



Spotlight by

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Mural Arts Institute Leaders and Advisors

Joseph Iacona
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Artist Assistants

Omar Omari
Trae (Aka Little Omar) Omari

Mural Address

Address 8188 SE Division St,
Portland, OR 97206

Dates

August 2021 - May 2022,
November 2022 - unveiling

Documentary Video

<https://bitly.cx/pksxX>

For more information:

<https://tinyurl.com/o82mural>

[https://www.instagram.com/](https://www.instagram.com/que_lo_gi/)

[que_lo_gi/](https://www.instagram.com/que_lo_gi/)

PACE CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



Paola De La Cruz & Lillyanne Pham

Drink the Water, Remember the Source

Overview

Amidst a dense, recently developed urban community in Southeast Portland, Oregon, artists and community members created a joyful neighborhood landmark together. The artists' teen assistant and resident Trae Omari conceptualized the initial imagery for the piece, observing that the playground serves mothers and matriarchs who regularly gather there to support their children through play and connection with each other. Through several workshops, community members iterated on these ideas to add detail of what they wanted the mural to represent and accomplish for the space. The final piece transformed the background of the local playground from a nondescript concrete wall to a colorful mural celebrating these community dynamics and values.

Selecting the Artists

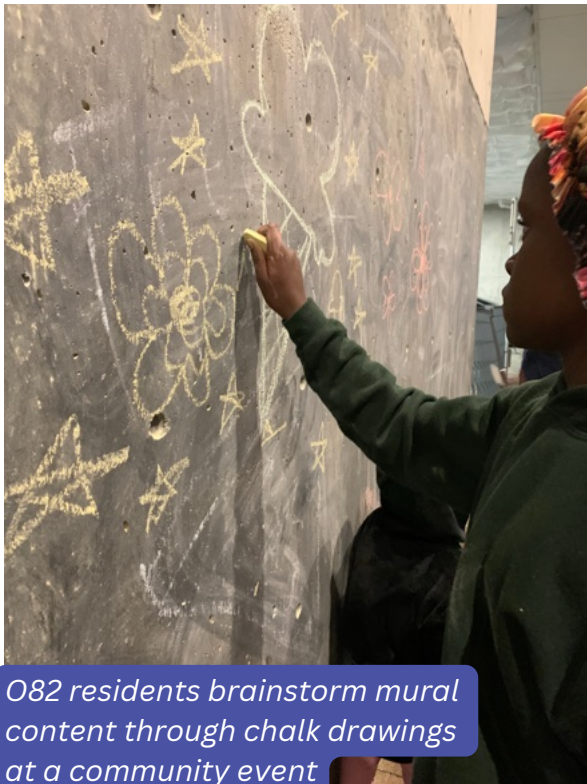
For the Catalyst 1 project, APANO commissioned a project for the Orchards of 82nd (O82 for short) building in East Portland, a mixed-use affordable housing unit and APANO office space. APANO's Cultural Work team, then headed by Candace Kita and Roshani Thakore, selected the artist team of Lillyanne Pham (they/she) and Paola De La Cruz (she/her/ella) because of their combined passion for uplifting youth of color, supporting the East Portland neighborhood, and strengths as both artists and organizers. Candace and Roshani were supported by



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a panel to select the artist team that was made up of APANO's artist collective base and staff. Both artists are grassroots organizers - personally and professionally- with complementary practices. They have deep connections to the O82 neighborhoods - Lillyanne is a resident of East Portland who lives down the street from the O82 building, and Paola worked at the Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Coalition to activate southeast Portland communities through grant programming, partnerships, and collaboration. When they applied for the Catalyst 1 project, Lillyanne had been interning and volunteering with APANO for several years. As part of her practice, she had co-organized several exhibits and other cultural work projects there - while Paola's practice as an illustrator and organizer led her to recently complete four community-focused murals across Portland. Their diverse life experiences - Lillyanne as a child of refugees, survivor of childhood violence, and more - and Paola as an ethereal queer, Black Latina who immigrated at age nine from the Dominican Republic - grounds and motivates their creative work and community organizing goals.

