

# Local Black artists aspire to inspire during Black History Month

Petrucce Jean-CharlesThe Courier-Tribune



The Randolph Arts Guild kicked off Black History Month in an “Aspire to Inspire” gallery exhibit including five African American artists from the county, who have an impact in their communities.

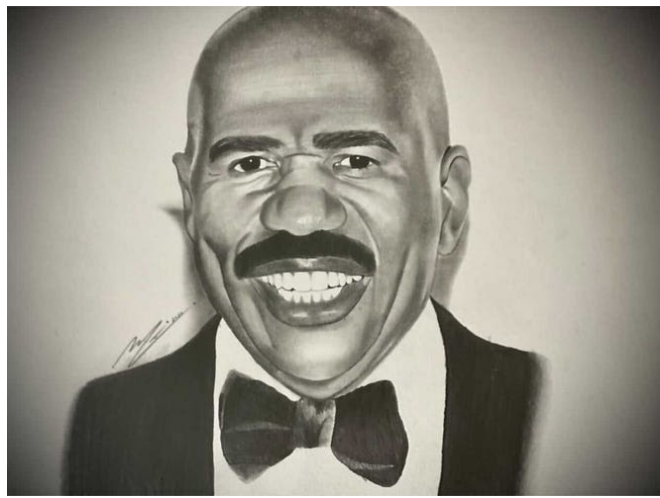
The Sara Smith Self Gallery features work from local, national and international artists who aspire to initiate conversation, influence and change.

The artists and their work are broken into five sessions, where they expressed their passion for change. Each of these artists has shared their positive influence through their talents and hope to inspire others to do the same.

## **'If you want to achieve your goals it can happen'**

Marcus Lowery, Asheboro native, usually takes two weeks to finish a drawing, depending on the size and details.

Lowery's art consists of a lot of detail, which is depicted in his favorite piece of rapper DaBaby. "The picture of DaBaby is my favorite because I was able to get a lot of the facial detailing such as his tattoos, wrinkles and grills. I was able to conquer the details that were put into it, and that's what made it realistic."



His second favorite piece of Steve Harvey was inspired by Harvey's motivational speaking and love of God. Lowery wants his piece to draw Harvey's attention so that they can speak about the dreams he's conquered. "The way that he speaks on life and has accomplished his goals has really drawn my attention to him and that's what made me draw him."

As a young Black man, Lowery is determined to stay on the right track and to use art as a tool to stay out of trouble. During this month, Lowery wants his art to show other young Black people to go after their talents.

"I just want people to know if you follow your dreams, work towards them, practice and have faith your dreams will come true eventually," Lowery said. "If you want to achieve your goals it can happen."

According to Lowery, he's chosen to follow his dreams instead of following the streets and wants different people to see the progress he's made.

For now, Lowery is focused on taking his art to the next level and broadcasting his message worldwide.

## **'You don't know what's in you until you fool around'**

Rodney Bennett, a Boston native who now calls Asheboro home, has been interested in comic illustration since he was a child and has mastered the characters he wants to display.

"I am a visual storyteller, I use whatever mediums I need to in order to help me tell the story I want," Bennett said. "I've always loved superheroes and cartoons as a child and tried drawing those characters."

Bennett's artistic nature goes back to when he was six, where his mom provided him with artistic outlets such as community programs.

When he studied at North Carolina Central University, his instructors pushed him to try different mediums including painting and sculpting. "At the time all I thought I knew how to do was draw and between my professors, they spent a lot of time working with me to pull out these abilities. Helping me to see that I was capable of excelling in whatever medium I decided to work in."

As a full-time art instructor, Bennett spends his time teaching the next generation based on the insights he gathered through commission work, reading and helping other people.

"I love working with the kids and I always tell them you don't know what's in you until you fool around, do it, and see what happens," he said.

According to Bennett, the biggest lesson he learned was to acknowledge the capabilities others saw in him and to tap into that skill.

## **'There is something different about each and everyone of us'**

Brian J. Brown, a multidisciplinary artist, realized the worth of his work when a young woman purchased a piece that he had no intentions of selling. Brown entered a painting at an exhibition at the Randolph Arts Guild and wasn't selling the piece.

"I was flattered, surprised and amazed and that was a turning point for me to understand within myself that I was actually making things of value and that I wasn't the only one who could see and appreciate that value," Brown said.

Brown made the decision to commit to art in 8th grade, with the goal of utilizing his gift to create works of art. His life story was started by focusing all his attention on that area. "I focused my studies in high school around art and continued my studies at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where I received my bachelor's degree in art."

According to Brown, he has a deep appreciation for arts of all forms but is most known as a foundry technician and creating mixed media paintings. He has been a foundry technician for many years creating bronze sculptures that are sent all over the world.

"When it comes to defining the type of work I do on a personal level, I'm almost inclined to say the work chooses me," he said. "I'm a facilitator for the production of ideas and concepts, but I try to stay out of the way of those ideas as much as possible."

Brown took a long time to realize that everything he created with his hands was unique. "There is something different about each and everyone of us, which also means that the ways we express ourselves would also reflect this originality."

## **'I want to be the one that people look to'**

Ma'Kira Settle, always tells people she could sing before she could talk and dance before she could walk.

Settle is a singer, songwriter, recording artist, dancer and aspiring therapist and motivational speaker. "My mother had dance groups and choirs in the church and throughout the community, so everything that she had, I tried to be involved in all of it."

Growing up Settle learned that music was a gift from God to do his work, so she started to seriously dance and sing because she knew it was a gift to help people. Settle sings and studies all genres of music and dance but gravitates toward Christian and Gospel mediums such as lyrical and liturgical dance.



According to Settle, her experience of auditioning for the X Factor, The Voice and American Idol and being told no helped her to appreciate the wins she has now.

"Growing up I was always competitive, always succeeded and always winning so when I received these no's, I eventually had to turn these into motivation," she said. "I can't appreciate my success if I'm always winning because I can't really work for it and it's not as meaningful."

However, Settle found as she became dedicated to her craft people saw the power in her movement including a hearing-impaired lady in a nursing home, who thought Settle's movements were a form of sign language. "Every move I do has to have placement, and everything has to have meaning behind it because I don't know who's attached to that specific dance or song."

Seattle's presence is known in the community because she never turns down a chance to be a motivational influence for others who may be interested in music, especially during this time of unrest.

"We often get lost in society, comparing ourselves to what's going on and who's doing what that we forget what we are created to do," Settle said. "I want to be the one that people look to and say she's doing what God created her to do"

## **'I made a vow to always stay true to who I am as a person'**

Tobias Trogon, an Ohio native, moved with his parents to Asheboro to take over his grandfather's church.

Trogon was raised in the church with both parents as pastors, so his love for contemporary and gospel music grew within their ministry.

There he also realized the talent he had as a drummer and was gifted a drum, later using that to join the band in middle and high school. "Both of those experiences have played a pivotal role in my development as a musician, and I've also taken bass, drum and piano lessons which has really helped me grow as a musician."

In the future, Trogon would love to be a worship pastor, songwriter and owner of a backline company with his own equipment set up for meetings, concerts and different events. "I made a vow to myself that I would always stay true to who I am as a person and artist and I would never try to mimic somebody else that I admire."

Before the pandemic, I would play at different churches in the community and I gave lessons, and I hope to continue because I am a firm believer that without creativity and music the world would be a very boring place."

All these artists will be on display all month and hope to show the expansive talent within Black communities in Asheboro.

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