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Local Partnerships bring opportunities for community dialog in the Lehigh Valley

Historic Bethlehem Museums & Sites partners with Allentown Art Museum and Esther M. Lee African American Heritage Center to challenge assumptions.

BETHLEHEM, PA, February 2022 – Join Historic Bethlehem Museums & Sites (HBMS) for two events of community and conversation for the Design After Dark: Community Curated series. This adult programming series features experiences produced by creatives with strong ties to the Lehigh Valley.

Over the last year, Community Curators from all over the Lehigh Valley have planned public programs including performances, workshops, exhibitions, film screenings and concerts all in response to the quote from the late designer and visionary Sylvia Harris: “Design teaches us not to make assumptions.” This month offers two unique experiences: a video screening curated by Ghen Dennis, presented in partnership with the Allentown Art Museum, and an exhibition of Esther M. Lee’s personal archive, curated by Rayah M. Levy, Founding Director of the Esther M. Lee African American Heritage Center.

On February 19, 2022, 1:00 PM at the Allentown Art Museum, Side/The Other Side a program of experimental film and video art curated by Ghen Dennis will be presented in partnership by HBMS and the Allentown Art Museum (AAM). The presentation investigates how people negotiate design systems - both as autonomous individuals and as collective social forces. The selected works will address design systems of the social world - citizenship, language, power, and ideology - with design systems related to architecture, photography and surveillance, costume and performance, objects and tools, and public/private space. The selected films and videos will approach these topics and questions with both a poetic and a “socio-scientific” methodology. Artists included for the screening are Sondra Perry; Hito Steyerl, Mandy Morrison and Ja’Tovia Gary.

Then on February 25, 2022, from 6:30 - 8:30 PM at the Kemerer Museum of Decorative Arts an opening reception and dialog for A Pillar in the Branch of Bethlehem's NAACP: Mrs. Esther M. Lee will be held at the Kemerer Museum of Decorative Arts, in Bethlehem. Curator M. Rayah Levy, and Mrs. Esther M. Lee will be present for the opening and discussion. This pop-up exhibit is dedicated to the legacy of the current president of Bethlehem's NAACP: Mrs. Esther M. Lee. Visit the exhibition during Black History Month to celebrate the legacy of Mrs. Lee. The exhibition runs through March 25, 2022, with free admission on Sundays from 1-4 pm.

Curator, Rayah Levy says of the exhibit, “An exhibition on this scale has never been done before. Viewers will not only learn about Mrs. Esther M Lee, the activist but will get a taste of historical content not previously known to the public. They will also learn about the history of
the larger African American community in Bethlehem. We are making the often overlooked visible through this exhibition.”

There is registration for a suggested donation for both events and can be made through the HBMS website.

_Historic Bethlehem Museums & Sites is a not-for-profit institution that brings to life three centuries of American history. Historic Bethlehem tells the story of a small town of great influence, home to some of our nation’s early settlers, to the first pumped municipal water system in the American colonies, and to one of the world’s greatest industrial companies. Historic Bethlehem is located in eastern Pennsylvania, only an hour’s drive north from Philadelphia and 2 hours west of New York City. Historic Bethlehem is an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and part of a National Historic Landmark District - a designated site on the US World Heritage Tentative List. HBMS is proud to be a part of the effort to bring World Heritage Site status to Historic Moravian Bethlehem. We are pleased to share that as of Spring 2021, HBMS will be working in tandem with international Moravian Sites – Herrnhut, Germany and Gracehill, Northern Ireland, UK to prepare a joint serial nomination to the World Heritage List – a first for the United States._

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