

Healing Bridges Across the Divide: *Baltimore*

Visual - Literary Art Exhibit
Jan. 25 — May 12, 2025
Third Space at Shaarei Tfiloh
2001 Liberty Heights Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21217



Two years ago, Rain Pryor had an idea to broaden conversations that explore racial divides and issues between Jews and African Americans in Baltimore City. She brought the idea to the Jewish Community Center CEO Barak Hermann, visual artist and poet Lenett Partlow-Myrick (aka Mama Nef), clinical psychologist Kohenet Dr. Harriette E. Wimms, and JCC's Chief Arts Officer Sara Shalva. It took only one lively meeting for Rain's idea to blossom. Almost nine months later, with Rain and Mama Nef serving as co-curators and Sara and Harriette as co-producers, the team witnessed the potency of a good idea created for the greater good.

Healing Bridges Across the Divide: *Baltimore* is a visual-literary art exhibit that engages Jews of Color, white Jewish and non-Jewish African American artists in a collaborative process of addressing our historical experiences, unspoken issues, and possibilities for solidarity. We are grateful for the commissioned poets and visual artists who shared their stories: Anson Asaka, Jude Asher, Dominique Butler, Dr. Schroeder Cherry, Justin Orlando Fair, Michael Glaser, Jey Le Rey, Jadi Z. Omowale, Benjamin Shalva, Valerie A. Smith, A'Niya Taylor, and Art Vandelay.

The Healing Bridges exhibit first opened in 2023 at the JCC two weeks after the Hamas attack on Israel. The global discourse that ensued from Israel's counterattacks were focal points of intense conversations at our opening and closing events. We realized that people also wanted to talk about their experiences and memories inspired by the visual art and poetry. They, too, have stories about Black and Jewish relations across generations that are valuable pieces of our collective Baltimore story.

The poets and artists featured in this exhibit demonstrate what is possible when artists have a space and financial support to tell their stories. Witness how their truth and vulnerability enable us to see each other, to stand in the uncomfortable complexities of human relations with hope, courage, respect, peace and the will to love. Healing Bridges Across the Divide: *Baltimore* is an invitation to experience that connection here at Third Space with people in our community. Witness for yourself.

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*Original poems and visual artwork were created in 2023 for this exhibit.



Jude Asher
Nana
Assemblage
14 in. x 7 in. x 8 in.

Miss Rose

*The people come in tidal waves
to land somewhere they can be free*

I.
In the twenties you built your homes, your temples,
your businesses, created a lively and prosperous
community along the edges of Druid Hill Park.
Shouldered by the synagogue, and a progressive school,
to educate your children— when *others* would not.
To land somewhere they can be free

The people come in tidal waves
West Baltimore received us as you left for
higher ground in western suburbs— up to Pikesville,
away from Druid Hill, where Negroes flowed,
a tsunami in search of better homes, better life
along the Gwynn's Falls corridor— *redlining*.

We built a lively community, of homes, of businesses,
of churches. We hosted legends along Pennsylvania
Avenue. Shopped at Mondawmin. Crowded Druid Hill
Park on hot summer days. Even as segregation tried to
weigh us down— we rose.
To land somewhere they can be free

The people come in tidal waves
By the sixties remnants of the Jewish
diaspora in Baltimore remained, as the proprietors
of corner stores, of downtown department stores,
in the sea of the new Black diaspora along the
Western corridors— North Avenue and Gwynn's Falls

II.

Miss Rose and her husband owned the corner store—
were always arguing. She large, bold, colorful—
him quiet, small, dark, but holding his own.
Their foreign tongue floating above my 9-year-old
self, just trying to buy a snickers and a bag of Utz.
Sometimes, I stood rapt, the language so full bodied,
I imagined I could see it in characters— my eyes lifted
to where they bounced off the yellowing tin ceiling.

When it got really bad, one of their sons, a tall, cute boy,
with black hair, would step from the back to wait on
customers. I recall the annoyance on his face, the
brusqueness of his body language, as he shoved my treats
into a bag.

Rudies' Drugs on North Avenue, where my mother sent
me for prescriptions or an item that could not wait
until market day. The men, in white shirts, suspenders
stretched over rounded bellies, who stood in the aisles,
black shiny shoes on scuffed linoleum, who greeted
customers by first names, clapped hands in hardy
handshakes with neighborhood fathers, the liquor counter
where men sauntered in and out, clutching brown paper
bags like stolen treasure.

