

# Culture Sustaining Arts Economies

Identifying Alternative Indicators for Connecting Culture to Development in  
the Local Arts Economy

Asiyah Kurtz  
Goucher College, Cultural Sustainability  
May 13, 2022

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# Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincerest appreciation to my spouse, Josh Kurtz, for his many nights of handling child duty, homework, and dinner as I worked through my Cultural Sustainability coursework. Enrolling in graduate school was a dream long deferred and I am proud to have him as a partner throughout this process.

I must also acknowledge my capstone advisor, Selina Morales, whose guidance helped me to stay on-track during the prolonged pandemic. There were numerous times that I wanted to quit so I appreciate Selina's reminders that she was in my corner. Without her steady hand, insightful questions, and encouragement, I would not have completed this process. Selina truly made all the difference.

Finally, I want to thank the artists who live and work in Camden. I often say that Camden reminds me of Memphis, the place where I was born. The people are just "regular folx" who did not hesitate to welcome me into their community. If I am honest, this capstone is a love letter to those artists: an acknowledgment of their work, identity, resourcefulness, and willingness to move forward in community with and for each another.

# Abstract

Since the 1980s cities across the United States have discovered the potential of using art as an economic driver for community development. In fact, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis tracks cultural commodities and found that arts and cultural production accounted for \$877.8B of gross domestic product in 2017. Because cultural industries and the economy are intertwined, any serious economic development work must incorporate culture as an asset to be identified and strengthened.

A review of arts economy reports shows that current indicators to define economic impact include quantitative data such as number of full-time jobs, dollars spent in the arts and tourism industries, household income, and local and state revenues. However, no current assessment tool exists that uses a cultural sustainability lens to measure a community's economic viability. Nor do current tools include independent artist perspectives in their assessments. The risk in only relying on myopic quantitative data is that it can negatively reinforce data and perspectives that are decidedly wealthy and white.

This capstone explores the inequity of arts economy tools in assessing the vitality of the arts in communities with fewer financial resources. One such place is Camden, New Jersey, a post-industrial town described as a city “past the point of no return”<sup>1</sup>.

Communities like Camden that seek to understand and contextualize the lived experience of artists can begin to engage their own neighborhoods with a simple question: *In what ways are the arts and artists here thriving?* Using a black feminist epistemology from Patricia Hills Collins, this paper uses personal reflexivity to offer a new tool called Culture Sustaining Arts Economies (CSAE). CSAE identifies gaps in economic indicators where culture is omitted but also highlights the places where culturally-specific indicators *should* be.

Keywords: *cultural sustainability, black feminism, epistemology, Camden, art economy, community development, cultural vitality, economic impact, arts and tourism, qualitative, quantitative*

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<sup>1</sup> Gillette, Howard, Jr. *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

# Introduction

In 2016 when I first relocated to Camden County in New Jersey from Memphis, Tennessee, multiple people reported to me that Camden City, the county seat, was unsafe and that I needed to steer clear of the city. In fact, in the years from 2004 - 2011, Camden was listed as "the most dangerous city in America"<sup>2</sup> three times and boasted a murder rate twelve times higher than the national average. At one point, the city had 175 open-air drug markets and 80 percent of drug arrests were of non-residents. In short, Camden's de facto economic base was, in part, supported by criminal activities.

In January 2021, I became the Executive Director for Camden FireWorks, a community-based arts organization located in the Waterfront South district of Camden. It was at this point that I began a serious process of discovery about the city known more for drug activity and crime than as a place of artistic expression.

According to the 2019 American Communities Survey<sup>3</sup>, the majority of residents (77%) in Camden are Black or people of color with less than 10% having attained a bachelor's degree and more than 36% living in poverty. The median income in the city is \$27,015 but it is likely that the average income is now lower due to economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Census data also shows that Camden is remarkably constant with more than 85% of residents having lived in the same house since 2015, thus there does not appear to be an issue of transience.

Additionally, the resident age trends young with 90% between ages 0 and 64 years old compared to 84% for the United States. Less than 10% of residents in Camden are older than age 65 which is decidedly below the 17% national data. It is not known if this is due to higher rates of mortality or older residents' relocation out of the zip code.

Located along the banks of the Delaware River lies the Waterfront South community. Established in 1851 as Stockton, NJ, the neighborhood was marketed as an escape from the larger cities of Camden and Gloucester. In 1872, Camden annexed the community, but like many post-industrial US cities, Waterfront South experienced disinvestment and population decline following the departure of its largest employer, New York Shipbuilding.

Currently, Waterfront South is the site of a combined sewer system that processes all of the sewage for Camden County. Coupled with the industrial businesses that process scrap metal, underutilized green spaces, and the periodic overflow of stormwater in the sewer system, the neighborhood is vulnerable to serious flooding, negative health impacts, and continual property damage.

Before accepting the Director position, I drove around Waterfront South conducting a windshield survey whereupon I noted the neighborhood vibrancy with its intermingled residential and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.phillymag.com/news/2013/12/12/rolling-stone-camden-article-apocalypse-new-jersey/>

<sup>3</sup> "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Camden City, New Jersey." n.d. Accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/camdennewjersey>.

commercial units. Broadway Avenue, where FireWorks is located, is an area of high freight and pedestrian traffic where I noticed some womxn<sup>4</sup> who appeared to be advertising for sex work.

After a few moments observing these activities, I decided to park on the street and walk the two blocks to survey the organization's building. Immediately upon exiting my car, I had to side-step several hypodermic needles that had been left on the sidewalk near the crosswalk to Sacred Heart School. The nearer I approached the building, the more I appreciated how prolific the litter was—it covered every inch of the gutter and was strewn about the sidewalks and in alleys. The nearby buildings, probably glorious in their prime, were now a hodge-podge of old and new materials leaving the impression that resources are constrained in this neighborhood.

Camden FireWorks is located along a stretch of sparsely populated rowhouses in the circa-1889 firehouse for Engine No. 3. The firehouse had been abandoned in the 1980s due to structural defects then later patched up as a multi-dwelling residence. By the early 2000s the firehouse was again left vacant and suffered further decay. This resulted in extensive damage to the building interior with mud and debris covering every surface.

In 2010, the community organized clean up parties and collaborated with Sacred Heart Church and a community development partner (Heart of Camden) to purchase and renovate the firehouse. After a lengthy period of organization and building restoration, Camden FireWorks opened for operations in June 2016.

Despite the environmental and economic challenges, the people in Waterfront South have demonstrated cultural perseverance. The neighborhood includes a growing arts and culture community that showcases visual and performing artists, theater ensembles, urban farming, literary art groups, and a maritime museum. Since it began tracking programming activity in 2018, Camden FireWorks has supported more than 50 emerging artists, presented 25 art exhibitions, and reached more than 500 community members (1/3 the number of people in Waterfront South.)

In conversations that I have had with residents (two of whom are also employees of Camden FireWorks), they are proud to live in Camden and point to the Waterfront South's burgeoning arts district as proof that the community is thriving. However, how a community assesses its own health does not necessarily align with the methodology that organizations like the Americans for the Arts (AFTA) uses to measure impact. For example, AFTA's Arts and Economic Prosperity 5 (AEP5) report<sup>5</sup> on the nonprofit arts and culture industry's impact on the economy, uses four indicators to define economic impact:

- Number of full-time equivalent jobs
- Indirect and direct dollars spent in the arts and tourism industries
- Household income and
- Revenue to local and state governments

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<sup>4</sup> I use the term "womxn" instead of "women" to be explicit in my inclusion of all who identify as such regardless of their gender assigned at birth.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/research-studies-publications/arts-economic-prosperity-5/use/download-the-report>

A cursory review of Urban Institute’s Cultural Vitality in Communities (CVC), The Vitality Index™ (VI) from Creative Cities International and the Arts Vibrancy Index (AVI) by SMU Data Arts show similar methodology to the AEP5 report. Unfortunately, the effect of these assessments is that they uphold inequities that serve as a sort of confirmation bias. For Camden, a city with high rates of unemployment and poverty that lacks a strong tax base or tourism industry, the AEP5 reiterates inequities. What is lost is the opportunity to highlight indicators that demonstrate the cultural assets that exist.

In their book *Resetting the Compass*<sup>6</sup>, Yencken and Wilkinson assert that, in addition to the environmental, economic, and social pillars of sustainability, culture should be added. According to Hawkes<sup>7</sup>, “Cultural vitality is as essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability”. Indeed, there has been burgeoning interest in crafting a theoretical and application framework for the nascent field of cultural sustainability as scholars attempt to incorporate culture as a fourth pillar.

Soini and Birkeland<sup>8</sup>, write that the scientific discourse on cultural sustainability is organized around seven themes: “heritage, vitality, economic viability, diversity, locality, ecocultural resilience, and eco-cultural civilization”. As Throsby writes in his book *Economics and Culture*<sup>9</sup>, the commodification of culture is its own industry and can be simply described as “the activities of producing and consuming cultural goods and services”. In fact, the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Economic Analysis tracks cultural commodities and found that arts and cultural production accounted for \$877.8B of gross domestic product in 2017<sup>10</sup>.

Because cultural industries and the economy are intertwined, any serious economic development work must incorporate culture as an asset to be identified and strengthened. This is important to the field of cultural sustainability because it moves the discipline more firmly forward as a field with practical application for communities. And so, it is from this perspective that this capstone explores alternative cultural indicators that can be used for the evaluation of arts-based economic activities.

A neighborhood’s perspective of their own cultural vibrancy is not factored into current assessment tools. What the Culture Sustaining Arts Economies tool seeks to do is broaden this perspective within the arts economy and emphasize the possibilities when culture is centered in these assessments. The audience for this project includes governmental stakeholders familiar with economic development, community-based arts organizations, and philanthropic entities interested in research that centers culture as a vital component of arts-based economic development.

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<sup>6</sup> David Yencken and Debra Wilkinson, *Resetting the Compass: Australia’s Journey towards Sustainability* (Collingwood, Vic: CSIRO Pub., 2000)

<sup>7</sup> Jon Hawkes, *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture’s Essential Role in Public Planning* (Melbourne: Cultural Development Network: Common Ground, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Katriina Soini and Inger Birkeland, “Exploring the Scientific Discourse on Cultural Sustainability,” *Geoforum* 51 (January 2014)

<sup>9</sup> Charles D. Throsby, “Introduction,” in *Economics and Culture*, Reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.bea.gov/news/2020/arts-and-cultural-production-satellite-account-us-and-states-2017>

## Of, By, and For Camden

Westerman contends, “If we do not foreground our planning with the question of how to effect a lasting transformation, we will never be able to achieve it”.<sup>11</sup> It is from this understanding that I engage with creating an assessment tool that identifies and highlights the ways in which communities like Camden are resourced in non-financial ways. To provide more equity in studies that intersect with the arts economy and community vitality, it is proposed that report sponsors provide the opportunity for communities to identify and highlight the places where cultural activities should be included.

My interviews with Camden artists for this capstone laid the groundwork for the CSAE model that follows. What I learned from those women revealed artist-first perspectives for measuring cultural assets that currently exist within Camden. However, the potential for this work is not limited to Camden, New Jersey. Other communities who seek to understand and contextualize the lived experience of artists can begin to engage their own neighborhoods with a simple question: *In what ways are the arts and artists here thriving?*

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<sup>11</sup> Westerman, William. “Wild Grasses and New Arks: Transformative Potential in Applied and Public Folklore.” *Journal of American Folklore* 119, no. 471 (2006): 111–28. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaf.2006.0012>.

# Centering a Black Feminist Framework

The challenge for engaging this research is how to reference foundational scholarship in the cultural sustainability field but distill the framework in a way that is accessible to and inclusive of the artist community in Camden. As a majority Black and brown city, this means that place-based arts research on the city must center the experience of artists who identify as Black or Latinx. My engagement with this topic is an extension of what Christina Sharpe refers to as “wake work,” or work that is a “theory and praxis of Black being in the diaspora.”<sup>12</sup>

Of the nine artist studios offered for lease at Camden FireWorks, 64% of the studio artists are womxn<sup>13</sup>. Additionally, FireWorks studio artists identify as Black (64%), Latinx (14%), or White (22%). In addition to offering affordable studios, FireWorks intentionally works to identify and hire local teaching artists. Since 2021 the nonprofit’s board and executive staff have identified artists of color as the primary target demographic for partnership. In fact, in 2021 FireWorks increased support of artists of color three-fold.

Due to time constraints amidst the pandemic, this capstone focuses on the Black womxn artists who live or work in Camden. However, future research on the arts economy in Camden should and must give equitable attention to epistemologies from Latinx scholars and artists.

As a Black womxn, quilting artist, and Executive Director of FireWorks, I will be writing – as Collins did – from the “I/we” perspective rather than as a researcher/outsider. Collins says, “Black feminist intellectuals must be personal advocates for their material, be accountable for the consequences of their work, have lived or experienced their material in some fashion, and be willing to engage in dialogues about their findings with ordinary, everyday people.”<sup>14</sup>

For this research, I employ Collins’ Black feminist epistemology which includes:

- 1) lived experience as a criterion of meaning,
- 2) use of dialogue,
- 3) ethic of personal accountability, and
- 4) ethic of caring.

## Lived Experience as a Criterion of Meaning

As a young girl raised by my grandmother in the South, my childhood was a culturally rich one. I lived on a small farm with her where she raised chickens and produce for our food. The only

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<sup>12</sup> Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. 1 online resource (192 pages): 31 illustrations vols. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> I use the term “womxn” instead of “women” to be explicit in my inclusion of all who identify as such regardless of their gender assigned at birth.

<sup>14</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. Routledge Classics. New York: Routledge, 2009.

time we really left the land was to spend Sunday's at the family church several miles away. The farm was small (less than 2 acres) but to me it represented the vastness of life: verdant, teeming with activity, and organized by the seasonality of labor and rest.

In my small neighborhood, I was surrounded by a community of specialists. Up the road lived the DeBerry men who were masterful meat smokers and the McLemore family who provided everyone with milk and cheese from their cows. My grandmother's fruit trees and vegetables ensured an abundance of healthful food not only for us but also supplied the disabled man who sold his famous pepper jelly (from our excess) in various recycled jars.

*And then there were the womxn*, who quilted from threadbare and ripped overalls, who prepped and cooked enough to share rich butter rolls, savory cornbread dressing, and delicious red velvet cakes for holidays. The womxn: they worked as hard as the men on the land, cleaned white womxn's houses, reared children (theirs and other people's) and filled all the gaps between.

This agrarian community, where I heard stories and songs commemorating what we knew of life, was located on a dead-end road surrounded by a small wood and buttressed by an overgrown area rumored to be an Indian burial ground. From a distance, we appeared to be completely disconnected from society – a poor old womxn and her shy grandchild. In actuality, I was more connected to my Blackness, creativity and femininity during my childhood than any time since.

There was only one way in and out to our farm on Fields Road. Because of where we were situated, we could see visitors from a distance as they approached – usually by car which kicked up dust to announce their arrival. My grandmother would stop what she was doing and go to the front porch to greet whoever was visiting. Many of those visits were from people like bill collectors and insurance salesmen who seemingly always had their hand out asking for money that I knew we did not have. And there were also people visiting that we did not know who were neither collectors nor salesmen, but who wanted to engage in some sort of exchange. Without fail, my grandmother would ask in her soft Southern drawl, “*Who sunt you?*” My grandmother was engaging in what anthropologist Johnnetta B. Cole says is an “element peculiar to the Black condition in America.”<sup>15</sup> This simple query was a way for Grandma to ensure our safety, as well as authenticate and judge the reputation of the person who was presenting themselves.

As I understand Collins, my experience as a Black womxn, raised in America in a community cutoff from capitalist resources, is the equivalent of ‘Who sunt you?’ By virtue of my lived experience, I am qualified to understand the cultural nuances and uniqueness required to partner with Black womxn. As the Executive Director of Camden FireWorks, I have built a reputation in Camden of seeking out and advocating with artists of color, including those who rent studio space from the nonprofit. I believed that I would not be seen as an outsider but rather as part of the Camden artist community.

For this project, I interviewed three Black womxn who live or work in Camden.

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<sup>15</sup> Cole, Johnnetta B. “Culture: Negro, Black and Nigger.” *The Black Scholar* 1, no. 8 (1970): 40–44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41206253>.

Terina Nicole Hill: A fashion design professional, arts educator, realtor, and the single parent of two children. Terina has three degrees in art and has been working in the arts since 2008. She lives and works in Camden.

Jazlyne Sabree: A high school art teacher, acrylic artist, and mother of two children. She does not live in Camden but works at a Camden charter school called Freedom Preparatory Academy. Jazlyn just finished her Master's in Art Education and is returning for a second graduate degree in Socially Engaged Art.

Katrina Tapper: A graphic designer, oil portrait artist, and mother of a six-month old daughter. Katrina grew up in a predominately white neighborhood as the daughter of two medical professionals. She does not live in Camden but has rented studio space at Camden FireWorks since 2018.

When thinking about their role as creatives in Camden, I wondered if the womxn I interviewed always considered themselves artists. With each interview, I began the session by asking the interviewees to introduce themselves. Invariably, they all shared a variation of the phrase, "I am an artist". Not, *I make art* but I am that which I make [an artist].

Lang and Roald write, "Meaning reaches down into the depths of our ongoing bodily engagement with our environments, which are at once physical, interpersonal, social, and cultural."<sup>16</sup> Reams says, "The image of self, created by thought, includes identifying ourselves as the physical body, emotions, or thoughts."<sup>17</sup> That these womxn have created themselves as artists is to embody the process of making meaning through creativity.

One of the interviewees, Jazlyne Sabree, works full-time as an art teacher at a charter high school. When asked to describe her relationship to teaching and the arts, she commented:

**I don't ever think I'll stop teaching like; I'll always be a teacher. It's just a part of me. It's as much a part of me as being an artist.**

But what of the liminal spaces? This phrase from my own life narrative resonates in this capstone: "*And then there were the womxn...*" How does their work as artists intersect with the other responsibilities in their lives as mother, partner, and employee?

Another artist I interviewed for this capstone is Terina Nicole Hill who considers herself a fulltime artist and also a teaching artist. She recently shuttered one of her businesses (Fashion Design Center of South Jersey) because the pandemic severely limited her ability to earn income. When I asked her how she held together all of these areas of her life as she pursues her artistry she shared:

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<sup>16</sup> Lang, Johannes, and Tone Roald. *Art and Identity: Essays on the Aesthetic Creation of Mind*. Consciousness, Literature and the Arts. Amsterdam: Brill, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Reams, Jonathan. "Consciousness and Identity: Who Do We Think We Are?" *New Ideas in Psychology* 17, no. 3 (1999)

**For a long time I was feeling like I am neglecting my work as an artist. I was making my living and in 2021 I didn't put out any art. No collections. No...- you know I did some custom work for people - but I didn't take the time to design new work.**

**And so that really took its toll on me but I was making a living kind of like adjacent to it [art].**

This adjacency to art and how it connects to their sense of self also came up in those times when the artist couldn't fully engage with their creative identity. Katrina Tapper, an oil portraitist with an infant daughter, shares this:

**I just kind of try not to beat myself up. If I can't do something, you know, like, just kind of talk to yourself in the sense of like, you do do a lot. So don't beat yourself up if you can't paint today or if you can't do a little doodle.**

Thinking of the dimension of lived experience, I wondered how these womxn's experiences (and mine) contributed to our personal imagination as artists. How are we making meaning of our existence as womxn, artists, and mothers? Bray<sup>18</sup> contends that the starting point for making meaning is through story telling. My own childhood supports this as most evenings found us sitting on the porch sharing personal narratives as well as cautionary tales.

As I re-listened to these interviews to transcribe the conversations, I was struck by how prevalent the call and response was in how we engaged. At many points in the dialogue, we participated in what Tannen calls "cooperative overlapping"<sup>19</sup>, where we interrupted to finish each other's sentences, test for understanding, or express engagement. This communication style sits firmly in Collins' second dimension of Black feminist epistemology: use of dialogue.

## **Use of Dialogue**

I often refer to Camden FireWorks as "the Blackest place I've ever worked." My assessment is not simply based upon the racial demographics of the neighborhood where the nonprofit is based nor the fact that Black artists rent the majority of art studios at FireWorks. My descriptor references the cultural nuances, ways of being, and language prevalent in personal interactions in the neighborhood.

Not long ago, I received a call from the alarm company that someone had entered our building after hours. I had the company cancel the police dispatch and sent a group text to the artists to determine if one of them had mistakenly triggered the alarm. After learning that none of them had, I drove to the gallery to make sure that all was well. Upon my arrival, a Black womxn whom I had seen previously walked over to me and asked if everything was alright. I told her that I thought someone might have broken into the building, so I was considering calling the

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<sup>18</sup> Bray, John N. Collaborative Inquiry in Practice: Action, Reflection, and Meaning Making. Thousand Oaks, Calif; Sage Publications, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Tannen, Deborah. Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk among Friends. New ed. 1 online resource (xix, 244 pages) vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

police. She then responded, “Don’t call the cops...they won’t do nothing. It was a white womxn who went inside but she left.”

Bell Hooks writes that, “Dialogue...is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination.”<sup>20</sup> Through this brief interaction, this womxn reiterated a mutual understanding regarding the necessity of neighbors looking out for one another. In other words, she knew that in Black neighborhoods, asking police to intervene is a tenuous - and sometimes dangerous - decision. She expected that I would believe her on the basis of her words alone and trusted that I would not subject the community to further police oversight. When I checked our video camera to verify what she had seen, I learned that she was right.

Collins’ inclusion of dialogue as a dimension of Black feminist epistemology is both culturally relevant and necessary. As a Black womxn, my connection to the neighborhood is reinforced through myriad conversations and dialogic interactions within the community. As a quilter, my creative practice provides me with language and proximity to Camden artists. A phrase often exchanged between Black artists within FireWorks is “I see you”. By affirming that we are visible and present to one another, we acknowledge the importance of our mutual belonging within the Camden arts community.

This communal affirmation was evident in my interactions with the Camden artists. As I was setting up for each interview, prior to recording, the opening sequences for each interview incorporated small talk that included a compliment about our hair or clothes that day. Schifffrin argues that these rituals “are important in both the maintenance of social order and in the organization of social interaction.”<sup>21</sup> These light-hearted moments served to reassert that we were not only, fully present in the space, but that we appreciated the uniqueness of our hair, makeup, or clothes. For Katrina, this was especially poignant considering her upbringing in a white community:

**It's also, you know, just growing up like I come from, like I grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood. Town, for that matter. And when you are a person of color, you're kind of not intentionally, but you're kind of ostracized in a way. Whether it's, you know, oh your hair so cool. Can I touch it?**

Brow shares, “The sense of belonging together typically combines both affective and cognitive components, both a feeling of solidarity and an understanding of shared identity.”<sup>22</sup> Using dialogue is one way to confirm one’s identity as well as fortify shared humanity. This is especially important among Black womxn who experience racial and gender bias and are routinely disbelieved about their lived experiences.

The intersection of dialogue, personal narratives, and meaning-making have relevance to my use of Collins’ framework for this capstone. Not only do these elements provide iterative context as I

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<sup>20</sup> hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989.

<sup>21</sup> Schifffrin, Deborah. “Opening Encounters.” *American Sociological Review* 42, no. 5 (1977): 679–91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094858>.

<sup>22</sup> Brow, James. “Notes on Community, Hegemony, and the Uses of the Past.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (1990).

sought to understand the experiences of these artists but also because they reveal and reflect a way of being that is prominent in Black cultural traditions.

## **Ethic of Personal Accountability**

Berkes et al. write that “cultural values like respect, sharing and reciprocity are the social underpinnings for how communities engage their traditions.”<sup>23</sup> As I considered this capstone, I pondered the Ghanaian word, *sankofa*. The literal translation of *sankofa* is “it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind.” In the Akan tradition, knowledge acquisition is based on critical examination, and intelligent and patient investigation. Implicit in this examination is that one must be accountable to those with whom they are engaged in the quest for learning.

In 2021 as I was working to prepare the 2022 exhibition schedule for Camden FireWorks, I realized that my predecessor had committed our organization to a show by artist Thom Goertel. The show is called *Tiempo y Belleza* (Time and Beauty) and featured portraits of financially impoverished womxn in Cuernavaca, Mexico. I was gravely concerned that the artist (a wealthy white male) was capitalizing off of the lives of these womxn and sharing their personal stories of abuse, health issues, and financial strife. He was, in essence, speaking for them and this did not sit well with me.

I felt personally accountable to the womxn in those portraits as well as the Latinx people in Camden. With this show, whose agency was being prioritized? I seriously considered canceling the exhibition until I could assure our Latinx patrons that we were being respectful and careful with how these womxn were being represented.

To address this issue, I contacted several Latinx artists with whom I have built a relationship and asked them to weigh in on the exhibition and let them know that I would cancel the show if they had any hesitation or discomfort at seeing the portraits. Thankfully, they supported the show and one of the artists even said, “This feels like home”. From the music to the food and exhibition materials, I employed Latinx people to infuse the show with Mexican culture.

To close the exhibition, we partnered with Rutgers University and Dr. Jason De León of UCLA on a community participatory event called *The Ones Who Left*. The event highlighted the U.S. Border Patrol’s hostile terrain enforcement policies and commemorated the lives of those who died while trying to cross the Sonoran Desert in Arizona. Here again, I conferred with Latinx artists, one who became visibly emotional and began to cry. When I inquired with Hector<sup>24</sup> about his response, he shared with me that his own mother had crossed the border when she was pregnant with him.

My accountability for *Tiempo y Belleza* and *The Ones Who Left* was to the Latinx community. And so it is with this capstone, my accountability is primarily to the artists in Camden.

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<sup>23</sup> Berkes, F., Johan Colding, and Carl Folke. “Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management.” Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada, 2000. WorldCat.org.

<sup>24</sup> The name has been changed to protect his identity.

Part of my accountability to Camden's artist is the sharing of power in working to create a future for the arts on their terms. For example, in my conversation with all of the womxn, I asked them for feedback on our strengths in how we engage the artist community.

**Asiyah - So, what do you think that Fireworks does well, right now to support artists here in Camden?**

**Katrina - I think definitely having affordable studio spaces and kind of bringing in the community. I love it. The openings we can just open up those big doors and just invite everybody in and kind of take that stigma of like, you know, this is an art gallery and...**

**Asiyah - You don't belong, right. Yeah.**

**Katrina - I really appreciate that. But I also you know, appreciate that everything is constantly changing, in the sense that like, how can we make the space better how can this a place where other artists outside Camden would also like to submit their work? I think that's a really great thing to strive for. To kind of branch out and not be siloed into just Camden. Yeah, yes, we want Camden artists to exhibit too, but we don't want to be like, you're only going to see Camden artists in Camden. We want to see all artists from everywhere, of course, but include the community. So, I think that's really great.**

My accountability to Camden artists also meant that I needed to ask for feedback on potential areas of improvement for the organization. Because all of the interviewees are mothers, it was not surprising that the majority of the responses discussed FireWorks' lack of programming and outreach to children in Camden.

**Terina - Like we need all of it. I mean, when I think about what I had growing up I had the museum and the after-school programming and the summer art camps. Yeah, we don't have a summer art camp program here.**

**Jazlyne - I will say partnering more with the schools because then you get them when they're young. They know that you're here. My mom when I was itty bitty, put me in Trenton - was it Artworks Trenton - and I took classes with them for a while and then I left. I only took classes, maybe a less than a year and I left I went to college. And then here I am, like maybe 20 something years later, and I still remember them.**

**Katrina - I think definitely reaching out to schools like to foster that young creativity because it's not always there.**

As I listened to these womxn discuss our opportunities for future program development, I also shared with them an NEA grant opportunity we had recently received that would allow us to provide collage quilting instruction to children at Veterans Family School, a public school in Camden. When I read the transcripts for those interviews, the black-and-white text seemed to indicate my sharing of the work that we were already doing to reach youth audiences was a defensiveness. However, listening to the audio for the interviews revealed that what was happening, in fact, was relationship-building. I was able to ask for accountability from the artist community but also request accountability from them by reframing their perspective of the work that FireWorks has and continues to do. This inquiry and feedback process is akin to what

Phillion calls the “loving inquirer”<sup>25</sup> – a role that is prevalent in this next dimension of Collins’ framework: an ethic of caring.

## Ethic of Caring

Collins argues that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy “resemble the importance that some feminist analyses place on womxn’s ‘inner voice’.” Indeed, Belenky et al., write that one aspect of womxn’s ways of knowing is based on the “capacity for empathy”.<sup>26</sup>

One of the first decisions I made as Executive Director was to have the organization’s mission statement revised. Camden FireWorks’ mission now is to *use art to create social change*. For me it was important that our work be actionable and lead to tangible positive results. Further, we incorporate the work of the Feminist Art Coalition into our activities and are “motivated by the ethical imperative to effect change and promote equality within our organization and work”.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, we have framed our fundraising and development programs with the mantra that “all money is not good money”. This was necessary because there are some companies in the Waterfront South neighborhood that have done great harm to our residents with air and land pollution who have asked to donate and/or perform volunteer services for FireWorks. Although our nonprofit could certainly use the funding, we care more about the people who live in the community and will not participate in the continued harm to them or the environment.

Another way that we have engaged our mission is to commit a sizable portion of our budget to provide professional development to emerging artists. We also provide meaningful compensation to commission them for art-making projects.

One project that enabled us to do this is our *allery*<sup>28</sup> mural. Next to Camden FireWorks is an alley that spans about 100 feet and connects the rear lot of the organization to the public sidewalk in the front. We installed a wood privacy fence to serve as a canvas for local artists for installing a mural. In addition, we paid for four of these artists to attend muralist training at Mural Arts Philadelphia, a premier institute of mural arts in the region.

During my interview with Jazlyne, I asked her to share one indicator in a community that shows that the arts and artists are thriving. In other words, what is one way that you know that an artist community is being cared for?

**Like for Camden, and like I'm thinking of murals and the community participation. I feel like murals are a representation of "Is the community appreciating this?" because these murals have to be approved and we have to get the bodies to create them. So, I think seeing that physical evidence is a big indicator. Um, and then I think just the presence of artists.**

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<sup>25</sup> Phillion, JoAnn. *Narrative Inquiry in a Multicultural Landscape: Multicultural Teaching and Learning*. Issues in Curriculum Theory, Policy, and Research. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Belenky, Mary Field, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. Tenth anniversary edition. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Feminist Art Coalition. “Feminist Art Coalition.” Accessed April 30, 2022. <https://feministartcoalition.org>.

<sup>28</sup> I refer to the mural site as an allery because it is the alley next to the Camden FireWorks gallery.

For me it was important that I not only equip these emerging muralists with training but also provide meaningful compensation that allows them to fully participate in Camden's arts ecosystem. By removing barriers to knowledge acquisition and providing opportunities for them to build their body of work, Camden FireWorks assists these artists in crafting their artistic futures on their own terms. Using Collins' epistemology was a critical research decision which enabled me to emphasize my accountability to the artists whose lived experiences I was upholding.

## Research Questions

In what ways do the current models for measuring economic and cultural vitality in the arts, uphold a framework that privileges hegemonic perspectives?

What quantitative factors, not currently found in current models, indicate a vibrant, self-sustaining, arts eco-system?

What qualitative indicators could be measured to reorient an arts economy model that recognizes communities who are well-resourced in non-financial ways? In other words, what cultural norms and traditions -- vital to the local arts community -- are omitted from the quantitative models?

# Methodology

This capstone employs a mixed methods approach that incorporates a literature review, a comparative analysis of the methodologies of several arts and community vitality reports, as well as interviews of Black womxn artists in Camden. Because the majority of professional artists in Camden FireWorks' network are womxn of color, this study uses Collins' Black feminist epistemology.

The first phase of the research includes a literature review of cultural sustainability scholarship and liberation movement texts such as *How We Get Free*<sup>29</sup> and *Emergent Strategy*<sup>30</sup>. Referencing this foundational knowledge, the second phase of this study includes a comparative analysis of the methodologies of the Cultural Vitality in Communities report, The Vitality Index, and the Arts Vibrancy Index Report VI. This analysis would allow me to identify gaps where cultural sustainability measures can be incorporated. Knowledge gained from the gap analysis informs the final phase of the capstone.

The last phase of capstone research includes interviews of three Black womxn artists in Camden with diverse backgrounds in the arts. The purpose of these interviews is to ascertain the challenges and opportunities and how these individuals navigate their work as artists. I incorporated learnings from their narratives to demonstrate community-specific ways that arts economies can be measured.

The result of this is a new tool called *Culture Sustaining Arts Economies* (CSAE) that applies a cultural framework to arts economy and community development activities. The CSAE offers a new measurement for Camden community and government stakeholders to consider as they work to shape a sustainable arts economy.

This study was conducted between December 2021 and April 2022.

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<sup>29</sup> Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, ed. 2017. *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books.

<sup>30</sup> Brown, Adrienne M. 2017. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press.

## Dialogue With Others

A critique that I, as a researcher of color, have of social sciences fields like anthropology and cultural sustainability is their over-reliance on scholarship from white and male researchers. The effect of this is that researchers of color find themselves having to repeatedly justify their inclusion of works from non-hegemonic sources (or the omission of white, male scholarship). As Collins' points out, "Oppressed groups are frequently in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group." Here lies an imbalance of power which disproportionately hinders the incorporation of viewpoints that contradict hegemonic works from the academy. As a student of cultural sustainability, I was troubled by participating in practices that uphold academic inequities. This is analogous to being complicit in my own ideacide<sup>31</sup>.

This over-reliance also has implications for research about communities of color, especially those with matriarchal structures like Black and Latinx cultures. If disciplines are centering the perspectives of white men, what might this myopic view miss in the research design? Or worse, the research results in thought that – at its core – embraces white supremacy ideals. Considering this, I was intentional that this capstone would “decolonize research practices”<sup>32</sup> in all phases of the process including the literature review.

According to Maori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith, the challenge of decolonizing practices lies in how to accomplish this while also “reimaging and bringing forward Indigenous epistemic approaches, philosophies, and methodologies.” I felt this challenge personally in my own research. I met resistance when I critiqued the prominence that my institution placed on the work of white scholars. (The weight of trying to decolonize my research led to me pausing my studies for two semesters. I felt lonely, unheard, and seriously considered quitting altogether.)

Yet, decentering white Western ideals of community viability is integral to this process. In my capstone, I upheld the lived experiences of Camden artists as the focus, not a secondary footnote. To me, a decolonized capstone meant I would challenge long-held assumptions of Eurocentric superiority and expertise, collaboratively include knowledge from Black womxn artists in Camden, and use a feminist framework that conjuncts with a relational epistemology<sup>33</sup>.

The cultural sustainability texts here are those that are related to this capstone project. In a concise way, these texts demonstrate my process in:

- decolonizing methodology
- centering non-hegemonic ways of being
- uncovering the necessity of culture in art assessment tools
- exploring a community's agency/power and
- redrawing a "cartography of research" using CSAE

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<sup>31</sup> Ideacide is the murder of ideas, ones own and those of others.

<sup>32</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

<sup>33</sup> Victor, Janice M., Linda M. Goulet, Karen Schmidt, Warren Linds, Jo-Ann Episkenew, and Keith Goulet. “Like Braiding Sweetgrass.” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 9, no. 4 (2016): 423–45.

Alvarez promotes a pedagogy of disruption that “prioritizes relationships and power dynamics over other tangible, quantifiable data”<sup>34</sup>. Thus, it is from this perspective that this capstone necessarily proffers the feminist scholarship of Black researchers as well as the work of other authors of color.

Hawkes writes that “cultural vitality is as essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability”<sup>35</sup>. For a city like Camden that is rich in non-economic ways, the challenge in assessing the arts economy is how to incorporate these cultural elements into quantitative assessments. If we accept Westerman’s assertion that that cultural production activities (like art) promote social transformation and increased community cohesion<sup>36</sup>, the question of how to measure these aspects must be considered.

Although Borrup<sup>37</sup> posits that leveraging a community’s cultural assets can spur economic development, his scholarship does not concretize the argument. His book presents research and emerging theories related to culturally driven community developments but stops short of providing measurement tools to assess the impact of these efforts. The importance of assessment tools in development opportunities, particularly those related to the arts, can not be underestimated. When an advocacy entity like Americans for the Arts (AFTA) publishes reports that only focus on inequitable measurements, funders and municipalities take note. For cities like Camden, these assessments can negatively reinforce data and perspectives that are decidedly wealthy and white.

Bedoya’s reflections on *Rasquachification*<sup>38</sup> describes the power that resourceful, Black and brown communities exercise to visually and socially assert their rights to space. Yet, AFTA’s AEP5 report upholds an arts economic system that privileges higher income communities as sites of cultural vitality. At a fundamental level, this capstone employs *Rasquache* (the underdog perspective<sup>39</sup>) to confront the exclusion and invisibility of communities like Camden in national arts economy models. To center Camden artists in a new arts economy tool is to add color to the “white spatial imaginary”<sup>40</sup>.

Identity and intersectionality are necessary devices for disrupting this white spatial imaginary. The Combahee River Collective Statement<sup>41</sup> reads, “If Black women were free, it would mean

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<sup>34</sup> Alvarez, Maribel. “Pedagogies of Disruption.” Southwest Folklife Alliance, n.d.

<sup>35</sup> Hawkes, Jon. *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture’s Essential Role in Public Planning*. Melbourne: Cultural Development Network: Common Ground, 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Westerman, William. “Wild Grasses and New Arks: Transformative Potential in Applied and Public Folklore.” *Journal of American Folklore* 119, no. 471 (2006).

<sup>37</sup> Borrup, Tom. *The Creative Community Builder’s Handbook: How to Transform Communities Using Local Assets, Art, and Culture*. Saint Paul, Minn: Fieldstone Alliance, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Bedoya, Roberto, Arizona, and United States. “Spatial Justice: Rasquachification, Race and the City.” *Creative Time Reports*, September 15, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Ybarra-Frausto, Tomás. *Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility*. San Antonio, Texas: School by the River Press, 1989.

<sup>40</sup> Lipsitz, George. *How Racism Takes Place*. 1 online resource (vi, 310 pages) vols. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta, ed. 2017. *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

that everyone else would have to be free.” From political organizing to health justice to thriving in a capitalist economic system, the capacity for growth in Camden’s arts economy has exponential possibilities if womxn of color are centered in the conversation.

Saavedra’s and Pérez’s multi-modal approach redraws “the cartography of research” with culturally centered epistemological and methodological tools. One example that the authors use is the notion of *conocimiento es otro modo de conectar* [another way of connecting] by Anzaldúa. These connections “across colors and other differences to allies also trying to negotiate racial contradictions, survive the stresses and traumas of daily life, and develop a spiritual-imaginal-political vision together”<sup>42</sup> make possible the innovations that elevate non-hegemonic practices. Culture Sustaining Arts Economies is an initial foray to center the work and perspectives of local artists in the arts economy for Camden.

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<sup>42</sup> Saavedra, Cinthya M., and Michelle Salazar Pérez. 2017. “Chicana/Latina Feminist Critical Qualitative Inquiry.” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 10 (4): 450–67.

# Economic Reports Comparison

This capstone compares reports from a diverse group of organizations including the D.C.-based think tank, Urban Institute, and Americans for the Arts, a nonprofit tasked with advancing the arts in the U.S. Of the reports analyzed, it was unsettling to see how myopic the Arts and Economic Prosperity 5 (AEP5) report is.

QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS		REPORTS			
Metric	Measures	Arts Vibrancy Index Report VI	Cultural Vitality in Communities	Arts and Economic Prosperity 5	The Vitality Index
		<i>SMU Data Arts</i>	<i>The Urban Institute</i>	<i>Americans for the Arts</i>	<i>Creative Cities Int'l</i>
Presence	# Independent artists	x			
	# Arts and culture employees/jobs	x		x*	x
	# Arts and cultural nonprofits	x	x		
	# Arts commercial entities	x	x		
	Audience attendance		x		
	Arts programming in schools		x		
	# Visual and performing arts teachers		x		
	Arts participating through volunteering		x	x	
	# Dedicated artist housing units		x		
	# Nonprofit community celebrations		x		
Art Dollars	Nonprofit earned revenue	x	x		x
	Nonprofit fundraising revenue	x	x		x
	Total nonprofit expenses	x	x	x	x
	Total nonprofit ee compensation	x			
	Indirect spending in arts and culture			x	x
Demographics	Resident household incomes			x	
Government Support	State arts dollars	x		x	
	# State arts grants	x			
	Federal arts dollars	x		x	
	# Federal arts grants	x			

*\*Only measures full-time equivalent jobs*

Unlike the Cultural Vitality in Communities (CVC) report, the AEP5 does not provide a comprehensive review of the arts-adjacent activities that allow artists to thrive, nor is it inclusive of non-organizational activities. Urban Institute’s CVC report, The Vitality Index™ (VI) from Creative Cities International and the Arts Vibrancy Index (AVI) by SMU Data Arts show similar methodology to the AEP5 report.

While SMU DataArts incorporates independent artists in their data, the AVI excludes arts and cultural groups that do not have 501(c)3 status with the IRS. This is noteworthy because the

process to attain tax-exempt status is time-consuming and requires access to financial and legal resources. Further, the report commented that change within the arts is evolutionary, not revolutionary - but I question if this is because the AVI excludes from their research non-traditional organizations that are more likely to engage in revolutionary work.

The CVC uses a four-tiered system that recognizes yet deprioritizes qualitative studies. An opportunity for the CVC to be more inclusive is to provide equal weighting to studies that emphasize the importance of art in communities (e.g., ethnographies). Additionally, the report uses data that requires a minimum annual budget of \$25,000 from nonprofit arts organizations, a practice that upholds inequities within the arts and excludes smaller community-based cultural groups.

Americans for the Arts' AEP5 uses measurements (e.g., household income, # FTE jobs) that omit or minimize the impact of art in fiscally under-resourced communities. Because of this, cities like Camden, are not deemed as thriving environments for artists. Additionally, because the AEP5 only measures data from nonprofit arts organizations, it excludes independent artists by whom the arts are sustained. Opportunities to improve the report include the removal of indicators that represent inequities within the arts and the inclusion of independent working artists in future reports.

The Vitality Index (VI) places a premium on *good messiness* which is defined as creative tension with a bit of edginess, however it does not concretize this descriptor so it is unclear if or how one can identify this in their own communities. The VI also found that safe streets and sound infrastructure are necessary for *good messiness* to thrive but did not highlight artist and cultural groups that have found creative ways to work around these precursors. An opportunity for this report is to provide a guiding definition of *good messiness* and describe how this can look different city to city.

# Culture Sustaining Arts Economies

My conversations with Terina, Katrina, and Jazlyne revealed a cross-sectored, overlapping of the many ways of being an artist in Camden. Whether through independent practice as an educator or as a parent, these womxn found creative opportunity in situations both meaningful and mundane. What I learned is that their Blackness, mothering, and occupation all provided fodder for artistic expression.

**Katrina - Like so, for a lot of the time that I grew up, I felt like I was kind of in the background, you know, not really necessarily noticed at all. Like, yeah, it was nice art classes. I knew that I made good work, but it wasn't something that ever was kind of like, "Oh! Good work. Maybe we should, you know, lift you up a little bit." Yeah, there was always someone that was like, easier for them to go to...So I wanted to make sure like any portraiture that I did do was kind of bringing people out into the light.**

**Jazlyne - One other good thing about teaching as an artist is that there are a lot of breaks, especially at my school, I teach in a charter school. And so, we get like, fall break, winter break, mid-winter break, spring break, then summer. And so that's been helpful. So yeah, I think that it has its constraints but like you can work around it...And I develop a lot of my own lessons. And so that has also added to my creativity and just really allowed me to kind of connect the work that I do in my studio to what we're doing in the classroom.**

Another benefit of their multi-modal approach to their practice is the way in which they are able to assess, innovate, and create in situations where the resources are not readily accessible. For example, in addition to Camden not having a grocery store for its almost 78,000 residents, there is no art supply store for local artists. This has provided opportunities where artists engage in tool sharing or patronizing non-traditional retail for supplies.

**Asiyah - I don't think there are, but I'm gonna ask. Are there any art supply stores in Camden?**

**Jazlyne - I don't think so. From talking to my students, I don't think so. I know a lot of them just like pick up what they can from the dollar store.**

**Terina - You know, I mean, like, I use this leather hole puncher that I've been using for 25 years, you know what I mean? So many things like, because I went to school for this, I had to acquire all these tools...just to be in school. So, a lot of them have, you know, just stayed with me and I freely share them.**

Terina's willingness to lend the tools of her trade underscores the trust and relationships that exist in the Camden artist community. In fact, I found that the cultural assets that could be embedded in arts economy models focused on presence and place.

## Presence

Using the Cultural Vitality in Communities report for inspiration, this capstone defines presence as the informal (peer) and formal (e.g., galleries, schools, etc.) relationships that validate and support both emerging and professional artists. In communities like Camden with a high degree of social connections but low-financial resources, these relationships provide capital needed for

artists to engage their craft. Tool sharing is one component of this but so are the opportunities to bond and collaborate as well as receive recognition from other artists.

**Katrina - There was a time when there were all of the residencies here and I was working full time going into the office. So, the only time that I could really come in was after work, it was dark. And at the time, one of the guys Shawn [Garrity] would come in and we chat with me like, "Oh, that's great." And like we talked about our process, and it was nice to have that sense of community. Like you're back at art school, essentially. Right? Whereas working from home like or my parents' house, they're always going to tell me my work is good. Oh, cool. Like nothing constructive about it... "Looks great!" ...So, I appreciated that Camden did have the [affordable studio] space and did have artists here with different backgrounds, to give different perspective because you can get so siloed into your own work, but sometimes like an outside perspective really helps.**

**Jazlyne - I always knew I was an artist, because like, I just always believed that you could be whatever you want to be. But as a young black girl growing up, you didn't really see an artist as something that you could be, you don't really learn about the opportunities for artists of color. I had never really learned about artists of color until college...I went to college and I switched my major because of the same thing like, just not knowing. And I switched to journalism, but I wasn't fulfilled. And so, I took an art class just to, I guess, give myself something I was missing - like fill a void. And when I returned to the art building, and I took the art drawing class, my professor was like, um, "Why aren't you an art major?" Again, like... "Why did you switch?" But when he said that something just clicked and I was like, well, he can't believe that, you know. And then, when I was on my way out, I remember seeing this giant poster with all of the different career paths that you can take in the arts. And it was, I think, at that moment where I started considering becoming an art teacher, because I wanted to not only become an art teacher but teach in a Black and brown community.**

For Culture Sustaining Arts Economies (CSAE), this presence can be measured in the following indicators:

- The number and quality of peer relationships the artist has that supports their art practice.
- The number of bonding opportunities that artists have to collaborate with other artists in a variety of disciplines.
- The number and quality of professional development opportunities that artists have engaged.
- The number of opportunities where artists are recognized by their peers as highly skilled and proficient in their craft.
- The number of students who attend higher education as a declared major within the arts.
- The number of students who complete a degree program in the arts.

## **Place**

Place is defined as the physical assets (nonprofit, commercial, public) that provide artists the opportunity to explore, create, perform, and exhibit art. In addition to an excess of abandoned dwellings, Camden has a high number of vacant lots. For artists, these provide free canvases and locations for the installation of public art pieces like murals.

As the only independent art gallery in Camden, there are limited opportunities for artists to show their work at Camden FireWorks. However, Camden artists have engaged local business to provide them with additional exhibiting space in public venues.

**Terina - There're cafes where artists can hang their artwork and have art shows and like all the things. I will say IDEA [Center for Performing Arts] is doing their part. Yeah, you know, IDEA, just had an art show this week. Erik was one of the artists and my friend, Nadeen, was the second artist, and they always having like live performances. Yeah, they're [IDEA] doing a good job and they partner with the cafe right next door.**

Additionally, Camden FireWorks has hosted a number of pop-up shows to provide local artists with opportunities to show their work in a professional gallery for a short-term exhibition.

Both the AVI and CVC reports provide a good starting point for measuring place; however, the following items are areas where those indicators can be expanded:

- The number of venues where art performance and exhibition occurred
- The number of designated art hubs
- The number of open green spaces for art activities
- The number of artist co-work spaces
- The number of murals in public places
- The number of vacant housing units with public art

The following proposed CSAE model incorporates not only quantitative measures relate to arts economies but also qualitative indicators that highlight the cultural assets in the Camden arts community.

ART SUSTAINING INDICATORS		
Metric	Measures	Culture Sustaining Arts Economies
Presence	# Independent artists	x
	# Arts and culture employees/jobs	x
	# Arts and cultural nonprofits	x
	# Arts commercial entities	x
	Arts programming in schools	x
	# Visual and performing arts teachers	x
	# Nonprofit community celebrations	x
	# Quality of peer relationships supporting artist's practice	x
	# Bonding opportunities through collaboration	x
	# and Quality of professional development opportunities	x
	Frequency of artist receiving peer recognition as highly skilled and proficient	x
	# Students attending higher education in the arts	x
	# Students completing a degree program in the arts	x
Place	# Venues for art performance and exhibition	x
	Designated art hubs	x
	# Open green spaces for art activities	x
	# Artist co-work spaces	x
	# Murals in public places	x
	# Vacant housing units with public art	x
	# Dedicated artist housing units	x

Fully implemented, these indicators can be gathered using two methods cultivated from The Vitality Index:

Method 1 - gather publicly reported data such as demographics, real estate trends, costs, and measures typically used in city benchmarking studies

Method 2 – perform surveys and focus groups with artists and community stakeholders in the arts that examine the artists’ habits, how they pursue their craft, where they go, what they do, their concerns, and their aspirations. This method provides more context and centers the cultural life of the artist in arts economy reports.

Next steps for using a Black feminist framework to test and evaluate CSAE include the following recommendations:

1. Gather quantitative data as indicated using Method 1 to compile factors like trends, costs and services as a foundational understanding of the community of research. This information will not be used to compare the community to other similarly situated ones. It is merely a baseline collection of measurable data points.
2. Compile a list of the artists and potential partners in the community of research. This process will be prolonged because researchers will want to ensure the inclusion of artists who are trained in fine arts and probably more well-known as well as artists who may not have formal training or are less prominent in the community. This step will result in a preliminary list of artists and community partners who will assist with the distribution and completion of qualitative surveys.
3. Using the list from step two, contact each of the artists to introduce the researcher and begin forming a relationship of trust. Artists should be engaged using dialogue and preliminary interviews performed to assess the artist’s willingness to participate in a more thorough interview. If possible, request that artists provide additional contacts who would be good resources for future field assessments in the arts. (Take note of artists whose names are frequently positively mentioned as they may need to be prioritized as peer-recognized leaders.) This step will result in a comprehensive list of local and emerging artists who may be contacted for interview and/or survey.
4. Create a preliminary survey to assess qualitative indicators from the Presence and Place metrics. A pre-determination of the survey data collection period must be established with finite dates. Be sure to include question(s) that elicit open-ended responses. Sample survey questions may include:

*How would you relate the quality of your relationships with other artists who support and encourage your practice? (0 = poor, 3 = average, 5 = high)*

*Have you participated in professional development opportunities over the past 12 months?*

*If yes, how in many have you participated? (1 = less than two, 3 = two to four, 5 = more than four)*

*How would you rank the quality of those professional development opportunities? (0 = poor, 3 = average, 5 = high)*

5. Using the expanded artist list from step three, contact peer-recognized artists and those who have agreed to a long-form interview. Before interview, share preliminary survey draft with these artists to obtain feedback and input.
6. Use feedback from step five to finalize survey questions. (Survey questions will initially be electronically distributed to ensure ease of collection.)
7. Partner with peer-recognized artists and community partners to distribute survey to local artists. After pre-determined collection period closes, identify non-respondents and follow up by phone. Continue following up until survey end date.
8. Using the quantitative data, artist survey results and interview narratives, compile this information into a comprehensive study on local arts economy and the artist community. The result of this step is a report that can be referenced in future reporting and assessments. (The initial report will be a baseline study to better understand the arts economy from the artists' perspective, not a predictor or measurement of the community's viability. It is not advised that the report is used to compare the community to other municipalities, but rather as a tool to understand and assess itself.)

## **Now What?**

After engaging the thorough process of gathering benchmarking data, personal narratives, and quantitative surveys, community stakeholders now have a comprehensive study of their local arts economy and the artist community. As mentioned previously, the study is a tool for evaluation that can be used in future self-assessments. Primarily, what this report does is provide artist-first perspectives of the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities present within the community.

For example, by engaging in this capstone I learned that Camden artists are purchasing their supplies in-person at retailers outside of Camden or ordering on-line. This represents the exodus from Camden of dollars spent in the pursuit of art activities, a factor measured by the Americans for the Arts as indirect and induced economic impact. In a May 2022 social media survey performed by Camden FireWorks, 100% of respondents indicated that they would shop with the nonprofit if it opened an art supplies store. This is an example of an artist-identified opportunity that municipal leaders, business owners, and communities could pursue.

Although there is no one result or report card from CSAE that is applicable to all communities, the benefits of knowing one's own backyard cannot be understated. By engaging in the CSAE tool, the result is that communities uncover specific opportunities that would help to sustain artists and the arts on their own terms.

## Closing Thoughts

In the acknowledgement to this research project, I wrote that this capstone is a love letter to Camden and it is. The city that people describe as the most dangerous place in America – a city past the point of no return – is still vibrant.

In my mind's eye, I visualize Camden as a piece of discarded wood, tossed aside amidst the fertile place (Philadelphia) just beyond the Delaware River. On the surface, it looks dead but turn over the wood and there is an environment teeming with life. This is how artists are working – “intentionally demonstrating their resilience as they evolve and maintain practices that ensure their survival.”<sup>43</sup>

Camden is a place of great potential and I am honored to be in this city, however small the role I play. I'd like to close with this final, parting thought from Terina who shared:

**What I love about Camden is that I haven't found any place else like it. We're building it from the ground up - we can do whatever we want.**<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Brown, Adrienne M. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> With permission from Terina Hill, the quote was edited for clarity.

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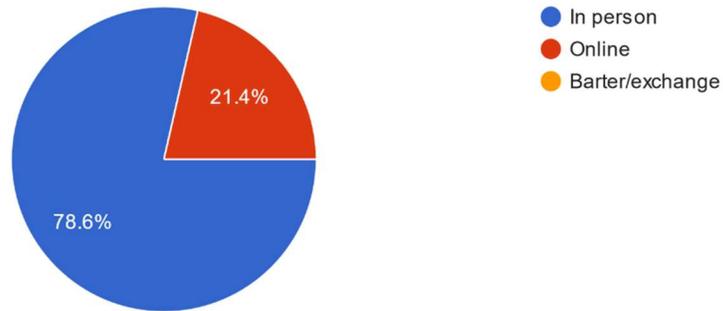
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# Appendices

# Art + Retail Survey Results

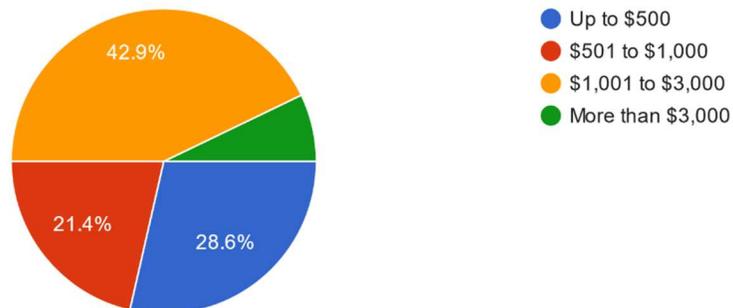
What is the primary way you obtain your art supplies?

14 responses



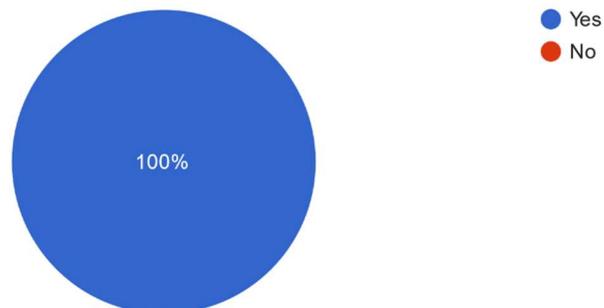
How much do you estimate you spend on art supplies annually?

14 responses



If Camden FireWorks opened a retail art supply store, would you be interested in shopping with us?

14 responses



# Neighborhood Map of Camden

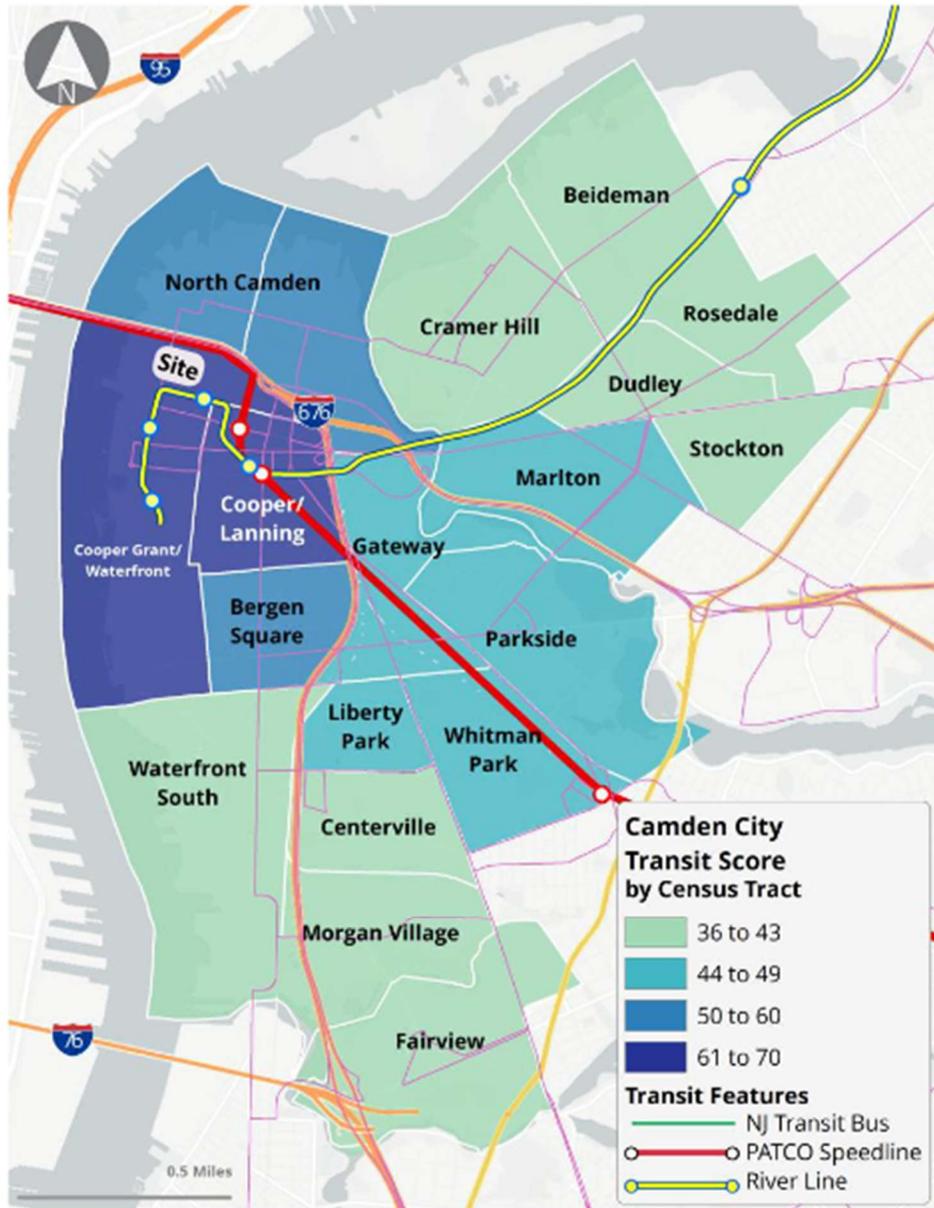


Figure 1. Waterfront South, a large southern district bordering the Delaware River, represents a river people cut off from its most precious resource. According to Walkscore, the neighborhood is Camden's most walkable neighborhood.

