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Reframing Freedom



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By Melissa Smith

The making of Shaun Leonardo's latest public artwork — "Between Four Freedoms," the exhibition of which has been extended to Tuesday at Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms State Park on Roosevelt Island — is predicated on the notion that the four freedoms cited in Roosevelt's 1941 speech don't apply to everyone equally. How would our most vulnerable citizens interpret them? In a series of workshops leading up to the installation, Leonardo attempted to answer that question. For one, he pointed to the freedom from fear: How can it be considered attainable when children continue to be incarcerated? How can people declare it when for them fear persists in the shadows?

The culmination of these exercises is represented in a series of large vinyl murals of hand gestures (which sometimes speak louder than words) that Leonardo applied to the granite walls at the entrance to the park. Words haven't been completely ignored, though. QR codes surrounding the works link to audio recordings of workshop participants discussing what freedom — or its lack — means to them.