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New Exhibit Shows the Power and Price of Freedom

Through Darkness to Light: Photographs Along the Underground Railroad *opens at The MAX on September 10*

MERIDIAN, Miss. (August 31, 2022) – They left at night, often carrying little more than the knowledge that moss grows on the north side of trees. They risked everything for a dream: freedom. A century and a half later, an evocative exhibit illuminates their path. *Through Darkness to Light: Photographs Along the Underground Railroad* opens Saturday, September 10, at The MAX.

From 1830 through the end of the Civil War in 1865, an estimated 100,000 U.S. slaves embarked on a perilous journey to northern free states or Canada. A clandestine, ever-changing network of safe houses and antislavery activists known as the Underground Railroad sheltered and guided them.



The fugitives traveled at night, in constant fear of being either killed or recaptured, returned, and beaten as an example to dissuade other slaves from running.

Dallas photographer Jeanine Michna-Bales spent more than a decade photographing actual sites along the route. She traveled 2,000 miles, from cotton plantations south of Natchitoches, Louisiana, to the Canadian border.

“These extraordinary photos show light glimpsed through shadows and glimmering

amid murky landscapes, hinting at the terror, uncertainty, and hope that escaping slaves would have felt,” said Stacey Wilson, Curator of Exhibitions at the Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience, known as The MAX. “Their impact transcends time and race. The importance of achieving – and preserving – freedom still resonates powerfully today.”

The Fred & Sissie Wile Changing Exhibition Gallery will host *Through Darkness to Light: Photographs Along the Underground Railroad* from September 10 through January 6, 2023. The exhibition consists of 48 color photographs and other materials and narratives.

“We especially encourage school field trips,” Wilson said. “The subject matter fits perfectly into a variety of curricula.” The rate for groups of 10 or more students is \$5 per person. The MAX also admits teachers free year-round with a school ID.

To learn about related events or curriculum tie-ins, check with The MAX via telephone at 601-581-1550 or online at msarts.org.

Michna-Bales says she believes an understanding of the Underground Railroad is more relevant today than ever. People from different races, genders, social levels, religions, and regions united in a common and worthwhile cause. Her images encourage visitors to ask questions and gain a better understanding of our origins.

The exhibition was organized by ExhibitsUSA, a program of Mid-America Arts Alliance.

About The MAX

The Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience explores the state’s creative legacies in one immersive attraction. Come discover the Mississippi roots of some of the world’s arts and entertainment icons – Elvis Presley, Oprah Winfrey, B.B. King, Faith Hill, Sela Ward, Margaret Walker, Eudora Welty, and Jim Henson, to name just a few.

Admission to the special exhibit is free with regular museum admission. The MAX is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. The museum is located at the corner of Sela Ward Parkway (22nd Avenue) and Front Street, overlooking the railroad at the edge of Meridian’s historic downtown. Street parking is available, with shops and restaurants within walking distance. For more information visit msarts.org or call 601-581-1550.

Image credit: *Decision to Leave*, Magnolia Plantation on the Cane River, Louisiana, 2013, digital C-print, courtesy the artist

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