



DREAM BOSTON



In early April 2020, in the midst of a devastating pandemic, the Huntington Theatre asked a group of playwrights to write a short audio play set at a specific location or landmark we long to gather at, with the people we long to gather with, a few years into the future. They called the resulting series of plays *Dream Boston*. As summer progressed, and the ongoing movement for racial justice intensified, *Dream Boston* pulsed with the urgent imagining of a more just and equitable tomorrow. Boston communities voraciously consumed the radio plays, in turn creating, sharing, and asking what the future-we-wish-to-see might ask of us now.

For Gallery 360's spring 2021 exhibition, Northeastern curator Amy Halliday and *Dream Boston* playwright Miranda ADEkoje came together to invite visual artists whose work is fundamentally in, of, or for the city to elaborate new dimensions to the original audio project. Through the unique visions of Furen Dai, Candice Jackson, Woomin Kim, MAR, Jane Marsching, Youjin Moon, and Sagie Vangelina, the Gallery becomes a space of projection and possibility. Offering an embodied call-and-response, the artists' work invites you into dreamscapes variously fantastical, dystopian, hopeful, revolutionary, playful, galvanizing, disarming.

Front Cover: Sagie Vangelina expanding *No Me Toques* (2019) onto the Gallery walls during installation, February 2021.

Left: Art handler Elena Brunner moves MAR's *RX1386* (2021) towards its installation site. Photos by Ruby Wallau/Northeastern University.

On Being Asked to “Dream Boston”

Miranda ADEkoje, Playwright, Producer, and Co-Curator

African-American sculptor and social practice artist, Theaster Gates, collects collections. The archive of *Jet* magazine, the entire contents of a defunct record shop, the inventory of a local hardware store after its owner’s retirement as a local fixture of Chicago’s Southside: each collection is repurposed as a work of art. He is interested in how these materials function as sources for, and provisional answers to, the question, “How do you catalogue the everyday, especially as the *phenomena* of the everyday is changing?” Gates muses about his attention to everyday collections, and to the individual, collective, and institutional ways of seeing and knowing embedded within them: “Is this another way of tracking Black space? ‘Black,’ not necessarily just about Black people but about *forgotten* people... and then maybe it’s also like the void. Black space. Like galactic space.”¹

A collection of material reflections and responses to what the future-we-wish-to-see might ask of us now, Gallery 360’s *Dream Boston* exhibition reads and registers as a time capsule. It is a provisional archive of works, of lived experiences and ways of seeing that question this singular moment we find ourselves in as humans, as Americans, as Bostonians and as artists: how do we track the forgotten? How do we see the unseen? Where do we find that which has been erased? The answer: In our dreams.

2020 was a year of people-led movements. The civil unrest catalyzed by injustice and compounded by quarantine created a crucible in which “the people” were activated. As a playwright and observer of the ways we heroically wage war on our human nature – a ravenous greed, a penchant for separating ourselves from the plight of those who subtly differ from

us in shade or skin tone, how we earnestly build our own gilded cages and lock ourselves inside – to find a more perfect humanity, I found 2020 to be a pinnacle of discovery for who, exactly, “the people” are. Ideological battles over who belongs, who gets to speak, who feels silenced, and who has benefited where others suffer proved a living backdrop to a conversation that raged as actual lives perished. This blazing commentary spilled out onto the streets as the people demanded a new expression of civility and refused to accept the suffocating status quo. “The people” was *all of us* and we demanded something *different*.

Here, at this intersection of thought and action, is where I find the artist. Beyond both words and bodies, the artists’ entry point into social commentary is so deeply personal, and introspective, that we give our bodies over to the work

Spending time in the exhibition with my daughter, Yemisi. Images courtesy of the author.



