



FREEDOM OF SPEECH MURAL PROJECT

Bonfoey Gallery
1710 Euclid Ave. Cleveland, Ohio 44115
Artist: April Bleakney

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This is one of three murals installed throughout Cleveland and commissioned by The City Club of Cleveland to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the original "Freedom of Speech" mural which hangs in the City Club auditorium. That mural was painted in 1942 by Elmer Brown (1909-1971), one of Cleveland's most prominent African-American artists. Brown was originally affiliated with Karamu House where he met and befriended Langston Hughes, eventually illustrating some of his books. Brown also received several WPA commissions to execute murals in downtown public buildings, and then became a commercial artist for American Greetings.

Each local artist in this series was invited to create a mural exploring what freedom of speech means in Cleveland today. Here, April Bleakney, inspired by Brown's work, features a young woman as the central figure in her modern depiction of free speech.

The other artists featured in the Freedom of Speech Mural Project are Christopher Darling (displayed at New Tech Collinwood High School) and Donald Black Jr. (displayed at the Rice Branch of Cleveland Public Library).

ARTIST STATEMENT

The themes of Elmer Brown's original Freedom of Speech mural of "breaking ties to oppression and exclusion, while compelling viewers and attendees at forum events to ask questions, avoid making assumptions, and keep learning" are as important now as they were in 1942; I'd argue especially so in our current political climate. The opportunity to visually celebrate these concepts, promote the City Club, and the citizens of Cleveland greatly appeals to me.

I wanted this mural to embody the spirit of Brown's work, but updated for our present time and, hopefully, for our future. One issue with the original mural I notice immediately is the absence of women and people of color. The central figure in my design was consciously chosen to be a young woman. As expression is at the core of free speech, my mural incorporates this quality of expression visually with a variety of expressive mark making techniques (brushes, drips, washes that are then translated into screen printing). My hope is to create something colorful, expressive, and vibrant - visualizing not only our citizens but visually abstracting community and concepts such as exchange, voicing, listening, learning, building, and engaging.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

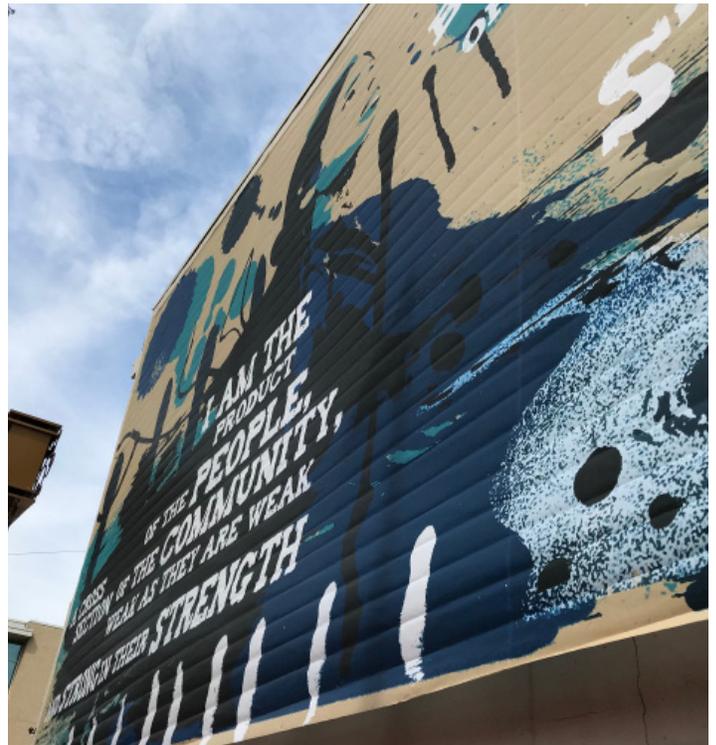
April Bleakney graduated from Kent State University in 2008 with a BFA in Fine Arts, Printmaking and a BA in History. After working in Youth Development in the nonprofit sector after college, she officially launched her creative business, APE MADE, in 2011. She has worked as a self-employed artist since then, primarily as a screen printer but is versed in a variety of other media. She loves photography and creating mixed media pieces. April believes in purpose-driven printmaking, and strives to engage the community through the arts.

SPONSORSHIP

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ABOUT THE CITY CLUB OF CLEVELAND

The City Club of Cleveland is one of the nation's great free speech forums. A product of the Progressive Era, we were founded in 1912 and are one of the nation's oldest continuous independent free speech forums, renowned for our tradition of debate and discussion. For more than 100 years, all of our speakers—from sitting presidents to community activists—have answered unfiltered, unrehearsed questions directly from the audience.



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