
issue one
CARE | CULTURE | JUSTICE
ARTIST COMMUNE JOURNAL!

The Instant Two Shin

Cover Art: Arris' Cohen
acrylic painting
2024

The Instant Two Shin challenges the coded gaze (an algorithmic bias in AI) by exposing the artificial segmentation imposed by technology on Black identity while simultaneously embracing the Black gaze (the critical lens through which art and visual culture centers Black thought and experience) by offering a layered, empowered representation of Black masculinity. It speaks to autonomy, complexity, and speculative vision, aligning deeply with the Afrofuturistic and diaspora-centered themes that I explore as an artist. Through this work, viewers are invited to see beyond imposed filters and recognize the full, multi-dimensional identity we all possess within.

ARTIST COMMUNE JOURNAL!

About Urban Arts Space

Founded in 2008 and located in Columbus, Ohio, Urban Arts Space is a gallery that offers free programming to the public. As part of The Ohio State University, it plays an important role in the Columbus arts scene, offering a mix of exhibitions, educational programs, and community outreach. Urban Arts Space also oversees Hopkins Hall Gallery on Ohio State's Columbus campus.

Address:
50 W Town St, Suite 130
Columbus, OH 43215

Visiting Hours:
Tuesday – Saturday: 11 AM – 6 PM
Thursday: 11 AM – 8 PM





Artist Commune: Soul Collage, January 2024, with MJ Abell. (Photo Credit: Jackson Wood)

About Artist Commune

Artist Commune is a collaborative event designed for artists looking for an interactive art space and anyone else hoping to create something new. Free and open to the public, *Artist Commune* features arts activities around a different theme held on the last Friday of each month. Past themes have included live figure drawing, pop-up exhibitions, poetry readings, downtown photo walks, and hip-hop storytelling. The *Artist Commune Journal* is an extension of this collaborative spirit. It serves as a record and a reflection of the creative energy that flows through the commune, documenting the experiences, projects, and journeys of the artists involved.

View an online version of the *Artist Commune Journal* at *uas.osu.edu/artist-commune-journal*

Foreword

Dr. Terron Banner, Urban Arts Space Manager of Community Learning and Experience



> Sometimes academic language offers precision, while everyday language offers connection. I've tried to weave both through this foreword. I share this not as a statement on how language should work but as an insight into the power of our words and the thought we all must use in creating them. Much like the artistic process, this writing evolved through reflection, revision, and a commitment to reaching across difference while honoring the poetry and power of our collective vision.

When I first dreamed up *Artist Commune*—the monthly program, not the journal—I did so with an understanding of the transformative power of art and community. In recognizing this collective power, there is also a pressing responsibility we—arts institutions and communities—hold as curators of creative spaces. This foreword emerges from the spirit of the Artist Commune event, which embraces CARE | CULTURE | JUSTICE as the foundation of real community connection. The *Artist Commune Journal* stands as a natural extension of that commitment.

This first issue of the *Artist Commune Journal* is more than just a collection of ideas and images—it's a living record of our work to break down walls between institutions and build authentic relationships between university and community. Born from The Ohio State University Global Arts + Humanities Discovery Theme & Office of Outreach adn Engagement grant-funded project "Care, Culture, & Justice as Practice," this publication both documents and actively participates in our shared reimagining of what arts engagement can and should be.

At its core, *Artist Commune Journal* challenges traditional academic knowledge and lifts community expertise and lived experience. The pages that follow show how the principles of CARE | CULTURE | JUSTICE come to life through co-creating.

What we're building together is an *Artist Commune* in its truest sense—not just a gathering space but a web of support, inspiration, and mutual aid that exists in physical spaces, virtual spaces, and the spaces in between. We know that community itself is a form of self-care, especially for underestimated communities, where pooling resources for everyone's benefit has long been essential for survival. The people who've contributed to *Artist Commune Journal*—artists, scholars, community organizers, and cultural workers—embody this spirit, creating infrastructure for imagination and innovation while challenging extractive institutional practices.

When I speak of "institution," I'm not only referring to the physical structures of universities, museums, and formal arts organizations but to the entire system of established practices, hierarchies, and power dynamics that have historically determined who creates art, who accesses it, and whose voices are amplified through cultural production. These institutions—both concrete and abstract—have often perpetuated exclusionary frameworks that privilege certain forms of knowledge, certain aesthetics, and certain communities while marginalizing others. To challenge institutional boundaries is to question these inherited systems, to dismantle the artificial separations between "academic" and "community" knowledge, between "high" and "folk" art, between those deemed cultural producers and those positioned as cultural consumers.

Our work through the *Artist Commune Journal* actively resists these false dichotomies, recognizing that meaningful transformation requires not simply reforming institutions but reimagining them entirely—creating permeable spaces where knowledge flows multidirectionally and where creative authority is distributed rather than concentrated. In this sense, our engagement with institutions is both critical and generative: we acknowledge their historical limitations while working to build new models of institutional practice rooted in accessibility, reciprocity, and shared power.

Similarly, when I speak of building community through art, I am not speaking of superficial collaboration or performative relationships. Instead, we envision and actively construct collaborative networks that drive change through shared responsibility and collective decision making. Our arts ecosystem thrives on principles of solidarity economy, valuing creative work and reinvesting in creators, their communities, and the issues that matter to them.



Artist Commune: Sketches in Black, February 2025, with Josiah Jamison. (Photo Credit: Dawn Tyler)



Artist Commune at the Maroon: Ode to Hip-Hop, February 2024, with TRIGNO and DJ O Sharp. (Photo Credit: Dawn Tyler)

As you explore the works in these pages, I invite you to consider how they collectively represent efforts to carve out authentic creative spaces—spaces that resist appropriation, commercialization, and exploitation. I am deeply grateful to the contributors, collaborators, and community partners who have made this journal possible. Together, we are not merely documenting artistic work but actively creating the conditions for transformative engagement that centers CARE | CULTURE | JUSTICE in all that we do. The journal you hold is our shared commitment to breaking through institutional silos, fostering accessible and just arts programming, and recognizing the power of art to build community across difference.

As the *Artist Commune Journal* grows, I hope it continues to serve as both mirror and window—reflecting our shared values while opening new paths of possibility for arts-based community engagement.

— Dr. Terron Banner

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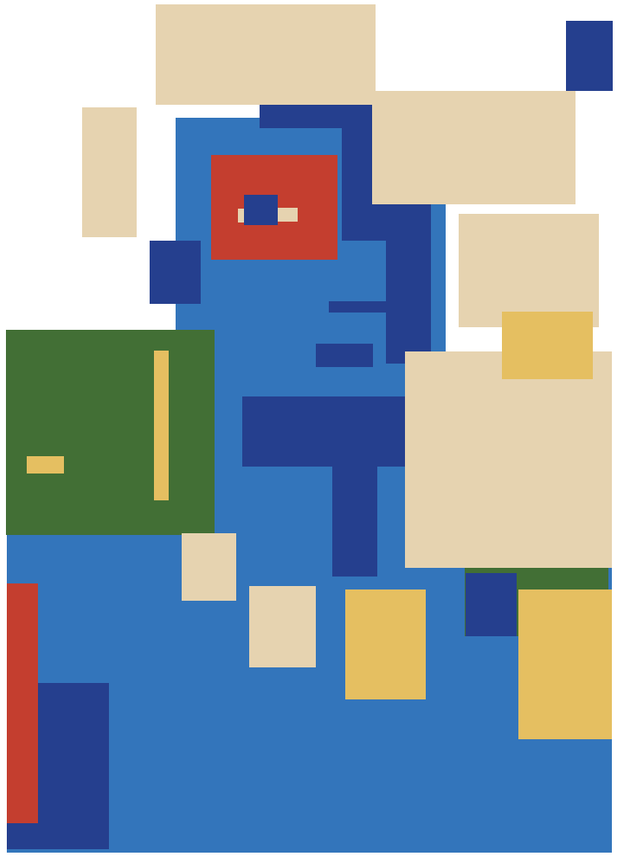
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Duplicate

Ajanaé Dawkins

The prayer closet is where I beg—belly slung to shag carpet. Lightless sea-dark until another eye opens. (Until maturity, your prayers are instructions from seasoned saints. The church's fixation on generational curses should be studied.) Faith is genetic. So too, trauma. I am my mother's prayers *and* the injuries[1] that led her to altar[2]. Something we share besides our small teeth is praying to a living God about dead men[3] who thieve;

Lord vengeance is yours so steal me back from their claws.
Return me to me so I can stop replaying the time
I said no. I said sure. I said nothing.
I left the door unlocked. I left.
I tied a rope around my hands. Bit an apple. Laid
at their feet. Face to carpet. Oh, I know
this position. I know what I smell like to a dead man
who can manipulate a corpse.
God,
what did my mother say to you when they took her?
So I know to pray for something else.

[1] Visible or invisible. a. What the first husband caused when liquor turned his coward to ghost and eye to plum bruise. b. What the second husband caused with his costume of fidelity shorn off on Christmas Eve. c. What my father caused; his free and stagnant body while she grew me.
[2] Location: church house, closet, bathroom floor, sister-girlfriend's lap, new man's cologned neck, table of collard greens, bible stuffed with obituaries.
[3] We skip their names when reporting the lineage. We left them and breathing or not, they dead. Their eyes surveil us from our babies' faces. All manner of mothering is complicated. Disrespectfully, we born looking just like our daddies. We grow into our mother's habits.

Issue One: Featured Artist

Ky Smiley

Ky Smiley (b. 2002) is a Black transmasculine artist, mentor, and arts administrator happily based in Columbus, Ohio. His work speaks to his lived experience as a queer individual navigating his evolving relationships to masculinity, Blackness, and queerness, often through collaborative projects with his family members. By working closely with his loved ones, Ky seeks to expand the Black family photo album, challenging conventional representations of Black identity. His visual narratives center tenderness, vulnerability, and queerness, pushing for a more nuanced and inclusive portrayal of Black life. Ky is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography at The Ohio State University, with a minor in African and African American Studies.

Ky's work has been exhibited in a range of prestigious exhibitions across the globe, including the *Kuala Lumpur International Photoawards* in Malaysia, and the *Pride Photo Exhibition*, which exhibited in the Netherlands, France, and Japan. Their photography has also been featured in multiple group exhibitions such as *Aggregate II* at Kent State University, *Love Black* at the Springfield Museum of Art, and *Inhabitable Zone* at Skylab Gallery. Ky's work has received numerous recognitions, including a Gold award in the portrait category of the *College Photographer of the Year* competition.



Ky & Kysaan

photography
2023

Ky & Kysaan (2023) is the second installment in a photographic series documenting the evolving relationship between my younger brother and me. This series began with a self-portrait we took together after my gender-affirming top surgery in September 2022. This particular photo captures us shirtless in a spare room at our father's home, reflected in a mirror. For me, it reflects not just our images but the growth of understanding in our relationship as siblings. We are constantly navigating the complexities of queerness while establishing our bond as brothers.

I often recall the time spent under the care of my father and brother post-surgery. I observed their shared mannerisms and temperament closely, inciting in me a profound sense of comfort. This period allowed me to experience a newfound security with myself, deeply intertwined with the safety and love provided by my family who were still learning what all my journey as a transmasculine individual would look like.

In the long term, this project aims to expand the Black family photo album in a way that is blatantly queer and universally appreciated. I no longer desire to imagine masculinity as approachable and loving but intend to help solidify it as such in my own familial relationships. By capturing these intimate, but intentional, moments of connection and vulnerability, the photograph expands the conventional representations of Black families, embracing a reality where queerness is inherent and celebrated.



In a Garden of Our Own: Antwan

photography
2023

Photos for this series explore the spaces Black men consider to be their sanctuaries. In this highlighting of worlds, I aim to help create a future where they are gifted their flowers much sooner than at their funerals and with no stipulations. They exist and therefore, they receive. Thank you to all the men who have made, and will make, themselves visible and share with me their gardens. Your vulnerability is revolutionary.

I pull much of my inspiration for this project from the emphatic words of poet, writer, and performer Danez Smith. In their poem "Summer, Somewhere," they envision a future where Black boys and men are granted their own alternative to heaven after death. The lines that compelled me to begin this work asks: "Do you know what it's like to live on land who loves you back? No need for geography now, we safe everywhere. Point to whatever you please and call it church, home, or sweet love." This phrasing evokes the questioning of what true paradise can mean for Black people, particularly men, and emphasizes how crucial both acknowledging and honoring those spaces is to ever feel truly safe in this life.



Last Century, Last Week: Holy Will

photography
2024

I have chosen to depict the space I dream of for Black girls when they go missing, because we all know they go missing. Here, they find a peace that is frequently denied to them in their everyday lives—a paradise that allows innocence to exist fully and without dispute. This is a world that does not suppress or neglect them, whether in childhood or as women. In this space, there is no better place to be than with each other, where shared realities turn to sanctuaries.

I draw much of my inspiration for visual choices from the words of songwriter, singer, and poet Jamila Woods. The title itself is borrowed from her song “Blk Girl Soldier,” which honors Black girls in our history who, despite facing numerous challenges, confront injustices every day. The full line, “Look at what they did to my sisters, last century last week—” aims to convey the sense that the violence they have endured, both past and present, is happening all at once. This line underscores that these are not isolated incidents but part of a systemic issue.

An Exploration of Black Narrative

Sydney Summey

Abstract

Utilizing an assignment given by an Art Education course in The Ohio State University's Arts Administration, Education, and Policy graduate program, this essay examines the article, "Black Geospatial Inquiry and Aesthetic Praxis: Toward a Theory and Method" by dr. gloria j. wilson. This paper analyzes how the author investigates Black narrative through the work of abstract artist Torkwase Dyson and feminist scholar Christina Sharpe. In addition, the exploration of this investigation is accompanied by my examination of other artists like Glenn Ligon and Ayana V. Jackson, as they use creative expression to give voice to what the Black narrative is and can be. As artwork and theory interact, this paper studies how each embodiment converges at a similar point: moving the Black narrative beyond suffering alone and forward to practices and existences of liberation.