Source: ESI Consult Market Study

## Camden FireWorks Photos

### Events



*Figure 2. Artist Cesar Viveros presents his art to celebrate Meso-American traditions at Camden FireWorks – April 2021.*

*Source: Asiyah Kurtz*

## Exhibitions



*Figure 3. Artist Renata Merrill and husband, Tim, celebrate her first solo quilt exhibition, New Beginnings - January 2022.*

*Source: Asiyah Kurtz*

## Workshops



*Figure 4. Patron, Loan Nguyen, shows off her handmade breadbasket created at Camden FireWorks community workshop - April 2022.*

*Source: Asiyah Kurtz*

## Historical

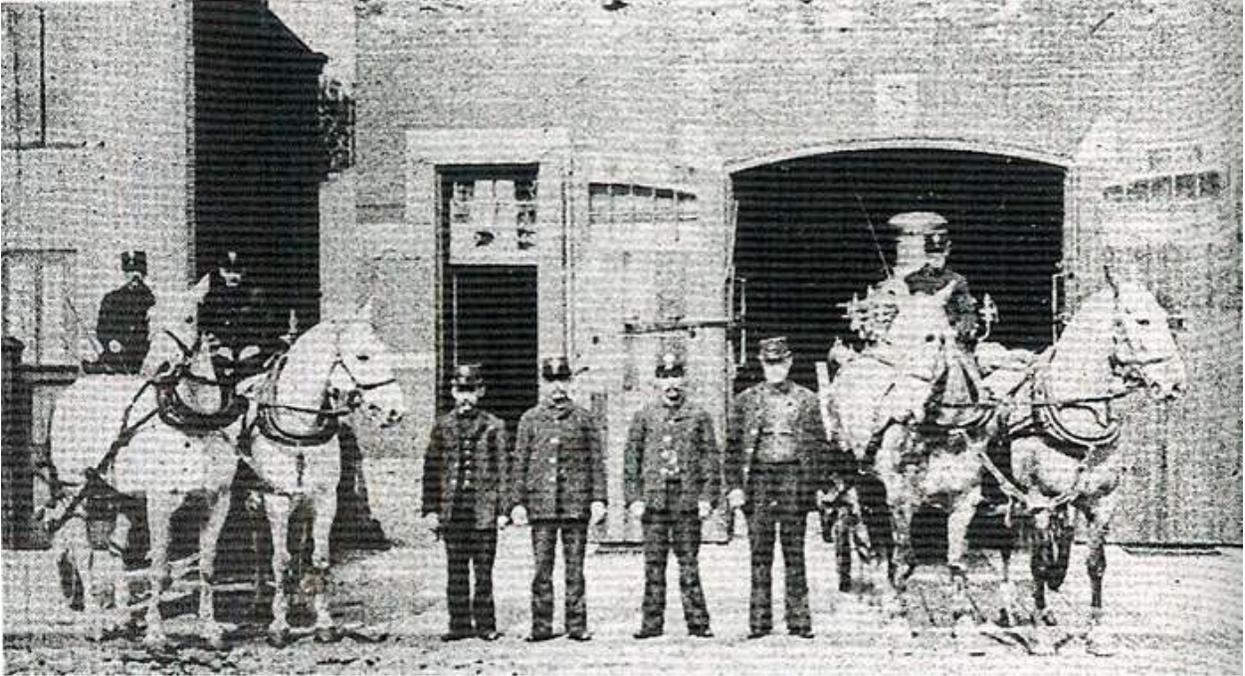


Figure 5. Firefighters from Camden's Engine No. 3 pose in front of the firehouse where Camden FireWorks is currently housed.

*Year and source unknown.*

## Renovation



Figure 6. A contractor works to renovate the old firehouse to make space for Camden FireWorks.

*Source unknown.*

# Terina Hill interview transcript

Mon, 4/4 4:20PM • 51:50

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

art, artist, camden, people, feel, teaching, gifted, space, students, fashion, happening, school, haddon, kids, museum, thinking, talented, studio, money, dropped

## SPEAKERS

Terina Hill, Asiyah Kurtz

**Terina Hill** 00:00

Are you in school?

**Asiyah Kurtz** 00:01

Yes. So I'm finishing my master's and I took a little bit extra time because I wanted to make sure for the work I'm doing here that I wasn't rushing, that I wasn't making some proclamation based off of four months of work here. Like, I wanted to be really inclusive and intentional about saying what I think that the arts are, what the potential is for the arts in Camden. So that I just took a little extra time - I would have been done by now, but I just decided to wait.

**Terina Hill** 00:37

Gotcha. So what do you mean? I mean, what is your major? I love it.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 00:40

It's cultural sustainability. Yeah, so it's kind of like anthropology or community development. So really, thinking about from a lot of what happens with developments is external people coming in and saying, "This is what you need." They drop it on you and they leave and then communities like, "What the hell?" I'm turning around and saying this is what the community says (the arts community says) that they need to thrive and then I want to use this to continue to have conversations with the Arts Council, with Camden City government with like, all the people who have a say in funding. I'm going to use that power to say this is how you need to shift. So that's, that's what I'm Asiyah Kurtz and I'm here interviewing Terina Nicole Hill. This is...what's today's date?

**Terina Hill** 01:42

It's the 3rd of April? Fourth! Already...

**Asiyah Kurtz** 01:45

Oh my gosh, April the 4th 2022. And Terina if you could just give us a little background about yourself.

**Terina Hill 01:52**

Sure. My name is Terina Nicole Hill. I am an artist here at CamdenFireWorks. I am also an arts educator. I teach K - not K - first grade through eighth grade at Sacred Heart School here in Camden. I am the art teacher there. I'm also a professor of fashion design, specifically accessory design. Over at Drexel University. I've been a teaching artists since 2008. Yeah, since 2008. I've been a teaching artist - never thought that was my thing. Even when I was in school people will always come to me and say, "It's easier when you explain things. I don't understand what the teachers talking about. What you say, it makes perfectly good sense. Like you need to teach." So I tutored very early. I didn't know teaching was my thing. But my mom's also a professor. She's actually a Director of Nursing at a hospital in Virginia. And so she's been a professor of nursing for at least a decade, maybe 15 years, you know, so I just think that teaching may not have been my thing, but it's really important to me that the things that I have had the privilege of learning - because I've spent half my life in college - you know, I have three degrees in art and design. I know that that's a privilege that a lot of people don't have, and I don't want to die with it all in my brain. You know, I want to share as much as humanly possible especially because even before I became like a teacher at school I was doing design workshops at libraries, summer camps, museums after school programming, and kids can't use scissors. Hmm, they don't have the dexterity and I'm talking about high school kids

**Asiyah Kurtz 01:56**

Are you serious?

**Terina Hill 02:34**

Yeah, because art has been taken out of school. So let's like where would they have learned? It just boggles my mind because there's never really an opportunity at home to use scissors much unless you're doing arts and crafts. So you would have to have a creative parent. You know, so you take arts high school kids can't use scissors, you know, and then when you take Home Ec out of school, they can't do basic things like sew on a button when it comes off. So they throw brand new coats or coats that are in good condition in the trash, which is killing the environment - first of all, right? And then you know to think of you know, all the money that's being wasted. So, for me, it was more about getting these basic life skills out into the world and then it became about...okay, some students though, are really gifted, you know. I mean, but with no one at home telling them that you know, you can go to school become an artist, you can go to school, become a shoe designer, a fashion designer, a millinery you know, a car designer, you can, you can do these things, because how would the parents know if they don't work in a creative fields? You know, I mean, you know, and so for me it's about helping those kids find the roadmap to their career opportunities.

**Asiyah Kurtz 03:06**

So how did you get there? Like,

**Terina Hill 05:33**

Oh, I got lucky. I got I got lucky.

**Asiyah Kurtz 05:35**

Tell me about that.

**Terina Hill 05:36**

So my mom was always college educated but she dropped out of college. She's used to go to Farleigh Dickinson, which is in Teaneck, New Jersey, and she dropped out of college to have me. Yes, um, but she you know, she never saw herself as a college dropout. She always saw it as a temporary situation. You know, she was gonna go back to school, finish her degree, blah, blah, blah. Despite you know, it, she took maybe 15 years off because she had to raise me and my... Yeah, yeah, exactly. Well, technically, she took 12 years off because at 12 - She went back to school when I was 12. Okay, yeah, and so, um, but because she was educated and because she was creative, and because she could sew from the time I was little, I would go to the Newark Public Library for their arts programming. I would go to the north museum for their arts programming, and they had an amazing summer camp for young artists and things like that. So anytime it was a rainy day, she would pull out the finger paints and we would make collages, so she always encouraged creativity. I didn't know that this wasn't happening in everybody's house, you know what I mean? So by the time I got to sixth grade, I was told that there was a program for gifted and talented students, and sixth grade you're chosen because our school only went up to sixth grade. And we had a junior high school, but there were some schools in town that went up to eighth grade. And so there was one school on the other side of Irvington that went up to eighth grade, and they had a Gifted and Talented program. And so every sixth grade art teacher at Grove Street will pick students that showed promise. And when they would start junior high school, they would go to the Gifted and Talented program across town. And so I was one of those students that was chosen until he named my name. I had no idea that I was gifted or talented.

**Asiyah Kurtz 07:47**

Really?

**Terina Hill 07:48**

I had no idea. You could have knocked me over with a feather. No one ever said, Hey, you're good at art. I mean, my dad kind of did, but he was always comparing me my siblings. I'm the only girl and I have two younger brothers. You know? So he compared us with everything who could box the best, who could run the fastest who could draw the best? (laughter) I never knew I was particularly gifted at anything. It was just like, oh, you beat your brother in drawing today. So you know, but other than that, no one ever gave me any indication that I was gifted or talented. What I didn't know about myself was that I was smart. I was a straight A student, and I was all our schools were they put the smart you know, they put you in categories by your - I don't know - I guess how gifts... not gifted, but

**Asiyah Kurtz 08:42**

Your grades?

**Terina Hill 08:43**

Yeah. I guess not just grades because I feel like they were kids that were in like intermediate that got good grades, but they could never be with the sharper students. Because if they were...because they did that a few times, took like students that were like, you know, mixed in with the average students. And because they were well behaved, they move them up to like the top students, and then they fell behind because they really were just good kids, you know, but not necessarily really sharp.

**Asiyah Kurtz 09:18**

The rigor...

**Terina Hill 09:18**

Yeah, so I was always in what we call a top class. Okay, you know, so anyway, um, because I was chosen to be in the Gifted and Talented program. It changed the trajectory of my entire life. I thought up until that point. Oh, I guess I'll be a doctor. You know, I was only in sixth grade. But that's the only thing I was thinking about when it came to a career choice, you know, and the second I found out I was gifted and talented. I wanted to be a fashion designer. And I just never had a plan B hmm, yeah,

**Asiyah Kurtz 09:55**

That's so interesting. You know, and I'm thinking about like FireWorks is gonna do in the fall the collage quilting with students and I was speaking with the principal we're going to be doing it at Veterans Family School.

**Terina Hill 10:12**

Yeah, and I have a friend that teaches there.

**Asiyah Kurtz 10:14**

Yeah, I was talking with the principal and telling her about the program, what we're trying to accomplish and really just having kids in the schools be able to articulate what's happening, but also express creatively using collage quilting. And she started to cry.

**Terina Hill 10:36**

Oh!

**Asiyah Kurtz 10:37**

Because she said that her kids don't normally get those opportunities. Yeah. And I was like, That is a shame that that just really touched my heart and really, let me know that we're on the right track in trying to reach kids in the public schools. We could have done it with any number of groups.

**Terina Hill 10:56**

Yep.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 10:57

But I didn't really want to like duplicate. I wanted to do something new and different. So when you're thinking about what young artists in Camden need, it sounds like affirmation is one, but what else would you put to that?

**Terina Hill** 11:16

Everything like okay, for instance, this past weekend, you know, the artist Bisa Butler?

**Asiyah Kurtz** 11:22

Yes, yes.

**Terina Hill** 11:23

So she's from the Newark area. And she had a...I guess it was more a dinner. You paid \$100 for a ticket. The theme was fairy tale. So you came dressed to the nines, right? At the museum for this dinner, and everyone got to meet her. She did an artist talk and everyone got a print of one of her quilts signed by her.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 12:00

Okay.

**Terina Hill** 12:01

Things like that don't happen, you know, you don't have it here. And so I think that that's that's - it is not the size of the town - because I think of a town like Montclair you know, I mean, it's smaller.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 12:19

Yeah.

**Terina Hill** 12:19

But still, everything happens in Montclair, you know, so much happens in Montclair. And so it's just the fact that Camden has just been overlooked for so long that, besides FireWorks, or maybe The Stedman Gallery, where would we even have an event like that? We don't even have the venue.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 12:21

No, we don't.

**Terina Hill** 12:22

You know, so that's what I mean. Like we need everything we need venues. We need a museum - they keep keep talking about this museum for Martin Luther King because he spent some time in Camden. Apparently, they've been talking about that since I moved here. Like they were

talking about making a house that he stayed in (a house in this neighborhood, apparently, a few months) and they want to turn the house into a museum for him. When? Yeah, like when we have a museum across the street, the Maritime Museum. I don't even know if it's open to the public.

**Asiyah Kurtz 13:25**

I don't know. I've always seems like it's closed.

**Terina Hill 13:29**

It always looks abandoned. Yeah, you know, so I just feel like what do we have to even get inspiration? You know what I mean? I feel like we have to start at the point of inspiration where kids have a place where they can go and view things and get ideas get inspired. Pull out their sketchbooks you know, I mean, like we have to start from the very basic, maybe some, some walks in the woods where we could stop off and pull out our sketchbook and use some charcoal and use color pencil. Like we have the first have the inspiration, then we need venues where artists can come and talk and give back and you know, and engage with the public. We need places for showing work besides just FireWorks...

**Asiyah Kurtz 14:15**

I completely agree.

**Terina Hill 14:17**

Like we need all of it. I mean, I when I think about what I had growing up I had the museum and the after-school programming and the summer art camps. Yeah, we don't have a summer art camp program here. You know, I mean, um, we - what else did I have? - I had even the magnet program. So where are the gifted and talented kids in Camden going? We don't a magnet program. You know what I mean? Like there gifted and talented and ain't nobody doing anything about it. And being that I'm teaching now I see I'm like it. Whoa, some of these kids are just out of this world. And they didn't even know it. Like I'm introducing like programs like digital art programs. Yeah, some of them had never touched any type of digital art programming at all. And yet, they are experts. They are so good. They just are gifted and talented. But who's encouraging it, you know?

**Asiyah Kurtz 15:20**

You know, I have reached out to some of the a few of the schools just to say, you know, we're here. Where are your students who are gifted and talented in the arts? And none of them, none of them responded. And I'm talking multiple inquiries by phone by email and I'm like...there has to be!

**Terina Hill 15:45**

When I first came here, I was on the same tip when it came to. I just want to go into the schools and talk to kids about careers in art and design. And I'm not looking for a speaking engagement. You don't have to pay me like I had t he time on my hands. Yeah, no, response. But I feel like at

the very minimum we could get started with Sacred Heart. Yeah, you know the teacher. I mean, the principal there is always looking for opportunities for their students. Always, as a matter of fact, everything that I suggest she's like, Yes!

**Asiyah Kurtz 16:17**

Really? Yeah. Well, that's encouraging.

**Terina Hill 16:19**

The only problem we've had thus far is Miranda [Powell] invited us to a play that's happening at the Blackwood campus and we don't have a school bus. And so she's been calling on bus companies and no one has the capacity.

**Asiyah Kurtz 16:35**

Um, I'm using the school bus for Eric's [Montgomery] nighttime photography. Holman? I think is Holman: h-o-l-m-a-n. And it's basically the entire school bus. We only needed like a small shuttle, but it was cheaper to reach out to them and they're like, yeah, we'll put you down.

**Terina Hill 17:00**

Really?

**Asiyah Kurtz 17:00**

Yes. So check with them.

**Terina Hill 17:04**

You have a phone number?

**Asiyah Kurtz 17:05**

I'll find it. I'll find it and send it to you. But I think I reached out to Rutgers to see if they had a shuttle that we could use. And they said, "No, we can't even use a shuttle. They're all scheduled in New Brunswick." So, but she said check with here [Holman] and that's what I did. So I'll get you...I'll get you the number.

**Terina Hill 17:27**

That would be amazing. So yeah, they're having - What's it? Jack in the Beanstalk. Yeah, and so she's like, Yeah, take the second and third grade. No problem. Yeah, I've been looking for three weeks for bus, seriously.

**Asiyah Kurtz 17:43**

Well, I'll get you that information because I checked with them. And they were

**Terina Hill 17:47**

like, sure. Wow. Amazing. So

**Asiyah Kurtz 17:51**

You talked about what kids need. What do you as an artist [need]? Like how do you acquire the things that you have? Are you just going on the internet and ordering it or are there places in Camden that..

**Terina Hill 18:06**

No! That's another thing! We don't even have art supply stores! We literally have nothing.

**Asiyah Kurtz 18:15**

So this whole ecosystem that supports the arts, we don't even have retail establishments that artists can go to and... No, it's not.

**Terina Hill 18:23**

Get brushes and paint, right - nothing. We don't have a thing here in Camden. Like when I when I just deal with that reality just sits in your spirit and it's just like it's not fair. Yeah. Basic, um, but so many things I've had forever. You know, I mean, like, like I use this leather hole puncher that I've been using for 25 years you know me so so many things like because I would school for this I had to acquire all these tools. Yeah, to start, you know, just to be in school. So a lot of them have, you know, just stayed with me and I freely share them. And you know, everything else I get from different suppliers. If I'm in New York City. Yeah, I'll pick up things while I'm there or directly from their website when I'm not there. That type of thing and then of course, everything can be found online.

**Asiyah Kurtz 19:23**

So yeah, I was thinking about that like because if you look at some of the places where art seems to thrive, there's not only the venues. There's the retail establishments. There's supporting industry for the art.

**Terina Hill 19:36**

There's cafes where artists can hang their artwork and have art shows and like all the things. I will say IDEA [Center for Performing Arts] is doing their part. Yeah, you know, IDEA, They just had an art show this week. Erik was one of the artists and my friend, Nadeen, was the second artist, and they always having like live performances. Yeah. Yeah, they're doing a good job and they partner with the cafe right next door.

**Asiyah Kurtz 19:44**

Is that Nuanced?

**Terina Hill 20:02**

Yeah. Yeah. My friend Rosemary owns nuance and so I - but that's downtown. So you expect more downtown? You know? Yeah. Um, but I just feel like there's no reason why there's not. I mean, Newar has an art supply store that was there before I was born. Like, it's been there forever. There's a fabric store on the same street, both of them are on Halsey street. That fabric

store's been there since the 60s - never closed. You know, I mean, so I just feel like I'm sure these things existed at one point. Matter of fact, were I was on Haddon Avenue, before I came here, was a fabric store for four decades. They closed down in the 90s. Yeah. And so I just feel like when you close these things down, and I understand communities change, you know, but when you leave nothing for people, then you kill a lot of dreams.

