

# Press Release

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[FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE]

City of Ontario  
Ontario Museum of History & Art

## **ONTARIO MUSEUM OF HISTORY & ART OPENS *THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT: PHOTOGRAPHS ALONG THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD***

They left during the middle of the night - often carrying little more than the knowledge that moss grows on the north side of trees. An estimated 100,000 slaves between 1830 and the end of the Civil War in 1865 chose to embark on this journey in search of freedom. They moved in constant fear of being killed or recaptured, returned, and beaten as an example of what would happen to others who might choose to run. Under the cover of darkness, “fugitives” traveled roughly twenty miles each night traversing rugged terrain while enduring all the hardships that Mother Nature could bring to bear. Occasionally, they were guided from one secret, safe location to the next by an ever-changing, clandestine group known as the Underground Railroad. Many consider the Underground Railroad to be the first great freedom movement in the Americas and the first time when people of different races and faiths worked together in harmony for freedom and justice. *Through Darkness to Light: Photographs Along the Underground Railroad* opens Thursday, November 30, 2017 and runs through to Sunday, January 7, 2018 at Ontario Museum of History & Art.

Photographer Jeanine Michna-Bales has spent more than a decade meticulously researching “fugitive” slaves and the ways they escaped to freedom. While the unnumbered routes of the Underground Railroad encompassed countless square miles, the path Michna-Bales documented encompasses roughly 2,000 miles and is based off of actual sites, cities, and places that freedom-seekers passed through during their journey.

Whether they were slaves trying to escape or free blacks and whites trying to help, both sides risked everything for the cause of freedom. From the cotton plantations south of Natchitoches, Louisiana, all the way north to the Canadian border, this series of photographs by Michna-Bales helps to imagine what the

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long road to freedom may have looked like as seen through the eyes of one of those who made this epic journey.

While many books have been written on the subject, there is very little visual documentation of the Underground Railroad because of its secretive nature. Today, as America becomes more and more diverse, Michna-Bales believes that an understanding of the experience, and those who lived through it, is more relevant than ever. The Underground Railroad united people from different races, genders, social levels, religions, and regions in a common and worthwhile cause. It was the first civil rights movement within America. *Through Darkness to Light: Photographs Along the Underground Railroad* encourages visitors to learn more, ask questions, and open a dialogue on the subject, and in the end, provide a better understanding of our origins.

This exhibition features beautifully dramatic color photographs, ephemera, and narratives that together tell the story of the Underground Railroad. The author is working with Princeton Architectural Press to prepare a publication that will combine eighty-two original photographs and text with a diverse sampling of related ephemera.

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

***In conjunction with this Exhibit, the Museum is hosting two events:***

**Trunk Show and Lecture: Quilted Pages**

**Saturday, December 9, 2017 (2:00 PM to 3:30 PM)**

Learn about American history through African American quilts with artist and author Allyson Allen. The presentation includes an overview of antebellum and slave era reproduction quilts. Seating is limited. Reservations Required. Free Admission.

**Book Chat**

**The Underground Railroad: A Novel**

**Saturday, January 6, 2018 (12 PM to 4 PM)**

Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad: A Novel* (Pulitzer Prize Winner and Oprah Book Club Pick) is a tale of one woman's ferocious will to escape slavery. Join the Museum for a book

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chat moderated by Sheila Marchbanks. Participants will share ideas and opinions about the book. Books are available at the Museum Store, Ontario City Library, online, or at a local bookstore. Light refreshments and hors d'oeuvres will be served. Reservations Required. Refreshments will be served from 12:00 PM to 12:30PM.

## **About ExhibitsUSA**

This exhibition is toured by ExhibitsUSA, a national program of Mid-America Arts Alliance. ExhibitsUSA sends more than twenty-five exhibitions on tour to over 100 small- and mid-sized communities every year. These exhibitions create access to an array of arts and humanities experiences, nurture the understanding of diverse cultures and art forms, and encourage the expanding depth and breadth of cultural life in local communities. For more about ExhibitsUSA, email [MoreArt@maaa.org](mailto:MoreArt@maaa.org) or visit [www.eusa.org](http://www.eusa.org).

## **About Mid-America Arts Alliance**

Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA) strengthens and supports artists, cultural organizations, and communities throughout our region and beyond. We achieve this primarily through our national traveling exhibition programs, innovative leadership development, and strategic grant making. We are especially committed to enriching the cultural life of historically underserved communities by providing high quality, meaningful, and accessible arts and culture programs and services. We believe in more art for more people. Additional information about M-AAA is available at [www.maaa.org](http://www.maaa.org).

## **About The Ontario Museum of History & Art**

The Ontario Museum of History & Art is located at 225 S. Euclid Avenue, Ontario, California 91762. Gallery hours are Noon to 4 PM, Thursday through Sunday. Admission is free. For more information call (909) 395-2510, email at [museuminfo@ontarioca.gov](mailto:museuminfo@ontarioca.gov), or visit [www.ontarioca.gov/museum](http://www.ontarioca.gov/museum). The Ontario Museum of History & Art is a public-private museum operated by the City of Ontario with support from the non-profit Ontario Museum of History & Art, Associates.

## **About the City of Ontario**

The City of Ontario is *Building A Better Tomorrow* with urban lifestyle districts that create sustainable places to live, work and play. Located just 35 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, the City of Ontario is ideally situated as Southern California's gateway. With three major interstates, two railroads and the Ontario International Airport, Ontario offers direct access from Los Angeles to the rest of California, and to North America. With approximately



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170,000 residents and residential development on the rise, Ontario looks to double its population in the next 20 years, making it one of the 100 most populated Cities in the nation. Complementing its business and residential core, Ontario dazzles with its amenities such as the Ontario Convention Center, Citizens Business Bank Arena, and the Ontario Mills Mall. To learn more about the City of Ontario, visit [www.ontarioca.gov](http://www.ontarioca.gov) or call (909) 395-2000.

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