



CITY OF HOUSTON'S **CIVIC ART PROGRAM**

COMMISSIONED ARTWORK FOR HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY'S NEW FREED-MONTROSE NEIGHBORHOOD

CONCEPT AND PROPOSAL

Spirit of Montrose is a mural, sculpture, and light piece proposal for the new Freedman-Montrose Public Library developed by Houston-based artist "Kill Joy."

The artwork begins on the first floor, with stalks of maize supporting the indigenous peoples of the Karankawas, and Akokisas that inhabited the greater Houston area for thousands of years (as far back as 8,100 BC). These tribes were hunter-gatherers, and understood to have enjoyed successful corn harvests to sustain these civilizations. The maize crops lay the foundational roots for the phases of humanity and are pictured in the scene as releasing magic, depicted as twinkling LED lights, representing the spirit of Montrose.

Historically, in the south, live oak trees provided shade and served as a gathering place for people to meet, engage in important discussions, and hold school teachings. Leading up from the top of the elevator is a giant live oak tree that gives shade and safe space for a circle of learning. A teacher is pictured reading to a group of children, with the book revealing both ghoulish and magical stories that have been shared and passed down throughout history. Live Oaks are some of the oldest living residents in Montrose (typically 100-300 years old), have witnessed the neighborhood change throughout history, and continue to serve as spaces for gathering.

On the second floor of the entrance north, the live oak branches twist around revealing a bungalow house in the style that was established at the start of the "Montrose neighborhood" in the 1910s. Nearby, on a branch, a couple relaxes and reads to each other, signaling the growing community in the area at that time. During the 60's and 70's, affluent people that had occupied these bungalow homes moved to the suburb areas as Houston continued to grow as an economic hub. LGBTQIA+ people, immigrants, and artists moved into the area, turning it into the colorful, vibrant, creative, but also complex neighborhood known today.

A rainbow arch extends throughout the artwork, and on the west elevator wall, figures are shown dancing and celebrating, as an ode to the start of the era when gays and lesbians met at bars and moved into Montrose as a safe gathering space. As the scene continues on the wall above the stairwell, members of these historically transformative communities reign down magic on an aging neighborhood. The rainbow appears to begin to fade away, surrounded by magic (twinkling lights).

On either side of the fading rainbow on the north stairwell wall, two House Sparrows are pictured. These are one of the most common wildlife animals found around the world and are recorded to engage in both homosexual and heterosexual interactions and partnerships. These social animals depend on one another for survival and continue to exist in thriving, global communities. Finally, the panel pictures live oak trees that will continue to survive as part of Montrose's story as it continues to change.

The live oak tree and branches, as well as the maize stalks, will be formed by laser engraved sheets of plywood. The recessed part of the carved plywood will be painted, and the raised lines will be rolled over with paint to create a multi-dimensional effect of a commonly two-dimensional looking print. The original files that the laser engraving will be based off will be from smaller studies that are drawn, and hand carved on MDF wood. The artist is choosing to engrave the live oaks and maize in plywood to honor their long- standing legacy that gave rise to humans inhabiting the area.

The “magic” that is mentioned throughout the scenes with the maize stalks, the book under the live oak tree, the magic being rained down, and the magic that the house sparrows protect will all be portrayed through LED lights that twinkle.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Kill Joy’s work sits at the intersection where jungle meets desert. She was raised in a small oil town of west Texas, but her family is from the archipelago known as the Philippines. These split identities have informed her worldview with experiences from vastly contrasting environments and cultures.

She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Printmaking from the University of North Texas in 2010. Upon graduating, she became the printmaking product manager for Gamblin Artists Colors in Portland, Oregon until 2014. From December 2014 to the summer of 2019, she lived in Mexico City as a muralist and printmaker. Since 2020, she has based her home and studio practice in Houston, Texas. She’s worked with various print shops including Oblation Papers and Press and Flight 64 in Portland, Oregon, Estudio Mitl in Mexico City and more recently, Coronado Print Studio based in Austin, Texas. Her prints and murals are published in books, magazines, and graphic novels. Her screenprinted posters are regularly used in people-led campaigns throughout the US, Mexico, the

Philippines, Micronesia and Indonesia. She is part of the Justseeds Artists Cooperative based between Canada, United States and Mexico. Her murals can be found across the United States, Mexico, Belize, Honduras, Colombia, and the Caribbean.

Kill Joy co-manages *La Onda*, a print shop and *taller*, based in Houston Texas. She works as a full-time artist maintaining a practice in printmaking, painting and puppet making.

SELECTION PROCESS | PANELISTS

Arts Professionals

Jennie Ash, Executive Director, Art League Houston



Jennie Ash joined ALH as Visual Arts Director in 2011, and in November 2017 transitioned into the position of Executive Director. Ms. Ash received an MFA from City & Guilds of London Art School and a BFA from the University of the Arts, London. In her role as Visual Arts Director, Ms. Ash launched a massive reorganization of the exhibitions program, and ALH is now known locally and nationally as a leader in arts programming and artist support. Ms. Ash has organized many contemporary art projects, community forums, and open dialogs

that intersect art with broad social issues with a focus on artist advocacy, social justice, and alternative models of arts administration, sustainability, and community engagement. Working closely with an engaged twelve-member Board of Directors, Ms. Ash provides strategic leadership, management, and direction for the organization. Ms. Ash oversees and supports a core staff of nine that includes the Director of Education; Community Engagement Manager, Exhibition & Curatorial Projects Manager; Education Coordinator, Marketing Manager, Finance Manager, Weekend Visual Arts Associate, Evening Visual Arts Associate, and Grant Writer.

Joel Kalmin, Director of Facilities Planning, Legacy Community Health



Joel is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and spent several years working in event planning for several non-profit organizations including the American Cancer Society, Hugh O'Brien Youth Foundation, among others. Later, Joel ventured to study interior design abroad as an apprentice in Melbourne, Australia. Upon moving back to Houston, he opened a retail/home furnishings store, and later began working for John B. Kidd Assoc. a boutique, high-end residential firm. After working on independent projects for nearly a decade, Kalmin served as a Senior Designer at Sue Firestone Associates in Santa Barbara, designing luxury properties in the hospitality and residential sector. Later pursuing graduate work at the GSD/Harvard for Urban Planning, Joel was brought back to Houston as a Design

Consultant for Legacy Community Health. First working on their main campus located in Montrose, Kalmin has now been with Legacy for over 12 years, working on over 50 facilities. Joel continues his work with Legacy as the Director of Facilities Planning.

Gabriela Magana, Executive Assistant and Special Projects Coordinator, ALMAAHH



Born and raised in Mexico, Magana is an artist and curator based in Houston. She holds a BA in Painting from the University of St. Thomas Houston and is currently working on an MA in Arts Leadership from the University of Houston. She has a background as a professional interpreter in the medical and legal fields, and recently has joined ALMAAHH as the Executive Assistant and Special Projects Coordinator.

Magana's work focuses on social issues such as womanhood, empowerment, and Latinx stories.

Houston Public Library Department Representative

John Middleton, Assistant Director – Spaces, Houston Public Library



John Middleton rejoined HPL in 2013 and serves as Assistant Director of Spaces for HPL. John's responsibilities include overseeing and coordinating the multiple components involved with managing HPL's Capital Improvement Projects and budget. Additionally, he oversees facilities management and security, interfacing with the General Services Department, other City of Houston departments and offices, and community groups.

Community Representative

Greg LeGrande, President, Neartown Super Neighborhood Association



Greg LeGrande has worked and lived internationally, most recently moving from Nigeria to Montrose in 2005. While interntaionally based, Greg has championed assisting local populations with accessing fresh water. Upon moving to Houston he continued his civic work, becoming an active member of local organizations, community initiatives, and City of Houston Committees and studies to enhance the liveability of Montrose and Houston. Greg currently serves as the President of the Neartown Super Neighborhood Association, and formerly served as the Vice President. He also is the past President and current member of the Avondale Civr Association.

