

AAW

ARTISTS AT WORK

2022-2023

ARTISTS AT WORK MISSISSIPPI DELTA REGION

THE OFFICE performing arts + film was thrilled to partner with the Mississippi Center for Cultural Production (Sipp Culture) in Utica, MS, to implement Artists At Work (AAW) in the Delta region from spring 2022 through spring 2023.



AAW MISSISSIPPI DELTA REGION ARTISTS: ALEX ELLIS, ALICIA ESTER, ESMERALDA FLORES, LISA HICKS-GILBERT, MONICA HILL, SIMONE IMMANUEL, DANIEL JOHNSON, KELCI BAKER, JJ JOHNSON, WRITEOUS SOUL & CHARM TAYLOR

AAW MISSISSIPPI DELTA REGION PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS: ASHÉ CULTURAL ARTS CENTER (NEW ORLEANS, LA), DELTA COMMONS GROUP (CLARKSDALE, MS), HISTORIC CLAYBORN TEMPLE (MEMPHIS, TN), MCELROY HOUSE (DARDANELLE, AR) SIPP CULTURE (UTICA, MS), THE ALLIANCE FOR CULTURAL EQUITY, DEPOT COMMUNITIES, UNITED GRIOT ARTS, JACKSON-HINDS COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CENTER, LEE STREET COMMUNITY CENTER, MEMPHIS INTERFAITH COALITION FOR ACTION AND HOPE (MICAH), CITIZEN SHE, RIVER VALLEY ADULT LEARNING ALLIANCE & THE UTICA INSTITUTE MUSEUM

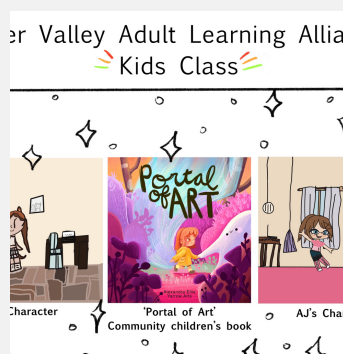
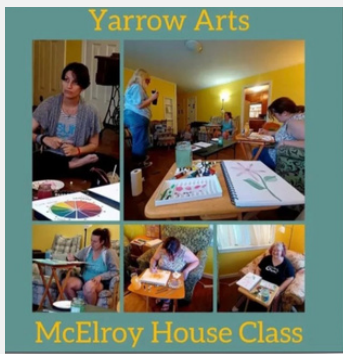
The implementation of Artists At Work in the Mississippi Delta region was made possible by the generous support of the Mellon Foundation who provided a \$3M grant to expand AAW nationally, launching programs in Los Angeles County (2021), the Mississippi Delta region (2022), and the Borderlands region (2023).

ALEX ELLIS

MC ELROY HOUSE | THE RIVER VALLEY ADULT LEARNING ALLIANCE



Alex Ellis has explored different mediums of art throughout her adult life and continues to dedicate her passion to creating vibrant and engaging children's illustrations. Paired with McElroy House and The River Valley Adult Learning Alliance this year, Alex was able to offer free art classes for children, teens and adults in the River Valley, providing space to grow confident in their artistic abilities. This partnership between students and teacher will culminate in a collaborative children's book, containing artwork from her students, to be released this spring. To further create sustainable access to arts in the River Valley, Alex has created a program to provide the community with free art supplies. The "free art closet" will be installed at the McElroy House alongside the Little Free Library and Free Food Pantry & Seed Bank and will be accessible to everyone 24/7.



ESMERALDA FLORES

MCELROY HOUSE | THE RIVER VALLEY ADULT LEARNING ALLIANCE



Esmeralda Flores's practice encompasses ceramics, printmaking, and paintings featuring insects, plants, the macabre, and her Hispanic heritage and upbringing. Esmeralda has played an integral role for young artists here in the River Valley this past year, by supporting them in their artistic endeavors in local art exhibitions. Esmeralda has been creating art for local events, including our first Hispanic Heritage Festival in the Valley, Day of the Dead, and Trunk or Treating at the Dardanelle Library honoring her heritage and will continue to do so in the years to come. She has worked to create a free food pantry with the River Valley Adult Learning alliance alongside Americorp members for MLK Day of Service, and demonstrated the art of printmaking for Spanish and English learners in the bi-lingual class. Esmeralda will continue to have a lasting impact on our community with an upcoming "bug hotel" to be placed in the McElroy House garden, encouraging the practice of honoring our ecosystem, as well as having her art on exhibit at the Ft. Smith Art Museum during the first 4 months of 2024.

