

Where Are All The Black People At founder to host artists panel at Watertown Library

Archy LaSalle founded the grassroots organization to address a lack of diversity in the arts world

By Arushi Jacob. Published August 27, 2024.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/08/27/arts/where-are-all-the-black-people-at-watertown-library>

“Where are all the Black people at?” is a question fine art photographer [Archy LaSalle](#) has asked himself since 1978, when he left his native Alabama for the Massachusetts College of Art. As a student, LaSalle noticed the lack of Black and brown visual artists in the permanent collections of museums he visited around the area. Nearly four decades later, in 2017, the Watertown resident founded Where Are All The Black People At, a grassroots organization that addresses a lack of diversity in the arts world.

In an effort to facilitate conversation around the topic, LaSalle has curated an artists panel to be held at the Watertown Free Public Library Sept. 10. The lineup consists of 11 visual artists specializing in photography or painting, all Massachusetts residents whom LaSalle has met over the years.

Each artist will present a series of selected images of their own work on a screen. Presentations will range from five to 10 minutes, as the artists provide background and explain their creative process and collaboration with the organization. After each presentation, there will be time allotted to answer questions from the audience, before a larger open discussion once all the presentations are completed.

While not all the artists know each other, a connection to LaSalle, a love for the arts, and the desire for better representation serve as their common ground.

Painter [DaNice D. Marshall](#), who was diagnosed with a chronic illness in 2016, began using art as a method of self-expression. A writer by profession, Marshall said she only started calling herself an artist last year, feeling like a newcomer to the art scene. As the effects of her illness made it harder for her to write, she was drawn to painting.

“I was born to write,” said Marshall. “And so I just started painting the stories I couldn’t write.”

Marshall added that LaSalle helped showcase her work in various museums and emphasized how important she found his activism, saying she was “quite aware of the lack of Black representation and collections by institutions in the area.”

Also on the panel is Boston-born and -raised photographer [Jaypix Belmer](#), who began taking pictures as a child. Starting with a point-and-shoot similar to their grandmother’s, Belmer graduated from the New England Art Institute with a bachelor’s degree in photography.

In 2022, Belmer worked with Where Are All The Black People At and other Black photographers on a [project that displayed the work of nine Black and Brown photographers](#) at 23 bus shelters throughout Dorchester.

“I try to encourage more projects that have to do with our visibility,” said Belmer. “Whether through posters, billboards, store windows, we should be advertising ourselves at all times since we’re not always visible.”

Belmer views investing in people of color’s art as a decision that not only builds them up but enables them to help their communities in turn, whether financially or by creating a sense of belonging and inclusion. LaSalle shared similar sentiments, especially regarding permanent visibility.

“A permanent collection means you were here,” said LaSalle. “In every culture throughout the world, the arts are the first thing that they talk about. And so, if you’re not in that permanent collection, you don’t exist.”

WATERTOWN LIBRARY ARTISTS PANEL

At the Watertown Free Public Library, 123 Main St. Sept. 10 at 6:30 p.m.. Free admission, no registration required. watertownlib.org