



Press Release

Announcement

Historic Brick Preservation launches in Houston Freedmen's Town



Photo: Hailey Reyes

HOUSTON, TX (February 4, 2024) – Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy (HFTC) and Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH), are thrilled to announce the second phase of *Rebirth in Action: Telling the Story of Freedom*, the multi-year and multi-part collaborative initiative to amplify and preserve the community, history, and heritage of Houston's Freedmen's Town. In partnership with the City of Houston and artist Theaster Gates, this phase of the project focuses on preserving and returning more than 30,000 historic bricks previously removed from Freedmen's Town, constructing a pavilion to temporarily house the bricks, and rehabilitate three historic homes. Phase two of *Rebirth in Action* is set to launch later this month with catalytic support from Kinder Foundation, the Wagner Foundation, and a dozen Preservations Champions.

Press Contact

For high-resolution images or
media inquiries, contact:

Billion Tekleab
Communications Specialist
sharon@houstonfreedmentown.org

Michael Robinson
Communications and Marketing
Manager
mrobinson@camh.org
713.284.8255

“The City of Houston is committed to preserving and revitalizing Freedmen's Town, a vital part of our history and a testament to the resilience of its community,” said Houston Mayor John Whitmire. “By protecting these historic streets, we honor the past and ensure that families and future generations can walk the same paths that helped shape our city.”

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

5216 Montrose Boulevard
Houston, Texas 77006
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The *Rebirth in Action* project, launched in 2022, aims to fully preserve the 0.7 miles of Freedmen's Town's historic brick streets and catalyze the ongoing preservation of Freedmen's Town. Established in 1865, Freedmen's Town is a 40-block area west of downtown Houston that was built by the newly freed Black people who lived there. The most significant intact Freedmen's Town in the country, its residents formed a vibrant community anchored by hand-made brick streets that are a testament to the resilience and possibility of Black places.

Over many decades, gentrification, long-deferred maintenance, and a series of street reconstruction projects that did not fully consider the historical significance of the community resulted in the removal of the historic bricks from the streets of Freedmen's Town.

In more recent times, the support for the *Rebirth in Action* initiative underscores the significance of honoring the heritage of the area through preservation efforts.

"Houston Freedmen's Town contributes to the rich history and diversity of our beloved city," said Nancy Kinder, president and CEO of Kinder Foundation. "We are honored to support an initiative that preserves and restores these historic bricks that are considered sacred to the community."

Rebirth in Action: Telling the Story of Freedom - Phase Two

Phase two of *Rebirth in Action* is scheduled to begin later this month. This phase builds upon the progress of phase one, and will catalog and preserve 30,000+ bricks previously removed from Freedmen's Town with the technical oversight of on-site archaeologist Dr. Alexandra Jones, who specializes in African diaspora archaeology, community archaeology, and archaeology outreach; Charonda Johnson as the Freedmen's Town Cultural Monitor; and Mich Stevenson as Project Lead. With the support of Workforce Solutions, Freedmen's Town residents will be trained and paid to help preserve the historic bricks and prepare them to return to Freedmen's Town. While the comprehensive design for the full preservation of Freedmen's Town's brick streets is being completed by Houston Public Works, the partnership will continue to host and inspire a range of artistic activations and community engagement events.

"This project brings together artists' engagement with the legacy community who have advocated for preserving the brick streets for decades, catalyzing a mission-based and artist-driven community development," says CAMH Co-Director and Chief Curator Ryan N. Dennis.

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Also, during phase two, three homes on Mt. Horeb Missionary Baptist Church's property will be rehabilitated – a pivotal step in preserving and revitalizing the cultural assets of the community. These homes are integral to the rich heritage and history of Freedmen's Town, and their rehabilitation underscores our commitment to honoring and maintaining this significant historical legacy.

Additionally, this initiative represents a vital economic investment in the community, catalyzing revenue generation through increased tourism, cultural events, and local business support.

"This project transcends the rehabilitation of historic structures and providing a pavilion to house the historic bricks. It's about reigniting the spirit and resilience of Freedmen's Town with a community-centered approach to secure a pathway for global recognition," says HFTC Executive Director Sharon Fletcher, who has led the organization since November 2023.

The project will continue welcoming support as the Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and the City of Houston continue progressing *Rebirth in Action* through the completion of phase two over the next two years.

Rebirth in Action: Telling the Story of Freedom – Phase One History

From 2022–24, phase one of *Rebirth in Action* successfully conducted numerous community and stakeholder meetings and a myriad of artistic activations. These concerted engagement efforts resulted in the successful completion of a comprehensive, community-approved Design Concept Report by Houston Public Works to preserve the brick streets and address infrastructure upgrades.

The public-private partnership between HFTC, CAMH, and the City of Houston, supported through the Mellon Foundation and NEA's Our Town grant, proves each party's commitment and thoughtful approach to addressing the needs of Freedmen's Town.

During phase one, the partnership produced two exhibitions: *THIS WAY: A Houston Group Show* and *Theaster Gates: The Gift and The Renege*.

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About Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy

The Houston Freedmen's Town Conservancy, established in 2018, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and preserving the history of Freedmen's Town for the benefit of future generations. As the steward of the Freedmen's Town Heritage District, the Conservancy seeks to transform the understanding of Emancipation, telling the story of freedom through education and engagement with visitors from around the world.

About Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH)

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.

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.