



Wadsworth Atheneum
Museum of Art

Coney Island Symposium: An Intersection of Art and Identity

February 28, 2015

Experience the lure and powerful influence of Coney Island through the eyes of artists, filmmakers, and social historians. This interdisciplinary symposium will investigate major themes and questions central to the exhibition *Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland, 1861-2008*.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

9:00 am

Coffee and Coney Donuts

9:30 am

Welcome – Aetna Theater

Susan L. Talbott, Director and CEO, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

9:35 am

Overview

Anne Butler Rice, Public Programs Manager, Wadsworth Atheneum

Deborah Gaudet, Curator of Film and Theater, Wadsworth Atheneum

9:45 – 10:30 am

Keynote Address

Robin Jaffee Frank, Exhibition Curator, Chief Curator and Kriebel Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture, Wadsworth Atheneum

10:45 – 11:45 am

Panel Discussion I: *Nightmares and Fantasies: Painting Coney Island*

Many artists working across a range of styles and traditions have depicted collective American anxieties and aspirations through their career-long engagements with Coney Island.

Moderator: Dr. Robin Jaffee Frank, Exhibition Curator

Panelists: Daze, Arnold Mesches, Frederick Brosen, Marie Roberts, and Joseph Koerner (Victor S. Thomas Professor of the History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University, and son of artist Henry Koerner)

11:45 am – 1:00 pm

Lunch and Exhibition Viewing

1:00 – 2:00 pm

Panel Discussion II: *Race and Identity at Coney Island*

This session, held in collaboration with The Amistad Center for Art & Culture, will explore how race and ethnicity are central to our understanding of the social identity of Coney Island, and a subject of cultural representations of this entertainment capital from the mid-nineteenth century to the present.

Introduction: Olivia White, Executive Director, The Amistad Center for Art & Culture

Moderator: Robert E. Steele, former Executive Director, David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park, NEH Consultant

Panelists: Davarian Baldwin, Robyn Autry

2:15 – 3:15 pm

Panel Discussion III: *Coney on the Silver Screen*

Coney Island has served a starring role in cinema from the inception of the medium in the late nineteenth century to the present day. From Classical Hollywood romances to experimental documentaries to action-packed thrillers, Coney Island has surfaced on screen in many subtle, sensational, and riveting ways. This session will explore why Coney Island has been and continues to be such a desirable setting and subject for filmmakers of all genres to explore, and what cinematic portrayals of this amusement destination reveal about American culture and identity.

Moderator: Joshua Glick, Assistant Professor of English and Film Studies at Hendrix College.

Panelists: Charles Musser, Nick Carr.

3:15 pm

Closing Remarks

3:30 – 4:30 pm

Special Presentations and Conversations with Curators

- **Presentation on the Coney Island History Project** with Charles Denson, consultant and director of Coney Island History Project
- **Artists in the Galleries**
Artists Daze, Rick Brosen, Marie Roberts, and Arnold Mesches will be stationed in the galleries to discuss their work.
- **Curators in the Galleries**
Talk with Curators Robin Jaffee Frank and Erin Monroe in *Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland*, and with William Frank Mitchell in The Amistad Center for Art & Culture's Exhibition *This is My Story, This is My Song*.

Program schedule subject to change.

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MODERATOR & PANELIST BIOS



Susan L. Talbott is Director and CEO of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. Before coming to the Wadsworth, she was Director of Smithsonian Arts at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (2005-08), and the Des Moines Art Center (1998-2005.) She also served as the director of the Visual Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts (1989-92) and began her museum career in New York as Assistant Director at the Queens Museum and then as Branch Museum Director at the Whitney Museum of American Art during the 1980s and 90s. Talbott is a Harvard University Fellow and an alumna of its Art Museum Director's Program.

She received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Alumna Achievement Award from her alma mater, Pratt Institute.

Panel I: *Nightmares and Fantasies: Painting Coney Island*



Keynote Address and Moderator: Robin Jaffee Frank, the Chief Curator and Kriebler Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, was formerly the Alice and Allan Kaplan Senior Associate Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture at the Yale University Art Gallery. At both museums, she has been involved in planning a major reinstallation of the collections in newly renovated galleries.

Dr. Frank has lectured and written on American visual culture and social history from the colonial to contemporary periods.

Among her exhibition catalogues are *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures* (2000) and *Charles Demuth Poster Portraits: 1923–1929* (1994). She is a co-organizer of the traveling exhibition and publication *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery* (2008). She appeared as an on-camera expert in *Art through Time: A Global View* on WNET-TV/Thirteen (2011). Dr. Frank planned the traveling exhibition and publication, *Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland, 1861–2008*. She received a BA from Brandeis University in Fine Arts and English and American Literature, and an MA and PhD from Yale University in the History of Art.



Frederick Brosen's watercolors have been featured in over 30 solo museum and gallery exhibitions across the country, most recently at the South Street Seaport Museum and at Hirschl & Adler Modern in NYC, both in 2012. His work is in the permanent collections of over a dozen museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the New York Historical Society. He is the recipient of the City College of New York Career Achievement Award in 2011, and of two Pollack-Krasner Foundation grants. In 2006 a major exhibition of his watercolors was featured at the Museum of the City of New York in conjunction with the publication of a monograph of his

NYC watercolors, with an introduction by Ric Burns, *Still New York*. He is represented by Hirschl & Adler Modern in New York, and his work is featured in *Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland*, premiering at the Wadsworth Atheneum and traveling to three additional museums, including the Brooklyn Museum. In March 2016 an exhibition of his series of Rome watercolors is scheduled at Hirschl & Adler Modern in New York.



Daze (Chris Daze Ellis) began his prolific career painting the gritty New York subways in the mid-70s while attending the High School of Art & Design. He is one of the few artists from that period to make the successful transition from the subways to the studio. His first group show, *Beyond Words*, was held at the Mudd club in New York in 1981. Showing alongside artists such as Jean Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, Daze sold his first work, an impromptu collaboration with Basquiat, from this show. His first solo show was held a year later in 1982 at Fashion Moda, a gallery in the Bronx. Daze has since had numerous solo shows in Monte Carlo, Hong Kong, Paris, New

York, Beijing, Chicago, and Singapore. His work has been included in group shows and museum surveys internationally.

Daze has also completed many public art projects including a mural for the Star ferry terminal in Hong Kong, the design of a train station in Hannover, Germany, alongside fellow artists Lee Quinones and Crash, and a mural for the Vivo City shopping center in Singapore. He has lectured at Hofstra University and the Bronx Museum and held youth workshops with kids during the Hutuz festival in Rio de Janeiro. Daze's paintings are in the private collections of Madonna and Eric Clapton. His work can be found in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, The Brooklyn Museum, The Museum of the City of New York, The Groninger Museum in the Netherlands and The Ludwig Museum in Aachen, Germany. Daze lives and works in New York City.



Joseph Leo Koerner is the Victor S. Thomas Professor of the History of Art and Architecture, and Director of Undergraduate Studies at Harvard University. A specialist on Northern European art, he has written books on self-portraiture in the German Renaissance, on Protestant image-breaking, on Romantic landscape painting, on word and image in Paul Klee, and on the fantastical art of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel. A member of the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he was a 2009 recipient of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Distinguished Achievement Award. His current work concerns the art and

culture of Vienna in the modern period. The son of the Viennese-born American painter Henry Koerner, he has also curated exhibitions of the work of his father, whose art is included in *Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland*.



Arnold Mesches was born in the Bronx, New York. He has had 141 solo exhibitions to date, as well as countless group shows, and is in the permanent collections of The Whitney Museum of American Art, the National Gallery, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art among others. He has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts, a New York State Fellowship, a Florida State Fellowship, and three Pollack-Krasner Grants. In 2009, the University of Florida awarded him an Honorary Doctorate. He lives in Gainesville, Florida, and Brooklyn, New York, and is married to novelist Jill Ciment.



Marie Roberts is a painter and native New Yorker, living and working in Southern Brooklyn. She received a BA in art from Brooklyn College and a MFA in painting from Queens College, both CUNY. Roberts is a Professor of Art at Fairleigh Dickinson University and Artist in Residence at the not for profit arts center Coney Island USA. Since 1997 Roberts has been painting the banners for Coney Island USA programs, among them the Coney Island Circus Sideshow, the Mermaid Parade and the Coney Island Museum. Growing up steeped in family lore from the Dreamland Circus Sideshow in the 1920s, Roberts now shares the history of Coney Island with 21st century visitors to

her studio and the Coney Island Museum. Her painting in the exhibition, *A Congress of Curious Peoples*, features the Dreamland Circus Sideshow on the left and the modern Coney Island Circus Sideshow on the right.

Panel II: *Race and Identity at Coney Island*



Introductions: Olivia White is Executive Director of The Amistad Center for Art & Culture, Inc., which is housed within the Wadsworth Atheneum. Ms. White joined the staff of The Amistad Center in January 2000 and was named Executive Director in 2004. Prior to that Ms. White held positions with the City of New York, Housing and Development Administration and at CIGNA. Ms. White serves on the Governance Board of Hartford Performs, Advisory Board of the Hartford History Center at the Hartford Public Library, Board of Overseers for The Bushnell, the Advisory Council of the Hartford Heritage Project at Capital Community College, the

Connecticut Civil War Commemoration Commission and the State Advisory Council of the US Civil Rights Commission. She holds a BA from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and a MBA from the University of Connecticut.



Moderator: Robert E. Steele, PhD, is the former Executive Director of the David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park. Under Dr. Steele's leadership, the Center became nationally known in the field of African American Visual Arts. Steele established a visual arts education program, including lectures and conferences, and founded several endowed funds to support the Visual Art program of the Center. Prior to this position, he held several positions at University of Maryland, College Park, including Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychology and

Associate Dean of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences.

Steele has written and contributed to a number of publications in the field of African American Art, including several entries in the St. James Guide to Black Artists. In addition, Dr. Steele has a number of advisory and board memberships, such as the Governing Board of the Yale University Gallery of Art, the Board of Directors of the National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta and the Founder of the National Black Arts Festival's Collectors Guild, the Advisory Committee of the Experimental Printmaking Institute at Lafayette College, the Advisory Board of Brodsky Center for Innovative Print and Paper at Rutgers University and the Board of Director of Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia. Steele is also a member of the Collectors Club of Washington, D.C., Inc. and the New York Print Club.

Steele and wife Jean are co-owners of the Steele Collection of prints and works on paper by African American artists. An exhibition of 62 works from their collection, "Successions: Print by African American Artists from the Jean and Robert Steele Collection" has been traveling to several venues on the East Coast since it first opened at The Art Gallery at the University of Maryland, College Park, in April 2002.



Robyn Autry is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Wesleyan University. Autry is a cultural sociologist with broad interests in racial and ethnic identity, collective memory and trauma, visual culture, and urban studies. Her article examining problems of heritage preservation and urban development in Johannesburg appeared in the discipline's public journal (*Contexts* 2010) and an article on the politics of apartheid era monuments in democratic South Africa appeared in *Theory, Culture, and Society* (2012). Her work on representations of racial violence at US museums was published in *Theory & Society* (2013). She has also contributed book chapters to two

edited volumes: *Memory and Post-War Memorials: Confronting the Violence of the Past and Memory* (Palgrave 2014). Her book manuscript "Desegregating the Past: The Public Life of Memory in the US and South Africa" is currently under review at Columbia University Press.



Davarian L. Baldwin is the Paul E. Raether Distinguished Professor of American Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. Alongside numerous essays and scholarly articles, he is the author of *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (UNC, 2007) and co-editor (with Minkah Makalani) of the essay collection, *Escape From New York: The New Negro Renaissance beyond Harlem* (University of Minnesota, 2013). Baldwin is currently at work on two new single-authored projects, *Land of Darkness: Chicago and the Making of Race in Modern America* (Oxford University Press) and *UniverCities: How Higher Education is*

Transforming Urban America. He is also editing the *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance: Using the Present to Excavate the Past* (Greenwood Publishers) and served as a consultant for the 2014-15 international art retrospective, *Archibald Motley: Jazz Age Modernist*. Baldwin is the author of *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007). He is Co-editor with Minkah Makalani of *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance beyond Harlem* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013)

Panel III: Coney on the Silver Screen



Moderator: Joshua Glick is Assistant Professor of English and Film Studies at Hendrix College and is currently on leave and completing his Mellon Postdoc in the Integrated Humanities at Yale University. His research and teaching interests focus on documentary film, television and web-based media, urban history, and Hollywood as an evolving mode of artistic and cultural production. Josh has designed and taught such popular courses as "Film, Video, and American History" and "Digital Documentary in the Age of the Internet." His writing has

appeared in the scholarly journals *The Moving Image*, *Film History*, and the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*. He is currently revising his book manuscript on Los Angeles documentary in the 1960s-1970s. For this Coney Island exhibition, Josh has contributed essays for the museum catalog and will introduce numerous films for the accompanying film series. Josh also co-directed the short documentary on artist Marie Roberts titled *This Side of Dreamland*. He can be contacted at joshua.glick@yale.edu.



Nick Carr is a location scout based in New York City. His work involves finding the perfect spot in NYC – both indoors and outdoors – for movie scenes. About his work, Carr says, “I’ve been pretty much everywhere, from the highest rooftops to the deepest subway tunnels, from abandoned ruins to zillion-dollar luxury penthouse apartments. What always amazes me about New York is how much there is to see if you take the time to look. Every street has a hidden gem or two, and yet they go largely ignored by the thousands of passersby daily who simply don’t have the time to pay attention.”



Charles Musser is Professor of Film & Media Studies at Yale University. He authored the award winning *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (1990) and many other subsequent books on silent cinema. One of the contributors to the *Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland*, his writings have appeared in numerous exhibition catalogs including *Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film, 1890-1910* (2005) as second author and *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution* (2013).

