



National Public Housing Museum Selects Visionary Artist for Social Justice Focused Residency

Artist Dr. ShaDawn “Boobie” Battle will harness the power of storytelling and the history of Chicago Footwork to examine structural racism as the National Public Housing Museum’s next Artist as Instigator.

[Press Images](#)

CHICAGO, October 27, 2023 -- Art has the power to help us examine and understand societal issues, shape how people feel, and shift public opinion. That potential is at the core of the National Public Housing Museum's Artist as Instigator Residency and at the heart of [Dr. ShaDawn “Boobie” Battle](#)'s artistic practice.

Battle was recently selected to be the National Public Housing Museum's next Artist as Instigator. The yearlong residency combines art and advocacy to shape public policy and promote equity, a key goal at the museum, the country's first cultural institution dedicated to interpreting public housing in America, opening in Chicago's Near West Side in 2024. Earlier this summer, the museum was awarded a \$1,000,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation to support both multi-year funding for the Artist as Instigator program and a historic apartment exhibit at the museum.

A multidisciplinary artist, researcher, activist, and educator whose work spans mediums including documentary films, performances, and public talks, Battle was selected from a large and competitive pool of nationwide applicants. Her creative practice is rooted in transformative justice and creating platforms for the most marginalized communities to engage in truth-telling practices.

Associate Director Tiff Beatty says, “We know it’s important to imagine the future we want for our communities before we can build it. Artists and activists like Dr. ShaDawn Battle help to spark our collective radical imaginations and inspire change– from the dance floor to the legislative floor. We are eager to work with ShaDawn, the first movement artist to be selected for this residency, to highlight the unique contributions of the performing arts and movement-based work to policy discussions which largely center verbal and visual language.

Dr. Battle’s work emphasizes how dance, and Chicago Footwork in particular, is a powerful communication tool that not only contributes to sustaining Black communities, hip hop, and



youth culture but also challenges the intersecting forms of state violence that disproportionately impacts public housing communities.”

Battle says, “The denial of public and affordable housing, and the dispossession of space, seen all over the world today—especially in Chicago—continues to strip marginalized groups of their humanity, a true sense of freedom in this land, and an ability to self-actualize. The National Public Housing Museum’s cultural, historical, and public-policy-oriented approach to this work is what draws me as an artist-activist to this collaborative opportunity.”

As the museum’s fifth Artist as Instigator, Battle will leverage the residency to develop, and create a new work, “Place, Space, and Werkz” (working title), a multi-dimensional project that weaves together oral histories and scholarship about the evolution of Chicago Footwork dance through workshops, creative placemaking, and performances that examine the art form in relation to oppressive systems, practices, and structures. She will receive a \$10,000 honorarium and a \$10,000 budget for project expenses. The museum will also provide exhibition space, programming, and administrative support, and help Battle make connections to public housing residents and additional funding sources.

The importance of storytelling is foundational at the National Public Housing Museum. The museum partners with communities to archive the voices and memories of public housing residents and share those accounts through exhibits and oral history activations. In a similar vein, Battle’s work stands out for its dedication to highlighting the voices and experiences of Chicago’s Footwork community. She is currently directing and producing a docuseries titled [“Footwork Saved My Life: The Evolution of Chicago Footwork.”](#) Through this work, Battle has amassed nearly 200 oral history interviews, offering rich insight into the stories, histories, memories, and community activities that represent the Chicago Footwork dance scene that will inform her new work during the residency.

A South Side of Chicago native, Battle now splits her time between Cincinnati and Chicago. She is an Assistant Professor of Critical Ethnic and Black Studies at Xavier University and serves on the Board of Trustees for the Justice Renewal Initiative, a Chicago-based nonprofit that tackles racial inequality in the Criminal Justice system. Battle earned her PhD in literature from the University of Cincinnati in 2017 and her research interests include African-American Literature, Postcolonial Studies, Black Feminist and Hip Hop Studies, and Critical Race Epistemology. Her latest course for Xavier University, “Giving “Whiteness” a U.T.I.,” seeks to understand, theorize, and interrogate the myth of white supremacy, to impede its efficacy within various national social bodies. ShaDawn’s most recent scholarly research examines the inexpressibility of Black girls’ pain, and the relationship between Black male killings by the hand of police, and epistemic injustice.



While the museum’s Artist as Instigator Residency only lasts one year, the museum maintains ongoing relationships with artists. Former Artists as Instigators William Estrada (2019), Jen Delos Reyes (2020), and Tonika Lewis Johnson (2021) helped shape the residency application process by contributing application questions and suggesting novel ways to apply (applicants could opt for a video submission instead of a written one). The most recent Artist as Instigator, Marisa Morán Jahn (2022-2023), is continuing her work with the museum through a Joyce Foundation grant for “HOOPS”, a permanent outdoor playspace located in a space shared by the museum and a new mixed-income housing development.

This year’s Artist as Instigator review committee included National Public Housing Museum staff: cultural producers Natalie Crüe and Abby Pucker; designer Nekita Thomas; former Artist as Instigators Jen Delos Reyes and Marisa Morán Jahn; arts journalist Ruth Lopez; and executive and artistic director of the Hyde Park Jazz Festival, Kate Dumbleton.

The committee narrowed the competitive applicant pool down to three finalists: Battle, New York City-based artist [Niko Koppel](#), and Miami-based artist [Roscoë B. Thické III](#).

Battle will be giving a virtual public artist talk on Monday, November 13th at 6 p.m. CT to discuss her past work and proposal for her residency with the museum. [Register here](#).

About the National Public Housing Museum:

Over the past century, more than 10 million people across the United States have called public housing home. In the late 1990s, as thousands of public housing units across the country were being demolished, public housing residents began to dream about creating a museum to preserve their collective voices, memories, and the histories of public housing across the nation. They wanted their children and grandchildren, and the public at large, to know more about their place in the American experience and to understand the public policies that helped to shape their families. In 2007, civic leaders, preservationists, historians, cultural experts, and many others joined with residents to help incorporate the National Public Housing Museum, which has since then offered transformative programs that connect the past with contemporary issues of social justice and human rights. The museum's permanent home is under construction at the historic Jane Addams Homes at 1322 W. Taylor St. in Chicago's Near West Side and is set to open to the public in 2024.

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