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William Penn Foundation Board Awards \$150,000 Grant to the
National Museum of American Jewish History
to fund *OPEN for Interpretation*

The National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH) was recently awarded a \$150,000 grant from the William Penn Foundation to support the Museum's signature artist-in-residency program, ***OPEN for Interpretation***, for three years starting in 2015.

OPEN for Interpretation

The Museum's signature artist-in-residency program, *OPEN for Interpretation*, invites creative thinkers to the Museum in order to develop high-quality, creative interpretations that trigger visitors and staff to look at the Museum's narrative and collection in new ways. Similarly, the program is designed to inject fun and invention into the study of history for the Museum's audiences. *OPEN* requires artists-in-residence to spend time onsite at the Museum engaging with staff and visitors.

"***OPEN for Interpretation*** is an annual program that invites creative thinkers of all backgrounds to immerse themselves in the Museum's stories of courage, struggle, and

heritage as inspiration for new works that explore the American experience in new and unexpected ways,” says Ivy Barsky, CEO and Gwen Goodman Director.

The William Penn Foundation’s grant will support the next three residencies starting in 2015. It will enable the Museum to engage one new artist each year.

The current artist-in-residence is the notable Philadelphia artist **Dito van Reigersberg**, co-founder/co-Artistic Director of the Obie Award-winning Pig Iron Theatre Company and the creator of his wildly popular alter-ego, **Martha Graham Cracker**. Dito van Reigersberg and his musical collaborator, bassist and composer **Andrew Nelson**, have found inspiration in the Museum’s music-related artifacts, including Irving Berlin’s piano, as well as lesser-known stories in American Jewish history, such as “The Girl Rabbi of the Golden West.” As part of their residency, they are developing an audio tour of the Museum from Martha Graham Cracker’s point of view; it will launch on October 29. The residency will culminate in a series of cabaret performances on December 3, 4, and 6, in which Martha draws the audience into an intimate confessional about her integral (albeit fictional) role in the lives of Jewish songwriters and composers throughout American history.

The prior (and first) residency, featured artists **Keir Johnston** and **Ernel Martinez** of **Amber Art and Design**, who were inspired by the American Jewish relationship to the textile industry and its broader themes of immigration and labor. They brought these themes to life through ***Hemmed Up: Stories through Textiles***, a vibrant installation made from hundreds of pieces of reclaimed fabric sewn together by both the artists and the general public. The order in which the strips were sewn was determined by a color-coding key the artists developed. Each strip of fabric corresponded to one letter, and sewn together, they represented texts from the Museum’s core exhibition that inspired the artists. The strips also symbolized piece-work, the system employed by sweatshops where many Jews and other immigrants worked at the turn of the 20th century.

Barsky continues, “This funding is a way to take *OPEN* to the next level—to attract new audiences and engage current audiences with the original perspectives of non-traditional curatorial voices across different disciplines and media.”

About the William Penn Foundation

The William Penn Foundation, founded in 1945 by Otto and Phoebe Haas, is dedicated to improving the quality of life in the Greater Philadelphia region through efforts that increase educational opportunities for children from low-income families, ensure a sustainable environment, foster creativity that enhances civic life, and advance philanthropy in the Philadelphia region. In partnership with others, the Foundation works to advance opportunity, ensure sustainability, and enable effective solutions. Since inception, the Foundation has made nearly 10,000 grants totaling over \$1.6 billion. The Foundation’s assets totaled over \$2.2 billion as of December 31, 2013.

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The National Museum of American Jewish History, located on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia, brings to life the 350-year history of Jews in America. Tracing the stories of how Jewish immigrants became Jewish Americans, the Museum invites visitors of all backgrounds to share their own stories and reflect on how their histories and identities shape and are shaped by the American experience. An open door for all, NMAJH honors the past and contributes to a better future by sharing the power of imagination and ideas, culture and community, leadership and service, in ways that turn inspiration into action.

The National Museum of American Jewish History is located at 101 South Independence Mall East at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets in Philadelphia. Museum hours are Tuesday to Friday, 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am - 5:30 pm. NMAJH is closed most Mondays, including federal holidays and some Jewish holidays. Museum admission is \$12.00 for adults, \$11.00 for senior citizens and youth, free for children 12 and under, Museum Members, and active military with ID. On Wednesdays from May 7 through the end of October, the Museum will stay open until 8:00 pm. Admission after 5:00 PM is pay-what-you-wish. For more information, visit NMAJH.org or call 215.923.3811.