



LAUREN FRANCES ADAMS AND STEWART WATSON
Centennial of the Everyday

MAY 15 - SEPTEMBER 3, 2017 — GADSBY'S TAVERN MUSEUM

Presented by the Alexandria Office of the Arts



Time & Place is an initiative of the City of Alexandria's Office of the Arts' public-art program. Artists with research-based practices were invited to create thought-provoking, temporary art-work at sites managed by the Office of Historic Alexandria. Through compelling art projects in a variety of media, *Time & Place* fosters exploration and dialogue about Alexandria's rich history.

THANK YOU from Stewart and Lauren

The team at Gadsby's: Liz Williams, Callie Stapp, Michele Longo, and Gretchen Bulova, as well as the Alexandria Office of the Arts, the Office of Historic Alexandria, the Alexandria Commission for the Arts, and the Time & Place Task Force.

Our technical assistants, artists in their own right: Mat Karas, Jani Hileman, Amber Whitehead, Kevin Cook, and Jonathan Monaghan.

To our collaborators, whose chairs we sculpted in response to their life stories: Char McCargo Bah, Lex Powers, Steve Hammond, Tracy Loughlin, Laurie Sisson, DeAnne Bryant, and Joan Sanders Sereysky.

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Personal thanks: Jake Peterson, Jim Vose, and Pulman Vose.

A CONVERSATION ABOUT ART, HISTORY & COMMUNITY



The City of Alexandria has always been a leader in the making of art and the making of history. Through the Office of the Arts, programs provide access to the arts in and around the community. Through the Office of Historic Alexandria, city-owned historic sites and museums preserve and provide broad access to Alexandria's centuries of history.

The many community conversations that informed the Office of the Arts' public art implementation plan (adopted in 2015), made clear that many Alexandrians were interested in a public-art program exploring the intersection of art and history. The idea of *Time & Place* grew out of these conversations and capitalizes on the rich historic sites that make Alexandria a unique place to live and a destination for visitors from across the globe. Gadsby's Tavern Museum became the perfect inaugural location for this initiative.

For artists, it is a rare opportunity to create work that is in direct dialogue with a historic site. For visitors, the exhibitions offer new windows into both contemporary art and the stories of place, for the power of *Time & Place* comes from the art being set in the context of the site. The history of Gadsby's offers hundreds of stories to begin the creative process.

Time & Place marks a departure from the traditional way that artists have interacted with Alexandria's history. Instead of simply commemorating a person, place, or event through a bust or bronze, the artists were challenged to draw connections between past and present. The artists worked to create new points of entry for people to learn about and understand aspects of Alexandria's history and why they still matter today.

Thank you for visiting the inaugural *Time & Place* exhibition. We hope the work these artists have done to uncover and resituate these pieces of Alexandria's past will inspire you to see new connections between the past and present in your own lives and appreciate the rich history Alexandria has always had, and will continue to have in the future.

Diane Ruggerio, *Director, Alexandria Office of the Arts*

Liz Williams, *Director, Gadsby's Tavern Museum*



INSTAGRAM: @centennialoftheeveryday

LOOKING FOR PRESENCE

SAMANTHA DORSEY, *CURATOR OF COLLECTIONS, GEORGE MASON'S GUNSTON HALL*

I have always found myself drawn to the actions and objects of women. It is a natural impulse given that I am one. Much like every visitor who walks through the door of an interpreted historic property, I look for evidence of myself in the objects displayed and the narratives shared in labels or by tour guides. Unlike the men whose names and public accomplishments often frame these places, however, nearly everyone else, including women and people of color whose work inevitably enabled their successes are frequently absent.

When first conceived in the 1870s, American period homes hosted “relics” belonging to important patriots. By the mid-twentieth century, many early houses were both shrines and modern aspirational showcases of colonial-revival interior decoration. In the past 40 years, curators have focused on recreating accurate historic interiors that serve as a backdrop for object-based narratives.

By transporting visitors back in time, these spaces become neutral ground where our guests are invited to thoughtfully explore the sometimes unpleasant legacies of the past. At Gunston Hall, we frequently help visitors wrestle with George Mason’s paradoxical relationship with slavery: his continued ownership of other people, even as he advocated for an American Bill of Rights.

