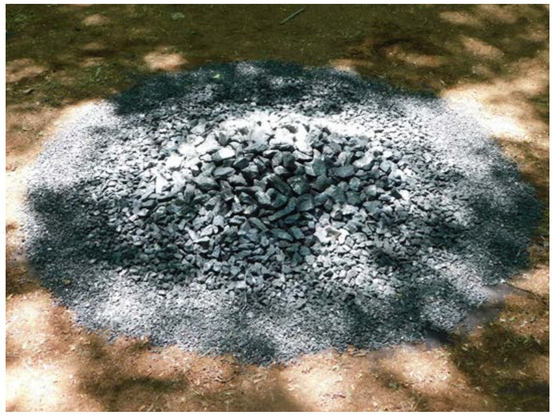
Bill Albertini's *Pipe Dream System: Through a Mirror*, Partly, is a tour de force installation, an intricate assembly of 3D printer frames or pipes mounted onto semi-transparent, semi-reflective plexiglass mirrors suspended high in the tree canopy, evoking a woodland cathedral. The viewer is invited to look up into a surreal fusion of natural and constructed space. The distinctive curvilinear elements of this hallucinogenic fantasy are resonant with Baroque art and architecture, itself a rejection of the strict symmetry of classicism. In fact, the Baroque aesthetic sits comfortably in this woodland environment, where unexpected visual and sonal pathways lead the mind to the new places.

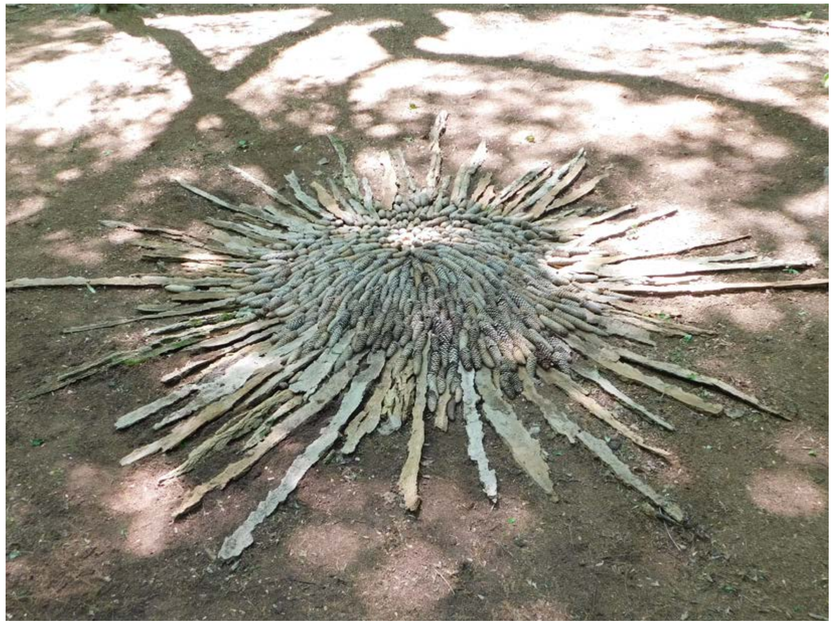
Yet to fully comprehend the Baroque, we must consider its classical underpinnings. Frank Stella, whose creative arc famously led him from Proto-Minimal to Baroque Maximal, offers a contemporary example of how seemingly divergent aesthetics are, in fact, two side of the same coin. In Albertini's installation, these polarities co-exist as partners in one piece. Similar to a JS Bach composition where, despite the melodic wanderings into chordal dissonance or key changes, it is anchored in strict musical discipline, the components of the *Pipe Dream System* incorporate elements that are Baroque-style meanderings while elements of *Through a Mirror, Partly* are attributes of reductionism and repetition, signatures of minimalism.

Particularly compelling is Albertini's willingness to allow nature to complete what art begins. In level competition with the creative imagination, nature will prevail, so better to invite it to collaborate. Here, the experience of the work is conditional upon the available light: on a sunny day, the plexiglass mirrors shimmer with reflection; on an overcast day, the work may nearly disappear into the canopy. Its capacity to come alive or go dormant is a function of having nature as a partner and co-creator.

Albertini's work holds up both a literal and an existential mirror to temporal life. Its unique duality—reflective and transparent—enables the viewer to see through to the "other side" (the future) at times, but not always. The dual nature of the glass and mirror is an extension of the binary aspects of Minimal and Maximal, of Baroque and Classical, of dream state and waking reality. Through this artistic deconstruction, Albertini leads us toward a meditation on self-knowledge and our own mortality, reminding us that while glimpses of fulfillment are fleeting in life, we become fully realized only on life's completion.

Roisin Bateman





Nesting Grounds
2025
Found materials: native plant materials, stone and coal.
Dimensions variable

While landscape has been a subject in art traceable back to cave painting, it is the British who lay claim to the crown of the genre. Although paintings by Claude Lorraine, Camille Corot, Jan Breughel, Giovanni Antonio Canaletto, or Giorgione and many others attest to the rich tradition across Europe and the many contestants for the title, the profound influence of painters like John Constable and J.M.W. Turner make this hard to argue.

Landscape as both the subject *and* the material of an artwork is a different matter: the field is far less crowded. British artists such as Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy, and more recently Henrietta Armstrong have explored this territory building on the foundations of American pioneers from an earlier generation of Earthworks artists of the 1960s–1970s: Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, and Dennis Oppenheim, for instance. They were the first to create site-specific works that eroded back into the landscape over time, subjected to the forces of nature and eschewing the commodification of the art market. Many of their seminal works survive today only in film and photography. An exception is Robert Smithson's 1970 masterpiece, *The Spiral Jetty,* installed on the Great Salt Lake in Utah, which was considerably degraded before being recently restored and preserved by conservation.

Among the afore-mentioned artists, Richard Long is distinctive for creating (mostly) permanent sculpture from material sourced on site, while Armstrong introduces elements with no relation to a natural setting, provoking altered perceptions of the landscape. Goldsworthy is renowned for his disciplined practice of sourcing native material to create site-specific installations that biodegrade back into the land.

Roisin Bateman, an Irish artist who has lived and worked on the East End for decades, is firmly aligned in the tradition and the ideology of the Land Art Movement. Situated in a quiet corner of the woodland, Bateman has gathered materials for this work that are cultural and historical signifiers of the diverse populations of Shelter Island. The beach pebbles speak to the island's marine culture, as the surrounding waters have been a source of sustenance through fishing, shellfish harvesting, and hunting. The waterways also served as seasonal migration routes for the Manhansett, who moved easily between the north and south forks and Connecticut.

On the forest floor, pinecones and strips of tree bark are arranged to suggest a sunburst pattern, as baroque as a commission from a King. Here, Bateman reminds us that the natural world, long a source of inspiration for the applied arts, can become so culturally elevated, and stylized that it loses its connection to an organic context. Her intervention of pinecones and tree bark are deftly configured to reinforce both their decorative potential and the intrinsic beauty of the natural world, urging us to notice what is often overlooked. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, these native materials point to medicinal healing, practices once rooted in the properties of plants and minerals, the art and knowledge of their uses now largely lost.

Finally, Bateman introduces a stark counterpoint: pieces of anthracite coal. Once a vital source of heat and energy for Sylvester Manor, in the post-industrial world, coal carries heavy baggage as a major source of environmental harm. In the creation of this work, Bateman has introduced two "strangers" like a matchmaker arranging a blind date. Similar to the practices of Henrietta Armstrong, Bateman has welcomed the controversial connotations of coal, coal mining, and harmful industrialization into an Edenic enclave of the natural world. In this context, these opposites attract. Here, we do not experience coal as a dangerous pollutant of carbon monoxide, instead we pause to admire it for its natural beauty in an unrefined state, as it might have appeared in Paradise.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Henrietta Armstrong, *Throwing Bones*, 2021, Crystacal R Plaster, dimensions variable. ©Henrietta Armstrong.
Mushroom courtesy of Sylvester Manor.

Walter Channing

Broken Vessel
2005
Painted Wood
48 x 24 x 24 in.

Dancing Bird
2002
Wood
43 ½ x 65 x 22 in.

Walter Channing was a man of many gifts: he had a Wall Street career in venture capital, and he founded Channing Daughters Winery in Bridgehampton in 1977.

The through-line of Channing's life, however, was making art which he pursued, refreshingly and without the restraints of formal training. As a sculptor with a formidable talent for carving, Channing gravitated towards wood, particularly drawn to trees and their roots as his material of choice. To name him a wood carver, however, would be misleading. Walter Channing was a sculptor who saw art in the mass of a tree trunk where most people see only wood.

Often whimsical and always unexpected, Channing often inverted the tree, leaving the roots as a kind of visual crown atop a totem in which he found figures and objects waiting in the cracks and the grain.

Known also for his widely admired series of *Pencils*, in which Channing harvested enough dead trees (from the dump or construction sites) to re-create the full complement of Caran d'Ache pencils. With each length of tree trunk stained in its corresponding color, he assembled them into a 7' high x 75' long fence representing the full chromatic spectrum offered by Caran d'Ache. This punning on the subject and the material—colored pencils made from trees—reveals the intelligence of the artistic imagination at play.

Here in Sculpture @ Sylvester Manor, we are fortunate to have on loan two of Channing's pieces. Situated near the opening of the Peacock House, his *Dancing Bird* is a very entertaining example of how Channing reimagined the root system of the tree as an anthropomorphic figure, and a balletic one, no less.

Enclosed in the protection of the historic box hedge, his *Broken Vessel* is turned to reveal a large crack that permeates the structure, depriving it of any utilitarian functionality.

Walter Channing enjoyed some recognition of his work during his lifetime, including gallery shows at O.K. Harris where the pop sensibility of his aesthetic resonated with other artists of the genre—but really, he was in a league of his own.

Labels like *naïf*, or *outsider*, or *autodidact* should simply be dropped from usage. The artworld is a large and varied world of many practices and venues, but what unites them all is the creative imagination of the artists, of which Walter Channing was undeniably one.

Walter Channing
Pencil Fence, c. 2004, Bridgehampton, NY.
Courtesy of the Walter Channing Estate.

Stephanie Needham

My Shelter Island, A Love Story
2025
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

In 1925, a quartet of Surrealists—all men; Yves Tanguy, Jacques Prévert, Marcel Duchamp, and André Breton invented the game Cadavre Exquis—or Exquisite Corpse, as it is called in Anglais. The game is simply played by taking a sheet of paper and folding into horizontal sections corresponding to the number of participating people, who each leave a drawing under the fold indicating only where it ends and passing this on to the next person to add to without knowing the image concealed under the fold. This "game" was perfectly contrived by the Surrealist who enjoyed combining imagery of unrelated origin in pictorially contiguous situations.

Unlike the collaborative Surrealists, Stephanie Needham works alone to create totemic sculptures that none-the-less recall the collaborative practices of the Exquisite Corpse. Needham's sculptures are modular, composed from a variety of domestic objects which are vertically stacked and placed into a setting once occupied by a bed of flowers. This disparity alone, is enough to associate the sculpture with more than a wink to both Schwitters and Dada and to the Italian Futurists whose imagery deconstructed propulsion in space.

It is important that we not dismiss the title of this artwork as being unapologetically auto-biographical. Accordingly the components and the form of the work must refer to aspects of a life lived with great affection for this place and for the people in the artists circuit. Needham, a long time educator and accomplished ceramicist, is herself a family member of art educators and creators of various kinds.

However emotional, Needham's sculpture is none-the-less comprised largely of industrially produced material, incongruously planted here in what remains of a formal garden to approximate an artificial bed of perennials. Despite its playful and whimsical character, we cannot help but see it for the imposter that it is—but even more dire is taking it as a harbinger of future extinctions. To what extent are we willing to compromise the beauty of the natural world before we settle for generations of derivatives that bear less and less similarity to the original?

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Fanny Allié, *Exquisite Corpse*, 2017, Wood, photo paper and steel, 90 x 30 x 30 in., Public Art supported by DOT, AIR Gallery and the Clinton Hill Community, www.fannyallie.com. ©Fannie Allie.
Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise, and Man Ray, *Cadavre Exquis (Exquisite Corpse)*, 1926-27, Composite drawing of ink, pencil, and colored pencil on paper, 14.125 x 9 in., Museum of Modern Art.
Digitalis growing wild courtesy of Tom Cugliani.

Aurelio Torres

Two Vessels and Gate
2025
Railway ties, cedar lumber and steel
77 x 54 x 9 in.

The very formalist construction of Aurelio Torres's *Two Vessels on Gate* is perfectly situated on a rather formal lawn of what was once a garden parterre at Sylvester Manor. The garden was designed by Cornelia Horsford in 1908 as a series of garden rooms in the Edwardian manner, fashionable at that time in England and America.

The material composition of the piece—railway ties, cedar lumber, and steel—speak to the functionality of their industrial origin and the overall aesthetic of a work that does not pretend to be anything else. The two "vessels" that surmount the supporting "gate" structure are elegantly shaped from cedar and form a perfect counterpoint to the rough patina of the creosote-darkened railway ties. Torres's contrasting usage of two distinctly different kinds of wood elevates the piece beyond its structural logic to a poem.

The elongated components of the two "vessels" bring to mind something of the Romanian-born Constantin Brâncusi's 1923 sculpture *Bird in Space* (Guggenheim Museum), while the unrefined mass of the columns are evocative of Brâncusi's totemic sculptures, placing Torres squarely in the Modernist tradition.

Taken visually, the piece also has much in common with the Japanese *torii*, a holy gate usually positioned on the water or set on the threshold before a shrine. Of considerable antiquity dating to the Heian period (794–1185), the shape is very simple. A lintel supported by two pillars with very minimal embellishment and usually painted in vermilion. The *torii* is meant to mark the symbolic passage between the mundane and the sacred, implying a transformative spiritual experience.

In the case of Torres's *Gate*, the water is not seen but implied by the "Vessels," leading us to understand that the two visual components unlock an internal meaning of the work. Although the sculpture is not a literal gate for a human, nor a gate for a boat to sail through, it is a metaphor for the imaginary gate through which we sail in life.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Constantin Brâncusi, *L'oiseau dans l'espace (Bird in Space)*, 1923, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Peggy Guggenheim Collection.
Torii Gate at Miyajima Japan. Photo by Jordan Emery.

Annemarie Waugh with Neisha Terry Young & Michelle Wittaker

Bitterest Sweet
2025
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

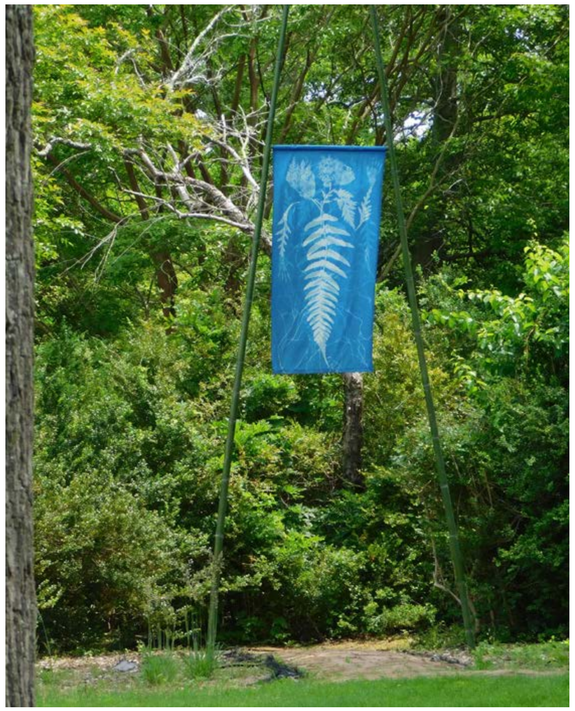
Bitterest Sweet, 2025, is an art installation dedicated to the enslaved Africans, indigenous Manhansset Indians, and Irish and English indentured servants who lived, worked, and died at Sylvester Manor. *Bitterest Sweet* features a walkway in the shape of the Nkyinkyim 'twisting' symbol of the Adinkra, which represents the Gyaman people of Ghana and the Côte d'Ivoire. Twisting is a symbol representing the tortuous nature of life's journey and the toughness, versatility, and dynamism required to thrive in it. It is also a symbol of dedication to service.

