



**Commission on
Human Rights**

DATE: November 2, 2020

CONTACT: Alicia McCauley, amccauley@cchr.nyc.gov, 212-416-0105

**NYC COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND PUBLIC ARTIST IN
RESIDENCE AMANDA PHINGBODHIPAKKIYA ANNOUNCE TAKEOVER OF
ATLANTIC AVENUE SUBWAY STATION WITH PUBLIC ART CAMPAIGN
ENTITLED “I STILL BELIEVE IN OUR CITY”**

Standing up to COVID-19-related stigma and racial bias, installations from the series will include an outdoor billboard outside the station, a large-scale community mural, installations on LinkNYC kiosks and bus shelters, and social media placements with the hashtag #OurCityNYC.

NEW YORK— The NYC Commission on Human Rights announces a new public art campaign, “I Still Believe in Our City,” in celebration of Asian and Pacific Islander (API) New Yorkers. The campaign was created by Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, one of the Commission’s two 2020-2021 Public Artists in Residence (PAIR). The series is a testament to the vibrant resilience of New Yorkers and, specifically, honors API and Black New Yorkers in the face of racial injustice, xenophobia, and COVID-19-related discrimination, harassment, and bias.

The works featured in “I Still Believe in Our City” couple striking visuals with statistics about discrimination API New Yorkers have faced amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The panels include words and phrases that have been uttered in hate, juxtaposed with bright colors, symbolic imagery, and portraits of defiant and proud API New Yorkers standing their ground. Nestling the ugly language in beautiful symbolism is intentional: API artist Phingbodhipakkiya shows that despite what API New Yorkers have faced, they remain undeterred and steadfast members of the New York community. Since February 2020, the Commission received over 566 reports of discrimination, harassment, and bias related to COVID-19, of which 184 were anti-Asian in nature. By comparison, over the same time period last year, the Commission received 26 reports of anti-Asian discrimination. More than an anti-hate campaign, the artist depicts her subjects as filled with courage, conviction and enduring community spirit.

“Growing up in the South, I experienced countless moments of anti-Asian bias,” said **Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, Public Artist in Residence at the NYC Commission on Human Rights**. “I escaped to New York City as soon as I could, seeking refuge in a diverse place that welcomed people from all walks of life. I’ve been proud to call myself a New Yorker for the last 14 years. But the pandemic opened up an ugly side of the city. So many of my friends and people who look like me have been harassed, told to “go back,” had our basic humanity denied. My goal with this series was to turn these hurts into something beautiful and powerful. Each piece features bold colors, dynamic composition, and hidden complexity, just like New York City herself. The flowers that surround the defiant figures each have a deeper symbolism in Chinese culture:

Chrysanthemum signifies resilience, Peony signifies friendship and solidarity, and Hawthorn berry signifies longevity and protection.”

A feature of the campaign includes an art installation in the Atlantic Avenue terminal, where Phingbodhipakkiya’s 45 unique pieces celebrate East Asian and Southeast Asian New Yorkers, who have been disproportionately targeted for discrimination during the pandemic, as strong, compassionate members of their communities and show solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and the fight to eliminate anti-Black racism. The Atlantic Avenue terminal was chosen for its centrality in connecting historically Black and API neighborhoods including Chinatown, Koreatown, Sunset Park, Crown Heights, Bedford-Stuyvesant and Weeksville, for being a site of reported anti-Asian harassment, reflecting the wave of COVID-19 related bias reports, and for its proximity to the Barclays Center, a de facto town square for Black Lives Matter demonstrations.

“Over the past seven months, New York City has experienced deep tragedy, and, for some, that tragedy has been compounded by stigma and discrimination,” said **Carmelyn P. Malalis, Chair and Commissioner of the NYC Commission on Human Rights**. “Despite being confronted with anti-Asian bias and rhetoric, Asian and Pacific Islander New Yorkers continue to fight for our city, for our neighbors, and for justice. Amanda’s art gives us something beautiful, moving and celebratory when we need it most and it encourages API New Yorkers to remain visible and proud. It reminds us that the fight for Black lives is everyone’s fight, that we share in this struggle with Black New Yorkers who face the dual traumas of the pandemic coupled with centuries of anti-Black racism, and that New York City’s recovery is dependent on our willingness to stand in solidarity with each other. Amanda’s art is not only stunningly beautiful; it epitomizes the spirit of New York City.”

“PAIR places artists in residence with city agencies to help imagine new forms of public service and creative ways of confronting the most pressing issues facing our communities,” said **Gonzalo Casals, Commissioner of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs**. “Amanda’s collaboration with NYCCHR has produced this amazing, eye-opening creative intervention that takes aim at the anti-Asian racism that has spiked during the pandemic. ‘I Still Believe in Our City’ will center the experiences of our Asian and Pacific Islander neighbors for everyone passing through the Atlantic Avenue subway and other locations and remind us all what it means to support our fellow New Yorkers through their most challenging times.”

This is the second time the Commission has participated in the public artist in residence program, which is administered by the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, and this is both the first series of works from this year’s collaboration and the Commission’s first API-centered series. The Commission is hosting two artists this year, street photographer Andre D. Wagner and Phingbodhipakkiya.

The public art campaign begins November 3 with a monthlong takeover at Brooklyn’s Atlantic Avenue station, lasting through December 2, 2020. The Commission worked closely with media company OutFront as a strategic partner on the project, which, recognizing the importance of the campaign, extended the series through its digital liveboard network to reach key audiences. Social media placements on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram will run November 12 through

November 26. Additional placements around the city and in Asian neighborhoods include LinkNYC kiosks and bus shelters which will run December 14, 2020 through January 10, 2021, as well as a future installation in partnership with the NYC Department of Transportation's Art Program. Installation of a community mural will be announced later this year.



[Visit the series webpage here.](#)

A prolific multidisciplinary artist with a neuroscience degree, Phingbodhipakkiya's Brooklyn-based practice includes augmented reality, large-scale visually arresting murals, experimental and interactive art. She has been featured in the New York Times, Fast Company, and Forbes, to name a few, and has twice presented on the TED mainstage. [Visit the artist's site for this campaign here.](#)

If you have witnessed or experienced discrimination or harassment in New York City, you can report the incident by calling 212-416-0197 or online at [NYC.gov/HumanRights](https://nyc.gov/HumanRights). Commission staff speak over 30 languages and reports can be filed anonymously.

###

“Thanks to the New York City Commission on Human Rights for launching this important art initiative,” said **U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-Queens)**. “It comes at an important time as the Asian American community continues to struggle with demeaning and disgusting acts of bigotry and violence related to the coronavirus. I appreciate this effort to highlight the resilience of Asian and Black New Yorkers as we keep up our fight to combat the rise in xenophobia and racial injustice.”

“Asian Americans have been fighting the stigma of coronavirus before it ever reached our shores,” said **New York City Council Member Peter Koo**. “The ‘I Still Believe In Our City’

public art installment is a poignant reminder of our American values of equality, diversity, and inclusion. Nowhere are those ideals better represented than right here in New York City.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed many aspects of life for New Yorkers. Sadly, it also exacerbated decades-old bigotries and prejudices against Asian and Black New Yorkers. The virus outbreak and the economic recession already disproportionately impacts these New Yorkers, particularly Asian American immigrants - the fastest-growing immigrant community in New York - who have become the victims of hate and intolerance. Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya’s work will remind every New Yorker of the beauty of our city’s gorgeous diversity and what we can accomplish if we move forward together. On behalf of the New York Immigration Coalition, I thank the NYC Commission on Human Rights and Amanda for this celebration of the best of New York City,” said **Steve Choi, Senior Advisor to the New York Immigration Coalition and Commissioner at the NYC Commission on Human Rights.**

“NYC Commission on Human Rights Public Artist in Residence Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya’s public art campaign is a bold and vibrant testament to the resilience of Asian New Yorkers,” said **Rocky Chin, Commissioner for the NYC Commission on Human Rights.** “Asians are the fastest growing ethnic group in America, and yet, we are told to “go back,” and that we don’t belong. Amanda’s artworks show the world that this is our home, and displays Asian New Yorkers proudly defying harmful stereotypes. As an advocate for Asian and Pacific Islander communities, and as a Commissioner for the NYC Commission on Human Rights, I am proud to see these works in our city.”

“Amanda said it best, I still believe in our city, too! It’s great to see this work come alive by my fellow artist in residence and I’m excited about the work we both will continue to make. I just started photographing for my project and I’m constantly amazed by how resilient New Yorkers are. It’s an honor and privilege to work on telling these stories,” said **Andre Wagner, Public Artist in Residence at the NYC Commission on Human Rights.**

“Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in the United States and are an integral part of the heartbeat of New York City. Since February, CPC has been engaged in a multi-pronged approach to address the anti-Asian discrimination and harassment associated with the pandemic, including our own campaign to highlight Asian American essential workers who support the city’s relief and recovery efforts. CPC has concurrently stood in solidarity with our Black neighbors to confront racism and injustice within all institutions,” said **Wayne Ho, President and CEO of the Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC).** “During this trying time, we commend the NYC Commission on Human Rights and artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya on the launch of a visually stunning public campaign that honors the resilience of New York City’s Asian American and Black communities, while serving as an important reminder that our city is that much more powerful when we are united. We thank the Commission and Amanda for giving a sense of hope and pride for our community members.”

