

Past Worlds / Future People: Exploring the Work of Derrick Adams

Inspiration: Derrick Adams (American, b. 1970). *Orbiting Us #18*, 2018. Mixed media collage on paper. Museum Purchase, 2018 ([2018.07](#)).

Ages: 5+ (through adult)

Duration: Open-ended

Materials needed: Paper and pencil; mixed media like cardboard, magazines/newspapers, and photographs; glue or tape; optional: colored pencils, markers, or crayons.

Introduction: Archival, or historical, materials like photographs, newspaper articles, magazines, diaries, journals, and books are used primarily as ways to study the past. Derrick Adams—a contemporary multidisciplinary artist who works in painting, installation art, and performance—provides an example of how to rearrange old documents so they tell us new stories for the future.



Look

Take a close look at Derrick Adams's work *Orbiting Us #18*.

- What's going on in this work?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Think

- How do you think the artist made the work? What materials do you see?
- How does the title connect to the work itself?
- When you view this work, what is familiar or unfamiliar to you?

Connect

Orbiting Us #18 is one of a series of mixed media works Adams created for a multi-dimensional installation at the [Stony Island Arts Bank](#) in Chicago. After exploring the Arts Bank's library collections related to African American history, he combined archival images in unique ways in order to highlight achievement, invention, and vision within the African American community, past and present. The cardboard frame creates a window for looking out into a world both modern and mythical. In this work, Adams celebrates the process of imagination ultimately becoming fact, and the joy and hope to be found in fantasy.

"I wanted it to look sci-fi, but low-tech. I wanted it to look makeshift. I like materials with a physical appearance. I don't like the mystery of how things are put together. What I like about arts and crafts is you can see how the material is joined together, but it doesn't take away from the experience of the fantasy." — Derrick Adams, 2018

Do

1. Look around for and gather any cardboard, old newspapers and magazines, and personal photographs you have at home. You can also use pencil and paper to draw if you do not have access to mixed media.
2. Take a few minutes to imagine the future, either one specific to you, or one that includes other people. What does this place look like? Who is there, and why? What looks different or similar to today? What natural or mechanical processes or actions are different as a result of their existing in your future space? How do you feel in this future space, and why?
3. Cut out and assemble found images, photographs, drawings, and/or text in a collage that depicts your future fantasy, experimenting with layout and design. Once you have a design you like, you have the option of taping or gluing materials in place. Cardboard is an excellent base if you have access to it, but plain paper also works.

4. Add a portal, or window, frame to your collage when you are finished. Adams used cardboard as a frame for looking at his scene from an imaginary vessel. In your own piece, you can simply draw on a frame, or if you have it, use cardboard like Adams did.

Reflect

Compare your future scene to what life looks and feels like today. How did you change the image to show something new to your viewer? How does your remix reflect your own hopes, emotions, interests, and ideas?

Share

Take a photo of your work and post it to Instagram using the hashtags #DerrickAdams #MuseumFromHome, and tag @HudsonRiverMuseum.

Further Resources

[Derrick Adams, Future People](#)

[Derrick Adams is Focusing on a Positive Vision for the Future](#)

[Space Is the Place: The Singular Journey of Sun Ra](#)