

# City of Boston, MBTA unveil digital billboards celebrating Asian American strength, resilience

By **Diti Kohli** Globe Correspondent, Updated May 5, 2021, 4:54 p.m.



Three designs that Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya created for the "We Are More" installation, now displayed around Boston. AMANDA PHINGBODHIPAKKIYA

Amid Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, dozens of digital billboards around Greater Boston boast slogans supporting the country's largest diaspora.

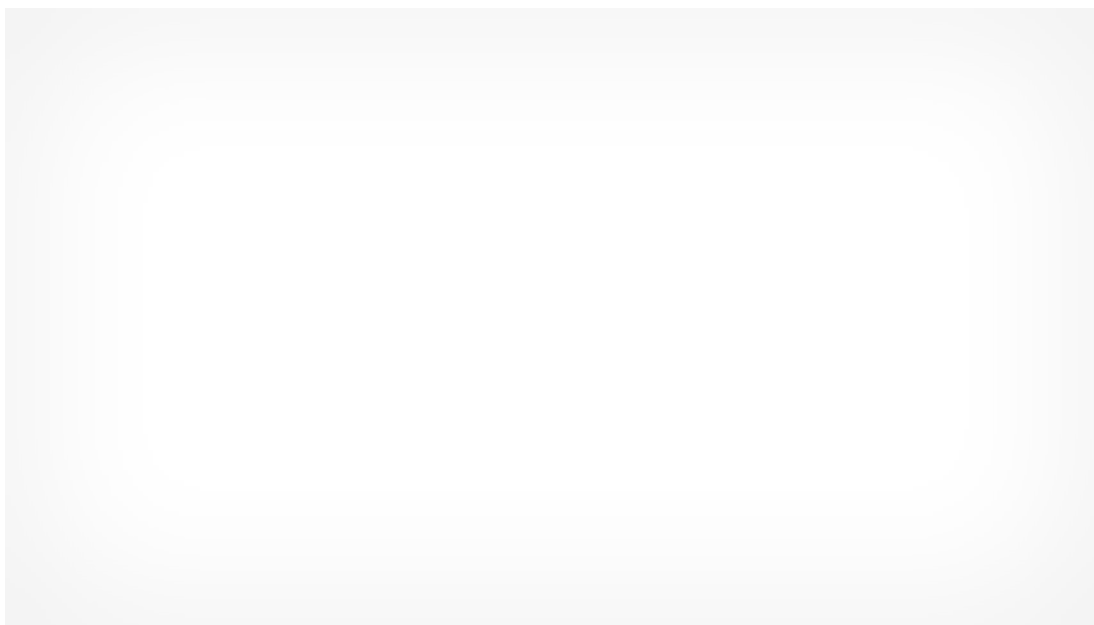
*Stand with us, some read. We belong here. Protect our elders.*

The signs are emblazoned with faces of people hailing from Korea to Bangladesh and crafted in a flurry of bold colors. A few plainly state that Asian American residents “are more than” a long list of stereotypes — more than “the future doctor,” “the straight A student,” “the helpless refugee,” “the nail lady,” “the Tiger mom.”

Together with the City of Boston and the MBTA, Chinatown’s Pao Arts Center stationed the signs in 80 locations.

To New York-based artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, the “We Are More” installation is a reminder of the community’s strength, resilience, and individuality.

ADVERTISING



“As Asian Americans, we haven’t been given the full range or freedom to tell the diversity of our stories, which makes it so easy for us to be scapegoated,” she said in a phone interview. This campaign finally shows that “this is our home, and we won’t tolerate being shoved into these narrow boxes that have been predefined for us.”

It’s also a callback to the staggering rise in Anti-Asian violence and harassment over the past 18 months. Spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, hate crimes against the community have increased by 60 percent in Boston between the beginning of 2020 and 2021, according to [The Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at Cal State San](#)

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## Bernardino.

The billboards serve as a joyous resistance to this violence, Phingbodhipakkiya said.

“Asian Americans have been cursed, pushed, spat on, kicked, shot, and killed,” she explained. “This is a manifestation of us no longer bearing our pain in the silence and not being cowed by bullies or bigots. We are here to stand. We are here to stay.”



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📍📍 Announcing "We Are More", my latest work, created in partnership with @tsqarts , 40+ unique pieces dropping on the screens and big bellies of Times Square in May for AAPI Heritage Month, and popping up in other cities around the country too. More at morethan.art

Feeling so much gratitude for this opportunity to boldly declare our belonging and proudly share our stories and celebrate our beauty, range and resilience. I cannot tell you how many times I cried in the making of this work—with pride and joy for the strength and beauty of our people, with sorrow for our elders being attacked, with empathy for our youth being bullied, with frustration at the lack of acknowledgment of our pain, the dearth of resources for our communities and the narrow boxes we've been shoved into, with anxiety at the stunning history of anti-Asian racism in this country that continues to this day, and with resolve to use my art to uplift our communities and ensure that we are seen.

WE ARE MORE is an art series celebrating the resilience and range of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

We are the deliveryman and the director of marketing.  
The class clown and the class president.  
The resident and the refugee.  
The singer and the scientist.

Our ranks are 20 million strong and growing by the day. We hail from over 20 nations, from the sweltering heat of Bangladesh to the skyscrapers of Seoul. We planted ourselves in nearly every city and town across this country. We call this place our home and we will no longer tolerate the narrow box that has been defined for us.

We have been cursed at, pushed, spat on, stabbed, kicked, shot, and killed. We have been blamed for a pandemic we did not create, a crisis that has caused tremendous damage to our community. We will no longer bury our pain in silence and we will not be cowed by bullies or bigots. We are here to speak. We are here to stand. We are here to stay.