¹ Theaster Gates, in “Collecting”, 2017, ART21 Extended Play series, accessed February 27, <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/theaster-gates-collecting-short/>

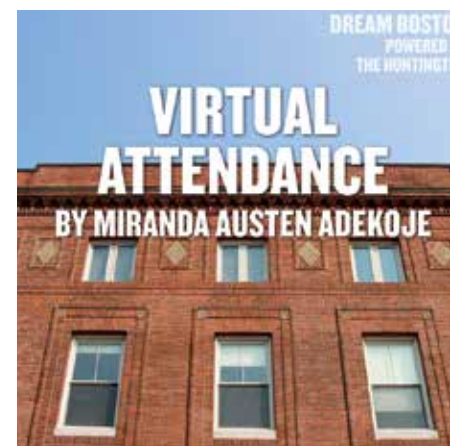
How do we track the forgotten? How do we see the unseen? Where do we find that which has been erased? The answer: In our dreams.

as translative vessels for the chaos and silence around us. In July, 2020, when I was commissioned by the Huntington Theatre Company to participate in their *Dream Boston* series – short audio plays set in a Boston locale in the not-too-distant-future – I was hesitant. I recoiled at the idea of writing something for a listener’s enjoyment. Especially as Black Americans were being murdered daily; their murderers incited and incentivized by their government.

But it was in exploring my profound reluctance that I began to pay closer attention to the powerful charge implicit in “dreaming”. Dreams hold so many interpretations, so many possibilities. They can be hopeful or ominous, precognitive or reflective, fantastical or realizable. I chose to take a dystopian

approach with my play – writing a Boston that had been erased of its rich cultural landscapes and histories. I wrote a Boston that carried this violation as survivors often must – in silence – voiceless as the world continues to turn and the powers that be find new and more appealing things to replace what was stolen. A smug and cruel attempt to distract from the violence of their actions.

I was certainly not the only writer for whom the *Dream Boston* prompt, initially a galvanizing response to the Covid-related closures of theatre, had mutated into a call to action. It presented the unique opportunity to shout into the homes of a sheltered-in-place, theater-loving audience about the long-reaching dangers of what was playing out on their television screens. The Huntington



Miranda Austen ADEkoje's *Virtual Attendance*, part of the *Dream Boston* audio play series. Image courtesy of Huntington Theatre Company.

Theatre Company's *Dream Boston* audio plays amassed an astonishing 11,000 listens in eleven weeks. One of those listeners was Amy Halliday – Director of the Center for the Arts and Curator of Gallery 360 – who invited me to co-curate an exhibition expanding the same prompt to visual artists whose work was in, of or for Boston. In addition to co-curating the exhibit, she sought to tap into and support a network of local artists formerly unknown to her, to lived experiences and histories of a city to which she newly belonged and with which she was forming her own layered relationship.

Where the *Dream Boston* audio series encouraged close listening, Gallery 360's exhibition demands that you look. Every piece in this contingent collection is layered, both physically

and metaphorically. They solicit closer attention, pick at questions beneath the scab of what has become our accepted culture. They use sensory and sensual layering – of objects, of color, of sound, of video, of light – to meditate on the unseen, the forgotten, the erased, and the hoped for. It is in this galactic void, this collective dreaming, that the works encourage collective remembrance and reflection. Boston artists take on the shapeshifting spirit of the Dream, the work of the time capsule through which we recall what has been passed over while concurrently anticipating what comes crashing towards us...

Now We Have to Start

Amy Halliday, Director, Center for the Arts, and Curator, Gallery 360, Northeastern University



Sagie Vangelina expands the original canvas work onto the Gallery walls during installation.

I AM / WE ARE / THAT IS ENOUGH / NOW WE HAVE TO START

... read the four banners, suspended from the ceiling at different heights. Artist Jane Marsching's hand-printed expanses – part poetry, part protest – carry the opening words of philosopher Ernst Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* (1918). Visible from all angles of the Gallery, they can be read in multiple directions, both spatially and semantically. Each stands as an evocative, independent entity; together, they form an invocation, a call, a charge. Assertions of presence, of collectivity, of the will for change (That is enough!) as well as the sufficiency to begin to build, even from a place of brokenness (I am... enough). Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia*,

written amidst the devastation of the First World War, envisioned a future that might yet be shaped anew in the labor of its making, its imagining. His words resound in the present tense, in this present place: Boston, Massachusetts, in the spring of 2021.

