

ART

These billboards sell Americans on good citizenship

By **Grace Griffin** Globe Correspondent, Updated October 30, 2020, 3:37 p.m.



Paula Crown's billboard art asks viewers "What Are You For?" PAULA CROWN

At the corner of Washington and Boylston streets, a billboard poses the question: “What are you for?” Also pictured are dozens of balls — a basketball, a football, a soccer ball — each marked with a hypothetical answer: Equality. Love. Choice. Taken as a whole, the balls represent a diverse community’s values and aspirations.

Part of the 2020 Awakening project, the sign is one of 93 artist-created billboards to go up across the country this month. Developed by the New York-based For Freedoms nonprofit, the campaign was designed to promote civic engagement, public discourse, and involvement in democracy during this election year. This particular work, by

Massachusetts-born artist Paula Crown, will remain on display well after Nov. 3.

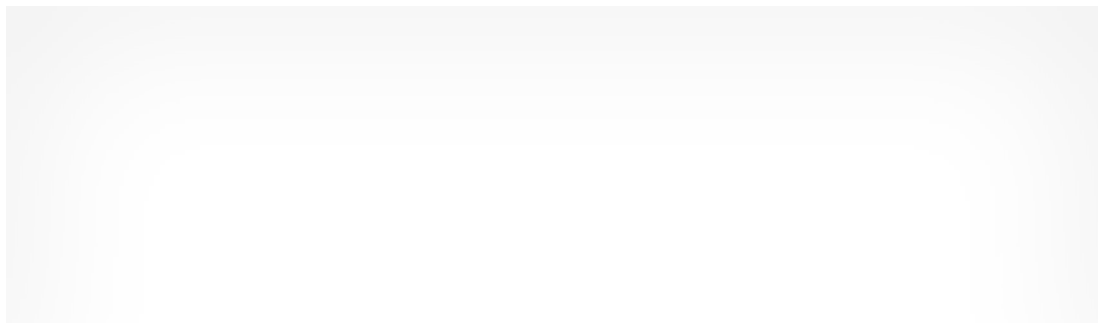
“So much of our lives right now, because of COVID, are self-curated,” said producer Taylor Brock, who co-created the project with For Freedoms colleague Jun Mabuchi. “A billboard is something we have no control over. ... That can impact people in a different way than when they expect something.”



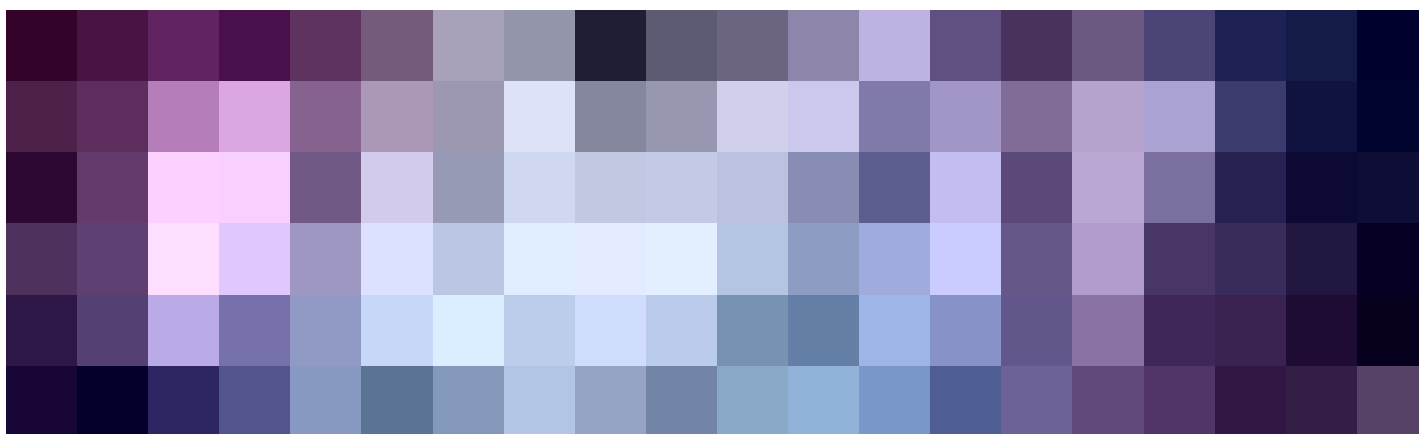
Jonathan Gardenhire's piece "Santa Biblia" stands at the corner of Lansdowne Street and Brookline Avenue. JONATHAN GARDENHIRE

The project has lent two more billboards to the Boston skyline: “Santa Biblia” by Jonathan Gardenhire sits at the corner of Lansdowne Street and Brookline Avenue. And Joaquín Esteban Jutt’s animated installation “Weapons of Mass Distraction” is parked at Lansdowne and Ipswich streets.

ADVERTISING



“Accessibility is always something I think about,” Mabuchi said by phone from New York last week. “To be able to put art in a normal place, not like a museum, is amazing.”



Joaquín Esteban Jutt's animated billboard "Weapons of Mass Distraction" can be seen at the corner of Lansdowne and Ipswich streets. JOAQUIN JUTT

Brock and Mabuchi provided each of their 77 billboard artists with the project’s overarching themes of taking pause and inciting justice. The rest, Brock said, was left to interpretation. “It’s all people we think are very creative, forward thinking, and asking the questions that are opening peoples’ hearts and minds.”

The year 2020 marks the third iteration of a nationwide For Freedoms billboard campaign; the first two coincided with the 2016 and 2018 elections.

“The ultimate goal is it gives people a moment to pause,” Brock said via phone from Los Angeles. “It’s about listening to not just one another, but also to ourselves. Listening to not just those we agree with, but those we disagree with. It’s about healing and giving time and space to do so. It’s about justice, love, and trying to incite joy.”

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