

Dail Chambers: A Mythological Journey

The sculptural installation by Dail Chambers was inspired by an ongoing search for her grandmother, Evelyn Haynes', final resting place at Washington Park Cemetery. The sculptures relate to Chambers' larger body of work, "*Itshanapa*," in which she investigates her vision of the West African tradition of *sankofa*, meaning to go back and reclaim one's past, to move forward. Linking her larger identity to place and placing work within the context of her own blood lineage.. The exact location of many gravesites at Washington Park Cemetery has been lost due to years of mismanagement, as well as the movement of thousands of bodies to three other cemeteries due to highway, airport and light rail expansion. Objects made of clay, copper and repurposed material hang, gather and join in a redefining way, recreating the feeling of movement through the overgrown vegetation found at the cemetery and referencing the spirit of the people buried there. The "bricolage" nature of the sculpture also allows for connotations and implications between art, culture and history. The artistic structure and materials form a visual jazz, complete with harmony and dissonance, that reference culture as a multifaceted "living" phenomenon. By moving around and among the elements of the sculpture, we can immerse our consciousness in metaphoric conversations about race, displacement and class.

Part of the artist's contribution to the exhibit also includes the stop-motion animated film, *Sankofa: A Collective Mythology*, seen in the next room, which takes place in St. Louis— the heart of the Midwest. Chambers begins the story with the search for her grandmother, which parallels her genealogical art process. Her character in the film then journeys through the landscape of St. Louis, meeting ancestors, famous people and collaborators who have impacted society and the St. Louis region. The film features historic places such as Cahokia Mounds in Illinois, the Gateway Arch, the banks of the Mississippi River and more. The film ends with the artist and her daughter exiting Washington Park Cemetery. In this visual journey, the artist interconnects the joining of community through collective power.

Chambers expresses her artistic voice through community engagement/social sculpture projects, private studio processes, and ethnographic research. "*Itshanapa*" meshes perfectly with the theme of Jennifer Colten's photographic work on Washington Park Cemetery and provides an element of personal history, and personal context of place and identity. Through the installation, Chambers creates her journey for the viewer.