

DESIGN PHASE DOCUMENTATION

BARBARA JORDAN COMMEMORATIVE MONUMENT FOR THE
AFRICAN-AMERICAN LIBRARY AT THE GREGORY SCHOOL

HOUSTON ARTS ALLIANCE
Department of Civic Art + Design



**Barbara Jordan Commemorative Monument
for the African-American Library at the
Gregory School**

Artists:

Charisse Pearlina Weston and Jamal Cyrus



The Meditative Space

The Meditative Space takes its overall structure from the Adinkra symbol *sepow*, which represents justice and authority. Instead of featuring a closed circle, our design features two half circles to emphasize the necessity of justice being porous and malleable to meet the changing needs of the people. This is a symbolic nod to Jordan's dedication to politics and law for the betterment of society.

The glass panels feature archival photographs coupled with handwritten notes and speeches by Jordan. The unifying

design element throughout the imagery are two grids derived from old maps of Houston's Fourth and Fifth Wards, the landscape of Jordan's formative years. This selection of photographs is meant to present another view of the late politician that counteracts many of the inaccurate portrayals of Jordan during the rise of her political career. Our design includes images of her youth, her family, candid photographs, and her interactions with her constituents and fans and intermingles them with handwritten notes and excerpts from her most iconic speeches.

The text and imagery will be applied to the glass using a variety of techniques that will elevate the artistic impact and significance of the sculptural space and its content. Working closely with Franz Mayer of Munich, we will use hand-painting, digital ceramic prints, and other imagery techniques to create a multidimensional representation of our designs.



Imagery

Nine panels featuring childhood photographs, collage of early speeches, are meant to represent the young Jordan looking to her future alongside her future constituents. The selected speeches, which make up the background of the panels, explore a wide-range of topics, including environmental activism, health equity, and racial justice. These texts — "Focus on the Quality of Life," "On Discrimination and Prejudice," "Speech Note on Love," and "Speech Note on Compassion" — largely outline the essential components for building a prosperous community and explore ideas of communal support and respect. These excerpts were chosen

to highlight the breadth of Jordan's views and their long-lasting relevancy.

Nine panels on the opposite side feature a series of portraits from 1969 to the 1980s, which show Jordan in motion. The speeches, which fill the background of these panels, including an excerpt from her 1976 keynote address to the Democratic Convention, highlight her political prowess and belief in the duty of politicians to represent and protect the people.

Charisse Pearlina Weston



Charisse Pearlina Weston (born 1988, Houston, TX) received her BA from the University of North Texas in 2010, a MSc in Modern Art: History, Curating and Criticism from the University of Edinburgh's Edinburgh College of Art in 2011 and a MFA in Studio Art, with Critical Theory emphasis, from the University of Irvine in 2019. She participated in the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2019-2020 Independent Study Program. She has completed residencies at SOMA Mexico City, Abrons Art Center, and the International Curatorial and Studio Program in Brooklyn, New York.

Her work has been exhibited in group shows at notable venues including the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, Bard College of Art (forthcoming) and solo shows at Abrons Art Center, Project Row Houses, Recess, and the Moody Center of the Arts at Rice University. Weston has received numerous

awards including the Houston Artadia Award (2015), the Dallas Museum of Art's Arch and Anne Giles Kimbrough Award (2014), and a project award from the Graham Foundation (2021). In 2019 she was a Dedalus Foundation Fellow in Painting and Sculpture. She is the recipient of the Museum of Art and Design's 2021 Burke Prize and is the Museum's 2021 Artist Fellow. She will have her first solo institutional exhibition in New York City in fall 2022.

Jamal Cyrus



Jamal Cyrus (born 1973, Houston, TX) received his BFA from the University of Houston in 2004 and his MFA from the University of Pennsylvania in 2008. In 2005 he attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and in 2010 he was an Artist in Residence at Artpace San Antonio. Cyrus has won several awards, including the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award, the Artadia Houston Award, and the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship. He has participated in national and international exhibitions, including *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 – Now*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL (traveled to ICA Philadelphia, 2016); *Arresting Patterns*, ArtSpace, New

Haven, CT (traveled to the African American Museum in Philadelphia, 2016); two exhibitions at the Studio Museum, Harlem (both 2013); the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (2012); the New Museum, New York (2011); The Kitchen, New York (2009); the Museum of London Docklands, London (2009); and The Office Baroque Gallery, Antwerp (2007). In 2006 Cyrus was included in *Day for Night*, the 2006 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Cyrus is also a member of the artist collective Otabenga Jones and Associates. As a member of the collective, Cyrus has exhibited at Lawndale Art Center, Houston (2014), Project Row Houses, Houston (2014), the High Museum of Art, Atlanta (2008), the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC (2008), the California African American Museum, Los Angeles (2008), the Menil Collection, Houston (2007), the 2006 Whitney Biennial, and Clementine Gallery, New York (2006). Cyrus's and Otabenga Jones's work has been reviewed in *Artforum*, *The Houston Chronicle*, *Houston Magazine*, and *The New York Times*. Cyrus participated in the New Orleans triennial, *Prospect.4*,