For Immediate Release  
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ROUND 52: GULF COAST ANTHROPOCENE OPENS AT PROJECT ROW HOUSES JULY 31, 2021

Houston, Texas. After pausing in-person public programming due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Project Row Houses (PRH) will re-open on July 31, 2021, with the unveiling of Round 52: Gulf Coast Anthropocene, curated by Ryan N. Dennis and Dr. Willie J. Wright. Round 52 will kick off with Porch Talks, an opportunity to hear from the artists about their individual practices and the inspiration behind their installation, from 3-4PM followed by a Community Market from 4-7PM on Saturday, July 31, 2021. The exhibition will be on view through December 5, 2021. The Art Houses, located at 2505 – 2517 Holman St., are open Wednesday – Sunday, noon – 5 p.m.
“In recent years, natural disasters have become unavoidable and unwanted collaborators in PRH’s practice of socially-engaged art,” explained PRH Executive Director Eureka Gilkey, “with increasingly frequent storms and floods disrupting our plans. We selected environmental justice as the focus for this round well before we knew that we would experience a global pandemic and catastrophic winter freeze, both of which had a disproportionately harsh and traumatic impact on Third Ward.”

“We are grateful,” Gilkey went on, “that we are finally ready to welcome people back to our site to experience art in community, and eager to learn from and with the artists and curators of Round 52 how we might address the ongoing environmental crisis through creative collective action.”

Round 52: Gulf Coast Anthropocene, is an intervention into global conversations about climate change. In other circles, it has been viewed as an example of the Anthropocene, a geological era associated with humans’ impact on the earth.

Dennis was formerly PRH’s Curator and Public Programs Director. She is now the Chief Curator and Artistic Director of the Mississippi Museum of Art.

Dennis shares: “I am thrilled to participate in another Round at Project Row Houses with my dear friend and colleague Dr. Willie Wright. PRH has set a stage for us to have important dialogue around complex issues with artists working in dynamic ways today. Through this Round, we hope to point an eye toward makers who are amplifying injustices within the environmental landscape in the Gulf. Finding ways to create space to creative problem solve and point to the unseen is of great importance. So thankful to have an organization like PRH in Houston who welcomes these discussions.”

Dr. Willie Wright is an Assistant Professor of Geography at Rutgers University’s School of Arts and Sciences.
Dr. Wright spoke of his involvement in the Round. “I am grateful to Project Row Houses for the opportunity to work with Ryan Dennis, the artists, and organizers to think of more imaginative, and less exploitative, ways to engage environments and communities across the Gulf. This Round is particularly relevant as Houstonians continue to suffer the fallout of extreme weather events, bureaucratic failures, and environmental hazards.”

Participating artists include Annotation 3.5.4.5, Kai Lumumba Barrow, Whit Forrester, Preston Gaines, HTX Community Fridges, Kindred Stories, Cristina Molina, and Xaviera Simmons. This Round questions what public art can inform us about this era, our connection to the built and natural environments, and our need for a more just and sustainable world.¹

This Round does not subscribe to the notion that all people pollute equally. Moreover, we acknowledge that our current era is but one of several anthropocentric moments in world history – that a variety of lifeways, development traditions, and ecological relations have been eradicated here and abroad by various forms of statecraft (e.g., colonization, chattel slavery). Acknowledging that other human-environment relations existed beyond those of today, as well as in the present, we encouraged artists to incorporate a capacious understanding of the Anthropocene into their works.

As natives of the Gulf Coast region, with relatives throughout the state of Texas, our concept for and approach to curating a Round on this subject was affected by recent bouts of extreme weather that ravaged Houston and the greater Gulf Coast region. The countless losses associated with Hurricane Harvey, Winter Storm Uri, and ongoing petrochemical exposures make it clear that there is no such thing as a natural disaster.
There are, however, consequences due to the (in)actions of those responsible for protecting residents. From these trials, and others, we have learned that the most vulnerable members of our city (i.e., houseless, underemployed) are predisposed to the worst effects of these storms. We have also realized that in these times, we must rely on one another for support, sustenance, and other forms of mutual aid.

*Round 52: Gulf Coast Anthropocene* stretches climate change and Anthropocene narratives beyond a focus on the earth’s elements. Our intent is to highlight the environment not through a nature versus society binary, but as composed of numerous intersections between human and non-human beings. We also intend to address the growing environmental concerns of our region while acknowledging that, for some, environmental concerns are not solely elemental.

This Round, building on previous Rounds, illustrates anti-Blackness as an environmental concern. We base our position, in part, in Christina Sharpe’s reference to anti-Blackness as an oppressive weather system that forecasts Black people’s lives:

Sharpe said: In the United States, slavery is imagined as a singular event even as it changed over time and even as its duration expands into supposed emancipation and beyond. But slavery was not singular; it was, rather, a singularity—a weather event or phenomenon likely to occur around a particular time, or date, or set of circumstances… In what I am calling the weather, antiblackness is pervasive as climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies… But the shipped, the held, and those in the wake also produce out of the weather their own ecologies.

This same system, through order and control, required the conversion of “idle” land into valuable property. In this way, plantation style agriculture ushered in an Anthropocentric era that disavowed Black and Indigenous ecological relations
and development traditions. The legacy of these design schemes, as does the weather, remains in how we order and value landscapes and the people who inhabit them (e.g., opportunity zones, suburbs, so-called ghettos).

And so, we claim, as have generations before us, that climate change is a Red, Black, and Green issue. For these reasons, righting the errs of this Anthropocene must be disruptive, imaginative, comprehensive, just, and sustainable. How might intersecting calls for climate mitigation with calls for tenants’ rights, anti-eviction campaigns, sustainable/equitable development, and prison abolition result in new ecologies? With this question in mind, we encouraged artists to read across Anthropocenes and with environments and global movements.

[1] The Carbon Majors Report 2017 details 100 companies that are responsible for 71% of the world’s greenhouse gases


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 a 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 site, 39 structures over five city blocks, serves as home to numerous community initiatives, art programs, and neighborhood development activities. Since its inception, PRH has demonstrated that collective community artmaking is a sustainable vehicle for community transformation. Today, PRH serves as a model in Houston and throughout the world. For more information, please visit projectrowhouses.org.

ABOUT COVID-19 PREVENTION AND PROTECTION POLICIES
In order to protect the most vulnerable members of the PRH community, and because PRH places the highest priority on the lives and health of our neighbors, supporters, artists, volunteers, and staff before all other priorities, visitors to the Round Opening and public viewing hours will be asked to comply with guidelines on masking, sanitizing, and maximum capacity restrictions on indoor spaces.

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