

San Antonio's San Pedro Creek Culture Park unveils plans for art at AME church site

Texas Public Radio | By [Jack Morgan](#)

Published September 5, 2024 at 2:58 PM CDT



Courtesy Photo / Gordon Huether

'The Presence of the Past' by Gordon Huether

Work on the [San Pedro Creek Culture Park](#) project was halted next to Houston street in October three years ago when foundations of an old [AME church](#) were unearthed.

Original plans for the area were scrapped, and the San Antonio River Authority went back to the drawing board to figure out how to honor the history they'd uncovered.

SARA's partner, the [San Antonio River Foundation](#), has now revealed the way officials will honor the church and its legacy. There will be two art installations in the church's original footprint and in the location next door.

California artist [Gordon Huether](#) was one of two artists selected.



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"I started in stained glass in my late teens, and I decided then that someday I was going to do large scale work across around the world that would have a lasting positive impact on people," Huether said.

That's how his career has played out. He said he also specializes in telling the stories of people with his art. In this particular case, he hopes to tell the story of the men, women and children who came to this AME church.

"The first installation, it was billed as a shade structure. It's very large structure in the shape of the original church that was there so as a little peaked roof on it. We're calling it *The Presence of the Past*, and it is pretty much the same footprint as the original church that was there," he said. "And it's all in white, and it is, it is filled with laser cut powder coated steel panels of the [Freedom Quilts](#)."

Its white color allows it to change dramatically depending on what kind of light strikes it.

"It depends on the time of day, your angle of viewing. And you know, from a distance, you'll see there's these beautiful patterns. But as you get closer and the patterns become more in focus," Huether said.

Those Freedom Quilt patterns came from the quilts that helped freed or escaped slaves navigate dangerous routes as they traveled on their way to freedom.

Huether was also able to, in a fashion, honor those churchgoers who attended the predominantly Black church that occupied the spot from 1871 to 1875.



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"There is also something of an altar on one end of it that has the 300 names of the original congregants, which is pretty awesome and cool," Huether said. "And then there's the community culture pavilion that's adjacent, and that is a round shaped hat, I'll call it, with Vocab's poem that she created."

That hat-shaped steel structure will have a poem by former poet laureate Andrea Vocab Sanderson etched into it. And while it's not an area for a sizeable gathering, Huether expects it will be a place for people to congregate.

"And it's designed for people to read poetry, give a speech, play guitar. It's definitely a place for gatherings," he said.

He hopes that in the hustle and bustle of day-to-day living, people will be inspired to slow down, take it in and give it some thought.

"I think that people going by will indeed stop," he added. "Want to actually enter, because it's almost like a building. And I think that nobody will see the same thing twice. It depends on the time of day, your angle of viewing."

The installation should be done in January.



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