

Content Review

THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show

On view | December 8, 2023–March 24, 2024



Nahtan (Nate Edwards) *Hold it Close, Don't Forget*, 2023 Still Image from Video: sound, color (1:40 minutes) Courtesy the artist

This content review is designed to communicate accessibility and powerful subject matters within this exhibition.

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Themes: Heritage, Black Histories, Research, Storytelling

On the west edge of downtown Houston, there is a small neighborhood called Freedmen’s Town or Fourth Ward. Most of the legacy residents in this community know the history—that freed Black people and descendants first laid the bricks on the streets 100 years ago. Fast forward to 2015, in an endeavor to uphold the historical significance of these bricks laid a century ago, current residents willingly faced arrest to preserve them.

Showcasing new work from 12 Black artists who are invited to participate in the storytelling of Houston’s Freedman’s Town, *THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show* marks a moment where historical research, art and community advocacy meet.



Michael Bennett, Imhotep Blot, and Studio KER, *Gumbo Chair, Gumbo Stool*, 2022–23
Furniture (two parts), Courtesy the artist’s studio

Exhibition Details: Art and Artist

- Imhotep Blot, an artist featured in the exhibition, passed away suddenly in early 2023, leaving behind a poignant legacy within the Houston arts community. Three of his oil and acrylic paintings, *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe*, *Sacred Quilt* and *Untitled*, seamlessly merge into the show, offering an innovative approach to storytelling.
- Nahtan (Nate) Edwards, Nick Lloyd, and Unique James respond to the 1978 film *Who Killed Fourth Ward?* by producing a new film in the exhibition. Their work envisions Freedmen’s Town’s revival, utilizing visual effects to plant new memories and reimagine the present landscape with historical resonance.
- Artists in the exhibition were asked to care and respond to this community from a holistic perspective, by attending community meetings, consistently interacting with residents, and joining community tours.

History and Facts

- Houston Freedmen’s Town is the largest post civil war settlement in the US, with seven UNESCO listings, beginning in 1865 as the destination for newly freed Black people from surrounding plantations in Texas and Louisiana after the Civil War.
- Freedmen’s Town residents pleaded for streets to be paved from 1907 to 1914. Upon discovering that it was an African American neighborhood, white contractors not only pocketed the funds allocated for the job but also declined to carry out the work. In response, Ned Pullum, a local brick maker and resident, worked diligently to pave the communities streets, while Reverend Jeremiah collected funds, going door to door, to rally community members. Their collaborative legacy lives on, as Ned Pullum’s bricks still pave the streets today, and his house still stands as in the neighborhood.
- Houston’s Freedmen’s Town is the birthplace of Black freedom within this region of the coastal south in Texas in a direct response to

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Irene Antonia Diane Reece, *You Can't Pray A Lie*, 2023, Archives, oral history, and personal items courtesy of Albert Ceasar, Henrietta Robinson, and Linda Preston Johnson; Slave Narrative Collection, Houston History Research Center, Houston Public Library
Courtesy the artist

- the Emancipation Proclamation (1863).
- The exhibition aims to inspire future generations to engage with the history and stories of Freedmen's Town.

Accessibility and Considerations

- Reminders: Michael Bennett, and Imhotep Blot's furniture work *Gumbo Stool*, and Jason Woods (Flash Gordon Park)'s installation, however, are not tactile and should not be touched to preserve the integrity of the pieces. Visitors should take note of "do not touch" signs throughout the exhibition.

Interactive Experience

- Some artworks incorporate sound elements; visitors are encouraged to use a QR code for Irene Antonia Diane Reece's work, *Give without sparing . . . Proverbs 21:26*, which directs listeners to a series of interconnected phone conversations from Freedmen's Town legacy residents.

- Amarie Gipson's binders as part of the work *An Ode to the Motherward*, offers a tactile experience, allowing visitors to touch and interact with the artwork by flipping through the binders.

Topic Sensitivity

- Due to the sensitive nature of the exhibition's themes, including discussions of historical violence and erasure, it is advisable to conduct research before or after visiting this exhibition.

Artists Include

Imhotep Blot by way of Amaechina Blot and Studio KER led by Michael Bennett; Colby Deal, Nahtan (Nate Edwards), Dom Elam, Amarie Gipson, Priscilla T. Graham, Gem Hale, Charonda Johnson, Berlin, Jaylen Pigford, Irene Antonia Diane Reece, and Jason Woods (Flash Gordon Parks).

THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show is curated by Mich Stevenson, Project Manager – Partnerships, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy.