

**TURCHIN CENTER
for the Visual Arts**

APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

EARTH TONES

ETIENNE CHARLES

PETTI/PEISER GALLERY

MAY 1 – OCT. 3, 2026





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front:
Etienne Charles, Saramacca District, Suriname, Amazon Rain
Forest, 2023

left:
Etienne Charles, "Earth Tones, Maldives"
Courtesy of Ahmed Ameen

EXHIBITION SUMMARY

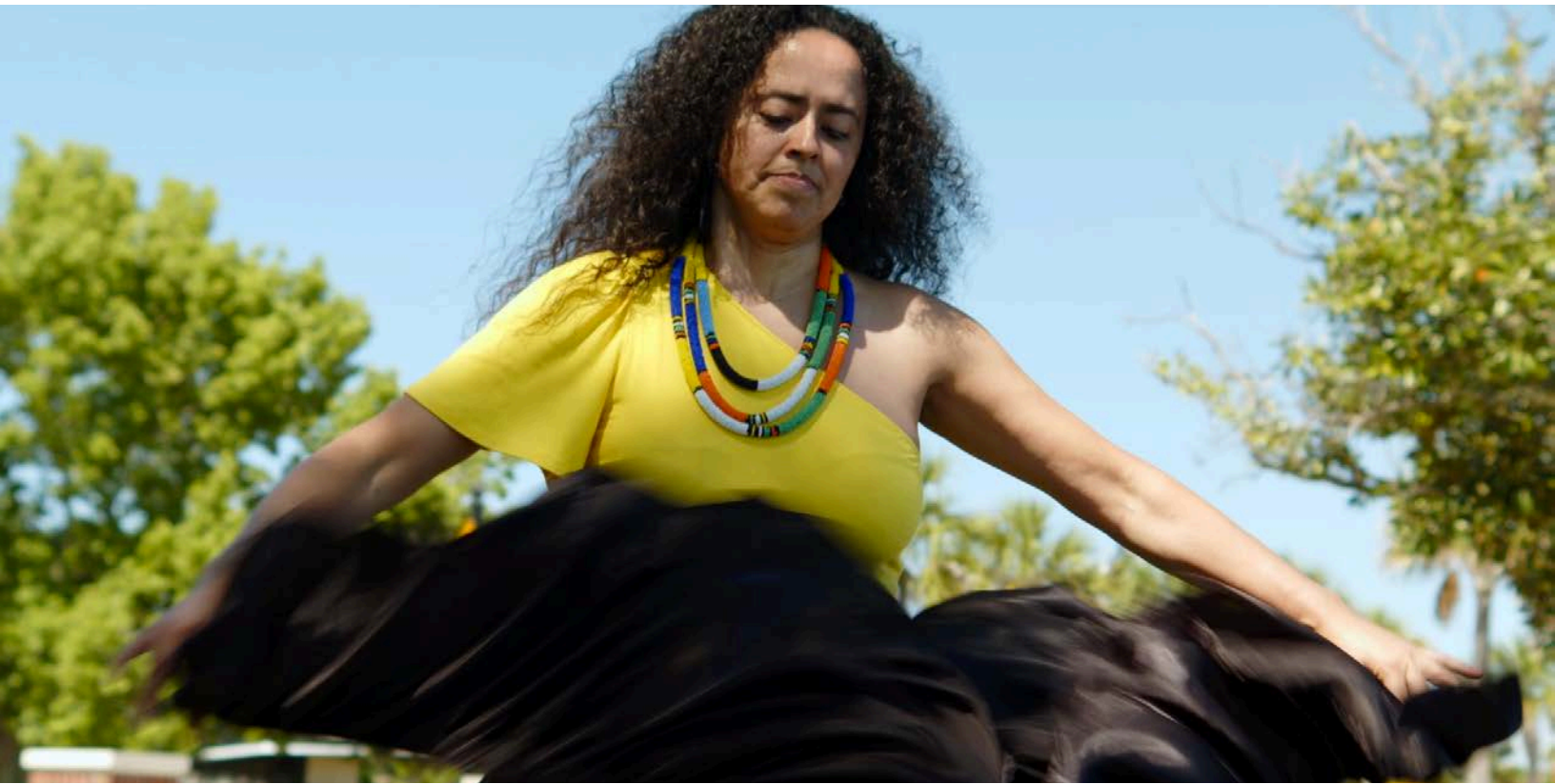
The creation of *Earth Tones* as a multimedia project began in 2021, which led composer and trumpeter Etienne Charles to ask, “How can I use music to tell stories, from the perspective of the people I meet?” Following a campus performance in April 2026, this exhibition includes the visual stories gathered from around the world, demonstrating loss, resilience, joy, and hope.

Earth Tones is presented in partnership with the [Pathways to Resilience QEP](#), a five-year climate literacy initiative at Appalachian State University.

During his time in Boone, Etienne Charles spoke with classes across the university and connected with our community. His visit culminated in a performance of his latest composition, *Earth Tones*, a multimedia jazz performance featuring original compositions that draw attention to people and regions that are, or soon will be, significantly affected by climate change. Special guest appearances included:

- Wednesday, April 22: 2:00-2:50 PM session in PSU 137 ABC Grandfather Mountain Ballroom (open to campus and community)
- Thursday, April 23: 9:30-10:45 AM session in PSU 420 Parkway Ballroom (open to campus and community)
- Friday, April 24: Hayes School of Music class visits, [evening performance at the Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts](#) (tickets required)

EXHIBITION STATEMENT



Earth Tones began as a multimedia jazz performance built around original works by composer and trumpeter Etienne Charles. Charles—recognized for his narrative-driven projects such as *Carnival: The Sound of a People Vol. 1*, *San Jose Suite*, *Creole Soul*, *Gullah Roots*, *Folklore*, and his recent commission *San Juan Hill – A New York Story*—premiered the piece in April 2024 in Houston, TX. Staff from the Appalachian State University Office of Arts Engagement attended the premiere and initiated conversations with Charles about expanding the single performance into a five-month exhibition for our community.

A live performance of *Earth Tones* took place at the Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts on April 24, 2026, and the project continues through an exhibition at the Turchin Center from May through October 2026. Stories gathered from around the world are shared through photographs and video installations in the Petti/Peiser Gallery.

ARTIST STATEMENT

The creation of Earth Tones as a multimedia project began in 2021, shaped by the stories I grew up hearing in Trinidad from my mother, a retired urban planner. She spoke of meetings on global warming in the 1980s, which led me to ask, “how could I use music to tell stories, but from the perspective of people?” Climate is often discussed in terms of economic impact; I wanted to understand its human impact.

I traveled to communities across the world, listening to people describe how environmental shifts unfold slowly over generations or arrive suddenly in a single catastrophic moment. I first visited Houma, LA, and Galveston, TX, followed by Rasdhoo in the Maldives—places at sea level where rising water is a continued concern. In Houma, saltwater pushes into the bayou and threatens freshwater resources. In Galveston, a 27-mile barrier island, the land itself is a fragile buffer. In Rasdhoo, shrinking sandbanks reshape livelihoods and traditions. These were places I had never visited before, yet the stories shared with me—of loss, resilience, joy, and hope—felt deeply familiar.

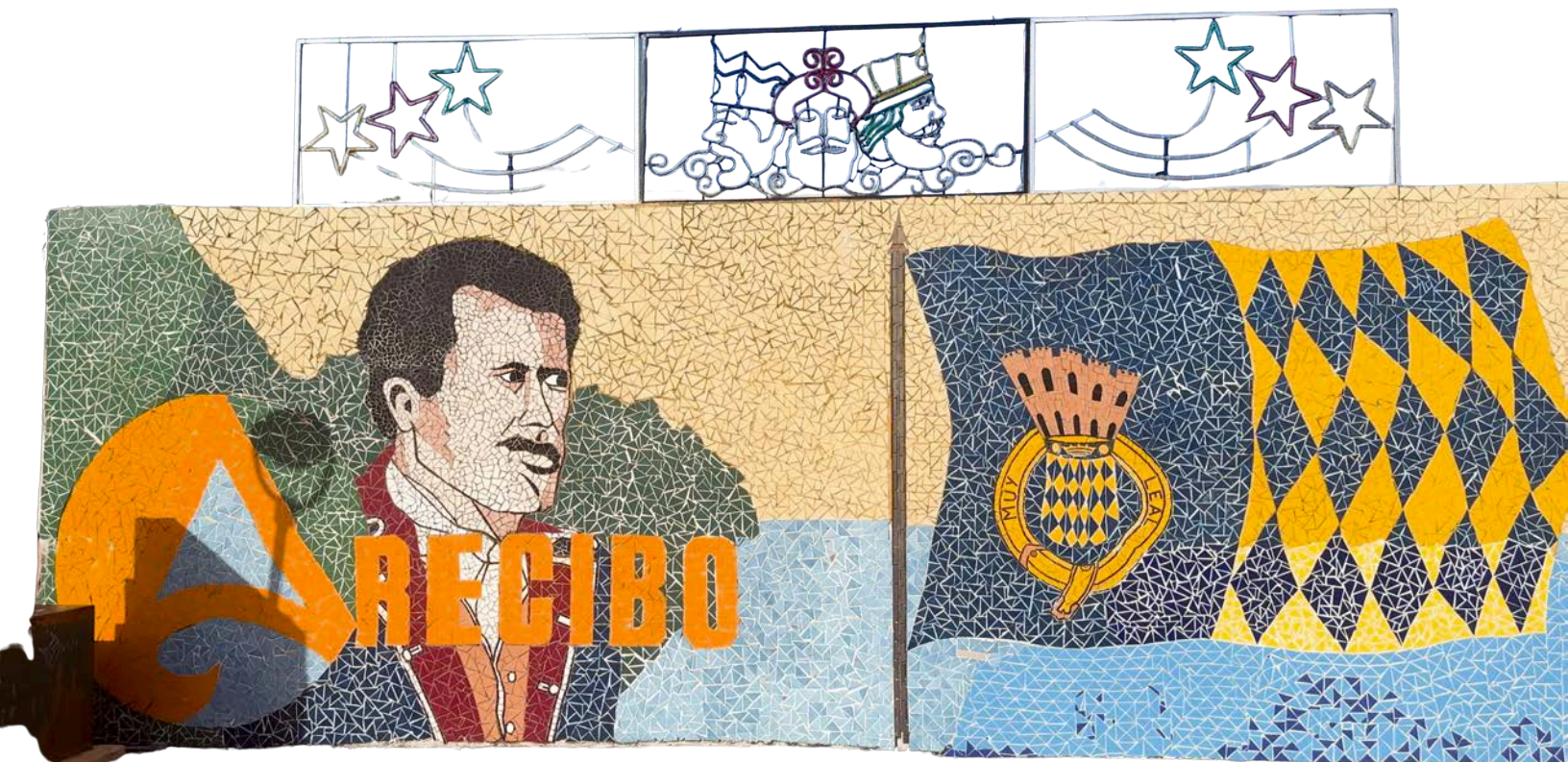


Salsa Bench, Orlando, Florida, 2023 (detail)
From the *Jareales, Puerto Rico* video by
Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones*
project

ARTIST STATEMENT (CONT.)

I also sought out places where the climate narrative looks different. Suriname, a carbon-negative country in South America whose dense forests absorb more greenhouse gases than the nation emits, offered a glimpse of what environmental stewardship can look like. Panama, a carbon-neutral country, is another place I plan to visit to understand how communities build climate success into their identity. As Hurricane Helene devastated Western North Carolina in September 2024, followed just weeks later by destructive floods in Valencia, Spain, I was struck by how two regions on opposite sides of the Atlantic—both considered relatively protected—were united by shared vulnerability. These events reminded me that there are countless stories still untold, countless voices still unheard, and countless images still unseen.

Earth Tones grew from a desire to create something more expansive than music alone. It is a living project that weaves together sound, imagery, and human testimony. Because our planet continues to evolve, this work has no true ending. New challenges will emerge, but so will new solutions—and new stories worth listening to.



El Capitán Correa, Antonio de los Reyes Rodríguez y Correa's portrait on a wall in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, 2024

From the *Jareales, Puerto Rico* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Trinidad-born Etienne Charles is a performer, composer, and storyteller, who is continuously searching for untold stories and sounds with which to tell them.

A 2015 Guggenheim Fellow and 2022 Creative Capital Awardee, he researches his compositions by travelling to the regions on which he is focused, meeting with musicians and cultural leaders then observing and participating in rituals to be fully immersed into the cultures that he is studying.

As an educator and conductor, he has done residencies at the Juilliard School, Stanford University, Columbia College Chicago, Oakland University, Kent State University, Walnut Hills High School, Cultural Academy for Excellence, and the US Military Academy.

