

Interview

STARS ACROSS TIME

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Snaking alongside the Hudson River, the MetroNorth Hudson line and the view from the train have remained largely unchanged for decades, and seasoned commuters tend to drown out lush forests and waterside panoramas with the white noise of the tracks. But when artist Melissa McGill, who has taken the line regularly since moving from New York City to Beacon in 2007, noticed a tiny island just south of Dia: Beacon, she couldn't shake her curiosity. "The experience of going by on the train and glimpsing this mysterious site...that was very influential," she remembers. McGill went on to unearth the long and unusual history around the place, called Pollepel Island, from its role in a Revolutionary War battle to its development by Industrial era mogul Francis Bannerman. The remains of the home he built, Bannerman Castle, are the island's current distinguishing feature.

Aiming to bring newfound attention to the site, McGill devised and executed the public artwork *Constellation*, which debuted in June after two years of research and fundraising. *Constellation* consists of 17 solar-powered

LED lights on 40- to 80-foot high poles. The poles are arranged strategically so that certain lights outline the former borders of the castle's crumbled walls, while others pay homage to the "White Road" in the night sky, referencing a belief held by the area's Lenape Native American tribe. As darkness swallows the island, the "stars" come on one by one and glow for a few hours. Though fixed at different points, the lights' relative positions are obscured after sunset—it's impossible to tell which are closer or further, or if seen from higher ground, which are taller or shorter. As a result, the shape of *Constellation* shifts depending on viewers' vantage points.

"I'm giving people a reason to go here," explains McGill. Aside from the train, visitors can travel around the surrounding Hudson Highlands State Park to see *Constellation*. There will also be boat tours, some of which McGill will lead, throughout the summer.

"There isn't one specific place that you need to view it from," the artist continues. "It's the idea of experiencing the work from a number of different places at different times of day and different seasons." Like stars in the sky, the magic of *Constellation* is how it seems to shine light through time and space. "It's a path that connects the past and present, light and dark, and heaven and earth."

CONSTELLATION WILL BE ON VIEW THROUGH SUMMER 2017, AND GUIDED BOAT TOURS ARE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE.