



# FREEDOM OF SPEECH MURAL PROJECT

**New Tech Collinwood High School  
Cleveland Metropolitan School District  
15210 St. Clair Ave. Cleveland, Ohio 44110  
Artist: Christopher Darling**

## 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, Christopher Darling, inspired by the sequential nature of cave paintings and comic books, focuses on three key words “dialogue, diversity, democracy” and, using a color palette and symbols from Elmer Brown’s original mural, presents a series of stories of democracy in action, even painting himself into the picture.

The other artists featured in the Freedom of Speech Mural Project are April Bleakney (displayed at Bonfoey Gallery) and Donald Black Jr. (displayed at the Rice Branch of Cleveland Public Library).

## ARTIST STATEMENT

Inspired by Neolithic Period cave drawings and current graphic novels, I decided to take a sequential and narrative approach to this mural. By drawing color from the original Elmer Brown mural and incorporating shades of the lake and city parks, I’ve developed a palette that looks both contemporary and nostalgic for the turn of the century.

The story is told in three parts. First is dialogue—the foundation of the City Club’s work. The burning earth from Brown’s original mural is restored and Elmer Brown takes center stage in this story. The second story is intended to reflect Cleveland’s great diversity and the importance of engaging people of all ages, races, and genders to bring their voices to the conversation in order to strengthen our democracy. The final story is more metaphorical. Democracy is the bedrock of our country, symbolized with a pillar, our flag, and a liberty bell, and I placed myself in the bottom as a participant in democracy. The woman in the center is holding documents representing the rules, regulations, and institutions of the past that are falling into obscurity to make way for a new, bright future.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Christopher Darling received an MFA in Illustration as Visual Essay and a Paula Rhodes Award for Exceptional Achievement in Visual Essay from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. In 2010, he co-founded *Carrier Pigeon Magazine*, a publication of illustrated fiction and fine art.

For more than a decade, Darling freelanced as an illustrator. His clients included The New York Museum of Natural History, Sony Music Entertainment, and the United Nations Refugee Agency. His artwork appeared in publications such as *Wallpaper Magazine*, *Frieze Magazine*, *Juxtapoz Magazine* and he was recognized by the Society of Illustrators, American Illustration, Communication Arts, 3x3, Creative Quarterly, The Pixie Awards, and the Association of Illustrators. His paintings, and illustrations, have been published and exhibited internationally.

His recent works include a series of illustrated vignettes titled, *Everywhere is Cleveland*. The series is based off Tennessee Williams' quote, "America has only three cities: New York, San Francisco, and New Orleans. Everywhere else is Cleveland." The series is a response to this generalized attitude, and seeks to expose different parts of the culturally rich, often misunderstood, and diverse city. He also implemented two murals, including one at the North Star Neighborhood Reentry Resource Center in East Cleveland, and another at Oriana House in Hough – reflecting client artwork and implementation.

Darling taught illustration & design at Queens College (NYC) and was teaching at Kent State University in the School of Visual Communication Design when he died in June 2018.

## 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.

## MEDIA

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