



The Ben Wigfall Project

By Lynn Woods

Photos by PUGG

Historical Photography by Pat Chow

Layout Design by Colin Secore and Maxine Leu

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Foreword

In my many years of teaching art at Kingston High School, I witnessed how the arts can transform lives, tapping into and unleashing the creative talents and learning potential of young people, teaching them skills that build confidence, empowering them through the discovery of their own expressive voice, and enriching their life experience. Many of my students came from underserved communities, and for them in particular, immersion in the arts often resulted in newfound opportunities.

I saw how breaking down the barrier between the art world and historically disadvantaged communities of color is essential in creating a more equitable, productive, and culturally vibrant society. Since retiring and launching an arts education program in Midtown Kingston, I have continued my mission of integrating the visual arts with the lives of the local community through workshops, exhibitions, and internships for high school students and young adults.

The three-month-long Ben Wigfall Project, inspired by a teacher, artist, and community leader who brought distinguished artists to a neighborhood printmaking facility he ran in the 1970s, provided a group of interns with an immersive experience that deepened their art historical knowledge through contact with original artworks at exhibitions, artists' studios, and a visit to a renowned printmaking facility. This knowledge then informed and inspired their own artworks, whose development was guided and assisted by contemporary artist mentors. Process, which was at the center of Ben Wigfall's art and teaching, was integral to the interns' creative explorations as well, which extended to their documentation of the project and the curating of their own show.

This project coalesced around a unique chapter of African American art history that was centered in Kingston and was the focus of a ground-breaking exhibition at SUNY-New Paltz's Dorsky Museum that itself is making history in its exploration of how the concept of community was central to the making of artworks of extraordinary sophistication.

I believe that this holistic learning experiment, which was rooted in the efforts of Richard Frumess to preserve and continue Ben Wigfall's legacy and blossomed thanks to partnerships with various individuals and organizations, was a success and could serve as a template for young people everywhere.

–Lara Giordano, Founding Director of D.R.A.W. and PUGG

Preserving a Legacy

In the fall of 2022, the arts education program of Kingston's Midtown Arts District, called the Department of Regional Art Workers, aka D.R.A.W., participated in an unusual program. It was inspired by the printmaking and photography shop that Ben Wigfall, an art professor at SUNY-New Paltz, operated in a black neighborhood in Kingston in the 1970s. Local youth, who found a safe hang-out and creative outlet at the print shop, were trained to produce prints for distinguished black artists visiting from New York City. Wigfall, who died in 2017, provided space within the context of art making to encourage a deeper understanding of what it means to be human through conversation, facilitation, and collaborative learning. Lara Giordano, director of D.R.A.W., has a similar vision for D.R.A.W.'s Pop Up Gallery Group, or PUGG, which provides paid arts-related internships to young people. She devised a program in which the high school and college-aged interns would immerse themselves in a study of the printmaking shop and the art of Wigfall and the artists he worked with. In so doing, they would actually experience such a synthesis themselves, giving new impetus to their art and community engagement. The Ben Wigfall Project was launched in late summer of 2022 and though technically completed in November, continues to reverberate in the lives of its artist-practitioners, who are carrying its message into the future.

Early in his career, Ben Wigfall, who'd attended segregated schools in his native city of Richmond, Virginia, before earning an MFA at Yale School of Design, was poised for success as a young artist. In 1951, when he was in his early 20s, his painting entitled *Chimneys* won first place in a statewide juried show of Virginia artists and was bought by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, at the time one of only four works in the museum's collection by an African American artist. In 1956, Wigfall was featured in an issue of *Art in America* devoted to young American artists; that same year, *Chimneys* was included in *American Painting Today*, a compendium of works by 154 artists that included Willem De Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Edward Hopper, Jackson Pollock, and other famous names. Wigfall was also included in the 1955 annual invitational print show at the Brooklyn Museum—and his woodcut singled out for praise in the review that appeared in *Art Digest*, a significant arts periodical of the time.

Wigfall ultimately took a different path, choosing to devote his creative energies to teaching. In 1963 he was hired as an art professor at the State University of New York at New Paltz, becoming the campus's first black faculty member. In the early 1970s, he stepped outside the confines of academia to launch a neighborhood print-making facility called Communications Village, which was revolutionary in the way it connected distinguished artists with the local community. The facility was located in Kingston's black neighborhood of Ponckhockie, which reminded him of the Richmond neighborhood where he and his wife, Mary, had grown up. His disappointment in the lack of community outreach by SUNY-New Paltz no doubt was also a motivating factor, as was Mary's work at the Migrant Day Care Center, located near New Paltz.

Situated in a former brick mule barn, Communications Village was unique in that it trained and employed local youth to make prints for distinguished, mostly African American artists who traveled to the facility from New York City. Artists such as Benny Andrews, Charles Gaines, and Melvin Edwards—world-famous names today—gave talks and made themselves available to the youth besides participating in poetry readings and other cultural events. Communications Village provided a venue for them at a time when they were shut out from the mainstream art world, while the local teens found a creative outlet as well as a second home presided over by a nurturing mentor.



Ben Wigfall and Communications Village members.

Wigfall later founded the Watermark/Cargo Gallery, located in downtown Kingston, where he showed contemporary artists and pieces from his huge collection of African art. When he died in 2017, Communications Village (and Ben himself) seemed destined to fade in memory as a chapter from the distant past. But Richard Frumess, a friend of Wigfall's, founder of Kingston-based R&F Handmade Paints, and co-founder and board member of Kingston's Midtown Arts District (MAD), was determined to preserve Ben's legacy as well as bring to light his art, which Wigfall himself had rarely shown. In cataloging the hundreds of artworks stored at Wigfall's home and studio, Richard discovered a body of work that was stunning in its originality, expressive power, and experimental processes, which the world had seen only in occasional group shows over many decades.

Starting in fall of 2016, Richard, along with other MAD board members, had met with local leaders in the arts as well as residents in the community and first floated the idea of a project that would honor and continue the work of Wigfall. "Many of the ideas coincided with projects that Lara had been initiating over the last year through PUGG.," Richard recalled. "The story of Communications Village provided a historical link for what Lara was doing, and PUGG, over time, became the heart of the Ben Wigfall Project."

Meanwhile, shortly after Wigfall's death, Richard had met with the family to determine how best to preserve Ben's artwork as well as his African art collection. As part of his efforts to raise awareness of the works, Richard brought Ward Mintz, chair of the advisory board of SUNY-New Paltz's Dorsky Museum, to see Wigfall's artworks, who in turn advised the Dorsky's exhibition manager, Anna Conlan, to see the collection. Conlan agreed with Richard that Ben's legacy was worth preserving, and the two proposed to the Dorsky board an exhibition bridging Ben the artist and Ben the community mentor.

"Benjamin Wigfall & Communications Village," on view at the Dorsky from September 10 through December 11, 2022, surveyed Wigfall's work over four decades, exhibited memorabilia from Communications Village that demonstrated the important role it played in forging a synthesis of the arts and community, and displayed pieces by major artists produced at Communications Village. It also realized Wigfall's longtime goal of hosting a show of contemporary black artists, which occupied a separate room. Wigfall's vision and commitment to Communications Village was clearly ahead of its time, not in the least because it upheld a high standard of artmaking.



Richard Frumess with Ben Wigfall's archived works.

PUGG Takes on the Ben Wigfall Project

After retiring as an art teacher at Kingston High School, Lara Giordano, who is an accomplished artist herself, founded D.R.A.W. in 2015. Initially launched in two empty storefronts, D.R.A.W. has since found a permanent home in two spacious, light-filled rooms on the ground floor at Energy Square, a new, subsidized housing facility in Midtown Kingston. D.R.A.W. offers Saturday and afterschool art labs for kids, workshops by well-respected professional artists for both adults and teens, and life-drawing classes as well as rental of its printing facilities to artists; scholarships are available to those in need.

As mentioned, D.R.A.W. also offers a youth workforce training program oriented to the visual arts for high-school students and recent alumni. Participants in PUGG help organize and hang exhibitions for high school students and local artists; assist teaching artists at the D.R.A.W. workshops; work on public art projects; and serve as community ambassadors. The paid interns learn arts management and curatorial, entrepreneurial, and leadership skills. Always on the lookout for new PUGG opportunities, Lara, who participated in those MAD meetings with Richard back in 2016 and 2017, saw the Wigfall exhibition as a possible jumping-off point for an educational program that would serve not just as a learning experience but also stimulate the creative energies of the PUGG participants.



PUGG interns discuss project plans.

For Richard, the Ben Wigfall Project achieved his goal that the exhibition “is not an end in itself but a way to connect with the community. Lara had the machinery, structure, and students to do this, which is a great opportunity.

“Ben saw his art being as much an audio-graphic portrayal of sound as image, of social engagement and education,” he said. “In other words, his teaching, his community mentorship, his gallery were different extensions of the same thinking. That’s why the connection with MAD and PUGG are of such importance in both revitalizing and continuing Ben’s vision.”

Out of the 11 active PUGG interns, six signed up for the project. Angel Brown, who has long been involved with PUGG, is a senior at Kingston High School senior who plans to attend SUNY Ulster in the fall and study fashion design. Colin Secore is in his last semester at SUNY-Ulster, Nick Carroll is taking a year off after attending art school in Baltimore for a year, and Micah Fornari recently graduated from the Montserrat College of Art.; all three are PUGG interns currently working at Center for Photography at Woodstock (which recently relocated to Kingston). Aleshanee Emanuel is attending Marist College and is a community activist. Asa Graham-Lowengard recently graduated from college in Vermont after being home-schooled in Kingston (he is the sole PUGG participant who didn’t attend Kingston High School).

“I thought, ‘how often do you have a local African American role model [in the mid Hudson Valley] that we can work from, and whose philosophy and work parallel what we do,’” she said. Plus, “I’ve been wanting to bring in artists from the city, which is what Ben did. And a lot of our focus is on printmaking, as was the case with Ben.” Lara obtained funding from SUNY-New Paltz and other local institutions to cover the cost of the participants’ and her time, travel, and materials, then reached out to Richard along with the Dorsky Museum and Eureka! House, a publishing outfit and print facility located in Kingston.



Nick presenting his sketchbook ideas.



Micah showing Angel some artwork.

What motivated them to participate? “I love the locality of it,” said Nick. “This was happening right in our backyard, and it’s good to trace our roots. Plus, I love printmaking.”

“It’s a history nerd thing for me,” said Colin. Communications Village “was so local, yet so significant.”

“The message of community was meaningful, as someone who didn’t grow up with that and is just finding it now,” noted Micah. “We get to learn how much influence Ben had, particularly on the black community in Kingston.” Micah discovered a personal connection as well: Ben was a close family friend and used to visit his parents’ restaurant in Uptown Kingston in the late 1990s and early 2000s. “They knew he was an artist, but they never realized what he did for Kingston,” said Micah.

Angel said she heard about the project from her mom, who saw the posting for the paid internship on Facebook. She said she had long had the idea of depicting important aspects of her life on a dress, and the program gave her the opportunity to fulfill that dream.

A Multi-faceted Program, Weaving Past and Present

The schedule of activities and events, culminating in an exhibition of artworks by the PUGG participants at the building headquarters of Kingston's African Burial Ground, began in August and extended into November. The group's visit to Wigfall's former studio and home in New Paltz, where his archives and artworks are stored, was arranged by Richard, who also hosted a brunch for the Puggsters to meet the original neighborhood kids who participated at Communications Village—now middle-aged adults living in various cities. The group also visited the EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, still in operation in New York City, which had a close association with Wigfall and the artists he brought up to Communications Village.

The program of events was rounded out with visits to an exhibition at Bard College focused on black artists entitled "Black Melancholia" as well as the print exhibition at SUNY-New Paltz's Sojourner Truth Library commemorating Truth, which the participants visited on the university's "Speak Your Truth Day." Jill Parisi, associate professor of printmaking, conducted a tour of the printmaking facilities and did a demonstration of paper lithography.



PUGG at "Black Melancholia" at Bard College.

Meanwhile, Sam Liebert, director of the Eureka! House, located in an Italianate mansion in a bucolic corner of Kingston, arranged for month-long residencies for two artists from the city, Jake Robbins and DonChristian Jones. Both are members of a Brooklyn-based non-profit arts collective called Public Assistants, which itself has parallel aims and methods to Communications Village and D.R.A.W. and whose artists have participated in Eureka! House residencies in the past. Liebert initially connected with PUGG back in 2020 through Kingston's then-director of arts and culture. The Ben Wigfall Project "was an amazing opportunity to have the residencies function as a space that was a bridge between different projects and artists, here at the residency and in town, and between folks in the city and in Kingston," he said. "DonChristian and Jake learned a lot from working with the D.R.A.W., and the students had a great experience working with them and the other artists. Lara and I have already started floating ideas for possible future projects like this."



PUGG at the EFA Robert Blackburn Studio in New York City.

The artists stayed at the mansion during the month of October, meeting with the PUGG participants at the D.R.A.W. to provide guidance on their art projects, putting together a four-minute film about the project culled from the participants' video and audio footage, and helping the group curate the exhibition of their work. Jake and DonChristian also put together a booklet filled with photographs and drawings chronicling the various activities of the project, which was printed at Eureka! House. The residency "was an opportunity for me to learn more about the creative eco-system of Kingston," Jake said. "My art has always been about social practice, and as soon as I met [the PUGG participants] and heard from them and saw what they were working on and their preferred mediums, it fell into place."

Wigfall's Story Comes Alive

On August 8, PUGG participants visited Wigfall's home and studio in New Paltz. Richard showed them Ben's prints and paintings, and they met and talked with Gino Wigfall, Ben's son. "We pulled out the prints and I let the students touch and hold them, so they could feel the paper," said Richard.



Angel feeling a plate Ben once used to print.

Such intimate contact with Wigfall's art and process made a profound impression. "Normally you don't get so close to a person's artwork and aren't able to touch it," said Micah. "In a gallery, the works are protected. But Richard didn't care, he said 'go ahead and touch it.' It was amazing, because Ben is such a legendary person. Not only was I able to see his art up close, but I also talked to his son about his childhood."

Besides sharing his childhood anecdotes, Gino discussed his father's printmaking process and priorities, noted Lara, who accompanied the students on their visit, along with PUGG program director Beth Humphrey. The interns learned that "Ben didn't do editions, but he would experiment all day long," Beth recounted. "Gino talked about how his father would come home smelling of ink and turpentine. The group got to see the plates and how Ben worked on the front and back of things. He used everything all the time." Listening to Gino's perspective enabled the group to "get a 360-degree idea of who Ben was," she said. The interns also got a glimpse of Wigfall's African art collection.



