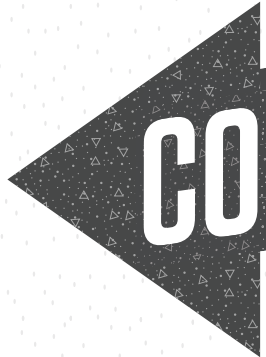


**SHATTERING**



PROJECT ROW HOUSES

ROUND 44



the  
**CONCRETE**



Artists, Activists and Instigators

### **Mission and About:**

The mission of Project Row Houses is to be the catalyst for transforming community through the celebration of art and African-American history and culture.

Project Row Houses (PRH) is a community-based arts and culture non-profit organization in Houston's northern Third Ward, one of the city's oldest African American neighborhoods. Founded in 1993 as a result of the vision of local African-American artists wanting a positive creative presence in their own community, PRH shifts the view of art from traditional studio practice to a more conceptual base of transforming the social environment.

## **ROUND 44 | SHATTERING THE CONCRETE: Artists, Activists and Instigators**

Text by guest curator Raquel De Anda

**Raquel De Anda** is an independent curator and cultural producer based in Brooklyn, NY. De Anda began her career as Associate Curator at Galería de la Raza, a contemporary Latino arts organization in San Francisco, CA (2003 – 2010) and has continued to support the production of socially engaged artwork in both Mexico and the United States. Born and raised on the U.S. Mexico border (Laredo, TX), much of De Anda's work approaches themes of duality, connection, separation and inclusion. She is a firm believer in the power of art and culture to ignite social change. De Anda holds an MS from Parsons School of Design.

We live in a historic moment fraught with both crisis and complexity – where the dramatic transformation of ideas and institutions may be a precondition for survival. Our economy continues to fail to provide for its citizens; black and brown bodies in America are deprived of dignity and security; our borders are becoming militarized zones; and energy extraction methods threaten both people and the planet. And yet, simultaneously, there is an ever growing call for a more just, equitable and cleaner future; there is a surging wellspring of solutionary thinking, tactical innovation and collective power. Mass popular social movements are once again surging, from Occupy Wall Street and The Movement for Black Lives to the Climate Justice Movement and more.

Peel back the layers of these uprisings and at their heart we find the work of hundreds of artists and organizers using culture and creativity to deploy creative interventions that are disrupting the mainstream narrative, amplifying the conversation around these issues and helping to create opportunities for concrete gains in the political and institutional realm. These movements, and the many artists who contribute to their richness, have brought renewed focus to the relationship between art and politics, between narrative-shifting and policy and between creating meaning and building power.

Round 44 | *Shattering the Concrete: Artists, Activists and Instigators* builds on this legacy by exploring the role that art can play in challenging our current political paradigm and fomenting political change. Well

situated within the celebrated community-based art non-profit, Project Row Houses, we are reminded how the work of artists can become directly involved in reclaiming power through community organizing.

Seven artists and collectives are situated on Holman Street, presenting work that approaches themes including prison reform, climate justice, immigration, housing rights and police brutality. Together, they explore the intersection of art and activism expressed through engagement, language, science fiction, performance, protest and play. Papermaking workshops, hybrid theatre, public interventions and oral history are only a few of the methods used by these artists.

Participating artists include The Argus Project (Gan Golan, Ligaiya Romero and Julien Terrell), Charge (Jennie Ash and Carrie Schneider), The Natural History Museum (a project of Not An Alternative) in collaboration with T.E.J.A.S. (Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services), Nuria Montiel & John Pluecker, People's Paper Co-op (Courtney Bowles & Mark Strandquist), Storyline Media (Michael Premo and Rachel Falcone), and Verbo•bala (Adam Cooper-Terán and Logan Phillips). Their work exists as both a call to action and provocation within and outside of the confines of the houses of Holman Street, engaging communities and inviting them to participate in altering the conditions that shape our lives.

Many groups, such as Not an Alternative's *The Natural History Museum*, embody a practice rooted in intervention and protest. Their campaigns exist both

on and off-line affecting public understandings of our institutions and the stories they promote. Most recently, the group led the charge in a viral campaign set to remove oil billionaire David Koch from the American Museum of Natural History's board of directors. Last Spring the group released a letter from 150 top scientists expressing concern about climate change obfuscation in institutions of science and history. The letter went viral overnight, and 552,000 people subsequently signed a petition. In December 2015 David Koch resigned from the board of directors, after 23 years. While his publicist denied the group's efforts having any bearing on his decision, the timing and massive public pressure it generated suggest otherwise.



📍 2505

The Natural  
History  
Museum

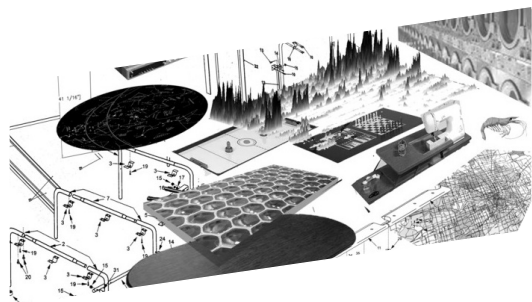
For Round 44 *The Natural History Museum* continues their work of modeling a museum of the future that celebrates action on climate change. Their project is site-specific, taking the socio-political landscape of Houston, and more precisely the Houston Museum of Natural Science as both case-study and critique. They have further strengthened their work by teaming up with the local Environmental Justice group, T.E.J.A.S.,

to both conceptualize the installation and host a series of programs across Houston that will both build public participation toward healthier communities in Houston and take a stand against the fossil fuel industry.

Within the walls of 2505 Holman the group has replicated and re-framed the Houston Museum of Natural Science's installations – rather than acting as an homage to the gas industry, Mining the HMNS depicts the socio-economic impacts of low income communities living in the shadow of refineries; communities that face the worst underreported environmental justice in Texas, and perhaps the country. *The Natural History Museum's* installation is both a celebration of the work done by local environmental justice groups in Texas and a call to take back the institutions whose stories shape our understanding of the world.

This **idea of investigation as a means of inciting change** can also be seen in other works, such as Charge's self-titled installation. Inspired by *Valuing Labor in the Arts: A Practicum* organized by Helena Keeffe and Shannon Jackson for The Arts Research Center at UC Berkeley, artists Carrie Schneider and Jennie Ash forged together a series of convenings in Houston to 1. platform artist led alternative models of sustainability 2. advocate for equitable compensation for artists 3. consider artists' work in the larger economy. The first iteration of Charge took place in November 2014 and the second in January 2016, as events that brought together artists, curators, organizers, researchers, and educators to conceive and host discussions, direct actions, lectures and workshops

that explore alternative, conceptual, organizational, and economic models of sustaining one's art practice. Together, they engaged critically and generativity within the arts ecosystem and broader social contexts, advocating for equitable compensation along the way. Their endeavors herald the work of the artist, understanding that the artist's voice is often excluded from platforms where critical arrangements about their work are made.



2507

Charge

Continuing their meaningful work in Houston, Schneider and Ash have built a table collaged from many other tables set with layers of engagement; and invitation for artists, curators, organizers and researchers from across Houston to continue the conversations that have emerged in their past convenings, by “asking what worked, avowing what else, and imagining what’s next”. In a participatory turn, the artists are asking us to decide what kind of programs we want to see take place in their row house.

The opening reception will include an activity where visitors visually vote on a which conversations sparked at Charge they would like to see carried

further, informing the series of programs to take place in the Charge house. We are especially honored to host a conversation between Mel Chin, Jesse Lott and 20 artists.

As these artists seek change by forging a new future for the art community, others look to art as a means of reclaiming lost histories. *KARANKAWA CARANCAHUA CARANCAGUA KARANKAWAY* is situated in 2509 Holman St. as a visual and sound installation; a poem that honors the legacy and language of the Karankawa people of Southeast Texas. The collaborative, multi-media piece between visual artist Nuria Montiel, writer and translator John Pluecker, and musician/sound artist Lucas Gorham was developed in conversation with members of the Carrizo Comecrudo tribe and people who associate themselves with the Karankawa native identity.

2509

Nuria  
Montiel  
&  
John  
Pluecker



The Karankawa are a First Peoples nation native to the Houston area and, as with native populations across the globe, are simultaneously both appropriated, and erased. Together the group will embark in a series of print and sound-based projects that will reclaim

both public space and the airwaves, at once illuminating Houston's relationship to its native history and re-asserting the legacy of its indigenous people. Their installation and series of events are accompanied by a series of interviews and recordings that illustrate their partnership and cross cultural conversations and is partially a product of Pluecker's decades-long investigation into regional (anti)colonial histories and indigenous languages.

