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## THE SHELDON ART GALLERIES TO OPEN MAJOR MULTIMEDIA EXHIBIT ON THE HISTORY OF WASHINGTON PARK CEMETERY

ST. LOUIS, MO - The Sheldon Art Galleries presents *Higher Ground: Honoring Washington Park Cemetery, Its People and Place*, an unprecedented multimedia exhibition, March 3 – August 26, 2017 in both the Bernoudy Gallery of Architecture and the Gallery of Photography. **An opening reception is scheduled for Friday, March 3 from 5 – 7 p.m.** and the galleries will be open until 9 p.m. for First Fridays in Grand Center. The Sheldon Art Galleries are open Tuesdays, Noon – 8 p.m.; Wednesdays - Fridays, Noon – 5 p.m.; Saturdays, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. and one hour prior to Sheldon performances and during intermission. Admission is free. For more information on exhibitions, visit the galleries' website at [TheSheldon.org](http://TheSheldon.org).

*The exhibition is made possible by a grant from the Missouri Humanities Council with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a Ferguson Academic Seed Fund Grant from Washington University in St. Louis, Karen and Lawrence Kotner, Barbara and Arthur McDonnell, David Capes Photography LLC, Officer Funeral Home, P.C., and James and Brenda Rivers. In-kind support is provided by Special Collections, Olin Library, Washington University in St. Louis and the Missouri History Museum.*



Conceived by the photographer Jennifer Colten, *Higher Ground: Honoring Washington Park Cemetery, Its People and Place*, includes 50 color photographs, some large-scale, made by Colten over 20 years; video and oral histories by artist Denise Ward-Brown to be shown on three monitors throughout the exhibition; historical land documentation; narrative text panels; and an art installation and animated film by community activist and artist Dail Chambers, which together will provide both a poetic and didactic overview of the history and issues surrounding this predominantly African-American cemetery.

The exhibition takes its title inspiration from Stevie Wonder's 1973 song "Higher Ground," which expresses resilience and perseverance. The three artists each contribute an aspect of the exhibition that will enable the subject to be presented both from artistic and historical perspectives, underscoring the humanity of the subject and shedding light on an important but neglected aspect of St. Louis' African-American history.

MORE...

Washington Park Cemetery, located near Lambert St. Louis International Airport in the city of Berkeley, Missouri was established in 1920 as a burial ground for African-Americans at a time when rigid segregation was common practice. For



nearly 70 years, it was the largest black cemetery in the region, the final resting place for many prominent African-Americans, including John Feugh who was assistant to Henry Shaw; Oscar Minor Waring, the first African-American principal of Sumner High School (and any St. Louis Public High School); and Dr. Miles Davis, Sr., dentist and father to the musician Miles Davis.

Like many African-American cemeteries across the country, Washington Park has both a celebrated and a troubled past. In its almost 100-year history, the grounds of the cemetery went from elegant and manicured to disturbed and attenuated when major construction projects like the building of Highway 70 in 1955, and the airport expansion and the extension of the MetroLink light rail system in the 1990s invaded the once-bucolic landscape. The story is further complicated by neglect and mismanagement by past owners of the cemetery. These unplanned changes to the original cemetery landscape reveal the complicated tangle of social injustice, racial politics, imbalance of power and dismal neglect that constitute the cemetery's long and tragic history.

Alongside the exhibition, Jennifer Colten, in collaboration with the Washington University Olin Library Special Collections, will develop a resource website for the exhibit. A fully-illustrated exhibition catalogue with essays by landscape architect Azzurra Cox and architectural historian and preservationist Michael R. Allen, and contributions by Jennifer Colten, Denise Ward-Brown and Dail Chambers, will also be available.

For the exhibit, the Sheldon Art Galleries is asking for loans of ephemera and photographs related to the cemetery, including cemetery sales brochures, maps or other related items. Also planned is a "memory wall," and organizers of the exhibit are inviting people with loved ones interred there to submit their photographs to be included on the memory wall. Photos can be emailed to, mailed to or brought by appointment to The Sheldon. Contact Paula Lincoln at [plincoln@thesheldon.org](mailto:plincoln@thesheldon.org) to make arrangements. All original loaned items will be returned to the owners upon completion of the exhibit.



MORE...

**Complementary Programs:**

**Gallery Talk: Friday, April 7, 2017, 6 – 7:30 p.m.**, featuring Jennifer Colten, Denise Ward-Brown and Dail Chambers.

Admission free, but reservations are required. Contact Paula Lincoln at [plincoln@thesheldon.org](mailto:plincoln@thesheldon.org) or 314-533-9900 x37.

**Panel Discussion at Missouri History Museum, Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.**

***Higher Ground: Honoring the Story of Washington Park Cemetery***

Moderated by Gwen Moore, Missouri Historical Society Curator of Urban Landscape and Community Identity, and featuring *Higher Ground* project artists Jennifer Colten, Denise Ward-Brown and Dail Chambers; catalogue essayist Michael R. Allen, Director of the Preservation Research Office and Senior Lecturer, Department of Architecture, Sam Fox School of Design and Art; and others, the panelists will illuminate the history of Washington Park Cemetery and discuss the process of honoring its history in an exhibit. **Missouri History Museum's Des Lee Auditorium**, admission free. Information at [mohistory.org](http://mohistory.org) or by calling 314-746-4599.

Additional programs are planned, including a gospel concert at The Sheldon on Tuesday, June 13, an artist workshop with Dail Chambers on April 8, 2017 and several cemetery cleanup days. Information will be available on The Sheldon's website at [TheSheldon.org](http://TheSheldon.org) as details are finalized.

The not-for-profit Sheldon Art Galleries exhibits works by local, national and international artists in all media. Over 6,000 square feet of the galleries' spaces on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor are permanently devoted to rotating exhibits of photography, architecture, music art and history and children's art. A sculpture garden, seen from both the atrium lobby and the connecting glass bridge, features periodic rotations and installations, and the Nancy Spirtas Kranzberg Gallery on the lower level features art of all media. The Sheldon actively supports the work of St. Louis artists in all mediums and features a dedicated gallery with museum-quality exhibits by St. Louis artists, past and present. Financial Assistance to the galleries are provided by the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency and by the Regional Arts Commission and the Arts and Education Council.

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**Image caption page 1:** Jennifer Colten, *WPC.Section 10 [271.11]*, 1991 inkjet print, © and courtesy of the artist.

**Image Caption, page 2 top:** Film still from the video, *Higher Ground*, by Denise Ward-Brown, 2016.

**Image Caption, page 2 bottom:** Dail Chambers, Detail from *A Mythological Journey*, 2017, mixed media, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist.