Join Beam Center, the Lewis Latimer House Museum, and Downtown Brooklyn Partnership as we continue to celebrate public art sculpture BEACON and pay tribute to pioneer electrical engineer and Brooklyn resident, Lewis Howard Latimer.

BEACON artist, Shervone Neckles; Brooklyn historian and scholar, Prathibha Kanakamedala; Lewis Latimer House Museum Director, Ran Yan; Beam Center Executive Director, Brian Cohen; and Downtown Brooklyn Partnership President, Regina Myer together explore Latimer's life, work, and activism in Brooklyn during the turn of the 19th century.

BEACON and this program are made possible with support from the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership through the Downtown Brooklyn + DUMBO Art Fund under New York State’s Downtown Revitalization Initiative, as well as through ConEdison’s ‘Arts Al Fresco’ program.

Read more about BEACON and the panelists in the following pages.

Explore educational materials and at-home activities related to BEACON online.

This program has completed. Watch the recording via the Beam Center YouTube Channel.
BEACON is an interactive, 13 feet tall steel and LED sculpture inspired by African American inventor Lewis H. Latimer’s 1880s patent drawings for the electric lamp and method for manufacturing carbon filament in incandescent bulbs. Designed by artist Shervone Neckles and selected as Beam Center’s 2020 Beam Project NYC, BEACON was built by a collective of young adults ages 18-21 known as Beam Center Fellows. Created in partnership with Lewis Latimer House Museum, BEACON is designed as an intergenerational pedagogical tool bridging humanities and STEAM disciplines. It engages the public in local history and commemorates Latimer’s legacy as a Black inventor and his contributions to society and the electrical engineering field.

BEACON is currently on view at Albee Square in Downtown Brooklyn, with support from the Downtown Brooklyn + DUMBO Art Fund and the New York State Downtown Revitalization Initiative. Members of the public are invited to stop by Albee Square and interact with BEACON.
Shervone Neckles is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, community worker, and artist advocate, who uses repurposed materials and Afro-Caribbean sensibilities to retell histories and mythologies. By embellishing textiles, assemblage, printmaking, sculpture, and installation, Neckles connects the sacred and scientific, the past and the present, and life with the afterlife. Her work has been shown worldwide in both group and solo exhibitions such as Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art at Snug Harbor, Staten Island, NY; Morris Museum, Morristown, NJ; For Colored Girls Museum, Philadelphia, PA; and Weeksville Heritage Center, Brooklyn, NY as well as internationally in places like New Dehli, India, Queensland, Australia, and Rome, Italy. In 2019, she was featured as part of the Venice Biennale’s Grenada Pavilion.

She has also participated in residencies internationally including the Youlou Arts Foundation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, WI; Dieu Donné Workspace Residency, NY; Wave Hill, NY; Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, FL; The Elizabeth Foundation's SHIFT Program, NY; The Center for Book Arts, NY; The Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, ME, among other. Previous awards include grants from The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Queens Council on the Arts, Foundation for Contemporary Art, Puffin Foundation, Joan Mitchell Foundation, and fellowships from Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop and Manhattan Graphic Center. Her work has been written about in publications including *Artnet*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *BOMB*, *Hyperallergic*, *Huffington Post*, and *New York Times*.

In 2020-2022, she presented her public art installation *BEACON* with Beam Center at Lewis Latimer House Museum, Queens, NY and, funded by Downtown Brooklyn Public Art Commission, at Fulton Plaza, Brooklyn, NY. In 2022, she has a forthcoming solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Jacksonville, FL and, in 2023, a solo exhibition at Engage Projects in Chicago, IL.
Regina Myer

Regina Myer is President of the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership, a not-for-profit local development corporation that serves as the primary champion for Downtown Brooklyn as a world-class business, cultural, educational, residential, and retail destination. Until October 2016, she served as President of Brooklyn Bridge Park, transforming 85 acres of formerly industrial Brooklyn waterfront into a world-class open space that welcomes millions of visitors a year, leading the mission to plan, construct, and maintain the sustainable waterfront park stretching 1.3 miles along Brooklyn’s East River shoreline, creating a recreational, environmental and cultural destination enjoyed by the residents of, and visitors to, New York City.

Prior to Brooklyn Bridge Park, Regina was the senior vice president for planning and design at the Hudson Yards Development Corporation, and the Brooklyn Borough Director for the New York City Planning Department, where she directed the comprehensive redevelopment of the Greenpoint/Williamsburg waterfront, the rezoning of Downtown Brooklyn for high density office and residential development, and numerous neighborhood rezoning efforts. She received her BA and Masters in Urban Planning from the University of Michigan, and resides in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

Prathibha (Prithi) Kanakamedala

Prithi is an Associate Professor in the History Department at Bronx Community College and the MALS Program at the City University of New York. Her research looks at archives, material culture, community-building, race, and citizenship in Brooklyn and New York’s 19th-century free Black communities.

As a public historian she regularly gives talks and lectures to the general public and has worked with a range of cultural organizations including Danspace Project Inc, Place Matters/ City Lore, Brooklyn Historical Society (now Center for Brooklyn History at Brooklyn Public Library), and Weeksville Heritage Center. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Sussex and is originally from Liverpool, England.

More at https://prithikanaka.com
Ran Yan

As the Executive Director of Lewis Latimer House Museum (LLHM), Ran Yan works to engage diverse audiences through inclusive programs rooted in African American inventor and humanist Lewis H. Latimer's legacy. In the first 3 years of her tenure as ED, Ran more than doubled the museum's attendance and budget. She builds partnerships with community stakeholders in Flushing, Queens and various organizations across New York City.

At LLHM, now a city landmark, Latimer’s life story is used as a point of departure from which to examine issues of race, class, immigration and contemporary events. Ran is passionate about arts as a public good as well as racial and gender equities. She has presented her work at various conferences and served on the grant panels for New York State Council on the Arts and Queens Council on the Arts. Before moving to New York City, Ran studied architecture and preservation at Tongji University in Shanghai, and completed her Master’s Degree in Historic Preservation Planning at Cornell University. She is a Beijing native and calls New York City her home.

Lewis Latimer House Museum

The Lewis Latimer House Museum (LLHM), through partnership with Beam Center, was the original site at which BEACON was installed in 2020.

A New York City landmark, the Lewis Latimer House Museum was the home for 26 years of the Black inventor who is renowned for his work in the field of electric lighting. Among Latimer (1848-1928)’s numerous inventions, the most important discovery was a method of producing carbon filaments that made the production of light bulbs both practical and affordable for the average household.

LLHM calls attention to the contributions of Latimer and other People of Color to American life, by interpreting this powerful but overlooked historic narrative and providing innovative K-12 S.T.E.A.M. educational programs. Latimer’s life story is used as a point of departure from which to examine issues of race, class, immigration and contemporary events.
Brian Cohen

Brian Cohen is Executive Director and Co-Founder of Beam Center, a Brooklyn-based non-profit organization, which serves 7,000+ students annually through its summer camp in New Hampshire, partnerships with 30 NYC public schools, and apprenticeship and work-based learning programs. Prior to sharing a tent with Beam Center co-founder Danny Kahn, Brian spent 18 years in the music industry, exiting as a Senior Vice President of Marketing for Elektra Records.

Beam Center

BEACON was built by young people at Beam Center, a Brooklyn-based, not-for-profit organization that focuses on self-directed growth through ambitious, collaborative project-making. Beam Center believes all young people are capable of spectacular things and has been proving it for 17 years. Beam uses traditional and advanced tools, technologies, and craft to honor the individual voice, celebrate the joy of producing something larger than ourselves, and inspire lasting sense of wonder and accomplishment.

In addition to year-round programming in NYC DOE schools, Beam Center also runs two summer camps: Beam Camp in Strafford, NH and Beam Camp City on Governors Island. Beam also runs an Apprenticeship program where students learn technical skills and how to lead educational workshops for younger children, in addition to employing youth.

A central part of the BEACON project production, Beam Center Fellows had the opportunity to work alongside Beam’s Project Directors and Project Designers and to learn new skills relevant to the project. These skills included metalworking, electronics, and mold making.

Check out Beam’s Instagram to see what NYC’s young people are working on now!
Supporters

The original creation of BEACON was made possible thanks to the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and Con Edison.

The current installation in Albee Square in Brooklyn, NY was made possible with support from the New York State's Downtown Revitalization Initiative and the Downtown Brooklyn + DUMBO Art Fund.