



Post Date

10.02.20

Category

News & Features

Share

Facebook,

Twitter, Email

Newark's Black Lives Matter Murals: A Design Process & Collaborative Action Framework

Image:
Abolish
White
Supremacy,
Newark. c/o
Isaac Jiminez,
DreamPlay
Media

Express Newark

On Saturday, June 27th, the words “ABOLISH WHITE SUPREMACY” were painted in bright yellow 25ft high letters on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard between the Essex County Historic Courthouse and Veterans’ Courthouse. On Halsey Street, east of the Rutgers campus, the words “ALL BLACK LIVES MATTER” takes up another city block.

“With these two statements, we are shifting the narrative and promoting thoughtful reflection and continued dialogue. In order to say Black Lives Matter, we have to Abolish White Supremacy,” said Arts and Cultural Affairs Director **fayemi shakur**.

“Through collective art-making, we were able to provide a space for safety, joy, and community engagement.”

These powerful statements launched the City of Newark’s social justice public art initiative in collaboration with the Arts, Culture and Media *Graphic Design Program* at Rutgers University-Newark (ACM-GD), many community partners, and several well-known city muralists and organizers.

“Poetry, music, graphic design, and public art are all public avenues to have our voices heard. Newark is a

have our voices heard. Newark is a movement City as well as a City of artists,” said Mayor Ras Baraka when he came to not only witness the project but also took up a roller and put down a few coats of the yellow paint. *“The convergence of art and protest is an age-old practice, especially pronounced in African-American culture.”*



Image: All Black Lives Matter mural on Halsey St. c/o Keary Rosen

In response to the various murals emerging all around the country manifesting their support for black lives, the ACM-GD faculty envisioned

a BLM street mural in Newark with its own perspective. **Ned Drew**, Chair of the *ACM Department* introduced the thought to his GD colleagues and to RU-N's leadership, all of whom reacted enthusiastically to the idea of taking action through a large-scale and lasting sign. The University and the City have established a strong relationship with Newark's creative community through a connection rooted in education and publicly-engaged scholarship, and the idea aligned with the City's social justice public art initiative led by fayemi shakur. Together they mobilized many creative sectors in Newark working in solidarity with the BLM movement.

The ACM Graphic Design Program — led by Professors **Jennifer Bernstein, Ned Drew & Chantal Fischzang** — includes a social impact-driven design curriculum that embraces publicly-engaged and collaborative design practices, and is a partner of Express Newark through the *Design Consortium* and *Visual Means* Programs. These two programs are embedded in the ACM-GD curriculum and expose students to socially engaged design practices. Designers and community residents, organizations, educational institutions, local activists, and

researchers, become equal partners who — only through their work together — can create impact.

Salamishah Tillet, Professor at RU-N and Director of *New Arts Justice*, an incubator at Express Newark focused on art and activism, collaborated with the Graphic Design faculty to envision the murals' choice of language for Newark, a city with a strong history of civil rights activism and artistic demonstration. They went through several options, some quite poetic, others more matter of fact, before collectively collaborating on two phrases that captured the urgency and possibilities of our moment. The first, “All Black Lives Matter” address the movement within a movement to recognize the leadership and vulnerability of gender-nonconforming, transgendered men and women, and black women and girls killed by police officers “Abolish White Supremacy” tackles racism at its root, while also envisioning a more inclusive and democratic future.”

“Through this unique collaboration between

the city, community artists, and the university campus, the community street murals made a statement and modeled a solution, of how to bring Newark, and our nation, one step closer to making the long-deferred dream of racial justice a reality.”

Salamishah Tillet



Image: City, University & Community collaborators. c/o Arturo Holmes and the City of Newark.

ACM GD Visiting Professor and alumni **Rebecca Jampol**, who is Co-Director of *Project for Empty Space*, served as lead of the cohort. Her commitment to Newark's art community and experience organizing public projects like *Four Corners Public Arts* and *Gateways to Newark*, concretized the larger partnership with RU-N, the City's Public Art initiative, local artists and organizers/community groups.

Chantal Fischzang, Assistant Professor of Graphic Design, who's pedagogy and professional practice focuses on design for social impact and publicly engaged scholarship, designed the typography and implementation method for the murals, articulating a collaborative system in which letters could be drafted individually by small teams.

Jennifer Bernstein, Associate Professor of Graphic Design and Graphic Design Coordinator, formulated a system of distribution of roles that respected social distance protocols, and mobilized forty Graphic Design students and alumni of the University who were paired with forty local community leaders/artists, led by **Malcolm Rolling** of *Yendor Productions*, *Layqa Nuna Yawar*, and

The Land Collective, as well as GD alumni leaders *Ayah Elgendy, Marilyn Gomes, Tiffany Hale & Jahi Lendor*, to draft the 25 foot high letterforms on the streets in preparation for community painting.

to draft the 25 foot high letterforms on the streets in preparation for community painting.



Image:
Muralist
Layqa Nuna
Yawar. c/o
Sindy
Sanchez



Image: ACM-
GD Professor
Chantal
Fischzang &
Artist
Malcolm
Rolling from
Yendor
Productions.
c/o Redens
Desrosiers



Image:
Kareem Willis
from Yendor
Productions.
c/o Redens
Desrosiers



Image:
Design
Faculty
William
Medina along
Mayor Ras J.
Baraka & City
of Newark
Arts and
Cultural
Affairs
Director
fayemi
shakur. c/o
Arturo
Holmes

Much like images, letterforms are typographic symbols and are basic components of visual communication. The formal qualities of a set of letters (a font) embody historic references as well as functional connotations, and designers make use of these subtleties to formulate and communicate meaning.

While the Newark street murals would employ the same yellow traffic paint as other BLM murals across the country, the design approach was intended to highlight Black voices, which led Professor Fischzang to design the murals with the typeface MARTIN, a font by *VocalType*, named for Martin Luther King, Jr., and inspired by the “I AM A MAN” signs carried by Memphis sanitation workers during their strike for equal treatment in 1968. She had learned about *Tré Seals*, the designer and owner of *VocalType*, through research on representation in design, which is a focus of RU-N Graphic Design faculty, exposing students to histories and references beyond Westernized and Eurocentric influence.

“By engaging students in partnerships with the community, a conscientious design-sense is forged. It establishes deep

networks of trust and personal involvement in the changes they want to see in their city.”

Chantal Fischzang

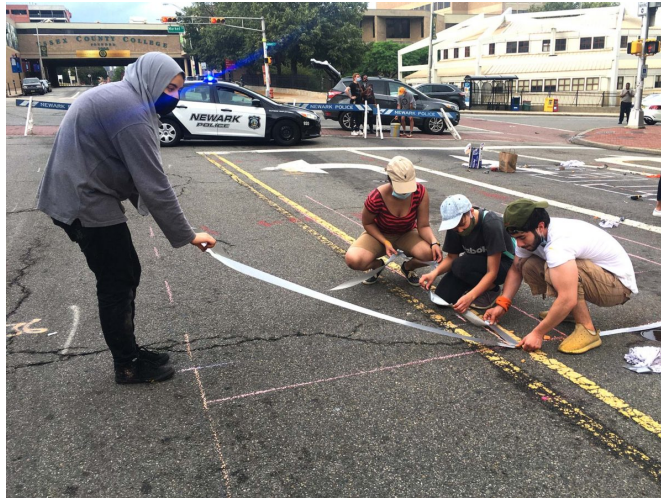


Image:
Alumni Ayah
Elgendy,
Marylin
Gomes,
Nadya
Adrianova &
Kevin
Cristancho.
c/o Jennifer
Bernstein



Image:
Alumni Dalia
Addalla &
Ronald
Mendoza. c/o
Jennifer
Bernstein



Image:
Alumni Kelly
Llumiquirega
& Lola Balla.
c/o Sindy
Sanchez



Image:
Professor Ned
Drew with
Alumni
Robert &
Jessica
Gonzales, and
Gisela Ochoa.
c/o Jennifer
Bernstein



Image:
Alumni
Marilyn
Gomes. c/o
Jennifer
Bernstein

With Jampol’s measurements of the sites, Fischzang made use of Google maps to compare and define the dimensions of the layouts — character heights, letter spacing, and margins — staying true to the design of the font and connecting both murals through the additional “All Black Lives Matter” message stacked at the end of “Abolish White Supremacy” to contextualize the statement. Fischzang created kits for each letterform in both murals to be distributed to the student designers, alumni, artists, and community members on the day of the event at both sites.

Mural Typography, Implementation Kit & Signage



The design process for the Newark murals was derived from a typographic exercise taught in the first year of the ACM Graphic Design Program at RU-N in which students use a grid system to enlarge letterforms, and learn about the anatomy of letterforms and craft. Starting at 6am, the first step was to transform the city streets into massive grids of 50" x 50" squares that assisted the drafting of the 25 foot high letterforms in preparation for the day of community painting. After the grids were constructed, each letter team (one designer student/alumni and one community artist) drew a letterform in chalk using Fischzang's kits, followed by taping so that it was ready for painting.

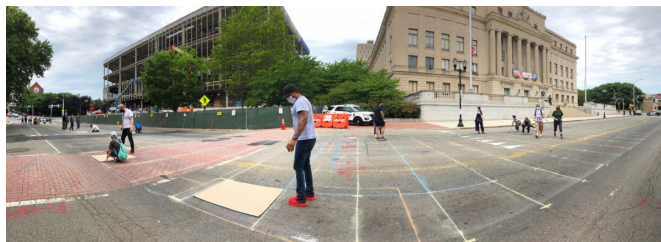


Image:
Design
Faculty &
students
collaborate
with local
Artists to set
the grid on
MLK Dr.



Image: Each letter is drafted based on the dimensions of the enlarged grid. c/o Jennifer Bernstein

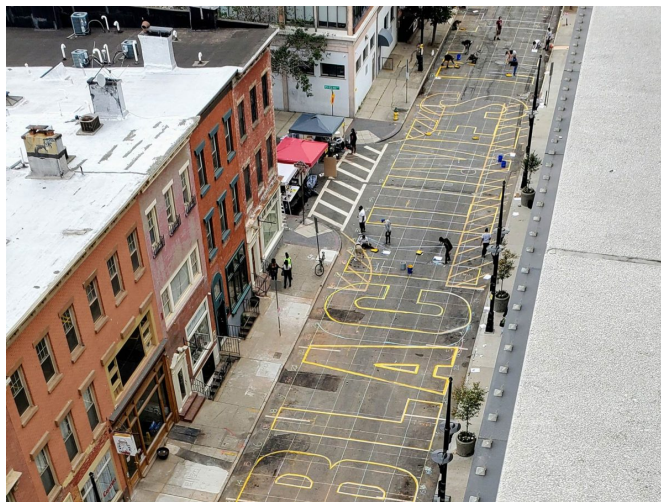


Image: Letterforms outlined with yellow paint, ready for community painting. c/o Igor Alves from DreamPlay Media

Throughout the day, over 200 community members arrived to help complete the murals in two-hour shifts to assure social distancing could be maintained. *Sherwin Williams Paint Company* donated 160 gallons of paint as well as application materials. *Burger Walla* provided food

for each site. Additional PPE equipment, water, and in kind resources were donated /provided by partners *Newark Downtown District*, *Rutgers University-Newark* and *Hahne & Co.* Local DJs were organized by *Marcy Depina* from Newark's Riverfront and *FORSA* provided music and encouragement, inviting participants to not only paint but also dance in joy, and community.



Image:
Alumni
Tiffany Hale
leads paint
distribution.
c/o Redens
Desrosiers

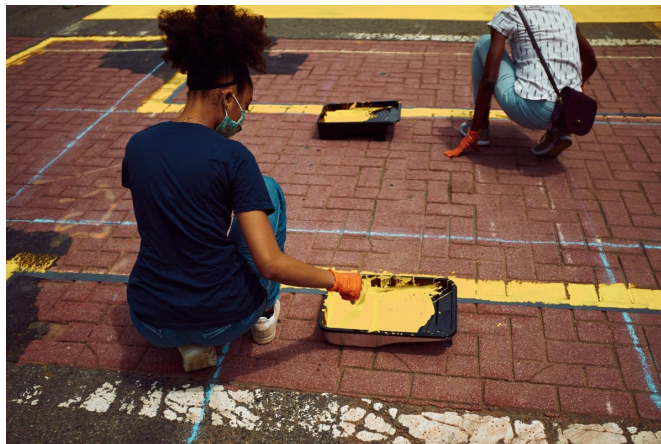


Image:
Community
painting. c/o
Redens
Desrosiers



Image:
Community
painting. c/o
Redens
Desrosiers



Image:
"Abolish
White
Supremacy"
in progress.
c/o Redens
Desrosiers

The project was developed in solidarity with the “Black Lives Matter” protests with the encouragement of Mayor Ras J. Baraka, who drafted an ordinance approved by the City Council to create a permanent Office of Violence Prevention, which also declared white supremacist groups as terrorists and outlawed all their activity in the City. The City also removed a statue of Christopher Columbus from Washington Park, which the Mayor

called “a statement against the barbarism, enslavement, and oppression this particular explorer represents.”

Community Painting on MLK Dr. & Halsey St.



In line with this history and Newark's recent revitalization, RU-N's mission encourages not just socially motivated research but publicly engaged work, understanding its crucial role in supporting the city it is part of through education that fuels co-building structures between University and Community. Endorsing the partnership between faculty, students, local organizations and artists creating the murals set a precedent and validated collaborative experience as a framework for research committed to democratic practice for the public good.

This vision and attitude connects with our students. ACM-GD alumni Tiffany Hale, a UX Designer at ADP, who has also taught as a Visiting Professor at RU-N, worked as a site lead at the MLK location. She thinks of Newark as her *"gateway to adulthood and freedom."* She adds: *"I saw so much glorious blackness here as a student, that diversity went beyond the countries representing it. It really showed me there is not one way to be black, or to love black, or to be a black creative."* When asked to collaborate on the murals, she jumped on the opportunity.

“This was a tangible real way for me to show my love for Newark. Of course as a black woman, I breathe the truth every day that black lives matter. But throughout the day so many people walked up to me asking “what are you panting on the street?” and when I told them, I would watch them light up. Because they knew that by being out here, painting this message, not only did we individually care as we were painting it, but

these larger institutions (of Rutgers University and the entire City of Newark) cared about them. We wanted to serve and protect THEM. And that makes all the difference in the world.”

ACM-GD Alumni, Tiffany Hale

Murals for Justice Newark (BLACI



Video:
Produced by
Igor Alves
Camera by
Peter Morris
Additional
Camera by
Keary Rosen
Aerial
Photography
by Isaac
Jimenez
Edited by
Gabriel
Kurzlop
Musical
"Free
Euphonia

TOP

Courtesy of
Roc Music
Group
Production
company:
DreamPlay
Media

Contributing Photographers

**Nadezda
Adrianova**
nods.work

Igor Alves
DreamPlay Media

**Redens
Desroseirs**
rexcamera.com

Sally Helmi
sallyhelmi.com

Arturo Holmes
gettyimages.com

Isaac Jiménez
isaacajimenez.com

Sindy Sanchez
vandalhaus.com

This story was co-authored by
*Jennifer Bernstein, Chantal
Fischzang, Rebecca Jampol &
Salamishah Tillet.*

**Express Newark is
currently closed**
Monday - Saturday.

**Located in downtown
Newark**
54 Halsey Street.

**For general inquiries
contact us at**
973.353.0791

Reserve S
Reservatio
Form.

TOP

Monday - Saturday,
8am - 4pm
plan your visit

37 Halsey Street,
2nd floor
Newark, NJ 07102

973-333-9734

2017

Please Join Our Mailing List

Enter your email



© 2021 Express Newark.
Site by *Level*.