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## DERRICK ADAMS CONSIDERS ACCESS, MOBILITY, AND FREEDOM IN FIRST MAJOR NEW YORK MUSEUM EXHIBITION

*Derrick Adams: Sanctuary*  
January 25–August 12, 2018



NEW YORK, NY (January 19, 2018) – The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) announces the opening of *Derrick Adams: Sanctuary*, the artist’s first major museum exhibition in New York. Presented in an installation designed by the artist, the exhibition comprises fifty works of mixed-media collage, assemblage on wood panels, and large-scale sculpture that reimagine safe destinations for the black American traveler during the mid-twentieth century. The body of work was inspired by *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, an annual guidebook for black American road-trippers published by New York postal worker Victor Hugo Green from 1936 to 1967, during the Jim Crow era in America. Adams activates the source material in myriad ways to meditate on identity politics and the role that leisure time plays within the black experience.

“Collage as both an early Modernist and hobbyist technique is the apt medium for Adams’ elegant yet poignant and political work,” said Shannon R. Stratton, MAD’s William and Mildred Lasdon Chief Curator. “It’s a nod to leisure as subject while acknowledging collage’s historic relationship to current events and pop culture. As part of MAD’s 2018 spring season, *The Personal Is the Political*, Adams demonstrates how vernacular materials and accessible techniques have been fertile ground for powerful, yet approachable, expressions of selfhood.”

**2 COLUMBUS CIRCLE NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10019 P 212.299.7777 MADMUSEUM.ORG**



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*The Negro Motorist Green Book*, often referred to simply as *The Green Book*, listed establishments that were welcoming to black Americans—including hotels, restaurants, beauty parlors, nightclubs, golf courses, and state parks—in an era when open and often legally prescribed discrimination against people of color was widespread. These designated safe spaces were sites of refuge and leisure, where one could spend quality time with friends and family. The depiction of leisure is a theme of continued interest to Adams, who explores how engaging in relaxation and reflection can be a political act for black Americans.

“When Derrick expressed to me that he wanted to create an exhibition inspired by *The Green Book*, I knew that he could bring the historic publication to life,” said Guest Curator Dexter Wimberly. “*Sanctuary* captures the spirit of road travel at a time when black Americans were not able to move safely around the country. When I think about freedom in the truest sense of the word, I’m struck by how relevant *The Green Book* still is today.”

Derrick Adams is a New York–based, multidisciplinary artist working in performance, video, sound, textile- and paper-based collage, and multimedia sculpture. His practice is rooted in deconstructivist philosophies such as the fragmentation and manipulation of structure and surface, and the marriage of complex and improbable forms. Through these techniques, Adams examines the impact of popular culture and the media on the perception and construction of self-image, resulting in work that appears to be both in a state of deconstruction and in the process of being built. A keen observer of his environment, Adams continuously collects patterned fabrics, culturally specific references, and design elements that he incorporates into his work.

## THE GREEN BOOK

In 1936, Victor Hugo Green, a forty-four-year-old black postal worker living in Harlem, published the inaugural issue of *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (1936–1967). The fifteen-page booklet, which Green wrote based on his own experiences and recommendations from black members of his Postal Service union, listed establishments, such as restaurants, hotels, beauty parlors, and even private homes, that welcomed black travelers. *The Green Book* initially covered the New York metropolitan area, but the response was so great that the next year Green expanded it to cover the entire country. It was available for purchase at black churches, Masonic lodges, and Esso gas stations, as well as from the Negro Urban League and the NAACP. In 1952, Green retired from the Postal Service to become a full-time publisher. The final edition of *The Green Book*, published in 1967, peaked with a circulation of twenty thousand copies. It filled ninety-nine pages and covered all fifty states, in addition to locations in Canada, the Caribbean, and Mexico.

Writing in 1948, Green predicted, “There will be a day in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States.” He died in 1960, four years before Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Today, *The Green Book* serves as a poignant artifact and reminder of the importance of equality during a time in which uneven law enforcement continues to negatively shape the lives and experiences of many black Americans.



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## **DRIVING WHILE BLACK**

The twentieth century saw the rise of automobility in the United States, the establishment of the Interstate Highway System in 1956, and the subsequent ubiquity of automobiles, which irreversibly changed American culture. In an era when “going for a drive” was a common leisure activity, the “open road”—as championed by Walt Whitman and Jack Kerouac—connoted freedom and a democratic public space. However, civil rights laws did not keep pace with the proliferation of easier transportation. For black Americans traveling by car in the era of segregation, the open road presented serious dangers in both northern and southern states. Driving interstate distances to unfamiliar locations, black motorists ran into institutionalized racism in several forms, from businesses that refused to accommodate them to hostile “sundown towns,” where posted signs might warn black people that they were banned after nightfall.

The idea of literally driving across racial boundaries presented black motorists with any number of quotidian challenges, including where to eat, where to sleep, and what to do in the event of an emergency. Automobiles introduced a new, complex layer to the American experience, and fifty years after *The Green Book* was published for the last time, the act of “driving while black” remains controversial.

## **COMPANION EXHIBITION**

### **Unpacking the Green Book: Travel and Segregation in Jim Crow America March 1–April 8, 2018**

Starting in March, *Derrick Adams: Sanctuary* will be accompanied by *Unpacking the Green Book: Travel and Segregation in Jim Crow America*. The companion exhibition will explore the history of *The Green Book* in an interactive project space that features a reading area with books devoted to the topics of segregation, automobility, and leisure; digitized copies of *The Green Book*; interactive maps of travel destinations included in the book; and numerous excerpts from upcoming documentary films. It will also showcase two banners by Cauleen Smith, featured in the 2017 Whitney Biennial and now in the permanent collection of the Museum of Arts and Design, and two sculptures exploring locations in Harlem and Washington, DC, from William D. Williams’ 2012 *Dresser Trunk Project*.

*Unpacking the Green Book: Travel and Segregation in Jim Crow America* is the inaugural project in the Learning Lounge, MAD’s gallery space dedicated to deepening audience experiences of exhibitions through interactive learning, research, and reflection. The exhibition’s goal is to foster curiosity and deeper investigation into the history of racial oppression through the lens of the black experience in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century United States, using art, film, and literature to encourage dialogue, critical thinking, and empathy. Though organized in association with *Derrick Adams: Sanctuary* (January 25–August 12, 2018), the exhibition explores issues of mobility and racism that are relevant to the experiences happening at the United States–Mexico border, as illuminated in the upcoming exhibition *La Frontera: Encounters Along the Border* (March 1–September 23, 2018).



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*Unpacking the Green Book: Travel and Segregation in Jim Crow America* is curated by MAD's Assistant Curator Samantha De Tillio.

## EXHIBITION CREDIT

*Derrick Adams: Sanctuary* is guest curated by Dexter Wimberly, Executive Director of Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art, with support from the Museum of Arts and Design's Assistant Curator Samantha De Tillio.

Major support for *Derrick Adams: Sanctuary* is provided by Exhibition Chairs Michael and Patti Dweck. Additional support is generously provided by Mike De Paola, Barbara T. Hoffman, Esq., Shari Siadat Loeffler and Nicholas Loeffler, The Paulsen Family Foundation, Ron and Ann Pizzuti, Barbara and Donald Tober, and George Wein.

Derrick Adams is proudly represented in New York by Tilton Gallery.

Community Engagement Partner: The Africa Center

## PROGRAMMING STATEMENT: THIS SPRING AT MAD

### The Personal Is the Political

This spring at the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), we examine how *The Personal Is the Political* in the art, craft, and design practices of several artists whose work focuses on social justice and identity politics. The concept of the personal as political was central to second-wave feminism, among other social justice movements of the twentieth century, which recognized that issues traditionally perceived as private and individual are in fact social and systemic.

In the US, craft as a discipline has been viewed as peripheral to the larger cultural sphere because of its functionality, its relationship to the amateur, and the marginalized identities of many of its practitioners, whether owing to gender, race, or socioeconomic status. As such, it has emerged as a powerful medium for addressing political issues, especially those that stem from personal experiences.

The exhibitions at MAD this season emerge from materials and methodologies that were considered "craft" at a time when to be considered "craft" was a demotion. Today, these applications have become potent forms of expression for urgent themes from the sociopolitical realm, particularly in regard to social justice.

## ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) champions contemporary makers across creative fields and presents the work of artists, designers, and artisans who apply the highest level of ingenuity and skill. Since the Museum's founding in 1956 by philanthropist and visionary Aileen Osborn



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Webb, MAD has celebrated all facets of making and the creative processes by which materials are transformed, from traditional techniques to cutting-edge technologies. Today, the Museum's curatorial program builds upon a rich history of exhibitions that emphasize a cross-disciplinary approach to art and design, and reveals the workmanship behind the objects and environments that shape our everyday lives. MAD provides an international platform for practitioners who are influencing the direction of cultural production and driving twenty-first-century innovation, and fosters a participatory setting for visitors to have direct encounters with skilled making and compelling works of art and design.

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### **PRESS CONTACTS**

Museum of Arts and Design  
Claire Laporte / Christina Allan  
212.299.7737  
[press@madmuseum.org](mailto:press@madmuseum.org)

Third Eye  
Will Hoffman / Rachel Joelson  
[Will@hellothirdeye.com](mailto:Will@hellothirdeye.com) / [Rachel@hellothirdeye.com](mailto:Rachel@hellothirdeye.com)