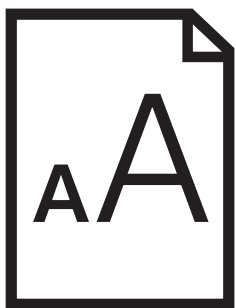


DERRICK ADAMS: VIEW MASTER

On View

Apr 16 –

Sep 7, 2026



Large Format
Text

ICA

For over two decades, Derrick Adams (b. 1970 in Baltimore) has built a vibrant, multidisciplinary practice celebrating contemporary Black life. Working across painting, sculpture, drawing, video, performance, and even puppetry, Adams transforms scenes from family life, urban architecture, public television, fashion, and consumer culture into a bold, unmistakable visual language. His work bursts with saturated colors and maximalist design that intertwine humor with sharp social critique.

Derrick Adams: View Master is the artist's first major survey, presenting more than 100 artworks spanning twenty-five years. This exhibition brings together never-before-seen works from the artist's personal archive alongside new paintings debuting at the ICA. Set within an immersive exhibition design conceived by Adams himself, this project offers a rare glimpse into his expansive vision. His signature blend of representational and geometric imagery depicts people at rest, at play, and in community, insisting on Black joy, leisure, and self-determination as vital and worthy subjects.

The subtitle *View Master* playfully nods to the childhood toy that sparked Adams's youthful imagination — and inspires a new painting — while also signaling the artist's unique perspective on the Black subject and viewer. Across intimate portraits and large-scale installations, his work is rooted in the power of vision to celebrate and affirm identity. Throughout the exhibition, the artist invites viewers into a world where cultural and creative agency

are essential to contemporary life.

Derrick Adams: View Master is organized by Dexter Wimberly, Independent Curator, and Tessa Bachi Haas, Assistant Curator, ICA/Boston.

Special thanks to Derrick Adams, and Alyssa Alexander, Studio Manager, for their close collaboration in conceiving this project.

Leadership support is provided by a sponsorship circle including Adelle Chang and Eddie Yoon, The FLAG Art Foundation, Mathieu O. Gaulin, Girlfriend Fund, John and Rachel Hanselman, and Patrick Planeta and Santiago Varela.

Additional support is provided by Boston Building Wraps, Jean-François and Nathalie Ducrest, Georgia and Jesse Feldman, Gagosian, Melissa Gilliam and William Grobman, Christine and Alan Huber, Stephanie and Tim Ingrassia, Natalie and Jake Lemle, Barbara H. Lloyd, Michelle Morpew, Mark and Marie Schwartz, and the Brizius Family Fund for Artists.



With warmest thanks, we gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the ICA's Avant Guardian Society in making this exhibition possible: Eunhak Bae and Robert Kwak, Lori and Dennis Baldwin and The Paul and Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation, Katrine Bosley, Kate and Chuck Brizius, Katie and Paul Bittenwieser, Stephanie and John Connaughton, Karen Swett Conway and Brian Conway, Steve Corkin and Dan Maddalena, Fotene Demoulas and Tom Coté, Jessica Knez Dulac and Nicolas Dulac and The Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation, Jennifer Epstein and Bill Keravuori, Bridgitt and Bruce Evans, Negin and Oliver Ewald, David Feinberg and Marina Kalb, Georgia and Jesse Feldman, The Fineberg Family, Audrey and Jim Foster, Mathieu O. Gaulin, Hilary and Geoffrey Grove, Jodi and Hal Hess, Barbara and Amos Hostetter, Barbara H. Lloyd and The Leonard and Ruth Horwich Family Foundation, Kristen and Kent Lucken, Tristin and Martin Mannion, Christine and John Maraganore, Christopher R. McGrath, Ted Pappendick and Erica Gervais Pappendick, David and Leslie Puth, Leslie Riedel and Scott Friend, Charles and Fran Rodgers, Mark and Marie Schwartz, Kambiz and Nazgol Shahbazi, Charlotte and Herbert S. Wagner III, Nicole Zatlyn and Jason Weiner, and anonymous donors.

