



FREEDOM PARK CONSERVANCY COMPLETES INSTALLATION OF SITE-SPECIFIC PUBLIC ART PROJECT, “ELDER,” AND TURNS OVER A NEW LEAF

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Freedom Park Conservancy is excited to announce the installation of ELDER, a site-specific public art project by lead artist Masud Olufani, in commemoration of the restoration of historic David T. Howard Middle School in Atlanta’s Old Fourth Ward neighborhood, and in partnership with Atlanta Public Schools and Parrish Construction Group.

ELDER is a temporary mixed medium installation created to honor the faculty and students of the David T. Howard School, and acknowledges the historic and senior members of Freedom Park’s surrounding community—both the people and the trees—for their stability, witnessing, and role in providing a foundation for future generations.

Originally opened in 1923 as an elementary school and converted to a high school in 1948, David T. Howard High School was named for David Tobias Howard, a former slave who owned Atlanta’s largest black-owned undertaking business and donated the original 7.5 acres for the school’s campus. The high school was one of only two serving Atlanta’s African-American community during the era of segregation. ELDER was commissioned by Freedom Park Conservancy to commemorate the 2020 restoration and reopening of the site as David T. Howard Middle School.

ELDER combines the body of one of the original trees on the school’s site, a 100-year-old American elm tree, with hand castings of David T. Howard High School alumni. The union of the tree and the hands brings together two symbolic representations of history, with memory marked by the human figure and the natural landscape simultaneously.

“Freedom Park Conservancy has taken tremendous initiative in curating and commissioning this thoughtful public art,” says Samara Minkin, Manager of Public Art for the City of Atlanta. “It is my hope that ELDER will engage the students of David T. Howard Middle School, their families, the neighborhood, and the thousands of citizens and visitors who move through Freedom Park every day.”

This is the first public art commission by Freedom Park Conservancy, and represents an important shift in scope for the park. Designated as an Atlanta Public Art Park in 2007, Freedom Park has been a frequent site for public art since its very first installation in 1996 (Evan Levy's "Wire Tornado"); from that moment until now the park has hosted numerous temporary and permanent installations by artists from all over the world. However, ELDER signifies Freedom Park's intent to expand its role in Atlanta's arts ecosystem.

"For us, ELDER is like turning over a new leaf," according to Freedom Park Conservancy Board Chair Harriett Lane. "Freedom Park has an important legacy in the areas of art, activism and nature, and by increasing our capacity to commission public art, we get to reinforce that legacy for future generations. ELDER is an important first step in that direction."

ELDER is located in Freedom Park, across from David T. Howard Middle School, near the intersection of John Wesley Dobbs Avenue and Howell Street. A formal dedication of the sculpture will coincide with the commemoration of the reopening of the school in the historic Old Fourth Ward neighborhood in Fall 2020, with accompanying virtual programming during the life of the project.

"Arts are a window to our soul, dreams, and reflections. When public art, like the ELDER Project, engages longtime residents and alums of David T. Howard High School, it not only reflects our city's history, it was literally created by it," says Atlanta City Councilman Amir Farokhi. "What a treasure this piece is for the city: past, present, and future."

This public art project is funded, in part, by a grant from South Arts in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts and the Georgia Council for the Arts. This project is also generously supported by Meredith Artley and Naka Nathaniel.

For more information about ELDER, please visit <http://www.freedompark.org/fpc/> or contact Nancy Boyd at nancy.boyd@gmail.com.

About Freedom Park Conservancy

Freedom Park Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the improvement and preservation of the park for the benefit of a diverse public. Our vision is for Freedom Park to be Atlanta's most innovative green space, celebrated for its inspiring origin and beauty.

About Masud Olufani

Masud Olufani is an Atlanta-based multidisciplinary artist, actor and writer. He is a graduate of Morehouse College and the Savannah College of Art and Design where he received an M.F.A. in sculpture in 2013. His work has been featured in group and solo exhibitions nationally and internationally. He is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including a South Arts Prize

state fellowship; a MOCA Working Artist Project Grant; and a Southwest Airlines Art and Social Engagement Grant. He is currently an Artist in Residence at the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center. His writing has been featured in Scalawag Magazine, Burnaway, Bahai Teachings, and he was a contributing writer for the Jacob Lawrence Struggle Series catalogue published by the Peabody Essex Museum. He is the co-host of Retro Report on PBS, a primetime investigative news show that analyzes news events through the lens of history.