The work of Montiel, Pluecker and their diverse team serves to make the invisible visible by re-asserting the presence of an erased history. Their artistic process is one of learning how to see anew, of asking how culture is shaped by colonial structures that validate, erase and distort histories. Together the group asks how culture survives and morphs amid the pressure of modern capitalist structures. They ask what the resonance of First Nations is within contemporary identities and remind us to look again at the culture that surrounds us, as it is certainly shaped by structures we are unaware of.



2511

The  
People's  
Paper  
Co-op

While Montiel, Pluecker and their cohort make visible this once-erased history, the People's Paper Co-op, an initiative of the Village of Arts and Humanities founded by artists Mark Strandquist and Courtney Bowles, appropriates erasure as a means to defy a flawed system. In 2014 the artists were invited by the Village of Arts and Humanities, (Philadelphia, PA) to pilot a program that merged artistic practice with expungement workshops. Together with formerly incarcerated individuals, civil rights lawyers from Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE) and others, the PPC organizes free expungement clinics where participants work with lawyers to legally transform their criminal records, and then take printouts of their records, tear them up, and transform them into new blank sheets of handmade paper. Participants have filled their new blank sheets of paper with photographs and writing in response the prompt "When people look at your criminal record what about you as a human being don't they see?"

In a country with a staggering 70 million+ people living with criminal records that create obstacles to employment, housing, education and healthcare, The PPC serves as a call to action, using art as a means to move through seemingly impassable situations and directly releasing people from the burden of criminal records. For their installation at Project Row Houses, PPC is working with PLSE to train students at Texas State University on running expungement clinics, and will then be leading a series of clinics in Houston's 3rd Ward. However, the clinics are not just business, as each is partnered with a papermaking workshop

where participants will shred their old records as they are then asked to rewrite a new story of self.

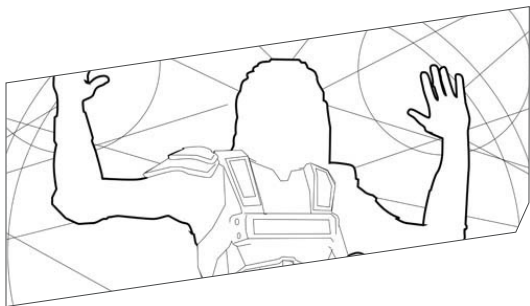
Mark and Courtney are also in residency at Project Row Houses as part of a Visual Arts Network Grant. Their goal while in Houston is to use this site as a space for future expungement clinics in order that lawyers trained by PLSE can continue to hold regular clinics in Houston. The project is one of the few in America that merges artistic practice with concrete legal remedies.

The forms these projects of **creative resistance** take in the public realm are often marked by moments of conflict and disruption, moments that highlight the absurdity of the systems that dictate our lives, and the socio-economic conditions that color them. This disruption is evident in The Argus Project, *Argus Awakens*, which is installed on the 2513 art house on Holman Street in 3 parts: a video installation, a suit of tactical counter-surveillance body armor and a series of programs that collectively serve to continue the conversation about police brutality in America and the rising #BlackLivesMatter movement. The installation

champions citizen videography and movements rising up against state violence and police impunity; against the grim social reality where Sandra Bland can die in a Texas jail after being stopped for a broken tail light, yet a police officer can walk free after killing an unarmed child.

The Argus Project takes inspiration from the Greek myth of Argus, the giant with 100 eyes who was a watchman both for and against the gods and is installed at 2513 Holman as a quasi-superhero of the citizen countersurveillance movement, a watchman for communities most affected by systemic violence in America, a symbol that may inspire others to take action. A suit of tactical counter-surveillance, Argus imitates militaristic body armor and comes equipped with 15 body cameras that surveil the police. It is as much provocation as it is performance and asks an almost absurd question: *If police need to wear body armor to protect themselves while in public, what does The Public need to wear to protect themselves from the police?* The video installation tells a story of what actions everyday people can take to hold the state accountable. The accompanying programs seek to support local communities in developing the knowledge and expertise to act as citizen videographers.

In light of an uncertain, uneasy and unstable tomorrow, artists in Round 44 embody a fierce persistence and determination. Their steadfastness and commitment to creative inquiry pushes for new understandings toward the co-creation of a world we want, one we all deserve to live in.