In the midst of the global pandemic and ongoing movement for racial justice, the seven artists featured in *Dream Boston* each offer unique visions of “dreaming” the City. For Marsching, this means drawing its citizens into communion with artists, activists, and thinkers, past and present, who have sought more just, more caring, more sustainable ways of living and being and relating to the environment and each other. The banners – their ink made from

natural materials Marsching foraged from walnut trees around south Boston's Hyde Park neighborhood – form part of her ongoing *Utopia Press* (2020) project, a mobile letterpress studio designed for collective use.

For both MAR and Sagie Vangelina, dreaming the city starts from the rich interior life of the self: *I AM* as a stative verb. MAR, one of the lead artists in Nubian Square's collaborative Black Lives Matter mural project (2020), works in both street art and studio modalities. His abstract paintings are dynamic articulations of feeling, mood, and memory, forged in relation to his surroundings. Some are painted live over the duration of a particular urban event: He describes,

for example, synthesizing sound and sensation in visual form during an outdoor summer jazz concert. *RX1386* (2021), the work he created for *Dream Boston*, was accrued over weeks in a series of highly-reflective, resin-sealed acrylic layers that combine half-remembered dreams, fleeting impressions, past experiences, and personal symbols.

Known for her mural work around greater Boston and the North Shore, Vangelina maps inner journeys onto urban space in a form of personal placemaking. Her attention to the rhythmic and affective potential of color and line (particularly variations in line weight, from the attenuated and suggestive to the thick and saturated) renders her surfaces

Viewers, transfixed by *Urban Nest*, take up the act of “nesting” in turn...They imaginatively braid their own experiences and memories into the social fabric.



Curator Amy Halliday and preparator Elena Brunner install Woomin Kim's *Urban Nest: Boston* (2017).

topographic and gives visceral, three-dimensional quality to two-dimensional planes. For *Dream Boston*, Vangelina revisited *No Me Toques* (2019), a large-scale spray-paint and enamel work on canvas. Over the course of two days, Vangelina worked out beyond the painting's edges onto the gallery walls – the expanded field covers almost 20 feet – and back into the piece in response: an intuitive choreography with spray paint and markers.

While MAR and Vangelina map the personal and proximal, Youjin Moon's video works, *io* and *Europa*, named after the moons of Jupiter, chart a celestial course. The artist layers filmed footage from Boston (from streetscapes to

snowfall) and her native South Korea with computer graphics and hand-painted elements to transport viewers into imagined realms shuttling between the earthly and extra-terrestrial. Constantly upending the usual pictorial cues of scale and perspective, horizon and depth, and underpinned by an ambient soundtrack which simultaneously locates and disorients, Moon's works question our reliance on established norms for orienting ourselves in the world.

In the photographic series *And They Were Radiant*, Candice Camille Jackson pictures children who are part of her local Dorchester community. Illuminated from oblique angles and eschewing traditional frontal poses, the children – Jordan,

Savannah, Nadia, Aaron and Leah – are radiant indeed. Each portrait vibrates with a luminous aura of fullness and possibility: of thoughts, wishes, and hopes tightly held. Jackson cites the significance through her own childhood of being raised in a house filled with picture books and photographs of children of color: images defined by beauty, pride, and potential in which she “found traces of [herself] in every image.”² Reflecting on the past year, Jackson sees the portraits working in two directions: as part of an ongoing commitment to representation for and of children of color, and as an invitation to see ourselves in others, to connect with the wonder implicit in this possibility: *I AM / WE ARE.*

Woomin Kim's *Urban Nest: Boston* (2017) is a massive textile made from lost and discarded objects and fabric scraps found by the artist in the streets and thrift stores of East Boston, Cambridge, Allston, and Brighton. Each fragment was once worn on the body or played a part in someone's everyday rituals, habits, and environments. Each material's history also intersects with complex international networks of labor and trade. Kim has long been invested in materializing lived experience. Amongst her earliest work in the United States after relocating from South Korea, *Gray from Walking: Shoes* (2014) traced the often unseen contours of immigrant life by replacing the soles of the artist's shoes with a lattice of white thread in which she walked for an entire year,

² Candice Camille Jackson, Artist's statement for submission to *Dream Boston*, unpublished, 2020.



