

**For Immediate Release**

May 22, 2019

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## Media Release

### **CCSD Students Exhibit Works in Anson Street Burial Ground Community Art Expo**

**Charleston, SC** – When the remains of 36 individuals were unearthed at the Gaillard Center in 2013, so were a mountain of questions: Who were these people? How did they come to be buried here? And most importantly—what are their stories?

Two hundred and fifty years after they were buried, some of those questions have been answered; many revealed in a reinternment ceremony to honor their mark on Charleston's history.

Leading up to that ceremony, nine Charleston County Schools were invited to [participate](#) in the recent Anson Street African Burial Ground (ASABG) Community Art Exhibition located in the Charleston Civic Design Center.

The self-guided tour of artwork was facilitated by five local artists and La'Sheia Oubre, who is the Education and Community Engagement Coordinator for the Gullah Society. She is also a retired Charleston County School District (CCSD) teacher.

"As a team, we were trying to determine how to bring this project to the community," said Oubre. "The students' artwork hung on the same walls as the professional artists and brought to life these people and their struggles and their impact on Charleston."

Redux Contemporary Art Center worked alongside the Gullah Society to provide the workshops and engage the community in the ASABG's efforts. Redux utilized local community artists to engage the community from children to elders.

Workshops were held at local schools and Redux; where students learned about archaeological and genetic research related to the Anson Street African Burials and created artwork using various visual media.

"The students were beginning to work on an African mask project when we were asked to do the large mural," said Burke High School art teacher Erin Carter. "We decided to combine the masks into a large collage of all the information we were given on the Gullah Society Burial Ground project. We wanted to include the actual

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bones dug up from the site, so I asked if we could get some copies of the burial remains photos. At that point, things simply started to come together.”

The artwork of these students was inspired by the ancestral spaces uncovered on Anson Street along with the Gullah Geechee Culture. The work was intended to reflect Charleston’s ancestry as much as their own genealogy. The art exhibit will make its way across the Lowcountry, with the next stop at Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission’s McLeod Plantation Historic Site. The exhibit there will run September 2019 to January 2020. All schools are invited to experience the Community Art Installation.

### **Learning about ancestry**

According to Joanna Gilmore, Director of Research and Interpretation with the Gullah Society, Brockington and Associates were contracted to excavate and remove the remains after they were initially discovered during construction work.

“The burials were placed in roughly four rows, dating 1750 to 1800,” said Gilmore. “It is important to recognize and remember the contributions of enslaved and free people of color so that we can enrich what we know about Charleston’s past and its impact on life today. Historical records relating to the lives of the enslaved are difficult to find, so archeological research combined with DNA analysis can help us create a better picture of who these people were.”

In May 2018, colleagues from the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Theodore Schurr and Raquel Fleskes, collected bone samples from the 36 individuals that were found near Anson Street. Historical, archaeological, and ongoing DNA research indicated that these 36 women, men, and children were buried between 1750 and 1800. Some were born in Africa and others were born in South Carolina.

Dr. Schurr and Fleskes also collected 78 DNA samples from living individuals of African descent. In July and August 2018, College of Charleston student Adeyemi Oduwole analyzed this material at the University of Pennsylvania with support from the National Geographic Society. The results of the analysis of modern DNA variation provides an initial view of genetic diversity in Charleston that can be compared with what was obtained from the Anson Street burials and allows community members to learn about their genetic ancestry.

During one school visit where Oubre conducted a workshop to share information on the 36 individuals, one middle school student asked if the Gullah Society could name the ancestors.

“The answer was yes and an important step towards reclaiming the humanity of these deceased individuals,” said Oubre. “The research into each individual provided significant insight on the important characteristics of these humans. They were provided culturally relevant names that honor their existence centuries ago.”

Gilmore said the students were eager to participate.

“Hopefully, they’re proud of their contribution to the project and how they helped us to remember these individuals here in Charleston,” said Gilmore. “The Gullah society was certainly overwhelmed by the amazing work produced by these students.”

For more information on this traveling Community Art Exhibition, visit [www.thegullahsociety.com](http://www.thegullahsociety.com).

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#### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 86 schools and specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.