“Art creates a space for us all to connect as humans, it allows for stories to be told across languages and cultures. More than ever, it is important for public art to broaden understanding within the city we call home,” said **Yin Kong, Director and Cofounder of Think!Chinatown.** “All of this is true of Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya’s public art campaign ‘I

Still Believe in Our City.” Her bright and joyous celebration of API New Yorkers depicts us as brave, resilient, and determined not to give up on the place we call home. We congratulate Amanda on becoming one of the Public Artists in Residence with the New York City Commission on Human Rights, and we commend this work of art.”

“Since January, Asian Americans, along with our fellow New Yorkers, have endured tremendous heartache and suffering, from deaths of loved ones from COVID-19 to the loss of employment. The anti-Asian hate that the community has experienced has only added to the terrible toll of the pandemic, even as so many of us continue to serve the city on the frontlines of this disaster. This initiative from the NYC Commission on Human Rights and its Public Artist in Residence (PAIR) Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, honoring Asian and Black New Yorkers, gives us hope as we move forward toward recovery. It shows us that our communities of color will never back down in the face of hate. We are here to stay and stand in solidarity with each other. We love NYC and are willing to fight for our city. Amanda's vision affirms that hate will never triumph over love,” said **Jo-Ann Yoo, Executive Director, Asian American Federation.**

“As New Yorkers, we are known for our strength in surviving the harshest conditions,” said **Bertha Lewis, Founder and President of The Black Institute.** “This year has been our harshest condition yet and these acts of racism are only adding to the suffering. Being a New Yorker means both standing up to give your seat away on the subway and standing up for someone facing discrimination. We will not allow these issues to be overlooked. That is why we at The Black Institute work every day to combat these injustices with actions, but it starts with holding ourselves accountable first. This incredibly brave artwork by Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya continues that push forward by spotlighting moments of racial bias and demanding better for our communities of color. We must act in solidarity because no one should ever have to feel these hurtful words. We still believe in our city, we still believe in compassion, and we still believe in you. Join us in standing up for our home.”

“In the past months, we have heard our President label COVID-19 as the ‘China Virus.’” His rhetoric, along with others, has fueled fear and hate that have had harmful effects on AAPI communities as patterns of hate and bias incidences against Asians rose throughout the country in this pandemic. If left unaddressed, hate, like any virus, will continue to spread. It is our hope that through this campaign that we can educate the public about the AAPI communities--that we are not scapegoats for a virus we didn't cause, that we belong here and that we believe in our city,” said **Karen Zhou, Executive Director of Homecrest Community Services.**

“Womankind applauds the NYC Commission on Human Rights and the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs for this inspiring initiative that leverages the power of art for social justice. As an organization that has served New York City communities for decades, we have witnessed the resilience and power of New Yorkers first hand -- from the survivors we serve, to our diverse community members, and to our own staff who have been essential workers during times of crises. We believe in New York and its people, and stand by it now and into the future,” said **Yasmeen Hamza, CEO, Womankind.**

“All communities should have the right to free expression, and no one deserves to be targeted for hate or discrimination--not because of prejudices around the COVID-19 pandemic or for any

other reason. Now more than ever, we have to remain united as we work through our city's unprecedented challenges together,” said **Nikki Singh, Policy and Advocacy Manager, Sikh Coalition.**

“The Asian American Film Lab is proud to support the City’s efforts to combat racism through the use of visual storytelling to create empathy, awareness and constructive dialogue,” said **Jennifer Betit Yen, actor and President of the Film Lab.** The Film Lab produced a series of anti-racism PSAs and short form entertainment that have been televised. Some are also available online. Of the content, Betit Yen explained, “As incidents of anti-Asian COVID-related racism rose, we thought it very important to get a message out there that was positive and constructive about how all of us, regardless of racial background, are in this together and that we need to help and support one another.”

“IMPACCT Brooklyn's core value is to promote racial equity within Brooklyn. We find that art is a vehicle that supports the messaging we want to convey and also complementary to our work of providing services and resources to Brooklyn residents. We salute the efforts of the NYC Commission on Human Rights and Public Artist in Residence, Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya,” said **Bernell Grier, Executive Director, IMPACCT Brooklyn.**

“It is no secret that our country is mired in a long history of discrimination and exclusion. Rather than seeking to reconcile with it, the Trump administration has only furthered this unfortunate history to further spew hatred and animosity toward marginalized populations. The rhetoric that this administration and its followers have used to brand this virus as a Chinese problem—“a Chinese Virus”—not only obscures the administration’s failures in containing the virus and spreading facts about its threat, but also feeds into an ideology that perpetuates xenophobia over the health and wellbeing of others. We have seen that these words fuel folks toward malevolent action, as Asian Americans, including those who are not Chinese, have received physical and verbal abuse throughout the pandemic. Not only as a survivor-centered organization, but also as a body of concerned community members, we denounce such violence. We stand in solidarity with the greater Asian American community and encourage all to be active bystanders as we all work to create safe, inclusive spaces. We can only move forward and out of this crisis of hatred if empathy and awareness are our guides,” said **Kavita Mehra, Executive Director, Sakhi for South Asian Women.**