



FRIDAY

One More River

GALLERY GUIDE

with exhibition essay by:
Joe Tolbert, Jr.



One More River is funded by The Ellies, Miami's visual arts awards, presented by Oolite Arts.
Friday is represented by the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery

The New Gallery acknowledges the traditional, ancestral, and un-ceded territory of the Yuchi, Shawnee, and Cherokee First Nations on which we organize, exhibit, listen and learn.

Freedom Dreaming: Rest as Reparations

By Joe Tolbert Jr.

The year 2020 will be forever etched in my mind. In January 2020, scientists in China confirmed a pneumonia-like disease, and days later Wuhan went under strict lockdown measures to contain the virus. On February 23, 2020, Ahmad Aubrey was murdered in a racially motivated hate crime. In the immediate aftermath, no charges were brought against those responsible for his death. A new virus was making its way around the world inducing fear and panic of encountering the world outside of our doors, and on March 11, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic as case numbers began to rise. On March 13 in Louisville, Kentucky, officers fired 32 shots into the home of Breonna Taylor fatally killing her. In the immediate aftermath, no charges were brought against those responsible for her death. Hospitals became overwhelmed with people infected by the virus. The death toll rose daily. On March 15, states began to institute lockdown measures to contain the virus. Daily the death toll continued to rise. On May 25, George Floyd was killed after a Minneapolis police officer restrained him by putting his knee on his neck. In the immediate aftermath of his death, no charges were brought against those responsible for his death. Daily the death toll continued to rise.

As a new wave of protest began to sweep the country declaring that Black Lives Matter, I began to check in with my friends and the recurring sentiment was that they were tired. Tired of having to work through a global pandemic. Tired of putting on a happy face at places of employment that refused to acknowledge the grief that comes with being Black in the United States. Tired of having to defend Black life in an atmosphere that seems to, at every turn, want us dead. Tired of expending emotional labor to teach people what it means to be an ally to Black people. Tired. When do Black people in the United States get to rest? It feels like there is always one more thing.

Set against the backdrop of the artist's experience of 2020, family archives and history collide in Chris Friday's new exhibition, *One More River*. With this exhibition, Friday invites us into her freedom dream of rest for Black people in the United States. "One more river to cross. One more mountain to climb. One more valley I gotta go through then I'm leaving my troubles behind." The chorus of the song from which this exhibition gets its title sets up a problem for Black people. Friday shared, "It's this idea, especially in the Black community that, 'Oh, don't worry about the here and now, cause when we die, we will get this eternal rest.' I'm fundamentally disagreeing with the idea that we're not allowed to have that right now."

The large-scale drawings in this exhibition build off an earlier work, *20 Feet Tall* (2021), of a Black woman lying down, back turned toward her viewers. Viewers of the work are caught in a moment of speculation, wondering what she is doing. She has sought rest for her artworks, which are often expected to exemplify an already known Blackness that has to work and perform for the predominantly white audiences that occupy museum galleries. She shared, "There are many ways to signify blackness, so how do I do that in a way that is comfortable for me, in a way that doesn't give away too much to people who don't understand it - in a way that retains autonomy, not just for me as an artist, but for the

work itself? I want the work to claim some sort of autonomy like, 'Oh, you get to see me do this, but you don't get to understand exactly what it is or why.'" Art is an outgrowth of the culture in which it is made, so it makes sense that Friday would want the same for her art as she does for those in her life. This is the freedom dream – rest, autonomy, and claiming agency over our lives.

In the shadows of this freedom dream lies the nightmarish history of Black labor in this country. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare how our thinking about labor is still rooted in the exploitation of those deemed expendable by the larger society. As the pandemic raged on, our sense of normalcy changed when the things we were used to were no longer options. The only businesses that were open were those deemed essential. As months went by, we began hearing how corporations weren't protecting their workers from COVID while experiencing profits that were never seen before. As the nation grew restless, the leaders of corporations and those in government sought to bring the workforce back with no protections despite prior months of remote work. This is a continuation of the exploitation that founded this country's wealth with the enslavement of Africans in this country.

Friday explores this nightmare by sharing the story her grandmother told about her great-grandfather's time as a sharecropper. After the legal end to chattel slavery, slavery by another name took hold in the form of sharecropping. Sharecropping was a legal arrangement that allowed newly freed Black men and women to rent land and equipment for a portion of the crop at harvest time. Though some were able to make a living, many were subjugated to the same exploitation that existed under the system of chattel slavery. The voice of Friday's grandmother tells the story of her father. He worked the land and harvested the crops, and when the landowner took the crops to market, he returned to tell her father that they broke even, keeping the profits for himself. These exploitative accounting practices set up the systems that allow for the ever-increasing wealth gaps we continue to see today. Reflecting on her grandmother's story, Friday shared, "I think about just what kind of lives my family has had, because of that particular start." This throws into stark relief that rest could be one form of reparations to repair the harm done by the continued exploitation of Black people and their labor.

Freedom dreams, set against the reality of our waking lives, allow us to see how this world doesn't work for us. It shows the ways our current culture upholds injustices and points us to a greater vision of who we can be. Friday reminds us of the many ways Black people labor, both physically and emotionally, and for those of us who are Black, we are encouraged to live the dream awake and claim rest for ourselves in the here and now.