Recounting history while moving beyond limited post-enslavement existences meets Black freedom and artistic expression in "Black Geospatial Inquiry and Aesthetic Praxis: Toward a Theory and Method" by dr. gloria j. wilson. In advancing Black study, the author takes the "thinking and theorizing" of Black livingness, its "inherent fugitivity," and locates meaning in a time after chattel enslavement. In doing this, the foundation of this pursuit is the liberation strategies of both Black compositional thought and wake work. In observing both, she then questions what existence looks like for the Black body after going through a traumatic racial violence. In addition, wilson folds in the artistic expression of Torkwase Dyson and theories of Christina Sharpe, informing these concepts and enlightening how Black creativity and thought are "tools for refusing 'death' and offer possibilities for living" (wilson, 2023).

I believe the author explains these concepts by making liberation and artistic illumination key. Liberation is initially pronounced as wilson sets the scene for how we, the reader, are even to approach Black-centered perspectives. One cannot brazenly enter into this space without first knowing how to show up for Blackness. How powerful—as I believe Black people have often been expected to show up—to serve and be grateful for whatever we receive. By doing so, the author equips the audience with a lens of tenderness. As we enter into the complexities of Black story, she unpacks Black centeredness as a refusal "of Eurocentric and Euroadjacent panopticism (voyeurism), which states blackness as simply an object to be observed and studied" (wilson, 2023). This is the making of a space that discusses Blackness "as is" and "independent of" rather than only "in relation to." When I recall my past history lessons, I can only remember seeing myself reflected as a small and restricted part of history. This minor part only allowed Blackness to be present in terms of the bondage and captivity of slavery, and the breath of fresh air by way of one or two civil rights leaders. Blackness was always within the context of struggle, relegating and limiting a recount of history that only establishes another kind of enslavement over again. By rejecting objectivity and meaning making only by way of Eurocentricity, Blackness can experience the attention, care, and freedom it deserves. Further, this removal of Eurocentric reliance requires a more adequate replacement. Letting Blackness stand independently means not only removing master narrative dependency, but replacing it with new, freeing language. A rearticulation is described in the success of Blackness's freedom and Black study for the arts in general. wilson highlights the need for "a rearticulation of authority, power, agency and knowledge production and representation to grapple with the indefinable range of Blackness" (wilson, 2023).

Liberation takes shape through artistic illumination in the work of Torkwase Dyson. In all honesty, before being introduced to Dyson's work, the world of abstraction hadn't meant much to me. Shapes didn't seem to communicate the story or reach me as I walked through museums and galleries. Representational art had a wider vocabulary of what the artist wanted me to know and reflected the Black body directly in ways I enjoyed. Although, referencing back to the indefinable quality of Blackness, the style of abstraction makes sense as to how it can encompass such multidimensionality and range while steadily communicating narrative. The author calls attention to Torkwase Dyson and her emphasis of narrative through her new language of liberation called "grammar of abstraction." Speaking volumes through what is described as Black compositional thought, Black people are recognized as engaging in self-liberation strategies "made for themselves through critical thought and spatial navigation of their environments." In sculpting black structures, what is revealed is "Black self-emancipation." This is utilized in works like Dyson's *Unkeeping (Garret Series)*, 2016, as an example of the state of freeing oneself. The story of Harriet Jacobs's escape from enslavement is brought from 1861 to the forefront of our present. Her escape to freedom entailed a decade of hiding in the sloping roof garret of a slaver. By honing in on her specific story, wilson shows how Dyson preserved the unique experience of the Black individuals that endured these tragedies. There is immense power in pulling a distinct name from the past so as to not gloss over the many, making it one cursory encounter. In doing so, Dyson centers Jacobs's Black perspective. Conveyed through the shape of a matte-black-covered rectangle, the pieces of the roof reflect Jacobs's place of safety, her place of cover, and hope for her liberation. Through the reminiscent shape, defining place, and the decisive use of deep black, Dyson portrays the otherworldly nature of Harriet Jacobs. Combining color and shape, Dyson traverses time and space

to encompass the breadth of captivity, freedom, endurance, and the foresight of Black hope.

This tool in the refusal of death and promotion of Black life is important in the imagining of a post-enslavement society. I have seen the same utilization of creativity when looking at the work of Glenn Ligon. While exploring American history, literature, and society, Ligon makes legacies of modern painting and conceptual art. Commonly known for his black and white text-based paintings, he is motivated by the work of cultural figures. Pieces like *Untitled (I am an invisible man)*, 1991, addresses the novel *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison. Not quite representational but also not completely abstract, Glenn Ligon's use of the selected text emphasizes the Black body's invisibility due to the dominant culture's refusal to see the main character. Mirroring the truth made known by Ellison, Ligon uses an oil stick to layer a gradient over the text. As viewers begin to read, the difficulty in deciphering Ellison's words increases. Invisibility is paired with illegibility as the viewer moves down the length of the page, the word "not" the only clearly visible word at the bottom of the paragraph. The relief of the singular word is the light of hope in the surrounding darkness. "Not" is the daring counter to being made unseen, a term that is "clearly visible, responding to the words of the title and this insisting on visibility and respect" (Moma, 2022). In choosing this particular story, Ligon centers the Black narrative of Ralph Ellison's main character and his experience of society refusing to acknowledge and see him. "Not" is the tool of refusal that also brings life to the Black story.

wilson pairs artistic illumination with the wake theory of Christina Sharpe. Described in four parts, the wake includes themes of homegoing after life, a continued search of humanization and the consequences of racism. Sharpe also likens life and death to the pathway of the back of a ship's engine. Wake theory uses these themes to "position blackness in the overallness, the everywhere, the anywhere of antiblackness" (wilson, 2023). I believe this was a necessary framework to include in the author's process of answering the questions of what existence and meaning there is for Black people after chattel enslavement. Moving from post-captivity to existence in a world stained by the slave trade, this theory confronts questions of what engagement in freedom and life looks like while in environments affected by and operating in antiblack violence. This theoretical tool is another form of refusal to the dependency of only being known by Eurocentric reference and, by default, only seen as victims, confined to terror and pain. The answer to what this looks like begins when Black people are freed both in body and in narrative, "moving beyond the carrier of terror's embodiment (blackness)" (wilson, 2023).

This is a necessary way of looking at history with new eyes and framing the present to make room for life outside of suffering. This has been effective in the work of Ayana V. Jackson and her photography. Through her creativity, she analyzes the effects of the colonial gaze and reimagines nineteenth- and twentieth-century portraiture of Black historical figures. Remaking colonial archival images, Jackson frees the Black body, providing them with an alternative liberatory narrative. In her series, *From the Deep: In the Wake of Drexciya*, ruthless history intersects with hopeful myth. Throwing themselves to their deaths or jumping overboard was the only free will allowed. Pregnant women and their legacies—made slaves—were murdered before setting foot on land.

Thinking of the mothers, their children, and the continuation of their lives from the Drexciya myth, Jackson's photography, sculpture, and video acknowledge the history of death but also make pathways of life. It is "the brutal history that cast these beings to the sea while simultaneously envisioning a world of powerful, resilient women" (Smithsonian, 2020). In challenging the colonizing gaze, Jackson addresses the annihilation that was the transatlantic slave trade and introduces new realms of possibilities (Smithsonian, 2020).

Through questioning the state of Black existence, wilson finds answers in the acknowledgment of the past and the liberation of tools that free Black people for the present and future. Frameworks like Black compositional thought, the wake, and the style of abstraction used in Torkwase Dyson's artistry reflect the pursuit of this goal. If the Black story begins and ends with enslavement, all that is left is a continuation of imprisonment and intangible and tangible loss of life and dreams. As each realizes the importance of challenging master narrative accounts that lack depth, they each work to make space for alternative truth, aspirations, and dreams. Centering and treating Black stories as an independent entity that births self-freedom expands what Blackness has been, is, and can be. I believe that these concepts are necessary because "Black life must always insist on imagining new ways of living an unimaginable life" (wilson, 2023). This quote makes something absolutely clear: that no one has, and no one will, imagine new ways of living for us. Engaging in theory and artistic practice that work to shape the world in these ways can transform environments and the lives of all Black people.

Medusa

Breanne Eickholt
screen print
2024

Starting in Ancient Greece, Medusa has been portrayed as a monster for her snaked head and petrifying female gaze. In Medusa's story, she was raped by Poseidon in the temple of Athena. Instead of punishing Poseidon for his act, Athena punished Medusa for defiling her temple. Athena turned Medusa's hair into snakes and equipped her with a stony gaze. This moment in culture is told repeatedly in stories not as an act against a woman who was raped and punished, but rather the moment a monster was born.

From that point on, Medusa lived in solitude, unable to face anyone she loved. After Medusa's death at the hands of Perseus, her power remained not her own. Perseus used her stony gaze to defeat countless enemies in his path. Medusa's monstrous power was thrust upon her, and her beloved feature—her hair—was turned into snakes; her ability to be with loved ones was stolen from her; and her decapitated head was taken and used as a weapon of war.

This piece aims to replace the title on Medusa from a monster to a woman who has her own story and reclaims her power as her own.



Anthem

Sayuri Matsuura Ayers

—A poem inspired by Stephanie Rond's Recognition, Justice, Belonging *woven with the voices of Gracehaven women, Louise Glück, Lucille Clifton, my mother, and the Song of Songs*

I am a rose of Sharon
I am the speared shoot
that ruptured stone
Dark I am
yet lovely
My thighs roped with scars
the searing brands
of men's hands
Three times I plummeted
into earth's gut
obsidian shards lodged
in my throat
Three times I clawed upwards
wrenching my name
from death's jaws
the name my Beloved
pressed into my palms
the name that *nobody can steal*
At the end of my suffering
there was a door
Seizing a flaming blade
I inscribe on its lintel
I'm
still here
When darkness pants
at the threshold of my home
I pray over my son
every time he goes to sleep
Singing over him
I tuck under his tongue
the honey I have exhumed from decay

Hear me out: that which you call death
I call splintered
That which you call life
I call the pearl
dredged up from muck
Won't you celebrate with me
I should have been dead,
but I'm not
I've never felt so free
See—*I am fearfully*
and wonderfully made.
Hewn from onyx and jasper
I am
made beautiful
by love
From the center of my life came
a great fountain
from it flowed the voices
of the women before me
We call out from the wilderness

A song surges from our lips

as a gleaming torrent

that rumbles over

our oppressors' bones



The Windsor Knight on His Horse, Knowledge, Asher Pollock

A Contribution of Care

Asher Pollock, MEd, CEA K–6 Art Teacher at Sullivant Elementary and Windsor STEM Academy, Columbus City Schools

My personal background is as an artist. I had artists in my family and a very supportive upbringing toward the arts. I am a graduate of Columbus City Schools, and in my senior year I received the Jack G. Gibbs Award of Excellence for my work in the art portfolio career center, which included painting the Longview Barbershop featured on the Clintonville Historical Society mural on North Broadway in 2013.

My return to Columbus City Schools as a teacher was a decision made with the need to focus on community and justice in mind. As an educator, I've come to better understand what I can and cannot change as a teacher, and focusing on what I can do to make improvements has led to some exciting work, which I would like to put forward as arts-based research. My research is about questioning conventional limits and exploring the possibilities of revolutionary pedagogy.

I received my BFA in painting and drawing from Ohio University in 2017, and I earned my MA in the philosophy of art, aesthetics, and cultural institutions at the University of Liverpool in 2018, during a year spent abroad in Europe, where I first dipped my toes into teaching through yoga. From yoga, I learned the importance of listening to oneself, sensing within the body, and quieting the mind. Mindfulness can provide a profound power in realizing what is in need of attention, strengthening, relaxation, or stimulation. I found a quiet and calming voice; teaching was a form of sharing and exchanging knowledge with my classmates.



I lived an exciting life in Liverpool, and then I came home to Columbus to find myself hard-pressed to find a decent job in my field.

I had made all of these discoveries with an open mind that had been cultivated and nurtured throughout my education, a mostly public education. When I started trying to get jobs in Columbus in my chosen field, as an artist or art institution professional, I was asked if I had classroom teaching experience. I had to admit I didn't, and from there I began taking steps toward teaching in order to support myself doing a respectable and available job using my skills as an artist.

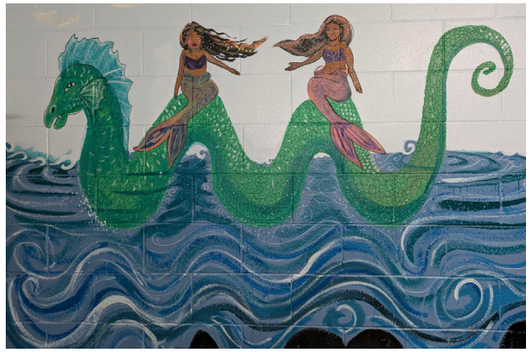
Ultimately, this led to me going back to school during the COVID-19 pandemic, earning my M.Ed. in visual arts education with full teaching licensure from Ohio University in 2021. Student teaching during COVID could be its own reflective essay; suffice to say, I did learn how education, especially public education, is constantly changing.

In the course of my M.Ed. study, I learned that teaching is one of the most embattled professions in our country, and, on a relevant sidenote, that dealing with anti-LGBTQ prejudice on a daily basis makes it very difficult, emotionally, to sustain one's peace of mind as a gay teacher. I learned this in theory in 2020–2021, and in practice ever since, as I am now in my fourth year of teaching. So, my journey has been full of tremendous moments of joy where I feel like I am making an impact on my students' lives and artistic journeys, but I have also had my share of deeply painful experiences, disheartening realizations, and exposure to students who don't get the kind of academic, cultural, or emotional support I got as a child growing up.

As an elementary art teacher at Windsor STEM Academy, located in central Linden, I aim to empower my students; I do this by teaching my students artistic behaviors (studio habits of artists, such as envisioning, observation, developing craft, and engaging and persisting) and by engaging and persisting in my own artistic practice outside of school. This is one of the foundations of my teaching philosophy: I must be an artist myself to teach my students how to be an artist. Put into practice, this philosophy can sometimes allow my professional work to transcend the classroom. The blank, brick, and cinder-block walls of our school—specifically in the bathrooms and hallways—have, over the past year, become the site for a creative vision: beautifully painted communal spaces that foster positive behaviors, spark imagination, and nurture a sense of belonging.

These mural projects came about as acts of care and cultural investment—my personal way of nurturing justice through the power of public art in an underserved community. Creating murals that will ultimately outlast my time at the school also has been a reflective exercise that has helped me understand my place as a community member with a specific gift to give the community. These murals have been completed during the course of my professional responsibilities during school hours, or sponsored by the Columbus Rotary Club and completed over the 2024 summer break.





Creating murals in a school bathroom or hallway isn't just about making a place look nicer. It's about building a space that says, "You matter here," to students who may not always feel seen. The transformation of blank walls into works of art is a form of care—an emotional investment in a place where students spend a great deal of time. It says, "Your space deserves to be beautiful, and you deserve to feel good here."

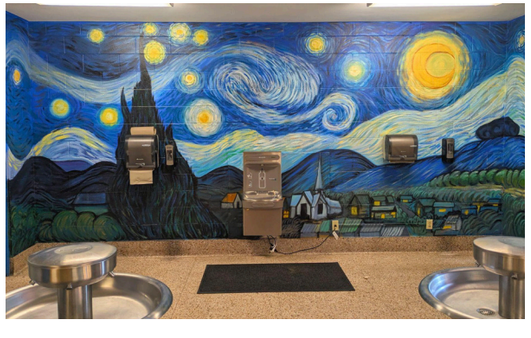
The murals feature mermaids, dragons, and thunderstorms; Pegasus with rainbow tails; sunsets and stars—imagery that invites students to dream, to see themselves as powerful creators and adventurers.

This visual language serves as a cultural bridge, speaking directly to the diverse and imaginative minds of the students. It is my hope that these images offer not only a reflection of their worlds but an invitation to reimagine them. At Windsor, where so many face financial hardships, the power of imagination is an essential part of survival and growth.

The act of creating these murals is a statement about justice—about what is owed to these students and their families. It is about challenging the inequity that exists in schools, where underfunded institutions are often left to operate in environments that are uninspiring and utilitarian. By transforming these spaces, I am advocating for a broader vision of justice—one where beauty and creativity are accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status.

The calming, quiet voice I found teaching yoga is a part of myself that I have to first quiet my mind in order to find, which is hard in a highly energetic learning environment.







In doing these art interventions on walls that have been the backdrops to so many fights, so much yelling, and even just the energetic nature of childhood, I have tried to bring focal points, alternative points of view, aesthetic perspectives of calm and quiet.

These murals, while only a tangential part of my work as an elementary school teacher, are a symbol of my commitment to empower the school community through creative leadership and lasting aesthetic improvements. They represent an ongoing journey of care, of honoring the culture of our students, and of striving for justice by integrating myself into the community as much as I can in the short amount of time I've been a teacher there. As I continue to create art in this space, I remain committed to transforming not only the walls but also the relationships and the possibilities for our students. Through these acts of creation, I hope to leave a visible legacy that teaches the next generation the power of art to shape a more just and caring world.



Asher Pollock

ode to dora maar

Mandy Shunnarah

It wasn't her fault
that man[1] was so intimidated
by her talent he[2] wanted
her to give up photography.
Nine years he[3] painted
her, made her fight his wife
for his[4] love, sold
canvases of her by selling
her out—making
bank on her anguish.

There was a man[5]
once who liked my poems
so much he[6] stole
a line—my words sliding
through his[7] pen.
When he[8] posted them online
under a pseudonym,
he[9] bragged to me later
it was his[10] most-
read & complimented.

1 Picasso
2 Doesn't deserve
3 The attention
4 Of being named.
5 This man is obviously
6 Less significant.
7 Furthermore,
8 He doesn't
9 Even write anymore.
10 Probably because

When I told
him[11] it wasn't his[12], that he[13] had
no right to write
my words, he[14] pretended
he[15] had no idea
what I was on about.
I cried, became
his[16] *Weeping Woman*—
tears distorting
my face for his[17] inspiration.

Who among us
hasn't looked at those cubist[18]
faces & thought,
I bet I could paint that?
Yet what artist
has heard another say
they could have
made their art, only
to reply:
Then why didn't you?

I didn't write
for years after he[19] took
my words.
Sometimes the answer is
we were robbed;
we were taken from before
we were ever
given the chance
to make
what might have been.

11 He was never
12 All that good to begin with.
13 On my pettier days,
14 I tell myself it's because
15 Actually,
16 Fuck him, fuck them both.
17 Who cares?
18 I am tired of trying to understand shitty men
19 When muses are where the real talent lies.

Smi Baby

Imara Regis
mixed media
2024

Inspired by Smino, an alternative hip-hop artist, *Smi Baby* encapsulates important concepts of the Black aesthetic and hip-hop culture. I chose to only focus on certain components instead of painting an entire face to accentuate beautiful Black features, such as big lips, Africentric noses, textured hair, and hair accessories like ballies. With acrylic paint, I was able to create vibrancy that symbolizes the liveliness of hip-hop. With the rhinestones, I was able to bring in texture that highlights the importance of grillz—a form of self-expression, wealth, status, and what was originally a pushback on the mental and dental damages of slavery.



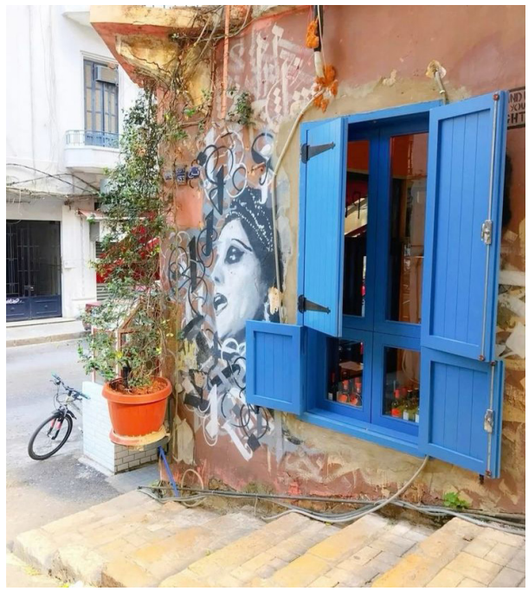


Listen to Mina Ibrahim's playlist of Fairuz Classics at *open.spotify.com/playlist/1nnmTk1eFe1IGIHFSApdJe*

Care & Culture: Fairuz's Cultural Significance to Arab Immigrants in the West

Mina Ibrahim

On early winter mornings, in a small, warm apartment in the heart of Beirut, Lebanon, four children sleep peacefully while their young mother rises to begin her day. The first thing that registers in my mind when I wake is the soft, muffled sound of music drifting from the kitchen, where my mother spreads homemade hazelnut spread on pita bread. I know it's morning when I hear the angelic voice of Fairuz emanating from the radio.



Fairuz—born Nouhad Wadie Haddad on November 21, 1934 or 1935 in Beirut—is perhaps the most beloved and iconic singer in the Middle East. With an extensive discography and countless records, her music has become a cultural touchstone that transcends generations. For anyone from the Middle East, mentioning Fairuz immediately creates a shared connection. Her voice is unmistakable, and her songs are universally recognized. In a region as rich in history and complexity as the Middle East, Fairuz's music offers a constant—a voice of comfort, solace, and nostalgia. Her songs have been passed down through generations, and there is never a time when her lyrics fail to resonate. Whether singing about love, war, heartache, homesickness, or the longing for a distant loved one, Fairuz's music remains timeless. It not only reflects the past but continues to echo through the decades, bridging generations and crossing borders.

This connection becomes especially significant for immigrants—those who leave the Middle East to seek new opportunities or safety in the West. Fairuz's music acts as an anchor for them in their new lives, easing the pangs of homesickness and helping them stay connected to their cultural roots. For many, the sound of Fairuz is the closest they can get to home. In faraway lands, distant from the traditions and people they grew up with, Fairuz's voice provides comfort and continuity; it's almost a safety blanket. Her music serves as a memory of simpler times, helping them keep their Middle Eastern identity intact while navigating life in a foreign place.



Fairuz's music speaks to the broader themes of Care and Culture, particularly within the immigrant experience. Care is reflected in how her music nurtures and sustains those who are far from home, offering them a sense of emotional safety and connection. For immigrants, her songs become a refuge from the disorienting feelings of displacement. When they need comfort, they can turn to her music, knowing it will transport them to a time when they were surrounded by familiar faces, a sense of home, and the people they love. Her songs resonate with anyone who has experienced the longing for home or the desire for a better, more just world.

Culture is expressed through how Fairuz's music preserves the traditions and stories of the Middle East, acting as a vessel for cultural memory and a symbol of resilience. Listening to her, immigrants reaffirm their connection to their heritage and pass it on to future generations. Many families create rituals around Fairuz's music—playing her songs while sitting together over a cup of Lebanese coffee, poured into small demitasse cups. Her music is more than just sound; it's tradition, warmth, and a reminder of home, no matter how far away that home may be. Her voice evokes a sense of being a child again, sitting with family while the same songs played in the background, just as they do today.

Fairuz is not just an extraordinary singer; she is the embodiment of the Middle East itself. Through her voice, she captures the region's joys, sorrows, and dreams. She has become a symbol of the enduring strength of the Middle Eastern people, especially for those living far from their countries of origin. For the Arab diaspora, Fairuz's music is a reminder of their younger days, memories of loved ones, and of who they are and where they come from. Her music bridges the gap between the past and the present, allowing immigrants to reconnect with cultural values they may feel disconnected from in their new lives. It also helps ease the loneliness that comes with leaving behind everything familiar in pursuit of a new beginning in a foreign land.

Listening to Fairuz is more than an act of nostalgia—it is an act of cultural resistance. It is a way for immigrants to preserve their identity and pass down their cultural heritage to future generations, even in the face of societal pressures to assimilate. In her music, there is a deep sense of belonging, a reminder that no matter where they are, they carry their culture with them. Her songs offer hope that one day, they may return to the home they long for so deeply.

Fairuz's music has a timeless quality, remaining relevant across generations and borders. For immigrants, her songs provide more than just a soundtrack to their daily lives; they offer a vital link to their roots, grounding them in their culture and history, and reminding them that even in exile, they are never truly far from home.

In the context of Care and Culture, Fairuz's music embodies these themes in a profound way. Through her voice, she provides emotional care for those in need of connection, preserves the culture of the Middle East, and speaks to the desire for justice, both in the region and for those displaced from it. Her music will continue to serve as a powerful tool for both community and personal healing, uniting those far from home and offering them a sense of peace and belonging in an often-unwelcoming world.





t4t

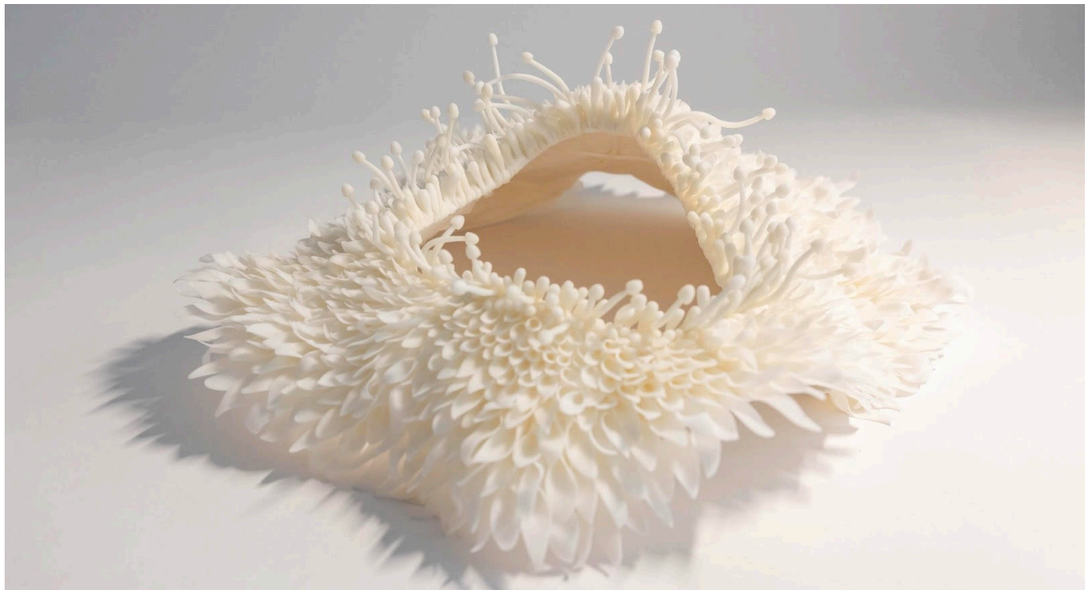
Sea Dax
acrylic painting
2024

During the summer of 2024, I began my series *trans[land]scapes*. This body of work reflects on the ritual of transition, the importance of trans spaces, and the love I feel for my community as a trans man. We deserve moments of gentleness, care, and the freedom to imagine and play. I feel such gratitude to the community that helps me cultivate that in my life. With this series, I sought to document those moments and the spaces where we take care of each other, where we dream together, and where we can simply be.