Art handler Elena Brunner prepares Jane Marsching's banners for installation, with Candice Camille Jackson's photographic series laid out in the background.

changing out the grayed and dusty strands as they inevitably wore through, before eventually weaving the entire collection into a carpet. *Urban Nest: Boston* offers an idiosyncratic archive of lived experience in the city, a contingent collectivity bound together from a diverse array of individual remnants, unknown stories. Viewers, transfixed by the piece, take up the act of “nesting” in turn. As they point out and identify items, sharing with each other the personal stories and associations they evoke, they imaginatively braid their own experiences and memories into the social fabric.

Furen Dai is similarly interested in foregrounding the unseen, particularly the underlying systems and structures that shape social relations. The final section of *Dream Boston* presents her new digital video work *Future Ruin* (2021),

set against the backdrop of her ongoing series *How was Race Made?* The latter series of vinyl prints renders visible the forms of difference – race, language, nativity, religion – that gain space and salience in and through the U.S. census over time. The reductive racial fields of bureaucratic forms become building blocks, laid layer by layer, as if to form a barricade. But the prints themselves, hung from the ceiling to flow freely, or set off from the wall with space to cast shadows, suggest far more permeability, less fixedness. The architectural element is echoed in *Future Ruin*: the viewer is flown through a digitally-rendered, highly rectilinear Boston cityscape toward the dystopian “future ruin” of the Museum of Fine Arts, emptied of art, in which an archeologist-narrator excavates and interprets the site to reveal the values of our current moment.

Ending the exhibition with a work that interrogates the present through the future relics of its cultural institutions is a reflexive act.

In our invitation to artists to submit work for *Dream Boston*, co-curator Miranda ADEkoje and I invited artists to consider what the future-we-wish-to-see might ask of us *now*. Ending the exhibition with a work that interrogates the present through the future relics of its cultural institutions is a reflexive act. It is one that calls us out and calls us in, as creative practitioners – a curator-educator in an academic institution and an independent playwright-producer – and you, the audience as co-creator, to consider how we are part of this work. How are we dreaming Boston? How can we be part of realizing that dream?

NOW WE HAVE TO START.

And now.

And now.



SAGIE VANGELINA

Sagie Vangelina's abstract linework reads as a form of territorial mapping. Tracing contours, colors, and textures, she delineates personal journeys that emanate into the world. Primarily a muralist, Vangelina is interested in creating her own space, as well as shaping new experiences of the built environment for others: her murals appear around South Boston, Dorchester, and Cambridge.

For *Dream Boston*, Vangelina presents two canvas-based works. In *Imbalanced* (2018), mirrored figures face in opposite directions, caught between past and future, between alternate possibilities. In *No Me Toques* (2019), a face appears, lips open in a cry that simultaneously bursts from the surrounding land and seems to call it into being. The artist explains the title as a response to suppressed childhood fear of authority figures when going against their will. Vangelina expands the piece beyond the edges of the canvas and onto the gallery walls, a cipher for how dreams can reshape the world beyond one's immediate interiority.

