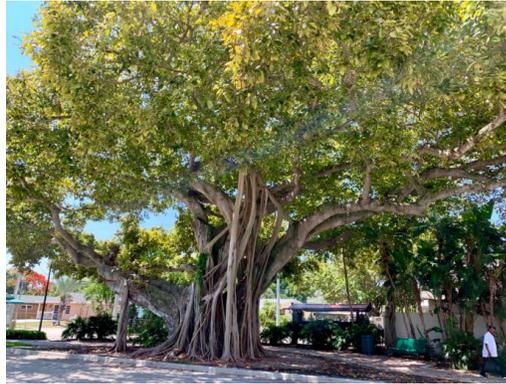


Thomason, John. "Boca Museum Receives Landmark NEA Funding for 'Tree of Knowledge,'" *Boca Magazine*, 5 June 2019.

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## Boca Museum Receives Landmark NEA Funding For "Tree of Knowledge"

By John Thomason – June 5, 2019



*The banyan tree in Pearl City (photo by Aylin Tito)*

The Boca Raton Museum of Art's ongoing efforts to diversify its audience base, showcase relevant and renowned art, and form bonds with the local community just received a major financial boost.

Late last week, the museum announced it will receive a \$35,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, one of 977 grants approved for arts organizations for the second round of funding in fiscal year 2019. The grant marks the first NEA donation in the museum's history.

The funds will support the creation of "Tree of Knowledge," a site-specific installation from acclaimed New York artist Maren Hassinger, who works regularly with found materials. This time, she'll be creating an homage to Boca Raton's own Tree of Knowledge, the historic landmark of the nearby African-American enclave of Pearl City. Planted by schoolchildren before the First World

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War, the tree, with its glorious, twisting trunk, was designated as "Historic" by the city's Beautification Committee in 1992.

"For us, the banyan tree is like the castles of Europe," says Irvin Lippman, executive director of the Boca Raton Museum of Art. "It's monumental. ... I'm not sure anything else quite equates to the power of the banyan tree."

The monies will fund Hassinger's monthlong residency here this summer, in which she will engage the community to create aerial "roots" of her version of the banyan tree inside the museum's gallery. The fig's roots will be comprised of rolled-up newspapers donated and shaped by volunteers.

"We loved the concept, and we explained it in such a gripping way that the NEA thought it was worthy of support," Lippman says. "It's a wonderful metaphor, using newspapers to evoke this tree that's known as the Tree of Knowledge—that doesn't go lost on people at all. But I like the idea of people coming into the museum, and then our going out into the community also."

When Hassinger's "Tree of Knowledge" opens Nov. 5, it will join an additional Hassinger sculpture, "Love," a phantasmagoria of inflated pink plastic bags enveloping museum visitors in an immersive cocoon. Hassinger's installations will not be the only work by prominent African-American artists on display; November also marks the opening of photographer Clifford Ross' "Waves" exhibition.

"Those two [exhibitions] evoke the environment, since we live in this coastal address," Lippman says. "Together, they will be a wonderful dynamic duo. And they couldn't be more different. Clifford Ross has a studio in the West Village, and Maren lives in Harlem. They come from two different art traditions, and it'll be interesting to see them come together under the museum roof."