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***African Village in America*, Monumental Site-Specific Artwork by Joe Minter, To Be Digitally Documented and Preserved**

First-of-its-Kind Project Uses Drones and State-of-the-Art Mapping Technology to Render Artwork Accessible to Scholars and the Public

September 30, 2021 (Birmingham, AL) – Using state-of-the-art imaging technology, Souls Grown Deep Foundation and Community Partnership in collaboration with The University of Alabama is digitally documenting and preserving *African Village in America*, Joe Minter’s nearly one-acre art environment in Birmingham, AL. The mapping and digital documentation of Minter’s work will be the first large-scale application of this sophisticated mapping and imaging technology to record and preserve an art installation. When it launches online in fall 2022, the digital rendering will offer immediate access to the artist’s site-specific presentation of found-object sculptures for both scholars and the public, who previously could only experience the monumental environment by visiting in person. With Minter as the sole creator and caretaker of *African Village in America*, Souls Grown Deep and The University of Alabama’s project will also ensure that this work remains archived for generations to come.

Dedicated in part to increasing the representation of Black artists from the Southern United States in the art historical canon, Souls Grown Deep is committed to fostering public access to the works by artists in its collection, as well as preserving these works in perpetuity. By working with The University of Alabama to create this digital reproduction of Minter’s environment, Souls Grown Deep and the artist will be able to leverage these visuals as a resource to generate support for its physical preservation as well.

“Given the physical magnitude, art historical importance, and vulnerability of *African Village in America*, it was imperative that we use this groundbreaking technology to create a record of this one-of-a-kind work of art,” said Maxwell L. Anderson, president of Souls Grown Deep. “Too many significant art environments have been lost to history; it’s our hope that like-minded foundations, museums, and universities will see this project as a model for future, equally urgent efforts to preserve and make more accessible site-specific art that cannot be easily transferred to a collection or institution.”

Initiated in 1989, *African Village in America* is part yard show, part sculpture garden, and part memorial: a transformation of the land—near two historically Black cemeteries—abutting Minter’s home. In consideration to the site’s history, Minter’s work provides recognition to both the millions of Africans

shipped in bondage to America and their descendants. Using found materials as well as natural objects, Minter, a former construction worker, has welded iron to form commemorations, from a room-size recreation of the Birmingham jail cell that held Martin Luther King Jr. to a monument to those murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary. Biblical scenes and signage are featured throughout the environment, as well as tributes to Black scientists and civil rights leaders. Works by Minter are today in the permanent collections of several leading art museums, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and the High Museum of Art. Minter was also featured in the 2019 Whitney Biennial.

Added Raina Lampkins-Fielder, curator of Souls Grown Deep, “*African Village in America* is a singular feat of imagination and ingenuity. The work is both deeply personal—rooted in Minter’s own history—and intimately connected to histories of the Black experience in America. It is important to document this installation as a complete unit and as a living and evolving expression of Minter’s life’s work.”

The University of Alabama Geography Department has deployed drone-mounted cameras and geographic information system (GIS) mapping to rigorously document the artist’s environment. Capable of capturing a complete and comprehensive record of a place, the use of this technology will capture not only a bird’s eye view of the environment, but also the detailed geometry, precise size, and relative spacing of each work in space. Led by Eric Courchesne, Geospatial Services Manager of the UA’s Geography department, the team, including Dr. Hongxing Liu and Dr. Doug Sherman at UA and Dr. Bo Yang at San Jose State University, has acquired and processed multiple high resolution drone remote sensing data sets to present a full digital reconstruction of the site, which will become available via an interactive online platform next year. In partnership with the UA’s Art History department, first-hand interviews with Minter and additional archival materials will also accompany this comprehensive visual compilation. The second phase is being led by associate professor Rachel Stephens, curator Emily Bibb, master’s student Nadia DelMedico, and postdoctoral researcher Jasmin Howard.

“As soon as I saw Minter’s work and met with him, I knew UA had to get behind it,” said Courchesne. “We saw this as a perfect opportunity to utilize The University’s resources and technical expertise in a meaningful way.”

About the Souls Grown Deep Foundation & Community Partnership

Souls Grown Deep advocates the inclusion of Black artists from the South in the canon of American art history, and fosters economic empowerment, racial and social justice, and educational advancement in the communities that gave rise to these artists. Souls Grown Deep derives its name from a 1921 poem by Langston Hughes (1902-67) titled *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, the last line of which is "My soul has grown deep like the rivers."

Souls Grown Deep Foundation stewards the largest and foremost collection of works by Black artists from the Southern United States, encompassing some 1,000 works by more than 160 artists, two-thirds of whom are women. The Foundation advances its mission through collection transfers, exhibitions, education, public programs, and publications.

Souls Grown Deep Community Partnership pursues racial, social, and economic justice by grant-making, values-aligned investments, underwriting projects, advocacy, and forging collaborations with a variety of like-minded civic organizations, businesses, and nonprofits.

For more information, visit soulsgrowndeep.org.

About The University of Alabama

The University of Alabama, part of The University of Alabama System, is the state's flagship university. UA shapes a better world through its teaching, research, and service. With a global reputation for excellence, UA provides an inclusive, forward-thinking environment and nearly 200 degree programs on a beautiful, student-centered campus. A leader in cutting-edge research, UA advances discovery, creative inquiry, and knowledge through more than 30 research centers. As the state's largest higher education institution, UA drives economic growth in Alabama and beyond.

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