No Me Toques, 2019-2021, spray paint and enamel on canvas and wall

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No Me Toques, 2019-2021, spray paint and enamel on canvas and wall



Imbalanced, 2018, spray paint and enamel on canvas



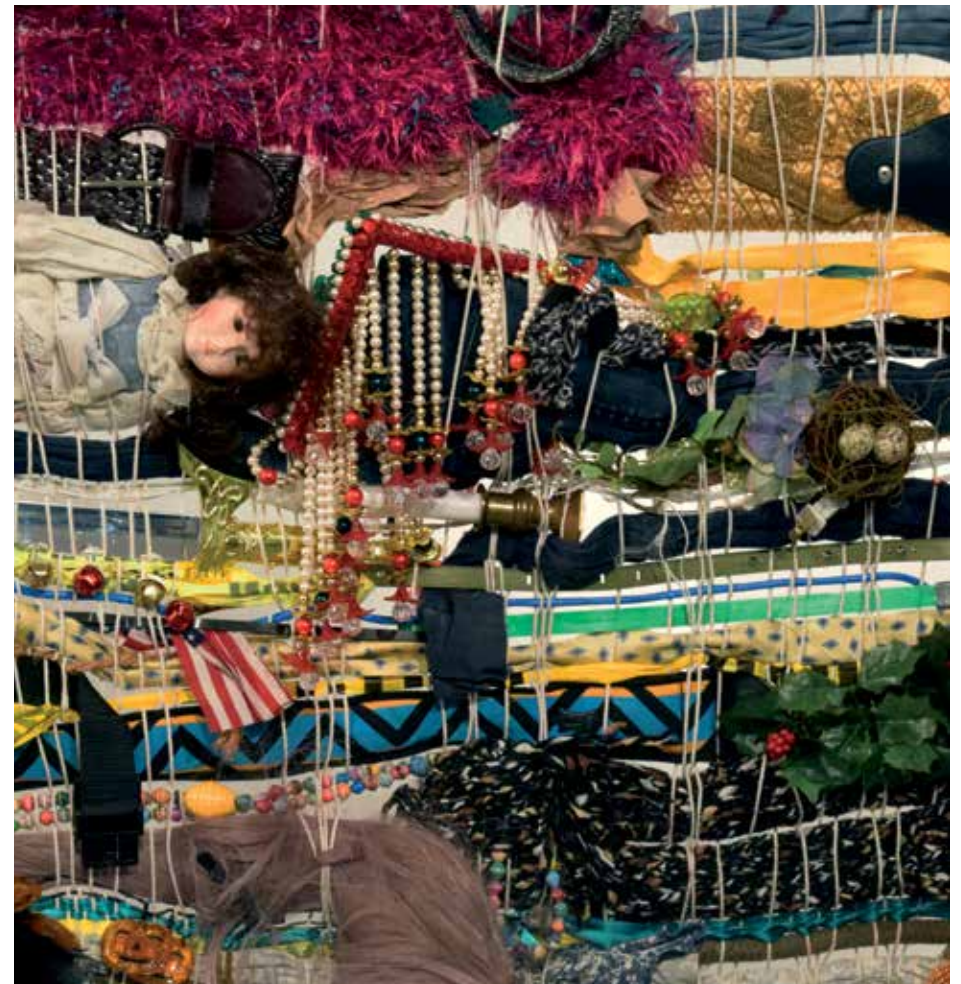
WOOMIN KIM

Created from lost and discarded objects and fabric scraps found by the artist in the streets and thrift stores of East Boston, Cambridge, Allston, and Brighton, *Urban Nest: Boston* weaves these fragments into a salvaged portrait of place and memory. A scarf, an electrical cable, old Christmas decorations, a plastic doll, a wig: each is an artifact of lived experience in the city. Each asks myriad – unanswerable – questions, encouraging our own associations and musings to surface.

The woven fragments read like sedimentary strata. Yet the richly textured layers variously reveal and obscure their origins, their edges, each spilling over into another. The result is an almost overwhelming accretion of sensory impressions that builds to something larger than the sum of its parts, its past. Yellow contractors' tape binds the textile's top and bottom edges, suggesting a city under construction, with the potential to be made, unmade, remade by the lives of those who move within it.