Paola and Lillyanne met through a Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Facebook group that connects roller skaters. They then started to collaborate on marketing materials for Portland State University's Women's Center Sexual Assault Awareness and Action Month (SAAM), and work with each other in monthly meetings to network with direct services for those unsheltered or housing insecure in East Portland.



O82 residents brainstorm mural content through chalk drawings at a community event

Devising the Mural

Lillyanne and Paola began the project by hiring two paid youth interns, residents of O82 Omar Omari and Trae Omari. Together, the team of four began brainstorming ideas for the playground wall. Initially, the group hosted conversations with neighborhood residents focused on sharing some of the challenges of living at O82. However, after a workshop with Michael O'Bryan of Humanature (offered by the Mural Arts Institute as part of the PACE program technical assistance) on trauma-informed practices, they decided to try to focus future conversations on positive aspects of the



“Design justice isn’t pulling into community and collecting data, it is ensuring that it is mutually beneficial”

Paola De La Cruz

community as a way to support community members through connecting with joy. In response to that way of thinking and engaging, Trae (one of the resident youth interns; aka Little Omar) shared happy memories of watching children play on the playground and noticing how important the space was for moms to congregate, share resources, and gossip. Other residents loved this initial direction, and shared other ideas for how to picture and connect with the idea of mothers, and then expanded that to include the idea of motherlands, since so many of the residents are refugees and immigrants trying to find ways to integrate their prior and current homes. The final project included patterns from African fabrics loved by women in Trae’s life. The artist team also heard from residents that they wanted the space to be enlivened through bright colors, movement, and images reminding them of Black and brown experiences of joy.



The team collecting feedback from O82 residents on mural design options



Making Art

The artist team showed numerous drafts to residents through a series of workshops, celebrations, by posting images around the residence, and through 1-1 conversations. These events and activities were first and foremost ways to build relationships between the artists and O82 residents. The team finalized the design, determining that it would include three main portions: the majority would be painted by the artist team directly onto the concrete wall (which the artists later had to figure out how to prepare for painting); community residents would paint in native flower outlines cut out from mural cloth, and the artist team would create a mosaic. The native flowers were painted by community members during the Lunar New Year celebration and later attached to the mural to form patterns for the clothing pictured. The idea for a mosaic came after the team visited Philadelphia, viewing Mural Arts' projects that incorporate mosaics. As part of the PACE program, MAI artists and staff Eric Okdeh and Noni Clemens visited Portland and helped the artist team learn and implement the mosaic. This was an especially challenging technical skill that the youth resident artists are now well-versed in. The artists wanted to incorporate mosaic as a way to invite tactile connections to the piece and more intimate connections- as well as the flowers to build neighborhood pride - in contrast to the bright, bold artist-rendered shapes that demand attention from farther away.



Trae and Lillyanne prepping the first glass mosaic installation



Accomplishing the Project Goals

Lillanne and Paola set out three main goals for the project, and worked to accomplish them through the following activities.

Inclusivity. The artists leaned heavily on their organizing skills and goals, implementing a wide range of engagement strategies to best reach the diverse community at Orchards of 82nd, with a specific focus on three segments of the population: youth, parents, and elders. To reach youth, they created a chalk wall, hosted ‘eat + draw’ sessions, offered painting opportunities for the mural, and invited youth to review their sketches. To connect with parents and adults, they hosted ‘eat + draw’ sessions, invited sketch reviews, and implemented a food drive with harm reduction resources. Finally, to reach elders, they organized a community Lunar New Year event, invited sketch review, and implemented a food drive. They also specifically wanted to offer opportunities to reach those identifying as artists across the age spectrum by organizing paint days and glass mosaic days.