Area 1

When the Stars Align, 2026

Acrylic, fabric collage, and glitter on wood panel

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

LEFT TO RIGHT

Four in One (The Same League), 2008

Faux brick, paneling, hooded sweatshirts, glitter, tempera, and wood

Collection of Josef Vascovitz and Lisa Goodman, Hunts Point, Washington

The Formal, 2013

Faux brick, fabric, enamel, and steel

Collection of Blanchard Nesbitt Family, Chicago

Neighborhood High Rise, 2011

Faux brick, fabric, enamel, and steel

Courtesy the artist

The Royale, 2013

Faux brick, tempera, acrylic, glitter, down vest, asphalt shingles, enamel, and steel

Courtesy the artist

Self-Made Structure, 2011

Mixed media

Private collection

He, Him, They, Them, 2008

Faux stone spray on dress shirts with ties, glitter, faux brick, chalice, and plywood

Courtesy the artist

Adams has long been interested in how memorials channel the essence of people, ideas, and moments in time. *He, Him, They, Them* captures both the uniform dress of civil rights era marchers and the power of mass gatherings like the marches from Selma to Montgomery for voting rights of Black Americans in 1965. Looking through archival imagery of these historic moments, Adams took note of how individual participants appeared “cemented” in time with one another. Through clever use of materials like shirts and ties, and a rigid, stacked composition, he created an embodied monument for those freedom fighters.

Inside Seeing Outside 2, 2012

Faux brick, puffer jacket, plywood, tempera, latex paint, and liquid rubber

Courtesy the artist

In his earlier work, Adams explores the stereotypes attached to objects, colors, textures, symbols, and ideologies, and how these are formed. The brick pattern suggests architectural space, while the puffer jacket marks a culturally iconic piece of clothing. The head is hidden by a blue brick-like block, suggesting that this could be anyone, perhaps even the viewer. As the name suggests, *Inside Seeing Outside 2* reflects the relationship between man and monument as representations of one another. This work, and others within the exhibition, focuses on the manipulation of structure and the shape-shifting force of popular culture in our lives.

Figure in the Urban Landscape 32, 2019

Acrylic, graphite, ink, grip tape, fabric, paper, and model cars on wood panel

Courtesy The Hutson Collection

Style Variation 35, 2020

Acrylic, graphite, and inkjet on canvas in custom gold leaf frame

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Derrick Adam: View Master

Area 2

Hood Rats, 2000

Mickey Mouse ears, durags, and fishing line

Courtesy the artist

Static Distortion Interference, 2012

Digital photograph

Courtesy the artist

Fabrication Station 4, 2016

Fabric collage

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Eye Candy, 2023

Six-panel screen print with relief and collage on paper, custom wallpaper

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Eye Candy builds on Adams's interest in Black American popular culture and its relationship to consumerism and commodification. The repeated masculine portrait is based on an underwear model featured in an early issue of *Ebony* magazine. Various "flavors" of the model, repeated over six screen prints, are framed atop a

Derrick Adam: View Master

rainbow pattern resembling a lollipop. By isolating and reframing the subject, Adams examines how Black masculinity has been historically marketed and visually consumed. As with other works across his practice, the artist asks us to reconsider the ways that desire, race, and commercialization shape cultural identity.

KING, 2010

Faux brick paneling, tempera, paint, spray paint, glitter, and leather jacket

Collection of Tony and Andrea Shore, Baltimore

That Cat Pat, 2013

Cat puppet, wooden arm, glasses, fabric, and plywood

Courtesy the artist

Area 3 Fabrication Station 12, 2017

Fabric collage

Courtesy the artist and Gagolian

LEFT TO RIGHT, FROM OPPOSITE WALL

Orbiting Us 8, 2017

Orbiting Us 2, 2017

Inkjet, paper plate, acrylic, pencil, and cardboard on paper

Courtesy the artist

Future People, 2018

Video (color, sound; 12:18 minutes)

Courtesy the artist

Afrofuturism blends Black history and culture with science fiction, technology, and fantasy to imagine a new era of African and Black liberation. Adams contributes to the Afrofuturist canon by creating out-of-this-world environments, including *Future People*, a series of collages, video animation, and space flight seats. Inspired by Sun Ra's visual album *Space Is the Place* (1974) and the *Star Trek* franchise, *Future People* imagines Black futurism as a realm of discovery. Through a simulated spaceship, viewers encounter celestial bodies alongside African cultural objects, floating figures, and technological artifacts — a cosmic vision celebrating Black existence across past, present, and future.

