

deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DeCordova Presents *Wall Works* on View through Spring 2012

Lincoln, MA, May 23, 2011—DeCordova is pleased to announce *Wall Works*, the newest exhibition in a series of projects designed to rethink and recontextualize the Permanent Collection. For *Wall Works*, on view June 11, 2011–Spring 2012, six artists were invited to create site-specific wall installations in response to the Museum’s collection of modern and contemporary American art. In preparation for the exhibition, artists Kysa Johnson, Natalie Lanese, Caleb Neelon, Alison Owen, Justin Richel, and Mary Temple trolled the Museum’s database of 3,500 objects and selected an artwork to serve as a source of inspiration for their proposed “wall work.” The artists identified artworks that resonated with their varied interests and aesthetics and have consequently assembled an eclectic assortment of objects from deCordova’s collection ranging from Teenie Harris’s civil rights era documentary photographs to the quiet and poetic sculptural work of Rebecca Doughty. Sited in the Dewey Family Gallery and the Museum’s Café, these new installations reflect each artist’s own practice while creatively engaging the Permanent Collection as an educational, historical, and inspirational entity.

Additionally, the newly created wall installations reference different artistic traditions of working directly on the wall. Caleb Neelon’s installation draws on the history of slogans through street art, placards, bumper stickers, and buttons in his graphic portrayal of the visual language of political activism. Alison Owen’s subtle investigation of space emerges from the conceptual practice of Sol LeWitt’s architectural wall drawings, while Natalie Lanese’s pop-tastic assemblage refers to the tradition of murals as narrative epics. Justin Richel’s delicately rendered sweets and Kysa Johnson’s dense chalk drawings on blackboard call upon early fresco techniques, whereas Mary Temple’s use of the wall as conduit speaks to the history of site-specific artwork. Working in various media – painting, drawing, collage, and sound art – the artists in *Wall Works* reflect the wide range of installation practices today and their projects collectively trace a larger history of bypassing the canvas for the wall. *Wall Works* is organized by deCordova’s Koch Curatorial Fellow Lexi Lee Sullivan.

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Wall Works is a curatorial conflation of the site-specific and historically-aware practice of artist, Fred Wilson, the “artist as curator” exhibition model, and the diversity of installation practices today. In his 1992 project, *Mining the Museum*, Wilson curated an exhibition from Maryland Historical Society's collection to critically expose the subjectivity and bias in institutional displays.

Through surprising juxtapositions, Wilson demonstrated how changes in context create changes in meaning. The popular “artist as curator” exhibition model, like The Museum of Modern Art's *Artist's Choice* series, invites artists to curate their own exhibitions from the institutional vault. *Wall Works* stems from these museological precedents of mining the collection for new relational meaning, but by engaging contemporary installation practice creates a new space for dialogue between the collection, the wall works, and contemporary art practice.

Wall Works curator Lexi Lee Sullivan says “The artist-as-curator model creates surprising and unexpected juxtapositions, which in *Wall Works* gives the collection a renewed energy by recontextualizing the works within contemporary installation practice. An eclectic group of works have been selected from the Collection—objects which never would have been exhibited together under any other theme and generate a certain spark when seen in this context.”

About the Artists

Based in Brooklyn, NY, Kysa Johnson weaves art historical compositions with the molecular structure of toxins fusing art with environmental history, to reflect upon our complicated relationship with nature. Her wall drawings speak in the language of science, and invite viewers to consider matter and issues beyond visual perception. For *Wall Works*, Johnson selected *Chemical Brook Enters the Sudbury River*, a large color photograph by the acclaimed landscape photographer, Frank Gohlke. This photograph is part of a larger, five-year project titled, *Living Water*, in which Gohlke photographed the length of the Sudbury River as part of an environmental activist project that culminated in a show at deCordova in 1993. The Sudbury River runs from Westborough, MA through Concord, MA and has long been polluted by chemicals from the Nyanza Corporation's textile factory located in Ashland. In *blow up 152*, Kysa Johnson uses the actual molecular structure of the pollutants found in the Sudbury River as the building blocks for her drawing which takes its larger compositional shape from Gohlke's photograph. Seen side-by-side, the works tell a more nuanced history of the impact of industrialization on the New England landscape.

Natalie Lanese is a collage artist from Cleveland, OH who currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

Using an angled geometric landscape as her ground, Lanese collages vintage materials and popular culture icons into open-ended narratives. For *Wall Works*, Lanese selected Warrington Colescott's 1981 etching *Washington Video Game: Poker Night at the Pentagon*, from deCordova's Permanent Collection as her inspiration for *Retro Future*. In Colescott's *Washington Video Game*, the enterprise of war is likened to poker and video games, where drinks, dancing girls, tanks and helicopters swirl in the background and the "players" at the table have lost their trousers. Made in 1981, Colescott's print is a pointed commentary on the "new Cold War" politics during Ronald Regan's early presidency.

Lanese draws on the tradition of collage as a method for social critique seen in Colescott's use of political satire, in her monumental wall work, *Retro Future*. In this sprawling installation, Lanese assembles an alternate landscape of 2011—a vision of what people imagined the future to look like 50, 40, 30 and even 20 years ago. In *Retro Future*, the "futuristic" look of Kennedy airport's former TWA terminal and NASA space capsules appear outdated and passé. By juxtaposing these retro images alongside pop cultural icons like Michael J. Fox's flying skateboard in *Back to the Future II* and *Star Trek's* teleporter, Lanese paints a sadly funny, nostalgic portrait of the many failed American utopian dreams for the future.

Caleb Neelon, a native of Cambridge, MA, is best known for his bold, graffiti murals; however, he is also an accomplished writer, educator, and an outspoken champion for the Boston arts community. For *Wall Works*, Neelon became interested in the photography of Charles "Teenie" Harris, who was an important chronicler of African American life in Pittsburgh, PA from the 1930s–1970s. Neelon's installation, *Mother Buddha of Infinite Involvement* uses the photographs as a platform for a three-generational look back on the aesthetics of political activism and how the Civil Rights movement shaped this aesthetic. Neelon has layered painted wooden panels of bumper sticker and placard slogans that he has collected on the wall in a stylistic collage that recalls the 1960s baby boomer uniform for change, the jean jacket. Neelon asks what it means to be, or to look, politically active today—and in a funny ode to Cambridge parents, traces the history of the look of political activism from the infancy of the Civil Rights movement to the baby boomers to the streets of Cambridge today.

Justin Richel is a Maine-based artist who paints complex and detailed compositions that range in content from precariously stacked desserts to mid-century furniture to comically exaggerated 18th-century political portraits of men with wigs and birds. His gouache drawings display the stylized precision and attention to detail of traditional icon paintings, but instead of staid religious subject matter, depict delicately balanced or swirling, sweets, chairs, bureaus, desk lamps and table stands. For *Wall Works*, Richel selected a series of color photographs by Harold "Doc" Edgerton from deCordova's Permanent Collection as inspiration for his painted installation, *Debacle*.

Mary Temple is a Brooklyn-based artist whose practice includes drawing, painting, installation, and now, sound art. For *Wall Works*, Temple presents *Someone Else's Secret*, a site-specific sound piece that is performed in the two semicircular galleries within the Dewey Family Gallery every 30 minutes during Museum hours. This collaborative piece asks the Museum visitor, to provide the script that will be read by a Museum guard during the course of the exhibition. By providing “someone else’s secret,” the visitor writes a portion of the monologue that will be performed at the top of the hour, and again at half-past.

Temple’s contribution to *Wall Works* functions as a call and response to Rebecca Doughty’s work in deCordova’s Permanent Collection, *Book*, a volume wrapped and bound shut—not revealing any of its contents. *Book* is installed in one semicircular space, while on the opposite side of the gallery, some 35 feet away, stands a beautifully handcrafted writing desk. Utilizing the unique acoustics of the galleries, the Museum guard will select “someone else’s secret” from the desk’s vault and whisper this secret into the wall. The secret travels to the opposite gallery in a parabolic arch, reverberating off the wall and the gallery. Temple’s work often negotiates the territory between truth and deception. For *Someone Else’s Secret*, she explores the idea of spoken “trusts”—the telling, keeping, and dissemination of other people’s secrets—as a type of currency. She raises uneasy questions about implied mores, transgression and third party confidences as exchanges of power and paths to intimacy.