Urban Nest: Boston, 2017, found fibers from Boston area

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Urban Nest: Boston (details), 2017, found fibers from Boston area



YOUJIN MOON

Youjin Moon's dreamlike video work transports viewers on a rich – and often ambiguous – perceptual journey between spaces real and imagined, between vast expanses and intimate detail. Named after the moons of Jupiter, *Io* and *Europa* are composed of filmed footage from natural and urban environments around Boston and the artist's native South Korea, layered with painting, computer graphics, and ambient sound scores.

The shifting environmental conditions, varying surface textures, and shadow-and-light play of Boston's historic snowscapes of 2015 are the departure point for *Europa's* elusive forms. *Io's* abstract narrative arc shuttles viewers between fiery red and liquid yellow environments, from cosmic space to cellular architecture to cyber hinterland. Simultaneously familiar and strange, earthly and extraterrestrial, Moon's video works challenge well-traveled patterns of perception.

Stills from *Europa*, 2015, video, sound, duration: 11:52

Simultaneously familiar
and strange, earthly and
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Stills from *io*, 2015, video, sound, duration: 10:55



MAR

To view MAR's abstract work is to encounter the sensory dimensions of urban life: a glimpse of graffiti under a busy highway, the sampling and scratching of a summer night's live DJ set. Turning the panel as he paints, MAR uses large brushes, aerosol spray cans, and paint markers to layer fleeting sensory impressions with a personal symbolic architecture of triangles, spirals, boxes and waves. Half-remembered dreams and experiences function as both malleable sources and shaping forces in the artist's work.

MAR uses thick coats of resin to seal each layer before adding the next; a series of impressions held in visual suspension. The resulting interplay of transparency, opacity, and reflective qualities invites viewers to project their own experiences onto the work in turn.

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RX1386, 2021, acrylic, ink and resin on wood panel



CANDICE JACKSON

As a young child, Candice Camille Jackson spent hours poring over Walter Dean Myers' *Brown Angels* (1993), a book of verse interwoven with photographs from the poet's collection of turn-of-the-century portraits of children of color. The portraits were filled with beauty, pride, significance, potential, she recalls: "Above all, I found traces of myself in every image."

In *And They Were Radiant*, a series of portraits of children who are part of her Dorchester community, Jackson expands the project of making images and shaping narratives in which all children may see themselves reflected. Each child is photographed in a moment of oblique light, looking away, making a wish, holding a dream, sharing a secret smile. For Jackson, the series offers a form of regrounding after a disconcerting year and extends an invitation to see ourselves in those around us, to be open to moments of unexpected radiance.

Savannah, from the series *And They Were Radiant*, 2017, archival inkjet print

The series... extends an invitation to see ourselves in those around us, to be open to moments of unexpected radiance.



Top: Jordan and Aaron, Bottom: Nadia and Leah, from the series *And They Were Radiant*, 2017, archival inkjet prints



JANE MARSCHING

This large-scale banner series is a hand-printed rendering of the opening salvo of philosopher Ernst Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* (published 1918). Written during the final years of the First World War, the book articulates a pathway for hopeful action in the midst of devastation. Bloch sets forth a vision of the future as the result of an "autopoietic" process (one whose structure is shaped by the act of its making), driven by the labor and imagination of those who dare to dream it.