**Asiyah Kurtz 20:59**

Yeah, you do. You do. So whatever happened with the place where you were because I think - What's his name?

**Terina Hill 21:07**

Samir.

**Asiyah Kurtz 21:08**

Samir is planning to move across the street.

**Terina Hill 21:11**

Yeah.

**Asiyah Kurtz 21:11**

So, is it that that didn't come to fruition?

**Terina Hill 21:16**

Well, the thing - so the people who own it, which is PBCIP, okay, you know so they have - what they do basically is buy abandoned homes in Parkside, renovate them and sell them to the people in the community who may not have qualified for traditional mortgage you know. And so once they got this big amount of funding, they decided that they were going to take on Haddon Avenue and the commercial spaces and the very first building was the building that I was in. And som commercial was not ever their specialty. They've been doing residential for so long. Yeah, commercial has so many different rules like they have we have a certain amount of parking spaces. Yeah. And all these different, you know, rules, and so they really weren't prepared for that, but they did get it open. I was there. I was happy there for a little while. Samir had a space that was supposed to be a dance studio. And you know, they needed mirrors on the wall for that never came to fruition because he felt like he shouldn't have to pay for the mirrors. They felt like they shouldn't have to pay for the mirrors. They just kept in this tug of war for so long. Yeah. And in the meantime, I'm the only one in the building and we had maybe, I don't know, at least 10 different spaces, and I'm the only one in the building. So it just got tiring. And then they promised me because I had the storefront window, which was fantastic. They promised me there was not going to be a gate. You know. So this way people can drive by all times a night and say, Yeah, my space, but they put the gate of any course you know, and I'm like, this was not what you promised. And so it was like the gate was down more than the gate was up. And so people would just always drive by they never put up signage on the building. Yeah, that you know, they were just never - it just looked - when when I wasn't in the building with the gate up it just

looked like an abandoned building. Yeah, yes. So um, and I did a lot of advertising. I spent so much money advertising and all the suburbs around here. Collinswood, Merchantville and all the surrounding towns and I would see - because you know, I'm inside and I have this glass window and I was see - them pull up looking inside, looking at the area and just keep going.

**Asiyah Kurtz 23:56**

Yeah, yeah.

**Terina Hill 23:59**

But they got the flyers!

**Asiyah Kurtz 24:00**

There was one workshop that we were having and it was like really trashy outside like literal. I guess we had a storm and the trash was just everywhere. And she's like, "Can I share something with you?" I say yes. She's like, "You just do such good work but when I look outside, it doesn't..."

**Terina Hill 24:22**

It turns people off!

**Asiyah Kurtz 24:23**

And I'm like, I appreciate you sharing that - she didn't have to share that - and I appreciate that she did. But I recognize that visually that's not appealing. So I've done what I can to raise that to the other business owners and also to the city council.

**Terina Hill 24:29**

Right. But people are so accustomed, you know, there's no trash bins.

**Asiyah Kurtz 24:46**

Right so I walk from the the corner store and just dropit.

**Terina Hill 24:51**

Downtown there are large trash cans on every corner. Why can't that just be consistent throughout the city? It doesn't make any sense.

**Asiyah Kurtz 25:02**

Yeah. So but thinking about like, venues, there's a church across the street. And I think about how many times I have to turn people away because we just don't, we're small. We don't have enough space to show everybody's work or to do everybody's event. But the church across the street...

**Terina Hill 25:24**

Are they operating?

**Asiyah Kurtz 25:25**

They are but it's only one day a week and like the rest of the time...so I think there's an opportunity to reach out and be like, Can you rent space to us?

**Terina Hill 25:36**

Well what about the space next door?

**Asiyah Kurtz 25:39**

So I have checked with Heart of Camden multiple times and told them we want the space. Carlos [Morales] is willing, I don't think his board is so that's just a long term. Okay, we'll just keep working on them because yeah, really that would be ideal. I've been it's it's something that they know that we're interested..

**Terina Hill 26:05**

What are they doing with the space? Are people living upstairs?

**Asiyah Kurtz 26:09**

No, it's empty. It's gutted, upstairs is ready. It would be really great artists space. It really would but they just want to hold on so... But as a mother though, trying to balance the jobs, the childcare of course, the artistry, like how how do you find that sweet spot to get it all done?

**Terina Hill 26:09**

No, I live by Google Calendar. I think that I'm lucky in a sense, like I compare myself to my husband a lot because he is if he wakes up today and it's a workday then it's a workday and he happens to get sick or work is canceled or whatever. He's still in work mode. He's not going to switch and say, "Okay, let's go to you know, Great Adventures. We'll have fun!" because he woke up in work mode. Whereas me, I'm very fluid and flexible.

**Asiyah Kurtz 27:14**

Yeah.

**Terina Hill 27:15**

Why was that was it a pandemic or? So it doesn't matter to me if I'm in my studio, or I'm teaching a workshop or I'm cooking dinner. I'm always I'm always just ebbing and flowing you know, but to manage it all because I don't leave anything to my memory. If it ain't in my calendar, I ain't gon' be there! Right my calendar rules my world, so I just organize it all on my calendar and I just go with my calendar tells me to be. But I mean I for a long time I was feeling like I am neglecting my work as an artist. I was making my living and in 2021 I didn't put out any art. No collections. No, - you know I did some custom work for people - but I didn't take the time to design new work. And um, and so that really took its toll on me. But I was making a living kind of like adjacent to it. You know, I was making a living, teaching, you know, having the Fashion Design Center of South Jersey where people were coming in learning from me so I

still felt creative in a sense. So it didn't really dawn on me until the year was coming to an end and I'm like, yo, you haven't put out a new collection now but... Well so much happened in those two years. Okay, I separated from my husband, you know what I mean. So I had to move out, get my own new place and so that just put me in grind mode, you know, because now on my own taking care of these two kids, so making money as an entrepreneur falls into like three categories for me: I'm a realtor. So that means I'm out showing properties and I'm hosting open houses and I'm doing all that stuff, filling out paperwork up to eyeballs. You know so much paperwork in real estate is ridiculous. I'm teaching is another way that I make my living so either people were coming to me, and I was teaching in my space on Haddon Avenue, or I was going out to all the places that I'm affiliated with like the Burlington County Library System, the Newark Library System and teaching workshops out into the world. Perkins [Center for the Arts] I teach at Perkins, you know, and now I have my vending machines. Yeah, I love the Dope Art Mini Mart, you know, but that didn't start to November, you know, that started at the end of the year. Um, and custom work, you know, I never really stopped doing custom work. It's just you know, doing one piece for someone is nice, you know, making a whole collection and, and having it sell wholesale. Yeah, that's really what I like to do. So I was still selling wholesale, but I was selling old collection, okay to store so they were just reordering things from two or three years ago, you know, I mean, and so that was cool. And that just kind of kept me going financially but I'm like, uh uh, I'm still an artist, baby. I need to you know, so I put a lot of energy into designing the collection I just dropped on Friday. Okay. And it's been successful so far, so many orders, and I'm excited about that. Um, so yeah, I think for me, it's kind of like you just work work, work, work work and then you look up and you see what part of your life has been neglected. You know, I remember in 2020 I was work work work work working more as an artist and stay at home mom because Camden was still very young. And I looked up and I'm like, I haven't had a Girls Night in two years. Like I haven't spent any time with any friends. So now I'm going to focus on reconnecting with all my my friends and pouring myself into my relationships because I value them you know, so I think for me, something always gets neglected. But then I look up and I noticed that it's neglected and been I pour my energy back. And yeah,

**Asiyah Kurtz 31:40**

So I was looking at some reports that talk about arts economy, not just you know, from Americans for the Arts, that's one but other ones that are national, maybe some more well known and some not. But one thing that they that Americans for the Arts measures, as kind of an indicator of if a community is has a good art scene is full time jobs in the arts and household income. And what else was it - it was another... I think it was government revenues. And so when I look at them, I'm thinking okay, that's easy information to get, but do individual artists consider art as a full time job? Like,

**Terina Hill 32:33**

I think I do. Um, I do consider myself a full time artist, but I also consider myself a teaching artist. Like I belong to like three different teaching art guilds so you know. I like that I can supplement because, you know, the thing about art is you have to feel inspired, ya know, like I was saying, like, I haven't been on vacation. Since last June. I'm exhausted so that dampens my

creativity, you know, not seeing new things go to the same places every day and seeing the same environment every day. You know, have to go through magazines or take a museum tour. Just to like, reignite some new - have new sparks happen in my brain, you know. I mean, to create something different, you know, and so that's really important for artists, you know, we can't just keep doing the same things day in and day out because it dampens our creativity. So, um, I think that being a full time artist means that if I was not teaching, could I sustain my household income with just my art? Yes. Okay. I mean, yeah, so because of that, I consider myself a full time artist. Because I could do that full time. I don't have to teach. I like teaching. You know what I mean, and not only do I like teaching, what I lacked as being a full time artist is stability. You know, I mean, like, there would be big chunks of money. That come my way. Yeah, you know, and it's like, I have to ride out this big chunk for a while. And then it's like feast and famine. You know what I mean so yeah, if you go through the year, did I make the same amount of money? Yes, but it may have been like 40k here that I rolled out for a few months, then no money for like, you know, a month and then another 10 of 15 G's and then nothing. So it was like feast and famine, feast and famine. So for the year and yeah, may have made the same money. Yeah, no real stable income that I could just be like, you know, I don't have to think about where the next chunk of income is coming in. Whereas having a teaching gig, I know, every two weeks that paycheck is going to be directly deposited. So it gives me a lot more freedom in my art. I don't have to make art for sale. Yeah, like art because it inspires me, right excites me. And for me, that makes it more sellable. Because now I'm doing something that my customer base is not going to compare to another artist and like well, I could just get the same thing from this girl makes handbags because they all look the same to me. Because you know, I'm just doing what's trendy so I make sales. Yeah, I mean, yeah, so yeah, having a teaching gig gives me the freedom to really like put my foot in my art. And I like right now the bags of my collection. I have a tote bag in my collection and that's a \$350 tote bag. Normally I try to stay under like 250 Yeah, so my bags and it's selling just fine. You know, I mean, because it's really original, you know? So what gave me the freedom to create something so original is the fact that I have a teaching gig so I know that you know the pays. Yeah, really just do what I want to do with my art.

**Asiyah Kurtz 36:17**

Interesting. So having kind of a nine to five so to speak, gives you more freedom in your art and how you express it. That's interesting...

**Terina Hill 36:30**

But the trick is the 9-to-5 can't be a 9-to-5. See with here, it's like 11:00 to 2:30 I dropped my kids off. Camden goes to the same school right? So he gets dropped off at 7:45. Jordan gets dropped off at 8:00, you know, so I come straight here [FireWorks]. So I get two and a half hours every morning of solitude in my studio. If it was 9:00 to 5:00, I wouldn't have...after I drop off at 8:00. I gotta get ready to go back there. Okay, so the trick is that it has to start. It has the hours have to make sense to it. Couldn't can't just be a paycheck because in that case, it will take the place of my job as an artist. Okay, it has to still be part time. You know, I'm the only art teacher there but still it works in a way that I can be there from 10:30 to 2:30 and in some days, on Thursdays I only teach one class (6th grade), you know, yeah. So because of that, I wouldn't

have to be there until 12:00 from 12:30 to 2:30. So I get to be here for 4 hours. You know, I mean, so it has to still allow the time flexibility. Yeah, so for me, it's like if you can give me a steady check, and I still have my time in my studio.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 37:53

That's a good arrangement. Yeah, so is the Fashion Design Center done?

**Terina Hill** 37:58

It's done. Okay. Yeah, it's done because what I was finding is I would hire these amazing fashion designer, textile designers, metalsmith artisans, always people who work in the fashion sector to come in and sometimes I'll have two students other times I'll have 20 students like there was never any way to know what the popularity of a class would be. In the meantime, I got to pay them. Yeah, they showed up. Yeah, I just found that um, it's not profitable. Because we don't have enough creativity to sustain a business like mine. Like, you know, someplace like downtown New York, it would have been like, I would have to turn people away every week. You know, I mean, because there's just so much creativity, and there's a life there's a lot of fashion scene, you know, right in the PSE and G has like this waterfall in downtown Newark. Not a runway, but like a walkway, you know, um, and they turn that into a big fashion show every year, you know, under the stars. It's like it's just phenomenal. Things like that, where we have a fashion show in the middle of the street.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 39:24

Yeah. Hmm. So I know we talked a lot about what we don't have, which, I mean, that's the reality. Right, right. But if there were like, I don't know, three to five things that you could immediately do that will help build this ecosystem that's needed. What would those three to five things be?

**Terina Hill** 39:47

Well, what we do have is no barriers. You know, so in a city like New York City, or even Newark because there's so many people who are known for certain things. I kind of feel like if I wanted to have a fashion show in downtown New York, then I'm gonna have to collaborate with the people who already have fashion shows. I'm gonna have to work within the system that's already there. You know, I mean, where as here, there's nothing. So a couple years ago, before the pandemic, I hosted, what I'm going to be doing here on the 30th, I hosted the independent designer showcase. I did a call for all the fashion design professionals in South Jersey because I have been here I've been here now for seven years. So at the time I've been here for maybe, I don't know four years. And in four years, I had not met one other fashion designer, not one. And so I'm like in Camden that sounds like impossible. So I did like an artist call and um, I think there were maybe six designers that that participated. Okay, two directly in Camden. And the rest were in South Jersey. Okay. And so we put up the chairs and we had a runway show downstairs in the gallery, you know, and then immediately in the second gallery space, the artisans were set up with tables and stuff, and so you could buy what you just saw on the runway, so it was a fashion show/pop up shop. And so for the first time, it was like, okay, there is a fashion seen

here, but I mean, everyone was like they had never seen anything like it before here in Camden. Never besides whatever fashion shows they have at Rutgers. No one else has seen professional designers and, um, and since then, there hasn't been another showcase of the fashion scene. So I feel like what I'm doing is now that we're coming out of this pandemic, that's going to be an annual thing. Yeah. You know, so I feel like someone has to get that started, you know, the fashion scene here needs a place or annual annual gathering, you know, and and showcase of its talent. Um, so I love that and it was so weird for me, I'm like, Oh, I could just like put this together, hire some models hire a photographer and it's like, oh,

**Asiyah Kurtz 42:38**

I don't know because in my head, I would love to see a festival where we shut down this part of Broadway. Just the block. But we shut it down and we just take over with an art scene. And that would be like, why couldn't the city do it?

**Terina Hill 43:05**

I used to drive up from Willingboro up to Jersey City on Fridays, and right outside of the Journal Square Station. They will have all of these. They will have all of these tents. And each artist would get a tent and people will come off the train station off the subway and um, and shop. You know, the PATH station in Journal Square, okay, so people would just come and they would shop and they did this every Friday from like, I don't know, 4:00 in the afternoon to maybe like 9:00 at night and we all have lights and stuff like that. And not, Haddonfield but Collinswood, you know they have the white tents and they have an arts market and you know. They do it in May. They do one in August. Haddonfield does one in September. But you know even Collinswood they have the - what you call it the fruits and vegetable - oh the farmers market and they let at least one artist set up there. And then on Thursdays the first Thursday of every month. Any artists for free as long as they register in advance can just set up any space they want on Haddon Avenue in front of a restaurant in front of a gallery and just set up the table and collect orders. You know, I mean, I'm just like we...

**Asiyah Kurtz 44:40**

I would love for us to be able to do that because I had that idea like late last fall. I was like, we need to shut down traffic. And we need to have arts be like the scene.

**Terina Hill 44:54**

Yes, people will have the easels out and you know, sometimes they'll be performing artists and I just don't understand like, what are we waiting for? We don't need you know, we just have to do these things. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I heard that. Well, I got a flyer from Shaneka [Councilwomxn Boucher], do you know Shaneka? She sent me a flyer that the Melanin Market is now going to be here on Broadway.

**Asiyah Kurtz 45:21**

Oh, really?

**Terina Hill 45:22**

She sent it to me yesterday. Let me see...So here it is. It's gonna be indoor and outdoor. Oh okay, that's going to be at Heart of Camden. Oh, okay. So that's something. Yeah. It's gonna be indoor and outdoor. That's great. Yeah. And that's from 9:00 to 2:00 every Saturday starting the 2nd [of April]. So it's started already.

**Asiyah Kurtz 46:24**

Okay, I had no idea. Hmm. So that's good. I feel like South Camden is getting some visibility. And I don't want to take all the credit for it. However, I feel like there's a lot of visibility and a lot of opportunity coming. I just feel a little bit constrained because we don't have enough space.

**Terina Hill 46:50**

Yeah but we do have some space. I remember when I went to my friend Stephanie Threet. She's a ceramic artist. She's one of my very close friends. And so she was before she got her own studio. She was doing studio work and a space kind of like Hope's [Mead]. It's called the Black Clay studio or something like that. It's in Camden, and they had outdoor space same size, outdoor space and a few times during the summer, maybe it was maybe every first Saturday or something I don't remember. But all the studio artists would bring this stuff outside set up a table, turn on the radio, open the gate and the public would come in and we would buy ceramic. One person though, had vintage clothing so we buy vintage stuff. It was like a flea market. Yeah, all these stuff was like super discounted. They were speedy. I still have like really beautiful gemstones that I bought. You feel me? So I feel like we could do stuff like that. You know, I mean, just one Saturday. When the weather's warm.

**Asiyah Kurtz 48:06**

My only thing is like getting the artists here to do it. Like, I know you would and I'm pretty sure that Hope would. I don't know like if everybody else would.

**Terina Hill 48:24**

But I feel like even if that's the case, what we could do is invite artists that we are affiliated with, that don't necessarily and maybe it'll be free for us. And those who don't have space here - \$20. Yeah, you don't mean so that we fill out all the spaces. And guess what? All those people that aren't affiliated will bring the audiences, you know what I mean? And so maybe we've got something going on exhibit going on inside that. Yeah, I don't know. But I just feel like it has to be done those type of things. You know, I just feel like what I love about Camden that I haven't found any place else is that because we're building it from the ground up, we could do whatever we want.

**Asiyah Kurtz 49:15**

True.

**Terina Hill 49:16**

You know, like in Newark I just felt like they were already. We had the Barrett Foundation. We had all of these people already in place and it's like okay, you can do that if you want to but you better go talk to the Barrets because they already do something similar and you just have to either get on board with them. Because if you try to do your own thing, everybody's gonna kind of like squeeze you out. Right? Oh, so here we are the thing you know, I mean, so like we whatever we say is what we get, you know and I love that flexibility here. Yeah, no structures in place to block. Yeah, I do. Yeah, but I think on the flip side, so little has been done. That there's a sense of complacency. Yeah, everyone thinks they gotta go to Philly to make it you know. They got you know, everyone feels like they've got to go up to New York for opportunities instead of just realizing that we can make them here. We can bring the press to us. We could bring you know, celebrities and stuff will start to hear about what we're doing and they'll come to us. Yeah, look at Detroit! Detroit rebuild itself from the ground up...like wow.

**Asiyah Kurtz 50:25**

You know, that is definitely an inspiration for me just because I mean, Camden is very similar in a lot of ways to Detroit, so there's no reason why we can't.

**Terina Hill 50:36**

It [Detroit] was a very industrial city and Camden was very industrial, very impoverished and they did the daggone thing.

**Asiyah Kurtz 50:46**

So I have to look into it because maybe there's a maybe we just do it. Maybe we just as soon as this mural goes up.

**Terina Hill 50:53**

Yeah, who's doing the mural?

**Asiyah Kurtz 50:56**

So it's gonna be um, Bronte, Priscilla Rios, Donald Williams. Who else? There's two more people, but they're all Camden people.

**Terina Hill 51:07**

And they're putting it on the fence.

