

On View

March 31, 2019 — March 31, 2020

Opening Reception

September 12, 2019

6pm - 9pm

Free and open to the public.

Panel Discussion

A part of the DyckmanDISCOVERED project, historians will engage with the community to discuss the updating of narratives told within historic house museums.

Fall 2019 (date to be determined)

Free and open to the public.

Please RSVP to: development@dyckmanfarmhouse.org

Artist Talk

Peter Hoffmeister discusses his exhibition with guest curator

Gabriel de Guzman.

January 25, 2020

3pm - 5pm

Free and open to the public.

Please RSVP to: development@dyckmanfarmhouse.org

All photos by Alexander Perrelli.

Ground Revision is made possible in part with funding from the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation and administered by LMCC. UMEZ enhances the economic vitality of all communities in Upper Manhattan through job creation, corporate alliances, strategic investments, and small business assistance. LMCC empowers artists by providing them with networks, resources, and support, to create vibrant, sustainable communities in Manhattan and beyond.



Peter Hoffmeister



Ground
Revision

Curated by Gabriel de Guzman

Director's Forward

It has long been a goal of the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum to add to the history of this site in a meaningful way—by representing the untold history of the enslaved and free people that lived and worked at this house and throughout what we now call Inwood. We have been working with elected officials and the City of New York to commemorate the Inwood Slave Burial Ground, a project that inspired our artist in residence Peter Hoffmeister to create site-specific installations for our period rooms. During his year-long residency, Hoffmeister created works in response to the house and its history, creating a dialogue between his studio practice and research in our archives, culminating in this exhibition, *Ground Revision*.

With the installation of his thought provoking work, we can create a conversation about whose history we tell, and why certain individuals have historically been left out of the conversation. So far, we have been able to piece together the legacy of white landowners, but not the enslaved or free people that kept the farm operating, as the Dyckmans and other landowners kept few records on them despite the important role they played. This exhibit is a first step for the farmhouse in expanding the narrative of the museum and the community to include the important figures whom we know little about.

We plan to conduct additional research through a grant from The New York Community Trust, and expand upon what we know about the enslaved and free people in Upper Manhattan in order to infuse this information into everything we do.

Meredith S. Horsford
Executive Director, Dyckman Farmhouse Museum



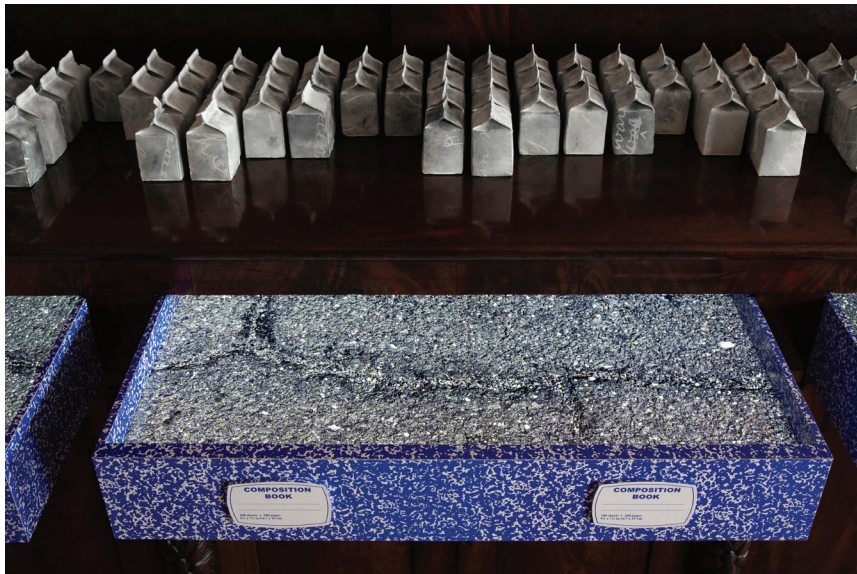
Uncovering Sacred Ground

by Gabriel de Guzman

Peter Hoffmeister's sculptures and installations are informed by a high level of research and experimentation. When working site-specifically, he delves deeply into the location's history, uncovering untold or forgotten narratives and revealing the institutionalized cultural ideologies that not only shape our history but also resonate in our present. Grounding his endeavors in this type of historical inquiry, Hoffmeister approaches current concerns by exposing firmly established roots that require a fully developed context to understand.

When invited to the Dyckman Farmhouse to participate as its first artist in residence, Hoffmeister brought his sense of stringent and thoughtful inquiry to the task. Rather than shy away from offensive aspects of the historic home's rich yet complicated past, the artist, with the encouragement and help of the Dyckman Farmhouse staff, felt compelled to tackle a lesser known facet of history that deserved greater attention. Aligned with the Museum's initiative DyckmanDISCOVERED,¹ Hoffmeister decided to create work that addresses the history of the enslaved in Inwood, attempting to acknowledge those forgotten individuals who lived and labored here, while recognizing the lasting consequences of the atrocities that took place. In doing so, he also exposes the legacy of racism that has persisted since European colonists first set foot in the Americas.

