



17 E. Taylor St., Champaign, IL 61820 | 217.351.4133
experiencecu.org/foundation

Media Contacts:

Terri Reifsteck: (217) 351-4133;
terrir@experiencecu.org

Kelly White: (217) 351-9841;
kwhite@40north.org

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**Champaign County African American Heritage Trail
Murals Underway**

Champaign, IL—The work of four nationally-recognized artists contracted for murals for the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail is under way this August and September.

The first mural currently in progress is by Oscar Joyo from Chicago, IL. This mural will reflect the theme of the “Champaign County African American Heritage Trail Timeline” on three walls at 1801 W. John St. in Champaign, on buildings owned by Fairlawn Real Estate, which has generously agreed to support the mural’s development and installation. Joyo started work on August 5 and looks to be complete by mid-month.

Starting on August 12, artist Georgie Nakima from Charlotte, NC, will begin work at 511 E. White St. in Champaign, also owned by Fairlawn Real Estate. This mural will reflect the theme of “the Power of Black Women.”

Also next week, on August 14 at 212 E. White St. in Champaign, artist Jeremy Biggers from Dallas, TX, will create a mural reflecting the theme of “African American Firsts and Barrier Breakers.” Fairlawn Real Estate also owns the building.

The fourth mural is slated to start on August 17 at 1401 E. Main St. in Urbana. Artist Rob “ProBlak” Gibbs from Boston, MA, will create a mural reflecting the theme of “African American Educational Excellence.” The Housing Authority of Champaign County, which owns the building, generously agreed to allow it to be used for a mural. The Urbana Neighborhood Connections Center, which occupies the building, has graciously agreed to support the mural’s development and installation.

All times may change due to weather and other circumstances.

Thanks to a grant from the Office of Tourism at the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity, the ECU Foundation—which facilitates the Heritage Trail—teamed up with 40 North (the Champaign County Arts Council) to launch a call for artists in February. Ninety-three artists applied from 32 states and five countries. A jury led by 40 North and Heritage Trail steering committee members reviewed applications and narrowed the pool to top choices for each of four available locations. Additional murals will be added at a later time.



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The Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation and 40 North hope the success of these murals will lead to more Heritage Trail murals being installed in the future, and they actively encourage property owners who may be interested in having a mural installed, or donors who may want to sponsor a mural, to reach out.

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About the Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation

The Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization, generates resources that support the destination experiences of people who visit, work, and live in the greater Champaign County area. For more information: <https://experiencecu.org/foundation>

About the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail

The Champaign County African American Heritage Trail is a celebration of the lives and contributions of African Americans in the Champaign County area. The mission is to educate today's residents and visitors about the rich cultural history of a people whose stories have been largely unrecognized, but who directly shaped the place we call home. For more information:

<https://www.ccafricanamericanheritage.org/>

About 40 North

40 North, the Champaign County Arts Council, advocates for the arts and artists. Its work is driven by a belief that arts are fundamental to the quality of every life, that art must be accessible to all, that diversity is essential to a creative community, that the arts fundamental to education, social change, and economic development, and that artists must be recognized, valued, and compensated for their work. For more information: <https://40north.org/>

About Rob "ProBlak" Gibbs

Rob "ProBlak" Gibbs is a visual artist, organizer, and community builder who has transformed the cultural landscape of Boston through his powerful art and commitment to youth education. His work has earned him numerous accolades, including being named one of Boston's 100 Most Influential People in 2022, Best of Boston (Artist), and Best of Boston (Muralist). In 2021, the city of Boston proclaimed February 1 to be Rob "ProBlak" Gibbs day. For more information:

<https://www.problak.com/>

About Jeremy Biggers

Jeremy Biggers is an award-winning creator who has made a name for himself as a painter, muralist, and filmmaker. His artwork explores themes of identity, particularly in relation to his experience as a Black man in America. Through his unique visual language, he employs his signature "hyper-red" color to convey a sense of aspiration and a rejection of complacency. His artwork is a testament to the power of personal experiences and the ability of art to spark meaningful dialogue and promote personal growth. For more information:

<https://jeremybiggers.com/>

About Georgie Nakima



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Georgia Nakima is a self-taught public artist from the South whose work has provided cultural representation and visibility to communities that have been historically discounted. She has been featured on ABC News, Good Morning America, Elle Magazine, and in other media. She has been a sponsored artist for AT&T, Ford, Xbox/2K, and Microsoft, and has had work commissioned by the World Trade Center, DC Comics, Coachella, and others. For more information:

<https://www.gardenofjourney.com/>

About Oscar Joyo

Oscar Joyo is a Malawian born, Chicago based artist whose genre of work can be described as Afrofuturism mixed with Afrosurrealism. He has completed several murals in Chicago and has collaborated with the NFL, Doc Martens, and Nike in digital media. He describes his work as a love letter to his African heritage and the hope that there will be a better future for people of color. For more information: <https://www.oscarjoyoart.com/>