

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – May 19, 2016 – We're Live Folks!

## **New Art Project Grabs the Ears of Kansas City Bus Riders**

KANSAS CITY, MO – Riders of Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA) buses are seeing placards promoting healthy-eating habits, and hearing folksy testimonials from a reformed junk food junkie. The “Freeing Throwers” project is a collaboration between artist Adriane Herman and raconteur Mo Dickens (with a little help from Ned Yost). Dickens says, “Sometimes People go to the Art; sometimes Art goes to the People, but in this case, the People and the Art take a ride together. I like that.” The project is geared to reach a diverse audience in all neighborhoods of KC through the more than 200 buses in the KCATA fleet.

Herman, who teaches at Maine College of Art in Portland, was a 2014-2015 National Studio Resident through Charlotte Street Foundation. During her residency she began photographing people receiving encouraging witnessing while releasing unsupportive habits and objects with which their agreements have expired. Herman believes all of us — not just professional athletes — deserve cheerleading when facing challenges. She exhibited documentation of people “letting go” printed on paper, license plates, a cell phone case, baby clothes bought from St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Shop, and “Freeing Throw Pillows” at Paragraph and Kiosk galleries.

Together Herman and Dickens relished reciprocity while surfing synchronicity, leading Dickens to let go of ingrained habits of eating fast food from drive-thrus and twice daily pastries. Featured on the placards installed in 50 KCATA buses is Herman’s photo of Dickens tossing a burger box over his shoulder into a dumpster before cheering congregants from a church in Prairie Village. Text exhorts: “LOVE YOURSELF... *DON'T EAT GARBAGE!* Change a habit, change your life. Change your life, and inspire others to change their lives....” A year later, Dickens has lost 27 pounds and his “feet feel better, and [his] back feels better too.”

The project is supported by a Rocket Grant (sponsored by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Charlotte Street Foundation, and KU Spencer Museum of Art) as well as Belger Cartage Service, Inc. The story of “Mo Is Less” also reaches bus riders through audio broadcast over speakers in all 236 KCATA buses. Four recordings in Dickens' drawl air at 6:28 and 8:28 am; and 5:28 pm, times when many riders are considering what and where to eat. They are also GPS-triggered near Dickens’ former drive-thru on Main Street in Midtown and a thrift shop at 39th & Troost Ave the team hopes to support.

Audio spots and accompanying electronic text feature Dickens recounting tales of leaving junk food behind, making healthy choices at the grocery, and losing the nickname the clerk at his local market formerly called him – “Mr. Honeybun.” Another voiceover encourages riders to utilize St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store at 39<sup>th</sup> & Troost to rid themselves of items they no longer need, but that may be useful to fellow citizens, cautioning that “side effects may include a sense of community and space in your closet.” The side of the thrift store sports a new mural recognizing community leaders.

Dickens says the highlight of the project was the day Herman showed up at the Belger Arts Center, where he works, with a special test of his commitment to healthy eating. Herman had carried a chocolate pie—a particular favorite of Dickens—from Portland, Maine, in a box sporting a hand-written message from the manager of the Kansas City Royals - “To Mo: Don't Eat the Pie! Ned Yost.” Dickens is a big fan of Yost and the Royals. For Herman the highlight to date was spending several hours riding buses with Dickens looking for placards and listening for their messages, and realizing the

project's audience is not only bus riders, but also drivers, who are hubs of itinerant communities. Several drivers reported noticing the new ads, with one being pleased to learn it is a project by artists, rather than a message from management to drivers, as he first thought. One driver asked Dickens what made him change his diet, noting he himself had given up soft drinks a month before and that he had a baby due in three days. Herman particularly enjoyed such conversations and learning about an impending joyous occasion of the kind capable of inspiring changes that can improve and extend life. She says "if photographically capturing and amplifying the infectious energy embedded in Dickens' gesture of letting go of unhealthy food improved or possibly helped extend his life, it is likely the greatest impact my art has had." The Freeing Throwers believe sharing news of Dickens' physical transformation as a sexagenarian can inspire change in and thus help others, having already collected data supporting this possibility.

Adriane Herman is a graduate of Smith College, with an MFA from the University of Wisconsin – Madison. Her work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, Yale University Art Gallery, Hallmark, Sprint, and has lectured at over fifty institutions. Dickens barely eeked out a BA degree from Appalachian State University in the late 1970s, and worked as a journalist, elementary school teacher, and librarian before joining the staff of the Belger Arts Center in Kansas City's Crossroads Arts District in 2004.

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