Transparency. The artists worked tirelessly to offer myriad and ongoing opportunities for community feedback. While some community-engaged projects can offer more cursory ways of engaging with the work, the artists were a regular presence on site, so much so that residents would jokingly berate them for posting yet another draft in the hallway and asking for more feedback at each step of the way. The team also felt it was critical to translate into at least four languages given the multilingual community of O82 - Vietnamese, Kiswahili, Chinese, and Amharic. The team used their personal second language knowledge to assist accessibility. Paola being a native Spanish speaker, Lillanne Vietnamese, and Omar with Swahili. To expand their outreach Lillanne and Paola outsourced translation services from the Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) as well as residents in the building to help with on site communication with neighbors. They hired third party translators and interpreters because the o82 building has a rich culture of second generation American youth who were already translating for their families. They were able to pay them for their skillset and highlight the built in resources of the building’s community.

Accessible, and in some cases trauma-informed, engagement. As organizers who are personally engaged with these communities, the artists knew how important it was to proceed with care. Some of the tactics related to improving accessibility, building belonging, and in some cases, trauma-informed engagement, that they used were:



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- increasing accessibility by providing gatherings with free food,
- hiring and paying residents to be part of the mural process, inviting mutual collaboration,
- conducting stipended one-hour 1:1 interviews with artists & residents on- and off-site to understand the varying relationships to the space
- facilitating open hour sessions with food and kid-friendly activities,
- hosting culturally specific celebrations (the Lunar New Years Party) + paying the community volunteers for the event,
- created intergenerational spaces,
- allowing multiple low stake one time pathways to participate such as drop-in glass cutting and paint days,
- multiple door knocking sessions for event invites and feedback on designs,
- holding drawing drafting sessions at the space itself so residents could see the process in action,
- given O82's location as 'surrounded by a urban heat island' (in the artists words), inviting residents to imagine themselves immersed in greenery,
- multiple languages at events and handouts,
- getting to know the residents beyond the art project to the point that they were holding conversations about personal topics unrelated to the mural project,
- And using the majority of the remaining mural funds for the final celebration to give out unrestricted gift cards to community members.



Reflecting on the Project's Impacts

The artists and APANO staff shared many indications that their activities will have long-lasting effects. Below, reflections are organized by the group of people they connect to - artists, community, and organization (see diagram below showcasing APANO's initial goals for their work with the PACE program, organized by group of people). The data below was shared by the artists and staff themselves after creating a spreadsheet to help organize their goals and data collection.

Community development indications of impact:

- Residents knew the artist's names, and asked them for other ways to get involved at APANO and O82,
- The artists asked for advice so frequently that residents joked with artists that they were being asked too often for their opinion about the mural design,
- Residents attended the mural celebration and made new connections with the APANO community,
- APANO's Arts & Media Project (AMP) artists volunteered their time in support of the project and took away mosaic and mural making experience, and
- AMP artists felt more connected to APANO by helping with the mural project.

Artist development indications of impact:

- The artists continued collaborating and received another shared commission,
- The artists feel more prepared and skilled in doing trauma-informed community engagement,
- The artists grew critical management skills including managing a budget of this size,

APANO Goals





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- The team completed mosaic training for the two artists and 15 year old Omari, one of the resident artist interns, in particular became a mosaic expert,
- The Interns wanted to paint the other side of the wall and continue the work. They expressed sadness that the work was over, and asked for ways to continue working with second artist catalyst,
- The artists described learning how to advocate for themselves as independent artists and community members against those in power, and
- Paola and Lillyanne have both been invited back to participate in different Cultural Work projects because of their community knowledge.

Organization development indications of impact:

- APANO expanded its capacity for cultural work,
- APANO learned many skills and strategies from Paola and Lillyanne, including efforts to incorporate trauma-informed practices. Advocacy for community members are being applied to other Cultural Work programs, like the O82 Art Crew. For example, distributing financial and other resources straight into the hands of community members is being practiced on several different projects
- The mural has been featured in prominent APANO marketing campaigns as a central identifier of O82, and
- The artists' year-long presence at O82 has paved the way for other artists to have access to O82 and APANO resources.

Note: The indications of impact above were shared with PACE project staff and learning consultants. While longer-term impacts need to be tracked over time, many of the indications of impact relate directly to the goals PACE had set for itself in terms of how it can impact change in people, place, and practice with the ultimate goal of creating more just and equitable cities through cultural and creative practice.

