



## MAYOR WU ANNOUNCES CASTLE OF OUR SKINS AWARDED NEW PERFORMANCE VENUE AND WORKSPACE IN LOWER ROXBURY AND SOUTH END

City partners with developer in groundbreaking deal to secure long-term ownership of arts and culture space for residents



*Image description: Castle of our Skins quintet performs with 23/24' Creative in Residence, Jenny Oliver (Photo Credit: Robert Torres for Castle of our Skins)*

**BOSTON** — Monday, December 9, 2024 — Mayor Michelle Wu and the Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture announced that the City of Boston has awarded [Castle of our Skins](#) (COOS), a Boston-based Black arts institution celebrating cultural curiosity and Black artistry through music, education, and community-driven initiatives, a new performance venue and workspace at 566 Columbus Avenue in Lower Roxbury/South End. This affordable commercial space is restricted to nonprofit ownership in perpetuity, ensuring that the location remains a vital cultural resource for the city for generations to come. This announcement was made Thursday at a ribbon-cutting ceremony that featured a short performance by Castle of our Skins' musicians.

"Ensuring that our artists and creatives have stable, long-term spaces to elevate art and build community is critical in our work to make Boston a home for everyone," said **Mayor Michelle Wu**. "This new space will support Castle of our Skins ongoing work across the city, growth of Black artistry and serve as a vital anchor for residents around 566 Columbus Avenue in Roxbury and the South End. I'm grateful for all of our partners' work and for the opportunity we



have to ensure this affordable commercial property is a space for artists to gather and work for years to come."

This award marks a significant milestone in *Castle of our Skins'* 11-year history as a champion for Black artistry in Boston. Through a competitive public process, COOS successfully secured the space, which will be purchased for the symbolic price of \$1. The organization will be responsible for the build-out, operating expenses, real estate taxes, and other associated costs.

"This announcement, made just following our 11th birthday, is a monumental step forward for Castle of our Skins", said **Ashleigh Gordon, Artistic Director and Co-Founder of Castle of our Skins**. "This new space represents not just growth for our organization but also a permanent home where we can continue to elevate Black artistry and build community connections in Boston for years to come."

The 2,491-square-foot space, located at 566 Columbus Avenue in Boston's Lower Roxbury/South End neighborhood, is in the historic jazz corridor and on the site of the former Harriet Tubman House. With its new role as the home of *Castle of our Skins*, the space will continue the legacy of cultural connection and Black artistry in the community.

The new home and performance venue for Castle of our Skins, named "Gold Hall," will host performances, artist residencies, educational workshops, and community events, ensuring that Black creativity remains at the forefront of Boston's cultural landscape. The space will officially open in 2027, following extensive renovations. COOS will also launch a capital campaign early next year to raise funds for the build-out of the venue, transforming it into a welcoming and vibrant cultural center.

COOS will partner with CoEverything, a community-driven firm specializing in designing cooperative and sustainable buildings, businesses, and projects. CoEverything will work collaboratively with COOS and the surrounding community to ensure the space reflects the values of inclusivity, sustainability, and cultural impact.

The space was made available through a Community Benefits Agreement as part of the City's Article 80 process for the large mixed-use development project, designating the project's affordable cultural space. The area was divided into two sections: one was gifted to United South End Settlements, who had previously operated out of this space, while the other was awarded through an extensive public process conducted by the Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture (MOAC).

The City of Boston, as is typical when affordable cultural space is made available, led the public process on behalf of the developer to identify a user. The process included the submission of Letters of Interest, public presentations from five finalist organizations, and a public comment period. A selection panel, composed of representatives from MOAC and Boston's Planning Department, reviewed and evaluated the submissions and ultimately chose *Castle of our Skins* for this opportunity.

### **About Castle of our Skins**

Founded in 2013, Castle of our Skins is a Black arts institution dedicated to fostering cultural curiosity and celebrating Black artistry through music. In classrooms, concert halls, and beyond, Castle of our Skins invites Black heritage and culture exploration, spotlighting both unsung and celebrated figures of past and present. With a commitment to storytelling through art, Castle of our Skins is known for its interdisciplinary collaborations, working with artistic disciplines such as



spoken word, dance, and visual arts. Castle of our Skins' programming highlights the multidimensionality of Black creativity, connecting with artists and audiences across the globe.

For more information on how to support the capital campaign or get involved, please visit [www.castleskins.org/new-space](http://www.castleskins.org/new-space) or contact Dr. Ciyadh Wells at [ciyadh@castleskins.org](mailto:ciyadh@castleskins.org).



*Image description: Castle of our Skins' team from left to right Ruben McFarlane, Kelley Hollis, Ciyadh Wells, Brandie Garcia, Ashleigh Gordon, Rachel Styles. (Photo Credit: F Point Productions for Castle of our Skins).*

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