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Adamses reunite!

Adams and North Adams rejoin Gallery 51 and online

By French Clements, Special to The Eagle Article Last Updated: 05/09/2008 05:06:53 PM EDT

Thursday, May 08

ADAMS and NORTH ADAMS — As of 1778, Massachusetts had only one settlement named Adams, with a south part and a north. A century later, residents passed a measure to split the town formally and create North Adams. This summer, the communities will reconnect — with a little help from their residents, a buoyant arts scene and the Internet.

Thursday, July 10, marks the opening of an unusual art exhibit titled "Lumens," which will be shown at three sites. Two are local but may involve some travel: Greylock Arts on Summer Street in Adams and the MCLA Gallery 51 Annex on Main Street in North Adams. The third is worldwide but likely quite accessible: www.turbulence.org, a pioneering venue for Internet-based artwork.

On May 1, the exhibit's creators opened a call for North Adams and Adams residents to lend a household lamp for the exhibit. They've asked that each lamp come with a story — that is, with a written account of the lamp's home life in the community. The idea is to fill the Gallery 51 Annex and Greylock Arts with as many lamps, and memories, as possible.

When "Lumens" launches



From left, artists Ven Voisey, Sean Riley and Matthew Belanger.

July 10, people entering Greylock Arts will activate sensors that illuminate lamps there and at the Gallery 51 Annex to the north; visitors to Gallery

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51 will do the same but to the south. (Don't worry, the lamps are to be fitted with low-wattage bulbs, and will be returned when the show closes in October.)

In addition, visitors to turbulence.org will be able to read the memories attached to each lamp. When Web users navigate to a particular lamp in the site's virtual galleries, its corresponding lamp, in one of two real-world galleries, will light up.

"Lumens" represents the collaboration of three Berkshire County artists: Sean Riley and Ven Voisey, both of North Adams, and Matthew Belanger, of Adams. They worked in tandem with Jonathan Secor, the director of MCLA Gallery 51, to make "Lumens" a reality. Also advising the group on "Lumens" was Tom Igoe, a professor in New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program and an authority in Arduino, an electronic method by which otherwise inanimate objects, such as lamps, are made interactive. (In a rare opportunity, Igoe will give a free workshop in Arduino at Greylock Arts this June.)

The exhibit is part of a broader, long-term project, "Networked Realities: (Re)Connecting the Adamses." Turbulence.org, a partner in the project, is currently offering grants of \$300 to \$1,000 to qualified area artists intent on creating work for the series; funding also comes from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Greylock Arts welcomes submissions for the project; guidelines are available on the gallery's Web site.

A lumen is a unit for luminous flux, which measures the perceived power of light. (Note how the measurement, like the exhibit, works to catalog our changeable perceptions.) Those seeking broader context for "Lumens" may find an answer in the term "net art." The genre's simple definition — art that exists only on the Internet — belies its complexity. Net art is as complex as the world it describes. It can incorporate sampled violins, data sets, expressionistic riots of color, the power of words, a barking dog, interactivity, silence and so on. Net art also encompasses desktop software, networked installations and performances, even e-mail. One popular recent work consisted of two computers sending automatic "out-of-office" e-mail messages to each other. Each reply begat another, ad nauseum, at the speed of the Internet.

Beyond a common basis in computer code, net art, as a medium, is nearly impossible to pin down. Says Secor, "The Web allows all to apply, all to participate and all to view. Is there something lost in not 'seeing' the art, hearing the art, feeling the art? I'm not sure."

The only certainty is that the concrete language of computers can express the imagination's boundless realm as freely as paints and a brush.

Belanger, a freelance Web designer, lives with his partner, Marianne Petit, above Greylock Arts, the gallery they founded a year ago. Much of Petit's net art — striking, nuanced animations — is shown at [www.mrpetit.com](http://www.mrpetit.com). (Galleries, through the democracy of the Internet, are now wherever you can post them.) The couple met at NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program, where Belanger studied, and where Petit still teaches. Their careers put them in frequent touch with the leaders of turbulence.org, Helen Thorington and Jo-Ann Green.

Last year, Thorington and Green approached the couple and offered funding for a project. The group arrived at the idea for "(Re)Connecting the Adamses" after a single session together, recalls Secor. "They came up to my house in Florida (Mass.), and we sat on the porch and dreamed."

Belanger and Petit, working with Secor, then chose to bring in Riley, who is the gallery manager for Gallery 51, and Voisey, who has shown work at the North Adams space.

Voisey doesn't define his work as net art. Nor does he adhere to any particular medium: "I use whatever means appropriate for manifesting an idea. If a network is a useful tool, then it comes into play."

He's posted portions of his portfolio on his beautifully rendered Web site, [www.v---v.net](http://www.v---v.net). The site includes extensive digital sounds and footage of his fascinating time-based sculptures, as well as images of more traditional drawings.

It was Voisey, in conversation with Igoe and his fellow artists, who hit upon the idea of using household lamps. (His initial plan was to animate the communities' street lamps. Logistics nixed it.) To Belanger, "the lamps represent people, and turning them on



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represents a sort of creative spark."

But can lamps, however rigged up, really bridge 200 years of history? And what's the point, anyway?

Belanger notes that the exhibit can apply to more recent events.

"After a tumultuous 2007" — with heaps of art controversy in northern Berkshire County — "we hope this can help heal some of the scars." He went on: "Because Adams and North Adams have faced a lot of the same challenges over time, and because they were once a single settlement, they have more in common in not. They might be like sisters who have grown apart, but they are still sisters nonetheless."

•

All of the interviews for this article were conducted electronically, mostly by instant message. These new ways of communicating offer new possibilities and challenges, but they share a basis in our humane connection — like net art. Voisey writes that he wants people to find his work "really fun. And at the same time hopefully meaningful."

FC: how would you sum up that meaning?

v. v.: not sure it has words: but it has to do with who is here in these towns, making them happen.

FC: making what happen — you mean giving the towns life?

v. v.: making the towns happen making them breathe, yeah life. and histories and entanglements and separations and now, and then

Get involved ...

North Adams and Adams residents should visit [www.greylockarts.org](http://www.greylockarts.org) to download the "Lend a Lamp" form. After selecting a lamp and writing down a memory, and filling out the form, take all three to two locations:

- **MCLA Gallery 51**, 51 Main St., North Adams, Monday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
- **Greylock Arts**, 93 Summer St., Adams, Monday-Sunday; call (413) 241-8692 prior to delivery.

Artists interested in guidelines for submitting work to "Networked Realities: (Re)Connecting the Adamses" should contact Greylock Arts at [info@greylockarts.net](mailto:info@greylockarts.net), or go to [www.turbulence.org/networkedrealities](http://www.turbulence.org/networkedrealities).

Ven Voisey: [www.v--v.net](http://www.v--v.net)

Sean Riley: [www.polaresolare.net](http://www.polaresolare.net)

Marianne Peit: [www.mrpetit.com](http://www.mrpetit.com)

Matthew Belanger: [www.matthewbelanger.com](http://www.matthewbelanger.com)

Greylock Arts: [www.greylockarts.net](http://www.greylockarts.net)

MCLA Gallery 51: [www.mcla.edu/gallery51](http://www.mcla.edu/gallery51)

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