



GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Division of Libraries, Archives, and Museums

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Open Call for Artists

Tides of Freedom: Legacies of Resistance from the USVI to the USA

Commissioner Jean-Pierre L. Oriol of the Department of Planning & Natural Resources is pleased to announce that the Division of Libraries, Archives & Museums (DLAM) invites USVI artists, creatives, and storytellers to submit works that explore the journey of Virgin Islanders self-identity from emancipation to the current drafting of a people-centric constitution.

“Tides of Freedom” is a multi-disciplinary visual art exhibition that explores the trans-Atlantic and inter-generational struggle for Black liberation through the lens of two pivotal emancipation events: the July 3rd, 1848, Emancipation Uprising in St. Croix, Danish West Indies (now U.S. Virgin Islands), and Juneteenth (June 19, 1865) in Texas, United States. Although there may be an ocean separating people of African descent in the mainland and US Virgin Islands, there are deep ties connecting both communities. These migrating histories include both forced migrations via the transatlantic slave trade and voluntary movement in pursuit of a better life, as many Virgin Islanders who migrated to major cities on the mainland had a profound impact on shaping Black liberatory thinking and civil rights in the USA. Similarly, the U.S. Virgin Islands have historically been a steppingstone to freedom and “The American Dream” from other Caribbean islands, with continuous cycles of immigration and emigration defining Virgin Islanders' identity. This exhibition seeks to bridge geographical and historical divides, highlighting how freedom movements and African people and their descendants are deeply interconnected, rooted in liberatory practice, cultural memory, and resilience.

The tides of freedom continue to swell today, embodied in the pursuit of self-governance. The exhibition calls attention to the work of the 6th Constitutional Convention, which represents a current and urgent act of self-determination. After five failed constitutional attempts, this convention offers renewed hope and a profound responsibility: to craft a constitution rooted in the culture, values, and voice of the Virgin Islands, by Virgin Islanders, and for Virgin Islanders.

The exhibition asks artists to examine how Virgin Islanders have envisioned self-determination and self-governance in the past. Additionally, artists should examine how this has been expressed through our songs, art, poetry, and dance. The exhibition offers an opportunity for contemporary artists and cultural producers to reflect on those legacies and reimagine them for our present moment and future.

Possible themes to explore:

Resistance as Legacy

- Liberation leaders and grassroots defiance then and now (General Buddhoe, Denmark Vesey, etc.)
- Who are some Virgin Islanders who have played monumental roles in improving civil rights not only at home in the Virgin Islands (former Danish West Indies) but who also inspired Trans-Atlantic Black Liberation worldwide?
- How have Virgin Islands cultural legacies served as a source of knowledge in guiding us on the path towards self-determination?

African-Diaspora and Connection

- Movement of ideas, people, culture, and struggle across the Atlantic
- What are some of the shared African-diasporic rituals, symbols, and languages of liberation?

Unfinished Freedom

- The ongoing pursuit of justice and economic equity
- Reflections on systemic racism, legacies of slavery and colonialism
- Addressing other themes specific to the 6th Constitutional Convention such as establishing rights to education, healthcare, environmental protection and voting rights
- What would self-determination and liberation look like had Virgin Islanders been granted independence upon emancipation? What would identity and nationhood look like if we were not colonized?

We Seek Submissions That:

- Honor the 1848 uprising and Virgin Islands ancestors
- Celebrate cultural legacies of resistance
- Reflect on unfinished freedom and systemic challenges
- Address the 6th Constitutional Convention as a blueprint for our future
- Articulate what self-determination and governance in the US Virgin Islands mean to you.
- Unpack multi-layered issues of cultural identity in the US Virgin Islands. Are Virgin Islanders African-American, Afro-Caribbean, or something else?

Possible Exhibition Components:

- **Visual Artworks:** Painting, photography, mixed media, performance-based work, film/video, dance presentations, pop-up spoken word and poetry sessions from contemporary artists in the USVI and the U.S.
- **Immersive Timeline:** A walkthrough visual timeline connecting the 1848 Emancipation Uprising in St. Croix to the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation and 1865 Juneteenth in the United States of America, through present-day activism in both regions.
- **Audio Visual Room:** Spoken word, digital storytelling, oral histories, interviews with historians,

- **Interactive Installation:** “Freedom Wall” prompting the audience to reflect and illustrate what self-determination looks like to them.
- **Community Quilt Project:** A collaborative fabric piece around African-Diasporic shared legacy

Important Dates:

- **Artist Call Opens:** May 14, 2025
- **Proposal Submittal Deadline:** May 30, 2025
- **Artwork Drop-off:** June 20, 2025
- **Exhibition Opening Night:** June 27, 2025 at Fort Frederik Museum
- Activities on St. Thomas and St. John: TBA

Submission Requirements due May 30th, 2025:

- Short artist bio (250 words max)
- Project statement describing how the work responds to the themes (500 words max)
- Images of recent work to show (photos, titles, media/dimension details)

Submit to: Monica Marin, Territorial Curator at monica.marin@dpr.vi.gov or call Fort Frederik Museum at 340.772.2021