

*THIS WAY:
A Houston Group Show*

**Contemporary
Arts Museum
Houston**

Located in Houston's Fourth Ward, Freedmen's Town is as deeply captivating as it is distinctly contested. The first settlement of freed Black people in the city, 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 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. When artists are concerned with place, reality finds poetic form, to uplift communities such as Freedmen's Town.

Working against the ongoing erasure of Freedmen's Town, the artists within this exhibition lend their vision to frame the memory of what was, and stretch the boundary of what lies ahead. *THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show* articulates themes of time and memory that offer their own evocation as collaboration to stir thought, dialogue, and perception, initiating an environment for rebirth and restoration. The exhibition offers not only a connection to a place but also to the legacy of others connected to its origin: historically and at present, Freedmen's Town.

In this moment in Houston's history, 12 visionary Black artists were invited to shape the unseen at a critical time in which Freedmen's Town's sacred archives and assets must be protected. Navigating what Freedmen's Town might have become had systemic forces not smothered the community's abundance means that the artwork in this exhibition is part archival and part first responder. These artists resuscitate the pulse of memory to fortify the archives while decelerating the momentum of erasure in this place of Freedom.

THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show showcases new work from 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 Nicholas, Jaylen Pigford, Irene Antonia Diane Reece, and Jason Woods (Flash Gordon Parks). They were invited to examine innovative ways to participate in the storytelling of Black legacy and heritage in Houston Freedmen's Town.

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

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Charonda Johnson

De Ro Loc, 2023

Found objects, found images, and hardware

Courtesy the artist

“*De Ro Loc* (2023) is a mixed media artwork inspired by a hidden gem of Freedmen’s Town, the De Ro Loc Carnival that started in 1909 and ended in 1920. The artwork highlights the celebration that African Americans established to combat segregation laws of the south that prohibited Blacks from participating in white events.”

-Charonda Johnson



Dom Elam

35 and Counting, 2023

Acrylic paint and glaze on clay

Courtesy the artist



Jaylen Pigford

4 Freedmen's Town, 2023

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the artist



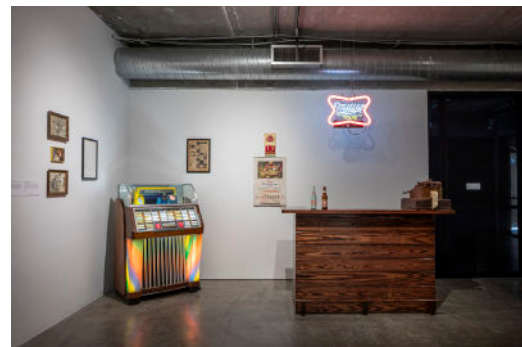
Jason Woods (Flash Gordon Parks)

The Ebony Bar, 2023

Installation of found objects, photographs, jukebox, vintage Miller neon light, reclaimed wood, paper, and metal

Courtesy the artist

“*The Ebony Bar* was located at 1010 Crosby Street near W. Dallas. It was a bar and grill owned and operated by George Edward Johnson (b. April 1, 1900) in the early 1950s. It was a favorite local hangout where you could hear Blues and Soul music on the jukebox while enjoying a cold beer on a hot humid day in Freedmen's Town. George had two sons, Wayne and Will Johnson who became notable musicians and performers in the Bayou City. Wayne Johnson was the drummer for the Bagby Street Boys who were the backing band for Ovide and Duke Recording Artists, The Masters of Soul.”



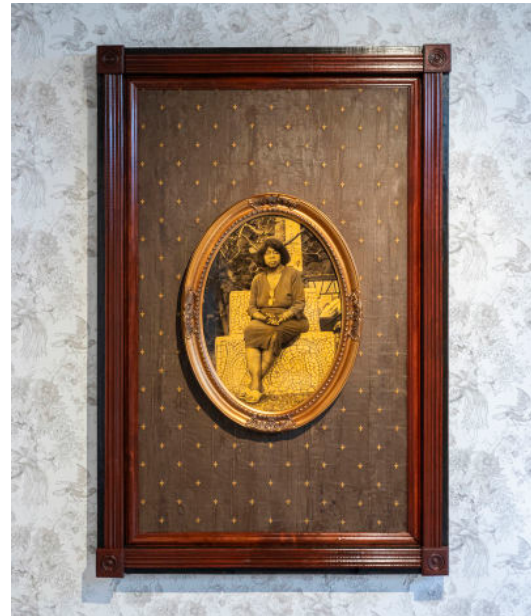
-Jason Woods (Flash Gordon Parks)