Alison Owen is a Brooklyn-based artist whose installations investigate the history of site, and specifically in *Transliteration*, the history of the Dewey Family Gallery and the Sculpture Park. Owen gathers most of the materials needed for her installations from the site itself in order to let the “site speak.” For *Wall Works* Owen selected two drawings for a proposed deCordova Sculpture Park installation by Irish artist Michael Timpson. Timpson’s project, *Knock Three Times and Whisper Low*, was built in the Park in 1981. In *Transliteration*, Owen uses the dimensions and materials noted in Timpson’s proposal drawings, like shingles, to inform her wall drawing. In this project Owen plays with a sense of temporal displacement, simultaneously continuing Timpson’s project in a new form while including the drawings as traces or residual marks of what once was. Additionally, Owen also explores the history of the Dewey Family Gallery. In response to photographs of the gallery when it was the showroom for Julian de Cordova’s European treasures—triple hung with oil paintings—Owen has included old frames found in deCordova’s storage to acknowledge the long and complicated history of this space as both a personal/domestic and public gallery.

Educational Programming

Process Gallery

Explore *Wall Works* in a behind-the-scenes way through hands-on interactive activities, touchable materials and samples, and insights on all six artists' site-specific installations at deCordova. Find out more about how the artists installed their work, the creative inspirations behind their practices, and challenges of working directly on the wall in this interactive gallery.

Cell Phone Audio Tour

Part of the *Wall Works* process involved the six exhibiting artists selecting a work from deCordova's Permanent Collection for which to respond. Listen to the artists and learn more about how their site-specific installations relate to the pieces in deCordova's collection in this artist-as-curator exhibition.

Artist Talks

Saturdays at 3 pm

Come to deCordova to meet the artists behind the artwork. Meet five of the artists from *Wall Works* and take the opportunity to get the inside perspective on the artists' work, processes, and creative inspirations. Talks begin at 3 pm in the 3rd Floor Lobby, and will be followed by a brief Q & A period.

June 18: Alison Owen

June 25: Natalie Lanese

July 9: Kysa Johnson

July 16: Mary Temple

Fall 2011: Caleb Neelon

Curator Conversation

Saturday, July 30, 3 pm: Koch Curatorial Fellow Lexi Lee Sullivan

Eye Wonder Family Program

Sunday, July 10, 1–3 pm, drop-in: Guest Artist Kysa Johnson

About deCordova

Established in 1950, deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum is the largest park of its kind in New England and encompasses 35 acres of beautiful rolling woodlands and lawns. In 2009, deCordova changed its name from deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park to deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum to emphasize its renewed focus on sculpture and to support the institution's goal of becoming a premier Sculpture Park by 2020. Providing a constantly changing landscape of large-scale, outdoor, modern and contemporary sculpture and site-specific installations, the Sculpture Park hosts more than 60 works, the majority of which are on loan to the Museum. Inside, the Museum features a robust slate of rotating exhibitions and innovative interpretive programming.

In March of 2010, deCordova acquired its first work by an international sculptor and continues to bolster the curatorial program by exhibiting high-quality, accessible art of nationally and internationally recognized artists indoors and out. To maintain its commitment to New England artists and emphasize the quality and vitality of the art created in this region, deCordova launched the *deCordova Biennial* in 2010 and the PLATFORM series in 2009.

DeCordova attracts more than 100,000 visitors from New England and tourists from around the world to its campus each year. Offering one of the largest non-degree granting studio art programs in New England, deCordova's School enrolls approximately 2,000 students in various classes and workshops throughout the year. Unique to deCordova, the Corporate Program provides area businesses the opportunity to support the institution and New England-based contemporary artists through membership initiatives and Art Loan options.

General Information

DeCordova is open Tuesday through Sunday, from 10 am to 5 pm and on select Monday holidays. General admission during Museum hours is \$12 for adults; \$8 for senior citizens, students, and youth ages 6–12. Children ages 5 and under, Lincoln residents, and Active Duty Military Personnel and their dependents are admitted free. The Sculpture Park is open year-round during daylight hours. Guided public tours of the Museum's main galleries take place every Thursday at 1 pm and Sunday at 2 pm. Tours of the Sculpture Park are given on Saturday and Sunday at 1 pm from April to November. All guided tours are free with Campus admission. Visit decordova.org or call 781.259.8355 for further information.

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