The wavy line, which forms the main component in the design of Nkyinkyim, depicts the meandering course of life's journey. These twists and turns require one to be versatile and resilient to survive and thrive. The proverb associated with this symbol is "Ɔbra kwan yɛ nkyinkyimii," which literally means "life's road is twisted." This symbol is often associated with concepts such as adaptability, resilience, versatility, and the ability to navigate through life's complexities with wisdom and strength.

Inside the symbol are terracotta clay sculptures created by the participants of the artist's community outreach workshop. Native flowers and healing plants from Shelter Island are to be seeded and planted and will grow around and inside the terracotta sculptures. The installation is intended to demonstrate growth and change over the course of the exhibition.

Andrea Cote

Of Hallowed Ground
2025
Cyanotype
60 x 30 in.



In 1842, Sir John Herschel discovered and named the process whereby photochemical reactions could reveal the electromagnetic spectrum and ultraviolet rays to the human eye through exposure to light. Hershel named this process Cyanotype, and one of its most significant practitioners was Anna Atkins, the daughter of a family friend of Sir John's. By October of 1843, Atkins had compiled *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, the first ever volume illustrated uniquely with photographically generated images and a handwritten text. Collected into three volumes, only 17 copies of the Atkins compendium are known to exist in varying states of completion, the maximum containing 433 plates and 14 pages of text at the Horniman Museum and Gardens.

Atkins (1799-1871) was fortunate to have been born into a family of scientists. Her father was a botanist and encouraged a science-oriented education for her, unusual for a woman in the first quarter of the 19th century. To be clear, the technique that Atkins perfected was one that did not involve a camera (or any type of lens), although she certainly could have accessed one—it was simply the registration of an object placed on photo-sensitized paper and exposed to sunlight.

In the 20th Century, the process, commonly referred to as photogram (from the Greek *photo*: light, and *graph*: draw) continued to enjoy experimentation among the Surrealists, especially Moholy Nagy and Man Ray, for whom the term Rayogram was coined. With the development of the polaroid, we see a fall in usage, but since the advent of more advanced digital photography, photograms have resurfaced with accomplished artists as well as with children for its instantly gratifying results and the beautiful blue tones of the negative space.

Andrea Cote, an artist and educator based in Hampton Bays, has an extensive background in printmaking as well as with photograms. *On Hallowed Ground* is a combination of both techniques: the floral images have been created by photogram and the figurative ones (the two faces in profile) by print. Here in Sylvester Manor, the work is installed over a brick path in the garden. The artist exposed the images to daylight but during the day of a full moon, when energy fields are thought to be at their peak.

The faces appearing at the top of the sheet, one looking skyward and the other downward, indicate the body both ascendant towards the cosmos and in descent towards the earth, opening the path of the middle way between them. Indeed, Andrea Cote has spoken about the crossroad as being a location of transmigration where the soul shifts from one material substance to another. The crossroad is a place where, in Irish mythology, banshees, fairies, and witches congregate to usher the living to the next world.

There are no accounts of where any of the Sylvester family members are buried on Shelter Island. There is speculation that, consistent with Quaker practices, the conventional cemetery interment was eschewed in favor of what we now call a "green" burial. If Sylvester was indeed a practicing Quaker, it would be difficult to reconcile this belief with the fact that he exploited slave labor on his property.

Andrea Cote, in *On Hallowed Ground,* freely acknowledges the imperfections and complexities of human nature and creates a space for the spirits caught in the extremities of history to be released through the middle.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Anna Atkins, *Jamaica*, from *Cyanotypes of British and Foreign Ferns*, 1853.
William Henry Fox Talbot, *Two delicate plant fronds*, c. 1839, Photogenic drawing negative.
Ferns courtesy of Sylvester Manor

Press

East End Beacon
news for the twin forks.