Orbiting Us 4, 2017

Orbiting Us 6, 2017

Inkjet, paper plate, acrylic, pencil, and cardboard on paper

Courtesy the artist

Area 4

Television & Media have long been at the heart of Adams's practice — he affectionately calls TV his “first classroom.” The colorful pattern on the adjacent wall references the iconic Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) test pattern — better known as TV color bars — the graphic grid once used to calibrate TV screens across America when the artist was a child in the 1970s. Since 2014, Adams has sampled and remixed these patterns in his work, tracing pivotal moments in Black television from the 1970s through the 1990s. This section of his practice explores how media shapes identity, representation, beauty standards, and power in our ever-changing landscape — a particularly urgent discussion given the funding cuts plaguing public broadcasting in the United States, and the use of media as a potent political weapon.

Super Nude 3, 2024

Acrylic, latex paint, and fabric collage on panel in artist frame

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Adams imagined the figure in this painting as a powerful superhero. The work combines this heroic archetype with that of the nude figure, a common theme in Western art history that reflects beauty and ideals. Here, a cape and rainbow, in colors of the Pan-African flag, suggest the body as a site of cultural pride and erotic expression.

The Black figure, adorned in glitter, actively looks at the viewer. Adams conceives this painting against a long history of picturing Black subjects as passive, emphasizing self-definition, resistance, and power.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Style Variation Grid 3, 2018

Acrylic, graphite, and inkjet on watercolor paper

Courtesy the artist

The wig shops in Adams's Brooklyn neighborhood of Crown Heights in New York inspired his Style Variations series of mannequin wig imagery. Wigs carry enormous cultural and political weight, particularly in Black culture, where they are powerful tools for self-expression and self-adaptation. Adams's larger-than-life paintings depict uniquely made-up mannequin heads that gaze directly at visitors. The Style Variation series is about having control over one's own image, honoring the spectacle of self-care, and celebrating what Adams calls every day "fantastic-ness."

Baked In, 2024

Acrylic and fabric collage on wood panel in artist frame

Courtesy the artist and Gagolian

Out There, 2015

Mixed media collage on paper

Collection of Benjamin Z. Bronfman

Ebony Fashion Fair 3, 2017

Mixed media collage on paper

Courtesy the artist

That's Music to My Ears, 2023

Acrylic and fabric collage on wood panel with custom wood frame and vintage TV antenna

Courtesy the artist

Installation Props from *ON*, 2016

Mixed media

Courtesy the artist

For Adams, television is a powerful tool. From fictional series to news, commercials, and infomercials, Adams's work forces us to reckon with representation. For his 2016 exhibition *ON* at Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, the artist staged various live infomercials featuring feverishly smiling performers of color engaging with audiences while fervently delivering information. By playing with

the archetypal info-mercial style, Adams examines how we define truth in media: what is genuinely informative, and what is propaganda?

Tell Me (Groove Theory), 2024

Acrylic and spray paint on wood panel in artist frame

Courtesy the artist and Gagolian

ON, 2016

Video (color, sound; 03:39 minutes)

Courtesy the artist

The Channel, 2012

Video (color, sound; 03:50 minutes)

Courtesy the artist

In *The Channel*, Adams creates his own children's educational program akin to *Sesame Street*. Two actors present ideas about public consciousness: whether it is currently "high" or "low." A newscaster offers advice that applies to viewers of all ages: "if you take something, give something," "if you want something, make something," and "if you have something, share something." The other host shows us how to spell words, such as "elevated" and "severe," and offers a silly weather report, like "the clouds

are in the sky.” As public broadcast television programs, particularly those geared towards children of all backgrounds, are at risk today due to recent federal funding cuts in the United States, many related works by Adams, including *The Channel*, take on a new and heightened relevance. Like Adams, this video is playful and poignant, nostalgic and timely.

The Entertainer: Static, Distortion, Interference, 2012
Video (color, sound; 04:25 minutes)

Courtesy the artist

Adams’s performance *The Entertainer* is a commentary on the effects of media overload. It is fused with historical 20th-century broadcasts showing the formation of media and the evolution of entertainers, projected onto Adams. The graphic imagery is inspired by early 20th-century Russian Constructivist propaganda, and inspires sculptural headgear that mimics a TV monitor, a microphone, and a speaker worn by Adams. Each patterned backdrop acts as an optical illusion and suggests each object’s dysfunction: the static of television, the distortion of microphone feedback, and the interference of blown-out speakers.

