



# PUBLIC ART COMMISSION

## Richmond, Virginia

# REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

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## Trailhead of the Richmond Slave Trail

### Richmond Public Art Commission, Virginia

#### Introduction

Richmond's Public Art Commission is seeking a permanent public art installation for the start of the Slave Trail at 1200 Brander St. Located in the heart of Richmond, the existing Slave Trail guides visitors along a walking path that includes 17 markers that illustrate a tragic history hidden in part by nature and the intervention of the built environment. From 1830 to 1860, the area was ground zero in the City's massive domestic slave trading business. This project is intended to complement a larger project that will renovate the trail entrance with a unique, historically relevant architectural feature. Three to five artist/teams will receive an honorarium of \$3,000 each to submit a formal proposal for the project.

RFQ Deadline:	October 23, 2023, 11:59 PM EDT
Honorarium for Draft Proposal:	\$3,000
Commission Budget:	\$300,000 (inclusive of all artist's fees, materials, insurance, fabrication, installation, travel and all other project-related expenses)

#### Eligibility

This project is open to artists and design teams living within the United States, its territories and the African continent.

#### Background

The history of the trade in enslaved people in Richmond is a complex one spanning more than 200 years. From 1657 to 1801, records show that 19,253 enslaved laborers were brought to the Upper James River, peaking from 1701 to 1775. They embarked from Gambia, Angola, Benin, Nigeria, Ghana, the Bight of Biafra, the Guinea Islands, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and other African ports.

They landed at many entry ports including what is now Richmond (on both sides of the river) as well as Chesterfield and Henrico Counties. Those that disembarked at Manchester, Rocketts and Rock Landing grew to such an extent that by 1750, nearly 80% of enslaved Virginians were born in the colony. Richmond's role in the international importation activity was small and mostly private. While it is estimated that 14 to 15 million people were transported to North and South America, and the Caribbean during the trans-Atlantic trade, Richmond's share of 12,000 to 19,000 was a small percentage.

But things changed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the end of the trans-Atlantic trade in 1808, the failure of tobacco in the upper south, the opening of and demand for enslaved labor in the deep south, the domestic trade exploded. And Richmond became a bustling center with its holding pens and auction locations concentrated in Shockoe. Of the 500,000 to 600,000 people sold in the domestic trade, Richmond's transporting of 300,000 to 350,000 constitutes a

staggering percentage making Richmond a major commercial center in the last 20-25 years prior to emancipation in 1863. The resulting trade provided a high-profit business enterprise.

Sources:

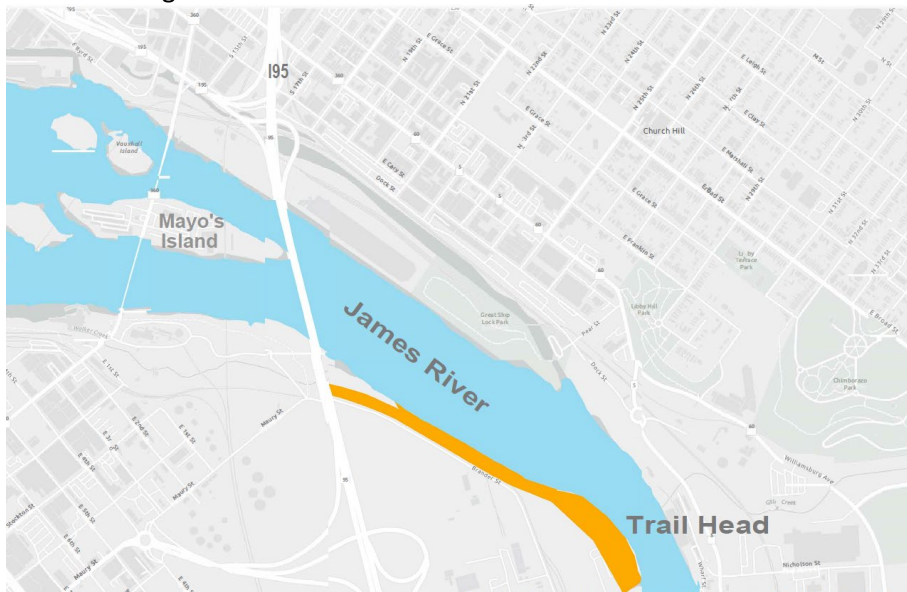
[slavevoyages.org](http://slavevoyages.org)

[middlepassagesproject.org](http://middlepassagesproject.org)

## Location

The project will be placed at the trailhead of the Slave Trail.\* Already planned for the site is a structure designed by the architectural firm Baskervill. The Baskervill installation represents a stylized slave ship the outer hull of which also serves as a small amphitheater.

