

PUBLIC HOUSING COMMUNITY FUND

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NYCHA, NYC Mayor's Office, Public Housing Community Fund, Mellon Foundation and Partners Break Ground on Historic Art Restoration Project at Kingsborough Houses

Mellon Foundation awards a \$2-million grant to Public Housing Community Fund for Place-Based Art Conservation Project and Art Programming at NYCHA's Kingsborough Houses

Funds will be used to support restoration of Exodus and Dance in partnership with the New York City Housing Authority and to launch a scalable artist-in-residence program



Brooklyn — The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and Public Housing Community Fund (Fund), an organization committed to enhancing the lives of NYCHA residents, are thrilled to announce a transformative partnership with the Mellon Foundation, breaking ground on an 18-month restoration effort of historic public art at NYCHA Kingsborough Houses, along with an artist-in-residence program and other place-based interventions. The Mellon Foundation's generous \$2 million grant to the Public Housing Community Fund (Fund) will support the launch of an unprecedented place-based art conservation project at Kingsborough Houses, one of NYCHA's key developments in the historic Weeksville community of Brooklyn.

The *Exodus and Dance* project is a groundbreaking endeavor aimed at restoring the historic 80-foot frieze, *Exodus and Dance*, created by renowned artist Richmond Barthé in 1938 and installed on the campus in 1941. Through a unique blend of art conservation and community engagement, the project seeks to celebrate and preserve the rich cultural heritage of NYCHA residents while fostering a deeper connection between the past and present. In 2019, NYCHA received \$1.8 million in funding from City Council Speaker Corey Johnson and City Council Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel to initiate the capital restoration project of the *Exodus and Dance* frieze. The Fund leveraged City Council and federal funding to secure grant funding from the Mellon Foundation to begin restoration work. This grant funding will support the capital restoration and lead to additional place-based interventions which will be determined by Kingsborough Houses residents and community stakeholders. The project also aims to set a precedent for similar initiatives across NYCHA developments, inspiring future partnerships and investments in art conservation, artist-in-residence programs, and community engagement.

This effort is a part of NYCHA's [Connected Communities](#) program, which is focused on transforming and modernizing open spaces by implementing public-private partnerships. The program's efforts are based on participatory planning and design and strive to enhance physical and social connections between residents and their communities.



Partners joined at Kingsborough Houses to celebrate and kickoff restoration of *Exodus and Dance*.

"Exodus and Dance is a stunning and significant piece of artwork," said **NYCHA Chief Executive Officer Lisa Bova-Hiatt**. "It is a brilliant representation of African-American

heritage, as well as a New York City and NYCHA staple since its installation at Kingsborough Houses in 1941. We are so grateful to the Mellon Foundation, the Public Housing Community Fund, and our city partners for the opportunity to not only restore this frieze to its intended magnificence, but to do so with the support and engagement of Kingsborough residents and the surrounding community."

"Mellon's funding in Barthé's *Exodus and Dance*, as well as Kingsborough Houses, signals the community and family value of New York and our public housing communities. Today, New Yorkers can be proud to feature the important artistic work and achievement of Richmond Barthé's contribution to New York's historic art world," said **Deputy Mayor Maria Torres Springer**. "Exodus and Dance is a magnificent and significant work of art that has become a neighborhood fixture of African American history and artistic excellence and achievement. We're excited to see this addition to the hard work of NYCHA and tenants to restore and beautify their communities."

"I am so proud and delighted that Richmond Barthé's breathtaking work called *The Exodus and Dance* is being restored to be seen and enjoyed by not only Kingsborough residents, but also by all New Yorkers," said **HUD Regional Administrator Alicka Ampry-Samuel**. "It is highly important for our children to know who Richmond Barthé was and his impact and contribution to this country as a well renowned African American sculptor. We do a disservice to our children if they only see walls and concrete, rather than beauty and wonder. This historic 80-foot frieze will make that possible and that is why I am grateful for the unprecedented partnership among NYCHA, the Public Housing Community Fund, the New York City Council, and the Mellon Foundation for making the preservation of this historic artwork possible."

"Mellon's investment in the restoration of Barthé's *Exodus and Dance* and Kingsborough Houses' open spaces acknowledges the valuable worth of the places, people, and stories of New York and its public housing communities that have long been under-resourced," said **Mellon Foundation Humanities in Place Program Director, Justin Garrett Moore**. "We are proud to partner with NYCHA, the Public Housing Community Fund, and local partners to help build more just communities. This project is groundbreaking not only for creating something new, but for making real investments in the care, maintenance, and engagement that our communities deserve and through recognizing the transformative power, meaning, and beauty that public art and places provide."

"This historic \$2 million grant from the Mellon Foundation will be instrumental in realizing the project's vision of restoring *Exodus and Dance*, uplifting the importance of the artist, Richmond Barthé, to our city and nation, and build long lasting connections within Kingsborough and the surrounding community," said **Public Housing Community Fund Executive Director Alex Zablocki**. "This project exemplifies the power of art to bridge generations, honor cultural

legacies, and build vibrant communities. We are excited to embark on this journey with NYCHA, our local partners and the Kingsborough Houses community. Thank you to the Mellon Foundation' Humanities in Place program for providing this much needed funding for public housing communities."

Key elements of the project include:

1. **Frieze Restoration:** Led by NYCHA's Asset and Capital Management Division, the project's first phase involves the meticulous restoration of the iconic Exodus and Dance frieze, which captures the spirit of Black theater and dance history. The 18-month restoration involves careful removal of the frieze from the wall and transporting it to a conservation studio. Additional work includes building a new wall to serve as the base of support for the frieze, replacing the surrounding pavement, and upgrading the site lighting for the frieze.
2. **Community Engagement and Cultural Preservation:** The second phase of the project is centered around community engagement and storytelling. Working closely with local artists and the Kingsborough Houses resident community, Weeksville Heritage Center and Fulton Art Fair, the project will unveil a place-based strategy that highlights shared histories, memories, and aspirations through an artist-in-residence and fellowship program. Art installations, community murals, and interpretive signage or storywalk will serve as mediums to reflect the voices and narratives of the community and significance of Exodus and Dance. The project seeks to preserve the rich cultural heritage of Kingsborough Houses and the broader African American community by showcasing their stories, memories, and dreams.
3. **Cultural Significance:** Exodus and Dance celebrates the history of Black migration and freedom, making it a pivotal representation of African American heritage. The project not only restores the artwork but also empowers the community to actively engage with and reinterpret its cultural significance.

The multi-faceted project aims to empower the community by involving NYCHA residents in the restoration process and the creation of new art installations, strengthen intergenerational connections, and uplift shared cultural experiences.

"On behalf of the residents of Kingsborough Houses, we are thrilled to see much needed investments being made in our community. Exodus and Dance is a treasured artwork that generations of Kingsborough residents have enjoyed and gathered around. We call it 'the wall,' but it's more than that; it's a place where our kids have played, where we have celebrated community gatherings, and today, NYCHA and its funders recognize what this special piece of work means to us and we are thankful for its restoration," said **NYCHA Kingsborough Houses Resident Association President Angela Whittaker**.

Once restored, the renovated plaza around the restored artwork will be transformed into a vibrant public space, fostering community gatherings, performances, and activities, contributing to the overall quality of life for NYCHA residents with improved lighting and seating and new community-led murals on the backside of the wall.

The project will also create a living archive, showcasing the journey of restoration, community engagement, and the reimagined cultural narrative with local partners including Weeksville Heritage Center and Fulton Art Fair. This documentation will serve as a blueprint for future initiatives.

“One of the goals of Fulton Art Fair is to maintain the legacy of artists. The restoration of Exodus and Dance helps to continue the legacy of Richmond Barthé and the Fulton Art Fair is proud to support this project by designing and installing interpretive banners at the Kingsborough campus to tell the story of NYCHA residents, their relationship with one another and with Barthé’ frieze, and continue the legacy of Joe Schwartz who’s photos from the 1940’s and 50’s are displayed for all to enjoy,” said **Fulton Art Fair President Larry Weekes**.

"The restoration of Exodus and Dance is an extremely important project for the cultural and artistic life of our Crown Heights and Bedford Stuyvesant community and Brooklyn more generally. Thank you to the funders, community members, cultural institutions, and others who had the vision to support this project. I look forward to seeing Exodus and Dance restored to its original glory,” said **Weeksville Heritage Center President and CEO Dr. Raymond Codrington**.

Firms leading the restoration effort on behalf of NYCHA include Jemco Electrical Contractors, Evergreene Architectural Arts, Ronnette Riley Architect, Jablonski Building Conservation, Inc. Fisher Marantz Stone Architectural lighting designers.

For more information about the Exodus and Dance project, please visit <https://www.communityfund.nyc/kingsborough>.

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About Public Housing Community Fund

Public Housing Community Fund is a nonprofit that forges partnerships to power transformative programs that enhance the lives of over 500,000 residents across NYCHA communities. Our goal is to engage people and partners to build a stronger, more equitable New York City by investing in public housing communities. We invest in programs focused on leadership

development, financial empowerment, community health, and workforce training for residents of the NYCHA community. www.communityfund.nyc

About NYCHA

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), the largest public housing authority in North America, was created in 1935 to provide decent, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. NYCHA is home to 1 in 17 New Yorkers, providing affordable housing to 528,105 authorized residents through public housing and Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) programs as well as Section 8 housing. NYCHA has 177,569 apartments in 2,411 buildings across 335 conventional public housing and PACT developments. In addition, NYCHA connects residents to critical programs and services from external and internal partners, with a focus on economic opportunity, youth, seniors, and social services. With a housing stock that spans all five boroughs, NYCHA is a city within a city.

About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive. Learn more at mellon.org.