Colby Deal

Mrs. Lou, 2023

Wood, polyurethane, fabric, and photo paper

Courtesy the artist



Colby Deal

1. Three Crosses, 2023

Digital photograph

Courtesy the artist

Colby Deal

2. Labryinth, 2023

Digital photograph

Courtesy the artist



Colby Deal

3. Prayer Garden, 2023

Digital photograph

Courtesy the artist

Colby Deal

4. Hands, 2023

Digital photograph

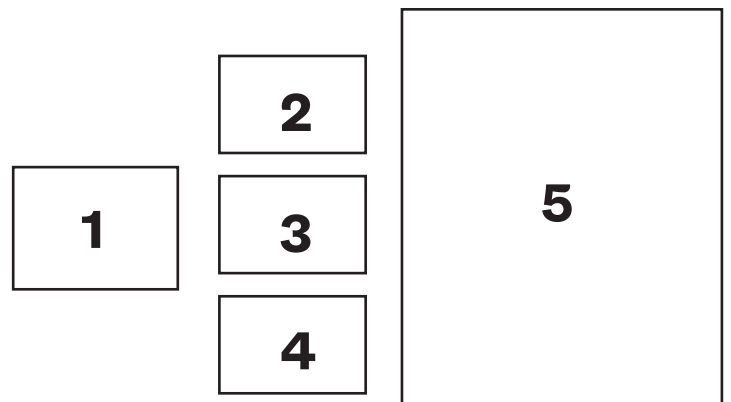
Courtesy the artist

Colby Deal

5. Archival Image of Mt. Carmel Missionary Baptist Church, 2023

Wood, polyurethane, fabric, and photo paper

Courtesy the artist



Amarie Gipson

An Ode to the Motherward, 2023

Wood, faux leather binders, and paper

Courtesy The Reading Room HTX

You are welcome to look through the binders.

“An Ode to the Motherward is a three-volume collection of archival material inspired by Freedmen’s Town and Houston’s understated role in the formation of Black America. Compiled in three-ring, faux leather binders that overlap on a custom wood shelf, each volume contains a thematically arranged multitude of juxtaposing portraits, film stills, artworks, news clippings, and snapshots of historic moments in Black culture across time and place.”

-Amarie Gipson



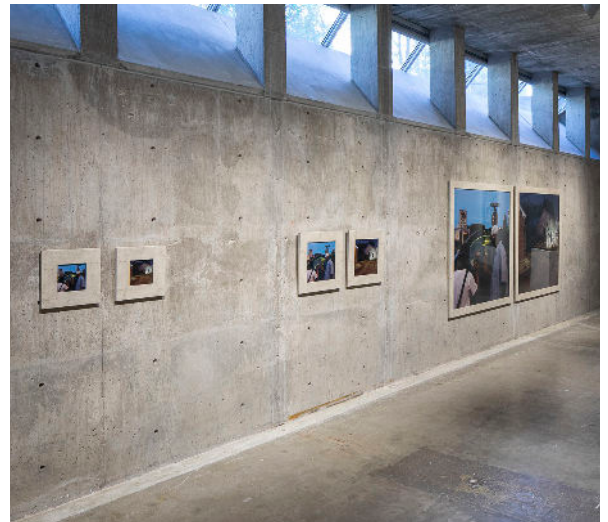
Gem Hale

Brick maker and The Protest Before the Protest, 2023

Digital photographs (series of three)

Courtesy the artist

“*Brick maker* (2023) shows Reverend Ned Pullum’s home in Freedmen’s Town. Pullum was the owner of the brickyard that produced 20,000–25,000 bricks per day. *The Protest Before the Protest* (2023) is a reenactment of the Brick Street protest led by Charonda Johnson and Mrs. Dorris Ellis Robinson on November 14, 2015.”



