

WHAT'S NEW 2022

# New Faces, New Places, as Boston Gets Revitalized

In New England's largest city, there are exciting music venues, a floating oyster bar and newcomers on the arts and restaurant scenes that reflect its diversity.

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There's a new face welcoming visitors to Boston. It belongs to a 3-year-old in Velcro sneakers, crouching by a boombox and haloed in gold. She's the artist Rob Gibbs's daughter, who stares unflinchingly from a soaring 70-foot mural across from South Station, the city's biggest train terminal.

Mr. Gibbs — who paints under the name ProBlak — is the first Black Boston-native artist to be commissioned for the rotating Dewey Square mural. Mr. Gibbs grew up in Roxbury and has been painting walls in the city for years. This newest mural, "Breathe Life Together," will be up through May 2023. His art pays homage to under-heard people in Boston, and is a reflection of his neighborhood and home. "If I'm going to welcome people to the city, the best thing I can do is give them a home-cooked meal," he said. "This is a home-cooked meal."

It's a welcome for visitors who are returning to New England's largest city at near pre-pandemic levels. Hotel occupancy in June was 81.8 percent — shy of June 2019, when rates were 89.8 percent, but a vast improvement over a pandemic low of 5 percent. And with nonstop flights from 127 domestic and international destinations, travelers are being met with innovative art, new music venues, upscale dining options and reimagined hotels.

## Exhibitions and installations

The role of art in fostering conversation has been a focus at the Museum of Fine Arts in recent years. That conversation was thrust onto a national stage when, following the murder of George Floyd and during an ongoing nationwide reckoning with race, its retrospective of Philip Guston, a painter who often explored white supremacy, anti-Semitism and violence in his work, was delayed two years to rethink and reframe its presentation, which includes things like trigger warnings and resources for viewers to prepare themselves emotionally for the show. The postponement outraged many in the art world, but in May, the M.F.A. opened the show, "Philip Guston Now," which was lauded by many for its thoughtful approach, while others questioned the need for such cautionary features.



The Museum of Fine Arts delayed the opening of its “Philip Guston Now” exhibition for two years in order to reframe its presentation. The show closes on Sept. 11. Tony Luong for The New York Times

The exhibition will close on Sept. 11, a week after the M.F.A. celebrates the opening of the “Obama Portraits Tour” (Sept. 3 through Oct. 30), the final North American stop before the official presidential portraits of Barack and Michelle Obama return to the National Portrait Gallery. Alongside the Obama portraits will be more than 2,600 drawings, paintings and photos from as far away as South Korea. They are part of a community project that invited participants to submit a portrait of a leader in their lives.

President Obama’s remarks at the opening of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington celebrated King’s vision of unity. In January, Boston will unveil its own monument to Martin Luther King and his wife, Coretta Scott King, who met as students in Boston. Designed by the Brooklyn-based artist Hank Willis Thomas, “The Embrace,” a 20-by-40-foot sculpture, will be installed on Boston Common, America’s oldest public park and one of the most visible places in the city.

Other new art projects are decidedly more whimsical. In June, 10 miniature street scenes seemed to appear by magic around Greater Boston. The mouse-size installations, like the tiny “Mouseum” in the Seaport, are the brainchild of AnonyMouse, an art collective that has been creating pop-ups around Sweden since 2016. The storybook scenes have spawned scavenger hunts for all ages.

## Music venues up the game

After Boston’s live music scene went quiet during the pandemic, concerts crept back onto calendars in 2021, with masked audiences and proof-of-vaccination requirements. Now concertgoers are back in full force, and Boston has two new venues to welcome them.

A decade after opening Cambridge’s Sinclair, which music lovers flocked to for its outstanding acoustics and unobstructed sightlines, the Bowery Presents enlisted the same team to design Roadrunner, a 3,500-person music hall in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston. Opened in March, the general-admission venue offers six bars and a modern industrial-chic design. The 50,000-square-foot room with multilevel viewing of the 60-foot stage has already hosted Olivia Rodrigo, Leon Bridges and Lake Street Dive, and has more than 30 acts booked for the fall.