

## Slave Rebellion Reenactment

*Slave Rebellion Reenactment* is a conceptual community-engaged performance that will restage and reinterpret Louisiana's German Coast Uprising of 1811. This was the largest rebellion of enslaved people in North American history and took place outside of New Orleans. *SRR* will animate a suppressed history of people with an audacious plan to organize, take up arms and seize Orleans Territory, to fight not just for their own emancipation, but to end slavery. It is a project about freedom.

The artwork will involve hundreds of reenactors in period specific clothing marching for two days covering 26 miles. It will be reenacted upriver from New Orleans in the locations where the 1811 revolt occurred—the chemical refineries and trailer parks that have replaced the sugar plantations will be its backdrop.

The reenactment will be an impressive and startling sight—500+ Black people, many on horses, armed with cane knives and muskets, flags flying, some in militia uniforms, others in 19th century French colonial garments, singing in Creole to African drumming. There was limited fighting during the 1811 rebellion, so, in contrast to many war reenactments, much of *SRR* will be a procession, with only occasional skirmishes. It will be jarringly out of place as they advance past mobile homes, Dominos Pizza and oil refineries. This historic anomaly will form a cognitive dissonance for viewers, opening space for people to rethink long held assumptions.

A key element of slave revolts was the organizing of the uprising by small groups of trusted individuals clandestinely plotting with others in small cells. Mirroring this structure, *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* will initiate several recruitment and organizing meetings of multiple small groupings of people to prepare the reenacted uprising. These meetings will be part the artwork—a performative reenactment of history. Taking the form of conversations about why people choose to participate and about others they might involve, the self-organization of the slave rebel reenactors is and essential part of the artwork.

The project will have multiple identities: the reenactment itself, a video of the reenactment including the small recruitment meetings, and photographs of the event.

Kook, Quamana and Charles Deslondes, the leaders of the 1811 uprising, and the many enslaved people who were part of the revolt are heroes and their vision should inspire more people. Their rebellion is a profound “what if?” story. It had a small but real chance of succeeding—what would that have meant for US and world history? Understanding that the past was not predetermined opens the ability for people to dream “what if?” for the future. I hope that this project helps people of all races broaden their vision of what is possible.

*SRR* builds on a performance I did at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. *Dread Scott: Decision* (2012) looked at American democracy's foundation in slavery. *SRR* shifts focus from the roots of America to the strivings of people fighting to be free of those roots. An army from the past, forged of decedents of enslaved Africans, will collide with the present and the reverberations will be felt by the audience and reenactors alike.

The ending of *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* will intentionally interrupt the timeline of the history it's based on. It will end without resolution, leaving space for people to dream “What if?” and open the possibility for people to imagine freedom.