



BLOCK GALLERY

Voices of Oberlin

JUNE 14 – SEPTEMBER 22, 2023



**Raleigh
Arts**

Large Print

Artist Reception June 29, 2023, 5:30 – 7:30 pm

Stacy Bloom Rexrode

Curator of Exhibitions and Collections

Michael S. Williams

Consultant and Black on Black Project Founder

Kelly McChesney

City of Raleigh, Public Art Director



2206 Bedford Avenue - Morgan family

A vintage photograph of people sitting and standing on a brick porch in front of a blue house. One man is on a porch swing and there is grass and shrubbery in the foreground.



Voices of Oberlin

What began in 1858 when free African American Jesse Pettiford purchased a 16-acre parcel in West Raleigh continued throughout the 20th century with the fight for school desegregation. This self-determining spirit of African Americans in what became known as the Oberlin community is a place "built on the strength of people who had worth and dignity," says Raleigh author and family historian Carmen Wimberly Cauthen.

A Reconstruction-era settlement of free African Americans, Oberlin produced citizens who made significant contributions to North Carolina and the nation. What makes this community

so great are its families and institutions. In Voices of Oberlin, hear and see from elders and contemporaries how special the Oberlin community was and still is. Through portraiture and oral histories from community members sharing memories and lessons from the mostly African American enclave, the spirit of Oberlin is made clear. As longtime resident Mable Scaver Patterson put it, Oberlin is "indescribable."

This is a collaboration between Friends of Oberlin Village and Raleigh Arts. Portraits taken by artist Derrick Beasley and photographer Teresa Moore.

"Oberlin was just a place where you felt safe no matter where you went, because there were always adults looking out for us. ... But Oberlin was warm. It was nurturing. It was really nurturing, and I just loved growing up there. It was awesome."

—Brenda R. Davis

"It was a quiet, tranquil neighborhood. There was an emphasis on decorum and character and good behavior. There was an emphasis on education and good conduct. That's what you sensed from living in Oberlin; that's what I sensed from it."

—Joseph H. Holt, Jr.

"You can't appreciate where you are unless you remember where you came from. When I think about that, I get happy. I do. I really do. I get happy when I think about us as a people and how, where we came from, what we accomplished, and where we are now."

—Marjorie Keith

"Folk in Oberlin believed in integrity and hard work. You might — this is what we were taught: throughout your life, you might run into folk that are smarter than you are, but don't let them outwork you. That's been my mantra. Nobody's going to outwork me."

—Dwight A. Peebles

"Because my grandma said, sometimes, 'all you have is your name. That's really all you have. So, your name carries some weight, so don't make me look bad. I grew up here. I carried myself that way, and so should y'all.' So, those things were taught and embedded in us."

—Kendall Harris

"Oberlin was a community of — it was a community of change. ... Because it's no longer in existence the way that it was, it should still be remembered as one of the premier communities in the state of North Carolina. I really think it should. I do."

—Andria Fields

Meet the Artist

Derrick Beasley

derrickbeasley.art

 **brobeas**

Nashville, Tennessee born and Durham, North Carolina raised. Derrick A. Beasley is a visual artist creating at the intersection of community and his imagination. His formal education includes a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and a Master's in Public Administration and Policy Analysis from Georgia State University. Beasley's professional and civic background is in education and environmental and mobility justice. His artistic education includes lots of independent study, mentorship, and practice. He is a self-taught artist that approaches his creative practice with the same rigor as he did undergraduate and graduate studies.

Beasley creates out of a sense of responsibility to the community and a desire to answer three persisting questions. What would make this world better? How can he work to create it today? What does he need to heal in himself to create it?

His work is informed by the intersection of his identities as a Black, Cisgendered, heterosexual man, his self-proclaimed nerd-dom and obsession with science fiction, and being from the American South.



Project Partner

Oberlin Oral Histories Project

Oberlin Oral Histories is a partnership project with the Friends of Oberlin Village and Raleigh Arts. In 2017 as a part of the Percent for Art Program associated with the Transportation Bond, Raleigh Arts began working with Friends of Oberlin Village and residents to develop the scope for a public art project along Oberlin Road. During engagement it became clear that capturing the voices of the Oberlin elders and original residents of Oberlin Village was vital for both the public art project and the City of Raleigh. Oral Histories were taken from 25 members of Oberlin Village selected by Friends of Oberlin Village. The interviews were taken throughout 2020-2021, mostly through virtual recording, due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Raleigh Arts

Raleigh Arts, a part of the City of Raleigh's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department, fosters and promotes the arts in Raleigh by administering the programs of the Raleigh Arts Commission and the Public Art and Design Board and supporting the Pullen and Sertoma Arts Centers.

Block Gallery

Connecting local artists to the community through ongoing exhibitions and public outreach, the Block Gallery was dedicated in 2006 to honor Miriam Preston Block, a former Raleigh City Council member, and community leader. Greeting all visitors to the Raleigh Municipal Building at the Upchurch Government Complex in Downtown Raleigh, the gallery's marble walls, and elegant staircase provide an ideal setting for showcasing original artworks. Exhibits change every eight to twelve weeks.

Raleigh Arts Commissioners

David Clegg | Toni Gadsden | Juan Isler | David Moore
Judy Payne | Angela Salamanca | Mary Silver
Isabel Villa-Garcia | Billy Warden | Carl Wilkins | Patty Williams

Raleigh Municipal Building

222 West Hargett Street, Raleigh, NC 27601

919-996-3610

M-F, 8:30am – 5:15pm

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