Nine Part Black Theme by Ben Wigfall, etching, 1971



Tall Man by Ben Wigfall

On August 27, the PUGG participants visited the installation for the Wigfall show at the Dorsky Museum, meeting with curator Drew Thompson, who is associate professor in Africana and Historical Studies and director of Africana Studies at Bard College. The half-hour lunchtime interview with the curator was followed by a tour of the exhibit, in which Drew described Wigfall's life and art and discussed why he made certain curatorial choices. The installation was very much in process: Drew was on the phone with a fellow curator from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, in Richmond (where the exhibition will travel in the summer of 2023), and staff were deciding where to place an installation piece by Melvin Edwards.



The Dorsky curators discussing the placement of pieces.

In his [blog entry for the PUGG website](#), Colin described the process:

We heard how [Drew] became a curator and why Wigfall's story appealed to him. "I firmly believe that exhibitions are the best way of answering certain questions and engaging the communities around you," Drew said. We learned of the many factors that go into curation. One larger piece needed a full corner of a room, which forced the team to move around several other pieces. Other spaces were left with too much or too little room as a result and required major adjustments. I'm starting to understand how stressful curation can be.

"The exhibition concluded with a room filled with art from Black artists that worked with Ben. This particular section of the show spoke to me the most about the real influence Ben Wigfall has had on local history and art culture.

Meanwhile, since documentation is yet another important component of the Ben Wigfall Project, the PUGG participants had cameras in hand, photographing and videotaping the installation.

Richard complimented the Dorsky for providing such access. "For the museum to allow a bunch of kids looking, photographing, and videotaping during the installation is really something," he said. "Everyone was so patient, and Drew gave a wonderful talk. It was fabulous." He added that he conceived the Wigfall studio visit in advance as a kind of "homework" that would enable the young people to better appreciate the finished work by Wigfall and others on display in the exhibit.

September 10 was a busy day: the PUGG participants attended Richard's brunch, visited the original Communications Village building, and attended the exhibition opening that evening. At the brunch, they met Dinah Washington, Bobby Easter (accompanied by his wife), and Theresa Thomas Washington (accompanied by her husband), all of whom had worked at Communications Village as teenagers. They shared first-hand accounts of what it was like to be mentored by Wigfall.



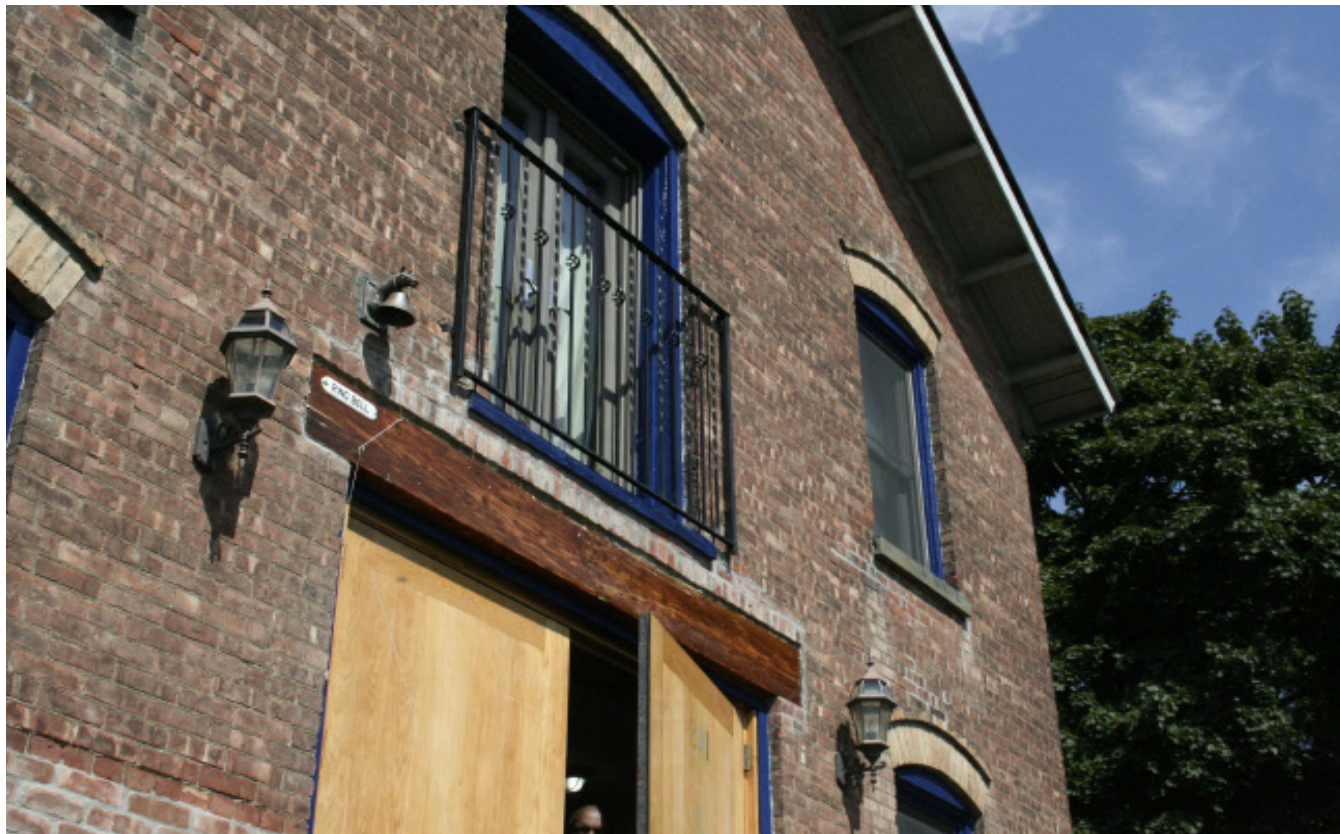
Reunion of Communications Village participants at the brunch.