Special Presentation on the Coney Island History Project



Charles Denson is a Coney Island native, author, photographer, filmmaker, and art director. He co-founded the Coney Island History Project in 2004 and serves as the organization’s Executive Director and curator. Denson was a consultant and a contributor to the catalogue for the Coney Island exhibition. His book *Coney Island: Lost and Found* (2003) was awarded the 2003 “New York Book of the Year Award” by the New York Society Library. He has directed two award-winning films about Coney Island: *The Last Immortal*, about gang life in Coney Island, and *Prince of Mermaid Avenue*, the story of Mermaid Avenue’s beloved shopkeeper, Jimmy Prince.

Denson has documented Coney Island for over 40 years and is an outspoken advocate for preservation and environmental issues concerning the neighborhood.

Charles Denson's presentation highlights the mission and accomplishments of the Coney Island History Project, a not-for-profit history organization dedicated to preserving and honoring Coney Island's unique heritage through oral history, exhibitions, walking tours, publications, film documentaries, school presentations, and community programs. This presentation will outline the tumultuous transformation of Coney's amusement zone during the last decade.

Astroland owner Carol Hill Albert and Charles Denson founded the organization in 2004 and began recording oral histories in a "Memory Booth" on the Coney Island Boardwalk. In 2008, the CIHP won an award from the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York (ART) for "Innovative Use of Archives." The CIHP's archive of photographs, artifacts, books, ephemera, and periodicals were made available for the Wadsworth Atheneum's *Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland, 1861–2008*. The CIHP exhibit center is located below the Wonder Wheel, in the heart of Coney Island's amusement zone. Visit www.coneyislandhistory.org for more information.

Curators in the Galleries



Frank Mitchell, Curator and Assistant Director of The Amistad Center for Art & Culture, specializes in African-American historical and visual culture. He received a BA from Bowdoin College, an MA in African-American Studies from Yale University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. Past Amistad Center exhibitions include *War Prizes: The Cultural Legacy of Slavery & the Civil War*, *High Water Marks: Art & ReNEWal after Katrina*, *Soulfood: African American Cooking and Creativity*, and *Hairitage*. He is a co-author of the anthology *African American Connecticut Explored*.



Erin Monroe is the Robert H. Schutz Jr. Assistant Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art where she works with an extensive collection encompassing colonial portraiture, Hudson River School landscapes, Connecticut Impressionism, and American modernism and surrealism. Since joining the Atheneum staff in 2007, Monroe has curated or co-curated numerous exhibitions including: *Andrew Wyeth: Looking Beyond* (2012), *Patti Smith: Camera Solo* (2011), *Colts & Quilts: The Civil War Remembered* (2011), and *American Moderns on Paper: Masterworks from the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art* (2009). She holds a

BA in art history from Northwestern University and an MA from Hunter College, with a concentration in 20th-century American art. She assisted Robin Jaffee Frank on many aspects of *Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland, 1861–2008*.

Symposium Organizers



Anne Butler Rice is Public Programs Manager at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, responsible for conceiving and implementing engaging educational programs surrounding the collections and special exhibitions for a diverse adult and family audience. Ms. Rice has been in the field of museum education since 1991, holding positions at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and The Cloisters. She has taught at the Yale University Art Gallery, the Cathedral of St. Mary in Aachen, Germany, and at Brandeis University. Ms. Rice holds a BA in the History of Art and Religion and a Minor in English and American Literature

from Bowdoin College, and an MA in Religion with a concentration in Art History from Yale University.



Deborah A. Gaudet has been on staff of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art since 1989. In 2004, Gaudet was named the museum's first Curator of Film and Theater. In overseeing the Aetna Theater, Gaudet programs and manages the cinema series; administers a theater rental program for community groups; produces multi-media performances; manages the First Thursday evening events; and works collaboratively with many arts organizations, community groups, and artists.

In 2012, Gaudet moderated a panel discussion at the Sundance Film Festival. She has been a featured speaker at various institutions and organizations, including Eastern Connecticut State College, St. Joseph College, New Britain Museum of Art, Mystic Arts Center, Real Art Ways, and the Lucy Robbins Welles Library in Newington (at which she curated and introduced an annual Italian film series for 10 years). Gaudet also taught a cinema appreciation class for the Adult Learning Program (sponsored by UCONN) from 1999–2002.

Gaudet has attended and taken groups to film festivals around the world, including the Sundance Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival; Palm Springs International Film Festival; Tribeca Film Festival, Prague Febio Fest; Thessaloniki Film Festival in Greece; San Sebastian International Film Festival in Spain, and Berlin Film Festival.

Gaudet is currently on the Board of Young Studios, sat on the Board of CATO (Connecticut Association of Theater Owners) from 2005–12; was a member of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters from 1997–2005; sat on the Board of Trustees of the Prudence Crandall Center of New Britain, Connecticut from 1995–2003 where she served as President from 2000–03.