📍 2513

The Argus  
Project



Rachel Falcone and Michael Premo of Storyline Media have spent the past years listening to and recording the stories of people whose lives have been affected by America's intersecting crises of racism, economic injustice and environmental blight. As they documented the housing crisis that unfolded in America in 2008, they worked to create rich, nuanced, portraits of communities at the frontlines of this struggle. Seeing the challenges that social movements faced in getting people to imagine that anything different might be possible, they recognize the importance of first person narrative and visionary thinking, of "strengthening the muscles of radical imagination to move our society beyond fear-based survival."



🏠 2515

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Storyline  
Media

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For Round 44, they have created an installation titled *The 28th Amendment*, a work that explores an imaginary future where the landmark passage of a U.S. constitutional amendment mandates that every citizen has the right to adequate housing. Their multidisciplinary installation consists of intimate narratives, large-scale photographs, musical conversations and audio testimony; each building upon the last to create a collective

portrait of the people and social movements that led to this reform. Central to their installation is the question, "what's next?" Now that revolutionary reform has passed, how do we as citizens ensure that a right to housing persists?

Building on the teachings of Octavia Butler, Samuel Delaney and the many organizers they have worked with as part of the housing and human rights movements, Falcone and Premo use the power of speculative fiction to imagine a world without the slow, systemic violence of inadequate housing and homelessness. During its time at Project Row Houses, *The 28th Amendment* will invite people into the possibility of a world that they can create together, showing them how we might have gotten there and posing the question – once there, what would we do next?

The work in *Shattering the Concrete* covers a wide spectrum. While some more directly fits within conceptions of activism and community organizing, other work embodies a form whose politics are embedded in performance and poetry. Verbo•bala (bullet verb) is a hybrid theatre group from Tucson, AZ whose work is a particular mixture emerging from the US/Mexico border. Combining live video projection with bilingual spoken word and performance art, their practice is at once about belonging and displacement, about inclusion and exclusion, and embodies the duality of mestiza – a hybrid identity that points to a future world produced from a concoction of divergent perceptions. As celebrated author Gloria Anzaldua writes in "Borderlands":



“*En unas pocas centurias*, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos – that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the way we behave...”

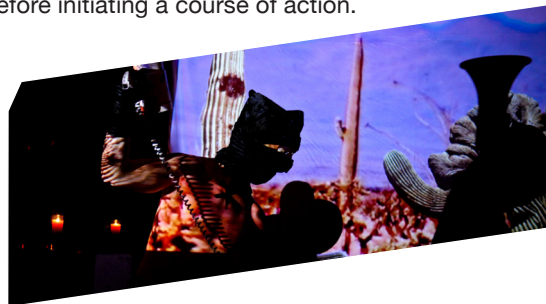
It is this destruction and reconstruction of paradigms that all the artists in *Shattering the Concrete* are actively engaged with. Verbo•bala’s *Acordarnos* focuses in on border identity and mestizaje through a multimedia performance that will take place on opening night. Through both the performance and installation of the work, the group embarks on a journey of remembrance, recalling lives that have been lost at the border, the beauty of the land and militarization of the border space, while acting as homage for the struggle we all carry within ourselves. Their work acts in defiance of “colonial amnesia” and traditional history books, calling upon the borderland – currently a place of militarization and fear – as instead, a place of deep wisdom, and a spiritual base for first nations and immigrants alike. Verbo•bala’s work is as much a performance as it is an invocation, channeling the creative spirit and connective tissues within us all toward our unknown tomorrow.

Each artist in Round 44 has taken it upon themselves to come to know the landscape of Houston and integrate it organically into their work. Preparing for the exhibition has been a process of curiosity and discovery; a process driven by the desire to connect in meaningful ways and impact daily life within Houston communities. In varying means and degrees, each

artist sought to integrate their work into the ever shifting landscape of Houston, designing entry point for our neighbors in the 3rd ward, students at Texas State University, Houston Science Museum goers, people living with criminal records, local activists and creative practitioners and more. Be it through phone conversations and email exchange, discussions around dinner tables, brainstorming strategies at coffee shops, or hosting skill share workshops in unexpected venues, each group asked questions about how their work would fit into the larger socio-political landscape of Houston, before initiating a course of action.