III.

Shaarei Tfiloh Synagogue— the green domed temple rises up,
its rusticated stone face dignifies the hilltop at Liberty Heights
across from the Park. As a young girl, I marveled at its presence.
We pass the synagogue, turn onto Druid Lake Park Drive, a busy
thoroughfare whose development was protested by Blacks and Jews
as dangerous. With its fast-moving traffic designed for easy conveyance
from the Western suburbs. On Auchentroly Terrace, the painted ladies

sit pretty and patient in the sun, lined up in their jewels, and colors.
Their porches singing in rich, deep shades of maroon, burgundy,
blue— an urn crowns each.

Jewish men dressed in black, their steep hats at jaunty angles, their
women and children among them, walk down Auchentroly after
service, as dad drove by on our way to the Park or Zoo. Me turning
round to watch, wonder at them out the rear window. Me reminded
of our church as it lets out— the men in their hats, the church ladies
in their hats, the children among them.

*The people come in tidal waves
to land somewhere they can be free*

Jadi Z. Omowale



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath and Rabbi Abraham Joshua

Anson Asaka
Footprints
oil on canvas
36 in. x 48 in.

Exodus

The Scroll was written with black fire on white fire...
– *Rabbinic Parable*

March sky, the blue behind,

then saltwater split; walls
rise, spilling on High

a saltwater's Word; but bound
for Montgomery, the Word

no more than a hiss, wordless,
we walk,

bearing fire, black
on white, little flags

pinched, and frowning – not for the heat,
the hate – frowning for faith

and fire is what we got.

Benjamin Shalva



Valerie A. Smith
People Tree
acrylic on canvas
24 in. x 30 in.

Black Forest

When a black body is planted in the ground
The soul becomes one with the earth around it
Bark colored bodies sprouting from the dirt
Blessed by the warmth of mother nature's womb

One after another black souls become natural monuments
Collections of fallen soldiers and grieving mothers standing in solidarity
They build forest out of family

But when trees grow too close to the wrong hands
The bark they wear feels more like splinters
Crazy how they can't shake the skin they're in in the next life either

Men burn the bodies of murdered brothers
Disperse there bodies in ether
Listen to the wails of the trees
As another black soul disperses into the ether

All the while they still create new ways to clear through
The forest
Burn one down in a white hot craze
And bury another below a park or a lake
Craft blades to tear through wooden bodies
Transform the reformed souls into boxes to hold a new seed
Use the souls of a black man to hold
The body of another

They like to recycle our trauma
Strip the bark off our bodies
To see if we bleed sap

Tear the flesh from our bones
To turn us into delicacies

Grind down the bones with a bit of supremacy
And then use them to build shelter
From the riots our broken bodies bleed through

When fires rip through the forest
Trees pray for Mother Nature to bring a saving rain
When they enslaved our forefathers
They opened their mouths to pray
But these people ripped our gods away
To blind us with another

Make us hate our own brothers
Teach us to hate the trees that grew beside our mothers
Just because their God is a different color

They'll uproot a society to
Replant the bodies on barren lands
Siphon the holy from their souls
So they forget the power that they have

They pull us up from the roots
Erase our histories hoping
We'll forget what our futures look like

For years these men have destroyed our forest and our families alike
Burned black bodies to dust and turned black souls into the kindling

The hearts in these trees
Beat out bloody spirituals
And move across barren lands to plant new roots

They pray to whomever may listen for a place
away from hands that only know fire
From hearts that only know destruction

They don't all come from the same places
But they still see home in one another
They worship different gods above
But down here they stand with each other

Jay Le Rey



Schroeder Cherry
Y-Love: Black Gay Jewish Rapper
 mixed media assemblage,
 38 in. x 32 in.

Building Bridges

*How good when we abide intimate together
 . . . Psalm 133*

*with gratitude to Yitz Jordan (Y-Love)
 and in recognition of all Jews of color*

Listen: The theology of Hip-Hop
 is to speak the truth.
 Hip-Hop invites us to the edge of courage

so that the fire in our bellies
 can burn with the generosity
 of love.

Human to human, heart to heart,
 community frames the call.

Understand this: Hip-Hop *is* Art
 and art is the thread that transcends
 the thought-traps we've been taught

addressing wounds that have not healed
 and redeeming our dreams of justice
 for every human being.

Hip-Hop speaks to the emotions we all share
 like the color of the blood we all bleed.
 It reminds us what the paleontologists know:

we are – all of us – of African descent.

That is the key –
 all of us, all of you, all of me
 struggling to be all that we can be.

Our family trees intertwine, urging us
 to be the change we wish to see,
 to dance to each other's songs

and feel the warmth of each other's breath
 as together we heal the wounds
 that have cast shadows into lives.

. . . . Michael S. Glaser



Dominique Butler
Cowrie Prayer: Clumsily Speaking with HaShem
acrylic on wood
16 in. x 20 in.

Mixed Faith

i come from a family of mixed faith
my mother believes in the bottle
my grandmother believes she's not addicted anymore
that God took away her vices when he gave her bills

but doesn't believe in going to His house
says she's too busy trying to keep a roof over hers
My grandfather just believes in her
but she doesn't believe he'll stay for long
so she becomes the current fighting against the rock of the family
because the past is a storm she stays in the eye of

i'm scared they don't believe in me anymore
but they want me to love them like God
they still know how to be water while trying
to play Jesus
will fill my bank account before they take accountability
say this is how they meet me at the shoreline
say i must honor my parent first

say "This is how you religion"
"This is in the name of God"
but he still isn't answering my calls
i guess that's a Father thing . . .

i learned in Judaism
one covers their eyes in front of a candle to let in the light
i learned the candle represents the human soul
and lately i've been feeling like the smoke of a blown out flicker
and i want to feel like an eternal flame.
want to be ignited

so i fired our God today
set out to find my own
a place where my soul feels safe
today i tried to find the God inside myself

maybe if i want to let in the light
i'll have to leave my family in the darkness for some time

cause this family tree
is a weeping willow trying to reach its roots again

that's the reason I have to burn a bridge
rise from the ashes reborn
all phoenix and flame

and ain't that holy?
ain't that whole?

A'niya Taylor



Justin Fair
He Shines Upon Me
Acrylic on canvas
36" in. x 24 in.

Journey

What if everything I believe to be true
about myself is a lie
And if every line is a new world
Created by the last
lost thoughts tossed in a shot glass
a formula formed to reborn elixirs
a metaphor for what?
mage made for page?
melanin molded into unfolded mixtures?

I'm an abstract path made clear picture
A color wheel of blank stairs
in a black n white world
I am who I'd thought I'd be
I was who I'd eventually become
but never who you thought you knew
Identity is an outfit we redesign while wearing

Often a symphony in front of an audience with no
hearing. Unaware of its own sonic ignorance
as if to exist is to convince everyone else
of your personally agreed reality
how self centered is self preservation in a world
that only accepts your shadow as evidence
how lonely is acceptance of self
when standing on the stage made for that shadow

I am not boxed
In. Nor Am
I. The Box

But foundational to the very ground I stand on
A title wave of truth that embraces the possible
Questions the logical
to authentically live as one's self
Even during times when that is questioned by
One's self

How do I get to be me tomorrow
If questioned today by those who could never
even begin to guess my truth
Or perceive my hue

I have been here so long
My skin blends with the walls
the sky is my ceiling
and the birds sing my song
a house built with Godly bones
will never bend wrong

But if a soul is strong
The light will always shine through
the Journey is what shapes
the landscape your foot prints lay out
In bad or good times let your inner shine
be what guides from within
for then all that will ever fade in the end
is the doubt
Amen

-Art



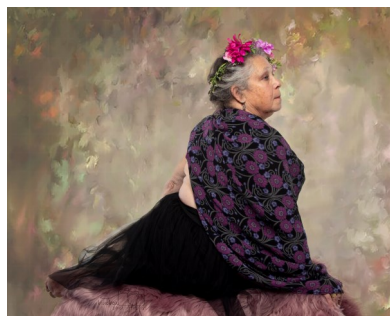
(Co-Curator) **RAIN PRYOR** is an entertainer, director, writer, playwright, speaker, activist, Osun priestess, wife and mother. Pryor wants to assist you in finding and living out your desires, and, breaking down racial biases. Rain has lead panel discussions on diversity in education and in the entertainment industry to groups around the world, and has also received honors for her commitment to arts education by the Business Women of Baltimore and the Baltimore Dept. of Education. She is currently a Schusterman Fellow, developing her leadership skills and participating in panel discussions on race and intersectionality. She's also on the board of the Columbia Arts Festival and Jewish Women's International.



(Co-Curator) **LENETT PARTLOW-MYRICK aka Mama Nef** is a Baltimore native and visual artist, poet-writer, educator, spirARTtual activist, grandmother, and principal artist for Partlow Art. She makes artifacts of her lived experiences as an African-descendant female living on occupied Indigenous land. Her visual art has been featured at Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery, on the covers of Passager literary journal, in her 33Bookz solo show, in the Dos-à-Dos 2-woman book art exhibit with Jenny O'Grady, and in group shows at Hamilton Gallery. Her writings appear in several anthologies, including A Community of . . . VOICES, When Divas Laugh, Little Patuxent Review, Dancing Shadow Review, and Poetry Baltimore. In 2022, she produced her first video documentary, "Making Our Spaces Sacred."



ANSON ASAKA is a visual artist and Civil Rights Attorney. He has had three solo art exhibitions and has created paintings for FMC Corporation and other collections. Most recently, Artspace in Richmond, VA, selected Mr. Asaka to participate in the JAZZ: February/March Juried Exhibition. He graduated cum laude from Howard University in 1992 with a Bachelor of Art degree in political science and in 1996 from Rutgers Law School. Mr. Asaka serves on the boards of NECO and WombWork Productions.



JUDE ASHER was born and raised outside of Washington D.C. and is a graduate of Walt Whitman High School. She attended Hofstra University, University of South Carolina and Maryland Institute College of Art as a painting major. Jude is a self-taught fiber artist, a founding member of The Hamilton Gallery, and an active member of The Baltimore Creative Alliance. She is also a former juror, participant, and installation aide for Nature Art in the Park, Baltimore.



DOMINIQUE BUTLER is a painter who primarily works in gouache and acrylic. Her recent work revolves around viewing nature through the eyes of a person of color. She captures images of often overlooked environments and conveys a distinct disconnection between black bodies and the great outdoors prompting viewers to question why nature, outdoor recreation, and environmentalism are white-dominated. She received her B.A. in Drawing, Painting, and Art History from Drew Univ. and earned a Post Baccalaureate Certificate in Fine Arts from the Maryland Institute College of Art. She has exhibited her work in Maryland, New Jersey, and Brooklyn, NY. She grew up in a small farm town in northern Vermont and now resides in Baltimore. Dominiqu is currently pursuing an MSW at the University of Maryland School of Social Work.



SCHROEDER CHERRY is an award-winning, Maryland-based artist who captures everyday scenes of African diaspora life. Originally from Washington, D.C., Dr. Cherry earned a bachelor's degree in painting and puppetry from the University of Michigan; a master's degree in museum education from George Washington University; and a doctorate in museum education from Columbia University. His works are in private and public collections across the U.S. In 2020 He was awarded the Municipal Art Society of Baltimore City Artist Travel Prize for research in Bahia, Brazil. In 2021 he received an Individual Artist Award from Maryland State Arts Council.

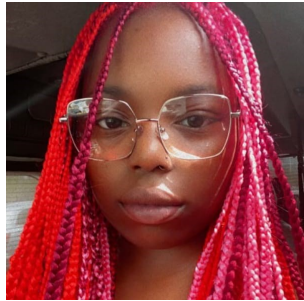


JUSTIN ORLANDO FAIR is a Baltimore native, artist and urban planner who chronicles his artwork and community projects at soulstrong.com. From 2011-2018, Mr. Fair exhibited and worked in arts management in the PG County Gateway Arts District. He now works with the MD Department of Housing and Community Development and earned his master's degree in City and Regional Planning at Morgan State University. He serves on the Jewish Museum of MD's art jury for the exhibition, "A Fence Around the Torah," on the boards of Unmatched Athlete, MissionFit, the Jewish Museum of Maryland, and JPride Baltimore. He also represents the Jews of Color Mishpacha Project. He hopes this community service and his creative endeavors continue to plant seeds and bring Tikkun Olam!



MICHAEL S. GLASER served as Poet Laureate of Maryland from 2004 – 2009. He is a Professor Emeritus at St. Mary's College of Maryland where he co-founded and directed the annual Literary Festival and the VOICES literary reading series. For many years he served as a Maryland State Arts Council Poet-in-the-Schools and as a member of the Maryland State Dept. of Education's Arts Advisory Committee. He is a recipient of the Homer Dodge Endowed Award for Excellence in Teaching, the Columbia Merit Award for service to poetry, the Loyola College's Andrew White Medal for his dedication to the intellectual and scholarly life and commitment to sustaining the poetic tradition in

Maryland. Glasser has edited three anthologies, including *Come Celebrate with Me*, a memorial tribute to Lucille Clifton (2011), and has published eight collections of his own work, most recently “Disrupting Consensus” which won the 2008 Teacher’s Voice chapbook competition, and *The Threat of Rain* (2014). He served as co-editor of the *Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton* (BOA, 2012), writes poetry reviews for *The Friends Journal* and co-leads retreats which embrace the reading and writing of poetry as a means of self-reflection and personal growth.



JAY LE REY (He/They) is a proud alum and current assistant coach in training of Baltimore City’s youth poetry team and a 2-time Baltimore Youth Poet Ambassador. Jay has encountered many excellent opportunities since joining the poetry team and has improved his abilities as a writer and a performer exponentially since becoming a DewMore poet. Jay has found a family that respects and supports not only his work but who he is as an artist and a poet. “I have had wonderful experiences with this team and everyone I’ve met through it.”



JADI Z. OMOWALE is a poet and fiction writer. Her work has been published in literary journals, Essence magazine, and in several anthologies. Her most recent publication is *The Goddess in the Girl*, a poetry collection (2017). She has a Masters in Writing and Publication Design from the University of Baltimore and is a Cave Canem fellow, a national organization of African American poets. She has read her work locally and nationally, most recently as a featured poet at Women Writers in Bloom Salon in New York in 2022.



BENJAMIN SHALVA IS is a poet, musician, and hospice chaplain. He specializes in spiritual counseling, mindfulness instruction, and song leading, and serves as chaplain for Gilchrist, a nonprofit provider of serious illness and end-of-life care. Benjamin’s poetry and prose have appeared in publications such as *The Washington Post*, *Image*, *Peauxdunque Review*, *Ponder Review*, and *Spirituality & Health Magazine*. He is also the author of two books of nonfiction, *Spiritual Cross-Training* and *Ambition Addiction*, both published by Grand Harbor Press. Benjamin lives in Pikesville, MD, with his wife, Sara, their two children, and their two hound dogs.



VALERIE A. SMITH is a surrealist illustrator and painter. Her vivid and colorful paintings tell stories that are meant to leave impressions on the viewer. Born in Baltimore, she earned her degree from the Professional Institute of Commercial Arts (PICA), studied architectural design and fine arts at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), fine arts at the Towson University’s College of Fine Arts and Communications, and basic electronics. Her work is a unique blend of architectural design and fine and commercial arts that inspire her distinctive surrealistic style. She is a former member of the Hamilton Arts Collective, Artists U, Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance, Max Gallery, the Sankofa Children’s Museum of African Culture, and Towson Artist Collective.



A’NIYA TAYLOR

A’niya Taylor, age 20, is the 2-time Youth Poet Laureate of Baltimore and a 2021 graduate of Baltimore City College High School. She is the 2021-2023 captain of the Baltimore City Youth Poetry Team. She won 1st place in the 2021 Brave New Voices individual poetry slam and was nominated for Marylander of the Year in 2020 for her work and activism while serving as a Youth Poet Ambassador in 2020 and 2021. She says poetry “has opened me up to so many different ways to express myself.”



ARTEMIS VANDELAY AKA SLANGSTON HUGHES

Slangston Hughes is an International and National Slam Champion based out of Baltimore, MD. He is the Artistic Director of DewMore Baltimore and former coach of the two-time world champion Baltimore City Youth Poetry Team. He is the founder as well as team member of the 7x champion Slammageddon Baltimore adult slam team, the winningest team in poetry slam history.