A RETURN TO PARADISE ON SHELTER ISLAND

When the Sylvester family of Anglo-Dutch traders sought refuge on Shelter Island in the late 1600s, it was a time of worldwide upheaval. Religious persecution, the advent of global trade and the beginning of the trading of enslaved people from Africa in that century would reshape society in ways that destroyed innocence worldwide.

Pictured Above: Sculptor Walter Channing's "Dancing Bird" outside the peacock house at Sylvester Manor.

John Milton's epic poem, "Paradise Lost," was born out of this upheaval, and the poem serves as the framework upon which curator Tom Cugliani has built his second annual immersive exhibition at the Sylvester Manor educational farm on Shelter Island, Sculpture@Sylvester Manor, which opened on June 14.

"It was really world-changing, seismic in a way for Europe, for North America and for West Africa. Everything, in a way, devolves here," said Mr. Cugliani of this time in history, as he gave a press preview tour of the exhibition on June 13. "The poem is really interesting because, on the one hand, it talks about paradise as a kind of Edenic setting, and on the other hand, it can be understood metaphorically for Cromwell's failure to produce the Utopian commonwealth that was going to replace the autocratic king."

Like last summer's exhibition, which brought more than 2,500 people to Sylvester Manor, dozens of works that interweave the natural world into this narrative are lovingly placed throughout the grounds of the 236-acre property.

Read more LINK

The New York Times

Long Island's East End

By Charity Robey Photographs by Tony Cenicola

Charity Robey is a feature writer for the *Shelter Island Reporter*, and a resident of the East End since 1985.

July 3, 2025

Broken Vessel, by Walter Channing

3 p.m. **"To live again in these wild woods..."**

Once you turn in your kayak, you are a 10-minute drive from the ancient, shady woods and gardens of **Sylvester Manor**, a 17th-century provisioning plantation that produced food and lumber for the sugar trade using enslaved Africans and indentured laborers. It is now a center for historical research and an educational farm on 200 acres of fields, woods and trails. Here you can take a walk through **Sculpture @ Sylvester Manor.** There is no admission fee for the self-guided exhibit "Paradise Lost," which continues through the summer. Sculptures, installations and photography by 23 artists appear along a one-mile trail on the banks of Gardiner's Creek. This is the second year for this surprising and whimsical exhibit, which was created by the curator Tom Cugliani and features a new group of East End artists whose works inhabit and reference the land.

Read more LINK

About the Curator - Tom Cugliani

PHOTO CREDIT ADAM FŰSS

Exhibition curator and organizer **Tom Cugliani** brings extensive expertise in the contemporary art world to the project, as well as a lifelong history with Shelter Island and Sylvester Manor. His eponymous gallery launched the careers of established artists such as Christian Marclay, Jack Pierson and Charles Le Dray, following which Cugliani served as Marlborough Gallery's point person for the great American painter Alex Katz, in addition to advising numerous private, corporate and public collections.

"Sculpture@Sylvester presents a singular opportunity for artists to reinterpret Sylvester Manor's position in local culture and the larger community. The aim of this exhibition is to show how this unique locality inspires the creative imagination and to bring deeper understanding of connectivity to the visual artists working here in the East End."

About Sylvester Manor

The lands of Shelter Island's Sylvester Manor were home for millennia to indigenous Manhansett People. The 236-acre site is the most intact remnant of a former slaveholding plantation north of Virginia. The site was home to eleven generations of Sylvester descendants, from 1652 until 2014, when it was gifted to the nonprofit organization Sylvester Manor. Over the past 370 years, Sylvester Manor has been a provisioning plantation, an Enlightenment-era farm, and a pioneering food industrialist's summer estate. Today, the site includes a 1737 Manor House, a restored 19th-century windmill, an Afro-Indigenous Burial Ground, and a working farm along with educational, history & heritage and cultural arts programs open to all. Sylvester Manor was designated a Historic District of national significance on the National Register of Historic Places in 2015.