We accomplish this in part by writing-in the very people who were previously (and often unintentionally) edited out of eighteenth-century records. With few or no legal rights and restricted education and literacy, enslaved people, for example, rarely kept diaries or

wrote or received letters. Inaccessibility and poverty meant that they used objects until they were quite literally spent and therefore were seldom salvaged, leaving few articles to tell their stories. At Gunston Hall, we design our museum spaces to make these often nameless individuals more apparent.

Our dining room is not arranged for a meal, instead it is composed as though the mistress of the household and her enslaved workers are cleaning and inventorying the porcelain and silverware. These decorative arts, beautiful everyday objects, have always been capable of telling indecorous truths. Their smooth, glossy surfaces hide the work of many hands that went into their creation and continued maintenance. We are working hard to give those hands faces and names through targeted research, creating room scenarios, and exploring museum theater performances with site-specific themes.

Institutions do not have to be large to make a big statement or have an impact on their community. I know this through my work at Gunston Hall and through my volunteer commitments in my hometown of Alexandria, Virginia. Gadsby’s Tavern Museum of Historic Alexandria, strives to reconstruct the lives of the disenfranchised through inclusion. They embrace the fact that our spaces – neighborhoods and house interiors alike – have always been occupied by many different people at the same time. As such, our individual stories are always best understood from multiple perspectives. The past is not simple; it is layered and complicated, just like the present.

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW



Existing as a temporary series of site-specific, all-media installations throughout the historic Gadsby's Tavern Museum, *Centennial of the Everyday*, shines a light on the history of women, enslaved peoples, and nameless citizens. To create this three-part installation, Baltimore-based artists Stewart Watson and Lauren Frances Adams conducted extensive research and created works in a variety of media, including furniture, stoneware, and textiles.

In *Centennial of the Everyday*, the artists explore different ideas in several of the period rooms within the museum. For *A Particular Provenance*, a series of altered furniture staged in the tavern's ballroom, the artists interviewed seven individuals with connections to Gadsby's Tavern Museum and its history, parsing out personal stories of place and family history connected to broader themes of belonging, work, identity, and genealogy. The artists acquired furniture from these individuals which they then altered to create sculptural objects that reflect the stories and themes brought to light in the interviews. The sculptures are placed in the ballroom to

acknowledge and interact with the centennial of the acquisition of this room's original woodwork by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where it now forms the backdrop for a display of Federal-era furnishings.

In *Not on View*, the artists created new muslin bedding for the Female Stranger's bedroom. The room is the backdrop of a local legend of a gravely ill woman who died in the hotel months after arriving from the West Indies. The work highlights anonymous women of various eras through unidentified portraits in the Metropolitan Museum's collection.

Alexandria is well known for its tradition of ceramic stoneware from the 18th and 19th centuries. For *Vestige Vessels*, the artists created ceramic stoneware using the materials and styles typical of Alexandria's 18th century stoneware with phrases both historic and contemporary, such as quotes by Ralph Ellison ("And who, by the way, was the mother of our country?"), Alexander Pope's poem on the Female Stranger's gravesite ("Grieve for an hour, perhaps, then mourn a year"), and a phrase commonly found on George Washington-era commemorative ceramics ("Peace, Plenty and Independence").

Using familiar domestic materials paired with modern fabrication methods, *Centennial of the Everyday* weaves themes of anonymity, loss, connectivity, and the fragility of memory in the public record with the stories of present-day Alexandrians, offering new interpretations of the many lives that have intersected with this space.

Images above: *Big Data / Small Finds*, Custom designed CNC routed birch wood chair painted in the Etruscan color range.

Images right: Installation views and details of *A Particular Provenance*.



CENTENNIAL OF THE EVERYDAY

LAUREN FRANCES ADAMS & STEWART WATSON

We began *Centennial of the Everyday* in search of histories not typically documented — women, immigrants, and enslaved peoples. Intent on finding people with ties to the tavern and museum rather than centering on John Gadsby himself, the concept of the tavern as a site for convergence of many varied peoples became our guide. We were also curious about the collaborative and connective efforts that have led to the preservation of this building as a museum. Asking questions about whose stories are absent or overshadowed by the more famous guests of the tavern has been central to our process.