Cool Down Bench (RWB), 2023

Fiberglass, epoxy resin, polyurethane paint, single-stage polyurethane clear coat, and radiata pine

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Area 5

Born in Baltimore and based in New York, Adams is finely attuned to the architecture of everyday city life: the streets, storefronts, and public spaces that frame *The Urban Landscape*. His work pulses with the city's visual rhythms, where signs, awnings, and scaffolding create a layered language. In Adams's hands, these elements become active participants — they shape identity, hold memory, build community, and capture the perpetual change of the city. Storefronts and stoops become platforms for performance and self-determination, and everyday scenes become monuments honoring Black experiences. This artist-designed wallpaper includes several references to the *Negro Motorist Green Book*. It was published between 1936 and 1966 by Victor Hugo, a U.S. Postal Service Worker, and guided Black travelers across North America to safe destinations during the violent and racially segregated Jim Crow Era. For Adams, the *Negro Motorist Green Book* is both a landmark of Black American history and a framework to consider travel, rest, and leisure within shifting social and political terrain.

LEFT TO RIGHT

EASY STREET, 2025

Acrylic and collage on wood panel in artist frame

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

There's More Than One Beauty School, 2018

Fabric, acrylic, and mirror on wood panel

Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey

Lieutenant, 2009

Vintage leather coat with faux fur collar, acrylic, glitter, faux brick, and plywood

Courtesy the artist

Head No. 13 (Floor Plan), 2012

Mixed media collage on paper

Courtesy the artist

If you're listening God, please don't make it hard, 2024

Acrylic on wood panel in artist frame

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Modern in Every Detail, 2018

Fabric, acrylic, wood, paper, and telephones on wood panel

Private collection, Scarsdale, New York

Human Structure Headquarters, 2013

Mixed media collage on paper

Courtesy the artist

Be the Table, 2023

Acrylic on wood panel in artist frame

Collection of Jodi and Robert Rosenthal, New York

LEFT TO RIGHT

NEON HAIR, 2018

NEON DINER, 2018

NEON MOTEL, 2018

NEON MUSIC, 2018

NEON OPEN, 2018

NEON SERVICE, 2018

Neon lights

All courtesy the artist

Derrick Adam: View Master

Homecoming, From A Soundtrack to Their Life, in collaboration with Dave Guy, 2021

Video (color, sound; 04:48 minutes)

Courtesy the artist

Homecoming is one chapter from the video anthology *A Soundtrack to Their Life*, a collaboration between Adams and trumpeter Dave Guy. The video pairs found mid-20th-century 16mm silent film footage with an original musical score. The footage follows a couple during a Caribbean cruise in moments of celebration, exploration, and rest. Adams discovered the film in an abandoned Clinton Hill brownstone in Brooklyn. The artists bring this once-lost footage back into circulation by adding sound and animation. Guy's score paces the images and preserves emotional weight, while Adams's animated forms make sound visible as they move across the screen. Together, these elements create a reimagined environment around the footage, extending beyond documentation and into a sensorial world.

Playthings, 2002/2016

Wood sculptures, doll clothes, and nylon rug on wood panel

Courtesy the artist

Playthings was initiated by Adams in graduate school and emerged from his ongoing exploration of cultural identity and representation. For this work, the artist purchased approximately

fifty Maasai warrior sculptures from Harlem's 125th Street — souvenirs often marketed to Black Americans for their connection to African heritage. He then re-dressed the figures in *Barbie*, *Ken*, and *G.I. Joe* clothing, including hoodies, headphones, and streetwear.

Arranged on a children's rug, the transformed sculptures became studio muses. Adams photographed them in improvised social and night club scenes. The playful setting contrasts with the layered references embedded in the materials themselves. Adams reveals an early understanding that meaning can reside in objects, clothing, and materials — not just imagery. By bringing together African diasporic symbols and contemporary Black American culture, *Playthings* reimagines how selfhood, heritage, and representation are shaped and performed.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Figure in the Urban Landscape 17, 2018

Acrylic, graphite, ink, fabric, paper, grip tape, and model cars on wood panel

Courtesy Marquez Family Collection, Miami

Navigator 1, 2013

Faux brick, paint, glitter, fabric, and metal

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Derrick Adam: View Master

LEFT TO RIGHT

Navigator 2, 2013

Faux brick, paint, glitter, wood, fabric, and metal

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Figure in the Urban Landscape 43, 2019

