

PERALTA

HACIENDA HISTORICAL PARK

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WHAT I HEAR, I KEEP : Stories from Oakland's Griots

February 23, 2013- February 2014/ Opening Reception: Saturday, February 23, 2:30-5:00pm

(Oakland, California) On February 23rd, Peralta Hacienda House Museum of Community and History will come alive through a magnificent visual and audio art installation featuring the voices of a group of African American Oaklanders who recorded the stories of their lives through the Griot Initiative of StoryCorps, a national nonprofit oral history project. The word "griot" (pronounced gree-oh) comes from the West African tradition of storytellers who perpetuate the oral tradition and history of a village or family.

The griots in this case are the gifted storytellers of Oakland's African American community. Their voices emanate from a gigantic horse glowing from within, designed and built by African American sculptor and landscape architect, Walter Hood, inside the 1870 Victorian house at the site. Holly Alonso designed the audio for all 30 stories which will cycle over a three-hour period. Visitors will attach their own messages in response to the audible personal memories of identity, connection with others and distances traveled. This exhibit is being done in collaboration with the Oakland Public Libraries, whose staff has created a reading list to explore the themes in the stories.



Hood chose the symbol of the horse in collaboration with the three dozen people who came forward to tell their stories. The animal epitomizes beauty and strength, and suggests the journeys traveled on many levels by African Americans. It also links the stories to the Peralta House location; two thousand horses once lived on the Peralta cattle ranch (granted by the Spanish governor in 1820) which covered all of Oakland, Berkeley, and five other East Bay cities.

The interviews tell about the pluses and minuses of segregation, rituals to commemorate the Black Holocaust, combating racism in major league baseball, the De Fremery Recreation Center community, the heyday of KJAZ, the Black Native community, the Black Panthers, and many other iconic Oakland events and figures. Malcolm Westbrooks, one of the featured griots remembers what it was like to grow up here as a child born after World War II, "The best part [of my neighborhood] was that sense of community ...at 8 or 9 years old I could leave Saturday morning and go play on the railroad tracks or in the creeks and we were safe"

The creators and staff invite the public to listen and add their own stories to this interactive installation of narratives from African American residents as they shine a light on the East Bay's past while exploring themes that are relevant to all who live in Oakland.

The opening of the exhibit and gala reception for "What I Hear, I Keep" is on Saturday, February 23 from 2:30-5:30pm at Peralta Hacienda Historical Park, 2465 34th Avenue, Oakland, California.

This program is made possible through the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Zellerbach Foundation.



About Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park

The mission of Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park is to promote understanding, historical healing, and community amid change and diversity. Partnering with community members, the organization presents and interprets the untold history of the Peralta rancho and the stories of the Fruitvale community today, giving voice to the many cultures that have created - and are still transforming - California. The six-acre park and historic house museum, and Center for History and Community form an arts and educational hub for local families and youth, and regional center for historical inquiry and discovery.

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