

The Lighthouse Resource Center's "Creative Commune": *Curating Community & Confidence through Art*
(now known as **JumpstArt NYC**)
United States - New York City
Claremont McKenna College
Toluwani Roberts
<https://www.jumpstartnyc2021.org/exhibit>

Section 1: Narrative

The goal of this project was to support Black low-income artists in New York City. As a historically and presently disadvantaged group of people, I found it important to provide members of my city-wide community with an opportunity to focus their attention beyond survival—to tap into their creative potential and produce a body of artistic work this summer.

There were no fundraising efforts during the implementation of this project.

I was inspired to create JumpstArt NYC after a few failed attempts at other community service projects. I grew up in Jamaica, Queens and went to high school in Brooklyn. What stood out to me most about the latter borough was the abundance of murals throughout. While some of the Brooklyn neighborhoods were as underprivileged as mine, the visual art brightened the space and increased the sentimental value of the community; I wanted the same for mine. Zoning, redlining, and other forms of systemic racism have left our communities of color with limited access to financial, educational, and artistic resources. Although a few murals in Jamaica, Queens don't solve these issues, they could provide healing and inspiration to members of my community—particularly to the youth who lack a proper arts education in their schools. I initially intended to establish a youth arts program in the Rochdale Community Center during the summer of 2020 that would spearhead a mural project, and other art workshops.

Following the pandemic, however, my attempts to network in person were halted. Local community organizations and art groups were not responsive to my calls and e-mails. During this time, I spent many hours on social media and witnessed a sharp increase in mutual aid organizations. Giving money directly to unemployed, sick, and grieving people was the most productive and impactful way to help them. After a summer internship with VidaAfrolatina in which we analyzed and critiqued the non-profit industrial complex, I wanted to make sure that my project did not replicate its hierarchical structures. I did attempt to reconnect with the Rochdale Community Center in 2021, and later with the Audre Lorde Project, but neither group had capacity to host my original project. Therefore, I mimicked the mutual aid organizations I followed on Instagram and set up a mini-grant program called JumpstArt NYC for Black low-income artists in the city. As a native New Yorker exposed to the arts, I wanted to safely connect with and serve people within my community.

My outreach was limited to graphics, emails, and social media. At first, I was worried about getting too many applications, but as the deadline drew closer, I had only received a few. The organizations I connected with, however, were supportive in sharing the opportunity, including my District Council in their newsletters, and my friends and followers on social media. Ultimately, everyone who applied and sent in the requested materials received funding; I am thankful that I did not have to select which projects to fund and to reject. I will admit, it was quite ambitious of me to implement this project independently, considering all the personal challenges and transitions I had experienced this summer. It was also quite overwhelming at times to respond to emails, set up and update the website, and keep the funding in order. These personal and project challenges, as well as my grantees' artistic projects, shaped my definition of peace.

JumpstArt grantee Charline Ogbeni used her funding to organize a photoshoot for breastfeeding mothers and is establishing her own non-profit to minimize the stigma around breastfeeding in public. Mothers deserve to feed their children without harassment, and in peace. Jacarrea Garraway completed her film this summer on mental health struggles and healing practices of young Black women. This project brings awareness to Black women's pursuits of personal and collective peace. Candace Leslie found peace in painting "Gardens" upon a very large canvas, revisiting themes from her childhood and reflecting on Blackness and her personal growth.

Peace is synonymous with mental and spiritual ease. To have housing, ample access to food, a whole and loving family, and all your needs met, supports in the embodiment of this peace. As an artist myself, I know that an artist's mental and spiritual ease, self-worth, and fulfillment is often seated in the progression and completion of their creative work. Money is key to fulfilling these needs and is one of the most important tools in spreading peace. To illustrate, Jacarrea wrote in her final reflection:

"I was very unsure as to whether I could complete 'A Guarded Condition' this summer, as I was still trying to recover from all that I endured during the height of the global pandemic. I definitely did not have it on my radar to create a new film, as I knew it would be an additional financial strain for me.... JumpstART was tremendously helpful in assisting me in achieving my production goals. The film really needed a bit of extra support to finish the last round of filming."

As shown in the website, many other grantees expressed a similar sentiment in their final reflections from this summer. This peace, of course, is short term. Life is full of surprises, artists are always dreaming of new ideas, and JumpstArt NYC may just be a one-time summer project. I am, however, working on getting district funding for Jamaica Resource Center, LLC to fund this mini-grant project in the future. I also see myself working in education or for a non-profit after I graduate and may potentially partner with an organization to sustain JumpstArt NYC long-term.

This summer, my project was limited to the digital realm, and I do feel that deeper connections were missed as a result. I would have liked for grantees to network with each other throughout the summer and within the context of an in-person exhibit. It is also far more impactful to witness art in a physical gallery, with the artist present to answer questions and discuss the themes of their work. The inquiries of viewers and fellow artists would deepen their understanding of their own project, and perhaps unlock a new idea or creative journey. However, it was far more accessible for both me and the grantees to conduct this project remotely. JumpstArt NYC was able to fund people from a diverse age range and background, some of whom are more vulnerable to COVID-19 and its variants.

My advice for future Projects for Peace recipients is to brainstorm their questions, concerns, and ideas out loud with their campus contact, their friends and family, and anyone who is receptive to listening. COVID-19 and its variants are still a threat, and your project is very likely to be impacted by it—although the manifestation of this impact will be different for everyone. However, do not let any challenges you may face deter you. Be willing to expand your definition of peace and you will make a positive difference in your chosen community.

Personal Statement:

Art is a means to bring peace and healing to the artists and their audiences. JumpstArt NYC provided a few Black low-income artists with the financial means to foster this exchange. The grantees' passion and commitment to their artistic creations this summer have been awe-inspiring and demonstrate how important it is to trust and invest in our people.

Personal email: toluslbs@gmail.com

Section 2: Photographs

The flyer from this summer and some grantees' artwork