“It was like a family reunion. A lot of these people were seeing each other for the first time in years, and it was really cool to see them bonding over their relationship to Ben,” said Micah. Besides making prints for the artists, the kids “also made their own work in the space,” Nick added. “They talked about their relationship to Ben and how he was a father figure to them. He provided a safe place for them, not just in terms of art. It was a very emotional, powerful experience for them.”



Members of Communications Village sharing experiences with PUGG.

Nick recalled Bobby Easter telling him how he had pulled artist Joe Ramos' prints of a large sneaker (an example of which is in the show) from the press. Richard explained that the teenaged Easter helped to print the edition, while the teenaged Larry Carpenter (who was at the exhibition opening but not at the brunch) did a number of editions for Charles Gaines.



Today Communications Village serves as the home and studio of artist Andrew Lyght.

“We learned of parallels between Communications Village and the D.R.A.W., for example both groups having the keys to our respective studios,” wrote Colin in his blog. “Those kinds of connections made the brunch empowering.

“The Communication Village veterans were happy to share their memories of the building and the neighborhood. Communications Village was the center of the small community...I can relate to that joy of having a studio where I can hang out, work, and create.”

Afterwards, the group drove the short distance to the Communications Village building, which is now owned by artist Andrew Lyght. Dinah, Bobby, and Theresa pointed out where they used to play, bringing to life the printmaking shop and its relationship to the neighborhood decades ago.

On September 28, Angel, Micah, and Nick, along with Lara and Richard, were featured on the “We Got Next” half-hour program on Radio Kingston. The PUGG participants reflected on what was meaningful to them. “I’m seeing the power of community and mentorship can have on young people. We’re getting that experience now,” commented Micah. “We’re finding community through the arts, and having that space to make and create art,” said Nick. “When we went to see [Wigfall’s] work, it was very cool to see his texts in ink, his love, how he puts his art into community and what that community should look like,” added Angel. “I’m loving how this is going so far and am getting more into this. We’re the next generation to tell other people ‘this is Ben Wigfall and his connection to community.’”



Communications Village

Printed image of the original Communications Village.

The final educational piece of the project was visiting the EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, a continuation of the printshop run by Robert Blackburn in New York City from 1971 until 2002. Blackburn, the child of Jamaican immigrants, was part of the Harlem Renaissance and acquired his first lithography press in 1947. He created a welcoming space for artists of color and people of all nationalities in his Chelsea atelier and later, in his printmaking shop. Blackburn was constantly experimenting and enhanced the repertoire of printmaking, which had a significant impact on contemporary art. Many of the artists who worked at Communications Village made the connection with Wigfall through his association with Blackburn, and Blackburn himself visited Kingston—a connection that links Communications Village with an important chapter of contemporary black American art history.

Back in April Lara had arranged the PUGG interns' visit to the exhibition, "Robert Blackburn & Modern American Printmaking," at the Hyde Collection, in Glens Falls, which was a prelude to the PUGG participants' visit to the printmaking workshop, accompanied by Jake and Donchristian, on October 8. Veteran printmaker Kathy Caraccio, who had worked with Blackburn, and Essye Klempner conducted the tour and displayed prints from the extensive archives, which represent some 4,000 artists.

"We saw proofs of prints that Ben had worked on," said Angel. "Kathy could pull out any print and tell a story about it," added Nick. "Robert Blackburn would do the design and hand it off to her to print." Colin said he was fascinated by Kathy's description of a printing technique that "had something to do with chemical reactions and Lara hadn't even heard about."



Kathy Caraccio sharing a print by Ben.

The Artmaking Begins

At their twice-weekly sessions throughout the month of October, Jake and DonChristian brainstormed with the PUGG participants. They free-associated words and concepts scrawled on white boards around five terms they believed were central to Wigfall's practice: process, textures, layers, records, community. "We talked about these tenets, which gave way to [the development of] artworks for the show," said DonChristian. "At the end of class, after discussing what words came to mind in association with the five tenets, we assigned homework, which was something to think about for the next class," Jake added. Lara also demonstrated various types of printmaking processes, including silk screen and collagraph.