In 1991, an African Burial Ground was found in Lower Manhattan, the burial site of enslaved and free Africans from the 1630s to 1795, bringing greater awareness to the history of slavery in New York. From its introduction in Manhattan by the Dutch in 1626, slavery lasted in New York until its gradual abolition from the end of the 18th century until 1827. The discovery of the African Burial Ground, containing the remains of more than 400 enslaved men, women, and children, offered proof of this objectionable past. In 1993, the site received official recognition as a national historic



March 31, 1777 and Nutrition Facts (detail from parlor), 2019, medium-density fiberboard, composition notebook covers, Plexiglas, Duratrans prints, and LEDs; ceramic and graphite; dimensions variable.

Both pieces located throughout the house on the first and second floors, and in the kitchen.

place, and in 2003, the ancestral remains were reinterred on the preserved section of the site in handmade wooden coffins. A memorial was built in 2007 to commemorate the enslaved Africans who contributed to building New York City from the colonial period to early American rule.²

Hoffmeister created the works for *Ground Revision* in response to the lack of signage or markers to commemorate the site of another burial ground for enslaved Africans at the opposite end of Manhattan. Discovered in 1903 when workers were building new roads in burgeoning Inwood, the human remains of enslaved Africans were excavated, discarded, and stolen as curiosities.³ Development in the neighborhood ensued, the former cemetery was paved over, and its presence was all but forgotten. Because of lack of documentation, and with the remains gone, both the archival and material evidence are missing. Hoffmeister's interventions attempt to reinsert the lost narratives back into the historic Dyckman Farmhouse, while being aware that they can never be fully recovered. Acknowledgment is but one step in the imperfect process toward honoring those African American individuals whose lives were disregarded.

In recent years, gravesites of enslaved Africans were discovered in East Harlem and at Hunts Point in the Bronx. Plans are in place for a memorial and cultural center to be built at the Harlem African Burial Ground. At the Hunts Point Slave Burial Ground, currently there is no official marker at the site, but efforts are underway for a memorial project there, and two teachers at nearby PS48 are conducting research with their students and organizing educational programs.⁴ On August 1, 2018, State Senator Marisol Alcántara held a press conference calling on the city and local community board to create a memorial at the site of the Inwood Slave Burial Ground.⁵ While formal plans for a commemorative marker have yet to be put in place, the DyckmanDISCOVERED initiative and Hoffmeister's project are part of continuing efforts to bring awareness and raise public interest in properly recognizing it as a historic site.

With the Dyckman's own history as slave owners in mind, Hoffmeister grapples with attempting to understand this country's past and present, creating four groups of work for his site-specific

project at the Dyckman Farmhouse. In the first series, titled *March 31, 1777*, composition book covers intervene in several furniture pieces throughout the historic home, and open drawers reveal illuminated photos of the cracked pavement from the current site of the Inwood Slave Burial Ground. The second group of works, *Nutrition Facts*, resembles milk cartons that are given to schoolchildren to drink. A third installation, *Storyteller*, displayed in the Dyckman Farmhouse's relic room, addresses the omission of historical facts by presenting informational markers that have been left blank. With these sculptures, Hoffmeister questions the way history is taught, which narratives are given voice, and which ones are suppressed.

The fourth and final installation is titled *Francis Cudjoe*. Composed of lantern sculptures, this work honors Francis Cudjoe—the only enslaved African American in the Dyckman household who is identified by name in surviving historical records. Rather than make the lanterns out of traditional tin, Hoffmeister decided to transform them materially to give them their own significance. The artist chose ceramic for the lanterns to refer back to his milk carton sculptures, thereby serving as a counterpoint to the problem of racism as a chronic subtext in American history that the milk cartons represent. In this case, Hoffmeister says, “in remembering Francis Cudjoe we not only memorialize an individual, we come to understand that our American present is inextricably linked to an oppressive American past.”

Notes

1. The Dyckman Farmhouse has been working to research the history of the enslaved through a project called DyckmanDISCOVERED, which is funded by the New York Community Trust. This initiative investigates the stories of enslaved peoples of the Dyckman family and of, what is now, Inwood. It is a priority for the Museum to develop a more complete narrative that is representative of all who lived and worked in the Dyckman Farmhouse and property. Their efforts combine historic research with arts and culture programming to benefit the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum audience today and long into the future.

2. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, “Uncovering, Discovering, and Recovering: Digging in New York’s Save Past Beyond the African Burial Ground,” and Sherril D. Wilson, “African Burial Ground,” in Berlin and Harris, eds., *Slavery in New York* (New York: New Press, 2005), pp. 3, 4, 7. For more information about the African Burial Ground National Monument, go to <https://www.nps.gov/afbg>.

3. “Two Ancient Burying Grounds of New York City: One to be Preserved, the Other Wholly Obliterated,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, April 12, 1903; also American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, 1905 Annual Report, p. 42.

4. For more information about the Harlem African Burial Ground and its recognition as a historic site, visit <https://www.habgtaskforce.org/home>. And for more information about the efforts of the Hunts Point Slave Burial Ground Project, go to <https://hpsbg.weebly.com>.

5. Gregg McQueen, “Far from Forgotten: Call for Memorial at Inwood Slave Burial Site,” *Manhattan Times*, August 8, 2018.

Works

March 31, 1777

The title of this work, *March 31, 1777*, refers to the lone inscription on one of the 36 rough-hewn grave markers that were found on the original site of the Inwood Slave Burial Ground. The other stones were blank, leaving no clues as to the identities of those who were buried there. Their memories have since been erased by an asphalt parking lot, along with an adjacent school building and auto repair shop, which now inhabit the location.



March 31, 1777 (above, second floor detail; right, kitchen detail), 2019, medium-density fiberboard, composition notebook covers, Plexiglas, Duratrans prints, and LEDs. Dimensions variable.

Located throughout the house on the first and second floors, and in the kitchen.



In several furniture pieces in the Dyckman Farmhouse, Hoffmeister replaced the drawers with ones clad in a marbled pattern like those on the covers of composition books used by schoolchildren. Inside the drawers are photos of the weathered blacktop pavement that now conceals the burial ground; the images glow from beneath as if history is struggling to be brought to light. Through this project, Hoffmeister wishes to raise awareness of this important history in the hopes that it will lead to civic commemoration of the individuals who were once buried in this site.

Francis Cudjoe

Hoffmeister's lantern sculptures illuminate the name Francis Cudjoe. Because of poor record keeping, there is a paucity of information about the enslaved African Americans who lived and worked at the Dyckman estate. Though Cudjoe is the only one identified by a full name, there is little else known about him besides the fact that he was an enslaved man of African descent who was "owned" by the Dyckman family and then freed in 1809 at the age of 40. Cudjoe requested that Jacobus Dyckman sign an official document stating that he was being manumitted (released from slavery). This paper is the only remaining evidence of Cudjoe's existence. The reason Cudjoe was freed is uncertain, although in the document Dyckman wrote, "on consideration of motive of humanity." It is worth noting that many owners freed slaves who were ill or unable to perform their duties, which is a possibility historians have suggested in this case.

Hoffmeister chose the form of colonial lanterns as an initial gesture toward the idea of memorializing Cudjoe, while playing on the metaphor of the lantern's use in finding one's way in darkness. The punched tin of this type of lantern projects interesting patterns onto the walls and ceiling when lit. The designs Hoffmeister created depart from the usual geometric motifs found on antiques; here the points of light coalesce around each letter of Cudjoe's name, as if trying to bring it out of obscurity. In this way, Hoffmeister suggests that Cudjoe is an individual as worthy of being remembered as any of the Dyckmans. Although it is not known whether Cudjoe was buried at the Inwood African Burial Ground, Hoffmeister nonetheless presents this work to challenge the notion that slavery was but a footnote at the Dyckman Farmhouse.

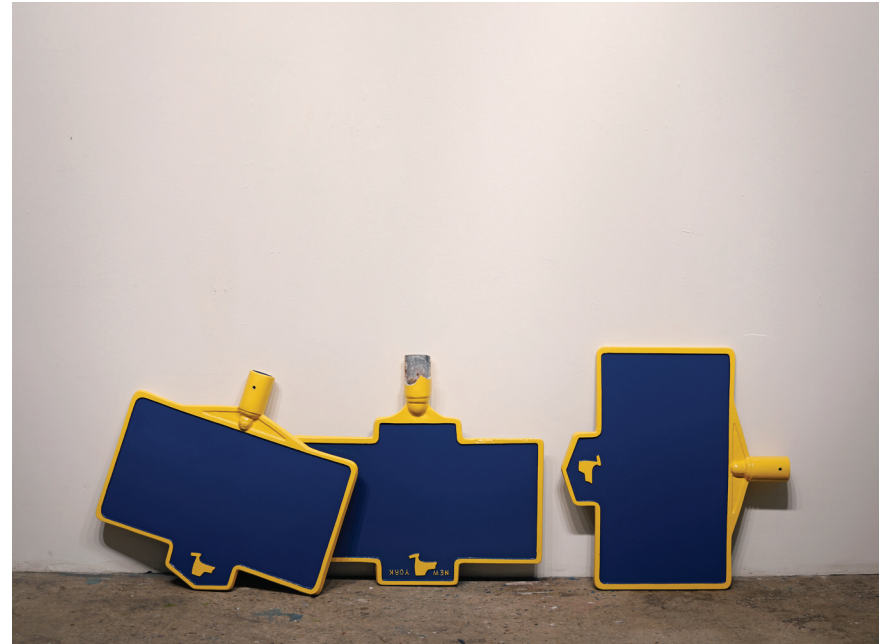


Francis Cudjoe, 2019, ceramic, graphite and LEDs, 84" x 24" x 80".