[#stopasianhate](#) [#standwithus](#) [#wearemore](#)

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Phingbodhipakkiya's portraits display composites of people and stories she has collected through hundreds of conversations. The phrases that are part of the installation are borrowed from activists and the Stop Asian Hate Movement. The project is funded by the

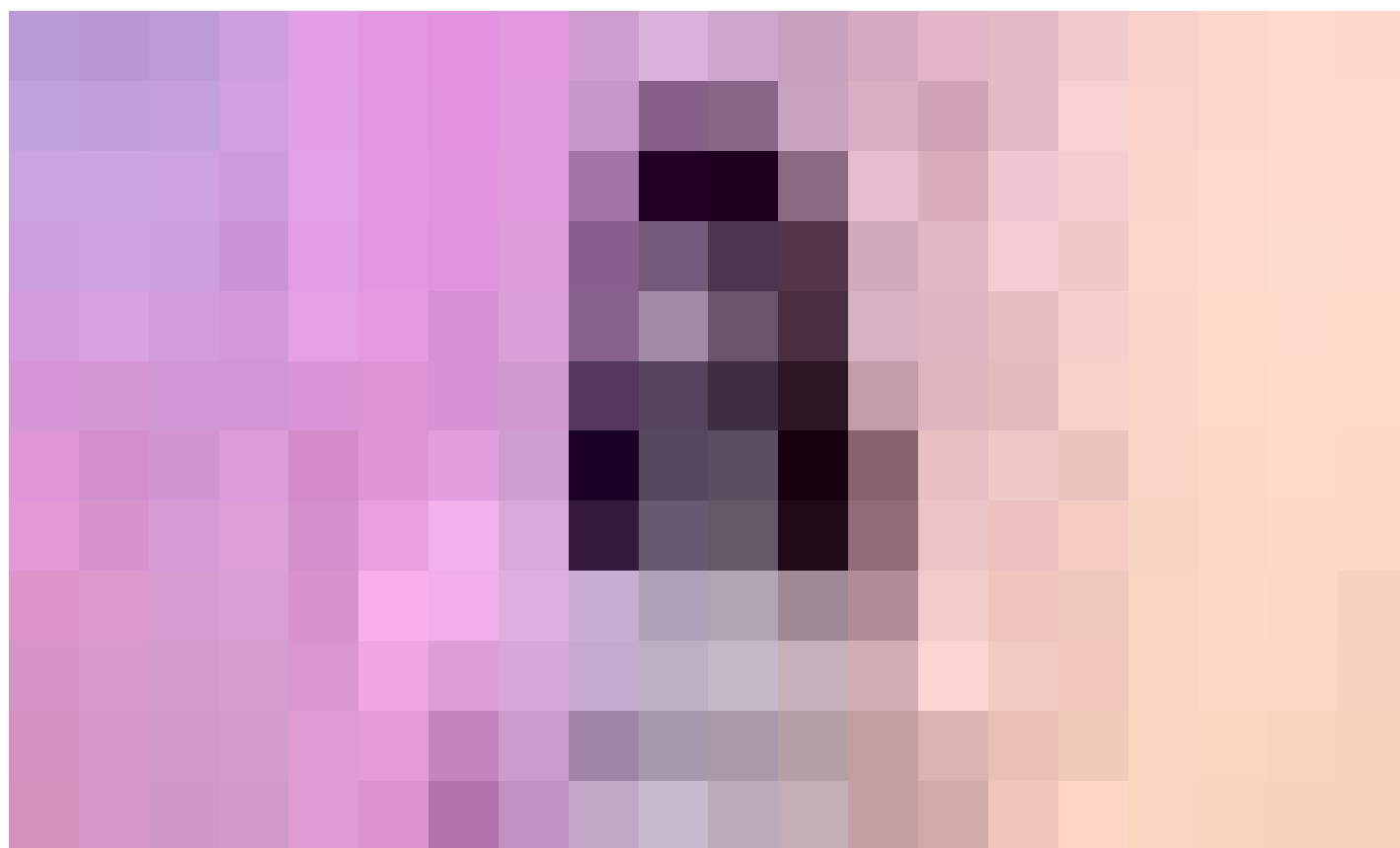
**Boston Foundation Nancy Wang Adams Scott A. Schoen Kevin Chang and Schweizer**

Foundation for Arts and Innovation.

The Boston iteration is just one of [several similar “We Are More” campaigns nationwide](#), born out of an original Times Square campaign.

In Boston, “We Are More” offers support and recognition for the Asian community where they already are — in Chinatown, Quincy, Malden, and beyond. It also serves as a PSA on public transportation, where the campaign holds “space for diversity,” two MBTA officials wrote in a statement.

“This is art literally in the streets,” said Ben Hires, who helped bring the work to the city as CEO of Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center. “It’s on public transport that Asians, immigrants, and so many marginalized people are taking ever day, and have been taking through the pandemic.”



New York-based artist and educator Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya MIKAYLA WHITMORE

Some folks reached out to Pao Arts Center director Cynthia Woo to say “We Are More”

made them feel safer in public spaces and on the T. (The BCNC collaborated with Bunker Hill Community College to create the Pao Arts Center, a Chinatown arts and culture center in 2017.)

But the “We Are More” installation extends beyond the enduring dangers to AAPI people. Rather, it’s a respite from the grief, Phingbodhipakkiya said.

“My work is about transmuting pain, grief, and loss into something hopeful and beautiful,” she explained. “We deserve to live without fear. We deserve to live with hope and joy. We deserve to celebrate our Asian joy.”

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