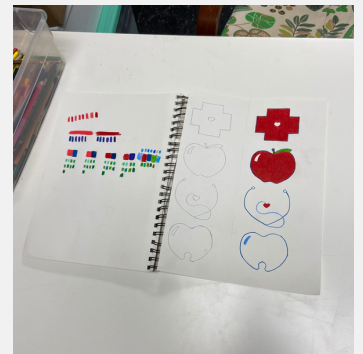


DANIEL JOHNSON

SIPP CULTURE | JACKSON-HINDS COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CENTER

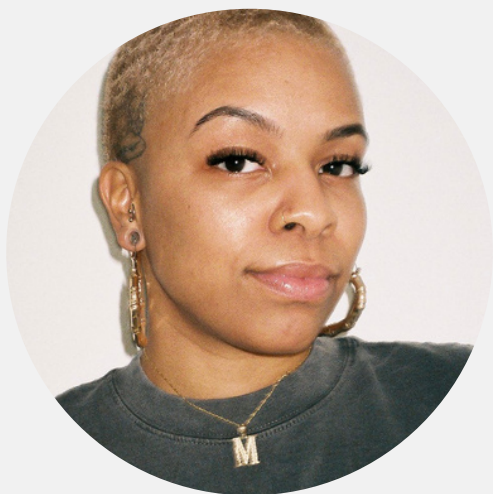


daniel johnson is a multi-disciplinary artist, public historian, and dad working in community in the Southeast. As Daniel explains, “The Artists At Work project created an expansive, patient space for him to learn about the community and facilitate his Culture Hub and Social Impact Partner in the development of a long-term, sustainable, collaborative relationship. Together they celebrated this new relationship by collaborating on the design for some hand-painted roadside signs for the public health clinic in Utica.



MONICA HILL

SIPP CULTURE | UTICA INSTITUTE MUSEUM



Monica Hill is a multifaceted artist whose work aims to reflect human experience, bring comfort, push her personal boundaries, and invoke dialogue. Monica wants to bring awareness to how art can translate into healing—just as it has done for her.

Working with Sipp Culture and the Utica Institute Museum, Monica spent the year building bridges with community members to gain a better understanding of the campus and surrounding area. Through a series of interviews, Monica documented the oral history of the town of Utica and the Hinds Community College. From these interviews, Monica co-created a shared textile work with each community interviewee that will be presented in a culminating exhibition. During Monica's time with AAW she was also able to produce work that will be featured in the Mississippi Museum of Art and is curating her solo exhibition titled "Tours Of My Heart"!



WRITEOUS SOUL

HISTORIC CLAYBORN TEMPLE | DEPOT COMMUNITIES UNITED



Writeous Soul (aka Carin Malone) is the founder of the Traveling Poets and the Memphis-based organization I Am a Poet Memphis. In both roles, she focuses on connecting the past, present, and future through poetry workshops, mentorships, poetry slams, and community engagement efforts—and on tackling childhood trauma that makes its way into adulthood. Her project, Product of My M'vironment, focuses on environmental racism in Memphis through the eyes of poets, a liturgical dancer, and community members residing in four Memphis neighborhoods.

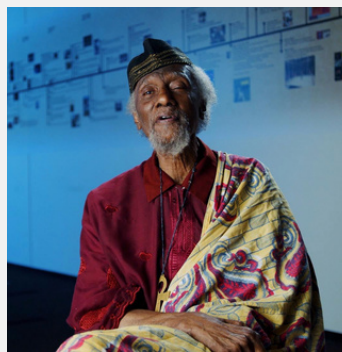


ALICIA ESTER

HISTORIC CLAYBORN TEMPLE | MICAH



Actress and filmmaker Alicia Ester was born and raised in Arkabutla, Mississippi, but considers Memphis—where she first performed on stage, and where she was first cast in a major movie—her chosen home. Alongside Clayborn Temple, she is now in post production of a documentary that will cover the history of black Memphis, the Sanitation Workers Strike, and Clayborn. With over 27 interviews across the country, the documentary is set to be completed this summer.



LISA HICKS-GILBERT

DELTA COMMONS GROUP | LEE STREET COMMUNITY CENTER



Lisa Hicks-Gilbert is a social justice activist, writer, and poet in her native Elaine, Arkansas, where she works to combat education, health, environmental, digital, food, and economic-related injustices throughout the Arkansas Delta. She is also the founder of Descendants of the Elaine Massacre of 1919 (DOEM1919), and now Mayor of Elaine, AR!

Lisa launched the "Silent No More" Multi-Media Exhibit on the anniversary of the Elaine Massacre, September 30, 2022, in Elaine, Arkansas. This two-day event drew more by more than 200 attendees, including more than 100 students. The "SILENT NO MORE" Exhibit is currently being expanded into a traveling exhibit with a 2024 launch date to educate the masses about the Elaine Massacre, and to bring the untold stories of the victims, survivors and descendants out of the silence.