In this painting, *t4t*, I depict a humorous exchange between two friends of mine, one forcing a boot onto the other's foot as onlookers watch with a wide variety of emotional responses. For us, it was a funny moment of play and gender expression, possible through the safety of the community we keep.

Care and Connection Through Art: Artist Interview with Cee and Weiting Wei on Transparent Chrysalis

Interview Conducted by Madalynn Conkle for Wild Goose Creative
Edited by Sarah Barr



Swaddler, Weiting Wei

Wild Goose Creative is about a lot of things: sustainable partnerships and artistic collaborations. It's about giving artists resources and facilitating their work. It's about creating a space for people to experience art and engage each other, to tell stories and listen. It's about participating in the growing arts culture of Columbus, Ohio. Mostly, Wild Goose Creative is about helping to build a vibrant community of people who care about creativity. Our mission is to build a creative community at the intersection of art, risk, and meaning.

The Portfolio program is a pillar of Wild Goose Creative (WGC). Its goal is to educate and build a creative community through monthly panel discussions, networking events, and specialized workshops. Portfolio introduces Wild Gallery artists and other speakers to the community by sharing stories, best practices, and hands-on learning opportunities. You can learn more about our upcoming events at *wildgoosecreative.com.*

Transparent Chrysalis is a two-woman exhibition created by award-winning artists Cee and Weiting Wei. Both rooms of the gallery will have multiple installations, with large and small sculptures as well as wall pieces on view from May 9 – 30, 2025. This body of work was supported through a project grant from GCAC. Themes of the artists' work include birthing, emergence, and transcendence.

Care is an integral part of your artistic practices, both in process and theme. How do you define care within the context of your work?

Weiting: My daily life as a mom serves as a significant source of inspiration for my artwork. The routines and tasks I engage in on a daily basis provide a natural framework for my creative process. I find that using methods similar to those I rely on in domestic life—such as repetitive movements and familiar tools—helps me connect deeply with the materials I work with. This connection is not just technical, but also emotional, allowing me to explore the nuances of the materials through muscle memory and intuition.

In my work, I often incorporate kitchen tools, which are not only functional but also evoke a sense of routine and repetition. These tools, used for everyday tasks, mirror the repetitive motions of a mother's life—whether it's stirring, kneading, or chopping. The act of using these familiar objects in my creative practice creates a direct link between the physicality of motherhood and the process of making art. This cyclical, almost meditative repetition allows me to engage with my work in a way that feels both intimate and grounding, reflecting the constant flow of tasks and the subtle joys that come with them.

Cee: My work has always been about the big questions: "What is the nature of Reality?" "Why are we here?" "Who am I?" After decades of spiritual seeking and meditation, I want to communicate what I have discovered. I care about communicating to my human brothers and sisters through a visual language.

How do the materials and/or processes you use embody or reflect acts of care?

Weiting: My favorite material is white porcelain. However, after graduating from my MFA program, I was no longer able to use porcelain as my main medium. At the time, my son was just a year and a half old, and my kitchen island and dining table became my work surfaces. I needed to choose a material that was safe to use and easy to clean up at home. That's when I decided to switch to polymer clay as my primary material.

The domestic realm and motherhood are recurring themes in *Transparent Chrysalis*. How do these experiences shape your understanding of caregiving in art and life?

Weiting: Being a mom, especially the primary caregiver in a family, requires a heart full of love. It's through this love that we are able to contribute, endure, and forgive. As I create, the process of forming shapes brings me peace and relief



Etherial Floatoids, Cee (2023)

from anxiety and tension. It allows me to experience moments of flow, using my body to shape the materials and release emotions. Even though I may reflect on the moments in my day I'm least proud of while I work, the act of creating offers me a sense of release and transformation. The journey of motherhood brings many struggles, but I am determined to turn those challenging moments into beautiful artworks. These creations serve as a reminder of how I've grown and become a better version of myself.

Cee: The materials I use are often iridescent, transparent, and reflective of light. Fabrics, papers, and paints that shine evoke the bright awareness emanating from every being. In addition to being a mother of three children and a grandmother to three amazing granddaughters, I was a Hospice Spiritual Caregiver for years. Looking in the eyes of another is a gesture of care. I feel there are not two beings or multiple beings, only one Consciousness peering out from all the eyes. Caring is very natural when you know that everything is interconnected. One hand helps the other without thinking.

As collaborators, how does the act of working together embody care? Are there specific moments where your collaboration strengthened the themes of caregiving or connection?

Cee: When I first saw Weiting Wei's work in a group show, I fell in love with it. I could feel her soul and spirit emanating from the exquisite subtle textures of her polymer clay art. From that moment, I dreamed of having an art exhibition with her. I reached out to her and she agreed.

It was no surprise upon meeting her to find a beautiful, brilliant, and empathetic woman. Neither of us had collaborated with another artist before. She took one of my bare-bones sculptures and turned it into something interesting and compelling. Working with her has taught me so much; our strengths complement each other.

Do you see your work fostering a sense of community care? If so, how do you intentionally create space for that in your art?

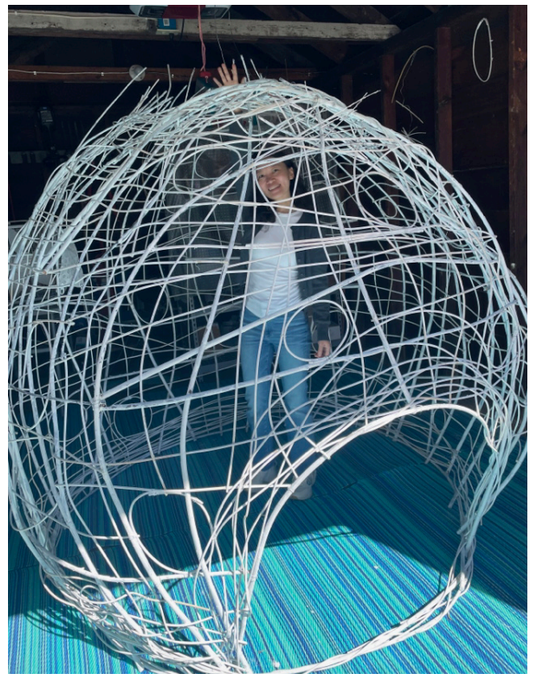
Weiting: Through sharing my stories of motherhood and the emotions I've experienced, I hope to convey a positive attitude toward facing struggles. I also want to highlight the importance of being proud of our ability to care for not only our families and friends, but even strangers.

Cee: Transparent Chrysalis will invite the audience to feel in their bodies what transformation is. We are creating art that can be walked into like the installation *Release*. *Chrysalis Hut*, a structure that a person can crawl into. The hut is meant as a sacred womb-like space for people to hibernate for a while and come out renewed.

How do you hope your audience will respond emotionally or intellectually to the themes of care?

Weiting: Feel being loved, being protected. Feel hope and faith to reach their goals in life.

Cee: I have no expectations for how people will respond. Some people walk on a flower, some smell it, some pick it, many don't even notice it. All responses are valid. My hope is that our work conveys a taste of the essence of life. Most of my life, I have been an artist-loner trying to somehow communicate with my art. Moving to Columbus, I discovered a wonderful community of artists and art opportunities that I have never experienced before. I am truly grateful.



Chrysalis Hut in progress

How do you approach caring for the emotional weight of the narratives embedded in your work, especially those tied to memory, tradition, and personal growth?

Weiting: I have many beautiful memories from my childhood. I was born in a village, and nature gave me countless gifts. My emotions found solace in the natural world. My family was full of love, and my parents showed me great understanding and support. The rich culture of my village also had a significant influence on me. After becoming a mother, I often turn to my own mom for guidance. Her hard work and resilience continue to inspire me till now. So, I hope to pass on the love I've received from nature, villagers, friends, and parents through my work.

Cee: Care is another way of saying "be aware," "be consciousness." Care should not entail specific good acts. Historically, much suffering and torment has come from one group's "care" for another. Like one religion trying to covert others, or people taking animals away from their kin to "care" for them. Especially in these troubled times where people's rights are being taken away, it is important to care for each other. Caring causes joy, and joy can be a radical act. If we are truly caring, we will be aware of the interconnectedness of all things in the Omniverse. Taking risks, struggle, and pain are natural components of transformation. Making art is my way of dealing with painful feelings. Again, awareness is key.

If care is a form of connection, how do you hope this exhibition connects viewers with themselves and with each other?

Weiting: I hope that through our work, my audience will think of those they care for and those who care for them. I also hope they can find emotional resonance and awaken their inner strength.

Cee: Listening to others is key to caring. In an art collaboration, one needs to ask what the other thinks and feels and take a back seat if needed. I know that art can change lives and expand our limited assumptions.

I love to be in a gallery and hear friends discussing works of art. Once I was in a museum, and a group of us were looking at a Monet painting. I heard someone say, "I have the biggest hard-on." Art affects us on levels visceral and spiritual, deeper than mind and material existence. If *Transparent Chrysalis* causes joy, that is radical.



Sprouts, Weiting Wei



Knowing; I Fly, Cee (2023)



Looking for Mariam, 1613

Director: Elizabeth Kolkovich
Executive Producer: Sarah Neville
Assistant Director: Tamara Mahadin
Video Editor: Doug Dangler

Shakespeare famously wrote for an "all-male" stage, but it is less well-known that early modern Englishwomen also wrote plays and took part in making theatre in a variety of ways. Around the same time as Shakespeare was writing *Othello*, one of his female contemporaries, Elizabeth Cary, wrote a play about Mariam, the second wife of King Herod of Judea. First printed in 1613, Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* explores issues such as the ethics of divorce, the threat of women's public speech, the dangers of defying tyrants, the norms of dramatic convention, and the construction of racial stereotypes.

This full-length documentary film, the eleventh production of Lord Denney's Players, explores the tragedy of Mariam's history and possible futures, featuring performed scenes and interviews from experts around the world. Written and produced by students enrolled in Ohio State's ENGL 4520.02: Special Topics in Shakespeare under the direction of Elizabeth Kolkovich, *Looking for Mariam, 1613* premiered on the Department of English's YouTube channel in 2024.

The documentary tells the story of a play deeply invested in ideas about justice. It does not provide easy answers, but it calls attention to gender inequity and discrimination based on racial and ethnic identities. It asks viewers to think about tyranny and how to fight for a just place for a learned dramatist whose gender left her out of our textbooks and conversations for centuries.

For full cast and crew information, visit the production page at *lorddenneysplayers.com/productions/lookingformariam*

Watch the film:
youtube.com/watch?v=sqKV4ZF941g

Excerpt from
There Is a Death at the End of This Dance
(Or: These Are the Facts of My Body)

A Handbook for Artistic Survival in the Twenty-First Century

Robin Raven Prichard

Survival in the twenty-first century
requires becoming at least 30% feral.

Then add 1% for every clock tick in your day.

Add 2% for every time you did not howl barbarically.

Add 3% for each time you should've felt hunger but didn't;
for each time you choked down the story that flopped like a fish in your throat.

Add 5% for each of the last 365 days when you did not stretch out luxuriously long and then curl back into yourself.

Add 10% for each time your body yearned to throw a tantrum but didn't.

Add 20% for each time you tried to think or see your way into survival.

Making meaning out of muck renders sight irrelevant:
It requires a dark, murky depth,
silty and algae covered,
where pearls cannot be seen, only felt
by hands, arms, feet, soft rolling bellies and squishy spines,
soft skulls, deflated cheeks, and slackened jowls.

Only softened flesh can feel the pearls,
which you'll find you didn't need anyway
and so you leave them safe in the muck
where they stay as part of your collection.



Archives

Dejiah Archie-Davis
digital collage
2019

During the 1970s, Black people experienced an explosion of political upheaval and racism, which began an era of cultural pride and the fight for equality. Realizing that these themes are still common today, I wanted to create something bold, highlighting the power behind Blackness and the external outlaws of freedom that can prevail.

These collages were made in 2019, in reference to the Black Lives Matter movement, and how the frustrations of inequity continued to exist in a prolonged timeline of racism. *Archives* is my interpretation of history repeating itself while also highlighting how a strong Black community can impact various outcomes of change throughout history.



Archives



Dejiah Archie-Davis (2019)

Excerpt from
There Is a Death at the End of This Dance
(Or: These Are the Facts of My Body)

Honor Song for Anita Hill and Christine Blasey Ford

Robin Raven Prichard

There is a courtroom in my heart
where the guilty reside in miniature.
They curl in fetal circles, for my heart
already knows them.

I am not a forgiving judge.
I do not sentence restoratively.

My body is a sovereign nation, and not necessarily a peaceful one.

Instead, I use spit and bone
and long banshee hair that was pulled out in rages.
I stir them with chips of granite from past enemies
I turned to stone.

I fashion a fire and air witch-spirit
that rises like a Disney villain above a cauldron.

My body is a sovereign nation, and you must obtain a visa before you approach.

The courtroom in my heart
has a backed-up docket,
where the guilty are sentenced to the wrath of the raging witch-spirit.
Their victims witness from offstage—

the unseen in the theatre of rage—
they leave silently when they are sated.

In my sovereign nation, a breach of any DMZ is an immediate cause for war.

The victims, light as birthday balloons,
float out of my heart
and go on to live incredible lives.
But the guilty must finish their sentences.

And so, I carry them around in my ribcage,
in this courtroom of mine, pressing against my lungs.

I shouldn't have to build a wall to keep you out. But there you always are.
Trying to get in.

My heart, the anvil.
I lug it around from place to place
as I fold the laundry
and attempt tasks of which I am mysteriously incapable.



