

CRAFT QUARTERLY



James Renwick Alliance

FALL 2020



DOCUMENTING HISTORY



Artist Amos Paul Kennedy Jr., courtesy of the artist.

ARTIST AMOS PAUL KENNEDY JR. EXPLAINS HIS PROJECT "THE DESEGREGATION OF ARLINGTON LUNCH COUNTERS"

Jim Byers
Marketing director of Arlington Cultural Affairs

Over the last six and a half months, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our creative communities and disrupted age-old traditions of how we engage with arts and culture. It also has presented new opportunities. Such was the case on July 17 when the James Renwick Alliance and Arlington Arts partnered to host a virtual "Coffee & Conversation" with Arlington Public Art's visiting artist Amos Paul Kennedy Jr.

Kennedy is an American printer, book artist and papermaker best known for social and political commentary, particularly in printed posters. Kennedy creates prints, posters and postcards from handset wood and metal type, oil-based inks and eco-friendly, affordable chipboard. The Economist noted that Kennedy was "unafraid of asking uncomfortable questions about race and artistic pretension."

From an early age, Kennedy was interested in letters and books and studied calligraphy for several years. At the age of 40, he visited Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia and was mesmerized by an 18th-century print shop and book bindery demonstration. He began studying printing at a community-based letterpress shop in Chicago and, within a year, quit his AT&T systems analyst job of two decades. He continued his printmaking studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison under legendary book designer Walter Hamady. Earning his MFA in 1997, Kennedy subsequently taught graphic design at the Henry Radford Hope School of Fine Arts at Indiana University. In 2015, Kennedy was honored as a United States

8 Artists Glasgow Fellow in Crafts and received a \$50,000 unrestricted prize.

Arlington Cultural Affairs, a division of Arlington Economic Development, delivers public activities and programs as Arlington Arts. By creating, supporting, and promoting the arts, this initiative connects artists and community to reflect the diversity of Arlington. For the last two years, Arlington Arts has been collaborating with the county's historic preservation program and center for local history to commemorate Arlington's civil rights history. Our focus is the 60th anniversary of the desegregation of Stratford Junior High School in 2019 and the 60th anniversary of the lunch counter sit-ins that occurred in June of this year. We have been working with Kennedy to bring attention to the places and events that are often overlooked in our collective memory of Arlington.

"Arlington is still a very transient community, so people don't necessarily know the history of what happened before," commented Joan Mulholland, a nationally known civil rights activist, Freedom Rider, and Arlington sit-ins participant, during the Zoom "Coffee & Conversation" chat.

Since 2018, Kennedy has been visiting Arlington to meet community members, research history and create letterpress prints in response to his discoveries. He has prompted community members to make their own prints at events and festivals throughout the county. The program's intention is for every person living and working in Arlington to receive or encounter one of Kennedy's prints to prompt their rediscovery of this part of the county's history. Before the onset of the coronavirus, Kennedy's prints were available for free in the lobby

at the Ellen M. Bozman Government Center, the seat of county government. This spring, a set of his original prints was installed on an Arlington Transit (ART) bus as part of its "Art on the ART" program.

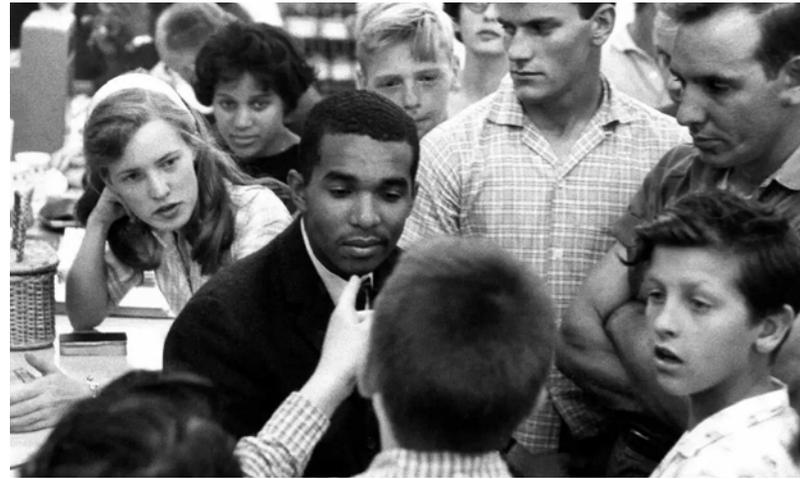
"Taking something from an idea to a concept enriches us," Kennedy says. "The art carries a little piece of your experience. I want everyone to experience a little bit of that."

While in-person interactions are now being reimaged for 2021, the virtual "Coffee & Conversation" offered an opportunity for Kennedy to engage with nearly 100 registered participants from across the country to discuss the project and the historic protests that challenged widespread segregation policies and resulted in change.

Mulholland shared her firsthand accounts of the sit-ins. "There were a lot more southern whites involved in the movement than people realize," mentioned Mulholland, "but they were threatened, too ... The ones that I know were drawn by their religious faith."

Kennedy is in the process of making 7,000 cards that will be distributed at Arlington Art Truck activations, and via special kiosks positioned near the sites of the former drug stores where the lunch counter sit-ins occurred.

Mr. Kennedy's residency was to conclude by launching the spring 2020 season of interactive art truck programming with the exhibition *The Desegregation of Arlington Lunch Counters: 60th Anniversary Tribute by Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr.* In partnership with The Black Heritage Museum of Arlington, the program was designed to immerse participants in the history of Arlington's lunch counter sit-ins by inviting them to collect letterpress cards designed by Kennedy to commemorate each of the



Dion Diamond, an 18-year old Howard University student (center), and Joan Mulholland, Arlington resident (on the left, leaning on counter), during a sit-in demonstration in Arlington. DC Public Library, Evening Star Collection © Washington Post, June 10, 1960. Photo by Gene Abbott. Courtesy of Arlington Arts.

seven sit-ins that occurred from June 9 to 22, 1960 with quotes from community members involved in the peaceful protests. This is one of the installations that is being rethought for 2021.

"Printing is a very democratic process," observed Kennedy. "You're able to make multiple copies that you can distribute to many people. They can take copies home and share them. The Arlington project fell right into what I wanted to do: Get the public involved."

"Dignity" on chipboard by Amos Kennedy. Courtesy of Arlington Arts.

SIT-INS PEOPLE SHOULD EAT IN
DIGNITY

ARLINGTON

Quote by Lawrence Henry
Sun Gazette
June 10, 1960

Howard Johnson
4700 Lee Highway
demolished, now Capital One Bank