

InLight 2021
organized by 1708 Gallery

Phantasmagoria of Progress

Artist: Benjamin Kidder Hodges

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Materials: metal stands, bicycle, cabling and light installation

Date: Nov 12 - 13, 2021

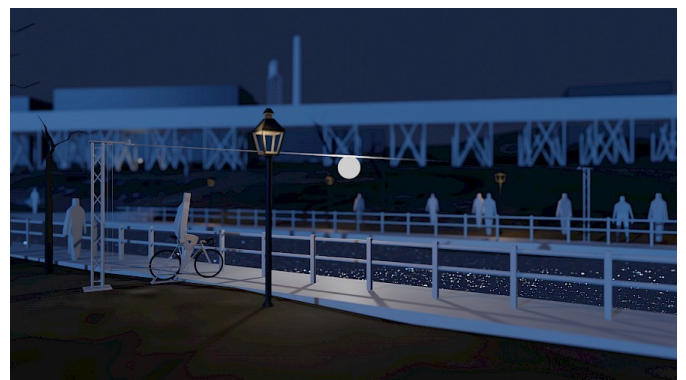
Venue: Great Shiplock Park, Richmond, Virginia

Curators: Tiffany E. Barber, Wesley Taylor, and Park C. Myers

Installation build: Christopher Evangelisto cevanglist@gmail.com



“Robert's phantasmagoria at the Cour des Capucines in 1797”



“Phantasmagoria of Progress” InLight 2021 project proposal

Project description:

With the installation “Phantasmagoria of Progress” InLight visitors are invited to take a seat on a bicycle and pedal a light across the Great Shiplock Park canal. Their energy is transferred up a metal tower via a pulley system much like those that might have pulled boats along the canal and powered early industrial factories. The pedaling of the cyclist also powers the light as it moves back and forth in a loop.

This project draws from folklore about ghost trains, early phantasmagoria light shows and Richmond’s history of electric rail to create an interactive light installation driven by the pedal power of participants. Like an oncoming headlight, the light traveling across the canal alternately illuminates the surroundings and blinds visitors to its multilayered history. In this way, the light works like a warning challenging visitors to consider their own role in witnessing often overlooked histories.

The initial trigger for the project comes from the artist’s own research on the electric rail line that once connected his hometown of Ashland, Virginia to downtown Richmond. The resulting article “Ghost trains: past and future mobilities haunting a Southern Town” is also about the uncanny experience of witnessing signs of historical tragedies while on the move going about daily routines. These electric trolleys are now ghost trains but even in their absence they still have the power to remind us of the stakes of future development. Any nostalgia for these early forms of electric public transportation must also be confronted with the harsh truth that they effectively helped to divide urban and suburban neighborhoods along racial lines and were themselves segregated.

This new installation brings a pedal-powered phantasmagoria to a site that once housed industrial shipbuilding, westward trade routes and brought goods and enslaved peoples into Richmond. The impacts of this history still haunt this site and Richmond.

Artist Bio:

Benjamin Kidder Hodges is an artist and anthropologist originally from Ashland, Virginia whose research-based art and writing draw on folklore, mythology and media archaeology to highlight overlooked histories. While completing his Ph.D. in Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin he received a Fulbright grant to conduct his dissertation research on media in Bulgaria in the early 2000s. He has taught in Europe, Asia and the U.S., and since 2008 he has been an Assistant Professor at the University of Macau where he teaches filmmaking, media studies, and cultural studies within the Department of Communication.

His work regularly involves the use of light, 3d animation and found objects associated with the history and culture of a place. It is motivated by a desire to draw attention to environmental and social changes and the ways in which they are seen or not during the course of daily routines. This involves using material culture in novel ways to create alternative spaces and opportunities for reflection on the cultural and ecological changes happening around us.

References:

B. Hodges (2021) "Ghost trains: past and future mobilities haunting a Southern Town," *Mobilities*, DOI: 10.1080/17450101.2021.1947153

B. Hodges (2021) "Phantasmagoria of Progress" InLight project proposal [3d render]

E.G. Robertson (1831) "Robert's phantasmagoria at the Cour des Capucines in 1797" [print]
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phantasmagoria#/media/File:Fantasmagorie_de_Robertson.tif