Handle (2024)
15’ sheet metal, steel, nuts and bolts

Sift to Strain

Elaff Houmsse
steel sheet metal, steel rod, nuts and bolts
2024

It is easy to be passive from where you are standing, and if I am being generous, I could call it self-preservation. I am interested in lines that make up privilege. In the decisions we make and how they serve us. If they serve us. In the spaces you choose to occupy and the ones that were assigned to you. In an internal monologue, if and when it exists. If it exists at all. Where you made your bed as you lie in it. I am interested in the conversations that we never had and the ones we neglected to finish. In our collective normalization.

because it was your hand as it was my hand.

and it was your voice as it was my voice.

and it was your body as it was my body that occupied, gravitated, and lived.

And I’ll create and work in symbols as an attempt to tease out transmissions of accountability, pleading with you to simply slow down and notice. For I refuse to exist for the sake of existence. To let my time be dictated by my desires and indulgences. For the world was not made to fit into my back pocket. And this is not a proclamation of selflessness or righteousness; I am no wiser, nor greater, nor kinder. But a call to listen to the voices layered within the wind. To witness them flatten into the background—for our skies of blue are covered in wallpaper.

As you have taken the time to stand before this work, my only hope is to remind you of moments and tendencies in a fabricated normal. This is my attempt to unravel some and remind you of systems that you have been planted in and participated toward. Because we ran so far from our beginning, and all the work we ever did was stand on the grounds of noticing—where you are, what you have done, and why?

To Have and To Hold (2024)
nine forged steel sifters



Sift, Sift, Sift (2024)
sand casted glass, charcoal







Right Through Me (Safi) (2024)
hot casted glass, bronze stamp, steel square tube



self-portrait as a lamp between two countries

Mandy Shunnarah

Lamp / Mamluk dynasty (1250–1517), 14th century / *Syria or Egypt*
Blown glass with polychrome enamels and gilding
Martin A. Ryerson Collection, 1932.1179 (The Art Institute of Chicago)

Rulers in the Mamluk era (1250–1517) commissioned glassmakers to create lamps like this one to illuminate the interiors of secular and religious buildings throughout Egypt and Syria …. In religious contexts, their glow would symbolize divine light and the presence of God.

In the art museum where the Mediterranean & Middle Eastern wing
is only Ancient Egypt & Greece, there is a painted lamp made
in one country or another, but never the place between:
Egypt or Syria, never Falastin. I can guess where
the institute gets its money: *someone* is
willing to pay for the privilege
of pretending there's a great swath
of nothing separating two countries where
there's a land that stretches from the river to the sea.
In the Art Institute where every infant Christ in the Medieval
wing has a gilded halo, the curators refuse to see god in the rest of us.
In the repository of thieved artifacts, curators count on geographic ignorance,
wishing for an amorphous blank in the mental map to replace the country
historians decline to name. They only love us when we're dead & holy—
history's paper trail singed in the embers of colonial memory.
In the stolen empire, my body is a reliquary
for the Palestine museums refuse to say.
In this house of knowledge where truth is
obscured, where the breath of blown glass comes
not from the mouth of the creator & never from a people
blown to the four winds, the provenance of my body is proof:
We don't need halos to know God breathed us to life & hasn't inhaled since.

Community Project Spotlight
Eastland's Canvas: Youth CoLab 2024

Mikey Mlakar for Neighborhood Design Center



How can design serve as a vehicle for social change? The Youth CoLab, an award-winning six-week paid internship program of the Neighborhood Design Center (NDC), is dedicated to addressing this question.

Local high school students are empowered through this initiative to explore the world of design, bridging an imagination gap that exists among the communities NDC serves.

Through hands-on experiences, mentorship, and site visits, students are introduced to a variety of opportunities, breaking down systemic barriers that may have prevented their access previously. By compensating students for their participation, the Youth CoLab not only combats financial inequity, but also affirms the value of diverse voices in shaping the built environment. As shared by Dilynn Jeferson, a 2024 Youth CoLab participant, "It feels amazing, like I get to put my name on the thing, 'Dilynn with NDC made this,' like that's how I feel… I'm part of the change, I'm doing something! Like people always say 'I wanna do this, I wanna do that,' but they never go out and do it themselves. So it's different, like when you actually go out there and do it yourself, you feel something in your heart."

This sense of personal impact came to life through the 2024 partnership with Mid-Ohio Food Collective (MOFC), as interns were tasked to reimagine their outdoor space at the former Kroger grocery in Eastland. Purchased by the organization in 2023, MOFC has since shared plans to renovate the facility and transform the property into a hub for social services, now formally known as the Eastland Prosperity Center. Columbus city officials have joined these efforts with their investment of $4 million into the development—the largest single contribution made thus far. The transformation reflects efforts toward justice-centered design, reclaiming a neglected site to serve as a beacon of opportunity for over 100,000 residents annually. By addressing the systemic inequities that created a human services desert, the project advances our city's commitment to fostering equitable, thriving neighborhoods for all.

This year's program built on the momentum of Eastland for Everyone, a community planning initiative focused on revitalizing the area. With most interns either living or attending school in Eastland, the 2024 project team reflected the neighborhood itself. Over six weeks, participants engaged with the entire life cycle of a built project, from concept to implementation. By centering the voices of local residents—particularly youth—the interns prioritized justice, addressing critical issues of safety, accessibility, and inclusivity in their designs. The resulting public space expresses the needs and aspirations of the community, fostering connections across generations and abilities. This work is not only a testament to the interns' creativity and commitment but also a model for how youth engagement can drive meaningful change. As Eastland's Canvas continues to evolve, it stands as a reminder that design, when rooted in justice, can transform both spaces and lives.

Photos credit: Kaleb Duarte



Hear from the students about their experience at *youtube.com/watch?v=mHzLk3J2Glc*







nba hoops #205

Jules Biller
animation
2024

sink it, sink it, shoot for two consists of a triptych of gifs made through single-frame, mixed-media animation. The distinct, colorful, and almost jarring visual language seeks to make connections between varied forms of American passive viewership, primarily through the use of found footage of 90s basketball and media surrounding the Menendez brothers' case. The form-based qualities of the gif, like pulsing rhythms and repeated sequences, allow the viewer to experience this narrative between violence, sport, and spectatorship.

A lot of my practice revolves around my almost obsessive attention to American pop culture and the many ways it has impacted real people and the way they choose to live. The revival of attention around the Menendez brothers' case, largely due to streaming media and the rise of "true crime," has been a point of interest for me lately, particularly because of my curiosity about what viewership means, both in the context of viewing art as well as average "regular'' media and things found in our normal environments. I find a similar phenomenon occurring between the ways in which we as Americans have become desensitized to seeing people as beings with real feelings, physical bodies, and worth within society in the contexts of both true crime and another interest of mine, which is American sports and the media that surrounds it.

What within our specific cultural zeitgeist has allowed us to detach ourselves from the people we see in media so easily? What are the consequences of being passive in the viewership of people, and what are the differences between the stakes in sports games and within "true crime" media? Is assigning "justice" or culpability to real people who've experienced crime or perpetrated it similar to the ways in which we root for sports teams?

View the full animation at
youtube.com/watch?v=8IyoMXGG1OA

Nature vs. Nurture: Implementing Afrofuturism in Contemporary Art Education

Lydia Gokey

Abstract

The current legislature in Ohio outlines four levels of curricula of visual arts, specifying eight progress points for students to achieve within the "appropriate departmental level." Although the Department of Education and Workforce has developed and updated a thorough curriculum to help students achieve participation and meaning within visual arts, many students lack motivation required to keep pace in standard art classrooms. Loose project criteria and limited resources in both monetary and physical art supplies can both help and hinder the creative process. Students in low-income, historically Black, Indigenous people of color (BIPOC) neighborhoods are disproportionately affected by lack of resources, hindering their ability to learn about the art, culture, and history of their race and community. This paper critiques the current curriculum and proposes alternative practices, drawing on experiences of Columbus Afrofuturistic artist and teacher Arris' Cohen, poet and writer Ajanaé Dawkins, as well as movies from popular culture.

Keywords: Afrofuturism, Ajanaé Dawkins, Arris' Cohen, Audre Lorde, BIPOC, *Black Panther*, Columbus, creativity, critical thinking, curriculum, Department of Education and Workforce, Ohio, visual arts

"For the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support." – Audre Lorde

All high school students in the state of Ohio are required to take fine arts classes before graduation. The current curriculum includes learning about other cultures, but many students entering higher education lack knowledge about other cultures or their art practices. In this paper, I evaluate the effectiveness of the Ohio curriculum and its specific progress points. I propose alternative practices to educate high school students about different cultures, with a focus on BIPOC low-income students and introducing the complex topic of Afrofuturism at a young age.



Mural at Franklinton High School, Arris' Cohen

Current Ohio Curriculum Evaluation and Critique in Practice

The current Ohio high school visual arts curriculum was last updated in November of 2023, with the previous update being in 2012. This indicates that updates to the curriculum, particularly within the arts categories, are infrequent and may not be reviewed annually. The most recent updates to the curriculum underwent a timeline spanning from spring of 2022 until November of 2023, when new and reviewed drafts were published and implemented into daily use in classrooms. During the review process, there were several advisory groups at the state and federal levels that reviewed the curriculum, implemented it into lesson plans, and then gave feedback to the curriculum developers at the Department of Education. In December of 2022, the fine arts learning standards did not pass, and were subsequently updated, sent back to the advisory boards, and then approved in summer of 2023.

Currently, the curriculum identifies eight different progress points, specifically detailing the following:

1. Understand and articulate the intrinsic worth and public value of arts and cultural participation.
2. Draw on a variety of sources to generate, select and evaluate ideas to create personally meaningful products.
3. Address and communicate complex visual and conceptual ideas using a range of technical skill and art media including new technologies.
4. Access and evaluate information from a variety of sources for visual reference with attention to ethical and legal issues.
5. Apply reasoning skills to communicate key ideas expressed in their artworks and the works of others and use appropriate criteria and language to critique the works.
6. Analyze and use digital tools to understand how and why images are created and interpreted and how media influences culture, beliefs, and behaviors.
7. Demonstrate flexibility and reflective habits when creating visual art forms in a variety of artistic contexts and environments.
8. Demonstrate respect for, and effectively work with, socially and culturally diverse teams or content to increase innovation and quality (Buck-Pavlick, 2023, pg. 1).



Collaborative mural at Juneteenth on the Ave. with Maroon Arts Group in 2023.

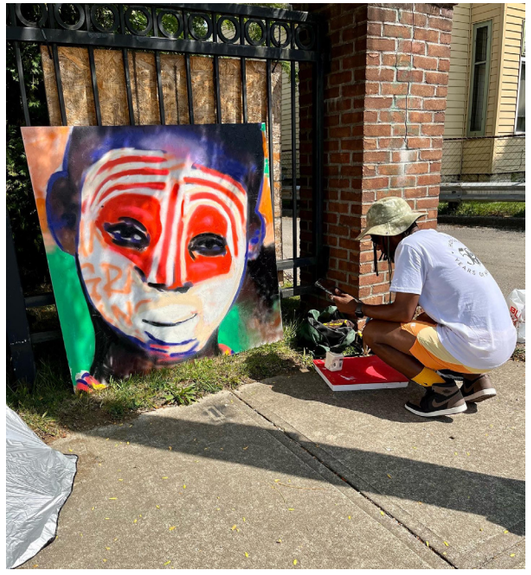
Many of the main standards within the curriculum are connected to other subjects, such as English Language Arts (ELA), social studies, science, technology, and mathematics. Additionally, all learning standards have career connections that can apply to these standards. Some of the careers they link to are in the arts, but some are outside or on the peripherals of the arts careers, such as toy designer, makeup artist, or architect. The curriculum is also divided into four sections, including beginning, intermediate, accelerated, and advanced, with each category having increasingly difficult and complex concepts for students to understand and complete.

Even though there are four levels for learning, students are only required to take two semesters of fine arts classes between seventh and twelfth grade unless they are in a career-tech program, in which it is not required (Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, 2023). If there are four levels for students in high school to achieve, how can we only require students to complete two semesters? Within the curriculum, fine arts is in the "electives" category, for which students need to earn five credits before graduation. In the high school cycle, each semester is considered a half point's worth of credits, meaning a student is only required to complete one year's worth of fine arts classes. Other electives are world languages, business, career-technical education, family and consumer sciences, technology, agricultural education, or other core curriculum classes that are not considered within the main curriculum. Other curriculums have set courses for when students need to take them, but electives do not have a timeline or required type of courses, other than the five credits required before graduation.

Although one of the progress points in the Ohio curriculum deals with culture and different environments, many art teachers do not make it a priority to discuss different cultural art practices. Reflecting on my high school arts education, I had the opportunity to attend a charter school with a focus on arts practices, allowing me to choose more arts-based electives than other students in traditional public schools. However, I still feel that my education in historical art practices was not thorough. I did not learn about Afrofuturism until I reached higher education, despite its importance as a topic within the arts realm for learning about different cultures and amplifying voices that have been previously silenced. Introducing the ideals and practices of Afrofuturism at a younger age can allow students, especially those who are BIPOC, to connect more with their culture and allow non-BIPOC students to learn more about Black art and how it will look in our near future.

Afrofuturism was first discussed in 1984 but was not coined until 1993 by Mark Dery to connect Black literature to the 1980s sci-fi craze. Afrofuturism intersects "imagination, liberation, mysticism, and technology" in fashion, music, and art but is also seen in various forms of writings and film (Yaszek, 2010, pgs. 43–44). Most think of Afrofuturism purely from an artistic standpoint, but the wider scope of the topic includes many different subjects in the academic field. The main point of Afrofuturism is to dream and think of a better future within Black culture, and the concept exists to inspire Black creatives and intellectuals, as well as amplify voices within the respective fields.

Arris' Cohen at a live-painting mural event in 2024.



Black Panther, Afrofuturism, and Its Impact on Black Students

The Marvel movie *Black Panther* (2018) has been one of the most influential films in the twenty-first century for Black people, especially children, who have not seen a protagonist who is Black from such a large production company. The fictitious world of Wakanda could only be possible without the true history of British and Dutch colonization of Africa, and the high technological advancements of Wakanda show that of an Afrofuturistic nation. *Black Panther* is one of the easiest ways to introduce Afrofuturism to children without having to explain the difficult theoretical concepts held within the topic. We can even see how closely Afrofuturism is held to the producers and creatives within the movie, where costume designer Ruth E. Carter used inspiration from traditional African clothing from different tribes across Africa, modifying the color palette to be more futuristic, and even using more futuristic techniques to craft the costumes; many different fabrics and costume pieces were 3D printed to allow for complete customization of the color palettes and designs in fabrics (Ryzik, 2018). A study conducted in 2018 and 2019 observed X users and noticed an increase in Black X users, which the researchers noted directly connects the release of the movie to an increase of Black user presence. It is also relevant to note that *Black Panther* was the most tweeted movie in the year of 2018, showing its societal impact on all races, especially those who are Black (Firmansyah & Jones, 2018, pg. 71). The impact of *Black Panther* and other similar films on social media users shows that this film meant something deep to Black viewers, especially those who have noticed the lack of representation of Black culture in current film standards. By using content analysis, we can see just how clearly impactful Afrofuturism is to consumers. There is absolutely no doubt that *Black Panther* was important to the movie industry, but it has also been important for Afrofuturism within popular culture, since it is not widely discussed outside of academia.

Not only has the *Black Panther* movie increased access in popular culture to Afrofuturistic art, but it also showed a great increase in Black artists in the movie and film industry. Almost the entire on-screen cast and those who are behind-the-scenes are Black. Although this is not unseen, many other mostly Black-acted and directed films do not do well in box offices. *Black Panther* was the highest grossing movie featuring Black actors and is in the top twenty highest grossing movies of all time, having a lifetime gross of over $1.3 billion (D'Alessandro, 2023). Having marginalized groups represented within popular culture is vital to everyone who belongs to those communities; smaller Black creators within the arts are taken more seriously when Black A-list celebrities are in huge blockbuster movies, leading to an increase in voices amplified within the arts (D'Agostino, 2019, pg. 4). With the huge success of *Black Panther*, Hollywood also saw an increase in other popular movies featuring Black protagonists from large film corporations, such as *Aladdin*, *Black Is King*, and *Soul* from Walt Disney Picture films, which produces some of the highest grossing films in the United States. Because *Black Panther* is one of the most recognizable movies within the last ten years produced by Disney, it has allowed educators to introduce the topic in the classroom, along with other Afrofuturistic artworks and writings in tandem with the movie.

Within the classroom, there are multiple ways to include the teachings of Afrofuturism to students, as created by Carrie Mattern, an English educator in Flint, Michigan. Within her curriculum presentation and review, she discusses her checklist she used to make sure Afrofuturism was discussed to the fullest extent in the classroom:

1. Contains elements of a variety of genres: science fiction, fantasy, and magical realism. [Afrofuturism] blurs line between reality and fantasy: an element of magic is included & not defined—similar to the Indigenous curtain (Reese, 2017), historical fiction, Afrocentricity where Africans are viewed as subjects rather than objects or items owned by colonizers, and non-Western cosmologies which helps explain the universe creation through a different lens than typically taught in religion.
2. Reclaiming: claiming something back or reasserting a right that was taken away by colonization, enslavement, and/or oppression.
3. Black liberation (the act of freedom): is the character free or fighting for liberation?
4. Revisioning the past (often through allusions and symbolism): how is the past reflected upon?
5. Predictions of the future through a Black cultural lens: How does the future look with Black folx leading, organizing, and creating without any threat from colonizers? What does the future look like if entire nations and tribal peoples were not colonized?

Mattern provided a wide range of resources for the unit, including poems, graphic novels, books, blackout poetry, music videos, and films depicting early and contemporary examples of Afrofuturism. Her lesson plans included teaching about the annotation process and found poetry, teaching students how to critically analyze segments of texts, critical thinking, discussion among peers, and recognizing where articles of text can be liberated using the checklist she had provided to students. Reaching out to other subjects while staying within the ELA classroom, she formed a creative assignment for the students in which she used historical documents and allowed students to remove texts that voice oppression and to highlight those that include liberation and reclamation (Mattern, 2023). Using Afrofuturism as the platform, educators can make creative projects in other subjects beyond art to not only teach the subject but show how it is important throughout a student's academic studies.



Ajanaé Dawkins reading poetry at her launch party in 2024. (Photo Credit: Le'Ana Christian)

Interviews and In-Classroom Work

For this project, I worked with local Columbus artists and educators Arris' Cohen and Ajanaé Dawkins. In my interviews, I based many of my questions on "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" by Audre Lorde, as this essay was particularly inspiring to me within my research. Many Afrofuturism scholars speak on how working with a Eurocentric-based curriculum will not amplify Black voices, since the system was built to intentionally silence them. During my interviews with Cohen and Dawkins, I presented a quote from Lorde's essay, which reads, "without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist" (Lorde, 2018). Both interviewees agreed with the quote's meaning. Dawkins brought up the 2023 film *Origin*, which discusses interpersonal relationships while working on art and justice work. The film connects the slavery system in America to the Holocaust in Europe and the caste system in India (Burns, 2024). Dawkins talked about how full liberation can only be achieved by working on interpersonal relationships, and that racism is taught based on people's own interpersonal relationships and cultural phenomenon. From an educational standpoint, Cohen and I discussed how many BIPOC students are failing to learn about other cultures in a Eurocentric curriculum because there are no advocates to teach them about different cultures. Cohen and I also discussed how racism and discrimination stem from discomfort and a lack of knowledge of other cultures, which can stem from an unfulfilling curriculum in public schools.

The best way to create a fulfilling curriculum in the classroom is to allow students to embrace their own culture while also embracing and learning about cultures other than their own. One way Cohen does this in his classroom is by giving students more freedom than a traditional classroom. Although he curates projects for the students to work on to give them direction while also honing their artistic techniques, he lets students work on personal and at-home projects and will assist if students are unable to complete a step on their own. He is very hands-on in the classroom and uses his personal learned experiences as an artist to better help the students. I assisted in Cohen's classroom twice this semester, allowing me to see his teaching methods and curricula. The last time I was in his classroom, we were painting lemons from a reference picture. Although a lemon is not necessarily "Afrofuturistic," he taught the students to use bold colors in the background and think about reference points of shadows and light.

Not only does Cohen work with students to enhance their artistic skills based on his curations and their personal projects and wants, but he also works with them on a personal level, building individual relationships with the students. He teaches at Franklinton High School, a charter high school that is not part of the Columbus City Schools district. The students come from a blended background, where some come from poverty and others are "trust fund babies," as I overheard from one of their conversations. Being able to build personal relationships with students allows for more respect from them, which creates a positive dynamic. Cohen said that it is essential to build these relationships with students because they end up trusting you more in the long run, which builds better teaching results for the students.



Arris' Cohen at *Artist Commune: Roots and Rhythms* in 2023. (Photo Credit: Ky Smiley)

Implementing Afrofuturism within school systems is not a slow change we can make; it is something that needs to be radical and come directly from experienced and knowledgeable educators who know how to best introduce the topic to students of any age. As we can see, Afrofuturism is becoming more popular and recognizable within media and culture. It is not necessarily a new topic and is easy to introduce, especially to younger audiences with the popularity and success of *Black Panther*. What we need to implement Afrofuturism within classrooms is the understanding of the topic and looking at past research to see how important and effective it is in the classroom. More exposure to Afrofuturism would help students garner a more meaningful and enriching education, allowing for even more exposure to different cultures that they would not be exposed to otherwise.

Acknowledgments

I would like to personally thank Dr. Terron Banner for supporting me in this independent study and providing endless support, Ajanaé Dawkins for assisting in my research in Afrofuturism and how to implement it within school curriculums, and Arris' Cohen for allowing me to be present in his classroom with his students to observe how he implements his artistic practices in his teachings.

Oxymorons

Jasmine Renee Parker

I'm not jealous, never been a hater
we just got different goals.
I'm trying to produce and you trying to play roles.
Ain't nothing wrong with what you want,
but I'm trying to surpass to higher levels,
you just want to pass the blunt.
Ain't nothing wrong if you want to smoke.
My ass naturally stands out, you force yours to poke.
We both can be cute; the world can have different views.
Who says I'm right, who says you're wrong?
We both can be dope like Cheech and Chong.
Who says you're wrong, who says I'm right?
Cause you fuck with local dealers and I'm a billionaire's type.
When they try to pit women against each other,
don't believe the hype.
Cause when I was thirteen I was learning how to type
while you were focused on how your body was getting ripe.

Either way, somewhere there was a grown man lurking
trying to "put us on game" and teach us right.
At some point we all make mistakes.
At some point we all got played.
It's about your support system and who you have in your corner
that determines your outcome.
Sometimes we get caught up and fall for bums.
Sometimes we get married just to feel loved.
Not realizing that love can't come from me, him, or her.
It takes a lot of pain to learn self-worth.
When you're young your brain is like a sponge.
Social media is like water and we drink that shit up,
oblivious to the fact that pictures are only moments.
Not realizing how many times it took for the camera to get
focused.
Or how many times you had to rearrange poses.
Or how many photos got deleted cause you got betrayed by those
closest.

We reveal our world like a wishing well where we throw in tokens.
Wishing our world was like the people we follow,
while the people we follow have a pride they haven't swallowed,
to show you their world isn't anything to follow cause they too
have problems.

I'm not the type to believe the hype,
so you can miss me with that shit and kiss me goodnight.
Most days you'll catch me posted in bed with this paper and pen
hoping that one day this writing shit will help me to provide.
Sweet temptations of vacations and baecations.
Right now the most adventure I get is on my PlayStation,
but I'll take that over traveling with a disoriented marriage and
fake faces.
Give me that money for marriage counseling or drinks with my
closest friends.
Don't get caught up in these Insta stories and Snapchat trends.
In the blink of an eye you'll miss it like the person who posted it
who wanted you to think their life is interesting.
I'm boring and I'll take that,
but I'll also take my real-life story and reach out to someone who
needs a pat on the back.
Someone who's thinking their life is off track
cause they're not married or taking trips to Dubai or comparing
their bodies, thinking they're fat.
Keep it real, post the facts.
We only show the world what we define as success.
Just cause you don't have a thousand followers or a blue check
doesn't mean you're any less
cause to someone in your family you're probably the best.
The first to go to college but probably in debt.
The first to buy a house but can't afford the tax.
The first to get married but have a negative pregnancy test.
Bad comes with the good; good comes with the bad.
Sometimes we just need a shoulder when we lag
cause no matter how big and pretty your house is
that dirt gon' come off the same when you take a bath.



Grace and Restraint

Wendy Pramik
photography
2024

While attending a photography workshop in Cuba in February 2024, I had the opportunity to photograph ballerinas from Cuba's acclaimed Ballet Nacional de Cuba at a mansion in the Vedado neighborhood. We worked individually with the dancers, requesting that they pose in various spaces. I particularly liked this photo because I felt it captured the significance of ballet in Cuban culture—where ballerinas earn a respectable wage of $30 a month—while also highlighting the limitations on freedom of expression in a country where the government controls all media and restricts access to outside information.

Depressed Black Girl

Jasmine Renee Parker

Dear World,
May I ask for a few minutes to feel?
Can I have permission to take time to heal?
I know it's been ruled that I'm strong, but I would like to appeal.
Can you spare a second of your preconceived notions for my sanity?
When I say "Black Girl Magic" I don't mean it in vanity.
It's about being betrayed, belittled, bullied, and the target of a bullet.
I need more than a pat on the back and being told I'll get through it.
I'm bearing the burden of generational curses from traumatic experiences I'm not even responsible for.
I'm confused, a mess, molested, queen, slave.
A white girl's muse and a white man's whore.
I birthed a nation that put me in last place.
So many replicas that you forget my original face.
Big lipped, brown, nappy crown, thick thighs that saved your lives and you can't even bow down?
I speak real loud but must not be making a sound cause I clap…my hands…to get…your attention!
Thought of last but looked to first.
How dare I be sad when someone's going through worst?
Mocked and so afraid, I walk through crowds so brave.
At home I shamefully cry in my pillow.
I've gotten comfortable with hiding my pain.
"FUCK IT! I'LL DO IT MYSELF!"
has become a motto of our stealth.
If I'm poor I deserve it, you only respect my wealth.
Single and single-handedly getting shit done.
"Mother, may I?" if I have little ones.
Married and you still see me as a stereotype,
Collecting welfare like candy, but sweet tooths still bring plight.
I don't deserve love because I put up an extra fight?
Because I demand your best and speak my mind?
No matter what I do I can't get right.
My titties can feed your babies yet you say I'm tainted.
My hair is nappy yet you want to play in it.
My ass too big yet you want a big rump.
My lips too big yet you want a pout that's plump.
You say I'm crazy yet look what you've made me.
You've contradicted my standard of beauty.
I'm not okay and you wouldn't know it.
My melanin disguises my wrinkles and frustration.
We make depression look like a vacation.
We disguise our pain in this world.
Sincerely,
A Depressed Black Girl

HAIRitage: A Cultural Journey & Experience

Erin Morgan Smith Glenn
installation and acrylic paintings
2008

HAIRitage was created during my graduate school experience at the University of Cincinnati, as I sought to explore not just hair culture but also its historical relation to the present. I wanted the work to be engaging beyond the two-dimensional surface and reach into installation and live performance qualities, in which the audience, no matter their background, would have a renewed sense of pride or even a newer understanding of hair culture as well as hair justice.