Acrylic, ink, graphite, grip tape, model cars, fabric, paper, and nylon on wood panel

Collection of Carole Server and Oliver Frankel, New York

In his *Figure in the Urban Landscape* series, Adams depicts the everyday scenes of a city. This portrait is made from painted surfaces, collage, fabric, and toy cars, combining elements drawn from modernist abstraction, African sculpture, and the artist's own life. Bodies are flattened, and the city streets are reduced to bold blocks of gridded colors. Miniature model cars seem to drive across the painted roads, drawing attention to the city as both real and imagined. The grid suggests movement, but also control, highlighting how individuals navigate city blocks and neighborhoods. As the figure moves through this scene, environment shifts and adjusts around them. By focusing on everyday movement, Adams opens space to imagine different stories shaped by self-determination.

Area 6

Domestic Space & Family Life are recurring themes across Adams's work. He creates scenes that are deeply personal, where figures lounge, strike poses, and gather within graphic, pattern-rich interiors. This new, site-specific wallpaper depicts a kitchen, living room, family room, bedroom, and bathroom. Transforming the gallery into a vivid domestic stage, this section explores how our homes, objects, and the people we live with are active and vital expressions of identity, containers of memory, and beacons of cultural inheritance. Here is where taste, care, aspiration, and the most radical ideas can take form. For people whose identities and experiences often face erasure in public life, Adams suggests that the power to design one's environment becomes a potent act of shaping one's reality.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Human Structure in Repose, 2013

Mixed media collage on paper

Courtesy the artist

Figure in the Urban Landscape 13, 2018

Acrylic, graphite, ink, fabric, paper, grip tape, pillows, and model cars on wood panel

Courtesy the artist

Upstate, 2014

Mixed media collage on paper

Collection of Mickalene Thomas, Brooklyn, New York

Playthings, 2018

Digital print

Courtesy the artist

Homeland Security, 2014

Mixed media collage on paper

Courtesy the artist

Untitled (Waves), 2025

Acrylic on wood panel

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Untitled (Woman with Gold Hoops), 2024

Acrylic on wood panel

Collection of John and Rachel Hanselman, Boston

Human Structure Shedding Light, 2013

Mixed media collage on paper

Collection of Blanchard Nesbitt Family, Chicago

Untitled (Woman with Orchid), 2024

Acrylic on wood panel

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Untitled (Musician), 2024

Acrylic on wood panel

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Only Happy Thoughts, 2024

Acrylic and fabric on panel

Collection of John and Rachel Hanselman, Boston

Feed Them With A Long Spoon, 2010

Video (color, sound; 31:23 minutes)

Courtesy the artist

Initially performed in 2010, *Feed Them with A Long Spoon* stages a simple but uneasy exchange. Two performers sit across from one

another and attempt to eat using excessively long utensils. What should be an ordinary, shared meal becomes awkward and strained, requiring careful coordination and constant adjustment. Documented here, it draws on the 14th-century English proverb, “He who supps with the Devil should have a long spoon,” a warning about maintaining distance in potentially harmful and untrustworthy relationships.

Adams remixes this notion as a commentary on television as a mainstay in contemporary American homes and its subsequent impact on family life and communication. An unintentional interloper, the television set for many becomes as much a part of dinner time as the meal itself. By performing this metaphorical distance as a physical action, Adams makes visible the challenge of maintaining connection, made even more prescient given the pervasiveness of social media and addition of multiple screens at home. *Feed Them With A Long Spoon* asks visitors to consider how we navigate relationships marked by the intrusion of technological advances.

Modular Head Space, 2014

Mixed media

Courtesy the artist

Adams has long explored the blurred boundaries between human figures and architectural spaces. *Modular Head Space* turns an interior world into an embodied physical structure. Created by

Derrick Adam: View Master

Adams in collaboration with industrial designer Michael Chaupoco, the sculpture resembles a Scandinavian doll house. Adams scales down Black interior life and domesticity into miniature furniture, patterned walls, framed images of his own work, and carefully arranged objects. Adams resists singular narratives across his practice, including in *Modular Head Space*, where one's inner world is both compartmentalized and interconnected.