Overall PACE Goals

Change in People

1. Build collective power of BIPOC communities
2. Generate & equitably redistribute communally held resources

Change in Places

3. Reflect community cultural identities
4. Strengthen community-based cultural organizing

Change in Practice

5. Support and break down barriers for artists of color
6. Increase accountability of organizations to BIPOC residents



Key Learnings

The artists and staff also shared reflections regarding the process itself. Overall, the feeling was the everyone agreed that the team went above and beyond in terms of investing in the work, especially community engagement. The artists shared that having a team of two artists and two more artist interns helped ensure accountability to their shared goals. It also meant that the team offered many different skills. The artists shared needing more support on the ground regarding project execution and management.

About the Artists

Lillyanne Phạm (LP) is an artist and cultural organizer based in so-called East Portland. LP's creative research relies on LP's relational work, and vice versa. LP approaches art as an intimate, expansive, and ancestral means for wayfinding, nesting, and communicating. LP uses art and the art world to facilitate culturally and politically meaningful webs of care and connection. Currently, Lillyanne asks, "What is a neighborhood?" because it can open doors to talking about covert and overt power structures, online and offline, and how those most impacted by systems of oppression make and keep home.

lillyannepham.com

Paola De La Cruz, a second-generation Dominican artist and community organizer navigates the intersection of art, advocacy and lived experiences. Her work interweaves digital and analog media to confront cultural identities and communal healing. Central to Paola's artistic ethos is a commitment to mutual aid and resource redistribution, guiding her practice towards community engaged public art. Paola creates as a testament to resilience, drawing inspiration from her lived experiences in homelessness, queerness and migration

paoladelacruz.com

“The title of the mural comes from the Vietnamese proverb uống nước nhớ nguồn / drink the water remember the source. Our time with the O82 community brought us back to our roots. Roots ground us. Roots nourish us. Roots connect us.”

Lillyanne Pham and Paola De La Cruz



About the Public Art and Civic Engagement (PACE) Capacity Building Initiative

The PACE Initiative aimed to develop sustainable infrastructure to support the growth of socially-engaged public art in communities around the United States through a cohort learning environment which included mentoring, shared learning experiences and resources, and funding for capacity and two Artist Catalyst Projects. After a competitive selection process, the three host institutions selected to participate in the cohort were the [APANO Communities United Fund](#) in Portland, Oregon; [Louisville Visual Art in Kentucky](#); and the [South Side Community Art Center](#) in Chicago, Illinois. During the 30-month initiative, each organization worked with artists and community to create two works of public art in a civically engaged manner, including sending the artists for an immersion incubator program to Philadelphia. Additional goals of the PACE initiative were to strengthen a national network of socially engaged public art practitioners, and produce and disseminate research, case studies and useful advice to a national audience. The Mural Arts Institute hired [Congruence Cultural Strategies](#) to lead the research and evaluation work for the PACE Initiative.

About the Mural Arts Institute

The Mural Arts Institute (MAI) was established in 2017 as an initiative of Mural Arts Philadelphia, the nation's largest public art program dedicated to the belief that art ignites change. As part of Mural Arts Philadelphia, the Mural Arts Institute is dedicated to sharing knowledge, ideas, and experiences that have shaped our approach to community-centered artmaking. At its core, MAI seeks to build connections, sustain relationships, and share skills about the practices that have been instrumental in creating works of public art with Philadelphians. We work with artists, arts administrators, and community leaders across the world to align knowledge, amplify voices, empower change, and distribute resources that move us all toward a more inclusive and equitable future of socially engaged public art. www.muralarts.org/institute

About APANO

APANO's mission is to unite Asians and Pacific Islanders to build power, develop leaders, and advance equity through organizing, advocacy, community development, and cultural work. We envision a just world where Asians and Pacific Islanders and communities who share our aspirations and struggles have the power, resources, and voice to determine our own futures, and where we work in solidarity to drive political, social, economic, and cultural change. voices, influence popular narratives, and build power. <https://apano.org>