

# HOME AT HEART

'Detroit '67' at Hartford Stage highlights family's love during turbulent times

BY CHRISTOPHER ARNOTT

**J**ade King Carroll is home again. The director of "Detroit '67" likes to direct plays about "family and home," she says, describing the Dominique Morisseau drama next up at Hartford Stage as being about "people taking care of each other" during turbulent times.

Hartford Stage is sort of a second home for Carroll. This is the third show she's done at the theater in the past three seasons. The others, which both played Hartford in 2016, were "Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years," a co-production with New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre; and August Wilson's "The Piano Lesson," a co-production with the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, N.J.

"Detroit '67" is yet another co-production – it was at the McCarter this past fall, and arrives in Hartford with the same cast and creative team.

The drama, which opens Feb. 14 and runs through March 10, takes



T. CHARLES ERICKSON PHOTOS

**TOP LEFT:** Nyahale Allie and Johnny Ramey. **TOP MIDDLE:** Nyahale Allie. **TOP RIGHT:** Myxolydia Tyler and Will Cobbs. **ABOVE:** Nyahale Allie and Myxolydia Tyler.

place in a basement of an after-hours club run by a widowed mother named 'Chelle and her younger brother Lank during the hot summer of what is often called "the Detroit Riot" or "the Detroit Rebellion." That intense five-day period of protests, confrontations and violence resulted in dozens of deaths, thousands of arrests and hundreds of burning buildings. It began with altercations following a police raid on an after-hours club.

In Morisseau's play, 'Chelle and Lank and the friends, plus a mysterious visitor, hunker down in the basement while violence erupts outside.

What's important to Carroll is that the characters in the plays she directs seem at home. For "Detroit '67" that means, as Morisseau describes it in her stage directions, "an unfinished basement, but efforts have been made to make it look inviting. ... A string of Christmas lights lies on an old shabby couch."

"The biggest difference" in the show after moving from the McCarter to Hartford Stage, Carroll says, is "going from a proscenium to a Turn to **Stage, Page G6**

## A feminist, surreal twist on an old tale at Wadsworth Atheneum

BY SUSAN DUNNE

Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" tells the story of a woman held captive in a tower near Camelot who is forbidden to look out the window. She only can look in the mirror at reflections of outdoor activity and weave what she sees. If she looks directly outside, she will be cursed.

Tennyson's mythical ballad inspired several paintings by Pre-Raphaelite artists, including William Holman Hunt, who spent decades perfecting his interpretation of the Lady. Hunt's Lady is surrounded by symbolic, Biblical and Arthurian imagery and is wound up in multi-colored threads from her loom.

That painting, in the Wadsworth Atheneum's collection since 1961, is the inspiration for the newest exhibit in the Hartford museum's contemporary-art series MATRIX.

The artist behind that exhibit, Emily Mae Smith, has been fascinated by Hunt's painting for years and wanted to respond to it with a feminist interpretation.

"She's trapped in a tower, unable to interact with the world. ... She's bound to domesticity. That's both fascinating and terrifying to me," says Smith, who lives in Brooklyn, N.Y. This is Smith's first solo exhibit in the U.S. It runs through May 5.

It's not only the painting, but the history of art itself,

that Smith wants to challenge. Traditional male domination in the art world has embedded depictions of women that are difficult to shake off, says the artist, whose work often comments on sex and gender with satire, in the traditions of symbolism, surrealism, and pop.

"There's this condition of women not being able to render what they see. They have to do it through the lens of another," she says.

"With the Pre-Raphaelites and symbolists, it was one of the last times that figurative images were allegorical in a way that was purposefully so. There was a kind of code getting really nailed down that carries through even in the subtext of 20th-century art. That's

when the language of oppression was perfected, and it becomes the newly blank page upon which new things are written."

A key painting in Smith's exhibit is "Unruly Thread," an image of a needle, with yarn wound around it, the same color and pattern as the weaving threads wound around Hunt's Lady.