One afternoon, several of the interns met the residents and several other Public Assistants artists at Eureka! House. In a downstairs room, Nick was utilizing the Epson large-format printer, which can accommodate paper and canvas up to 44 inches wide. He had transferred Xeroxes of his photos onto polyester plates and was now printing them onto canvas. The photos depicted signs, traffic cones, and other elements of the local streetscape, which Nick planned to incorporate into a long black skirt "inspired by punk pants," as he described it.

Upstairs in the capacious, well-lit attic studio, outfitted with silk-screening equipment and an audio recording set up, Angel was painting on a denim dress laid out on a table, while Colin was making drawings on paper snippets that would be transformed into metal buttons, for a project incorporating the concept of community exchange. Outside in the barn, Aleshanee was on the floor working on her sculpture, which consisted of a mannequin collaged with black-and-white printed photos downloaded from her phone. The images "incorporate all of the five tenets," she said, adding that she especially liked learning about the legacy of black artists in Kingston. "My project is finding places that make me feel safe and secure in Kingston," she said, noting they include a cat hang-out at Kingston Point and a wildlife watering hole in Wilbur. Nearby, Asa was working on two collagraph prints.

A walk through Midtown and Uptown Kingston by Jake and several of the PUGG participants one October day was pivotal in inspiring a few of the artworks. "Ben Wigfall made audio field recordings, so I brought my audio recorder," Jake said. "It ended up being more of a tour from the locals' perspective. They shared their experiences, and I was given a context for what it was like being an artist here."

"We could see the effects of gentrification," recalled Micah. The advertisement of a woman in a shopping cart in a storefront window ("clearly tailored for people not from Kingston") inspired him to "reclaim our idea of the shopping cart...in Midtown you see people carrying their stuff in a shopping cart, and I was thinking of this in contrast to the gentrifier's idea of a shopping cart," he explained. Utilizing his degree in illustration, he made a drawing but then decided to burn the lines into a wood piece after seeing Wigfall's burned wood pieces at the Dorsky exhibition. He bought a woodburning kit and painted over sections of the completed image in blue, which was a favorite color of Wigfall's. "I'm already planning more woodburning pieces," Micah said.

Micah’s experience is an example of how each of the artists “had a concept, then internalized it,” noted Lara. “Printmaking is a big part of that, with its combination of text and image.” She added that “the most inspiring pieces of Wigfall’s for many of them were the text image pieces and the recordings of interviews, which indicated his interest in people.” Indeed, during his stay at Eureka! House Jake made some text linocuts that were inspired by the wood-carved text pieces of Wigfall’s, which utilized various sizes of letters, spacing, styles and even configurations of the lines of text to convey the speech patterns of stories he’d heard and recorded from his father and other family members, stories that touched on the history of slavery and the voyage from Africa.



Lara giving a printmaking demo to PUGG and Public Assistants artists.

PUGG Hosts an Exhibition

On November 4, “Material Heritage,” the name the artists in residence and PUGG participants gave to their exhibition, opened in the building located on the grounds of the Pine Street African Burial Ground, a former slave cemetery in Kingston dating back to the 17th century. Formerly a house, the building serves as the headquarters of Harambee, a coalition that promotes cultural and educational events primarily geared to the African American community. “Material Heritage” displayed the work of the six PUGG participants as well as Jake and DonChristian and five other artists from Public Assistants. “We all selected the pieces, and when we started talking about them we decided to illuminate the process,” said Jake. “That took a bit of trouble shooting.”

The result, located in the two downstairs rooms of the former house, pulsed with visual energy: prints were grouped together by artist on the walls, sculptures were arranged on the floor or on high rectangular wooden stands, depending on their size, and Jake’s cyanotypes, which incorporated vintage photos from Communications Village, hung on a wire, as if out to dry. The mixture of styles and media spoke to each other in a visual dialog. A photo of the Communications Village building, enlarged and printed on a piece of canvas, dominated one wall.

The opening was packed with the friends and family of the artists as well as other people from the community. “I was glad about the turnout. People were very receptive,” said Nick. “It was interesting to see what other people saw in the pieces.” “Usually openings are stuffy and boring, but this was cool,” said Micah. “Not just people interested in art but people from the community or who had known Ben or were involved in the burial ground showed up. It was a diverse group, and it was nice to see people appreciate my work.”

The highlight of the evening was the screening of the four-minute film Jake had edited from archival material and the footage and photographs taken by the PUGG participants. The film’s lively montage of photos and video of artists, students, and art, of old and new footage, of various voices melded the life of Communications Village and the activities of PUGG in a kind of beat poetics, its syncopated rhythm of speech and images itself a reflection of these diverse energies.



Lara speaking to the attendees and presenting the Ben Wigfall documentary at “Material Heritage.”

