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Fabric Lab / North Omaha Trail Quarter 2&3 2023 Newsletter

In this time of growth and change, it is important to remember that the community desires to maintain the integrity of the Black experience in our neighborhoods, create healthy environments, and thrive in places of belonging. Over the past year, we have worked with the community to initiate and co-develop thriving communities and healthy neighborhoods, one project at a time.

We partnered with Bromely & Co., DeOld Andersen Architecture (DAA), and Joy Brings Light for a community design session that focused on creating missing middle, infill housing designs informed by the community. We hosted two panels that started conversations on what Black Futures look like in Omaha and how to build a thriving North Omaha despite historical injustices such as redlining and highway construction. In line with this, we are launching the U.S Department of Transportation **Thriving Communities** initiative in partnership with the City of Omaha and MAPA. This initiative aims to develop the capacity needed to begin to address the impacts of Highway 75 on North Omaha and positions the community to apply for **Reconnecting Communities planning grant funds**.

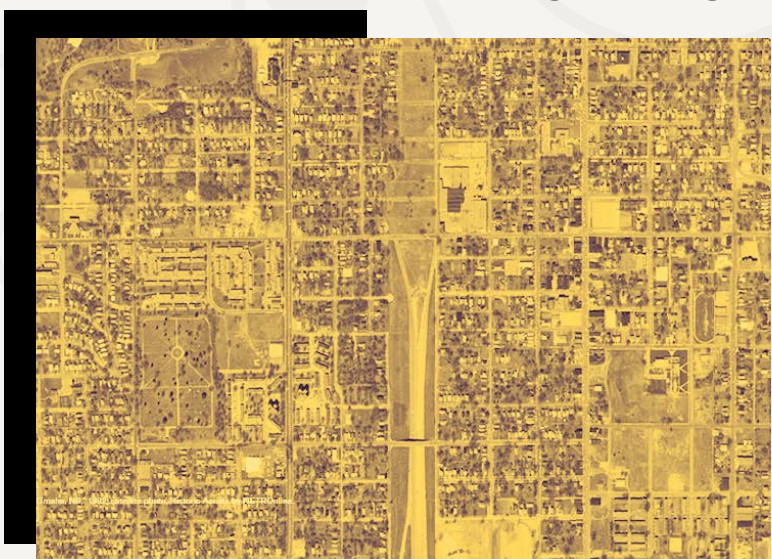
Partnering with the community, we added 4 new murals and several public art projects by local artists to the North Omaha Trail, and **we are happy to announce that we are working on a North Omaha Trail app (beta version available for download here)**. Phase II of the trail is also making progress, as we have had fruitful conversations with a few partners, we may even see a downtown segment installed yet this year.

Apart from infrastructure, we believe that the essence of a home, neighborhood, and community lies with its people, culture, connections, and sense of belonging. We supported and organized community-centric events like Melanin City Classics, Coming Home, and Juneteenth Joyfest that celebrated culture, creativity, and fostered community connections. Additionally, we explored the presence of Earl and Louise Little, Malcolm X's parents, on 24th & Lake Street. We did all this and more with the community.

The following newsletter outline some but not all of our work over the last 6 months of 2023.

Creating the space for people
to find their unique power
to make meaningful change.

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Cultivating Spatial Agency

What is agency? Agency is more than capacity, it is an individual or group's knowledge, resources, and their belief that they can fulfill their goals. It involves the feeling that one's actions directly impact the world. At its core, agency is freedom, self-determination, and the ability to create change.

Why does a sense of agency matter? Having a sense of agency plays a significant role in how individuals perceive themselves in relationship to the world and how they navigate their communities, experiences, and interactions. It influences how people approach life's challenges, interact with others, set and pursue goals, and maintain a positive outlook. As a result, fostering a healthy and well-balanced sense of agency is essential for personal growth and thriving communities.

What is spatial agency? An individual or group's knowledge, resources, and belief that they can shape the world around them and create supportive environments and places to thrive.



Fabric Lab's urban development and community development-focused approach cultivates spatial agency, empowering individuals to take control of their communities by contributing to positive change. Fabric Lab provides community members access to resources as a community space where individuals can learn, collaborate, network, and access information. Fabric Lab also offers fellowships and grants to support community-led initiatives and projects that align with our values. Fabric Lab encourages active participation in community projects, events, and decision-making processes. Fabric Lab facilitates forums for open dialogue where community members can voice their opinions, concerns, and ideas for improvement. Fabric Lab intentionally designs opportunities for community members to develop and share their expertise. Fabric Lab engages in collaborative problem-solving with community members. Fabric Lab develops projects and programs that uplift the cultural diversity and values of the community to enhance a sense of relevance and belonging. Fabric Lab recognizes and celebrates the achievements and contributions of community members and highlights their impact. By implementing these strategies, Fabric Lab works towards building up our community's spatial agency.

QR A Place



Called Home



On the Wednesday of Native Omaha Days we organized **"A Place Called Home"**, an innovative housing design session, aimed to elevate the conversation about potential housing models in Omaha by prioritizing community input, particularly from Black community members, and incorporating cultural experiences, creative ideation, and architectural best practices. By reimagining housing as a cornerstone of neighborhoods and cities and highlighting potential models that currently exist worldwide, this session actively created new possibilities that support healthier neighborhoods and improve the quality of life for residents.

The session explored what housing could look like in the future and how it could feel through focused on identification of the highest values and needs of the community. The outcomes of this session are informing architects in the development of forward-looking infill housing designs that can contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future for North Omaha and Omaha as a whole. This session and process was co-created by Fabric Lab, DAA, and Bromley Co with executive producers: Manuel Cook, Clarice Dombeck, and Andrea Joy Pearson. Designs will be created within the next couple of months; in the meantime, [the full report can be viewed here](#).



Black Futures 99



BLACK FUTURES



Fabric Lab hosted two Black Futures Panels. Black Futures: Centering Afro-Futurism in Omaha and Black Futures: Designing a Thriving North Omaha. The first panel Black Futures: Centering Afro-Futurism in Omaha, organized by Manuel Cook, Alajia McKizia, and Clarice Dombeck and held at the Kiewit Luminarium on June 13th, was a panel discussion about the future(s) of Black Communities and Black Spaces in Omaha with a focus on afrofuturism as a tool for envisioning and shaping our collective futures. As Omaha undergoes significant changes, it is crucial to have conversations about how we build the futures we want.

This panel moderated by Joanna Leflore brought together diverse perspectives including; Kene Okigbo, Reggie Leflore, Jade Rodgers, Andrea Joy Pearson, Stephine Finklea, and Jakeen Fox to clarify potential ways forward for our community and create a supportive space for dialogue and collaboration. By drawing on the power of afrofuturism and exploring questions around urban and community development, economics, social structures, technology, and more, the panel aspired to empower and promote change. Additionally, the discussion examined how the arts and cultural production can be used to create more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable communities. Overall, the panel created a culturally inclusive opportunity to engage in forward-thinking discussions and take a collaborative approach towards creating the futures we want in Omaha.

The second panel Black Futures: Designing a Thriving North Omaha, held at the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation during Native Omaha Days, aimed to explore what it means to thrive as a community while overcoming challenges like environmental racism, generational trauma, and historical injustices- with a particular focus on the impacts of Highway 75 on our community. The panel moderated by Andrea Joy Pearson consisted of both local and national spatial practitioners and community organizers who are actively involved in cultivating positive change including; John Comer, April DeSimone, Sherman Wells, Manuel Cook, Bri Full, and Jakeen Fox.



Their experiences and strategies provided valuable insights, perspectives, and ways to move forward and achieve the futures we want to create and thrive in. This second panel also served as a “kick off” for further discussions that will be held as part of the Department of Transportation’s Thriving Communities initiative which will be spearheaded locally by Fabric Lab, the City of Omaha, and the Metropolitan Planning Agency (MAPA), and also parallels the upcoming creation of a new City of Omaha Comprehensive Plan. Recordings of the panels can be found here: [Black Futures: Centering Afro-Futurism in Omaha](#), [Black Futures: Designing a Thriving North Omaha](#).



Coming Home

In short, Coming Home highlighted the importance of creativity in envisioning our new realities. By reflecting and honoring the varied backgrounds and experiences of our community we are fostering a sense of identity, promoting community engagement, and contributing to the overall quality of life in North Omaha - while transitioning into the Native Omaha Days weekend celebrations. Coming Home featured nationally renowned Hip-Hop artist LaRussel and local artists: Edem Soul Music, Lite Pole, Tynn, Dex Arbor, and DJ Getejikewithit. Executive producers: Alajia McKizia, Andrea Joy, Clarice Dombeck, and Manuel Cook.



"Coming Home", the final design session in July took the weeks processes from conceptualization to realization through a deliberate embodiment of our creative community in North Omaha. Coming Home served as a platform for different artists, communities, and voices to express themselves, share their stories, and contribute to the cultural tapestry of the city; thus, creating a high impact, culturally responsive and relevant way to interact with the community and recap the earlier design sessions and outcomes from the week while showcasing the importance of art and music in the creation of a thriving culture and a sense of rootedness - showcasing what makes a house a home and a neighborhood a community - a sense of belonging.

JUNETEENTH JOYFEST



The second annual Juneteenth Joy Fest was curated by Alajia McKizia and hosted by Andrea Joy Pearson in partnership with the Fabric Lab, the North Omaha Trail, the Union for Contemporary Art, Juneteenth Joy Fest committee, and volunteers. Juneteenth Joy Fest is a Black Arts & Culture festival cultivated to honor the history of Black heritage for Juneteenth while simultaneously supporting Black entrepreneurs and artists, providing space for communal healing, and community building at the intersection of the North Omaha Trail and North 24th Street (24th & Ohio Street). The result was a free and fun experience that served nearly 1000 community members with \$40,000 directly supporting Black artists and entrepreneurs, including eleven local artists and two national artists.



This year's Juneteenth Joy Fest was about envisioning Black Futures in Omaha. The festival was heavily inspired by the intersection of the Harlem Renaissance Era and Afro-futurism. The Harlem Renaissance and Afrofuturism are two distinct cultural, social, and artistic movements that share thematic and historical connections, particularly in their exploration of Black identity, creativity, and representation. The Harlem Renaissance movement challenged stereotypes and promoted a positive, authentic portrayal of Black life and culture. While Afrofuturism envisions alternative realities where Black people can exist beyond the constraints of historical oppression and marginalization and celebrates the rich cultural heritage of the African diaspora while reimagining it in futuristic and often fantastical settings. Juneteenth Joy Fest indeed expressed the essence of both the Harlem Renaissance and Afrofuturism by promoting a positive and authentic portrayal of Black culture in North Omaha, reclaiming and celebrating Black identity and Black culture in a free and public space by challenging dominant narratives where Black individuals and communities are empowered in Omaha, and by holding space for healthy and creative outlets for the community. Fabric Lab and the North Omaha Trail are proud to be a resource to Juneteenth Joyfest and a collaborator in a community-led event that celebrates the history and accomplishments of our community in a culturally inclusive way.

Melanin City Classics & More



It has been a long summer of growth planting seeds, and spreading knowledge. From Open mics to Saturday brunch, to plant sales, urban studies projects, and collaborative community led creative projects, events and workshops Fabric Lab has been actively supporting community development, capacity building, and spatial agency - watching the seeds we plant, grow.



This Spring Fabric Lab organized a Brunch and DJ Series, every first Saturday in April, May, and June, building a sense of community and supporting food entrepreneurs. In addition to creating space for creatives and community members to come break bread and chill, this series also created opportunities for Black entrepreneurship. For example in one 2 hour span, \$800 was made off of food and \$200 was made in coffee sales, plus the music was hitting every time!



For the second year in a row North Omaha artist, curator, and community organizer Keiria Marsha led, Pull Up and Vibe (PUAV), a spring open mic series capped off with a June open Mic Festival in collaboration with SkateFest and the Union for Contemporary Art.



This all age series centers, supports, and develops up and coming Black artists from North Omaha by giving them space to highlight and showcase their talents while building connections with other creatives and entrepreneurs.



Building on the momentum of the Pull Up and Vibe series, Keiria Marsha led a team of 42 artists and creatives (and their kids) to develop a placemaking event entitled the “Melanin City Classics”. Melanin City Classic was a heart-led event that fostered healing within both individuals and the community. By embracing the diverse talents and creative expressions of North Omaha, MCC provided a platform for community members to connect with forward-thinking individuals and highlight the positive aspects of North Omaha’s cultural heritage”. This year’s inaugural event was curated with several influences in mind including the chakra system, HBCU marching bands, runway fashion, the Wiz, and West-African adinkra symbols.



This summer has been full of movement, especially when it comes to walks along the North Omaha Trail. Celeste Butler has led the charge to get people moving by organizing several walks including a 5am sunrise walk on Juneteenth, and 8pm glow walk during Native Omaha Days, and even a walk in solidarity with the anniversary of Martin Luther King's walk on Washington. Other groups like GirlTrek, Hit These Trails, and Wellbeing Partners have also been taking to the trail for a fun way to better their mental and physical health while building community, and a sense of place.



Walking is one of the best ways to maintain and develop one's physical health and mitigating many sedentary lifestyle conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity while experiencing nature, and keep "eyes on the street" - know what's going on in the community & increasing neighborhood safety.

In addition to walking, Blake Harris director of [SkateFest](#), newest partner at Fabric Lab, has been planting the seeds for a North Omaha skateboarding scene supporting community events by creating opportunities to skateboard, launching a series of Skateschool events geared at teaching young people how to skateboard, and using his expertise to support the development of infrastructure that creates ongoing access to places to skateboard and more.

