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**THE NICHOLSON PROJECT UNVEILS “ELEVATE (FREEDOM IS A PLACE)”, A NEW PUBLIC ART WORK BY ARTIST APRIL BANKS. OPENING SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2022.**

Contact: Allison Nance, Managing Director  
[allison@thenicholsonproject.org](mailto:allison@thenicholsonproject.org)



Left: © 2022 Estate of Morris Huberland / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. The New York Public Library / Art Resource, NY. Right: April Banks, design detail from *Elevate (Freedom is a Place)*, 2022.

**Washington, DC (August 23, 2022)** The Nicholson Project celebrates their third anniversary with the unveiling of *Elevate (Freedom is a Place)*, a new public artwork by LA-based artist April Banks. Taking inspiration from the stoop, a common architectural feature in Southeast DC and throughout other parts of the City, *Elevate* serves as a pedestal, a functional piece of public art, as stage or seating, for performance or for rest. The work will be installed in The Nicholson Project’s garden under a beautiful old oak tree, to be unveiled on Saturday, September 17th, 2022 and will remain on view through December 2023. Throughout the duration of the

exhibition, other artists will be invited to create works in response to *Elevate*, including a special movement-based performance at the opening event by Jessica Valoris. *Elevate* was curated by Dashboard and supported by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities through a Public Art Building Communities grant.

### **Unveiling + Opening Reception: Saturday, September 17th, 2022, 4-7pm**

In celebration of The Nicholson Project's third anniversary, *Elevate* will be unveiled on Saturday, September 17th. During the celebration from 4-7pm, April Banks will be present to speak with visitors about the work. DC-based artist [Jessica Valoris](#) will perform a special commission movement performance in response to *Elevate*. Light refreshments will be provided, with music by [DJ Geena Marie](#), accompanied by [Asha BOOMCLAK Santee](#).

For more information about this project, visit [www.thenicholsonproject.org/elevate](http://www.thenicholsonproject.org/elevate)

### **About the Artwork**

## **“THE FUTURE WILL BE HERE WHEN EVERY STOOP IS A THRONE”**

*Elevate* is an echo, a re-imagining of tradition. From the side view, it is a line drawing, a ghost structure, a metaphor for weightlessness, a resistance to enclosure. From the front and top views, words and patterns cut into the structure are an archive of collective memory. The base is constructed as a single piece of metal, folding time into place.

During the recent public art and community engagement work that April Banks has been doing around Black erasure, the subject of reparations always comes up. How does making art repair these systematic and institutional removals? Are you (the artist) really making a difference? Are you being used by organizations that want to appear on the right side of the conversation? These are difficult questions. What Banks does know is that public art is/should be accessible and has the power to provoke ideas, conversations, and actions. Public art is a marker, a reminder, and ideally, a truth-teller. With all of this in mind, Banks has been examining why she does this work and if/how it matters.

This line of questioning led her to dig into the root of reparations. Of this she says, ***“For me, it would be psychological, spiritual, and somatic as well as financial. It would be the absence of the burden. To be free of the weight of American history. To not be defined by and continually needing to navigate or respond to racism and all the isms. Can I just make something beautiful or ugly without it having to speak to identity or the political? That to me is true freedom and the reparations that I imagine. We can’t change the past but I can imagine what it might FEEL like to not have the trauma attached to my DNA. So I think about the sensation of floating, of flying. To be weightless, light. And that is how I approached this concept. How can I talk about the siting and sitting of black bodies in public space, and what a radical act Black leisure seems to be and how can these intersect?”***

Banks is educated as an architect and lately, her work has been considering how the construction of space and how we move through it affects how we feel. She is interested in interstitial spaces like doorways, thresholds, stairs, bridges, and porches. The stoop is a common architectural feature in the region and the neighborhood The Nicholson Project is

based in. The decorative metal work that frames the stoop and the porch harkens back to another time and writes its own history into the urban landscape.

If the narrative written into the built space directly reflected the people who lived there, what might the form language be? Considering ownership verse rental and who is constructing the built space around us, brings Banks back to concepts around erasure, eminent domain, and historically unfair lending practices that shape who owns land and property in America. How that property is valued. The generational wealth that it produces and the legacies we inherit.

Banks pairs these two concepts: this idea of weightlessness with inscribing a chosen narrative into one's own architecture. This is what she anatomizing in *Elevate (Freedom is a Place)* for The Nicholson Project.

**About April Banks:** [April Banks](#) is an artist, educated as an architect with a creative career that straddles visual art, social practice and exhibition design. Her art practice sits intentionally between image, space, and experiences. April's recent work time travels through historical archives and memories, questioning what we think we know of the past and how it informs our cultural positioning systems. She is interested in amplifying lesser known stories, challenging the gaze, and giving narrative to the erased and intentionally forgotten.

April is the producer of [Tea Afar](#), a nomadic storytelling experience, launched in 2016. For over a decade she made art that raised awareness and pointed to the global disparity in food security, farmer's rights and fair trade. Tea Afar was conceived as a salve—bringing us together across borders—for the divisiveness and exploitation that is propagated by a global trade economy and discriminatory travel bans.

Her work has been exhibited in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, Minneapolis, Cleveland, Daytona Beach, New Hampshire, Maryland, New York, Switzerland, Colombia, Brazil, United Arab Emirates, Senegal and Ethiopia. In February 2021 she completed her first permanent public art sculpture [A Resurrection in Four Stanzas](#) in Santa Monica, CA. Her work is in the collection of the Getty Museum and other private collections.

April graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture from Hampton University in Virginia in 1996. She obtained a Master of Science in Environmental Design from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena in 1999. She lives in Los Angeles.

**About Dashboard:** This project was curated by Dashboard, led by Oshun Layne. Dashboard is a 501c3 nonprofit organization co-founded in 2010 as a co-op that created non-traditional art experiences in vacant buildings. Since then, we have grown rapidly into an all-encompassing, national arts agency offering a wildly creative approach to strategic development and public engagement. Dashboard specializes arts-led + human-centered design projects to improve livability of our public spaces. [www.dashboard.us](http://www.dashboard.us)

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### **About The Nicholson Project**

The Nicholson Project is a paid artist residency program and neighborhood garden in Washington, DC's Fairlawn neighborhood. Our mission is to support, provide opportunities, and engage with and amplify artists and creatives from our community and the local artist community—particularly artists of color and those from Ward 7 and 8—while engaging our

neighbors through community-based programming. We are located at 2310 Nicholson Street SE, Washington, DC. For more information about The Nicholson Project, visit [www.thenicholsonproject.org](http://www.thenicholsonproject.org).

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*High-Resolution Images Available Upon Request*

Press and Media Requests: Allison Nance, Managing Director  
[allison@thenicholsonproject.org](mailto:allison@thenicholsonproject.org) | +1-703-615-1824