2023 Arts Grantees Emphasize Artistic Expression

In 2023, the Black Belt Arts Initiative (BBAI) funded a total of 28 public art installations, workshops, festivals, classes and more, emphasizing the importance of artistic expression across the Alabama Black Belt. Recently, the Bullock County Humane Society, a 2023 BBAI grantee, unveiled a large-scale mural as part of their ‘Paint the Town With Dogs and Cats’ program. Through art, they are seeking to reach the younger population to "begin the education of responsible pet ownership and also to instill pride in the community in which they live,” showing the power of art to both bring communities together, while also addressing pressing needs and providing education. The mural, a large, expressive painting of a cat and dog, with messages to ‘Save a Life, Spay, Neuter, and Adopt’, was painted by local professional artist Megan Foose with assistance from her daughter and fellow artist, Ellen, who recently graduated from Kenesaw State with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA). The Black Belt is incredibly fortunate to be home to a variety of talented artists and legacies, and the BBAI grants help to highlight those artists in both traditional and nontraditional ways.

A similar BBAI grant-funded mural was recently unveiled in Gilbertown, AL, by the Saiasi Foundation. Gilbertown is a rural community with a population hovering around 700 and this beautiful female deer mural was painted on a building at Gilbertown Walking Trail park with the goal of inviting the community & visitors to appreciate the beauty and importance of deer and the landscape and to create a subliminal sense of care for these creatures. The Gilbertown mural portrays a beautiful, life-sized, deer running in its natural habitat.

The 4th Annual Photographic Nights of Selma, an additional BBAI grant-funded program, was held the first weekend of November, highlighting photography as an art form. Through the power of art, this festival is building bonds of friendship as it crosses a multitude of boundaries and allows people to come together to better understand each other. The event included the work of more than 2 dozen international photographers, seen through exhibitions, screenings, and various presentations, all free and open to the public.

Other grant-funded projects include an upcoming Arts Sampler Showcase from the Eutaw Housing Authority and the Annual ‘Christmas on the River’ Musical Extravaganza in Demopolis the first Saturday of December. The diversity of organizations and arts projects funded emphasizes the BBCF’s commitment to meeting the needs of our communities through artistic opportunities and underscores the ways that the visual arts can bridge gaps, through murals, photography, and so much more.