Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair

NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission

One Centre Street, 9th Floor

New York, NY 10007

Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor

City of New York

City Hall

New York, NY 10007

Hon. Carlina Rivera, City Councilmember, 2nd District

254 East 4th Street

New York, NY 10009

RE: Support for landmark designation 285-287 East 3rd Street

Dear Chair Carroll, Mayor de Blasio, and Councilmember Rivera,

I am writing to express my strong support for the landmarking of 285 East 3rd Street. Built in 1837 by the Fish family, and adjoined to 287 East 3rd Street, this building retains its historic integrity and is emblematic of the neighborhood’s19th-century architecture. Despite centuries of rapid change in the East Village, this building retains the original scale and character of the neighborhood, while having played home to important artistic and cultural movements the East Village has seen over the last 60 years.

Professor Steve Cannon resided at 285 East 3rd Street from 1970 until 2013. This is also the location of his renowned organization, A Gathering of the Tribes, and the beloved Tribes Gallery.

Beginning in the 1970’s, Steve Cannon maintained an “open-door policy” in his home, welcoming underrepresented artists and writers into an environment where art was shared and celebrated. This informal artist salon, grew into an art gallery, small press, performance and community space known as A Gathering of the Tribes (Tribes). In 1991, Tribes was officially incorporated as a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit arts organization, which, over the years, received funding from such institutions as NYFA, NYSCA, The Jerome Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation, the DCA, The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, and many others. Tribes has served tens of thousands of NYC artists, with Cannon taking on the role of a mentor to countless authors, writers, musicians and visual artists. In 2018, The New York Times declared it “possible that no figure in downtown Manhattan has done more than Cannon and yet received less credit.” With his passing in 2019, this building serves as a tangible reminder of Cannon’s legacy in the cultural history of the Lower East Side.

The structure’s historical significance extends beyond the Fish family and their colonial ties; 285 housed A Gathering of the Tribes for nearly 40 years, an organization, founded and led by renowned Lower East Side resident, Steve Cannon, an important figure in American literature, art, and culture. In 1969, Cannon authored *Groove, Bang, and Jive Around (published by Olympia Press),* a novel that immediately became an underground sensation, noted for being a distinct “embodiment of downtown NYC.” Cannon also collaborated with such renowned artists such as Miles Davis, David Hammons, Al Loving, and Cecil Taylor, and was a leading member of the Umbra collective in the 1960s, one of the most prominent African American literary groups in the city. Innumerable NYC artists, at various points in their lives, saw Tribes as a home away from home. Through the small press, gallery and open-door salon, over the decades, Tribes hosted, published and featured countless renowned authors and artists, including Ishmael Reed, Toni Morrison, Allen Ginsberg (who paid off a portion of the building’s mortgage as a favor to Steve Cannon), Anne Waldman, Quincy Troupe, Lois Elaine Griffith, Billy Bang, Lawrence D. “Butch” Morris, John Farris, Jade Sharma, Willie Perdomo, Tish Benson, Paul Miller (D.J. Spooky), Bob Holman, Miguel Algarin, Paul Beaty, and many others.

To say the least, this space is precious those who continue to ensure NYC’s reputation as a city that generates cutting-edge, contemporary art, and nurtures diverse artists.

A Gathering of the Tribes, by its mission, still “provides a platform for diverse, traditionally under-represented artists and writers, amplifying the emerging and established revolutionary voices of our time.”

As your agency implements its equity framework, landmark designation for the houses at 285 East 3rd Street that nurtured so much creative expression from artists and writers in underrepresented communities would be proof positive of the framework’s veracity. I strongly urge the Landmarks Preservation Commission to take immediate action in honoring Steve Cannon’s legacy with 285 East 3rd Street’s designation as a New York City landmark.

Sincerely,

*Name*

*Address*

*Contact*