The Look, 2014

Mixed media collage on paper

Courtesy The Clark Collection

Family Portrait 6, 2019

Oil on linen

Courtesy the artist

Area 7

Performance is a foundational yet lesser-known aspect of Adams's career. Many works across the exhibition reference stage and cinema through scale, composition, and a unique cast of characters. This gallery brings together more than twenty years of Adams's performance practice, evoking poetry, hip-hop, church, and theater. For him, performance is both entertainment and a complex negotiation of agency for many Black and brown communities. It becomes shield and spotlight, where stereotypes are dismantled, and new stories are told. Through performance, Adams honors the creativity, agility, and resilience required to navigate a world that often diminishes Black life, asserting a presence that demands recognition and envisions a brighter future.

LEFT TO RIGHT

In The House, 2010

Digital photograph

Courtesy the artist

The Root of It All, 2010

Digital photograph

Courtesy the artist

The Sleep Over Under and Inside (Beuys), 2011

Digital photographs

Courtesy the artist

Communicating with Shadows is a collection of four short performances. With controlled lighting, Adams creates enlarged, projected silhouette impressions of historic performance scenes from artists Joseph Beuys, David Hammons, Adrian Piper, and Jim Henson. In this way, Adams fabricates a personal conversation between the past and the present, and highlights earlier artists' influence on his own practice. Shadows of iconic artworks are cast across Adams as he performs interpretations of the source images. This remix highlights the original context and intent made by their creators, while exploring new ways of seeing these historical works within our current culture of media and consumerism. Video and photographic documentation of these performances are on view in this area.

One Nation Under a Groove of Instruction (Piper), 2011

Digital photographs

Courtesy the artist

Can We Talk (Henson), 2011

Digital photographs

Courtesy the artist

Adams has often cited Jim Henson (1936–1990) — creator of *The Muppets* — as an important influence on his work, particularly Henson’s use of puppets as tools for communication. For Adams, puppets offer a way to reach audiences directly, using humor, drama, and recognizable characters to make layered or difficult ideas more approachable.

Adams adopts the puppet as an extension of himself, as seen in this photo of his original 2011 performance. Much as Henson used *The Muppets* to create universal and accessible characters, Adams uses physical actions to translate ideas about representation and everyday experiences for intergenerational audiences. Video documentation of *Can We Talk (Henson)* is on view at the center of this gallery.

I Just Crush A Lot (Hammons), 2011

Digital photographs

Courtesy the artist

LEFT TO RIGHT

Elevated Platform, 2015

Digital photograph

Courtesy the artist

Please Come Back, 2015

Archival pigment print

Courtesy the artist

LEFT TO RIGHT

Crossroads, 2012

Archival pigment print

Courtesy the artist

Left at Arm's Length, 2013

Mixed media

Courtesy the artist

Can We Talk (Henson), 2011

Video (color, sound; 08:45 minutes)

From the series **Communicating with Shadows**

Courtesy the artist

I Just Crush A Lot (Hammons), 2011

Video (color, sound; 15:53 minutes)

From the series *Communicating with Shadows*

Courtesy the artist

One Nation Under a Groove of Instruction (Piper), 2011

Video (color, sound; 09:43 minutes)

From the series *Communicating with Shadows*

Courtesy the artist

The Sleep Over Under and Inside (Beuys), 2011

Video (color, sound; 05:46)

From the series *Communicating with Shadows*

Courtesy the artist

These videos are silent, encouraging visitors to find visual connections across performances.

LEFT TO RIGHT

What Are They Doing in Heaven Today?, 2018

Digital photograph, copper, and brass

Courtesy the artist

In this work, Adams constructs a photographic tableau of portraiture and sculpture. A multigenerational family gathers tightly together. The photograph is multiplied atop itself, an artistic strategy that suggests further generations of lineage. Radiating behind the figures is a brass structure that recalls antennae, rays of light, or religious objects. Along with the work's title, it suggests ideas of communication and reception, linking the family to ancestors as well as larger systems of memory and visibility. The sculptural element also echoes the visual language of religious iconography and early studio photography, where light functioned as both illumination and metaphor. *What Are They Doing in Heaven Today?* proposes family as a conduit through which ancestral history and cultural knowledge are passed down, positioning familial relationships as powerful sources of transmission.