He currently serves as Associate Professor of Studio Music and Jazz at the University of Miami, Patricia L. Frost School of Music.



INVITATION TO CREATE

*Every connected conversation matters! **Tell us your story.***

Visitors are invited to tell their weather stories in the sound booth located in the gallery. Please ask at the front desk for assistance or from the Gallery Ambassador in the gallery.

Here's what the Nature Conservancy has to say about talking about our climate:

“Knowing that people like you—someone they know and like—believe climate change is important reduces the perception that there’s a gap between those who do and do not support climate action. Showing that climate change is important enough for you to talk about will help change hearts and minds. Plus, you’ll make it easier for others around you to talk about it as well.”

Questions to think about as you tell your story.

- What is your most memorable weather story?
- Climate change is a human issue, not just a science issue, or an environmental issue. It's a health issue, a food issue, a water issue, and an economic issue. Who are you, what do you like to do, what do you like to eat, and what do you care about deeply?
- Bonding and connecting with each other is critical to having meaningful conversations, rather than arguments. What challenges do you face in today's world when it comes to finding common ground? How do you navigate these challenges?
- Challenges around climate warming can bring up difficult feelings, but pairing this experience with information about tangible solutions can motivate meaningful action.

Etienne Charles,
Saramacca District,
Suriname, Amazon Rain
Forest, 2023



BEHIND THE SCENES



BEHIND THE SCENES



WORKS IN THE EXHIBIT



Salsa Bench, Orlando, Florida, 2023

From the *Jareales, Puerto Rico* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project



El Capitán Correa, Antonio de los Reyes Rodríguez y Correa's portrait on a wall in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, 2024

From the *Jareales, Puerto Rico* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

Born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, Antonio de los Reyes Correa (ca. 1665–1758), better known as El Capitán Correa, served as a captain in the Spanish Marine Infantry. Correa was in charge of a small militia assigned to protect the city from possible attack. He successfully defended Arecibo against an invasion by the British in 1702.



Mandela Gregoire

John Bourg, Houma, Louisiana, 2023

From the *Bayou* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

Houma is the largest city in the parish seat of Terrebonne Parish in Louisiana. Houma was struck by Hurricane Ida, a category 4 storm, in August 2021. The city continues to be at an extreme risk from flooding which can occur at any time of year. According to the Terrebonne Parish website (<https://tpcg.org/ramp/floodloss>) “Floodwater collects because Terrebonne Parish lies at, or below sea level. The low, flat ground provides little gravity drainage, so water that falls must be pumped out. When the ground is saturated and a heavy rain falls quickly, the system can be overwhelmed and flooding can result.”



Ben Doyle (photo edited by Adrien Tillman)

Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern, Houston, Texas, 2023

From the *Bayou Park Cistern, Houston, Texas* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

The Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern is a former drinking water reservoir built in 1926 for the City of Houston. The 87,500-square-foot cistern has been converted into a public space for tours, performances, and art installations.

