

The River Times



America’s River Roots Festival marks America’s 250th celebration, taking place October 8-12, 2025.

This festival is meant to showcase and celebrate the vibrant and unique cultures of America's river cities. It is a festival of music, cuisine, and culture. For this festival, eleven promising apprentices from ArtWorks and The Well have come together to make eight unique projects made to last beyond the festival and preserve its legacy. These artists were commissioned by America’s River Roots to make projects exploring our relationship with the river, past and present, and how we coexist with the river, bodies of water, and our communities that surround them.

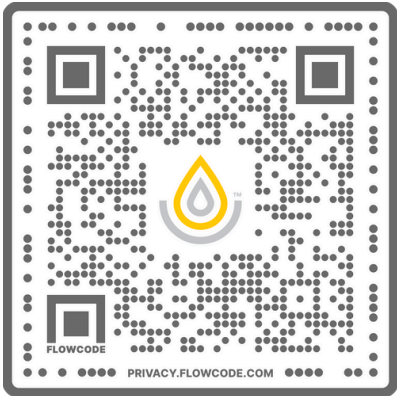
ohio river history

For centuries, the Ohio River has served as both a means of transportation and a natural border in the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky area. Cincinnati was founded in 1788 on the banks of the Ohio because of its strategic location on the Ohio River. The Ohio River has long stood as a symbol of freedom and resilience in the face of oppression. The Apprentice Artists have set out to capture this spirit and carry on the long-standing legacy of the artists and makers of the Ohio River that came before.



the well & true body

The Well is a Cincinnati-based, national nonprofit working at the intersection of arts and wellness. Its foundational program, True Body Project, began in 2005 in partnership with ArtWorks. To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the program, eleven youth apprentice artists created work to celebrate the America’s River Roots festival and the legacy and potential of the Ohio and other river ways. Learn more and see these works with the QR Code below.



ep & site specific works

‘what reality is’



‘What Reality Is’ is a collaborative EP created by August Brown and Josiyah Mateo with assistance from Max Rush and Desmond Reeder. This project is about the Ohio River and the reality of what it is in this day and age. They chose this project because they wanted to do something unique that would stand out. With this project, they are hoping that people will start taking care of the river and help clean it up.



album cover

Josiyah Mateo is an apprentice at ArtWorks and has worked here for two years previous. His favorite mediums to work in are pencil, pen and paper. A fun fact about him is that his name is Josiyah.

August Brown has worked at ArtWorks for two years and is back for his third. His favorite medium to work in is pencil and paper. A fun fact about him is he has worked in lighting.

This summer is Jayson's first year working with ArtWorks and The Well. He enjoys reading and drawing. His most prominent memories involving the river are visiting it with his uncle. A fun fact about him is that he has two first names.

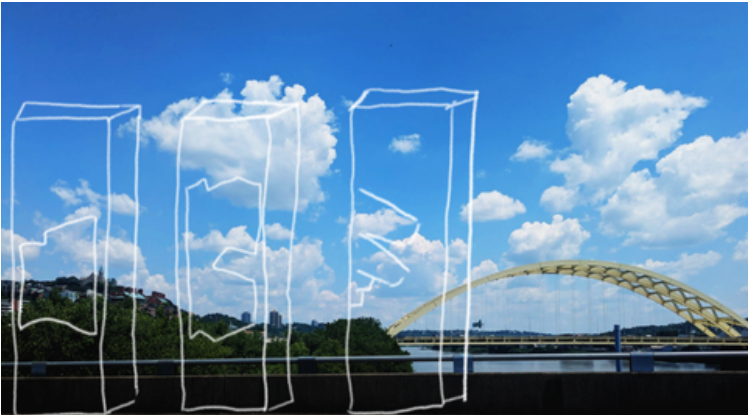
‘palette flowers’

Jayson Drew’s project ‘Palette Flowers’ is a light installation designed to look like a flower vase. Jayson was inspired by the responses to the survey the group put out asking people about their connections with the Ohio River. He took key words from the responses and chose flowers: Anemone (anticipation and beauty), Cosmos (peace), black rose (death). Jayson hopes that the take away from this project will be that people will have a fun experience and get to witness something cool.



‘make your mark’

‘Make Your Mark’ is an interactive art installation, designed by Max Rush, on the Purple People Bridge that is up for the duration of the America’s River Roots Festival. Inspired by the street art and graffiti of Cincinnati, this installation is an invitation for people to go up and write/draw something on the pillars. Max sees this project as a way to highlight the vibrant communities and the history of the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky area. “As a kind of positive note on the history of the area. I notice a lot of street art, both graffiti and murals around town, and I think doodling is something a lot of people can relate with. I want people to make their mark on the festival and have a space to be themselves,” says Max on the plan for their idea. Their hope for this project is that people have fun and get a little break from walking around the festival and also help people have a sense of ownership of the city they live in. “They’re part of our city, they’re part of the installation, they’re part of our history.”



‘make your mark’ concept art

Max Rush is a student at University of Illinois Chicago majoring in the teaching of history with a minor in museum studies. They are also a musician and play the drums and the piano. Last year Max was a summer apprentice on the Tuskegee Airman project with ArtWorks. Max’s favorite art mediums to work in are acrylic paint, sketching, drawing graph, charcoal, sculpture, and embroidery. A fun fact - they were an actor at the Dent Haunted Schoolhouse and they took a gap year.

films

‘the river’s voice’



‘The River’s Voice’ is a documentary showcasing people from Cincinnati and Kentucky as well as the stories and connections they have surrounding the river and their communities around it. Regan and Desmond want to tell people’s untold stories and perspectives about the Ohio River. They believe the festival is a good way to get people’s stories out there and to show many points of view at once.



Regan Jordan is a student at the Columbus College of Art and Design for film and video. Regan is a returning Artworks/Well apprentice previously working on the Sona and Soma project with Fotofocus. Her favorite media fall into lens-based art including film and photography. A fun fact about Regan is that she has two guinea pigs.



Desmond Reeder is in 11th grade and is majoring in creative writing. This is his first year working at Artworks and the Well. His favorite media includes writing and film. A fun fact about Desmond is that he makes youtube videos.

‘rooted’



‘Rooted’ is a dream-like short film that captures how the human body connects with nature, the river, roots, emotions, and everything else. Nature makes Elke and Ash feel more connected to themselves, which is why they chose to make this film. With this film, they are hoping to raise awareness to nature and how we need to take care of it for it to take care of us. “We need to take care of the earth and the river more because it's a very good tool for grounding ourselves and our minds and bodies,” says Elke on the effect she hopes this film will have. The film is shot at multiple locations and has a voiceover of poems written by August Brown, fellow apprentice. This film explores similarities in the patterns of the human body and the patterns in nature through a surrealist lens.



Elke Hounshell enjoys spending time in nature, watching cartoons, listening to the Beatles and making comics. Elke worked with both ArtWorks and The Well last year as an apprentice working on the True Body ‘Sona and Soma’ project. Some of their favorite art mediums to work in are fine line inking pens, alcohol markers, watercolor, painting with ink, photography and fashion.



Ash Carroll likes music, drawing, art, his cats, and playing Roblox. Ash has lived in Cincinnati his whole life and he goes down by the river often. His favorite medium to work in is pen and paper. A fun fact about Ash is he can’t do a cartwheel.

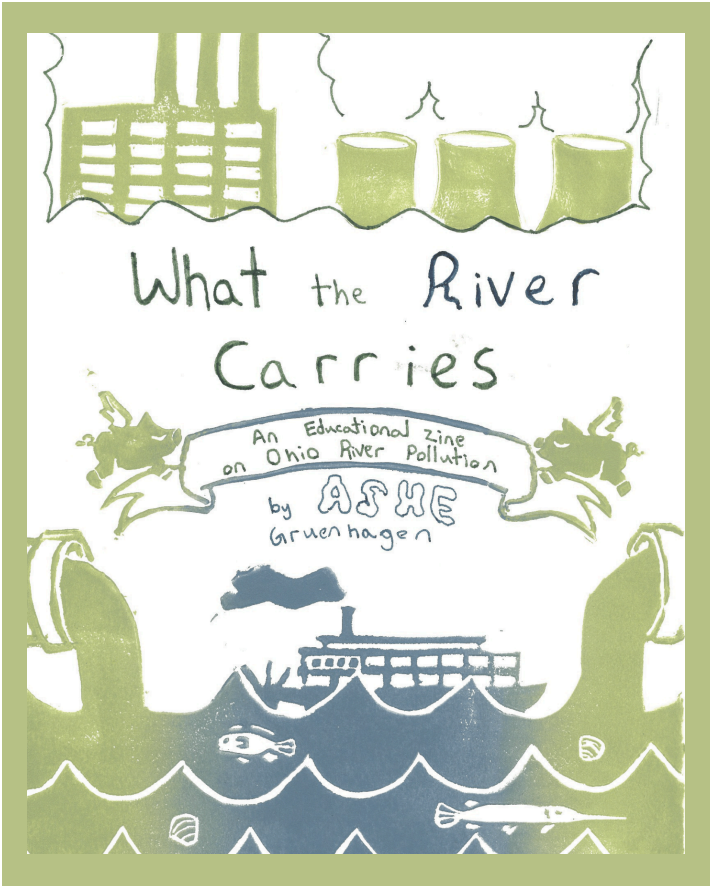
other media

‘what the river carries’

‘What the River Carries’ is an in-depth look at the nature and preservation of the Ohio River, how it’s threatened by pollution, and how we can save it in the form of an educational zine. The illustrations are made from hand carved linoleum block printing. Ashe wanted to showcase the environmental and biological aspects of the river rather than the metaphysical and historical aspects as they felt the latter was already being covered by many other projects. They hope this project will raise awareness to how river pollution not only affects the environment but the people that live there too. There is a free online version on The Well’s website and a physical version available at the festival and in The Well’s online store. All the proceeds from the physical zine will go to the Ohio River Foundation.



Ashe Gruenhagen is a second year student at Miami University studying zoology and environmental earth science. Using art to raise awareness for the environment in a way people feel connected is a concept that Ashe likes to explore and is utilizing in this project. Ashe has previously worked with both ArtWorks and The Well. Their favorite mediums are sketching, sewing, crocheting, and sculpture with polymer clay and ceramics. A fun fact about them is that their favorite animal is a tiger shark.



‘the river’s source’



‘The River’s Source’ is a webcomic narrative based around the culture and history of the Ohio River in the Cincinnati area with characters and locations based on specific time periods and cultural moments in the city's history. The story follows five travelers from different periods of time and the obstacles they must overcome on a journey to find the river's end. Violet feels a natural inclination to storytelling and specifically art as a means of storytelling. Violet is hoping this project will help people connect to Cincinnati and the river more through the characters and the narratives. The artist's concept is that you relate more to other humans than anything else even as abstract concepts. “I relate to the bathroom sign more than I do to a table,” says Violet. Both Max and Ashe were collaborators and assisted on making this project come to life.



Violet Holland is a born and raised Cincinnati and a first timer as an ArtWorks apprentice. Their favorite art mediums include writing, sketching, watercolor and digital. They feel like the river is something that is involved in their everyday life and is constantly in the back of their mind. A fun fact about them is that they went to the ArtWorks interview to learn to deal with rejection.

with gratitude

Teaching Artists

Elan Schwartz
Andrea Sisson
Stacy Sims

Supporting Artist

Anissa Lewis

Apprentice Artists

Finn Blust
August Brown
Ash Caroll
Jayson Drew
Ashe Gruenhagen
Violet Holland
Elke Hounshell
Regan Jordan
Desmond Reeder
Max Rush
Josiyah Sams

America’s River Roots Team

Tysonn Betts
Holly Brians Ragusa
Ali Crowdus
Rachel Desrochers
Kelly Kolar
Sean Rugless

ArtWorks Staff

Adrienne Dixon
Sydney Fine
Colleen Houston

Hamilton County Job Coach

Morgan Lockett

Guest Artists & Subject Matter Experts

Scottie Bellissimo
Nick Burke, Music Resource Center
Craig Davis
Christina Hartlieb, Harriet
Beecher Stowe House
Bryce Kessler, The Well
Charli Littleton, The Well
Kim Popa, PONES
Patrick Raneses, The Well
Alexander Shelton
Sara Vance Waddell
Chris Watt, Music Resource Center
Barbara Wilks
Midwest Grip & Lighting

See individual projects’ websites for additional gratitudes.



Sara M. & Michelle
Hance Waddell



The River Times editor-in-chief:



Finn Blust enjoys listening to music, playing video games, drawing and taking long walks. This is his first year at Artworks and The Well. His favorite art mediums include pencil and paper, sculpture, painting, and sewing. He is especially drawn to making miniatures and doll sized stuff. A fun fact about him is his favorite food is strawberries, mainly because they’re so pretty. :3