The works by the PUGG interns held their own amid the display of pieces by older, more experienced artists. Micah's wood-burning piece, blackened along the bottom edge and with subtle blue touches of color, was beautifully drawn, its delicately incised lines mitigated by the texture and rawness of the block of wood. The two figures—a young woman pushing the cart with a laughing woman inside—had a Crumb-like cartoony character and were not easily placed: were these homeless folks, errant shoppers, or shopping cart thieves out for a joy ride?



Asa with his print series.



Our Place by Micah Fornari

Asa's series of collagraph prints were eye-catching in their unusual format—two large white paper circles, like ghosts of vinyl LPs, each framing a tiny circular print, viewed as if in the lens of a telescope. The titles, *Ghost-town #1* and *Ghost-town #2*, referred to the memories of the family businesses that occupied Uptown Kingston when Asa was growing up but have since vanished. The abstraction of the pieces was inspired by the “abstracted figuration” that was part of Wigfall's visual language, said Asa, noting that Wigfall's remark that “there were no images for what [I] wanted to convey” especially resonated with him.

“Just as *Chimneys* depicts Benjamin Wigfall’s subjective perception of buildings he walked by as a child, *Ghost-town* depicts my subjective perception of the buildings of Wall Street in Uptown Kingston in the past, present, and future,” Asa wrote in an e-mail, noting that the walk he took with the other participants had jolted these memories and instilled in him “complicated feelings...I was reminded of my disconnection to the Midtown community, the comfort I felt Uptown compared to my peers, and my sense of being a gentrifier since my family moved to Kingston from NYC in 2002.” Those feelings inspired the format of his pieces: “I decided on circular plates and a miniature scale because I wanted to take up as little space as possible.”

Visiting artist Jazmine Hayes gave him the idea of making collagraph embossments with no ink, resulting in a ghostly image. He also used a process called chine colle, gluing a separate layer of paper, string, and other material onto the print. Asa also contributed a screen print inspired by the dictionary entry on Frankenstein, to which he added his own drawing and found clippings. Called *Small Miracles of Love and Science*, the print involved a lot of experimentation and revision—as was the case, Asa learned, of the art made at Communications Village and Bob Blackburn Printmaking.

In contrast, Nick’s series of prints evoked a Pop sensibility. They consisted of bold, playful compositions of words, which spell out a provocative, thought-provoking, and humorous message, to wit: “Attack Your Panic Subvert the Rules,” “Consummate Chump,” and “Good Fun.” Realizing that his original idea of patching his photographic images onto a pair of pants or skirt would be too difficult given the stiffness of the canvas they were printed on, he instead made a collagraph and two monotypes. The sayings “came to me as kind of quirky and funny. ‘You’re the best and then you’re a chump.’ They’re aggressive, punk, and playful.”



Consummate Chump by Nick Carroll

Aleshanee collaged a mannequin whose svelte figure, assertive pose, and black gloves suggested a female superhero. She inserted a typed sheet with her artist's statement in the hand of her colorful avatar, whose hodge-podge of texts and photographic snippets of people, landscapes, animals, and graffiti interspersed with touches of bright pink, red, and green took on an almost cinematic quality; scanning the images as they slid around the torso, arms, and legs, one experienced them in motion. Describing herself as "a local student, artist, activist, and advocate," she noted the piece was inspired by Wigfall's focus on "art as a means for therapeutic expression, self-reflection, manifestation, and healing." Her piece "explores the visual and emotional landscape of Kingston, with a particular focus on 'safe places,' spots... where I and people like me... feel comfortable existing."



Aleshanee's mannequin, close-up.



Aleshanee's mannequin, full-body.



The Recording of My Life by Angel Brown

Angel's long denim dress, cinched and gracefully displayed on a dress form, was in essence a wearable life story, titled *The Recording of My Life*. "It was time to put myself out there and record the struggles I faced," the artist said, including the reading and writing disability she struggled with as a child. Photo transfers of Angel and her family were interspersed with painted and appliqued flowers, letters, and shapes of colored fabric representing an image associated with an emotion; for example, "anxiety" in scripted letters was superimposed on a blue biomorphic shape representing a pond. The flamelike forms and colors along the broad hem encompassed not only a personal history of joys and challenges but also had a flowing quality, much like time itself. Angel said she utilized skills learned at a fashion class she's taking at Ulster BOCES and incorporated ideas from her English class in the piece. "It was exciting" to finally execute her idea and get feedback from a teacher and her family, an experience that fueled her ambition to study fashion and costume design.

A button-filled multicolored box perched on one of the high white stands extended an invitation: take a button, choosing from a variety depicting drawn characters, and in exchange create one yourself and pin it on a banner. Colin, whose creation this was, directed the button-taker to a nearby table supplied with Magic Markers and tiny circles of paper. After drawing a design the participant gave the piece of paper to Colin, who transformed it into a metal button using a sleek-looking steel machine, then returned it to the participant who in turn pinned it onto the banner (the canvas printed with the photo of Communications Village). “The original idea was to build this community of different characters,” Colin said.

