

# SIMPLY ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Meet the Past historical interpreters bring history to life at the Atlanta History Center.

**ON STAGE** In Their Shoes P48

*"I am actually acting out history. I get to live the lives of these people." —Kate Kovach*





**Left:** Damian Lockhart performs a monologue in front of the Texas locomotive.

**Above and below:** Kate Kovach portrays a variety of characters in historic homes, in the galleries and at special events.



# In Their Shoes

## Meet two historical interpreters who bring history to life at the Atlanta History Center

STORY: Amanda Morris

**T**ucked behind the skyscrapers of Buckhead, Meet the Past historical interpreters at the Atlanta History Center immerse visitors in history. Dressed in period clothing, they recreate everyday life and events from the past. For Kate Kovach and Damian Lockhart, the job allows them to combine their love of acting and history.

"The interpreters are so valuable, especially with our school groups," says Howard Pousner, the center's manager of media relations, of the 35 part-time interpreters on property. "They make strong first impressions about the Atlanta History Center and history in general, and often those first impressions are long-lasting."

Kovach has worked at the center since 2014, following a year-long volunteer assignment combating human trafficking around the world. She landed in Atlanta because of its strong anti-trafficking presence. Kovach, who has a theater and

performance studies degree from Kennesaw State University, enjoys her work at the center as she pursues her acting career. "I am studying historical ritual and culture, as well as the performative aspects of it. I am actually acting out history. I get to live the lives of these people," says Kovach.

Lockhart also has a theater and performance studies degree with a minor in African and African Diaspora studies from KSU. "I've always loved African history," says Lockhart, who has worked at the center since 2015. "But working here, I've grown to love a wider range of history." Outside of the center, he pursues acting, directing and producing as a freelancer.

Interpreters play the roles of historians and educators as well as actors. As part of the hiring process, candidates do a "cold" read of a previously performed monologue. Kevin Edmiston, the center's education manager, says an acting background is preferred, but it isn't the most im-

portant quality of an interpreter. "The person must have passion," he says.

Throughout the week, interpreters portray multiple characters based on actual people from history. Lockhart might one day guide a school tour as a young 1963 activist, and the next day work in the gallery as Denmark Mitchell, a journalist from the post-Reconstruction era (1863-1877).

Likewise, Kovach, alternates between roles, portraying Celeste, the wife of a slave owner, at the Smith Family Farm or a student in a Civil Rights sit-in. "I love the student because I'm portraying someone who has since become a friend of mine," says Kovach of Joan C. Browning, the inspiration for the student character. The now 78-year-old was one of the original Freedom Riders in Albany, Georgia, who protested for civil rights during the 1960s. "She came and saw our tour and said it was so much like the actual experience."

The actors also play roles in special

events, where, for instance, visitors learn what African Americans went through during the complex times at the end of slavery. During an event like this, interpreters may act in performances including "Order of Freedom," written by award-winning playwright Addae Moon, the director of performance-based interpretation at the center.

Lockhart explains that it's important for interpreters to be in tune with their audiences and understand that each visitor comes in with a different background and point of view. "We have to read people to know if the person wants to have a real discussion and to learn about the history," says Lockhart. "The kids ask the best questions." ■

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