

BOATS AGAINST THE CURRENT

May 3 and 4, dusk to 10:30pm

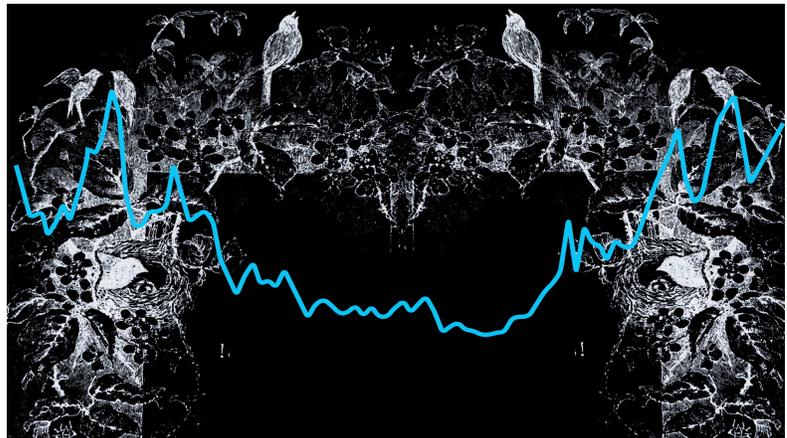
Projected onto the southwest corner of Harrison Hall

Support

This work is part of the ARTECHA Festival and curated by Annie Dell'Aria, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Art History. This project is made possible through the support of the College of Creative Arts, the Department of Art (including the VASE Fund), and the Humanities Center. Elizabeth Grace Huddleston ('19) provided archival research as a Humanities Center Research Apprentice, in partnership with the Walter Havighurst Special Collections & University Archives at King Library and the McGuffey House and Museum. Special thanks to Arts Management faculty Todd Stuart and Willie Caldwell and Diana Kate Karsanow ('20).

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An original public artwork by Tiffany Carbonneau

Boats against the Current is an original public artwork commissioned specifically for Miami's campus by artist Tiffany Carbonneau. Utilizing projection mapping technology, which enables the projection of moving images onto irregular architectural surfaces, this piece explores issues of social inequality and educational access through the imagery and legacy of the McGuffey Readers housed in Miami's special collections. This work will spark curiosity in visitors and passersby through monumental scale and technological spectacle, but its site-specific evocation of this important social issue will also hopefully prompt dialogue and engagement in public space.

Artist's Statement

On July 4th, 1776, the Second Continental Congress ratified the United States Declaration of Independence. Included in this paramount document, was the radical notion that "the pursuit of happiness" was an inalienable human right, inspiring millions of people, then and now, to leave their ancestral homes to find what they believed would be a better life in the United States. These

Americans dreamt of a place where one could find financial stability, social mobility, and freedom from ethnic, political, or religious persecution. Their immigrant dreams became the American Dream.

As the son of Scottish-Irish parents who immigrated to what would become the United States in 1774, William Holmes McGuffey held a strong belief that education and religion were essential to the building of a stable, healthy United States. McGuffey's Readers became some of this country's earliest and most significant textbooks. They were used by millions of students for more than a century to learn how to read, develop moral values, and cultivate an American identity.[1] Americans today continue to look to education as an opportunity to achieve financial stability and social mobility. Unfortunately, broadening income gaps have led to a corresponding education gap, where wealthy Americans can more often afford quality early education, private tutoring, elite primary and secondary school tuition, and costly higher education. In addition, the lack of public policy equalizing funding for public schools has led to disparities amongst the rich and poor in test scores, college completion rates, and access to early education.[2]

Created specifically for the Oxford campus of Miami University, *Boats against the Current* is an architectural video projection that combines archival imagery found in William McGuffey's Readers, historical still and moving images, and animated modern data to highlight the effects of income disparity on equal access to education and the ability to achieve the American Dream. The title of this work is borrowed from the final sentences of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel, *The Great Gatsby*, in which the main character's roots in poverty and struggles for financial success in adulthood illustrate Fitzgerald's own disillusionment with the American Dream: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning—So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." [3]

1. William Smith, "William Holmes McGuffey," McGuffey House and Museum, Miami University, 1973, <https://miamioh.edu/cca/mcguffey-museum/wh-mcguffey/>.

2. John Jerrim and Linsey Macmillan, "Income Inequality, Intergenerational Mobility, and the Great Gatsby Curve: Is Education the Key?" *Social Forces* 94, issue 2 (December 2015): 505–533, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sovo75>.

3. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 1925).

Artist Bio

Tiffany Carbonneau is a 2011 Efroymsen Contemporary Arts Fellow, and an Associate Professor of Fine Art at Indiana University Southeast where she founded and heads the Digital Art program. Tiffany's work has been exhibited internationally at The University of Hamburg, Move Light Festival in Lodz, Poland, Infecting the City Public Art Festival in Cape Town, South Africa, and The Toronto Urban Film Festival in Toronto, Ontario. Nationally, her architectural projections have been exhibited during IN Light IN: Indianapolis Light Festival, Fountain Art Fair at The 69th Regiment Armory in New York City, Inlight Richmond in Richmond, Virginia, Currents New Media Festival in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Free State Film and Art Festival in Lawrence, Kansas, as well as other traditional and non-traditional venues across the United States.

tiffanycarbonneau.com

Curator's Statement

The moving image has the ability to capture our attention unlike nearly any other visual form. Whether on the scale of IMAX or smartphones, we are constantly engaging a stream of visual images drawn from the legacy of film, animation, television, and digital forms. When projected in public space, moving images generate a shared temporal and spatial experience with others, transforming individual passersby into an audience. Seen recently in events like the BLINK Festival in nearby Cincinnati, public projections

frequently attract large groups of strangers through spectacle and illumination. The best examples of this kind of public art, I argue, employ the inherent spectacle of moving images in public space not as an end in itself but rather a means for generating meaningful and multilayered experiences among members of the public through art. These experiences range from the playful to the political, and though the work must extend opportunities for the public to connect to it, their success does not hinge on wide comprehension.

It is through my research in this area of public art that I came across the work of Tiffany Carbonneau, a Louisville-based projection artist who walks this line between accessibility and complexity. She is interested in the complex web of relationships between people, places, and history, and produces research-based works that communicate this density of place and memory for a wide audience. These projections take on the scale of architecture but do so in order to amplify and layer the rich detail and texture of the archive. Drawing from research into local histories, her works think about social and historical site as well as architectural form while connecting to the concerns of the present. Upon joining the planning committee for the ARTECHA Festival due to my research in media art and public projection, I immediately thought of her work as a way to point to how this kind of art practice can grapple with social issues and respond to place.

At Miami, Carbonneau has used the McGuffey Readers as her point of departure for a new projection, *Boats against the Current*. These readers, which were created by a former Miami professor and housed in our special collections, were hugely influential in the development of American primary school education and found in schoolhouses throughout 19th century United States. Though connected to a desire for widespread literacy and education, their pages have their own troubling gaps and omissions, particularly with regard to representing the diversity of the nation and responding to the injustices of slavery during the height of their popularity. Carbonneau's layering of the contents of their pages draws upon the readers' mission but complicates their legacy. She updates the readers' lessons and goals by addressing contemporary obstacles to education and social mobility, starting through the lens of migration. The illustrations and texts from the readers are densely layered with maps visualizing steamboat routes to the United States, found home movies from anonymous families of the past, 19th century stereoscope photographs of schoolhouses and educations, newspaper headlines, and vibrant data visualization of the correlation between our widening income gap with decreased social mobility and access to education. This so-called "Gatsby Curve" is itself a layered reference to our history of inequality, referring to the iconic Jazz Age tale of class immobility and the empty promises of the American Dream whose final lines inspired the projection's title.

During an initial research visit by the artist last fall, we tested projections at various sites on campus and settled on the corner of Harrison Hall, the former site of Old Main where Miami's first classes were held. At our present moment when public education finds itself constantly under threat, this message is urgent and necessary—making it appropriate to be amplified on the edifices of public higher education. The dramatic scale and rich imagery and animation of the work attracts passersby through a projection that wraps around the building's southwest corner and is visible along a sizable portion of Slant Walk. By reaching an audience going about their Friday or Saturday night and not primed to look at art, the work opens up multiple potential experiences and takeaways for viewers, from those that merely glance up as they pass to those that stay for the work's entire eleven minute loop.

It is my hope that by activating campus public space in such a way, this project, along with others in the ARTECHA Festival, will demonstrate how public artists can employ technology in the service of art that goes beyond spectacle, has a message, and generates experiences of empathy, dialogue, and discovery in our public spaces.

—Annie Dell'Aria, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Art History

ARTECHA SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Friday, May 3 and Saturday May 4

PROJECTION MAPPING

Boats against the Current by Tiffany Carbonneau

Dusk - 10:30 pm. Southwest corner of Harrison Hall, along Slant Walk.

MULTIMEDIA PROJECTION

Ensemble Parallax Projection Experience by Ensemble Parallax and Per Boland

Dusk - 10:30 pm. Exterior of Hall Auditorium facing Spring St.

SOUNDSCAPE & MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION

And that's as far as the story goes by Diane Fellows

6:00 - 10:30 pm. Southwest corner of Alumni Hall facing Spring St.

GEO-MAPPING VISUALIZATION

by Eric Hodgson, Elizabeth Dirska, and Ben Smith

For details see artecha-miamioh.com/geomapping-visualization

VIRTUAL REALITY

Center for Innovation: Redesigning Miami with Virtual Reality by Brian Oldiges

6:00 - 10:30 pm. Alumni Hall Atrium.

STUDENT EXHIBITION

Project, Animate, Activate: Student work in projection mapping & animation

6:00 - 10:30 pm. Alumni Hall

Sunday, May 5

ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC & MULTIMEDIA CONCERT

Ensemble Parallax

7:30 pm - Hall Auditorium

GEO-MAPPING VISUALIZATION

by Eric Hodgson, Elizabeth Dirska, and Ben Smith

Additional Information Coming Soon