Pratt Street Placemaking



Speaking of infrastructure, Jewel Rodgers' organization PlaceMade recently completed a skate ramp located at 20th & Pratt just North of Kountze Park and across the street from King Middle School. Since opening, the ramp - Caden's Corner - has seen frequent use and will be a location for SkateFest's Skate School. The ramp was constructed with design support of SkateFest, artist support from the Union for Contemporary Art, planting support from Manifest Acres & Healing Roots African Diaspora Garden, and seed money from the North Omaha Trail and several other organizations. This project is a great example of community led placemaking at its finest. Keep up with everything Caden's Corner and all things PlaceMade by following them on Instagram: [@residentsofplacemade](https://www.instagram.com/residentsofplacemade).



Healing Roots African Diaspora Garden is a Black-led community garden organized by Fabric Lab partner Clarice Dombeck. Healing Roots is intentionally cultivated to honor the people, cultures, plants, and gardening practices of the African Diaspora. This growing season, Healing Roots has hosted four seed bomb-making workshops with youth from our community. These seed bomb-making workshops have been a joyful way to learn about food sovereignty and seed sovereignty, our environment, and how to better care for the earth and an active form of community engagement and participation.



Healing Roots hosted the Yoga in the Garden series in collaboration with a friend of the garden, Misha Frazier. This series has featured three BIPOC yoga instructors: Lindsay Decker, Brandis Janae, and Brit Jones. Working with these incredible women in reclaiming our mental and physical well-being through yoga's peaceful and healing practice and reclaiming public space in North Omaha simultaneously has been an amazing experience to witness and be a part of.



Pratt Street is a historically significant street with a lot going on today. Historically the street was the Northern border of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition of 1898, and at one time 24th & Pratt was the original site of the University of Nebraska at Omaha. No doubt the area is rich in history and deep community roots. Today 24th & Pratt is the most densely populated intersection along North 24th Street and boasts the highest transit (bus) usage. Moreover, you can find several points of interest within a short walk of the intersection including, King Middle School, the North Omaha Salvation Army, Bud Crawford's Storefront, Grown Folks Club, Healing Roots Garden, Evans Tower, Kountze Park, the North Omaha Trail, and of course Caden's Corner, making it an ideal location for a heartland bikeshare station (wink, wink).



Trail Art

People have been driving by and snapping pictures of trees, taking selfies in front of new murals, and posing with new public art - it was mentioned many times during Native Omaha Days that, "there is so much new art!" Art, History, Culture - maintaining the Black experience in North Omaha means prioritizing Black artists and creatives so that the community sees itself in the art and so the art is a reflection of the community. Over the course of the summer, the Fabric Lab has created space along and around the North Omaha Trail for the community to create meaning through creative works. By supporting black artists we support black communities by putting resources back into those communities and providing opportunities for personal and professional growth.



Artist Patty Talbert is blessing North Omaha with over 70 positive affirmation signs along the North Omaha trail. Patty's work is inspired by techniques used in Batik. When the elements of Batik are translated onto canvas or wood, there is a building up of different colors, patterns and textures. When sanded down the relationship between these three elements creates a unique harmony within the elements of each design. So far, 30 signs have been installed. 40 more will be installed by the end of September. Patty has several other projects underway, and you can find more of her work through September at Project Project (1818 Vinton Street) during her gallery opening entitled "Black Joy".



Another project that has had people's heads in the trees is artist Celeste Butler's tree bombing project which has draped several trees in front of Fabric Lab and along the North Omaha Trail with quilts. This project has caused a lot of attention and multiple people have pulled over just to take pictures of the trees. Celeste began this project to support placemaking efforts for Juneteenth Joyfest and has had several offers to recreate this project throughout the city. There is no doubt that this project has sparked an interest in the area and created a renewed sense of place.



Earlier this summer Patty Talbert & Celeste Butler completed the mural on the Seed Archive (2514 N. 24th Street), now the archive is ready to be filled with seeds each year and support plantings throughout the community and help start community gardens going forward.



Famous photographer, artist, and overall stellar human being, Abiola Kosiko is installing an outdoor gallery / photo-mural on Fabric Lab's southern wall. The Photos are from several prominent, Black, Omaha photographers including Abiola himself and highlight the excellence of Black photography in Omaha as well as several aspects of life and prominent people in our community. The installation is set to be complete in September.



This summer 4 new murals have been added along the trail. Each mural has been led by an artist from North Omaha or was selected by people living in North Omaha to represent an aspect of North Omaha. All of the public art along the trail has been led by Black artists, and several of the projects have created opportunities for community involvement in the painting of the murals themselves. While the specific subject matter of each mural has varied, each artist's work has been geared towards recognizing and uplifting the community or aspects of the community.



The first mural on the mural wall has been completed by well known North Omaha Artist Gerard Pefung. Gerard attended Benson High School and is from Omaha by way of Cameroon, he currently is working to expand his practice in Brooklyn, New York. Gerard's mural entitled "Breath Eazy" is a collaboration between the neighborhood and the North Omaha Trail recognizing community and the importance of clean air. The mural specifically recognizes community members Keiria Marsha and Preston Love Jr. Gerard's process included several community members over two weeks in the painting of the mural and lists participants by name. In addition to his mural, Gerard has made several custom hand bags and notebooks [available for purchase at Fabric Lab and online](#), several of which are directly based on the images in the mural itself.



Another new mural is on the side of a church. The southern wall of Mt. Moriah is the site of the "North Omaha Church" mural which recognizes the ecumenical history of the Black church in North Omaha and highlights several important historical figure in North Omaha's ecumenical history including: Rev. James Commadore (J.C.) Wade, Rev. Edward S. Faust, Mrs. Lizzie Robinson, Rev. David St. Clair, and Mrs. Helen St. Clair. The Mural was created by Joelle Storet with the guidance of Pastor Michael Williams & Pastor Lassiter of Mt. Moriah Church and support from the Union for Contemporary Art.



There are two other murals currently underway and set to be complete in September. One by well known North Omaha Artist Reggie Leflore and one by another North Omaha artist Jennifer Young & Eduardo Gardea.





ABDUL AZIZ OMAR

Earl and Louise Little, parents of Malcolm X, moved to Omaha in 1921 in the wake of the Red Summer and the lynching of Will Brown to establish and lead the Omaha chapter of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Their home was where the current day Malcolm X Memorial Foundation is located, 3448 Pinkney Street, Omaha, Nebraska.



Louise Little was chapter secretary and a reporter for Garvey's newspaper. In addition to her work as a secretary and reporter, Louise was a skilled seamstress and sold her designs. Earl Little was president of the UNIA Omaha branch, a Baptist minister, and an experienced carpenter. Their community organizing skills, activism, and vocational skills illustrated the ethos of UNIA theology.

The main office for the Omaha branch of the UNIA was in the 24th & Lake area, home of Native Omaha Days, a historic center of the community, and a thriving business district. Today, that corner is owned by Kay Andersen and RH Land Management (a.k.a. The Sherwood Foundation) and has one building that appears to be collapsing.

How could we honor the legacy of the UNIA, Marcus Garvey, Earl and Louise Little, and Malcolm X in this space? What could this historic corner become? What should development look like in this area? A high-quality grocery store, more housing for young Black professionals? Community space? How could this corner encapsulate this space's historical and cultural significance and the future of North Omaha?

Earl & Louise Little

and the 24th & Lake Historic District

UNIA in Omaha

Divisions of UNIA mentioned that the Omaha chapter met in the mid 1920's met at Liberty Hall at 2528 Lake Street, right off N 26th Street.



Malcolm's father was president of the Omaha UNIA branch. Wherever Garvey branches were located, there was a great effort to raise money for the local group to have its own meeting hall. Under Little's leadership, the Omaha branch became strong enough to obtain its own "Liberty Hall." The organization was often denied hall rental or the permits that were readily given to white and "acceptable" black groups.⁶





GIVE THEM THEIR FLOWERS

We would like to extend our love and gratitude to two friends of Fabric Lab Andrea Joy Pearson & Biko Kwanzaa and our partners Alajia McKizia, Keiria Marsha, Blake Harris, Preston Love Jr, Dawaune Hayes, Clarice Dombeck, and Manuel Cook.

Special thank you to Andrea Joy for being an uplifting spirit of love and light for Fabric Lab, Fabric Lab partners, and the greater North Omaha community. Thank you to Biko Kwanzaa for being our eyes and ears on the ground and keeping our corner of North 24th St. looking right. Y'all are appreciated.

What We're Reading



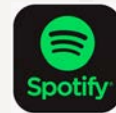
Download and test the App! (beta version)



Support North Omaha artists and grab some trail merch at Gerard Pefung's Elefung Store



Stay connected



5 Black spatial practitioners from North Omaha visiting the Black Archives in Amsterdam, August 2023.

(Photo by a passerby.)





Fabric Lab is a program of Spark

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THE NORTH

