



Camden Artist Exhibition celebrates Black Artists

by Asiya Robinson
South Jersey Information Equity Project

CAMDEN, NJ — The rich cultural heritage of Camden was on full display Tuesday afternoon as the city honored Black History Month with an art exhibition at City Hall. The event served as both a platform for local artists to showcase their work and an opportunity for the community to celebrate the talents of their neighbors.

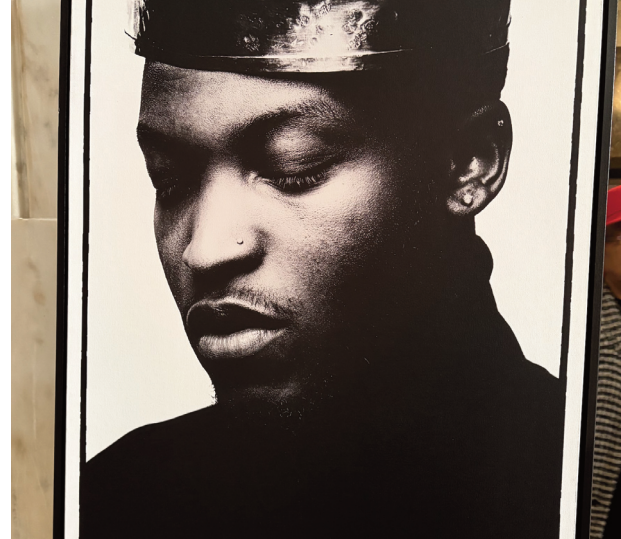
The exhibition featured the works of numerous artists making significant contributions to the Camden art scene.

Among them was Patrick Freeman, a passionate painter known for his pieces of prominent Black athletes. Freeman, who works under the pen name "Free Man," displayed a collection that included a painting of Jackie Robinson, the first Black man to play Major League Baseball.

"Jackie Robinson is one of my heroes," Freeman said proudly, reflecting on the legendary athlete's accomplishments both on and off the field. Freeman, who spent years as a coach at Camden High School, described his painting process as an intricate process. "I hold the picture in one hand while I'm working on it," he said, emphasizing his dedication to capturing every detail of the photographs he uses for some of his paintings. His paintings, which are based on photographs, often take weeks to complete and are driven by passion rather than profit. "I don't make my living painting. I just paint for fun," he shared.

Freeman's love for sports is a major influence on his work. "I like sports," he said simply, explaining why so many of his pieces feature athletes and that passion is evident in every stroke of his brush.

Another standout at the exhibition was Erik James Montgomery, a veteran photographer with 35 years of



Above are some of the portraits that were on display at the Black History exhibit at Camden City Hall, portraits provided by the following artists, (above l to r) Patrick Freeman and Donald T, below (l to r) Aaron Cooper and Erik James.

experience. Montgomery, who runs the Jersey Photography Education Gallery (JPEG), focuses on themes he calls the "Five R's:" Religion, Race, Racism, and Racial Reconciliation.

"When I'm photographing subjects, I boil it down to five R's, and that's Religion under Christianity, Race, Racism, and Racial Reconciliation," Montgomery explained.

"The photographs I capture and create talk about humanity, the human struggle, and human victory," he added. His journey from being a self-taught photographer to studying at Columbia University and the Academy of Art University reflects his commitment to growth and education in the arts.

Beyond his own artistic contributions, Montgomery

plays a crucial role in fostering the next generation of Camden artists. Through monthly artist meet-ups at JPEG, he provides the community with workshops and educational initiatives, helping others navigate the often-overlooked business side of the art world. "Next month, we'll have a financial advisor who's going to come in to talk about taxes, healthcare, and insurance," he shares.

Reflecting on the gallery, Montgomery looks to the future, "Here in Camden, I am graced to be here because it's a budding arts community. I see Camden becoming as art-centered as Philadelphia, Newark, Oakland, and other cities very shortly," he predicted, expressing his optimism for Camden's cultural growth.

The Black History Month art exhibition was a testament to Camden's diverse and thriving art scene. With artists ranging in age from their early 20s to their 80s--the event highlighted the city's depth and variety of talent.

As Camden continues to foster its artistic community, figures like Freeman and Montgomery remain

essential to its growth. Their dedication to their craft and commitment to sharing their talents with the world ensure that the city's creative legacy will live on for generations to come.

For Camden residents, the exhibit was more than just an art show; it was a celebration of culture, resilience, and the power of artistic expression to bring people together.

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Negro League Exhibit

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Throughout the exhibit, visitors are encouraged to interact and discover the barrier breakers throughout pivotal moments in baseball's history. The Barrier Breakers include: Octavius Catto, Ed Bolden, Richard "Dick" Allen, and Mo'ne Davis. Each is presented with compelling storytelling, historical context, and QR codes to access videos.

The exhibit is produced by Carolyn Quick (University of the Arts alumna) and Brian Michael (owner of Shibe Vintage Sports).

"A League Apart highlights a commonly untold story of baseball. You hear the names Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb, but what about the stories of Philadelphia Stars' Mahlon Duckett and 'Slim' Jones?" Quick said. "In this exhibit, we highlight why the Negro Leagues are important, their formation, and their ongoing legacy so that people today can have a complete history of America's pastime."

The exhibit began as a University of the Arts graduate school project by Quick, the exhibit's designer. After advising on historical content, Michael and the team at Shibe Vintage Sports spearheaded efforts to produce the exhibit. It is now open thanks to generous sponsors, donors from a GoFundMe campaign, and dozens of people who contributed with in-kind goods and services. There are plans for future phases of the exhibit to expand in content and interactivity as well as travel throughout the Philadelphia region, culminating in a permanent home for the 2026 citywide celebrations.

Visit www.ALeagueApart.org for information on visiting, educational resources, and ways to get involved.

Down Memory Lane



SCOOP file photo

Pictured are some children who participated in the "Fight To Learn" program in 2008. The program provided literacy, life skills, computer, and athletic training to enhance the lives and futures of at-risk boys and girls ages 5-12. Where are these young people now?