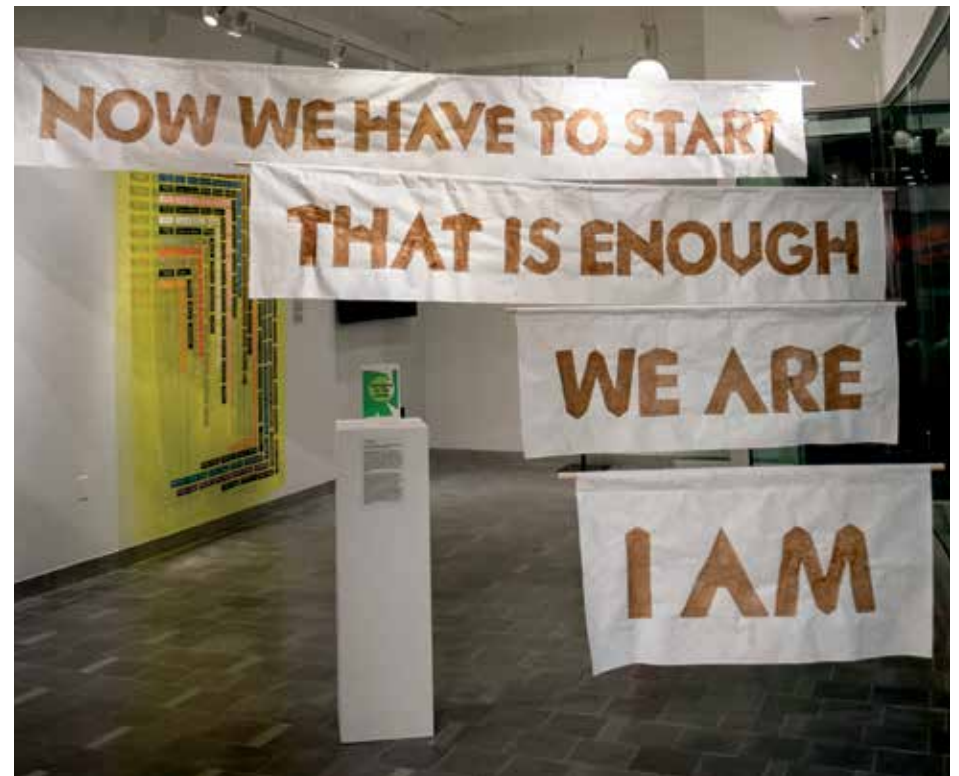
The banners form part of Marsching's ongoing *Utopia Press* (2020-) project, created via a mobile letterpress studio designed for collective use. Marsching designed a new font for the project based on the geometries of the 1927 modernist typeface futura, used often for science fiction and space exploration, as well as domestic architectures. Materials for ink-making are foraged from the local environment: in this case, from walnut trees around Hyde Park, Boston's southernmost neighborhood. Spread across multiple banners, Bloch's words may be encountered in different directions or sequences, and read variously as affirmations, incantations, protests: *I am / We are / That is enough / Now we have to start.*

I am, We are, Ernst Bloch, 2021, printed banners on Tyvek with Boston-foraged walnut ink

