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HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY'S ARTWALK REOPENS WITH POWERFUL, COMMUNITY-DRIVEN EXHIBITION BY TRÁÉ BROOKS

First exhibition since 2022 renovation closure transforms memory, grief, and connection into a living memorial

[HARTFORD, CT] – After more than three years of closure for renovations, Hartford Public Library (HPL) proudly reopens its ArtWalk gallery with a major new exhibition, *...And My Heart Beats For You*, by Connecticut-born artist Traé Brooks, on view June 1 through August 29, 2026.

This highly anticipated reopening marks a significant cultural milestone for downtown Hartford, welcoming the public back into a vibrant, accessible space for art and community.

“This exhibition was well worth the wait, and we couldn’t imagine a more powerful way to welcome the community back. Sharing Traé’s work in this moment feels both timely and deeply meaningful,” said Bridget E. Quinn, HPL’s President and CEO.

A free public opening reception will take place on Friday, June 5, from 5:30–7:30 p.m., inviting the community to reconnect with ArtWalk and experience Brooks’ work firsthand.

A Living Memorial Rooted in Community

Blending sculpture, painting, and found materials, including worn clothing and personal artifacts, Brooks’ multidisciplinary exhibition explores how individuals carry history through memory, ritual, and material.

In this space, remembering becomes a source of connection, and shared grief opens pathways for collective reflection and care.

Brooks’ work also reflects on the impact of systems of power on communities while opening space for dialogue, healing, and envisioning more just and compassionate futures.

Artist Statement

“My art is about the people I love: my family, friends, and the connections that shape who I am. Through painting, sculpture, and installation, I explore how we form bonds with each other and how these relationships define my sense of belonging and identity.



My process is experimental and playful. I work with whatever materials feel right: paint, metal, fabric, found objects, family heirlooms, even worn clothing. These materials carry their own histories, and I use them to capture something essential about the people I'm depicting. Sometimes I'll paint portraits with bold colors and expressive brushstrokes. Other times I'll weld metal sculptures or create installations that incorporate personal objects that hold memories.

My work investigates how we hold onto our histories and how those histories shape who we are. The personal is political for me, especially as a person of color. I feel a responsibility to represent and honor people from marginalized communities and to show how our everyday lives and relationships hold deeper meaning. I believe art can be a catalyst for reflection and social change.

At the same time, my work is closely tied to my spiritual background and serves as a way to venerate the people in my life; honoring those connections in the past while nurturing the ones that exist in the present. Much of my recent work reflects on grief, mortality, and the loss of relationships. I want my art to serve as a reminder for us of our inherent connections to each other, and to serve as a reflection of my heart," said Brooks.

About the Artist

Traé Brooks is an interdisciplinary artist based in Providence, RI. Originally from Windsor, CT. Earning a Bachelor's Degree in fine art from the University of Hartford in 2019, his work explores familial relationships, spirituality, and the collective experience by utilizing various mediums, such as painting, sculpture, metal fabrication, and installation. Throughout the years, he has participated group exhibitions and solo shows as well as residencies and fellowship programs like The Farmington Valley Arts Center (Avon, CT), The Steel Yard (Providence, RI) and briefly served as a board member and chair of Curatorial at the Windsor Art Center (Windsor, CT). Currently, Brooks contributes to the arts community as a security guard at the RISD Museum.

About the ArtWalk

Hartford Public Library's ArtWalk is one of Connecticut's largest exhibition spaces dedicated to local and contemporary artists. Its reopening signals a renewed commitment to accessible, community-centered arts and culture in Hartford. ... *And My Heart Beats For You* is funded by the Roberts Foundation for the Arts and Suzanne Hopgood in memory of Frank Lord.

Event Details

Exhibition: ... *And My Heart Beats For You* by Traé Brooks at ArtWalk

Dates: June 1 – August 29, 2026

Opening Reception: Friday, June 5, 5:30–7:30 p.m.

Location: Hartford Public Library, 500 Main Street, Hartford, CT

Admission: Free and open to the public

About Hartford Public Library

Founded as the Library Company in 1774, Hartford Public Library has remained at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience for over 250 years. The Library has seven full-service



locations, two Boundless Library locations, and multiple outreach services, including the Library on Wheels and Story Stash, a 24/7 pickup locker. HPL provides education, intellectual enrichment, and cultural development for thousands of children, youth, and adults. HPL has gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance, and youth leadership training. For more information, visit hplct.org

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