The challenge was “figuring out how to make it happen, since the process of making buttons is kind of disruptive.” He made 54 buttons—based on six drawings he scanned into multiple copies, then cut out and produced into a button—which were placed in the box, ten of which were exchanged by people at the opening. The project was primarily an experiment, still on-going: “I want to work at PUGG a lot more and get my footing and take more time to figure out what I want to create,” he said.



Colin holding one of his buttons.



Community in a Box by Colin Secore

The show was taken down November 17 and reinstalled in the lobby of Energy Square, adjacent to the D.R.A.W. studio, where the pieces will be on display through January. On November 15 and 16, Lara and Micah conducted a collagraph workshop for the kids in the after-school program held at the Burial Ground, which officially concluded the Ben Wigfall Project.

However, the interns said their experience continues to resonate: “I don’t have the feeling it’s over,” Colin said. “The experience will carry on, especially seeing how interconnected everything is with this,” added Nick. “Ben Wigfall created all these different ripples in the art world and community, and we are one of those waves,” Colin said. “We’re continuing those ripples, and his influence keeps growing.”

Special Thanks

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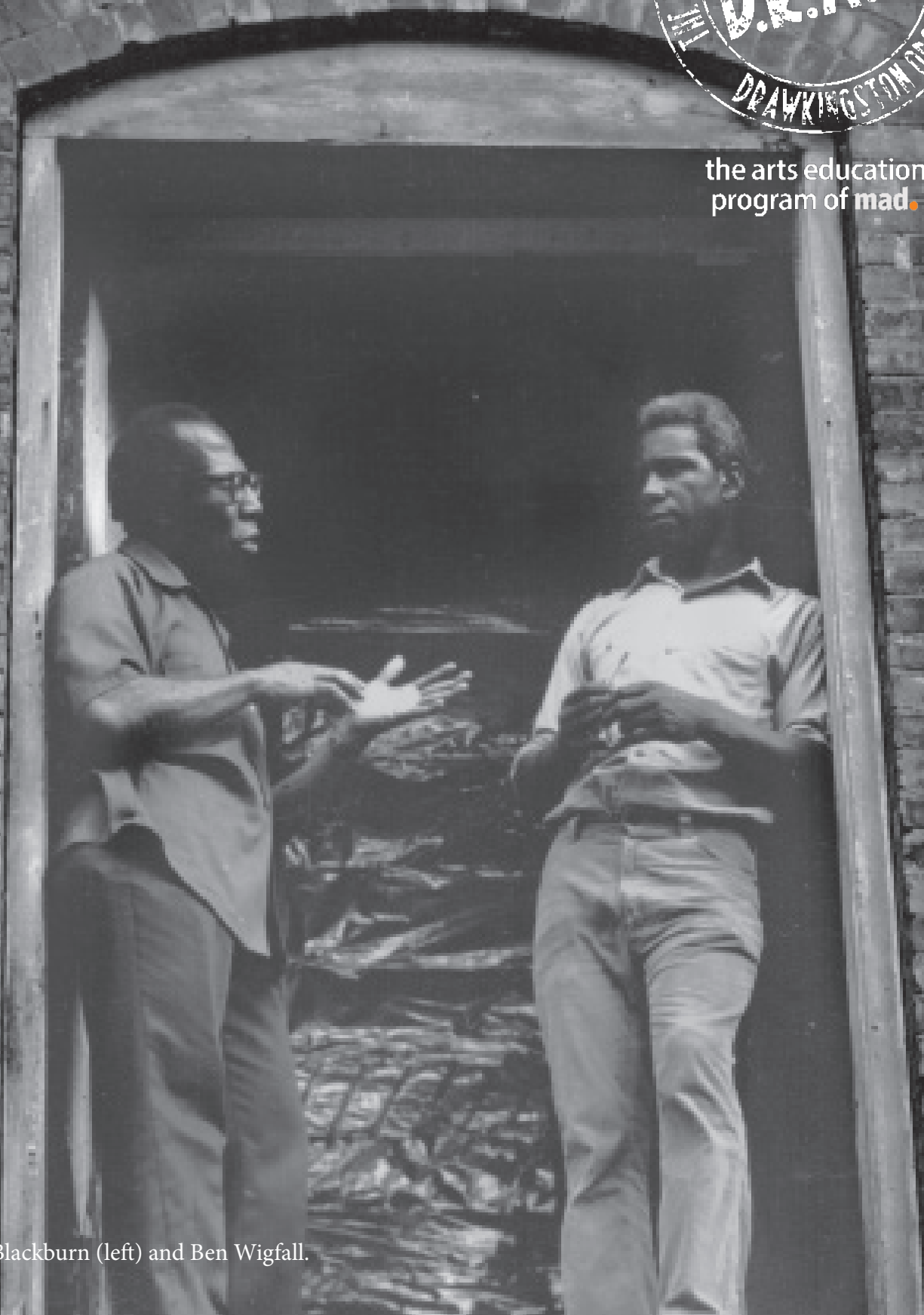


Ulster Savings

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Robert Blackburn (left) and Ben Wigfall.