

The Boston Arts Academy (BAA) recently completed construction of a new building to be named after Dr. Elma Lewis, a celebrated Boston arts educator and civil rights activist who utilized art to instill positive change in the city's community.

A Roxbury native, Lewis founded the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts in Roxbury in 1950, Franklin Park's Playhouse in the Park in 1966 and the National Center of Afro-American Artists in 1968.

Denella Clark, the BAA Foundations' CEO and President, noted the parallel of Lewis' work to that of the academy.

"Elma Lewis' impact not only as an arts educator but also as a civil rights activist is a testament to our mission to help shape and mold artistic scholars who share their talents and education with their community," said Clark.

The new BAA building, which opened for the 2022-2023 school year, holds the space and latest technology for academic study in dance, fashion, professional theater, and fine art.

In addition to theater and rehearsal spaces, the building contains a high-tech STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, math) lab. The space is open to students and faculty of the academy, as well as "local artists and performers" who wish to utilize it.

The BAA is the first and only visual and performing arts public high school in the City of Boston.

"Elma Lewis' work and legacy are a testament to the school's investment in the youth of Boston and the arts' impact on social and political change. Lewis' legacy is an inspiration to young students of color, specifically black students who can look to a black woman pioneer and icon," the BAA Foundation said in a statement.

In addition, Lewis was the recipient of many awards for her lifetime of public service. She was the first black woman to receive the MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant" in 1981 and a Presidential Medal of the Arts by President Ronald Reagan in 1983.

In 1970 Lewis founded the Massachusetts Correctional Institute Norfolk Theatre Program, which allowed inmates who were predominantly men of color, to put on theater performances while incarcerated.

In the same year, Lewis established the annual holiday production of Langston Hughes' Black Nativity, which has now been consecutively performed by the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston for 50 years.

"I applaud the Boston Arts Academy for their recognizing the contributions Dr. Elma Lewis has made to the education and cultural fabric of our city. Having a public space named for her not only pays tribute to a great cultural icon but also helps to remind the next generation of artists that they stand on the shoulders of people like Dr. Lewis," said Barry Gaither, Executive Director of the National Center of Afro-American Artists.

---

From: <https://read.thebostonguardian.com/the-boston-guardian/see-2022/09/09;c-4018871>