Project Row Houses Unveils Round 50: Race, Health and Motherhood

Round 50 explores maternal mortality, with a focus on the health disparity that impacts women of color, specifically, Black women in the Third Ward community

HOUSTON – September 12, 2019 – Project Row Houses (PRH) will unveil its latest Artist Round, Round 50: Race, Health and Motherhood, on Saturday, October 12. Curated by PRH Curator and Programs Director Ryan N. Dennis, Round 50 explores how artists, healthcare professionals and practitioners are responding to the Black maternal mortality rate, a national problem that has local ramifications in Third Ward and other neighborhoods in Houston.

“Round 50: Race, Health and Motherhood is an opportunity for us to propel the conversation around Black maternal mortality forward. This is not a topic that we can ignore, especially when women of color in Houston’s Third Ward have one of highest rates of death and complications prior to, and following, birth,” Dennis said. “As a Black woman and expecting mother myself, I find it troubling that women of color, especially Black women, are facing these extreme health disparities, due to controllable factors. Through Round 50, we will explore the impact of Black maternal mortality and acknowledge the reality that health disparities exist while responding to these issues within our communities.”

Round 50 participating artists include Dem Black Mamas Podcast comprised of Crystal Tennille Irby, Nekisha Killings, and Thea Monyeé (South Carolina and Los Angeles-based); Brian Ellison in collaboration with Jasmine Mans (Houston-based); Alexandra Folino (NYC-based); Lindsay Gary in collaboration with Stacey Allen, Cecilie Baxter-Lofton, and Felicia Thomas (Houston-based); Healthy Women Houston (Houston-based); htx people project comprised of Bria Lauren and Morganne Nikole (Houston-based); and Elise R. Peterson (Los Angeles-based). The artists will create site-specific installations, which aim to have nuanced conversations that raise awareness, offer supportive services, participate in advocacy strategies that have an impact on Third Ward and share resources and create multiple entryways to engage with the topic that is inclusive.

Round 50 was conceived and curated in response to a 2018 project titled, “Improving Maternal Health in Harris County, A Community Plan” funded by the Houston Endowment, a private foundation that convened a steering committee of leaders from a wide range of backgrounds— including healthcare, behavioral health, social services, businesses, government and philanthropy to identify the forces behind Harris County’s high rate of maternal morbidity. The year-planning and research effort produced findings from this collaborative project showed that Houston’s Third Ward is a maternal mortality hot spot.

The healthcare industry, much like other industries in the country, are fraught with a racist, biased lens that doesn’t take into consideration socio-political and economic issues that are centered around systemic racist structures that inform how people of color are seen and the health services they receive. In addition to implicit bias, factors such as lack of transportation, access to healthy food, and safe and affordable housing have an impact on maternal mortality.

MEDIA CONTACT
Nataly Torres, nataly@elmorepr.com
Elmore Public Relations, 713.524.0661
“Throughout its 26-year history, Project Row Houses has used its resources to drive and support the conversation surrounding overlooked social justice issues,” said Eureka Gilkey, Executive Director of PRH. “Black maternal mortality has been a part of the national conversation for some time; however, it was our local philanthropic partners and healthcare providers that made us aware of the issue’s impact on Third Ward mothers and their families; a risk that is consistently three to four times higher for them than their white counterparts, irrespective of income, education or marital status.”

“Maternal mortality doesn’t just happen; its roots are steeped in disparate medical care and treatment during pregnancy, labor and postpartum,” said Gilkey. “Third Ward is located approximately five miles away from the largest medical complex in the world, yet Black mothers in our community are being severely impacted by maternal mortality. With Round 50 as our platform, we are using socially engaged art to highlight actions we can take to change the fact that for Black women, Texas is the most dangerous state to have a baby.”

Guests will have the opportunity to hear from the artists about their individual practices and the inspiration behind their installation at the opening event during the Artists’ Talks, which will begin at 3 p.m. followed by the opening from 4 p.m. – 7 p.m.

Round 50 will be on view from Saturday, October 12, 2019 through Sunday, February 16, 2020. The Art Houses, located at 2505 – 2517 Holman St., are open Wednesday – Sunday, noon – 5 p.m.

###

**ABOUT PROJECT ROW HOUSES (PRH)**

Project Row Houses (PRH) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering people and enriching communities through engagement, art and direct action. PRH was founded in 1993 to be the catalyst for transforming community through the celebration of art and African-American history and culture. Inspired by the work of German avant-garde artist Joseph Beuys and African-American painter Dr. John Biggers, the seven founders – James Bettison, Bert Long, Jr., Jesse Lott, Rick Lowe, Floyd Newsum, Bert Samples, and George Smith – purchased 22 historic shotgun-style row houses on two blocks in a disinvested neighborhood in Houston’s Historic Third Ward and began using the houses as spaces for thematic art interventions.

The PRH site now encompasses five city blocks and houses 39 structures that serve as home base to numerous community enriching initiatives, art programs, and neighborhood development activities. Since its inception, PRH has demonstrated over its 25 year-plus history that collective community art-making is a sustainable vehicle for community transformation. Today, PRH serves as a model for not only the greater Houston region, but for communities all over the world. For more information, please visit projectrowhouses.org.