We were initially interested in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1917 acquisition of the tavern's original woodwork by John P. Ryan — now installed in the Period Rooms of the Met's American Wing as the Alexandria Ballroom — and how this instigated Alexandria's citizens to

preserve parts of the tavern's history. We were keen to open an awareness of what is overlooked when institutions focus on one grand narrative. What we have created in Gadsby's Tavern Museum's ballroom is a nod to the Alexandria Ballroom — now a staged backdrop for Federal-era domestic furnishings at the Met — and a direct acknowledgement of the centennial mark of the Met's acquisition.

Our display of altered furniture borrowed from seven people we interviewed is a sculptural reversal; a framework that points to the limitations of the museum space to 'snap to life'. By actively including living, everyday people and their stories, the archival becomes interactive. Through interviews, multiple visits to Alexandria's historic sites, and connecting these interviewees with Gadsby's Tavern Museum, we rendered these individuals' stories into fantastical and inventive sculptural



objects that emphasize the extraordinary within the conventional, and the personal within the universal — another kind of inversion of a museum’s typical approach to presenting historical objects.

Developing artworks that use traditional forms and craft-based processes, our work intertwines with the rich textures and objects already situated in the historic museum. We foregrounded collaboration in all aspects of creating the work — with each other as artists; Alexandria as a city and historical construct; the Gadsby’s Tavern Museum and its team; our fellow technical assistants in making the stoneware, chairs, and fabric; and the individuals featured through the sculptural chairs, textiles and videos.

Genealogy has been a useful tool in our process to connect history with people’s present lives. Our biggest challenges in working with research-based methods may be knowing that there are so many stories we cannot adequately tell. The past remains difficult to emancipate because all lives in the past were not respected and recorded in equal fashion. We also acknowledge the

imaginative limitations of our own flawed and subjective lens, a position typically celebrated by artists, but a landscape particularly difficult to traverse when researching such complex subject matter as gender, race, and class in 2017. Yet through our research, exciting discoveries have been made. Locating Lex Powers and Steve Hammond, whose families have connections to the tavern’s history but were previously unfamiliar with the museum, has been a meaningful part of this project that grows a fuller picture of their families and widens that lens to our collective history.

Our hope is that visitors to Gadsby’s Tavern Museum gain awareness that history is a fertile artistic subject matter and can be revisited, excavated, and investigated in nonlinear ways, bringing about surprising results in our present day. Offering interpretations of quotidian life and upending it from defined categories, our exhibition negotiates the contradictions of a historic museum’s precise timeline within and against the Mid-Atlantic region’s rich untold diversity.

Images: Installation view and details of *Not on View*, custom designed textile on historic four-post bedstead.





ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Lauren Frances Adams has exhibited at the North Carolina Museum of Art; Nymans House National Trust in England; The Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Conner Contemporary in Washington, and Smack Mellon in Brooklyn. She attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and has held residencies at the Cite in Paris, Joan Mitchell Center in New Orleans, and the Sacatar Foundation in Brazil. She is the recipient of a 2016 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Award and the 2016 Trawick Prize. Her work has been reviewed in *Frieze*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *Hyperallergic*. Adams is a professor at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

Based in Baltimore, **Stewart Watson** is the executive director, curator, and co-founder of AREA 405 and co-owner, founder, and president of Oliver Street Studios. She also teaches at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Watson has received four individual artist grants from the Maryland State Arts Council, two individual artist grants from the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts, and was awarded with the 2010 Sadat Art for Peace Prize. Her work has been featured in *BmoreArt*, *Baltimore* magazine, *Outpost Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *ArtFCity*. Watson received her masters of fine art from the University of Maryland, where she was an Anne Truitt Scholar and a Daniel Nicholson Olkhe Award recipient. She earned her bachelors of fine art in sculpture from the Pennsylvania State University. She lives at Oliver Street Studios with her husband, son, their dogs, and cat.



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Images: Installation views of the East Bedchamber and the Public and Private Dining Rooms.

Back cover: Broken mid 18th century mahogany side chair from the collection of Gadsby's Tavern Museum, presented as an exploding form in the musician's loft.