Storyteller

In the Relic Room of the Dyckman Farmhouse, Hoffmeister presents three blank New York State historic markers, as if awaiting commemorative text. They serve as reminders that the nearby site of the Inwood Slave Burial Ground is still without a marker. The three plaques suggest that there are other sites with other stories that also need to be remembered and that this is an issue which is not unique to Inwood. In fact, African burial grounds were also recently discovered in East Harlem and at Hunts Point in the Bronx. Ultimately, Hoffmeister aims to connect this local history to the city's larger past, as well as to the ideology of the United States.

Hoffmeister chose the format of the NYS historic marker to point to the conventions of how we remember history in public places and how an officious aesthetic can be used to express authenticity. The NYS historic marker program was initiated in 1926 and managed by the Education Department's State History office to provide the public with knowledge of significant historic events and locations. In Hoffmeister's version, the markers' lack of text seems conspicuous. On one level, they call attention to the absence of untold histories by presenting an empty metaphorical container that is meant to hold and share them. In another sense, the blankness speaks to our present day anxiety with facing our past, as we try to understand its complicated, and often unsavory, facets and their implications for our collective future.



Storyteller, 2019, painted cast aluminum, 36" x 24" x 4" each.

Nutrition Facts

Made of white ceramic and coated with graphite, these sculptures resemble milk cartons that are given to schoolchildren. The boxed beverage acts as a stand-in for the educational textbook, a vessel that holds contents intended to be consumed by students. Hoffmeister decided to use ceramic as a material for this work, reflecting on the decorative arts in the historic house, such as earthenware cups and dishes. He applied graphite to the surface of the ceramic forms after they were fired, relating to the idea of students writing in their notebooks with pencil.



Nutrition Facts (above, second floor; right, parlor detail), 2019, ceramic and graphite, dimensions variable.

Located throughout the house on the first and second floors, and in the kitchen.



Cursive writing emerges from the gray background but remains illegible. The text is quoted from letters written by Isaac Michael Dyckman in the mid-19th century, describing current events and expressing racist views. He expounds on the rights of slave owners, believing they must be respected in the context of property rights. Refusing to give Dyckman a platform for his racist concepts, Hoffmeister reveals only fragments of writing, which become scattered traces, like fingerprints, but also exposes the subtext of racist beliefs that are a common theme throughout American history.



Nutrition Facts (detail from kitchen), 2019, ceramic and graphite, dimensions variable.

Located throughout the house on the first and second floors, and in the kitchen.

Peter Hoffmeister creates work that challenges dominate cultural narratives in the United States, using historical events, places, and documents as a lens through which to understand the present. Often his works are site-specific in nature, informed by extensive research, and fostered by a holistic approach to use of material and mode of display. In addition to the Dyckman Farmhouse, he has created site-specific works for various locations including: *Bill(board)*, a billboard in Washington Heights, *Unpacked*, a solo exhibition in the period rooms of Morris-Jumel Mansion, and various work for The Church of St. Paul the Apostle. He received his BFA from the Fashion Institute of Technology in 2007, and his MFA from Hunter College in 2017. He is currently adjunct faculty in the Art Department at Hunter College.

Gabriel de Guzman is Curator & Director of Exhibitions at Smack Mellon, where he organizes group and solo exhibitions that feature emerging and under-recognized mid-career artists whose work explores critical, socially relevant issues. Before joining Smack Mellon's staff in 2017, de Guzman was Curator of Visual Arts at Wave Hill, organizing solo projects for emerging artists, as well as thematic group exhibitions that investigate aspects of human connections to the natural world. As a guest curator, he has presented shows at BronxArtSpace, Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs, Rush Arts Gallery, En Foco at Andrew Freedman Home, Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance, and the Bronx Museum's 2013 AIM Biennial. Prior to Wave Hill, he was a curatorial assistant at The Jewish Museum. His essays have been published in *Nueva Luz: Photographic Journal* and in catalogues for the Arsenal Gallery at Central Park, Kenise Barnes Fine Art, and the art institutions mentioned above. He earned an M.A. in art history from Hunter College and a B.A. in art history from the University of Virginia.