**Asiyah Kurtz 51:08**

They're doing it on the fence. So they'll do it the whole length of the fence just basically different scenes from Camden. I'm just and I'm just like I don't have an idea what it really needs to look like yet. You are the artist. But I just want it to be... we're calling it calling it our allery: from the gallery to the allery.

**Terina Hill 51:28**

I love it!

**Asiyah Kurtz** 51:29

Yeah and so having that and then it just kind of sets the stage for "there's art here" and then we can really like use a space outside. Yeah. So awesome. Well, this is great conversation. Thank you so much. I'm gonna stop recording.

# Jazlyne Sabree interview transcript

Wed, 4/6 4:17PM • 35:04

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

art, artists, camden, schools, students, murals, education, people, community, teaching, teachers, pursuing, feel, years, pandemic, guess, thinking, dreams, life, interviewed

## SPEAKERS

Asiyah Kurtz, Jazlyne Sabree

### Asiyah Kurtz 00:00

Okay, this is a Asiyah Kurtz. I'm interviewing Jazlyne Sabree. So awesome. So if you could just I'm going to give you a little insight into what I'm trying to do. And if you could just like share a little bit of your background, and then it's very informal. It's like a conversation. So basically what I'm doing is I'm looking at the arts as an economic engine for Camden. Like really how can we use the arts to energize the city, but not necessarily make it be like, the next Detroit the next i i just wanted to be like the Camden that has what it needs to thrive.

### Jazlyne Sabree 00:49

Yeah.

### Asiyah Kurtz 00:50

And so I think the art can be part of that process. But what I don't want to happen is that when we're talking about the arts, we're leaving out black womxn, artists who are working in Camden. We're leaving out black men artists, Latinx artists, like I don't want it to be skewed in a way to where artists who are here who are working are left out of the picture. So if you could just tell me a little bit about like yourself as an artist, and what work you're doing now within the arts? That would be great.

### Jazlyne Sabree 01:35

Yes, um, myself as an artist, um, I've always considered myself an artist, even before I realized that it was a profession that I could pursue and it's funny, we were just talking about this earlier, my husband and I. And he asked me if I had always dreamed to be a famous artist. And I said, Well, I always knew I was an artist, because like, I just always believed that you could be whatever you want to be. But as a young black girl growing up, you didn't really see an artist as something that you like a famous artist or something that you could be, you don't really learn about the opportunities for artists of color. I had never really learned about artists of color until college. So really, and then I saw quote, It was weird, because then I saw quote, a couple of minutes ago that said, your imagination only goes as far as your intelligence. So I thought that was interesting, because we were just talking about that. But I always knew I was, but it's not until recent years that I really began to fully pursue it as a career. So because of that, and because

of my love for education, since I was like, 16, I was working in early childhood. And when I graduated, well, I went to college for I switched my major because of the same thing like just not knowing. And I switched to journalism, which I did very well dean's list everything but I wasn't fulfilled. And so I took an art class just to, I guess, give myself something I was missing - like fill a void. And when I returned to the art building, and I took the art the drawing class, my professor was like, um, why aren't you an art major? Again, like... "Why did you switch?" And I was like, you know, you're right. Like, you're right. But when he said that, something just clicked and it was like, well, he can't believe that, you know. And then when I was on my way out, I remember seeing this giant poster with all of the different, you know, career paths that you can take in the arts. And it was, I think, at that moment where I started considering becoming an art teacher, because I wanted to not only become an art teacher, but teach no black and brown community. Yeah, because I wanted to make sure that other you know, children of color, were getting a different experience than I got where they actually could learn about artists of color and could dream...become a famous artist one day. And so it all came together for me with that I got my bachelor's in arts. But I went the alternate route and I became an educator after some working in schools and figuring out if this is what I wanted to do, so I've been teaching art in Camden for five years now and also running my own art business for the past four years. So it's just been a journey. But it's been a journey that I've been really doing.

**Asiyah Kurtz 04:42**

That's awesome. You know, there reminds me when you said that you always knew you were an artist. I remember my daughter, she is 14 now. But when she was three, she's my only girl. And I wanted my daughter to be in ballet, because that's just what I wanted. Right? And so she tolerated it for about a month. She was three years old, and I can remember her coming out of the lesson. In her little tutu, she was looks so adorable, and she was mad. It was like, "Liv, what happened?" And she said, "Mommy, that was my last ballet lesson." And I said, "What?" And so I'm automatically thinking somebody said something. And I said, "Well, what what happened? Why?" And she's like, I'm not a ballerina. I'm an artist." At three. She articulated that to me. And so, and she is she always that's just who she is. That's what she's known herself to be. And I just like, help her express that in all the iterations. You know, her style changes, and I support that. So what do you see that is present in the schools - you're at Freedom Prep - like what's present there that is helpful to students and also on the alternate side of that what is not there that the students and Camden need?

**Jazlyne Sabree 06:09**

Like in general or related to the arts?

**Asiyah Kurtz 06:11**

Related to the arts.

**Jazlyne Sabree 06:13**

Um, what is their um, I guess, and my past five years, I have seen the desire to actually hire art teachers, which is a huge deal. It's a huge deal, even from elementary and middle school where I

find that our teachers being employed is lacking more so than in high school (since it's a requirement for graduation in New Jersey). So that is one good thing I've noticed is that schools and Camden specifically I've always seen an art teacher even when I was just like working in the schools or subbing or, you know, I always saw the presence of an art teacher. Although I've only been to a few of the schools, and I have interviewed my own students to find out a little bit of their arts background, and they've expressed to me that there are a lot of schools that don't have an art teacher, so there's still work to do there. Yeah. There's still work to do. But in my experience I've seen in all the schools I've been in, so maybe we'd say like, you know, a third or half, but that's me jumping around. What else is there for them? Oh, it's hard not to be biased.

**Asiyah Kurtz 07:33**

Just say that,

**Jazlyne Sabree 07:34**

For my school, I, like am a strong advocate for them. Like I'm sitting those down and making sure they have like their supplies that they need, you know, opportunities. I'm making sure I have the liberty in the in the curriculum to bring in artists of color and teach about artists of color. So that I can really I guess, like I said before, like give them what I was missing like had them be able to take that education with them and know that, you know, art is collective and it's not just like, you know, whites, yes, see white and male. And so, that's been something that I've advocated for with them. And I've just seen in my school, um, what more could be done. I think that I think it will go farther. If parents were brought in as partners in the art and also teachers I feel like a lot of the other subject teachers still don't fully understand what an art education is. Or what it requires. Yeah and so sometimes when kids are getting mixed messaging, there's only so far that you can go in the classroom. But I found that when parents are brought in as advocates and when other teachers are brought in as advocates, I've even started teaching professional development at my school for the other teachers to unify us all in the same language and then understanding the purpose of our education and you know, everything that we're doing and trying to do for the future. So I think that that's one thing that I would say is lacking. A lot of other teachers don't fully, they don't fully understand what art education is, and then that messaging, sometimes can get into the student. Yeah. And then, but it's really like a lack of education thing. Like we just have to make sure that all stakeholders are on the same page and using the same language so...

**Asiyah Kurtz 09:45**

No, I love that what you said about you know, really is about education. Something that we really is really kind of a struggle to get funders to fund is professional development for emerging artists. Like if you let's say, you go through Camden schools and you feel like you have an affinity and a talent for the arts, but you're not sure if you want to go and get student loan debt. What do you do? So you know, there's ways to help people understand the business of art, but us trying to make that pitch to funders. They just don't get - they don't see the value. And it's like, oh, you just do the thing. It's like, No, there's a business behind it. Yeah.

**Jazlyne Sabree 10:36**

Hmm. That's really interesting.

**Asiyah Kurtz 10:38**

So you said you interviewed your students? What was that like?

**Jazlyne Sabree 10:42**

Um, well, what was it like? Um, it was just, I guess, enlightening for me. I just finished my Master's in Art Education. Last December of 2020. And it was all about like, culturally responsive teaching, and urban communities and just exploring the lack of access that black and brown students had to the arts, and terms of not just their education, but even in their communities. You know, and museums and galleries, even when they do go, not seeing themselves on the wall. It goes, we could go on forever. And so in that research, I just really wanted to and I guess it's something I've always been passionate about, because that was my experience and honestly, if not for going to an HBCU. I don't know if that would have ever changed. But I wanted to know, I didn't want to one thing I didn't want to do in my research was assume. And so I wanted to bring the students into the research and really ask them about their art background asked them about how they felt in their classes. If they knew any black artists, and you know, and you know, the research, you know, the results were, you know, kinda sad. Yeah, because it was like everything that I thought was.

**Asiyah Kurtz 12:14**

Yeah. Your assumptions proved to be true.

**Jazlyne Sabree 12:20**

Exactly. Because they, like I said, they had a lot of gaps and their education and like, even with me going in at a high school level, and having to teach like using a ruler or you know, having to it's a huge gap there. And it's just really, it can be disheartening, but it's been, I guess, kind of motivating for me. So it just really uncovered a lot of things that I had questions about.

**Asiyah Kurtz 12:51**

That's interesting to me. I was thinking about one of the things that I looked at as a resource, the Americans for the Arts has this report that they put out every, I don't know, four or five years, and they call it - the last version was AEP5 - and the way they measure if a community is really, like, vibrant and embracing the arts is they look at the revenue that's produced from the arts. They look at the full time jobs, they look at median household income, and so by their standards, Camden doesn't make the cut because there's not a lot of full time jobs. There's a lot of unemployment. The median income is not very high, the government revenue I mean, it's just like you picked all the inequitable things to measure us by for the arts. And so I'm throwing that out. Saying that, that doesn't work. So if there were other ways that you could measure if the arts are doing well or if artists are thriving (young artists and yourself as well) what are some of those things that you would say, "Oh, this is a measurement of the arts are doing well."

**Jazlyne Sabree** 14:13

For like the community, I would say the presence of arts organizations. I know Camden has several. And then even like Rutgers being here, like kind of adds to that. And then also, I guess, what else would be a measure? I want to say like, maybe not for a suburban community. Like for Camden, and like I'm thinking like murals and like the community participation. I feel like murals are like a representation of "Is the community like appreciating this?" because these murals have to be approved and we have to get the bodies to create them. So I think seeing that physical evidence is a big indicator. Um, and then I think just the presence of artists.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 15:10

Yeah.

**Jazlyne Sabree** 15:11

I don't think you can measure like if it's a vibrant art community by like, finances and like... there are artists there. So I think that definitely needs to be a measure. Are there are programs in schools are there you know, art teachers? Because I feel like that's where we actually like, see the data live like, oh, we have so many like talented students. And so and then, I mean, even maybe how many students are like pursuing the art as a career or as an education path? All that type of stuff?

**Asiyah Kurtz** 15:47

No, that's really good and especially what you said about like representation through murals. We just installed a wood privacy fence right here just in the little alley, and we're calling it our Allery (from the gallery). And we are working with local artists. I think there's five Camden artists who are going to paint a mural it'll be you know, depicting different things. I'm like, "Look, ya'll are the artists. What you envision just tell me show it to me and then we can, you know, figure out how to make that come to fruition." But, um, you know, that's just one way that we bring we I know that there are people in this community who will never walk through the doors. They just don't feel like this is a place for them. But if we can open the gates and have art be reflected in outdoor spaces, that's another way to connect

**Jazlyne Sabree** 16:41

Yeah, yeah.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 16:44

So you work full time as a teacher?

**Jazlyne Sabree** 16:47

Yeah.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 16:47

Do you find that being employed full time like constrains your ability to be an artist or how does that play into your practice?

**Jazlyne Sabree** 17:00

I do. I can't lie. It does. Because it's like, it's just such a large chunk of the day. I try to find time to pay in the evening. But I'm like a daylight painter. Like I like the natural light and yeah, but in the absence of that, I do try to push myself to paint in the evening and I've gotten like my - what do they call it? - the daylight lamp.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 17:27

Yeah, that's good.

**Jazlyne Sabree** 17:29

Yeah, I try my best. One other good thing about teaching as an artist is that there are a lot of breaks, especially at my school, I teach in a charter school. And so we get like, fall break winter break, mid winter break, spring break, then summer. Okay. And so that's been helpful. So yeah, I think that it has its constraints but like you can work around it. I also feel like teaching has been not so (not in terms of hours), but like, in terms of like, just, you know, content and like being there and like, it's, it's been very inspiring for me. And I develop a lot of my own lessons. And so that has also added to my creativity and I'm just really allowed me to kind of connect the work that I do in my studio to what what we're doing in the classroom.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 18:27

Yeah, well, we're gonna be in what's the name of the school? Veterans Family School. So we got an NEA grant to do collage quilting. So we will be in the school in the fall for like, every I think it's every other week for like six weeks. And we're calling it "Quilting for Social Justice". And I'm developing the curriculum now because it doesn't exist. But it's like, we will take a topic on a social justice issue. So like, why are there no grocery stores and in Camden? Like that's the reality of children who are in this school. There is no chain grocery store for 78,000 people in Camden. Why? And so what I hope to do is to give the students the words to articulate what is around them, but also to talk through how can you creatively express that if it's a frustration. How you can do that using fabric and glue basically and at the end of it, we will send collect all of the blocks and send them away to be professionally quilted. And then next spring we'll have a show and we'll invite the students in and we will have a documentarian capture all of it. Because there's something about seeing your art on a gallery wall. Tell me like as an artist, why is it that you can see it on your kitchen table, but in the gallery, it's just different?

**Jazlyne Sabree** 20:13

No, I just felt like I just feel like it makes it feel real. I mean, you know, you're an artist, but like it's something about being able to share that art with the world and like, you know, in this dedicated space, you know, even more so than selling art, like just having it seen by people who are going and coming it's just like really meaningful as an artist. And I think it really expands your reach in a way that you can't get at home or just by selling it to one person. Hmm,

**Asiyah Kurtz** 20:48

No, that's really good. Do you are there I don't think there are but I'm gonna ask are there any art supply stores in Camden?

**Jazlyne Sabree 20:59**

I don't think so. From talking to my students, I don't think so. I know. A lot of them just like pick up what they can from the dollar store. Yeah, okay. Yeah.

**Asiyah Kurtz 21:09**

So that's definitely an opportunity. Okay, because I'm also thinking about like, what are other things that that are needed for the arts to thrive so supplies, right? And that creates like a local kind of a community of sharing resources you know, that people have access to, versus what if you don't have a debit card? And you can't or don't pay for Amazon and, and you know, what do you do? Yeah, so I'm not saying that artists can't work around constraints because if anybody can it's artists, but it just makes it that much more difficult when it's not like readily accessible. Yeah. So do your boys - you're a mom of two, right? Do you do your boys show any artistic ability?

**Jazlyne Sabree 22:02**

Yes, they absolutely love art. I don't know if I have anything to do with it. I know, for my youngest for my oldest son. I stayed home with him for his first like year and a half. And so I think that definitely like, aided him and his development. Yeah. Because like I did, like a family childcare situation. I had six kids. A lot of the lessons that I plan were like, it was math, but it was art. Yeah. But it was art, right. And I found that that really, I mean, I've always known and then my research and stuff that that connection is so strong and like the arts really just as a way to make all learning better. And so but with that, like I find that my oldest son really has like just this like diehard love for just like learning and art. And so now I think I was telling you before, like he's just everyday wants to make books and he's just like drawing his pictures and writing his sentences and it's just been really fun to see. And then my youngest. I didn't get that four year term at the beginning, but the pandemic helped. He is more just freely creating like I mean like all over the floors all over the walls. Everything. He loves color and he just really loves to spend time with me at my studio. So, so that's been fun. They're definitely like all just super into it and interested trying to always get their hands on whatever they can and create stuff.

**Asiyah Kurtz 23:56**

So did I hear that you were going to Moore [College of Art]?

**Jazlyne Sabree 24:00**

Yeah.

**Asiyah Kurtz 24:01**

So how's it like - how did you decide - you already have a master's? So tell me about this. Why did you decide to go back and get another Master's?

**Jazlyne Sabree 24:12**

I think that I think that like for a long time, because of just like I keep saying like the lack of education and just like the lack of exposure to black artists, not really understanding the the opportunity and the field has just kind of like it was like I was delayed and like actually like really fully pursuing my own profession. And I really started to do that more so in the last four years of my life, as opposed to like maybe when I was in college or like when other people might think it should have happened. Yeah. I don't think it really should have happened another way. I think that everything like layered itself for me and like that. I wouldn't have gotten to this place if it wasn't for this. And so I should even do it like this. I should because I do I feel like teaching my kid has really just been so inspiring for me. And just the dialogues I have with them and like the connection of like what I'm doing in the classroom to like what I believe in what I'm doing at home. My studies at home right now, but what I'm doing it has really been inspiring and motivating for me. And then it's like I really I don't want to, like get to like wherever in life and like look back and have any regrets. Yeah. And I also feel like if I'm telling my students that they can do this, and that they can be a professional artist and that they can be famous or whatever. Yeah, I'm like I have to fully also walk that path. Yeah, and that will only make my teaching that much more, you know, profound and meaningful. Because I don't ever think like no matter where my art career takes me I don't ever think I'll stop teaching like, always be a teacher. It's just a part of me. It's as much a part of me as being an artist. So yeah, I think my students had a big influence on me. And then I think just like this past two years of the pandemic, like really reminded me why I fell in love with art for like, it's therapeutic, you know, these things like that. And it just really showed me how short life is honestly and just like don't like just do whatever you like right now go after your dream life to the fullest because life is short and you know all we have is today. Whether you decide to go back now or later, life is gonna continue to pass. So it was just a lot of different things that led me to make that decision and say it's time. Yeah, no, that's awesome. I don't know if you know this about me but I spent 20 years in human resources in corporate America. I hate - I really hated - everything about sitting in like, you know, six by eight cubicle and just the world just felt like it was this small. And so I did that because I had children young children and you know, then paid well in the benefits and all the stuff you you know are told that you're supposed to pursue as a marker of success. And it just it there came a point where I was like, "This is not what I want to do. I don't want to spend my life like this." And so I walked away from it and really delved back into my first love which is community organizing and anthropology and just you know, facilitating connection and relationship and helping people to see what matters. And that was a hard thing for people to get like, "Why would you leave that job?" But I was shrinking on the vine. I really was like, I could just feel myself not being whole anymore and so, in that process, I really got back into quilting. I had stopped I just you know, because there was no space in my head for it. Yeah, so it's good to hear that there's still space in your head for that. That just should reiterate to us. You're doing the right thing. Yeah. So awesome. So if you had any advice for, you know, another mother, black womxn, maybe in education or not who's thinking about pursuing art as a career? What advice would you give them? Just do it.

**Asiyah Kurtz 29:15**

Just rip the band aid off.

**Jazlyne Sabree 29:20**

Because like, I think like one thing like when my first son was born, that was when I started my art business. Some people have looked at me and been like, you're not supposed to do it that way. You're supposed to let them grow up first, then you could be an artist. Um, but for me, I want my children to grow up and see their mom pursuing her dreams and not feel like I have any type of resentment about motherhood. I feel like you know, a lot of people say, "Oh, I had to put my dreams on hold." Yeah, I don't agree with that. I feel that you can. You can still chase your dreams and your children can be a part of those dreams and it just makes it all the more thrilling and exciting. Like my kids love telling people I'm an artist. So I think that you just have to do it like don't feel like at any point in life. It's gonna be the right time. Like, the time is right when you do it. Yeah..

**Asiyah Kurtz 30:27**

Awesome. Any parting thoughts?

**Jazlyne Sabree 30:30**

Um, I don't think so.

**Asiyah Kurtz 30:34**

Well, let me ask you real quickly about FireWorks and don't give us like glowing reviews because I'm asking you, but what could we do? What can we as an organization do better to support artists in Camden?

**Jazlyne Sabree 30:47**

Um, it's it's tough. I think these I don't know, like, everything you guys are doing. Your social media presence is awesome. A lot of my students like find you guys on social media. Okay. Yeah, they're like, oh, that's the one on Instagram. I am like, yeah. So and I told them I'm gonna give them a homework assignment that they have to follow. Yeah. But if not already, I will say partnering more with the schools because then you get them other young. They know that you're here. My mom when I was itty bitty, put me in Trenton - was it Artworks Trenton - and I took classes with them for a while. And then I left I only took classes, maybe a less than a year. And I left I went to college and my thing everything. And then here I am, like maybe 20 something years later, and I still remember them. And now I see. Okay, how can I be a part of that? How can I so I think um, I think just really, I guess I don't know what like promoting looks like or marketing or whatever. But I think letting the community really know that you're here even louder. Because a lot of my students like over the years I've been trying to like get them to know that. Go there, you get extra credit. That I think just really raising awareness thing. I don't think that the community just like doesn't want to come. I think they just don't really know I guess that they're welcome to come and that has so many layers. Yeah, yeah. But I think definitely getting out there. I don't know. You can like mail things to homes. Like we are here. Yeah. And we are inviting you in.

**Asiyah Kurtz 31:43**

Okay. Yeah, that's good to know. Like we're trying with like I said the grant to get into at least Veterans. We've just found it very difficult to find someone in the school to be like, yes, come on. Because I get it - Schools are busy. You're an educator, you can't like vet everybody that comes to you. So that's our first foray into that. But I interviewed Terina [Hill], do you know her?, I interviewed her and she was talking about like, there's no art camp, like, hmm. So I was like, that's great. That is good. There should be - if not during the summer - but can we have a presence like every week on this day, you can come to FireWorks and make art it's just open for you. Yeah, so I've tried to restructure our hours, so our gallery is open like through the week, but then we keep our weekends open so that when those opportunities arise we can like really easily say Saturdays are for art you know for art making.

**Jazlyne Sabree 32:47**

So I think you guys doing more of that like since last summer like with different things...

**Asiyah Kurtz 33:35**

We're really trying but you know the pandemic and then some people are still really nervous about groups. I get that so we're trying and another thing that we're going to try to do specifically not necessarily only with students, but with young artists is to offer a marketplace so like we open up once our Allery mural is done, we open up the yard and let people come and you can set up your booth and we can have like a marketplace. So we're trying to it's just methodical and of course, all these things take time and resources and outreach but, but we are it's good to hear you say that because that's kind of where we're trying to do.

**Jazlyne Sabree 34:34**

It's all I feel like it's all about the young people are the ones who are going to like, remember your love and come back.

**Asiyah Kurtz 34:43**

Yeah, absolutely. But this has been so great. Thank you for coming. Oh, I'm sorry that he got like a little confused but and the reason I didn't do it on Zoom is because I knew I was gonna do this and have it transcribed without a lot of typos. So thank you so much.

# Katrina Tapper interview transcript

Thu, 4/7 2:51PM • 1:01:18

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, art, portrait, artists, painting, paint, camden, space, graphic design, studio, work, landscape, school, hair, exhibitions, college, prints, person, home, aunt

## SPEAKERS

Asiyah Kurtz, Katrina Tapper

### Asiyah Kurtz 00:00

I'm really having just very informal conversations with black womxn artists here, I've talked to Terina I talked to there's another artist she teaches at Freedom Prep her name's Jazlyn Sabree. So I've talked to her so just trying to get, you know, a better understanding of what's going well with the arts in Camden. Like, how does Camden do a good job, whether it's our organization or the city supporting the arts, and then what what can we do better? And so just trying to get your perspective, I know you don't live here, but you kinda do. I guess you you make art here, as well as other places. So if you could just start by giving me like a little bit of background on you because we've never really had a chance to talk.

### Katrina Tapper 00:59

So I was born in Chicago, but my family quickly moved to Philadelphia. Close To My grandmother where my dad grew up and everything like that. And I was there for maybe about six years, but I started school in Morristown. Not too far. But I went through school all through there and then I was looking - originally, I was gonna follow my dad's footsteps and try to go into the medical field.

### Asiyah Kurtz 01:01

Is your dad in the medical field?

### Katrina Tapper 01:36

Yeah, he's an emergency room physician, okay. And my mom is a cardiovascular tech so they're both in the medical field. They thought for years that was going to be my direction. You know, my dad used to buy like these chemistry sets. I really love these models like an anatomical heart, build and put together but I don't think he understood like my interest in it wasn't how it worked. But like, the arts of putting it together and yeah, all that stuff. So that was the exciting part. But he was like, Oh, she's really into this, great. But like all through high school, like I was convinced I'm like, oh, probably go into something medical, whether it's like psychology or, you know. But it wasn't until my senior year. I was in an art class because I always enjoyed the art. So I'll just take these art classes and they brought in a womxn who was going to the Philadelphia

Academy of Fine Art. And she gave a presentation and she was showing like, this is my artwork before I went to school and this is my artwork now. And her artwork was phenomenal. Like this is gorgeous work, but I was like, but my artwork is better than that. So I was like, interesting, like if they could hone your craft so well and maybe that's where I need to go. Like maybe someone needs to just teach me how to paint. So from that point on, I was like, I'm gonna go to art school to try to hone this craft that I had. And my parents were pretty understanding I have two aunts that are both artists with a teaching route. I never saw myself as being a real teacher but for those who can do it like that for me like I don't think I have as much patience that you need for that role. But to make it a little less daunting for my parents, I was like, well, I'll just go into graphic design so that I can get a job, okay. Because like, tell your parents you're like I want to be a painter.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 04:12

So basically, you're gonna stay at home! (laughter)

**Katrina Tapper** 04:17

They were okay with that. And I went, I enjoyed graphic design. But I started in their painting classes and I was like, I really love painting. So I was trying to like toy between the two. I'm like, How can I continue to do both of these things that I like, but also be able to be independent once I graduate school. So one of my professors for design actually, I told him I was struggling with this decision because you have to pick a major. And he was like, to be honest, you don't need to major in graphic design to be a graphic designer. When you graduate as long as you have the portfolio and the skill set. No one's going to ask like what, what was your major? What classes did you take? They look at your work. And that speaks for itself. And I was like, "Sold." I continued to minor in design, but I majored in painting because that's just what had my, you know, attention and I knew that I could teach myself things online for design, but having these people in person, these professors be able to teach me like technique that needs to be hands on. You know, you can't really - I mean, you can try to pick it up on a digital screen. You know, this is exactly how you need to like mix, you know, something like egg tempera or something like that, like age old things that are passed down denervations, you know. That knowledge! So I decided to go that route, and I went up to art school in Hartford, Connecticut. So it was close enough to home but far away. I didn't get any surprise drop ins and I kind of wanted that distance from Philadelphia. Because I knew I was like, if I go to art school in Philadelphia, I'm gonna know everybody but I wanted to break free from that a little bit. So once I graduated, I found that it was really hard to kind of get your foot in the door and find like, affordable studio space anywhere. There were places in Philadelphia, but it was at the same time. Like, you know, I'm not making that much out of school as graphic designer. So can you justify paying toll every day to go to a studio space?

**Asiyah Kurtz** 07:06

Right.

**Katrina Tapper** 07:07

And at the time, I graduated in 2009, it was like the height of the recession. So I think it was almost like a full year before I even had a full time job. Yeah, so there you are with like the student loans at home like trying to make it work. So yeah, I just had to do what I could from my parents house. But after a while, you know, it's not like when you have a studio space and you can leave your paints out and come back. Like you have to pack everything else. It's not your own space. So eventually, many years pass and I get married and I move into a house with my husband and we have a spare room but again, same thing I felt bad having my stuff out. Yeah, even if it wasn't a spare room like he would comment like "Well, but there's oil paint smells and you have the paint thinner." And I'm like I understand. It's like a smell that doesn't bother me now, like for most people, they're like, "Oh, yeah..eww" So you know, I can paint in acrylic, or watercolor, but it's just not my preferred medium. So I started looking around for some studio space and I think I looked at a couple of different places. There was one in Collingswood at the time. I think it was called The Factory at the time. Um, and then there was another space but it was more catered to like, small businesses. And I was like, I'm that business person, right. And they wanted like, it was a large space, but they wanted like \$500 a month and I was like, "That's not happening." For me, especially, you know, since I'm just starting out and I'm trying to make work that people buy, there's no guarantee that anyone's gonna buy it right. To be spending that much monthly. Just wasn't doable. So one of my good friends from high school. She was in that same art class that she was like, I'm on the steering committee for this place in Camden and I think they're gonna do artist studios. And I'm like, Okay, well, I'll keep checking back. At the time it wasn't really flushed out. So eventually I did and I was like, okay, yeah, during this whole process, and I hadn't like been in juried shows or anything such a long time. And I tell you, like, my anxiety goes through the roof everytime.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 10:24

Really? Why, though?

**Katrina Tapper** 10:28

It's one of those things , I guess it's like, you're your own worst critic.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 10:33

Oh, yeah.

**Katrina Tapper** 10:34

So I'm like, it's not good enough. They're not gonna like it. So when I applied for space here, and they're like, oh, submit some of your work. I was like, it's not good enough. They're not gonna call me back. They're not gonna...you know, I go through all this. But yeah, I got a call back from from Cassie. And she's like, come in, check out the space and see if there's a studio that speaks to you. Yeah and then I went from there.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 11:06

Have you always been in this space?

**Katrina Tapper 11:08**

Yeah. So I think at the time, it was really only Hope [Mead] that was here. Jon [Cofsky] might have been here too, but I'm not sure I rarely see because he's on the other side. But yeah, and then they did that whole thing, the residency. So there was a couple different people coming in. But yeah, I've enjoyed my time here. It's I appreciate it, but it was something that was affordable. Yeah. And a decent space, you know, decent community. There was a time when there were all of the residencies here and I was working full time going into the office, though. So the only time that I could really come in was after work, it was dark. And at the time, one of the guys Shawn [Garrity] would come in and we chat with me like, "Oh, that's great." And like we talked about our process and it was nice to have that sense of community. Like you're back at art school, essentially. Right? Whereas working from home like or my parents house, they're always going to tell me my work is good. Oh, cool. Like nothing constructive about it... "Looks great!" So to have like someone to like bounce ideas off of I do still have friends from art school that sometimes I'm like, does this even work? Okay, like, I'll send them a picture and they'll say, "You're good. Don't worry about it." So I appreciated that Camden did have the space and did have artists here with different backgrounds, to give different perspective because you can get so siloed into your own work, but sometimes like an outside perspective really helps.

**Asiyah Kurtz 13:11**

Yeah, now that and that's definitely something that I love about this space because it is very communal, like you know, the ceilings, the walls don't go all the way up. You can't really wall yourself off from from anyone you have to learn how to be in community with other artists because the arts in Camden is not very big. It's not New York City. Yes. Yeah, we all kind of know each other. But I think something you said about - you have two aunts who are artists. Do you collaborate with your aunt's in any way on art or you haven't?

**Katrina Tapper 13:57**

So they're both very elderly. But my one aunt Vivian - and it was my grandmother's sister - she has always been a mentor for me growing up like fostering my love of art. Anytime she would come over for like family gathering she'd be like, "Okay, let me see." But she like her drive to make work has always been an inspiration to me. Because she was constantly doing paintings for her church. She's still actively teaching at a senior center. Oh, I want to say she's 93.

**Asiyah Kurtz 14:48**

Wow.

**Katrina Tapper 14:50**

So yeah, she's just...

**Asiyah Kurtz 14:53**

Oh, that's amazing. We need to hire her.

**Katrina Tapper 15:01**

But yeah, I mean, she's always been an inspiration to me. I'm trying to - she had this large painting that was my grandmother that I always loved as a kid. It was just a landscape. But it was so massive because my grandma when she moved in the house, she was like, I want a really big painting on this wall. My aunt had never painted anything that large scale. But she said it was really freeing for her to make brushes and try new strokes and I've always loved that painting. [Shows a picture from her phone} This is not that painting. She did a wedding portrait.

**Asiyah Kurtz 15:58**

Oh, wow.

**Katrina Tapper 16:00**

So that was done when she was 87.

**Asiyah Kurtz 16:05**

Wow, that's good. That's really good.

**Katrina Tapper 16:09**

Yeah. So she's always been like, "Yeah, you just have to keep doing it and working." And like I said, this is my father's aunt. So yeah, he's always been around that his whole life. So he was accepting of my wanting to go into the art world.

**Asiyah Kurtz 16:37**

Where do you get your paints since you're working in oil? like so. Um, a lot of them I still have from college. Really? Oh my gosh.

**Katrina Tapper 16:50**

Yeah they last forever but if I need like a certain color I'll either look online or sometimes like even stores like craft stores like Michaels. Joanne carries like your basic colors, I mean, so anything that's like kind of out there, I have to order.

**Asiyah Kurtz 17:11**

But there's no place in like Philly or near Moorestown...

**Katrina Tapper 17:15**

There used to be...what was it? I forget the name of the store. There used to be a place right on. I want to say it was South Street and Philly like right before I went to college. I got all of my stuff from there. Okay. I'm sure there are stores in Philadelphia but at the same time like tracking all the way there. I just it's been easier to just order. Yeah, because I was thinking about like for artists who are here who you know, maybe they don't necessarily have a debit or credit card. Like where did they get their supplies? Like there's no I don't know of any art supply store like in Camden. Yeah. Which is unfortunate. Yeah, I mean, like I said, you can get some basic stuff at like some of the craft stores. But anything that was like really specific. We have to do a little digging. Here's that painting but landscape Yes.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 18:32

Oh, wow. How big is it?

**Katrina Tapper** 18:36

It's huge. It would take up this whole wall.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 18:45

Oh my gosh. Yeah, cuz it's like the span of the entire sofa. Yeah, that's amazing.

**Katrina Tapper** 18:54

Yeah, she's always been like a, you know, a great inspiration.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 19:00

So you usually you're into portraiture more than landscape or stills... what is this one of...hands?

**Katrina Tapper** 19:07

Yeah.

**Asiyah Kurtz** 19:07

Okay. So how why is it that you're drawn more to, to the human form versus like landscapes?

**Katrina Tapper** 19:16

Humans are more interesting to me. I did a lot of still lives in college course. But for after a while, I'm like, All right. Like yes, it's a tree! I think there's something more intimate about doing a portrait, you know. I think and it's, it doesn't have to be exact. But if you can evoke the kind of feeling of a person. Your mind will fill in the little things that aren't exactly 100% right. So, you know, I paint a lot of portraits of my husband. I think the one up there's...

**Asiyah Kurtz** 20:11

Oh, okay. So the picture here that you used for that, okay. And he didn't come to the open?

**Katrina Tapper** 20:20

No, okay. He didn't come to that one. I think he was out of town. But for the most part, you know, he's been a subject of a few of my works because number one proximity. But it's interesting because before I say who it is, I've had people you know, look at the painting and be like, "Who is this person in relation to you because this is such like an intimate look."

**Asiyah Kurtz** 20:57

Yeah. Just from his eyes I see that.

**Katrina Tapper** 21:01

And I will say like, "This is my husband." They're like, "Oh, it makes that makes sense." Yeah. So, you know, it's just like, even if you were to look at him like point blank, like the portrait doesn't exactly look like but I've figured out kind of like a formula in my head where I've been like, as long as you get three features accurate it's enough that it looks like them. Um, so that's kind of like my metric when I when I do portrait work. I just want to capture the feeling of the person. And I think it it's easier for people to connect to other people than it is to landscapes. Landscapes for me, or still lives or anything like that...they're great pieces, just put over the couch and people will kind of look at it for a little bit and then keep walking away. But I found with portrait work, you can kind of hold someone for a little bit longer, because there's a lot of questions that come to mind. Like who is this person?

**Asiyah Kurtz 22:20**

What is the story? Yeah.

**Katrina Tapper 22:24**

If that person's in the room. "Oh, it's that person." And that leads to more conversations. Whereas like for me, like, don't get me wrong - I love landscaping. I love looking at them - but you know, you look at them. You're like, that's a beautiful scene. And you move on.

**Asiyah Kurtz 22:48**

Yeah, you don't really ponder it in any way. Yeah, I have one thing that I used to do. It's so funny because I really don't like antiques, but I love going to antique stores. Because it's just I want to see it's in my head somewhere, I think I'm going to find a beautiful portrait of a black person, and I never do. I do see pictures like so there's this phenomenon called instant family where people will actually go to antique and thrift stores and they will find old photos and they will like buy them and then let's like instant family. Yeah, but...

**Katrina Tapper 23:32**

Guilty!

**Asiyah Kurtz 23:33**

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Because just because the picture yeah. It's it's a point of interest. But I have in my wall in my dining room. Actually. I have one wall that I am filling up with portraits of black womxn, so they can be young. I have one I have a young black womxn. I have one I have an older one. So I'm just like, covering all in this. The whole wall is gonna be filled up at some point. But I don't know. It's just like this idea of when you go into galleries, who do you see? Yeah, whose facei s looking back at you?

**Katrina Tapper 24:17**

Yeah, and a lot of white womxn. Traditionally, that's who could afford portrait painting. I did a copy. I'm sure you know the painting the portrait of the Negress.

**Asiyah Kurtz 24:33**

Yes.

**Katrina Tapper 24:33**

I did a copy of that one when I was in college. That one fits in my dining room. Yeah, I don't want to sell a copy but it that was one of the things for me. It was like if I'm going to have to do a copy of a painting. Let it be that study. I want to paint someone that looks like me. And not someone that looks like everybody else I was surrounded with at art school.

**Asiyah Kurtz 25:00**

Yeah.

**Katrina Tapper 25:02**

I can count on my hand how many students of color.

**Asiyah Kurtz 25:05**

That's so unfortunate because when I think about kind of the arts ecosystem, I'm always thinking about the emerging artists and the people who will come after them. So like because those are the ones who will go on to art school, they will you know, they will do other things within the arts. But I feel like here in Camden, there's not enough emphasis on the arts with young people and with emerging artists. It's like skip over all that if I'm the end product, so to speak. The muralists...well, they had to develop their skills. They had to have a body of work and build on them. So I wonder though, how - do you work full time?

**Katrina Tapper 25:55**

Yes.

**Asiyah Kurtz 25:56**

How does that affect your art discipline, how much you're able to do or your approach?

**Katrina Tapper 26:03**

I mean, it does affect it. So recently, I guess the beginning of the pandemic, I changed jobs. I was working in event management but with COVID events, kind of...yeah, I was gone. I also the company that I was working for in Philadelphia, they had to let people on the event's team go. I was one of the newer hires last two years, so I was on the job. So I was like, alright, well, I'm gonna be home. So let me get back to doing my graphic design work. Because I had taken a break for a while. So I started building up my portfolio for that and I was able to get another job doing graphic design, remote because the company is based in California. So I've been doing that for the past two years. I will say when you do work for creative work for corporations or other people you do get a sense of burnout. Creativity, like like, you just, you get so stuck in like someone else's ideas and it's hard to pull out your own because at the end of the day, you're drained. You just want to go to sleep you don't want to think about like let me do all this extra stuff to keep me awake, especially with the new baby. Yeah, I'm like, I gotta get my sleep in when I can. So it is it is difficult, but I think something that a lot of artists can relate to is there's

always a need to get some express yourself creatively somehow, which is how I started to kind of painting on those like, denim jackets. Yeah. it was something that I could do at home when the baby was sleeping. That was kind of, you know, zero pressure scenario. Sometimes when I start a painting, I'm like this white blank canvas. It's like, is this going to be terrible? Am I setting myself up for failure? Those feelings eventually do pass when you actually get working. But there's always that like, that moment of fear. When I touch the canvas with the paint. It's not like I can't paint over it. It's just one of those things. So irrational fears. But I think, you know, it was like a little pressure scenario, something that I could do at home and it kind of helped me at least get some of those ideas out of my head and onto something. Doesn't have to be paper; doesn't have to be canvas. Just onto something. But it is hard. It is hard to do a full time job, but at the same time you don't really have a choice. You know, it is very hard in this day and age to be a single income family. So for us, I was like well, that's not an option, so I need to go back to work.

**Asiyah Kurtz 29:41**

Especially when you have a baby.

**Katrina Tapper 29:44**

Yeah, so I try to do what I can and you know, I just kind of try not to beat myself up. If I can't do something, you know, like, just kind of talk to yourself in the sense of like you do do a lot. So don't beat yourself up if you can't paint today or if you can't do a little doodle. Just know that your work is being seen elsewhere. So you know the stuff that I do for work it is graphic design, doesn't have my name on it, because...

**Asiyah Kurtz 30:33**

You've basically have already you've sold your work.

**Katrina Tapper 30:36**

Yeah. So it don't have my name on it. But at the same time your work is being seen whether or not someone knows it's yours. So I kind of look at things that way. But when I can I'd like to work on my own work. So I don't have to come up with this like crazy explanation on why I design especially with these corporations. I do a lot of work for Google and sometimes like I you know you have to follow their brand colors, their aesthetic. But for the most part, they'll come back to me and be like, so what was your feeling behind this? Why did you do this? Design this way? And I won't be like because you told me to! I'm like, yeah...A+ I'm just hoping that it gets approved so I can keep it moving. Yeah. But sometimes you have to come up and kind of, you know, massage it in such a way. Make them like oh, yeah, I can totally see you went that route. I was like alright.

**Asiyah Kurtz 32:02**

So what would happen though if you just completely like you did their version and you did what you think it should be? You went a little wild. (laughter)

**Katrina Tapper 32:15**

They call it Creative Market review. Okay, so there's like a panel of people that the work gets sent to, and they'll basically decide if they like it. If it follows their brand, sometimes I've had things go to review and they've been like this follows the brand too much. Yeah, add a little bit more of you into it. I'm like, that's very vague. I'll try. So, I mean, it's, it's a catch 22 because, you know, art is subjective and like, what I like, isn't necessarily what you're gonna like or, you know, what [undecipherable] he's gonna like Yeah. So it's kind of just, you know, shooting in the dark in the sense like, you're like hoping you hit a target, right? Okay. So that was one of the things when I was in school. When I was trying to choose a major I was like, I don't think that I want to do other people's work for the rest of my life.

**Asiyah Kurtz 33:22**

Yeah, I can see how that would just like not be rewarding.

**Katrina Tapper 33:27**

I'm getting paid to, right. But I'm like is that my primary objective is to like yes, do creative work, but not necessarily what you want to do? And the answer to that was No. I don't want to do that.

**Asiyah Kurtz 33:44**

I really like how you use pattern a lot so the shadow on her face who is this portrait of?

**Katrina Tapper 33:52**

This is an abstracted version of me.

**Asiyah Kurtz 33:56**

I kind of thought it because of the hoop in your nose but I was like I'm not gonna assume. And then you have like the cheetah print and then you have your I really liked that.

**Katrina Tapper 34:07**

Yeah, light is a big thing for me. Think it's also, you know, just growing up like I come from, like I grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood. Town, for that matter. And when you are a person of color, you're kind of not intentionally but you're kind of ostracized in a way. Whether it's, you know, oh your hair so cool.

**Asiyah Kurtz 34:44**

Can I touch it? [both speakers exclaim]

**Katrina Tapper 34:46**

But can't have those reactions when you're the single person in that scenario.

**Asiyah Kurtz 34:53**

Because like you're holding up the whole race.

**Katrina Tapper 34:58**

Your actions...

**Asiyah Kurtz 35:00**

How unfair!

**Katrina Tapper 35:02**

[referring to hair touching] I'm like...sure. I don't know. Like so, for a lot of, you know, the time that I grew up, I felt like it was kind of in the background, you know, not really necessarily noticed at all like, yeah, it was nice art classes. Right. I knew that I made good work, but it wasn't something that ever was kind of like, oh, good work. Maybe we should, you know, lift you up a little bit. Yeah, there was always someone that was like, easier for them to go to. So it was like, okay. So I wanted to make sure like any portraiture that I did do was kind of bringing people out into the light. So like, a lot of my backgrounds are pretty plain, like some type of dark background. This one was a change for me. It was...

**Asiyah Kurtz 36:08**

I love it.

**Katrina Tapper 36:11**

It was an experiment for me because it's, it's outside of my comfort zone. It's very dark. So it was like, let me just try something. Yeah, but I didn't like how it turned out. And I have plans for this canvas behind it to kind of follow this one just very bright. Yeah.

**Asiyah Kurtz 36:40**

Do you ever make prints of your work?

**Katrina Tapper 36:42**

I haven't. I've looked into it. And I'm like, but who wants to buy a print like...

**Asiyah Kurtz 36:51**

There is an audience. Trust me. Like I'm not I'm not necessarily someone who would buy prints, but people will be like, Well, can I get a print of this? No, I don't have prints to sell. But we're thinking about doing - we're going to do the marketplace this winter. But Terina brought up an interesting idea of I don't know if you saw the fence here in the alley. Yeah. So we're calling that our Allery. So there's gonna be a mural painted on it.

**Katrina Tapper 37:24**

That's cool.

**Asiyah Kurtz 37:25**

Yeah, some local artists are going to do that and so once the weather is better, and the mural is painted, we'd like to kind of open up the space and have like, Terina [Hill] can sell her things and if you had prints, you could sell them like you know, you're welcome to have a booth. Like it would not be a charge for any of the artists here but if other people outside in the community wanted to we would charge them a booth fee. So we're really trying to think about people who appreciate art, who may not necessarily come inside of a gallery for whatever reason. There are people who feel like the gallery is not for that but if we set up shop on the sidewalk, okay, it's all right. So you know, there might be - I would, I would guess it there would be an audience for prints of "Cookie" [a large oil painting of a man in drag]. I would guess that yes, because it's so it's vibrant. It's and his gaze is piercing and yeah, I would think that. But I really I do really like this one.

**Katrina Tapper 38:30**

Thank you. Yeah, it was like, well, I've done a lot of light on my husband. It's like, let's show some light. Yeah. So that's where that came from. But everything started from like that top portrait.

**Asiyah Kurtz 38:52**

Oh, really.

**Katrina Tapper 38:52**

So that was a self portrait that I did it in college.

**Asiyah Kurtz 38:54**

I love that.

**Katrina Tapper 38:56**

And that was you know, I was bartering. My one of my studio mates she was majoring in painting and photography. And I was like, hey, I'll make your business cards because I'm in graphic design. If you can shoot a photo of me in this particular light setting because like I had come up with this idea of like, I want to do dark portrait but just like a sliver of light on my face, but I was like, how am I going to do this by myself? So they're a little bit afraid to do it. So it worked out. But yeah, for the most part I work from from photographs. Someone recently asked me they were like, well, I wanted a portrait to like, do I have to sit? I was like no, I'm not one of those traditional...

**Asiyah Kurtz 40:01**

Do people still do that?

**Katrina Tapper 40:02**

Yes - so I mean, it's like if I was ever that prolific with my, my work and I could have them sit in the studio all day. Then maybe yeah, it is nice to paint from life. But for the most part, you know everyone has jobs. Everyone has things to do.

**Asiyah Kurtz 40:28**

Can't just sit there.

**Katrina Tapper 40:31**

Like looking back in art history, like you said like when you go to a museum and you see all these portraits, it's mostly affluent, white people, and because they have the time to sit around and get their portrait painted. Yeah, like that was a time consuming process. It's multiple sessions of doing it especially if it's an oil painting. Because you have to wait for the paint to dry. Then come back and keep doing it so you know, I think that's the plight of people of color have always had to work. Yeah.

**Asiyah Kurtz 41:09**

Yeah, that's that's a really good point. So what do you think that Fireworks does well, right now to support artists here in Camden?

**Katrina Tapper 41:22**

I think definitely having affordable studio spaces. And kind of bringing in the community. I love it. The openings we can just open up those big doors and just invite everybody in and kind of take that stigma of like, you know, this is an art gallery and...

**Asiyah Kurtz 41:42**

You don't belong, right. Yeah.

**Katrina Tapper 41:44**

I really appreciate that. But I also you know, appreciate that everything is constantly changing, in the sense that like, how can we make the space better how can this a place where other artists outside Camden would also like to submit their work? I think that's a really great thing to strive for. To kind of branch out and not be siloed into just Camden. Yeah, yes, we want Camden artists to exhibit too, but we don't want to be like, you're only going to see Camden artists in Camden. We want to see all artists from everywhere, of course, but include the community. So I think that's really great.

**Asiyah Kurtz 42:35**

Yeah, well what do you think that we could be doing better?

**Katrina Tapper 42:38**

Um, I know it's difficult like this isn't, you know, Soho. This is really where you're gonna have people that are casually walking down the street to walk into the gallery and I understand that but I think just some broader outreach. I don't know if it's a matter of, you know, just letting people know, I think there's a lot of people that don't know the space exists. Yeah. So if it's matter of, you know, reaching out to adjacent towns in their art communities to be like, hey, like, there's a gallery here, whether you believe it or not, and, you know, kind of set that precedent that this

isn't an unsafe place to be. Yeah. And like coming from, you know, Morristown, like I know, there's a stigma about like, "Oh, you're going with Camden, you're going at night, like should I be worried?" But I'm fine. So it's just one of those things to like, really let people know like, you're going to be safe.

**Asiyah Kurtz 43:45**

Yeah. What one thing that I've been trying, I've only been here a year, but I've really been trying to use our social media and so that's been really good and bringing in new people that who find us that way. Using Eventbrite to announce you know when we have things and also to help us be able to track where people are coming from. But I do agree with you about not really kind of boxing yourself into this is just only for, by, of Camden, it can't be there because Camden as it is now can't sustain that there's just not a ripe system that allows us to just be that insulated. So I'm trying to like broaden what - we do broaden our reach. I really feel like our next opportunity is for like gender expansive people. Like why do we not have trans people on our board? Why do we not have you know, people who identify as queer in our space? Why? So we need to be making those additional efforts to be more inclusive of all people within the arts. And so I've tried to this past year do that more so with with race because if I look back, kind of through all of the workshops that we've had in most of the exhibitions, they've been white people. artists of color, yeah. So I've tried to like make sure that we are not so far imbalanced on that. I think gender is the next thing, but I also believe that you know, we're gonna do this collage quilting for social justice in the schools in the fall. So that's an NEA grant that will get us in the school. I've had a couple of other people. We did a pop up for a charter school. And I've had other people from the schools who they now know who we are, they're reaching out and say, Hey, can you talk to my students about what you do? Sure, I can do that. But it's better if you come here and I know the transportation is an issue. But it's trying to strike that balance of doing just enough and not too much or not too little.

**Katrina Tapper 46:19**

Yeah, yeah, there was one of my cousin's she is a school psychologist, psychologist in like, Upper Darby area. And she did at one point asked me to come in, they had like a careers day. Yeah. And she was like, Could you come in and do one for the arts? And I was like, Yeah, sure, no problem. So I brought my portfolio. As well as like a couple of paintings. And you'd be surprised on the amount of student interest in the arts, but I think is, you know, families that are like the arts aren't for you. Because there's always like, one kid that you'll talk to that is completely enamored and like, they're like, Oh, I do all these little drawings. You know, I'd like to do this one day, but I don't know if I can and so I think definitely reaching out to schools like to foster that young creativity because it's not always there. Like I said, you know, it's not that my my parents weren't supportive when I finally made the decision. I just didn't think it was an option.

**Asiyah Kurtz 47:41**

My daughter, she's 14 and she's my husband's white. So she's at that awkward. I don't know what to do with my hair, who's gonna find me attractive and oh, you know, she's just she's at that stage

where she's always been involved and identified as an artist. But now she's at the point where she's like, Yeah, I don't know if I'm gonna go to art school. And I wonder if some of that is fueled by she doesn't see other - we live in a majority white town - she doesn't see other art professionals like her. She doesn't see black womxn. She doesn't see biracial. She just doesn't see it. So like she's talking herself out of thinking that's an option. So I get her here as much as I possibly can just to like be around other artists and talk to you know, Hope [Mead], talk to Terina, do the workshops, just so she sees that she's not an anomaly. Like it is hard, though.

**Katrina Tapper 48:53**

It is hard. I recognized that being the poster child for my university. Yeah, I was actually in the brochure, a poster child of the art school because they're like so I've been there, you know, and having professors. Most of my professors were white. Yeah. The way that it was but I think you just kind of have to really ground yourself and your convictions like I do believe in care. Like I have as much talent as all the other students here. I can do that. But it is, you know, I remember like my first portfolio review going up to the school. I remember I just wanted to go and be myself or my ripped jeans, my T shirt. My parents were like, No!" They're like, "You can wear this nice blouse, these dress pants and I was like, "Why though?" and it was like 'because you need to be better'.

**Asiyah Kurtz 48:53**

Yeah, unfortunately.

**Katrina Tapper 49:00**

Yeah. But this is not fair!

**Asiyah Kurtz 50:07**

But it's reality.

**Katrina Tapper 50:08**

Yeah, yeah. But at the same time, once you have that skill set, and once you can show other people that like this is what I do, and I am proud of this work. That you can make that space for yourself. At my events job they had there was a group called the Young Futures that they brought in, to kind of go over like the work that sparked it [the art] and like different career paths and things like that. I was there but like I wasn't planning to go to this meeting at all. Yeah, but my boss at the time was like, Oh, come along, and like, see what it's all about. Okay. And at the time I had my hair in long twists and I had my nose ring in. I have visible tattoos, right because that's who I am. This one girl, she was black. She came up to me and she was like, I noticed that you know, you wear your hair natural and you have facial piercings and visible tattoos and like how did you deal with like the hiring process? Did you feel the pressure to straighten your hair and become this other person to get this job and I was like, I've been there. But I realized a lot of the time you can kind of comb through these companies' social media, and you can see, yeah, what's acceptable to them. Like for me, being in a creative position I was I knew that I wasn't going to be one of those people that felt the need that I had to have my hair straight. Dress this

certain way and I couldn't have piercings and I couldn't do this. I was like, That is not an environment that I'm going to thrive in and so if that's going to be a problem, then maybe that's not the right place for you to be. Because you don't want to be miserable. I've been in those classrooms, and like, I've had people comment, like there's times when I do want to wear my hair straight. Oh, you look so much better with your hair straight and I'm like...

**Asiyah Kurtz 52:23**

Who asked you?

**Katrina Tapper 52:24**

Right. Personally I look the same. My facial structure has not changed. So, I mean, like, all those little comments will get under your skin. But, you know, you just have to be truthful to yourself, and I know that you know, my husband is also white. And I hope that my daughter will have that kind of, I hope that I can instill that in her. Yeah, you know, like, yeah, be unapologetically yourself.

**Asiyah Kurtz 52:57**

Exactly. Yeah, I um, I was telling a board member that you know, when it comes we have exhibitions that we do and of course, we offer the studios...I said, but really the workshops and the real work for us is in identity formation, like for artists to know that they're an artist and that they have the chops they can do the work and that there is a place for them to be accepted and that we're it. Because there will be a lot of places that they won't be accepted and so we're trying to - that's the hard work is helping young people, young artists to know that they have a place. You know, so as great as this firehouse is, I wish we had more space, because it kills me to have to tell people 'no'. I can't. I don't have room for you. I don't have room in my schedule for you. It kills me, because I don't know that they're not gonna take that as an internal criticism.

**Katrina Tapper 54:09**

It is really hard not to [internalize the criticism]

**Asiyah Kurtz 54:11**

But I hate it and I always have conversations like - I invite dialogue. I don't just say no, I want them to know it's not a reflection of their work. I just have constraints. So I'm working to - there's a church across the way that's mostly empty, except for Sunday. Yeah. Like y'all got that big old building... loan me some space! Can we like have some studios set up over there and some space you're not using...So the place next door I'm still trying to get them to sell the thr- it used to be the hardware store, you know? Sell it to us. We can do something with it. You just use it once a week for old clothes, which y'all have other places you can put your thrift store. Like let us help this block to be arts. So I don't know, it's just hard...I've only been here a year but...

**Katrina Tapper 55:19**

With your limited time here, definitely seen an improvement. And I know it is hard because it's like there's only so much you can do.

**Asiyah Kurtz 55:31**

There's only so much and what your nonprofit like there's not this limitless supply of money out there. Like you have to fundraise for everything. So it's definitely a balance but...

**Katrina Tapper 55:45**

I'm wondering if like I know it's difficult at least winter months, but like what's it like in this area to get like permits for like, say like a block party to kind of open up the entire block.

**Asiyah Kurtz 56:01**

I'm so glad you said that because I was talking to Terina about it. I talked to Cassie about it. I would love to have an art block party. Yeah, right here from Ferry Ave. just to Emerald St. It may even just be just this one little block. So um, that's a conversation I'm gonna have with the mayor's assistant. Who's number I just got. Because the city ultimately has to tell us that yeah, we can do it and then we have to get sign off from ?"the county who's gonna say, "Did the city say you could do it?" Yeah. So there's a lot of like, you know, hurdles to it. But it's definitely something I want to do. I would love to have a block party. Just shut down the block. Let's do it once a month. This summer. I'm not saying we have to do it every week. But if we could do that and get just get traffic here, pedestrian traffic here...people like in our spaces. It's definitely on the radar. Yeah.

**Katrina Tapper 57:06**

Yeah, I think there's some really cool stuff that could be done. And I'm sure there's hidden talent in Camden.

**Asiyah Kurtz 57:15**

I know there is. Like I've met quite a few people and some of what I've seen is like potential some of it is...not necessarily that they have potential, but that they are just looking for direction. Like is there a place for me? And I'm like, you don't have to necessarily be the painter you can be the videographer. You can be the graphic designer. Art is more than just what this [visual art] is. Yeah, there is a whole world out there. So it's just helping them to like kind of see what the options are.

**Katrina Tapper 57:57**

Yeah, and I love that. You know, have a jewelry artist. Yeah, that is amazing. Just the variety so that people can walk in and be like, oh, yeah, my stuff does count.

**Asiyah Kurtz 58:11**

Yes, yes. I'm really excited about the show at the county [college], the exhibition. I can't wait to see your art. It's gonna look so good. There's so much room there's so much space and they're basically given us carte blanche so you can put it whatever you want. Okay. So yeah, I'm excited about that. Is there anything else you want to share with me?

**Katrina Tapper 58:45**

Oh, think that kind of covers the gamut.

**Asiyah Kurtz 58:53**

Thank you.

**Katrina Tapper 58:55**

I'm excited to see where you know, as being one of the first here, it's changed a lot. I know it's gonna continue to do well.

**Asiyah Kurtz 59:08**

Yeah my fear and the thing that I guard against is that we don't grow so much that we attract the wrong kind of development that really leads to gentrification and people not being able to afford being artists here. Like, I want to see development happen, but I don't want it to happen at the expense of artists and residents who are here. So there's a way that those things can kind of exist together, that development can happen and people can continue to afford their rent, whether it's for their studio or their apartment. And so that's that's the conversation I continue to have is that, yes, we want development but it has to be the right way. It cannot just be pushing people out, and then raising rent. It can't be that.

**Katrina Tapper 59:09**

Yeah.

**Asiyah Kurtz 59:18**

So and that's, that's something you know, inflation is what it is. I've very much said the last thing I want to do is raise rent here. Like I would rather cut costs in other areas than raise rent because otherwise I'm edging you guys out the door. If I'm raising rent 10% here and 10% there and yeah, that's fine. But what does that say about how how much we're really trying to cultivate, you know, the arts here. So it's definitely a consideration but it's a lot of work.

**Katrina Tapper 1:00:50**

But now that I know, I don't I'll make you a black portrait to hang on your wall.

**Asiyah Kurtz 1:00:58**

Yay! That's awesome!

**Katrina Tapper 1:01:03**

What are the parameters?

**Asiyah Kurtz 1:01:08**

Yes, like 16 by 20 is good. I love it. I love it. I'll take it. All right, thanks.