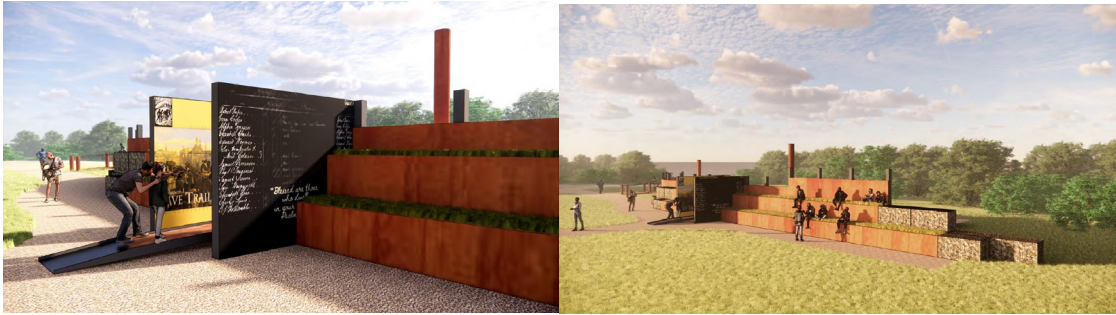
The Baskervill structure is located along frontage on the James' south side and sits at the site of Ancarrow's Landing; home to the Manchester Docks which served as a trading port for chattel slavery. The Baskervill structure is intended as a place of interpretation, designed to both orient visitors to the start of the trail as well as offering context and interpretation to the aspects of the story that came before. Middle passage was an unimaginable experience many did not survive; this physical marker begins to foster imagination of that experience before arriving at the Landing.



This RFQ is asking for an art installation that can be located adjacent to the Baskervill structure or integrated into it (see images to right and below). Finalists who are invited to submit a full proposal will get a fuller description of the

Baskervill project before starting their design.





\*Information about the Richmond Slave Trail itself can be found here: <https://www.rva.gov/sites/default/files/2022-06/Slave%20Trail%20Brochure.pdf>

## Project Description

We must always remember that those who were enslaved and carried across the Atlantic may have come empty-handed . . . but not empty-headed. They came as social beings, persons embodying and creating culture and history.

Henry John Drewal, Historian

The Public Art Commission seeks a permanent art installation that honors African cultural traditions left behind—and carried forward—by African women, men and children in spite of displacement and enslavement. In memorializing a sampling of the cultural traditions of their original homes, the installation will tell the larger story of the myriad cultures that merged to form an amalgamated culture of enslaved people in the United States, a culture that—in many ways—continues to influence the daily lives of all Americans.

Considered together, this installation and the Baskervill structure will provide a virtual portal and transition from Africa to North America.

## Project Intent

The vision for this project is an art installation that complements a planned structure depicting an abstracted slave ship/amphitheater and highlights a selection of cultural influences carried by African people to Virginia, from skills and kinships to strategies for survival and resistance.

## Goals

- Provide a creative intervention that commemorates a sampling of the cultural traditions that African men, women and children left behind—worship, music, food, farming practices, language, et al.—and that continue to influence life in the United States today; priority will be given to design concepts/components that can be replicated along the Slave Trail or at other related historic sites around Richmond
- Demonstrate historical accuracy
- Enhance the main entrance to the Trailhead
- Reinforce the communal nature of the Slave Trail and safely accommodate visitors of all ages and abilities
- Actively engage the community in the pre-planning, design and/or installation of the work
- Ensure durability and easy maintenance

## Finalist Selection Process

All RFQs will be reviewed by the Artist Selection Panel consisting of a Public Art Commissioner, one representative from the project design firm, several artists, a representative from the Richmond Department of Parks Recreation and Community Facilities, a City Council Liaison and a representative of the neighborhood.

Three to five finalists will be invited to submit a full proposal to the Artist Selection Panel; round 2 evaluation criteria will be provided to each finalist.

Finalists may be asked to make a presentation of their proposal to the Artist Selection Panel.

The Artist Selection Panel will review proposals and make its recommendations to the full Public Art Commission.

The Public Art Commission will make its final recommendation.

The Public Art Commission will present its final recommendation to the City Planning Commission.

The City Planning Commission will approval a final proposal.

## How to Apply

Artists interested in this project should submit an application at:

<https://rvapac.slideroom.com/#/permalink/program/75136>

## Richmond, VA's Public Art Program

The mission of Richmond's Public Art Program is to equitably invest in artists as essential partners contributing to the City's economic, infrastructure, environmental, and cultural identity and growth. The Public Art Program envisions a City where citizens and visitors value the arts as a vital public asset, where developers routinely contribute to public art as a dynamic tool for enlivening community gathering places, and where artists reify Richmond's many histories, celebrate Richmond's present, and help shape Richmond's future.



## **RICHMOND PUBLIC ART COMMISSION EQUITY STATEMENT**

Cultural Equity embodies the values, beliefs, policies, and practices that ensure all people can exercise their right of cultural expression and economic livelihood within the arts ecosystem. This guiding principle requires a commitment to citizens who have historically been underrepresented in mainstream arts programming, discourse, leadership, and resource allocation.

The Public Art Commission of Richmond, Virginia acknowledges these longstanding inequities, recognizes that differences are not deficiencies and strives to counter this in our work. We hold ourselves accountable for enacting policies and operating procedures that value and celebrate everyone's life experiences and their histories. We are committed to the full scope of this work to ensure that individuals from under-invested and under-represented communities can compete equitably for artist commissions, are actively sought for open positions on the Commission, and are included on curatorial review panels and site selection committees.

By consistently bringing new perspectives to our decision-making, forming new relationships and alliances, and finding new ways to support creativity, the Public Art Commission aspires to be an essential voice in making Richmond a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.