While my work was established in 2008, the CROWN Act (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural hair) was established in legislation in 2021. This only confirmed my desire to seek hair justice and anti-discrimination on a broader level. I was empowered by this legislation to help pass the CROWN Act, which has not yet passed in the state of Ohio. However, it is making more and more strides across the country to provide a sense of safety and security toward those who feel they have no voice in protecting their bodies—even the hair that grows out of their own bodies.

My work will ultimately help my three children and my students as they go off into the world, embodying the tresses of their ancestors. They should have love and pride for their culture, as I always have, even when everyone around me did not. Ultimately, I hope to create a stronger sense of community.



Hair Hut

synthetic loose and braided hair, hair glue, hot glue,
patio umbrella, umbrella base, fire and water
2023



HAIRitage, Erin Morgan Smith Glenn (2008)



Tamur, Ayat Ibrahim

Forty Days of Remembrance: An Aesthetic Exploration of Muharram

Ayat Ibrahim

Forty Days of Remembrance is a project that explores the cultural and spiritual significance of Muharram within Arab Muslim communities. Through large-scale paintings, ceramic works, and research, the project delves into the mourning rituals observed during this sacred period and examines their role in fostering cultural continuity and resilience. By investigating these communal practices, the work reveals how Muharram rituals serve as acts of care, cultural preservation, and social justice—especially within diaspora contexts.

As an Iraqi Muslim painter and ceramicist, my work bridges personal narrative and community storytelling, challenging stereotypes and fostering inclusivity in the art world. Born in Baghdad, Iraq, and now based in Columbus, Ohio, I draw on the rich traditions of Arab and Muslim cultures to amplify underrepresented voices and explore themes of displacement, memory, and hope.

This project honors Muharram as a time for collective remembrance and transformation. Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, is one of the holiest months for Muslims. It is a period of reflection, mourning, and spiritual renewal. For Shia Muslims in particular, Muharram holds profound meaning as it commemorates the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE, when Imam Hussein—the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad—and his companions were martyred in their stand against tyranny and injustice.

The tenth day of Muharram, known as Ashura, marks the day of Imam Hussein's martyrdom. Communities observe this day through rituals such as prayers, storytelling, and processions, gathering to honor his sacrifice and the values of justice, courage, and compassion that he represents. For many, Muharram is not just about grief but also about drawing lessons from history to inspire resilience, unity, and a commitment to justice in the present.

Through rituals like *Ziyarat* (pilgrimage) and the communal preparation of food, I reflect on how acts of care and remembrance empower communities facing historical erasure and displacement. These intersections of care, culture, and justice are central to creating spaces where Arab Muslim voices are heard, fostering cultural pride and resilience.

Forty Days of Remembrance consists of a body of work that investigates the impact of Muharram rituals on communal grieving, mourning, and healing. This includes two large-scale paintings—*Labaik* and *Shrouds of Love*—a collection

of one hundred terracotta clay dates titled *Tamur*, and a series of slip-covered date stems titled *Ashes to Mounds*. Each piece draws from Muharram rituals such as candlelight vigils, food preparation, and communal gatherings to explore the collective emotions of grief, remembrance, and healing. These works are informed by archival research, oral histories, and my personal experiences as an artist engaging with Iraqi and diaspora communities.



Labaik is an oil calligraphy painting on a 3.5’ x 3.5’ wooden panel. Using a wax-oil medium, I sculpted phrases frequently used during Muharram rituals into three-dimensional forms. These phrases, often chanted in unison during gatherings, express collective grief and provide cathartic release.

Shrouds of Love is a 4’ x 3’ oil painting depicting my sister seated in a traditional Iraqi abaya amidst a sea of candles. With her eyes closed, she holds a lit candle, embodying the community’s shared grief. Her act of lighting candles becomes a gesture of remembrance, love, and devotion, illuminating the space in honor of those who have passed.

Tamur, a collection of one hundred terracotta clay dates, reflects on the cultural significance of dates as a food in Arab culture and the communal act of sharing them. Inspired by Michael Rakowitz’s *A House with a Date Palm Will Never Starve*, this piece mourns the loss of lives and traditions. As I molded each date, I reflected on those who will never have the chance to share one again, burying each piece in remembrance.





Ashes to Mounds explores the transformation of materials through fire. By covering date stems in clay slip and firing them, the stems burned away, leaving fragile, fossil-like remnants. These "archeological findings" symbolize the resilience and fragility of memory. I reflect on the devastation of Iraq's date palms—reduced from forty million in the 1970s to only four million after the US invasion in the early 2000s—and draw parallels to the loss of lives and cultural heritage.



Muharram rituals emphasize communal care through acts such as food distribution, remembrance gatherings, and creating safe spaces for mourning. This project highlights how these acts foster collective healing and solidarity. By representing rituals that have endured for centuries, *Forty Days of Remembrance* showcases the resilience of Arab Muslim cultural practices, particularly in the diaspora, where they serve as anchors for identity and belonging.

The project is enriched by personal reflections and stories gathered from local Arab Muslim communities, emphasizing how Muharram rituals provide comfort and a sense of home for those far from their homelands. One anonymous participant from the Iraqi diaspora shared:
"I was born and raised in Baghdad, Iraq, and lived there until 2008. After the US invasion in 2003, things became really dangerous for me and my kids. We fled to Lebanon under a visitor's visa, staying there for about a year and a half while we applied to the UN for asylum."

This narrative underscores the sense of loss and displacement that many Iraqis face, illustrating how Muharram traditions serve as anchors for cultural and spiritual grounding. Another participant shared how observing Muharram in the diaspora preserves their connection to heritage: *"Muharram plays a pivotal role every year, grounding me in principles that guide my life. It reminds me of the values of bravery, justice, and the importance of standing up for what's right."*

However, they also described the challenges of observing these rituals outside their homeland:
"It's tough here; it's lonely, and the atmosphere doesn't carry the same spirit. In Iraq, visiting the shrine feels like a cleansing experience, almost like purging negativity from your life. Here, it's different. But when we do gather to pray or share a meal, those moments feel precious."



These interviews informed my artistic exploration of care, culture, and justice. They also revealed a deep desire to preserve and pass down Iraqi traditions to younger generations: *"It's about living as a symbol of your culture. I try to pass down the tradition to my kids by sharing Muharram stories, having them help distribute food, watching documentaries, and being open to their questions. It's important for them to feel connected to their heritage, even if we're far from Iraq."*

By connecting personal and communal storytelling, *Forty Days of Remembrance* fosters a broader understanding of how Muharram rituals transcend borders, embodying resilience, justice, and love in the face of adversity. In today's political climate, where Arab and Muslim experiences are often oversimplified, this work challenges harmful stereotypes and offers nuanced perspectives.

Ultimately, this project seeks to create a space where Arab Muslim traditions are celebrated, understood, and preserved. It addresses the critical need for representation in the art world, empowering others from marginalized backgrounds to embrace their narratives. By fostering inclusivity and dialogue, *Forty Days of Remembrance* demonstrates how art can be a powerful tool for community care and cultural continuity.

Brotherly Love

Raja Green
photography
2022

Do you remember what it feels like to be pure? No cares in the world? Not knowing what heartache is, what letdowns are, to be young, Black, and free? Do you remember what it feels like to explore any and everything, not anticipating results but living with them when they arrive? Remember what it feels like to lie in the grass as the wind kisses your skin, the sun is baking you as you get a shade darker, and the sharp grass pokes you just enough to feel it but not enough to pierce the skin? Remember walking to the corner store with your brother(s) on a hot summer day and putting the money together your parents gave you or money that you saved up for cutting grass, sweeping barbershop floors, or chores around the crib, or even using your moms EBT card, purchasing the most dehydrating drinks and snacks? Honey buns, cream soda Faygo, ice cream, and Grippos, and Gatorade? **Can you feel it?**





Brotherly Love, Raja Green (2022)

Simple, Not Easy

Molly Davis

I come from a long line of alcoholics who would consider themselves “drinkers.” My great grandfather lost his leg to alcohol use; my grandfather suffered multiple strokes caused by alcohol use that ultimately left him with dementia. My dad has an Old Milwaukee’s Best in his hand in nearly every photo and memory from my childhood. I began drinking when I was fourteen. My best friend and I got into her dad’s liquor cabinet. The only thing we knew about alcohol was that the people around us seemed to like it an awful lot. Not knowing better, we drank a mixture of different types of alcohol. It tasted awful, but I liked how I felt. My tension lifted. I distinctly remember thinking, “I understand why everyone around me does this.” It would take me more than twenty years to begin to untangle my relationship with it.

Alcohol had done me damage long before I ever took that first drink. The way growing up in an alcoholic home affects a child is profound. It is a time in life when you need structure and predictability, and growing up without that predictability inherently makes you anxious. I would get off the bus after a day at school, a day filled with structure and routine, and not know what the situation would be when I opened the door. Would dad be asleep? That would be preferable. Would he be awake and drunk and want to ramble to me? Would there be a mess to clean up, remnants of what occurred while I was at school during the day? These questions flooded my young brain as I walked the tenth of a mile home from where the bus dropped me. Once I opened the door, I would intuitively know what had happened while I was gone. It was as though the air in the house was a distinct color. My vigilant little brain noticed a hundred subtle and not-so-subtle clues. Coming home from school should not be stressful, but when it is the only experience you’ve had, you don’t know that it can be any different. You don’t understand how unusual your experience is.

I existed in a state of chronic stress that everyone around me attempted to hide. I lived with this looming sense that something was wrong, but I could never pin down what. I walked through my life with an inexplicable stomachache. No one talked about my dad’s drinking, and no one was going to attempt to explain addiction to a child. As I got older, people around me talked about my dad’s alcoholism more, but usually in moments of anger or accusation. “You’re drunk!” my mom would yell; my dad would shrug and shut down. If not angry, then they were often vague and didn’t get to the heart of the issue: “Your dad has mental health issues,” my mom would try loosely to explain. “I know your life can’t be easy,” my grandmother would prod. I too would shut down in response—I loved my dad and didn’t want him to be the target of blame. The confusion, anxiety, and shame are carried silently from generation to generation.



My first sober trip.

I thought about sobriety for a long time before I made the decision to quit. When my son turned five, the voice saying it was time to quit got louder. When I was five and went to school, I started to notice that our family was different in some mysterious way from other children’s families. We didn’t do many things outside of the house together. I didn’t have organized activities. We didn’t have many people over to our house. I knew we were somehow different, but I couldn’t really grasp why. As my son came into more awareness, I didn’t want him to grow up in the same confusion that I did. I didn’t want him to think that alcohol was an unnegotiable part of life. I wanted to break this generations-long family cycle. This don’t-talk-about-the-problem, perpetuate-the-problem cycle. I wanted to show him that there was a different way. But I had no idea what that way was. I had never had a different way modeled for me. I would have to learn it as I went along.

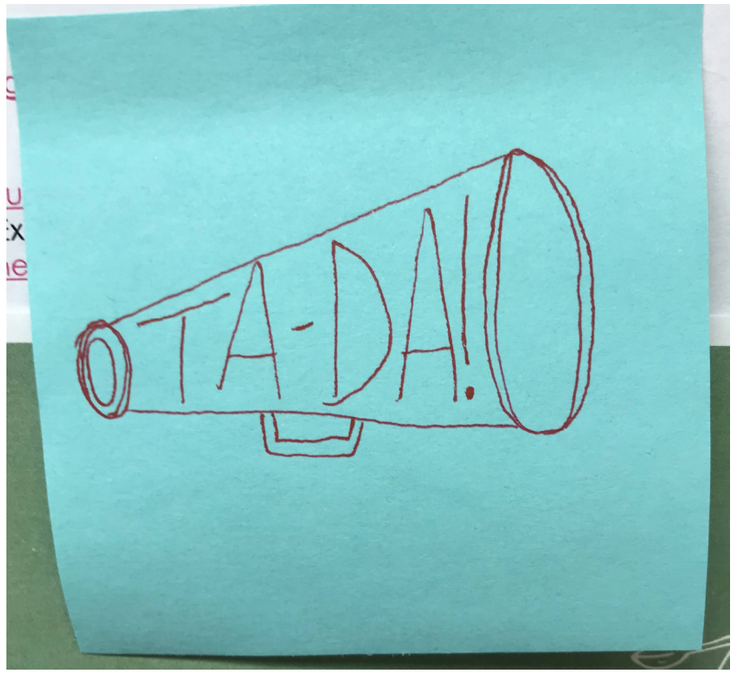
I didn’t hit rock bottom; quite on the contrary, I thrived despite my complicated relationship with alcohol. I excelled in school. I began working a white-collar job at twenty. I started a 401K at twenty-one. I never had a DUI. I never lost a job. I could control my intake, but only with a supreme amount of invisible effort and mental gymnastics—how many drinks can I have and still be able to drive home? How many hours of sleep can I get and still function tomorrow? I put a great deal of pressure on myself to function at a high level, in part to justify my drinking and to assure myself I was different than my father. This habit can’t be problematic if I am checking off all these boxes, if I am contributing to society, if I’m not getting myself into trouble. I imagine there are many people who drink and function in this way. This thriving made my decision to quit puzzling to those around me. “For good?” people would often ask. “I think so,” I would reply.

The night I decided to quit, I came downstairs and told my partner. It wasn't a surprise to him; I had talked about thinking about quitting for a long time. But this time I was direct. There was a conviction. I had specific things I needed from him. "I'm going to quit drinking, and I need you not to bring anything that I enjoy drinking into the house. I need you not to offer me a drink. I need you to take this seriously and to help me take it seriously." He agreed.

