

LA Celebrates Dinaw Mengestu's Novel 'The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears'

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Tadias Magazine



Dinaw Mengestu. (Photo by Mathieu Zazzo)

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By Tadias Staff

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New York (TADIAS) – The award-winning novel by Ethiopian American author Dinaw Mengestu, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, has been selected by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) as part of their 2019 NEA Big Read Program.

“DCA will mark its 11th year of programming the NEA Big Read with the 2018-2019 selection of Dinaw Mengestu’s *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, a fictional account of an Ethiopian immigrant living in Washington, DC, but whose story could relate to any immigrant living in any city,” the Department announced. “The protagonist deals with the trauma of leaving his homeland, the struggle to find success and love in America, and the adjustment of gentrification to the neighborhood that has been his new home.”

The 2019 program officially kicked-off on Wednesday, March 6th with a ceremony held at the Los Angeles City Council Chamber. The opening event was followed by a reception and a presentation of original artwork by Los Angeles poet and artist, Dorothy Randall Gray, based on

Dinaw Mengestu's book. The artwork in the exhibit, which is a "combination of sculpture and creative writing" focuses on "themes of family memories, community change, and home," stated the announcement from DCA. "Guests will enjoy an exhibition of art created by youth at the Canoga Park Youth Arts Center."

The program also includes a community film screening today (Sunday, March 17th) featuring Yared Zeleke's critically acclaimed movie *Lamb*, which is "the first film from Ethiopia to be included in the Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival and was the country's entry for a Best Foreign Language Oscar.

DCA notes that the Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) "designed to restore reading to the center of American popular culture" and is presented in partnership with Arts Midwest. "The Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) and the NEA hope to unite communities through literature and intra-cultural connections, as well as to inspire teens to become life-long readers with the Big Read Program in Los Angeles."

DCA added: "The NEA Big Read Program in LA will address several timely topics through its engagement with this award winning literary work...the theme of memory will explore personal and local history, and how we can learn from the past and be empowered to shape the future. Los Angeles residents experience these issues to various degrees on a daily basis. *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* will remind Angelenos that despite the different reasons and roads that brought us together, we are all companions within this diverse, vast city we call home."

If You Go:

For more information about DCA's Big Read Program in Los Angeles, please call 213.202.5567, or

email elizabeth.morin@lacity.org.

COMMUNITY FILM SCREENING

Lamb (2015) director Yared Zeleke

Dates: Sunday, March 17, 2019

1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Site: Barnsdall Gallery Theater

Barnsdall Art Park

4800 Hollywood Boulevard

Los Angeles, CA 90027

Cost: Free

culturela.org

BigReadLA.org

neabigread.org

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