

# Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

5216 Montrose Boulevard  
Houston, Texas 77006  
CAMH.ORG | @camhouston

Trust Artists.

Press Release

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Exhibition

## THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show



Gem Hale, *The Protest Before the Protest*, 2023, Digital photograph. Image and work courtesy the artist.

#ThisWay  
#HoustonGroupShow  
#TrustArtists

### Press Contact

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HOUSTON, TX (November 2, 2023) - Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) is thrilled to announce its newest exhibition, *THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show*. The exhibition showcases new work from 12 visionary Houston-based Black artists including Imhotep Blot by way of Amaechina Blot and Studio KER led by Michael Bennett, Colby Deal, Nathan (Nate) Edwards, Dom Elam, Amarie Gipson, Priscilla T. Graham, Gem Hale, Charonda Johnson, Berlin Nicholas, Jaylen Pigford, Irene Antonia Diane Reece, and Jason Woods (Flash Gordon Parks), who were invited to examine innovative ways of participating in the storytelling of Black legacy and heritage in Houston Freedmen's Town.

Located in Fourth Ward, Freedmen's Town is the first settlement of freed Black People in the city of Houston. At one time the boundaries of Freedmen's Town extended from the banks of Buffalo Bayou bordering downtown to present day Montrose. This origin place once consisted of over 500 historic structures within a vast swath of city streets. These structures were aggressively and systemically reduced, building by building, street by street, resulting in the much-diminished footprint of present-day Freedmen's Town.

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Working with Charonda Johnson, a fifth-generation Freedmen's Town resident and CAMH x HFTC's Engagement Manager, these artists reimagine the documentation of a critical period for the historical Houston Freedmen's Town. The artists' work is part archival, navigating the "What If...?" of a community that faltered at the hands of systematic forces. Together, the artists engage in fortifying the archive of Freedmen's Town and overcome the momentums of erasure and reclaim the intent of the founding Freedmen's Town Community members.

The artwork included in the exhibition centers the histories and the present realities of Houston's Freedmen's Town. Artists were supported by Research Fellows to create work that centered the histories and present realities of Houston's Freedmen's Town. Informed from the archives at the African American History Research Center located within Freedmen's Town and oral histories of living legacy residents, Black artists in the exhibition develop an understanding of how to relate to the one of the first land in Houston that welcomed Black freedom since America's founding.

Architecture and design collective Studio KER combines architecture, furniture design, and myth meaning to create a space for contemplation over the concerns of Freedmen's Town, realizing the memories and interpretations by the late artist and designer Imohotep Blot by Studio KER founder Michael Bennett and Blot's sister, Amaechina. Artist and activist Priscilla T. Graham uses her camera lens to present work around the pivotal moment that civil rights activist Dorris Ellis Robinson protested the city's impending destruction of Freedmen's Town historic brick streets by physically laying her body down in front of them. Nate Edwards, in collaboration with cinematographer Nick Lloyd and producer Unique James, responds to James Blue's 1978 three-part documentary, *Who Killed the Fourth Ward?*, with a filmic work that imagines Freedmen's Town's resuscitation, utilizing VR into present landscapes to create visual possibilities for things to come.

"Freedmen's Town is the Motherward and it feels necessary to support Black artists making connections to this place. The more that Houstonians learn about and advocate for Freedmen's Town the less there is to forget," says Mich Stevenson, the exhibition curator. "As an artist granted the opportunity to curate an exhibition at CAMH, I'm genuinely asking some of the best artists I know to connect to the legacies of Freedmen's Town that resonate with them and interpret their experiences in a way that is generative for the residents and those who will touch Freedmen's Town's historical legacy."

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*THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show* is part of CAMH's ongoing partnership with Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy (HFTC) through the *Rebirth in Action* project.

In a world where globalization often dilutes local cultures, the importance of maintaining regional identity cannot be overstated. The historical archive of Freedmen's Town, now celebrated nationally with events like Juneteenth, symbolizes Freedmen's Town's evolution after emancipation and stands as an embodiment of the ongoing fight for equality. Houston-based artworks that draw from this archive contribute to a collective memory that resonates nationally while keeping the distinct regional identity alive.

Research support for *THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show* include: 2023 Lead Research Fellow, Amarie Gipson and 2023 Student Fellow Raymond Burgos.

*THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show* is organized by Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and curated by Mich Stevenson, CAMH x HFTC Project Manager with support from fifth generation Freedmen's Town resident Charonda Johnson, CAMH x HFTC Engagement Manager.

## **About Contemporary Arts Museum Houston**

Established in 1948, CAMH is one of the oldest non-collecting contemporary art museums in the country, and is internationally known for presenting pivotal and landmark work by artists recognized as the most important of the 20th and 21st centuries. CAMH's mandate is to be present, to connect artists and audiences through the urgent issues of our time, and to adventurously promote the catalytic possibilities of contemporary art. CAMH's programming, both in and beyond the Museum, is presented free to the public, and advocates for artists' essential role in society.

## **About Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy**

The Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that protects and preserves the history of Freedmen's Town for the benefit of future generations. We support community engagement, re-education, and heritage tourism.

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### **Support**

Major support for *THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show* is provided by the Mellon Foundation.

*THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show* has been made possible by the patrons, benefactors, and donors to CAMH's Major Exhibition Fund: Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Louise Jamail, Sissy and Denny Kempner, Dillon Kyle and Sam Lasseter, MD Anderson Foundation, Rea Charitable Trust, The Sarofim Foundation, The Stolbun Family, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

Contemporary Arts Museum of Houston is funded in part by the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance.

### **CAMH Mission**

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally.

### **General Information**

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, in the heart of Houston's Museum District.

### **Hours**

Wed 11AM-6PM  
Thu 11AM-9PM  
Fri 11AM-6PM  
Sat 11AM-6PM  
Sun 11AM-6PM

Admission is always free. For more information, visit CAMH.ORG or call 713.284.8250.