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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Xavier University programs present performance-based exhibit “Imagining Grace” in honor of Women’s History Month**

**New Orleans, La-** Xavier University of Louisiana’s Women’s Studies Program, Performance Studies Laboratory (PSL) and Department of Art and Performance Studies will present “Imagining Grace,” a performance-orientated installation encouraging participation from visitors in activities promoting wellness and contemplation starting on March 8, International Women’s Day. The exhibit will be housed in the Administration Building Art Gallery on Xavier’s campus and includes curated spaces that actively stimulate the physical senses and foster conscious engagement of the materials in each area. “Imagining Grace” can be viewed by the public through April 8, 2022.

“Imagining Grace” reimagines space, opportunity, and wellness for our current times. The exhibit asks viewers to consider how individuals and society-at-large has navigated recent events, including COVID-19; racialized violence directed towards Black bodies; the January 6 assault on the Capitol; the devastation of Hurricane Ida, its coinciding with the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and the breached levees; and the still-fresh bomb threats to Xavier and other HBCUs meant to disrupt the education and learning of students.

“Imagining Grace” presents a haunting meditation on slavery and its effects on the Black body and psyche using performance-based conjoining of visual art, textures, sensory experiences, and contemplative practices seeking to honor presence, wellness, and the human spirit. Consciously set within the midst of campus life and foot traffic, the project juxtaposes public/private selves, stillness/movement, release/reclaim, and ideally becoming “so much more”—one’s “own best thing.”

Visitors can walk along hand-drawn labyrinths expressly created for the project by Xavier Visual Arts faculty Professors MaPó Kinnard and Ron Bechet. There is also access to a space organized for meditation with singing bowls and a list of online sources drawn from myriad musical expressions to create personalized sound baths. Zen-sand gardens for continuously creating ephemeral designs are also available. There will be weekly posted prompts supporting self-reflexive exercises for persons to consider the trajectory of their pasts, their present, and their imagined future selves in other gallery areas. With each prompt, guests will be invited to join their reflections with others, creating ongoing visual texts that reflect their individuality and collective humanity. A different written reflection card will be available each week so that visitors can continuously connect to the project beyond the gallery’s physical space.

The exhibit is inspired by the works and legacy of Xavier's foundress, St. Katharine Drexel, and the late Nobel Prize laureate Toni Morrison. St. Katharine, who was canonized in 2000, committed herself to a life-long mission of educating Black and Indigenous communities during a time when it was nearly impossible for people of color to access a quality education. Morrison's literary career contributed to understanding the Black experience in America. Both women's work considered how the social constructs of race and gender were often employed to limit African Americans' potential, opportunities, and challenge their wellness. St. Katharine Drexel and Toni Morrison, respectively, were able to peer through the veil of our collective humanity to glimpse the sacred in all her forms and the possibilities for communal wholeness.

Xavier's Center for the [Advancement of Teaching and Faculty Development](#) will host a meditation session each Monday at 12:30 p.m. led by faculty member Bart Everson in the space. The project will periodically host special events and presentations over the exhibition. The first series of events will be African Dance classes led by Kai Knight, Founder and Creative Director of Seasons Center. Classes are scheduled in the gallery for Tuesdays, 5-6 p.m., March 15 through April 6. Due to limited space, participants are required to register in advance.

For additional information, contact Dr. Robin G. Vander at [rvander@xula.edu](mailto:rvander@xula.edu).

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### **About Xavier University of Louisiana**

*Xavier University of Louisiana, America's only historically Black and Catholic University, is ranked among the top three HBCUs in the nation. Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier produces more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Additionally, Xavier's College of Pharmacy is also among the top producers of African American pharmacists in the country.*

*Established in 1925 by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for African-American and Native Americans to receive a quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in art, business, education, biological sciences, chemistry, pharmacy and political science. More recent additions in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science, neuroscience and genetics, in addition to new STEM-based master's programs, have provided Xavier students (2815 undergraduates and 787 graduates) an unbeatable combination of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty, who are experts in their fields, to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula provides students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls, thereby facilitating a more just and humane society for all.*

*For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit us online at [www.xula.edu](http://www.xula.edu) or follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, or Twitter @XULA1925. To book interviews and/or to speak with our experts in the field of pharmacy, education, premed, public health, science, technology, math, business, English, communications, and the arts, contact Chelsea Cunningham at (504) 520-5425 or [ccunnin@xula.edu](mailto:ccunnin@xula.edu).*



Xavier University of Louisiana  
*presents*

## **IMAGINING GRACE**

performance-based exhibit in honor  
of Women's History Month

Opening *International Women's Day*,  
March 8  
on display until April 6

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Administration Building Art Gallery  
1 Drexel Drive  
New Orleans, LA 70125

*Presented by Xavier University of Louisiana's  
Women's Studies Program, Performance Studies  
Laboratory (PSL) and Department of Art and  
Performance Studies*