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 - Food
 - Outdoors
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 - Comics
 - Puzzles & Games
 - Horoscopes
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GUIDES

- ### Communities
- Adams/Cheshire

Art venture connects North Adams, Adams

By Jennifer Huberdeau, North Adams Transcript
Article Launched: 05/06/2008 10:28:38 AM EDT

Tuesday, May 6
NORTH ADAMS -- North Adams and Adams are being reunited through an art collaboration aimed at reconnecting the two entities through physical spaces and the Internet.

"Networked Realities: (Re)Connecting the Adamases" is a joint venture by MCLA Gallery 51, Greylock Arts in Adams and Turbulence.org, a virtual gallery that commissions Internet art. The series kicks off with "Lumens," an exhibition by artists Ven Voisey, Sean Riley and Matthew Belanger.

Lumens, which will run from July through October, is envisioned as a three-pronged project, connecting lamps in the MCLA Gallery 51 annex at the former Sports Corner store on Main Street, with matching clusters of lamps at Greylock Arts on Summer Street in Adams. The lamps, which the group is hoping to borrow from residents of the city and Adams, also will be connected to an Internet gallery.

Belanger, co-owner of Greylock Arts, said the work will have clusters of lamps in each space that will light as a person approaches.

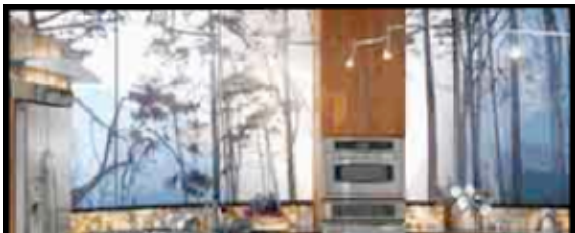
"It will then activate a corresponding cluster in the other space," he said. "So someone can be in the gallery in North Adams, and a cluster on the other end of the room will light up. They'll

know someone is either in the gallery in Adams or online at that same moment."

The lights will also dim and light as a person moves throughout the galleries, creating a rippling effect.

"It will be as if one is

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moving through a body of water," Voisey said. "The idea is that this is a very small community, and it is particularly evident that people really influence what goes on in this area."

Marianne R. Petit, co-owner of Greylock Arts, said the group knew early that they wanted to

explore the ripple effect.

"Initially we began with the idea of using street lamps -- when people would walk down the street the lamps would respond to movement of the individuals," she said.

As the idea grew, the group also wanted to incorporate the shared history of the two municipalities.

"We visited a few historic sites that they share a history with, and then researched the archives at the library, really exploring the old newspapers and reading about what was going on during the period of separation," Belanger said.

Voisey added, "We are very interested in incorporating the community, digging through history to see how we got to where we are now. We don't want it to be heavy-handed, it's not necessarily a history lesson."

So the idea developed further, incorporating both the historical data and the personal stories behind each of the lamps.

"We're hoping people will share their stories when they lend us the lamps," Belanger said. "Perhaps a lamp is important because it's the lamp you're grandmother used when she read to you at night, or it was a gift from someone special. Items have special significance and hold their own histories."

He added, "We want this exhibit to work on many levels -- you can just walk through it, or you can dig a little deeper by reading the history and visiting the site online."

Petit said the project began about a year ago, when Helen Thorington and Jo-Anne Green, co-directors of Turbulence were on their way to a show at Mass MoCA.

"They really wanted to do something with the area," she said. "They approached us with the idea and we approached Jonathon Secor with the proposal to connect the virtual and physical spaces."

Secor, director of special projects at MCLA, said the proposal caught his interest because it wasn't a fully-formed idea.

"All too often people approach you with a specific idea," he said. "Usually they'll have a specific project and artists in mind. Not only were we able to develop the idea, which required an online component, but we were also able to choose the artists. They were also providing the funding."

Belanger was already on board with the project when Riley and Voisey were contacted.

"I received from Marianne during the Fall Foliage Parade," Voisey said. "I was like I'm in."

Now, they're just hoping the community will pitch in, lending lamps and the corresponding histories.

"All of the lamps will be taken care of and returned in their original condition," Belanger said. "We're supplying the bulbs -- low wattage incandescent."

Lamps are being collected at two locations. In North Adams, lamps can be dropped off at Gallery 51, 51 Main St., from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. In Adams, lamps can be brought to Greylock Arts, 93 Summer St., however, donors should call 413-241-8692 prior to delivery.

As part of "Networked Real-ities," Turbulence is offering commissions to artists living or working in Adams and North Adams. Commissions will range from \$300 to \$1,000 and

must include a compelling Internet experience or component. The application deadline has been extended to June 1. For more information or an application, visit turbulence.org/networkedrealities.

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