

Telling the Story of Louisiana's Past

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Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts will give a reading of her work in progress about a slave uprising in Louisiana. The reading is at 6:30 p.m. today (April 7) at the New Orleans African American Museum, 1418 Governor Nicholls St.



Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts is working on a project that tells the story of an 1811 slave uprising in Louisiana. (Photo by Monique Verdin)

The reading is in conjunction with the museum's exhibition called "Drapetomania: A Disease Called Freedom."

Rhodes-Pitts, a writer, Texas native and graduate of Harvard University, is the seventh "Changing Landscapes" resident of [A Studio in the Woods](#).

Rhodes-Pitts says that she is incorporating history and natural history and disappearance and preservation in her project that tells the story of an 1811 slave uprising. She is interested in the juxtaposition between an act of human violence and the natural environment, where the decomposition and disappearance of human remains offer an accelerated version of events that took place in nature and the violence and domination of men echoed similar acts against the land.

The project includes a hand-bound, letterpress-printed limited edition of her writing about the River Road area along the Mississippi River and an 1811 slave uprising. Rhodes-Pitts is creating experimental artifacts using handmade paper and calligraphy.

She intends to craft paper from refuse fiber from the three main cash crops of Louisiana's plantation economy: cotton rag, bagasse from sugar cane and rice straw.

Rhodes-Pitts also is writing a trilogy on African Americans and utopia. Her first book, *Harlem Is Nowhere*, will be published in 2011 by Little, Brown. Her work has appeared in *Transition*, *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*. She has received awards from the Independent Press Association, the Rona Jaffe Foundation and the Lannan Foundation.