The History Behind Us, 2018

Digital photograph and foam ring buoy

Courtesy the artist

Area 8

Play is central to Adams's practice. In this section, lively carnivals, birthday picnics, pool parties, and family gatherings burst with color and joy. The artist's background teaching elementary and middle school frames play as a political act. This wallpaper features imagery from *America's Playground: DC*, the installation that Adams designed on the National Mall in 2024. The location in Washington, D.C carries deep resonance: it was home to the first desegregated playground in the country. The artist sees playgrounds as early arenas of negotiation — where rules are tested, identities are formed, and power dynamics are explored. This section features a new work from Adams's iconic Floater series depicting a figure reclining in a pool float — unguarded, radiant, and fully at ease. By elevating these everyday scenes to monumental status, Adams celebrates play, pleasure, and leisure as forms of resistance and vital expressions of freedom.

Funtime Unicorn: Ruby Rides Through Four Seasons, 2023

Video (color, sound; 09:58 minutes)

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Funtime Unicorn: Ruby Rides through Four Seasons is an animated work that follows Ruby, a unicorn who time-travels through her urban playground over the course of a year. The world Ruby inhabits is a colorful dreamscape that emphasizes childlike

imagination over realism. Also installed in this gallery, *Funtime Unicorn* brings Ruby to life. Modeled after the spring-mounted playground equipment commonly found in public parks, the sculpture reminds us of the bodily sensation of play and childhood. Adams extends the playground into our digital and physical reality, centering on whimsy, joy, and fun for visitors of all ages.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Braving the Path, 2023

Acrylic on panel in artist frame

Collection of Hooman and Tiffany Dayani, Beverly Hills, California

Braving the Path depicts a child playing on one of Adams's *Funtime Unicorns*, like the one on view in this gallery. In Adams's signature style, the child is built from angular and interlocking shapes that mirror the geometric language of the surrounding playground. Here, the silhouettes of the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Washington Monument anchor the scene in Washington, D.C. By placing this child and their environment on the same visual plane, Adams emphasizes the relationship between identity and setting. *Braving the Path* underscores the importance of visibility, representation, and unbridled joy, especially for our next generation.

The Citizens, 2018

Digital photograph and fabric bunting

Courtesy the artist

Tables Turned 3, 2016

Mixed media sculpture and collage on hardboard panel

Courtesy the artist and Gagolian

Family Portrait 9, 2019

Oil on linen

Collection of Mike De Paola

Your Turn, My Turn, 2025

Acrylic and fabric collage on panel

Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer

We Came to Party and Plan 35, 2020

Acrylic, fabric, and collage on paper

Courtesy the artist

We Came to Party and Plan 36, 2020

Acrylic, fabric, and collage on paper

Derrick Adam: View Master

Courtesy the artist

Adams's series *We Came to Party and Plan* began with an acute awareness of the constraints faced by earlier generations, when worship and formal occasions such as weddings and holidays were among the few socially sanctioned occasions for Black communities to come together. The artist shares, "When we get together, it isn't just to have a party. We might be planning a revolution at the same time." For his immersive installation, *We Came to Party and Plan* at the Hudson River Museum in 2020, Adams created 40 individual party guests — a cast of unique individuals imagined discussing dreams, plans, or frustrations — two of which are on display here.

I'll Be Right Here, 2026

Acrylic and fabric collage on wood panel

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

View Master, 2025

Acrylic and fabric collage on wood panel

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

This painting honors Charles Harrison (1931–2018), a pioneering Black industrial designer whose work shaped everyday experiences in the United States. In 1958, Harrison redesigned the *View Master*, a handheld stereoscope toy that creates the illusion

Derrick Adam: View Master

of three-dimensional images. Though widely used, his contribution remains largely underrecognized.

In this new work, on view for the first time, Adams enlarges the View Master to a bold, monumentally scaled image. Two circular lenses frame portraits of Harrison. Printed at the center is the phrase, “double consciousness is the dual self-perception,” a reference to the Massachusetts-born civil rights pioneer W. E. B. DuBois, who described the experience of seeing one’s self through both personal identity and the gaze of society.

View Master links vision to awareness. Adams asks visitors to consider how perception shapes understanding, and how recognizing overlooked figures and histories, such as Harrison’s, can itself be an act of making them visible.

Cool Down Bench (RBG), 2023

Fiberglass, epoxy resin, polyurethane paint, single-stage polyurethane clear coat, and radiata pine

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Funtime Unicorn, 2022

Cast aluminum, steel, aluminum alloy, alloy steel coil, stainless steel, and hand painted enamel

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Please do not touch.

In Summer 2026, visitors can physically engage with these Unicorn Riders outside the museum.