2517 ↑

Verbo•bala



As such, the work in *Shattering the Concrete* embodies an expansive understanding of art, one that is both analytical and experiential, one that develops an analysis of our socioeconomic conditions and then engages with communities to alter the conditions of our daily lives. In so doing, the work champions stories that have been intentionally ignored and unveils the reality that we are stronger when we act together. It asks: How does art serve to break apart what has been deemed concrete and insurmountable, and reformulate reality into something new? ■

# About the Artists

## 2517 | Verbo•bala

Verbo•bala (“bullet verb”) explores border identity through nuanced storytelling and digital media, creating performance pieces and installations composed of bilingual poetry, live video projection and sound design. Formed in Cuernavaca, Mexico in 2007, the group is currently based in Tucson, Arizona and considers the borderlands its home.

Described as “going for a poetry written without letters” by Mexico’s national newspaper La Reforma, Verbo•bala’s innovative practice has taken their work from Cuernavacan speakeasies to international venues including the National Hispanic Cultural Center, the Phoenix Art Museum, New York University, and the Poesía.en.Voz.Alta Festival in Mexico City.

Verbo•bala is codirected by transdisciplinary artists Logan Phillips and Adam Cooper-Terán, joined by visualist Moisés Regla of Mexico City and a wide range of collaborators. Since 2013 the group’s primary project has been the performance piece *Sonoran Strange*, which has toured across the Southwest US and as far afield as Rostock, Germany.

## 2515 | Storyline Media

*28th Amendment* is the latest installment of Housing is a Human Right, a creative storytelling project by artists Rachel Falcone and Michael Premo that aims to connect diverse communities around housing, land and the dignity of a place to call home. Since 2009 the artists have created a space for people from across the globe to share first person stories of their ongoing struggle to obtain or maintain home. Stories are recorded in sound in the tradition of oral history and shared as audio stories, photographs and multimedia.

Rachel and Michael are founders of Storyline, a non-profit production company that crafts original stories to make

sense of complicated issues, provoke discussion and inspire actions that address society’s biggest challenges. Storyline produces multi-platform art projects in partnership with grassroots organizations and communities, and stories are shared through broadcast, the web, and interactive installations and exhibitions in unconventional spaces.

## 2513 | The Argus Project

The Argus team is a constellation of activists, community organizers, fashion designers and tech magicians. Gan Golan is an artist, cultural organizer and NY Times bestselling author; Julien Terrell is a community organizer and member of the Harlem Copwatch Team; Ligaiya Romero is a documentary filmmaker and producer; Ayo Okunseinde is an artist and interactive designer; and Pierre Mendy is a sportswear fashion designer.

## 2511 | The People’s Paper Co-op

Mark Strandquist and Courtney Bowles are cultural organizers who use art as a vehicle for connecting diverse communities to build empathy and support for social justice movements.

At the core of their practice is the belief that those most impacted by the criminal justice system are the experts society needs to listen to, and that by connecting those directly affected with a multitude of community experts and political stakeholders, we can create change on personal and systemic levels. Their projects include working with incarcerated youth to create their own police training manuals; working with incarcerated individuals to design interactive public art installations that have engaged thousands; and organizing teams of lawyers, artists, and formerly incarcerated individuals to help clear the records of thousands of individuals.

Their work has received multiple awards, fellowships and national residencies and has reached wide audiences through the NY Times, the Guardian, NPR, the Washington Post, PBS NewsHour, VICE and a multitude of other media outlets.

## 2509 | Nuria Montiel & John Pluecker

John Pluecker is a writer, translator and co-founder of the language justice and literary experimentation collaborative Antena. He has translated numerous books from the Spanish, including *Antígona González* (Les Figues Press, Forthcoming) and *Tijuana Dreaming: Life and Art at the Global Border* (Duke University Press, 2012). His most recent chapbooks are *loyaiene* (Fresh Arts, 2014) and *An Accompanying Text* (She Works Flexible, 2015). His book of poetry and image, *Ford Over*, was published in 2016 by Noemi Press.

Nuria Montiel (b. 1982, Mexico City) understands art as a thinking and learning process that attempts to create new ways of existence. Montiel participated with her project *Imprenta Móvil in Antena* (2014) at Blaffer Art Museum in Houston. She collaborated in *La Galería de Comercio* (2010-2014), an artist led project which presented public space events in Mexico. Montiel is currently pursuing a MFA with the generous support of SAIC, FONCA-CONACYT and Jumex Foundation.

## 2507 | Charge

Charge is a convening presented by Art League Houston to  
1. platform artist led alternative models of sustainability  
2. advocate for equitable compensation for artists  
3. consider artists' work in the larger economy.