"It's an art form, but it's entangling her and destroying her," she says, adding that her images "are unraveling myths that are bad, that bind."

"Brooms with a View" depicts two anthropomorphic brooms at two round windows, outside of which is the same countryside seen outside the window in

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COURTESY OF SIMONE SUBAL GALLERY, NEW YORK

Emily Mae Smith's painting titled "The Drawing Room" (2018 oil on linen).

# Yale's Claudia Rankine to open poetry fest

BY SUSAN DUNNE

Poet Claudia Rankine, the MacArthur Foundation “genius grant” winner who teaches poetry at Yale, will launch the 27th annual Sunken Garden Poetry Festival at Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington, which opens June 19 and features five evenings of readings, ending on Aug. 11.

Rankine, of New Haven, has published five collections of poetry, including the “Citizen: An American Lyric,” which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry and is the only poetry book to be a New York Times best-seller in the nonfiction category. She also has written two plays and numerous video collaborations and has edited several literary anthologies.

In addition to her “genius grant,” Rankine has received the Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry, Poets & Writers’ Jackson Poetry Prize and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Lannan Foundation, United States Artists and the National Endowment of the Arts. She is the co-founder of the Racial Imaginary Institute, which works to change percep-

tions of racial differences.

On June 19, Rankine will be preceded by poet Emily Skillings and the Jeff Barnhart duo will perform.

The other headliners in the festival are:  
 ▶ “Lighthouse” author Terrance Hayes on July 10. That evening will feature music by Jeff Burnham and the Insiders.  
 ▶ “A Celebration of Indian Poetry and Culture” with Aimee Nezhukumatathil and Rajiv Mohabir on July 21, with Indian music.  
 ▶ “Poetry of Our World” with Mai Der Vang and Chris Abani on July 31, with world music by Criollo Classic Trio.  
 ▶ “Young Poets Day” with Elizabeth Acevedo on Aug. 11, with Fresh Voices Student Poetry Contest winners and music by Merritt Gibson.

Poetry writing workshops also will be held in connection with the festival. Admission to each evening is \$15 in advance, \$20 at the gate, free for ages 17 and younger. The Hill-Stead Museum is at 35 Mountain Road in Farmington. hillstead.org.

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JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR PHOTO

Yale poetry Professor Claudia Rankine will open the 2019 Sunken Garden Poetry Festival.

## THE ARTS IN BRIEF

### ‘Anastasia’ ending Broadway run

The long, magical journey of “Anastasia” is ending — on Broadway, at least.

The musical about a young woman impersonating a princess had its pre-Broadway try-out at Hartford Stage in 2016. The Broadway run will end March 31 at the Broadhurst Theatre in New York, just over two years after it had its first performances there in March of 2017.

Two lead cast members — Christy Altomare as Anya/Anastasia and John Bolton as Vlad — were with the show in Hartford as well as for its entire Broadway run, as were Molly Rushing (who plays Anastasia at age 17) and ensemble member Janet Dickinson. Constantine Germanacos, who played Tsar Nicholas II and Count Ipolitov in Hartford, recently joined the Broadway cast in the role of Gleb, the Bolshevik general who chases Anastasia from Russia to France.

“Anastasia” is directed by Darko Tresnjak, who has been artistic director of Hartford Stage since 2011 and will be relinquishing that position in June. The show is based on two feature films — a 1956 drama starring Ingrid Bergman



JOAN MARCUS

Christy Altomare as Anya in “Anastasia” at Hartford Stage in 2016. The show went on to Broadway, where it will end an impressive two-year run in March.

and a 1997 animated musical — enhanced with a great deal of fresh material. The book for the musical is by Terrence McNally, and the songs (including several from the 1997 cartoon) are by Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens.

