

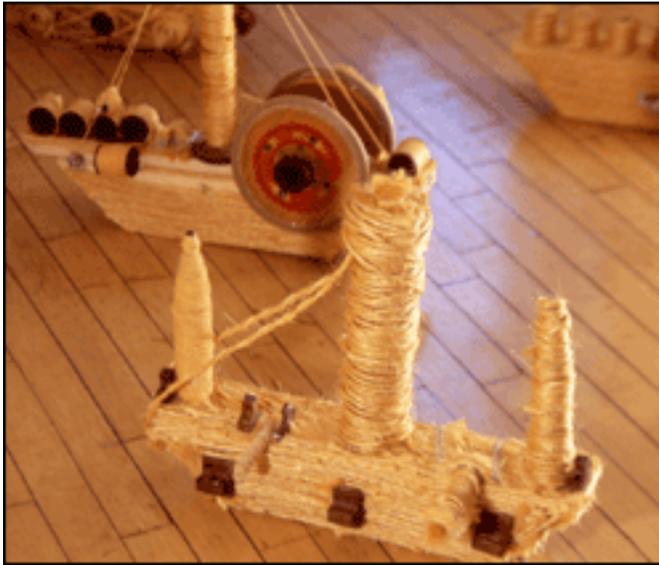
EDITOR'S PICKS

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Safe harbor

ICA artist-in-residence Jerry Beck builds an ark in Charlestown

BY RANDI HOPKINS



Jerry Beck, 'Lifeboats,' from *The Secret Ark of Icon Park*

Vita Brevis is the name of the public art arm of Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, a program dedicated to taking contemporary art out of the museum and into the streets. These works encourage us to see our surroundings, our history, and our art in a new light. And for the past five years, a significant ingredient in Vita Brevis's recipe for integrating art into daily life has been the fruitful joint initiative between the ICA and Boston National Historical Park, a collection of historic sites owned by the City of Boston, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the federal government, and several private organizations.

Each year, the ICA and the Park Service invite a New England artist to become an ICA artist-in-residence at Boston National Historical Park. This year, that honor went to politically minded, community-spirited sculptor Jerry Beck, and on July 2, after months of preparation, his labyrinthine outdoor sculptural environment *The Secret Ark of Icon Park* opens in the Charlestown Navy Yard. Situated right next to the USS *Constitution*, *The Secret Ark* addresses the impact of current US military activity and cultural attitudes to violence on our lives.

Beck is a pioneer in the field of participatory public art in Boston, and his art reflects his commitment to civic dialogue, grassroots involvement, and social change. Founder and artistic director of the Revolving Museum (previously located in South Boston's Fort Point district, now in Lowell), he's been making art and orchestrating art events utilizing and celebrating entire creative communities for more than 20 years. He has built his ark, as he writes in the ICA's press material, for a country that "lives in a constant state of fear and critical loss of innocence

since the prevailing course of world events of September 11, 2001." Sixty-four feet long, 28 feet wide, and eight feet high, it's a freestanding boat-like structure constructed with recycled materials that visitors can walk through and around. The captain's quarters, crew bunks, and living garden encourage you to think about security and insecurity, (home)land and sea, hope and fear. Beck stresses the need for safe harbor and optimism amid the crisis of our times; as part of his ICA residency, he worked with middle- and high-school students from Boston Collegiate Charter School, a public charter school in Dorchester, to create a moving series of "lifeboats" — wooden boats wrapped in rope that contain artifacts about the students' families and their goals — that will be incorporated into the installation.

The Secret Ark will remain on view through October 10. For the opening, Boston composer Evren Celimli will premiere his horn quartet *The Secret Ark*, which was composed for the launch of Beck's project. Celimli, who runs Evos Arts in Lowell, is known for collaborations with modern-dance, ballet, and avant-garde-theater groups; this performance extends the nature of Beck's *Ark* into yet another artistic dimension, that of sound.

Jerry Beck's *The Secret Ark of Icon Park* | Charlestown Navy Yard, Constitution Rd, Charlestown | July 2–October 10 | noon–5 pm daily | Free | 617.242.5601 or nps.gov/bost

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