Charge equally commissions local and visiting presenters (artists, curators, organizers, researchers, and educators) to conceive and host discussions, direct actions, lectures and workshops that explore alternative conceptual, organizational, and economic models of sustaining an art practice.

We focus on supporting, celebrating and hearing real talk from those who've been:

- Intervening in their cities as citizens, artists, and organizers
- Piloting alternative models
- Engaging critically and generatively within the arts ecosystem and broader social contexts
- Intersecting arts and activist communities
- Inspiring the present via historic precedents
- Advancing practices of equitable compensation
- Reflecting how artists' work ties into the larger economy

The second iteration of Charge was January 8–10, 2016.

Charge is co-organized by Jennie Ash and Carrie Schneider.

## 2505 | The Natural History Museum

The Natural History Museum is a mobile pop-up museum that highlights the socio-political forces that shape nature, yet are excluded from traditional natural history museums. The museum's primary subject of study is the "fossil fuel ecosystem," characterized by a complex set of interrelated feedback loops encompassing land, energy, politics, society, economics and culture. The museum turns its anthropological gaze on traditional science museums as ideological habitats within this ecosystem.

The museum is a project of Not An Alternative, a NY-based collective that works at the intersection of art, activism and pedagogy. Not An Alternative was named in NY Times and ArtNet's "Best in Art in 2015" round-ups. The group's installations, performances and presentations have been featured within art institutions such as Guggenheim (NY), PS1/MOMA (NY), Queens Museum (NY), Brooklyn Museum (NY), Tate Modern (London), Victoria & Albert Museum (London), MOCAD (Detroit), and Museo del Arte Moderno (Mexico City) and in the public sphere, where they collaborate with community groups and activist mobilizations. ■

<b>People's Paper Co-op</b>	3/26/16 9:30am – 12:30pm	Know your rights training to equip people with legal knowledge and guide them through the process of accessing housing, jobs, education, healthcare, etc without facing discrimination due to criminal records	SHAPE Community Center, 3815 Live Oak
<b>Verbo-bala</b>	3/26/16 4 – 7pm	Acordarnos – Durational performance within the installation	2517 Holman
<b>Nuria Montiel &amp; John Pluecker</b>	3/29/16; 3 – 8pm	This talk and performance will feature a live broadcast through personal listening devices of recorded conversations with members of the Carrizo Comecrudo tribe and others who identify themselves with the Karankawa and other Native identities. Snacks will be provided, and a sound performance by Lucas Gorham will close out the evening.	2509 Holman
<b>The Natural History Museum (Not an Alternative)</b>	4/2/16 10am – 12:30pm	These tours will be led by Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (T.E.J.A.S), and Not an Alternative will have a mobile museum / "toxic tour" 15 passenger van. Groups will meet at Project Row Houses and depart from 2521 Holman St. Registration with T.E.J.A.S. is required. Information forthcoming	Meet at PRH; 2521 Holman
	5/7/16; 10am – 12:30pm	These tours will be led by Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (T.E.J.A.S), and Not an Alternative will have a mobile museum / "toxic tour" 15 passenger van. Groups will meet at Project Row Houses and depart from 2521 Holman St. Registration with T.E.J.A.S. is required. Information forthcoming.	Meet at PRH; 2521 Holman
	6/4/16 10am – 12:30pm	These tours will be led by Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services (T.E.J.A.S), and Not an Alternative will have a mobile museum / "toxic tour" 15 passenger van. Groups will meet at Project Row Houses and depart from 2521 Holman St. Registration with T.E.J.A.S. is required. Information forthcoming.	Meet at PRH; 2521 Holman

Programming at Project Row Houses is generously supported by Mark Bradford; The Brown Foundation; Bruner Foundation Inc.; Chevron; The Nathan Cummings Foundation; William Stamps Farish Fund; Agnes Gund; William J. Hill Land & Cattle Co.; Houston Endowment Inc.; Joan Hohlt & Roger Wich Foundation; Kensinger Donnelly; Jeanne and Michael Klein; The Kresge Foundation; The Lewis Family Foundation; Marc Melcher; John P. McGovern Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts; National Performance Network's Visual Artists Network; Nightingale Code Foundation; Betty Pecore and Howard Hilliard; Picnic; Robert Rauschenberg Foundation; South Texas Charitable Foundation; Texas CapitalBank; Texas Commission on the Arts; Susan Vaughan Foundation; The Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; and a grant from the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance for the generous support of our programs.

*RAUSCHENBERG*