With the exception of “Dear Evan Hansen” and “Come From Away,” “Anastasia” outlasted every other musical that opened

during the 2016-17 Broadway season. Shows which opened that season include “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,” “Groundhog Day,” “Bandstand,” “Amelie,” “Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812” and revivals of “Miss Saigon,” “Hello, Dolly,” and “Cats.” “Anastasia” will live on, for years to come, in international productions and tours. A Spanish produc-

tion opened in Madrid in October. That same month, “Anastasia”’s embarked on its first U.S. tour. In November, a German “Anastasia” opened in Stuttgart. Further productions are planned this year for The Netherlands and Mexico.

### CT Humanities grants

Connecticut Humanities announced grants totaling

\$17,750 to 12 projects statewide. The organizations and awards are the following. For details, visit [cthumanities.org](http://cthumanities.org).

▶ Durham Public Library, \$6,750 for a marketing assessment and brand strategy project.

▶ Fairfield Historical Society, \$9,980 for strategic planning for the Fairfield Museum.

▶ Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington, \$20,000 for the 2019 Sunken Garden Poetry Festival.

▶ Bill Memorial Library in Groton, \$5,891 for strategic planning.

▶ Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford, \$9,999 for the Cultural Heritage Archive Project.

▶ Community Foundation of Middlesex County, \$17,500 for a documentary about Ann Petry and the James family.

▶ Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, \$28,641 for the exhibit “Ancient Mesopotamia Speaks: Highlights from the Yale Babylonian Collection.”

▶ Artspace in New Haven, \$15,000 for the exhibit “Learning from the Black Panther Trials, 50 Years Later.”

▶ The International Festivals of Arts & Ideas in New Haven, \$9,999 for a community impact assessment.

▶ Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme, \$30,000 for “The Great Americans: Portraits by Jac Lahav.”

▶ Keeler Tavern Preservation Society in Ridgefield, \$9,990 for visitor research and analysis.

▶ Weston Historical Society, \$8,000 for the Coley Homestead Interpretative and Wayfinding Program.

### Arts-hero nominations

The 2019 Connecticut Arts Hero Awards will be handed out on May 1 at a ceremony at 6 p.m. at Infinity Music Hall in Hartford. Members of the general public are invited to nominate members of the state’s arts community for the award. The deadline is March 28.

The ceremony will precede Connecticut Arts Day, a celebration of the state’s cultural communities, which will be May 2 in New Haven. The arts day includes performances, panel discussions, workshops and the presentation of Connecticut Office of the Arts’ Lifetime Achievement Award. To nominate someone for the Arts Hero Award, visit [surveymonkey.com/r/2019CTArtsHero](http://surveymonkey.com/r/2019CTArtsHero).

— Christopher Arnott, Susan Dunne

## Exhibit

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Hunt’s painting. One broom is pulling itself apart, what Smith calls “a deconstruction, an unraveling.”

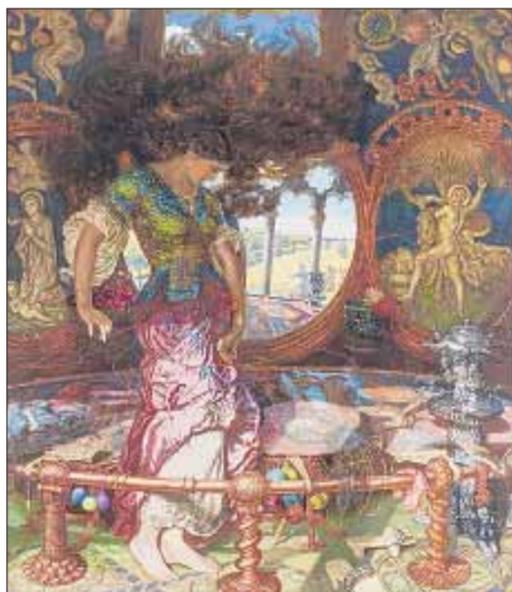
“[In ‘The Lady of Shalott’], you gaze upon the window, you’re going to die or something horrible will happen. Here, the broom is gazing out and wants to be free,” she says.

Smith was inspired by Disney’s “Fantasia” in creating women in the guise of brooms, and she finds the removal of more realistic figures liberating.

