



April Newsletter



For our April Newsletter we asked Dr. Austen Barron Bailly, The George Putnam Curator for American Art at the Peabody Essex Museum and Lydia Gordon, Assistant Curator for Exhibitions and Research, to comment on the topic, does art create social change? They shared their thoughts on experiencing the Derrick Adams: Sanctuary exhibition at the Museum of Art and Design and how the PUNTA Urban Art Museum is transforming The Point in Salem.

Does Art Create Social Change?

On a recent research visit to New York City, Peabody Essex Museum's George Putnam Curator of American Art, Austen Barron Bailly and Assistant Curator for Exhibitions and Research, Lydia Gordon had the privilege of experiencing the exhibition [Derrick Adams: Sanctuary](#) at the Museum of Art and Design. Derrick Adams (b. 1970) is a multidisciplinary artist based in Brooklyn. To create *Sanctuary* Adams took inspiration from *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, an annual guidebook created by United States postal worker Victor Hugo Green and published annually between 1936 and 1967. [The Green Book](#), as it was called, navigated black Americans--particularly those journeying by car, through the United States during the mid-twentieth century. During this Jim Crow era, racist attitudes, customs and laws had a significant affect not only daily life but also travel and leisure pursuits. By offering a guide to restaurants, hotels, parks, nightclubs, and beauty parlors among other social spaces, *The Green*



Book helped travelers find places where they would be welcome and could find refuge, acceptance, and leisure.

The Green Book originally covered the New York metropolitan area but quickly grew to accommodate travelers across the country and even internationally to places like Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Africa. The list for Massachusetts included Boston's [Harriet Tubman Hotel](#) and [Estelle's Restaurant](#), Cambridge's [Mrs. S. P. Bennett Tourist Home](#) and Great Barrington's [Crawford's Inn Tourist Home](#). By 1947, Green was publishing the book full time. According to Adams, the guide, "enabled African Americans to travel like Americans and to feel American."

An inspired and influential response to social injustice and prejudice, *The Green Book* is little known today. The artist discovered the publication while conducting other research at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library, which [digitized its rare, nearly complete set in 2015](#). When asked about *Sanctuary*, Adams commented, "I've thought a lot about barriers, and accessibility, and obstacles, and perseverance."



Adams used collage, sculpture, and models of roadways to explore themes of mobility and freedom. Surrounded by wallpaper made from enlargements of pages of *The Green Book*, the visitor journeys in the exhibition through a space comprised of twists, turns around mini-buildings and doorways you enter and exit. Representations of mid-century material culture, such as driving caps and glasses, fabrics and banners, as well as fragments of roadways, architecture, and dwelling spaces bring the traveler's guidebook to life. The immersive quality of Adams'

objects and installation offers the visitor not only a space of reflection, but also a space full of hope and optimism.

Adams recovered *The Green Book* as a document of social change. He used this historic material to create art that highlights and reflects upon overlooked experiences of black Americans. *Sanctuary* imagines the possibilities for history as a means to deepen understanding and create new perspectives on American culture and race relations. Working at the intersection of art and social justice, Adams suggests ways through history to build connections across difference. In *Sanctuary*, themes of community, family (and chosen family), perseverance, and playfulness trump ideas of strangerhood, alienation, and otherness. The objects in Adams' *Sanctuary* transform the gallery into a space of discovery and leisure.

Like Adams' transformation of history in *Sanctuary*, The PUNTO Urban Art Museum has transformed Salem's historic Point neighborhood. The Point now boasts 50 outdoor murals painted on three blocks of buildings protected by deed from gentrification so they remain affordable housing. Mickey Northcutt, chief executive officer of the North Shore Community Development Coalition, told the Peabody Essex Museum in a recent [blog post](#), "It's no secret in Salem that there is a lot of stigma around the Point neighborhood and directed at the people of this neighborhood." No longer a neighborhood many thought should be avoided, the Point welcomed 30 artists whose work has turned their historic neighborhood into a cultural destination and source of civic pride. The PUNTO Urban Art Museum is making history and is a model for how art can produce social change.