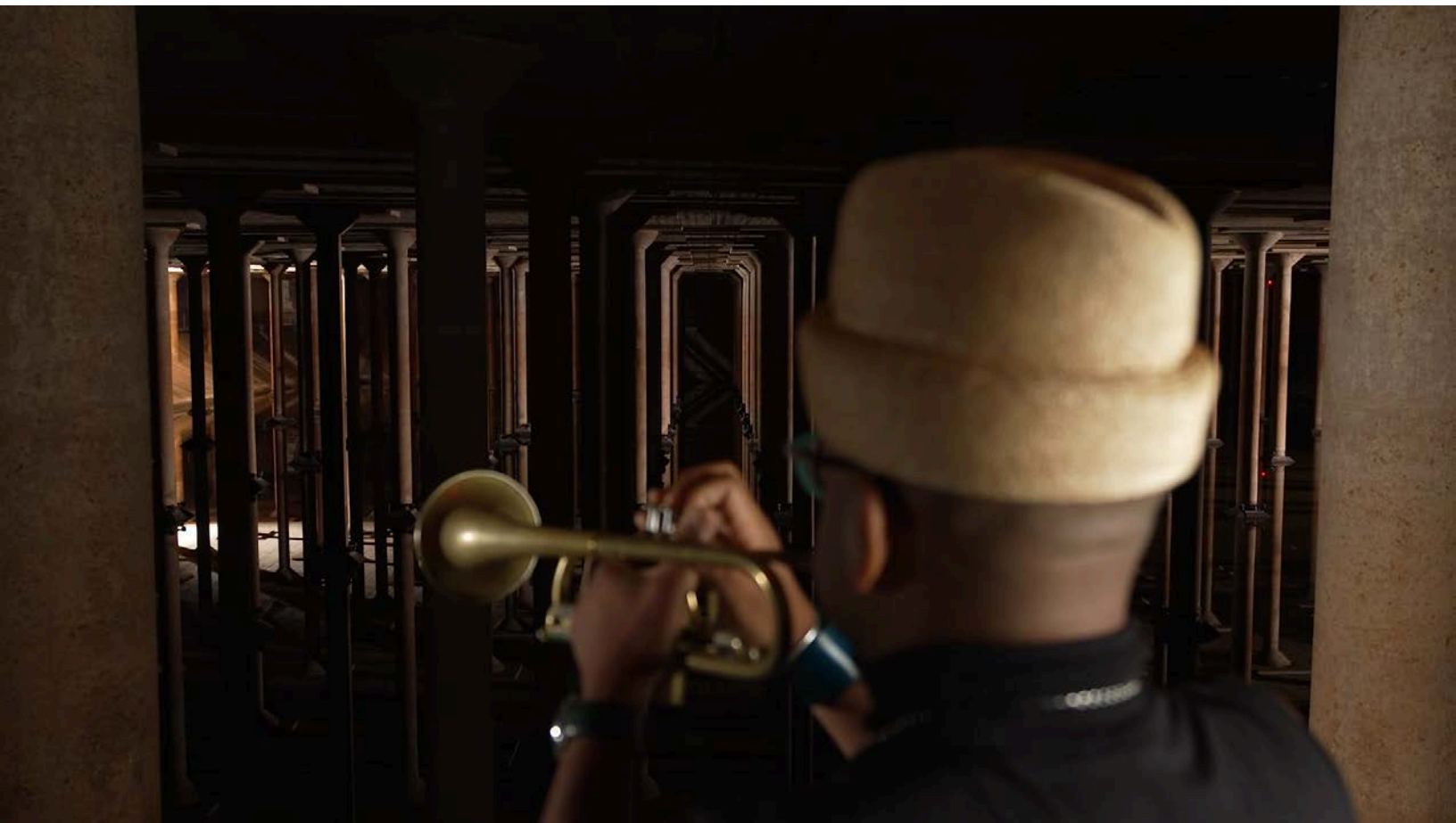


Ben Doyle (photo edited by Adrien Tillman)

Abstraction, Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern, Houston, Texas, 2023

From the *Bayou Park Cistern, Houston, Texas* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

The Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern is a former drinking water reservoir built in 1926 for the City of Houston. The 87,500-square-foot cistern has been converted into a public space for tours, performances, and art installations.



Ben Doyle

Etienne Charles playing trumpet in the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern, Houston, Texas, 2023

From the *Bayou Park Cistern, Houston, Texas* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

The Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern is a former drinking water reservoir built in 1926 for the City of Houston. The 87,500-square-foot cistern has been converted into a public space for tours, performances, and art installations.



Mandela Gregoire

Sankofa Caravan to the Ancestors on Galveston Beach, Texas, 2023

From the *Earth Tones, Galveston Texas and Galveston, Texas* videos, from the *Earth Tones* project

The NBUF (National Black United Front) website describes the Sankofa Caravan to the Ancestors as a spiritual, cultural, and historical public experience. “SANKOFA is a West African concept coming from the AKAN people meaning ‘Go back to your past and retrieve what you have lost, bring past values forward to today, go back and fetch it...go back and get it.’” NBUF’s Sankofa Caravan to the Ancestors has welcomed participants from around the world including spiritualists, activists, organizers, revolutionaries, scholars, royalty, entertainers, television and movie personalities to share in the festivities.



Mandela Gregoire

Drumming on Galveston Beach during the Sankofa Caravan to the Ancestors, 2023

From the *Earth Tones, Galveston Texas and Galveston, Texas* videos, from the *Earth Tones* project

The NBUF (National Black United Front) website defines the purpose of the Sankofa Caravan to the Ancestors this way, to:

- HONOR our Creator divine mother essence and father essence.
- VENERATE/UPLIFT our Black/African Ancestors. Acknowledging the shoulders, we stand on.
- LEARN about our African & African in America spirituality history and culture.
- RECEIVE blessings to achieve our goals and overcome our challenges.
- SETTLE conflicts/disputes.
- ENERGIZE ourselves for the work we must do.