-Gem Hale

ON FLOOR

Please do not remove from gallery

ON FLOOR

Michael Bennett, Imhotep Blot, and Studio KER

Gumbo Stool, 2022–23

Furniture (two parts)

Courtesy the artist's studio

Michael Bennett, Imhotep Blot, and Studio KER

Gumbo Chair, 2022–23

Furniture (two parts)

Courtesy the artist's studio



ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT

Imhotep Blot

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 2020

Oil and acrylic paint on paper

Courtesy the artist's studio

Imhotep Blot

Sacred Quilt, 2020

Oil and acrylic paint on paper

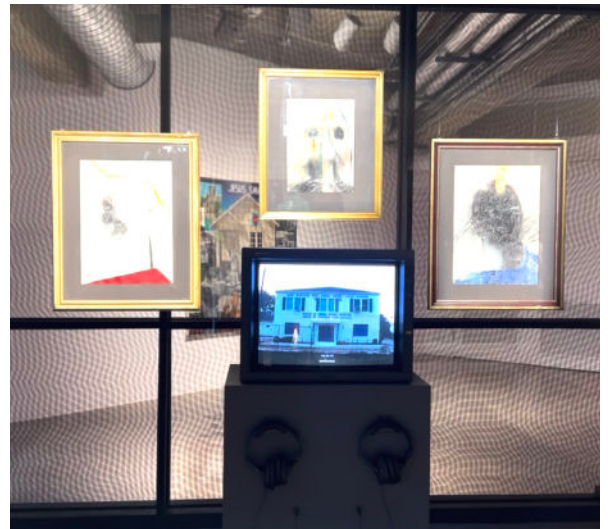
Courtesy the artist's studio

Imhotep Blot

Untitled, 2020

Oil and acrylic paint on paper

Courtesy the artist's studio



ON PEDESTAL

Imhotep Blot and Amaechina Blot

Winter's Funeral, Spring's Rebirth, 2023

Video: color, sound (13:31 minutes)

Courtesy the artist's studio

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



“This is a photographic series with the collaboration of native Fourth Ward residents’ archives, oral history, and portraits. I often think that the majority of my history, whether it be family or community, has always been passed down orally. The great-grandparents, the auntie, uncs, grannies, grand-daddies, the family friends, all have been a part of our lives and have at one point bestowed knowledge or gifted down memories. I often thought about that when creating this work, much like previous work with the archives. I was reminded recently about the significance of the meaning of when an elder within your family or community passes on. The effects it could have—if those memories and knowledge were not preserved or circulated. I was reminded that when an elder passes on in the community, it’s like a piece of that history dies with them. It’s like a library full of knowledge, identity, and culture, becomes destroyed. And if not treated or make efforts to collect, preserve, and circulate it will eventually be forgotten. I want us to be curious about our history. I want us to connect, continue to protect, and make sure nothing is forgotten.”

- Irene Antonia Diane Reece

Irene Antonia Diane Reece
Give without sparing . . . Proverbs 21:26,
2023

Audio recording

Archives, oral history, furniture, telephone
and personal items courtesy of Albert
Ceasar, Henrietta Robinson, and Linda
Preston Johnson.

Courtesy the artist

Your are welcome to listen to the audio
recording through the QR code.



Poem

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

-Langston Hughes

Irene Antonia Diane Reece
Nahtan (Nate Edwards)
Hold it Close, Don't Forget, 2023
Video: sound, color (1:40 minutes)
Courtesy the artist

“This video installation explores the lives of four different generations from Houston’s Freedmen’s Town. It revolves around their collective struggle to hold onto a floating brick, symbolizing the historic brick-paved street, laid down by the free Black community in the early 1900’s. As the city evolves around them, the bricks, and the stories they represent, remain suspended in time, defying the current of change.”

-Nahtan (Nate Edwards)

Director: Nahtan (Nate Edwards)
Producer: Unique James with CompoZition
Director of Photography: Duncan Johnson
Camera Operator and Editor: Nicholas
“Burner” Lloyd
Gaffer: Freddy Dang
Key Grip: Pyrex Hru
Assistant Camera Operator: Kerwin Escobar
Visual Effects: Kenneth Benitez
Behind-the-Scenes Camera Operator: Trey
Henderson
Score Composer: Charswa
Poem: “A Call Home”
Poem Written and Performed by: Avalon
Hogans
Talent: Charonda Johnson, Angelique
Johnson, Quick Lewis, Cherish Johnson,
Breeze Hall King Anthony Grimes, additional
kids: Jadon Johnson, Siah Johnson, and Amir
Johnson



Priscilla T. Graham

The Warrior Queen, 2022

Inkjet print on Dibond

Courtesy the artist

“In *The Warrior Queen* (2022), Dorris Ellis Robinson moves silently through the universe investing, as she goes. She is strategic, precise, and calculating.”

-Priscilla T. Graham



Berlin

Leave It All Behind?, 2023

Wax and acrylic paint

Courtesy the artist