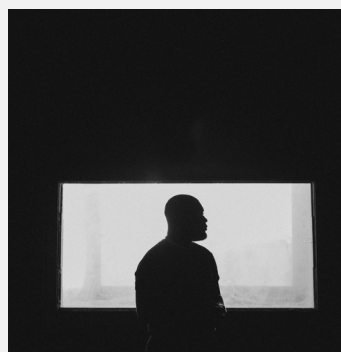
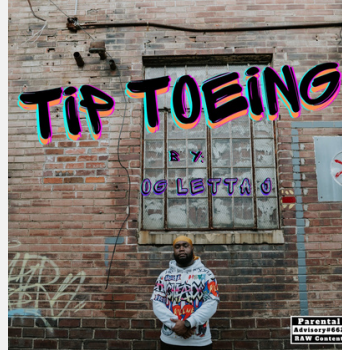


JYLAN JOHNSON

DELTA COMMONS GROUP | GRIOT ARTS INC



Jylan Johnson was born and raised in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and tells stories through music, recording as OG Letta J. Johnson. He has always wanted to use his passion to uplift his community and help it grow. He uses complex rhyme schemes and lyrics that are by turns deep and simple to provide clarity or comfort to listeners. JJ is working towards finishing his album, but released several singles during the AAW year. JJ is also working in partnership with Delta Commons Group, to survey the community to gather feedback and ideas for a new building Delta Commons Group has acquired, which is the site of an old segregated hospital and grounds.

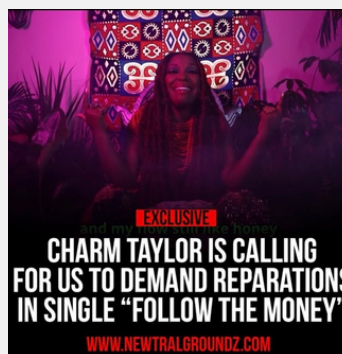


CHARM TAYLOR

ASHÉ CULTURAL ARTS CENTER | CITIZEN SHE

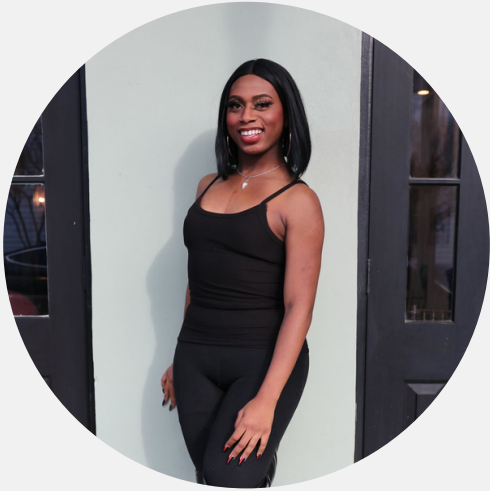


Charm Taylor is a multi-disciplinary transformative artist whose work reflects her visions of a world that is vibrant, innovative, and healed. Taylor embodies the powerful cultural legacies of her ancestors and the arts activists before her. Charm has been working with CitizenShe and Ashé Cultural Arts Center performing & speaking on restorative justice through the lens of ARTivism, as well as laying the groundwork for social impact in the revolutionary Web3/NFT space focused on digital community building, creator ownership, and economic redevelopment using emerging blockchain technology. She's released new music and was featured in her first exhibition at Tulane University: Unthinkable Imagination: A creative response to the juvenile justice crisis, in her AAW year.



SIMONE IMMANUEL

ASHÉ CULTURAL ARTS CENTER | THE ALLIANCE FOR CULTURAL EQUITY

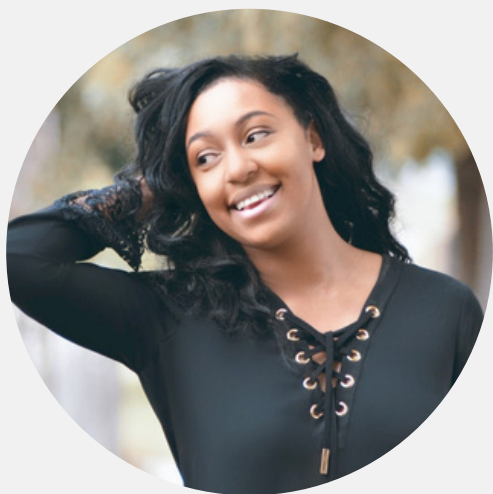


Simone Immanuel is a performing artist and writer. Her goal is for her unique experience, as a Black queer artist, to be a new voice for people who look and act like them. Simone featured her amazing drag family in a drag review in collaboration with Ashé Cultural Arts Center. Simone also served on the team advancing the Alliance for Cultural Equity (A.C.E.), a cohort of 18 small museums and community-based archives preserving the culture and history of BIPOC and LGBTQ communities. Simone has plans to continue her partnership in the future with a podcast series, more drag shows, dance classes, and work with the LGBT+ Archives Project of Louisiana to help preserve queer history.



KELCI JOAN BAKER

AAW MISSISSIPPI DELTA ADMINISTRATIVE FELLOW



Hailing originally from small town Richmond, Indiana, Kelci Baker found comfort and inspiration in literature and art. An undergraduate of Ball State University, and recently received her master's degree in Library and Information Sciences with a focus on museum studies. Passionate about African American storytelling, she has worked in her home region to share the African American journey through interviews, interactive media and podcasts. Working collaboratively with local organizations, her work has made an impact in making sure the underprivileged get their voices heard. A recent transplant to the Mississippi Delta region, she now lives in New Orleans, Louisiana where culture and self expression can be found around every corner. Her focus on community, artistic expression, and inequity issues are the driving forces behind what she does.