Even then, I knew I was committing to more than just not drinking again. To be successful, I needed to create a life in which I didn't need to drink. I needed to commit to reparenting myself, filling in the gaps that my well-intentioned but woefully ill-equipped parents missed, learning the coping skills that I had never developed, learning stunningly basic self-care that I had never allowed myself, breaking the cycle of alcoholism in my family. It was and is the most radical choice I have ever made.

I committed to learning what caring for myself looked like. At first, the care felt like a monotonous and boring undertaking. I hadn't practiced much discipline in my life; I mostly accomplished things through fear of failure and bribery. This approach of discipline out of love for myself was foreign. I threw a lot at it. I tried things I'd heard other people talk about, things I thought "responsible grownups" did. Much of it didn't support me in the long term. Rigid and drastic changes—a strict gym schedule, a supplement regiment, a twelve-step program—the inflexible extremes did not stick. The pieces that did support me became powerful, yet shockingly simple, sacred practices. Cleaning the sink each night. Washing my face. Putting lotion on my itchy skin. Packing my lunch. A weekly yoga class. Many of them were things I'd done countless times before, but with an intention of gentle care and support, they became wholly different. They became acts of love. Through them, I began to love myself.

The care is not profound. It is not complicated. But it means so much. Clichés are clichés because they are true, and recovery is full of them. It is simple, but it is not easy. Much like abstaining from drugs and alcohol, it is a simple thought that is very difficult to put into practice. It is hard to slow down in this grinding world. It is hard to feel your feelings and not reach for something, anything, to numb them when that is the only way of dealing with pain that adults demonstrated for you. When society holds drinking up as an acceptable coping behavior. When alcohol is portrayed as integral to every celebration. It is hard to rest when the world calls our attention everywhere else. It is hard to care for ourselves, which is why "self-care" has become an entire movement, filling our social media with advertisements but never allowing us the space and grace to genuinely care for ourselves. It is hard to allow that care to be simple, without a subscription or a coach or a cost.



The Post-it I keep on my desk to remind myself of the small wins.

The first week, we had a social gathering with some friends. We were getting ready to leave, and my partner got a cooler and put a six-pack in it. A knot formed in my stomach. I began second-guessing if we should go. I began wondering what a sober life would look like in reality. Seeing that six-pack gave me palpable anxiety. I questioned whether to say anything. In the past, I would have pushed through my anxiety as I so often did when experiencing discomfort. But this time I chose to say something. "This is my first social activity sober and bringing the six-pack is making me nervous." He quickly agreed not to bring it. I told him I hoped it wouldn't always be this way, but for today, I appreciated it. "It's no big deal," he said. My eyes welled with tears. "It might not be a big deal for you, but it means a whole lot to me." The authenticity and care I offered myself by simply expressing my discomfort was overwhelming. The support I felt from my partner through this simple act was immense.



At the beach (from that very day!), with me and my husband on the far right.

We met our friends at the beach that night and watched our kids roughhouse in the water. We yelled at them to come back in when they went too far out, to stop chasing the birds. We ate salty meats and drank cold seltzer waters and laughed. It was not profound. It was not complicated. But it was lovely.

I felt a new feeling of pride in creating sober memories with my family and friends that night. In replacing my own childhood memories that almost all included the presence of alcohol with these new alcohol-free memories with my own child, knowing that his memories will be different than mine. Knowing my son would have memories where the fun was not *because of alcohol*, but *because of companionship*. Sobriety started to feel possible. And powerful.

For the first few months, I took a picture of myself every day. I would zoom in and carefully examine my face, looking for some kind of noticeable change. Looking for some outward evidence of transformation. I couldn't see it yet, but I could feel it. Something was changing inside me, and something was beginning to shift in our family. Cycle breaking is slow work. These generational chains do not snap through in an instant with bolt cutters; the links slowly rust through from a steady drip of intentional choices. This generations-long family cycle was beginning to oxidize.

In those first ninety days, long-numbed feelings began flooding in. The turmoil of my childhood came rushing forward. With clarity of mind and an adult understanding, that confusion became sadness, anger, and resentment. I had not known those feelings were ever there. That sweet, confused child could never make sense of that pit in her stomach. If you had asked me if I drank to numb my feelings, I would have said no. I was drinking because it was fun and social, and I enjoyed it. But alcohol numbs feelings. It's what alcohol physiologically does, whether that's what you intended to do when you picked up the drink or not.

Without my numbing agent, I felt those feelings for the first time. I had to sit with that lonely little girl. I told her I knew she was scared. I knew she wanted to protect her parents. I had to explain that this responsibility was all too much for a child. That these were adult problems for adults to deal with, not for a child to grapple with on her own. The beer cans were not hers to clean up. I held her while she cried years of tears. I reassured her that we would change things going forward. I thought I had quit for my son, but it turned out that I was quitting for her.

I desperately wanted something to show for the work I was doing to stay sober. This desire must be why they give you a chip in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. I wanted something I could hold up and say, "See, I quit drinking, and I lost thirty pounds; I quit drinking, and I got this great new job; I quit drinking, and I won the lottery; I quit drinking, and my entire life changed." My life did change, but not in ways I could hold up to my old drinking buddies to justify my choice, not in ways you could tell by looking at me. I wanted a "ta-da." Something that would prove that giving up this thing I had once loved and needed was all worth it.

One day, I was standing at my sink making myself a snack. I was standing there with all these feelings, this angst at not having anything to show for my hard work, this feeling that I'd given up a lot and had little to show for it, this frustration at how slow the time felt, this questioning if anything would ever feel that fun again, this knowing that I was healing but the work was so hard. I didn't particularly feel like eating, but I knew I needed something in my stomach. I stood there, shaking the protein shake. "Ta-da," I whispered to myself.

About the Artists

Ajanaé Dawkins is a poet, conceptual artist and theologian. Her work has appeared in Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day, *The Rumpus*, *Prairie Schooner*, and more. Her chapbook, *BLOOD-FLEX*, won the New Delta Review's chapbook prize and is forthcoming in Spring 2025. Ajanaé co-hosts the VS Podcast at the Poetry Foundation.

Arris' Cohen, known as Sir'ra, is a Cleveland-born, Columbus-based, classically trained visual artist who has been working professionally since the onset of the pandemic. His artistic vision is based in the diaspora and telling the story of his creative journey as an African American. Using vibrant colors and geometric shapes with melanated peoples as his primary subject matter, his paintings reflect Afrofuturism and Afro Surrealism.

Asher Pollock is a contemporary artist and educator working in Columbus City Schools and attending The OSU Arts Administration, Education and Policy doctoral program. Pollock's arts-based teacher action research has been informed by educational psychology, using creative exploration to design opportunities for greater student engagement as a way of empowering future artists.

Ayat Ibrahim is an Iraqi Muslim painter and ceramicist based in Columbus, Ohio. Ibrahim is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting and Drawing with a minor in Business at The Ohio State University. Her work challenges and dissects dominant narratives within the art world, creating space for Arab Muslims to be represented and celebrated.

Breanne Eickholt (she/her) is a graduate of Ohio State's History of Art Department. Previously, she worked as an intern at Urban Arts Space. Breanne now works for Downtown Columbus, Inc. She spends her free time traveling, creating, reading, and watching sitcoms. Bre would like to thank Jacob for everything.

Dejiah Archie-Davis received her BFA from Columbus College of Art and Design in fine arts and has been making mixed media art professionally since 2013. She currently lives in Columbus, Ohio where she works as a full-time artist, photographer, filmmaker, and curator. Dejiah has also worked as an arts instructor for over five years.

Elaff Houmsse, based in Columbus, Ohio, explores the poetic significance of materials in her practice. She uses visual metaphors to navigate the complexities of inherently political art, examining themes of family, place, memory, identity, and the external narratives shaped by broader cultural and social systems.

Elizabeth Kolkovich is an Associate Professor of English at The Ohio State University. She researches and teaches sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature, especially Shakespeare and women writers. In 2024, she directed Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam* for Lord Denney's Players, an OSU theatrical group dedicated to performing early English plays.

Erin Morgan Smith Glenn is an associate professor of art, former VP of the board for the Dayton Society of Artists, and alum of Central State University. She holds an MFA from the University of Cincinnati. Erin has had her work shown in various regional, national, and international exhibitions, including numerous solo exhibitions. Erin is also the creator and faculty lead for CSU's Fine Arts Study Abroad program, which has covered Italy (2022) and more recently, Paris (2024).

Imara Regis, a Saint Lucian-American artist from Columbus, Ohio, celebrates Black beauty and identity through bold oil and acrylic paintings. Her vivid work merges Afrofuturism with ancestral wisdom. With an Arts Management background, she empowers young artists while creating portals between cultural heritage and futuristic vision.

Jasmine Renee Parker, artistically known as Soul Candy, is a native of Detroit, Michigan. A Bowling Green State University alum, she received her bachelor's degree in journalism. Jasmine has had an innate passion and gift for creative writing since she was a child, which was nurtured by mentors and peers that observed her potential. She is the mother to two daughters (her muses) and the author of the three-volume series *Still Not Satisfied: A Collection of Poems & Short Stories* with more pieces in the works.

Jules Biller is a video artist from Cleveland, Ohio, currently pursuing their BA at The Ohio State University. Their work delves into the intersection of digital and physical landscapes, queerness, spectatorship, pop culture, and political activism, largely through the mediums of mixed media animation and found footage.

Ky Smiley is a Black trans-masculine artist and arts administrator in Columbus, Ohio. His work explores his experiences with masculinity, Blackness, and queerness, often through collaborations with family. Using analog photography and poetically informed storytelling, he creates intimate depictions of nostalgia, family, and the sacred spaces Black people inhabit or imagine.

Lydia Gokey is an undergraduate alum and current graduate student at The Ohio State University. She has a bachelor's in art management and is currently studying for her master's in art education. Her research focus is advocacy-based curriculum. As an artist, her focus lies in printmaking and ceramics.

Mandy Shunnarah (they/them) is an Appalachian and Palestinian-American writer in Columbus, Ohio. Their first book, *Midwest Shreds: Skating Through America's Heartland*, was released in 2024, and their second book, a poetry collection titled *We Had Mansions*, is forthcoming in 2025. Read more at mandyshunnarah.com.

Mina Ibrahim, originally from Baghdad, Iraq, is now based in Columbus, Ohio. She graduated from The Ohio State University with a degree in psychology, focusing on the mental effects of the refugee experience. Through music, Ibrahim explores and amplifies shared stories often forgotten.

Molly Davis is a writer and editor living in Columbus, Ohio. When she isn't sitting in front of a computer, Molly enjoys exploring the outdoors with her adventurous family, cooking, and practicing meditation (or trying to).

The Neighborhood Design Center (NDC) is a Columbus-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to empowering historically disinvested communities and their residents through the built environment. By providing services related to public engagement, project visioning, and systems advocacy, the NDC equips those it serves with design as a right, not a privilege.

Raja Green is a Columbus, Ohio born and raised street photographer and drawer/painter. He uses the talents and skills God blessed him with—and some he's learned—to reflect, represent, and display visuals into his heart and eyes and represent his life journey as a black creative within this experience we call life. Exploring his creative abilities with these tools, he hopes to evoke in others a sense of strong feelings, thoughts, wants, and desires.

Robin Raven Prichard was a dancer in her first act, and a choreographer/dance professor in her second act. Now in her third act, she writes dance scholarship, poetry, creative non-fiction, and whatever else she wants. This is the first time she is outing herself as a poet.

Sayuri Matsuura Ayers is a poet and essayist. Her work has appeared on The Poetry Foundation's website and in *TriQuarterly, ANMLY, Gulf Stream, Hippocampus Magazine*, and more. The author of three poetry chapbooks and one nonfiction chapbook, Ayers explores Chinese and Japanese myth, lineage, and history while uplifting the voices of female creatives, laborers, and caretakers. You can visit her at sayuriayers.com.

Sea Dax is an interdisciplinary artist and maker who lives and works in Cincinnati, Ohio. He earned his BFA at the Art Academy of Cincinnati in 2012 and is currently acquiring his MFA at UC's School of Art. Dax has exhibited with many galleries including the Carnegie, Wavepool Gallery and the Contemporary Arts Center. His current body of work explores themes of found family, queer temporalities, the function of memory, and the concept of home, positioning remembrance as both an intimate act and a mode of resistance.

Sydney Summey is a graduate student in the Ohio State MA program in Arts Administration, Education and Policy. As an artist, Sydney cultivates her craft and perspective of the arts not only to be viewed but used to challenge history and create change. This is expressed in her passion of the Black experience and how Black ways of knowing make pathways to liberation. Sydney cherishes the vulnerability and transformation that the coming together of community, validation of narrative, and art can produce.

Wendy Pramik is a senior writer and staff photographer at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. She enjoys blending words and images to tell compelling stories about people and health care. An avid traveler, Wendy's stories and photography have also appeared in national newspapers and magazines. When she's not on assignment, you'll likely find her exploring new places with her husband and two children—camera in hand, capturing moments along the way.

Wild Goose Creative is about sustainable partnerships, artistic collaborations, and giving artists resources to facilitate their work. Wild Goose creates a space for people to experience art, engage with each other, tell stories, and listen. It's about participating in the growing arts culture of Columbus, Ohio. Wild Goose Creative's mission is to build a creative community at the intersection of art, risk, and meaning.

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Global Arts + Humanities
DISCOVERY THEME

The first two issues of the *Artist Commune Journal* are generously funded by a grant from the Global Arts + Humanities Discovery Theme as well as the College of Arts and Sciences Office of Engagement at The Ohio State University. These funds go toward paying contributors and printing high-quality copies of the journal to distribute for free to the local community, in addition to supporting marketing for each issue.

Urban Arts Space