“I can speak about issues really differently than when I have someone that someone recognizes,” she says.

A third painting shows one of Smith’s anthropomorphic forms looking into a mirror and shrieking. “She is screaming in either terror or joy or maybe both,” Smith said.

Smith and curator Patricia Hickson chose other works for the 10-piece show that suggest that “The Lady of Shalott” has influenced Smith’s work for years, whether she intended it or not. These include a figure gazing out of a fortress and a lone figure in a room, looking out the window and creating artwork.



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

William Holman Hunt’s “The Lady of Shalott” is the inspiration for Emily Mae Smith’s exhibit in the Matrix gallery

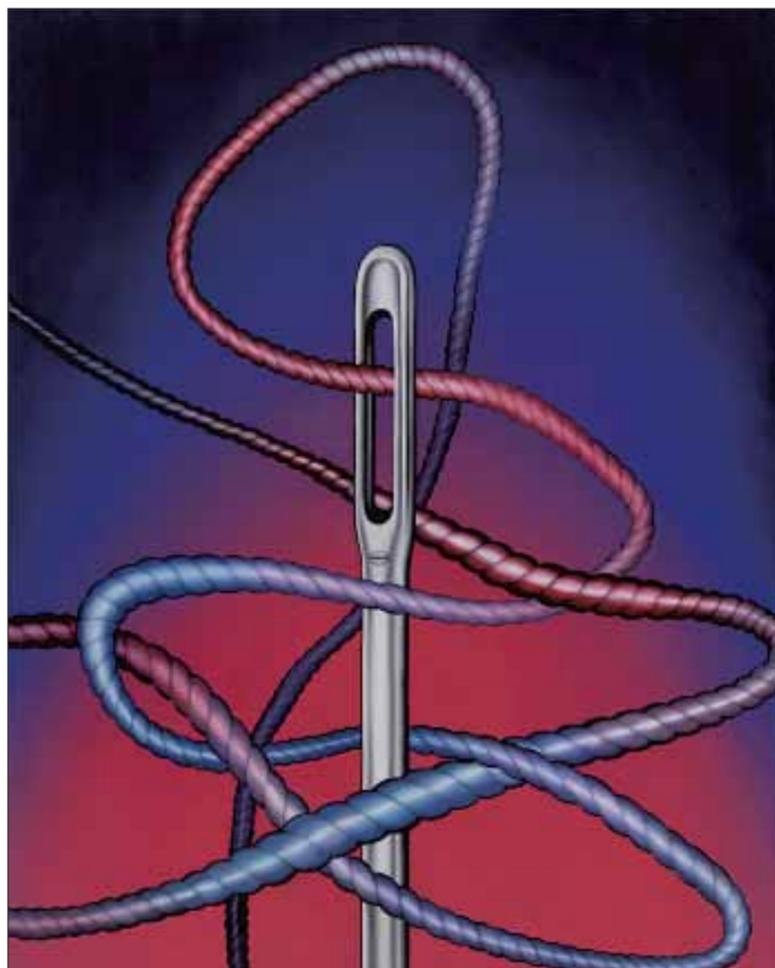
Hickson says Tennyson and Hunt had another interpretation of “The Lady of Shalott,” focusing on the solitary existence of artists.

“An artist must create in his studio or writing at his desk,” Hickson says. “It’s the lonely fate of those destined to be creative.”

Hunt’s “The Lady of Shalott” is on exhibit on the second floor of the Morgan wing of the museum.

**EMILY MAE SMITH / MATRIX 181** is at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, 600 Main St. in Hartford, until May 5. A related talk, “Emily Mae Smith and #MeToo,” will be March 9 at 10 a.m. Curator Patricia Hickson will give a gallery talk on March 21 at noon. [thewadsworth.org](http://thewadsworth.org).

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COURTESY OF SIMONE SUBAL GALLERY, NEW YORK.

Emily Mae Smith’s “Unruly Thread,” 2019 oil on linen.