Mandela Gregoire

Participants in the Sankofa Caravan to the Ancestors on Galveston Beach, Texas, 2023

From the Earth Tones, Galveston Texas and Galveston, Texas videos, from the Earth Tones project

The National Black United Front (NBUF) is a “grassroots, Pan-African organization working and organizing towards the advancement of all people of African descent.”



Max Nierlich

Melanie Maldonado-Diaz, Genealogist, Cultural Practitioner, and Founder of PROPA (Puerto Rican Organization for the Performing Arts), Puerto Rico, 2024

From the Jareales, Puerto Rico video from the Earth Tones project

In her LinkedIn account Melanie Maldonado-Diaz writes that she “hosts and curates the Africa Habla en Mi genealogy series. She is a member of the United Confederation of Taíno People and has a direct ancestral connection to the Urhobo people of southern Nigeria, among many other places on the Mother Continent. Melanie is the Principal (consultant and genealogist) of Karabalí, LLC.” She founded the Puerto Rican Organization for the Performing Arts (PROPA) which “builds community, celebrates diaspora and connects people to history, culture and the environment through the arts.”



Etienne Charles

Bomba Record Release Party, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2024

From the Jareales, Puerto Rico video from the Earth Tones project

Bomba is a Puerto Rican musical genre that emerged roughly 400 years ago from the colonial plantations where West African enslaved people worked. It remains one of the most popular forms of folk music on the island and serves as significant evidence of the island's rich African heritage.

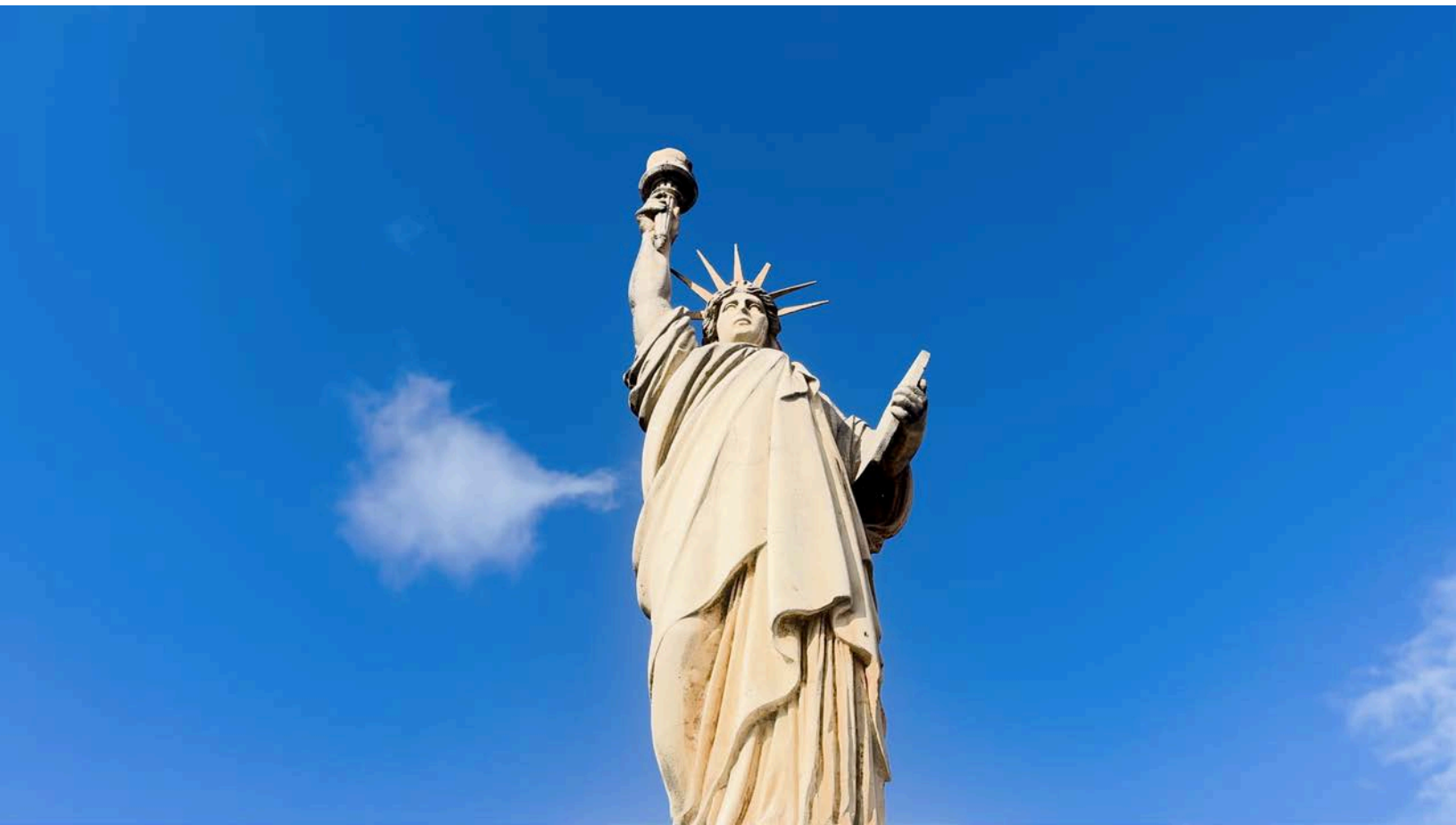


Etienne Charles

Waves crashing against the shore where Jarealas used to exist, 2024

From the *Jareales, Puerto Rico* video from the *Earth Tones* project

Melanie Maldonado-Diaz: “We are no longer able to visit Jarealas because the place doesn’t physically exist any longer. Due to coastal erosion, the sea reclaimed its land and the space upon which these practitioners lived and drummed and celebrated and mourned through Bomba no longer exist.”



Etienne Charles

The Statue of Liberty in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, 2024

From the *Jareales, Puerto Rico Video* by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

“DEL PUEBLO, POR EL PUEBLO Y PARA EL PUEBLO”

Located on Paseo Víctor Rojas, at the intersection of Calle Gonzalo Marín and Avenida Víctor Rojas, the Statue of Liberty in Arecibo is a replica of the iconic New York monument. This symbol has been part of Arecibo's urban landscape for over a century, becoming a landmark for locals and visitors alike.



Max Nierlich

Etienne Charles talking to Xavier Cortada, climate artist, 2023

From the *Mangroves* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

Xavier Cortada: “Mangroves live both in and out of the water. It’s important for an ecosystem, it [mangroves] becomes a habitat for marine life and for birds and land animals... Mangroves also protect human beings from the storm surges that come with hurricanes. With more and more stronger hurricanes coming, it’s really important that all across the planet, we preserve and protect our mangroves.”



Max Nierlich

Mangroves in the early morning light, 2023

From the *Mangroves* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

According to EARTHDAY.ORG (<https://www.earthday.org/>)

“Mangroves are trees and shrubs with characteristically intricate, exposed roots that form a type of tropical forest typically located near bodies of water. More importantly, mangroves host the most diverse, beautiful, and resource-abundant ecosystems in the world. However, the rise in deforestation and the looming danger of sea-level rise have threatened the mangroves habitat, putting the area’s biodiversity as well as local communities at risk.”



Max Nierlich

Sunlight penetrating the Mangrove Swamp, 2023

From the *Mangroves* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

According to EARTHDAY.ORG (<https://www.earthday.org/>) There are five important reasons to protect mangroves:

1. Mangroves act as carbon sinks.
2. Mangrove forests are biodiversity hotspots.
3. Mangroves improve and maintain local water quality.
4. Mangrove forests double as coastal protection.
5. Mangroves provide essential resources for people.



Ahmed Ameer

Rasdhoo (Dhivehi: ރާސްދޯ) Tourism, 2023

From the *Rasdhoo, Maldives* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

According to the United Nations Development Programme, Rasdhoo (Dhivehi: ރާސްދޯ) also sometimes called Rasdhukuramathi Atoll, “the Maldives tourism sector faces major issues resulting from climate change, such as shoreline and beach erosion, reduced water availability, interrupted supply chain and coral bleaching, among others.”



Ahmed Ameer

Underwater, Rasdhoo (Dhivehi: ރާއްޖެ), Maldives, 2023

From the *Rasdhoo, Maldives* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

Situated on a low-lying archipelago, Rasdhoo Island is located in the North Ari Atoll, known for scuba diving and snorkeling in clear blue waters. Like all the islands in the Maldives, this beautiful tourist site faces impending sea level rise and loss of the protective coral reefs. The Maldives are mitigating these challenges by installing sea walls, adding sand to its beaches, encouraging sustainable tourism, and may have to move the people who live on the inhabited islands to safer places.



Ahmed Ameer

Etienne Charles walking along the shore, Rasdhoo (Dhivehi: ރާއްޖެ), Maldives, 2023

From the *Rasdhoo, Maldives* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

At the current rate of global warming, almost 80% of the Maldives could become uninhabitable by 2050, according to multiple reports from NASA and the U.S. Geological Survey. "Our islands are slowly being inundated by the sea, one by one," Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, the president of the Maldives, told the U.N. Climate Change Conference. "If we do not reverse this trend, the Maldives will cease to exist by the end of this century."



Ahmed Ameer

A walk on the shore with a Tern, Rasdhoo (Dhivehi: ރާސްދޯ), Maldives, 2023

From the *Rasdhoo, Maldives* video by Etienne Charles from the *Earth Tones* project

According to Avibase - The World Bird Database, 208 species of birds can currently be found in the Republic of Maldives, nine of those species are globally threatened.



Kuksie

Aurora, Sipaliwini District, Suriname, on the Upper Suriname River, Etienne Charles talking to the Saramaka women of the village, 2023

The Village of Aurora is home to the Saramaka, a group of Maroon people who have established communities along several of the rivers in the Amazon Rain Forest.



Etienne Charles

Saramacca District, Suriname, Amazon Rain Forest, 2023

Located in the Heart of the Amazon Rain Forest, Suriname is one of the world's greenest nations. The Saramacca District is known as a birder's paradise encompassing three nature preserves: the Coppename Monding Nature Preserve, the Beven Coesewijne Nature Preserve and the Noord Saramacca. Saramaka is also the name of a group of Maroon people who established communities along the Saramacca River.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Etienne Charles, "Earth Tones, Maldives"
Courtesy of Ahmed Ameen

INSTAGRAM / <https://www.instagram.com/etiennejazz/>

FACEBOOK / <https://www.facebook.com/etiennejazz/#>

YOUTUBE / <https://www.youtube.com/user/etchala>

CONSERVATION LAW <https://www.clf.org/blog/the-truth-about-climate-anxiety-and-how-to-address-it/>

UNITED NATIONS / <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/communicating-climate-change>

MENTAL HEALTH AND <https://mhcca.ca/connecting-on-climate/knowning-the-dos-and-donts-of-climate-conversations>
CLIMATE CHANGE
ALLIANCE /

CLIMATE CHANGE <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/resources/videos/waters-paradise-adapting-climate-change-maldives>
ADAPTATION /



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Etienne Charles, "Earth Tones, Maldives"
Courtesy of Ahmed Ameen

WORLD BANK <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/endpovertyinsouthasia/thriving-in-blogs/a-warming-world--how-maldives-can-adapt-to-climate-c>

LUXURY LONDON / <https://minio.la.utexas.edu/webeditor-files/southasia/pdf/Can%20the%20Maldives%20be%20saved%20from%20climate%20change%20%28Condensed%29.pdf>

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/florida/stories-in-florida/why-mangroves-important/>

EARTHDAY.ORG / <https://www.earthday.org/the-importance-of-mangrove-forests/>

THANK YOU

FROM THE TURCHIN CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS



North
Carolina
Arts
Council

This project is supported by the North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

**CREATIVE
CAPITAL
FOR ARTISTS**

EARTH TONES WAS MADE
POSSIBLE BY A CREATIVE
CAPITAL AWARD (2022).

Earth Tones is presented in partnership with the Pathways to Resilience QEP, a five-year climate literacy initiative at App State.



The Turchin Center for the Visual Arts at Appalachian State University engages visitors from the university, community, nation and beyond in creating unique experiences through dynamic and accessible exhibition, education, outreach and collection programs. These programs inspire and support a lifelong engagement with the visual arts and create opportunities for participants to learn more about themselves and the world around them.

Appalachian
STATE UNIVERSITY