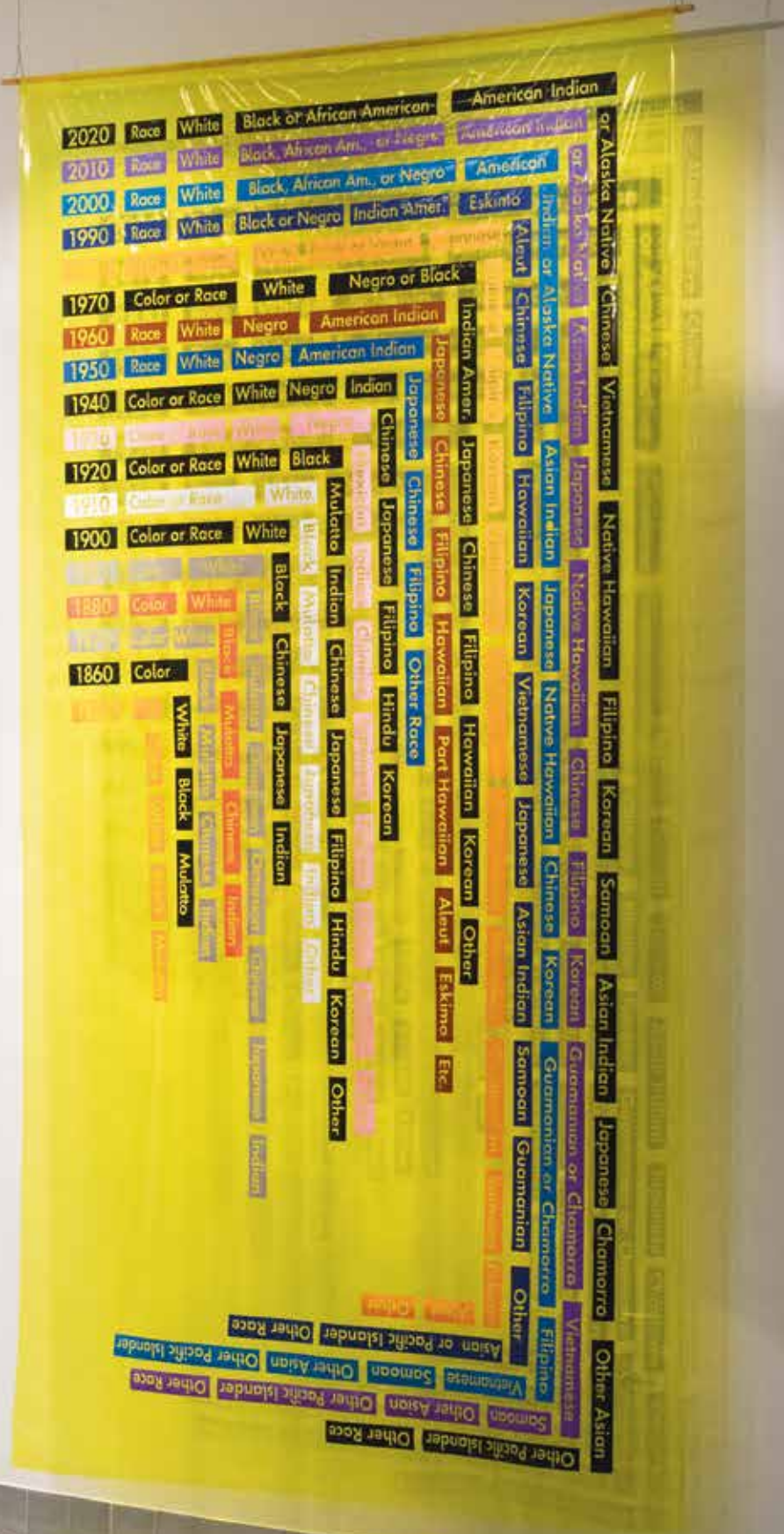
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Film stills documenting Jane Marsching's *Utopia Press* project, including ink making and hand printing.



I am, We are, Ernst Bloch, 2021, printed banners on Tyvek with Boston-foraged walnut ink



FUREN DAI

For *Dream Boston*, Furen Dai presents a new digital video work, *Future Ruin*, set against the backdrop of her ongoing series *How was Race Made? How was Race Made?* is a set of vinyl prints that materializes the shifting salience of forms of difference (race, language, nativity, religion) encoded in and through the US census over time. The racial “blocks” that appear in the vinyl print in the exhibition not only recall the reductive nature of form-filling demographic data, but also accrue to form strata, the sense of an edifice that casts long societal shadows.

Future Ruin posits the museum as a nation-state of its own, replete with – and reflecting – society’s dominant visions of difference and value. Viewers are taken on a dystopian archaeological tour of the ruins of the “encyclopedic” Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Emptied of art, the space is interpreted, instead, through the usually-invisible mechanisms, labor, design, architecture, and spatial decisions by which cultural institutions convey who and what is most valued.

How was Race Made?, 2021, vinyl

The racial “blocks”
that appear in the vinyl
print... accrue to form
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Stills from *Future Ruin*, video, 2021

How are we dreaming
Boston? How can we
be part of realizing
that dream?

To see a virtual 3D tour and video
about the exhibition, visit:
camd.northeastern.edu/dream-boston

Inside back cover: Woomin Kim, *Urban Nest: Boston*, 2017, found fibers from Boston area
Back cover: Sagie Vangelina's supplies and test sheets. Photo by Ruby Wallau/Northeastern University.





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