Dr. Austen Barron Bailly is The George Putnam Curator for American Art at the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM). Her most recent exhibitions for PEM include *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art, Image, Style* (2018), *American Impressionist: Child*

Hassam and the Isles of Shoals (2016), and *American Epics: Thomas Hart Benton and Hollywood* (2015), which won an Award for Excellence from the Association of Art Museum Curators. She is working with PEM's Lydia Gordon on the upcoming PEM exhibition, opening in 2020: *Jacob Lawrence: Struggle....from the History of the American People*.

Lydia Gordon is an Assistant Curator for Exhibitions and Research at the Peabody Essex Museum. Prior to joining PEM, Gordon worked for the Society of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute of Chicago and as a Curatorial Fellow for the department of Exhibitions and Exhibitions Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Gordon earned her BA in Art Administration from Simmons College in 2010 and her Dual MA in Art History, Theory and Criticism, Art Administration & Policy from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2017. Her research interests include the histories of modernisms, post-structuralist theory, and contemporary art.

News

On Sunday March 25th Voices Against Injustice presented The GroundTruth Project with the 2018 Salem Award for Human rights and Social Justice at Salem State University's Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts. [Read the Salem News article.](#)

Charles Sennott, founder and Executive Director of the GroundTruth Project commented, "When we have people who weaponize doubt, they do it for a reason. They do it to intimidate us. They do it so we succumb to fear and we turn on each other, and that is alive today as it was back during the witch trials." [More here.](#)

Events

Spotlight:

April 6 - Race and Power in Boston @ Boston Park Plaza 7 - 8 PM

In a highly publicized seven-part series published in late 2017, the Boston Globe's Spotlight Team dug into one of the city's most pervasive and troubling issues: the marginalization of the black community. The series exposed the insidious impact of racism on all levels of city life from housing to healthcare to education. In their live event, "Spotlight: Race and Power in Boston," the Boston Literary District and GrubStreet invite the story's writers to the stage where they will share their reporting, what didn't make it into print, and engage with the audience on these pressing issues that strike at the core of the city's identity.

Latoyia Edwards, morning anchor and host of THIS IS NEW ENGLAND, NBC10 Boston, will moderate the panel.

This event takes place at the Boston Park Plaza in the Arlington Room (Mezzanine Level). Free and open to the public. No pre-registration necessary, though seating is limited. More information, <https://activistcalendar.org/events/>

April 7 - 381st Anniversary of the First Muster 9:30 AM - 12 PM

The 381st Anniversary of the First Muster commemorates the first military muster ever held in the United States as part of the birthplace of the National Guard in Salem, Massachusetts. More information, <http://salem.org/event/380th-anniversary-first-muster/>

April 8 - *Pathways to Freedom* Encounter

11 AM - 4PM

Pathways to Freedom is a public art project created by the Jewish Arts Collaborative and social sculptor Julia Vogl. Inspired by the Passover Exodus story, the project engages the Greater Boston community in a dialogue about freedom and immigration. More information, <http://salem.org/event/pathways-freedom-encounter/>

Now through June 10th

T.C. Cannon: At the Edge of America, Peabody Essex Museum

One of the most influential, innovative, and talented Native American artists of the 20th-century, T.C. Cannon embodied the activism, cultural transition and creative expression that defined America in the 1960s and 70s. More information, <http://salem.org/listing/t-c-cannon-edge-america-peabody-essex-museum/>

April 15 - One Boston Day

April 15, 2015 marked the beginning of a new annual Boston tradition, One Boston Day. The day serves as an opportunity to celebrate the resiliency, generosity, and strength demonstrated by the people of Boston and those around the world in response to the tragedy of April 15, 2013.

More information, <http://www.onebostonday.org>

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