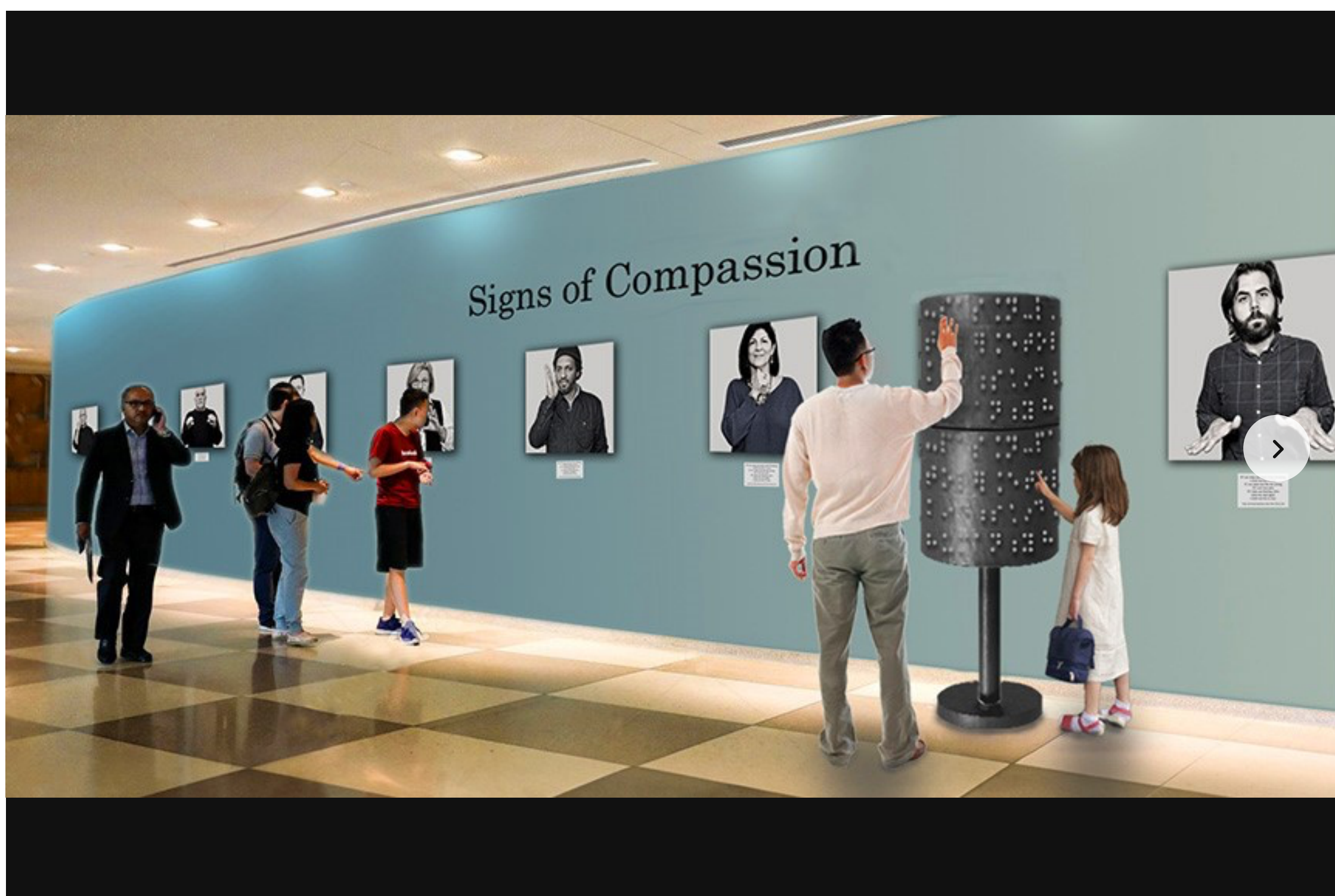


# Westport artists to showcase at United Nations headquarters in NYC



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Sep. 26, 2023

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A rendering of what the "Signs of Compassion" exhibition will look like at the United Nations in New York City.

Miggs Burroughs/Contributed photo

WESTPORT — Two local artists are about to have their work featured in the United Nations headquarters, telling a story of diversity and inclusion through one of the great American poets.

Miggs Burroughs and Mark Yurkiw have teamed up for an exhibition called "Signs of Compassion," after the Emily Dickinson poem of the same name. Burroughs's portion features 30 portraits of Westporters using American Sign Language to showcase the 30 words within the poem. It is accompanied by Yurkiw's prayer wheel mantra, which features the poem in Braille, based on similar ones he saw while on a trip to Bhutan.

"I never thought of it as having that potential," Burroughs said about his artwork coming to the UN. "I'm so happy with what this has accomplished."

The exhibition opens Oct. 10 and runs through Nov. 20 at 405 East 45th St. in Manhattan.

It all started about six years ago, when Burroughs had the same exhibition at the Westport Library.

Yurkiw said he saw the piece at the library and was floored. He told Burroughs, "This is too important to keep hidden here, just in Westport."

It was also later featured at St. Joseph's School for the Deaf in the Bronx. The director of that school will interpret Burroughs's and Yurkiw's presentation into ASL during the exhibition's opening.

Seeing the exhibit at the library inspired Yurkiw to search for another area to display the work about four years ago.

He said he thought it belonged in the United Nations because the piece involved the state of the world.

"Mark thinks lightyears ahead," Burroughs said, adding he hadn't thought of it outside of Westport beforehand.

Burroughs said about 20 years ago, his son lived in an apartment across the street from Emily Dickinson's historic house in Amherst, Mass. He took a tour then and read her poetry, and "Signs of Compassion" struck a chord with him.

As the artist-in-residence in Westport, Burroughs put on seminars and workshops, and needed to come up with a piece to put in the lobby. He said he wanted something collective, not just a bunch of random artwork.

Since the poem is only 30 words and many signs are only about two movements, he wanted to combine the two. Burroughs brought together Westporters to be featured in it, and said it took much trial and error.

He said the poem is metaphorical, beautiful and poignant, which is why he chose to focus on it.

Yurkiw said the UN doesn't allow for single-person shows, which is one reason why his work is also featured.

It was a lengthy process to get the artwork secured for the UN, he added. They needed an endorsement from an elected official, which they received from U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy. They also had to raise \$18,000, which covers the reception for the after hours for the reception, producing the pieces for the space and publicity.

In August, they finally convinced the UN this was a piece involving the mission of the organization, not just about one country, Yurkiw said.

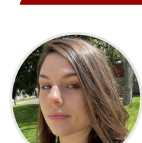
Originally, Yurkiw wanted to feature his artwork of the Statue of Liberty, where she is crouched on a curb, shivering, with snow falling around her. However, staff with the UN said this was too centered around America and New York.

He instead came up with a new piece in about 60 days involving the prayer mantra. It is accessible in multiple ways, with it having Braille on the outside, and short enough for those in wheelchairs to touch.

"When you can wrap your hands around it, you can wrap your mind around it," he said.

After the show at the UN headquarters, the duo is hoping to bring it to other locations, such as the UN base in Geneva, Switzerland; the Vatican; and Kiev, Ukraine, when the war has subsided.

Fundraising for the exhibition is ongoing through the Artists Collective of Westport. Those who wish to donate can at [paypal.com/ArtistsCollective](https://www.paypal.com/ArtistsCollective).



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Reach Kayla on

Kayla Mutchler covers Westport for Hearst Connecticut Media Group. She graduated from the University of New Haven in 2022, where she served as The Charger Bulletin's Editor-in-Chief for two years. When she's not reporting, she's catching up on the latest in fashion and pop culture.