Joe Tolbert Jr. (Joe T.) is a minister, art critic, and the founder and lead cultural strategist of Art at the Intersections. He received his B.S. in Communications from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and completed his M.Div. in Social Ethics from Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. As an art critic and writer, his writing has appeared in various publications and exhibition catalogs such as Quiet Lunch, Arts.Black, CrossCurrents, and in Applied Theatre with Youth: Art, Education, Activism that was published on Routledge Press. Joe is a sought after facilitator and cultural strategist that works with communities and institutions to help them harness the power of art and culture through the building, implementation and evaluation of cultural strategies.

I am excited to introduce the work of Chris Friday - or just Friday - to the Austin Peay and Clarksville community. Friday creates drawings of figures at rest or doing mundane leisure activities, but in a larger-than-life scale. It's the scale of the drawings, one close to twenty feet long, that really draws in the viewer and enhances the importance, and desire, of leisure and rest - but with their backs turned toward the viewers - forcing the viewer to become a bystander and witness to this leisure - not a participant. The exhibition title, *One More River*, refers to the song *One More River to Cross*, by Sam Cooke. With this exhibition, Friday, as a Black woman, asks the question, 'When is that last river coming, because I'm tired.'

-Michael Dickins, curator/director of The New Gallery

Artist Bio:

Friday is a multidisciplinary artist based in Miami, Fl. Her work offers itself as both a contemplative reflection of and counter-narrative to the pervasive under/misrepresentations of Blackness in mainstream media and popular culture.

Often incorporating a black and white "Chalkboard" aesthetic, which plays on concepts of learning and teaching, Friday identifies problematic perspectives and their origins, questions their legitimacy, and offers possible solutions in her work.

Friday's portfolio features large-scale works on paper, murals, video, ceramics, projections, photography, comic illustrations, and social practice/activism through curating.

Friday has exhibited extensively in her hometown of Miami, Florida, nationally and internationally. Most notably, her work was included as a part of "The Cartography Project" presented by the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. (2022), "Black Thought Anthology" curated by Octavia Yearwood and presented by Spinello Projects in Miami, Florida, (2020) and " #WhoOwnsBlackArt?", presented by Zeal Press at Muce 305, in Miami, Florida (2019).

Friday received a "The Ellies" Creator award from Oolite Arts (2021), The GMBCV People's Choice award for her work in Miami Beach's No Vacancy juried art show (2021) and residencies with Anderson Ranch Arts Center (2022), and the Visual Arts Residency at Chautauqua Institute (2019).

Friday is currently a resident studio artist at Oolite Arts in Miami, Florida and an adjunct professor at the New World School of the Arts.

Gallery Assistants: Katie Boyer, Rheanne Bouchard, Sarah Roach

Gallery Intern: Jordyn Jones

Additional support: Arsimmer McCoy, Yaheli McCoy, McLean Fahnestock, Melissa Proctor, Jessica Kishbaugh and Billy Renkl

Associated Events:

Artist Lecture: Sept. 27, 6 p.m., AD120

Reception/Gallery Talk: Sept. 28, noon-1:30 p.m.
w/ special performance by Arsimmer McCoy

First Thursday Art Walk: Oct. 6, 5-7:30 p.m.*

Writer, International poet, educator, creative programmer, cultural worker, performance & collaborative artist, Arsimmer (pronounced Awe-summer),

is a Miami native, by way of Richmond Heights.

She is a Mother, a griot, and creative.

Arsimmer has been blessed to write for award winning films, like, "You can Always Come Home", Directed by Juancy Matos and produced by Monica Sorelle, and The experimental dance film, directed by sculptor GeoVanna Gonzalez, "HOW TO: Oh, look at me".

"You can Always Come Home", was the winner of the Knight Made in MIA Film Award and recently screened this past week at the Black Star Film Festival.

And "HOW TO: Oh, look at me", premiered at Soundscape Park

and screened at the Slam Dance film festival in 2021.

Arsimmer has been an artist-in-residence for several different organizations including AIRIE (pronounced AIRY) which stands for "Artist in Residence in the Everglades", in February of this year,

Atlantic Center of the Arts/Oolite Arts, and Bakehouse Art Complex 'Summer open' in 2021.

She is the winner of the Ellies Creator Award and Wavemaker Grant for her project, "Ms. Mary's House| The Carol City Museum", a museum and gallery that will live in her home and is projected to open this year.

Her work has been featured in Venice Magazine, Mixed Mag, Creatures Mag, The Lighthouse Review, The Far Gallery, Perez Art Museum, Locust Projects, and several others.

Arsimmer is also a veteran teaching artist with O,miami and has facilitated workshops through their creative community initiatives, like, Apple Creative Studios

and the recently published poetry collection entitled Waterproof: Evidence of a Miami Worth Remembering, a collection of Micro-elegies to Miami's landscape.

Arsimmer has work on display via a collaborative mural with multi-disciplinary artist Chris Friday, The poem "Ode" was commissioned by Cathy Leff of the Bakehouse Art complex as a commemorative letter to the complex's 35 years of existence, unveiled in 2021.

Arsimmer is proud to have been inducted this year to the Board of Directors of the New Canon Chamber Collective. A South Florida based chamber ensemble with a more inclusive and equitable approach to sourcing professional local talent in the classical music field.

But she is most proud of her now 12 year old daughter, Yaheli, who is an amazing dancer, phenomenal cheerleader, a talented speaker in her own right, and a beautiful soul.



Untitled, Courtney, 2022
Approx. 70" x 108"
white chalk on black paper



Untitled, Aalijah/Pivot, 2022
Approx. 144" x 50" each
white chalk on black paper



Untitled, Amerie, 2022
Approx. 168" x 36"
white chalk on black paper



20 Feet Tall, 2021
Approx. 240" x 40"
white chalk on black paper



Grandma, 2022
video
34:09

