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There's a 10-foot-tall pyramid outside of the YUAG. What is it?

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CONTRIBUTING REPORTER



This past September, The Yale University Art Gallery, or the YUAG, unveiled a new piece known as "Monument (Pyramid)" in the Margaret and Angus Wurtele Sculpture Garden. The piece, created by artist Maren Hassinger and funded by the Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund, is a 10-foot-tall pyramid made of local tree branches.

The YUAG partnered with [Gather New Haven](#) — a nonprofit that aims for the equity of people and environments — to collect branches from an invasive tree species in order to complete the project. The branches were of the buckthorn species from Quinnipiac Meadows. "[Gather New Haven] staff and volunteers were vital to the success of the project and enthusiastic about contributing to the creation of the sculpture," said Assistant Curator Margaret Ewing, who worked to coordinate the installation.

The piece is a part of Hassinger's Monuments series, which began with her 2018 exhibition in Harlem's Marcus Garvey Park. Branches in this series were used to construct sculptures that respond to the landscape of the parks.

The Monuments pieces center community engagement. Hassinger created these pieces with the help of volunteers so the projects are made by, and for, the community.

"One of Maren Hassinger's aims when she conceived of the series is that people get to know one another when they're working together, especially if they're working outdoors and handling natural materials," said professor Kathryn Slanski, director of the Six Pretty Good first-year seminar program.

According to Slanski, the participating teaching faculty and students felt a "greater connection" through the initiative.

In order to complete the project, Hassinger and her studio worked with Yale first years, New Haven residents and museum staff to assemble the pyramid.

"I thought it was an interesting way to connect with my classmates outside of class and to collaborate in order to create something because there were so many people that had to come together to finish it," said Tatiyana Kauo '28, who participated in the project through her first-year seminar. "It's cool that I got to help build something that's going to be displayed in the sculpture garden for anyone visiting to see."

First years were able to participate through the Six Pretty Good Seminars Program — a group of first-year seminars in which students follow a scaffolded writing curriculum centered on a theme.

The program aims to provide first years with the opportunity to do hands-on work in Yale's Special Collections. According to Slanski, this experience aimed to help students feel that they were an active participant in Hassinger's creative process, as well as to feel a sense of belonging at the Art Gallery.

Rather than just producing papers and research projects, new students were given the unique opportunity to work on a sculpture that will remain a part of the YUAG.

The sculpture served as an amazing way for students, volunteers, faculty and museum staff to come and connect with each other — as Hassinger intended.

"[Hassinger] believes that bringing people together in this way can lead to the breaking down of barriers and to mutual understanding," said Ewing.

Hassinger will be coming to speak with students who worked on the sculpture on Nov. 15 and give her artist talk about the pyramid on Jan. 30, 2025.