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COLAB Exhibit Debuts with Immersive Sound and Vision at the Eubie Blake Center

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by **Adrian Harpool** | May 23, 2025



(L-r): An opening reception of COLAB: Art and Music from Baltimore and Beyond was held at the Eubie Blake National Jazz Institute and Cultural Center on Saturday, May 17, 2025. Nearly 200 art enthusiasts, cultural leaders, and artists attended the multisensory exhibition. (L-r): Multimedia artist Joyce J. Scott; Kibibi Ajanku, textile artist; Alma Roberts, abstract painter; and Megan Lewis, Contemporary painter shared a celebratory moment reflecting on the multi-generational legacy of the Eubie Blake Cultural Center. COLAB will remain on view at the Eubie Blake Cultural Center through August 16, 2025. Photo credit: Catalina Byrd

Nearly 200 art enthusiasts, cultural leaders, and artists gathered at the Eubie Blake National Cultural Center on Saturday, May 17, 2025, for the opening reception of COLAB: Art and Music from Baltimore and Beyond. The multisensory exhibition curated by Hilary Pierce, President of the Art Collector's Athenaeum, transformed the historic venue into a dynamic space where art meets music in a celebration of Black cultural creativity.

The COLAB exhibition is unlike any other in Baltimore. With 30 visual artists and 18 music collaborators participating, the show invites audiences to experience visual art through sound. Each piece is paired with a QR code that links to music curated by an impressive lineup of musical performing artists, DJ's, and producers. Visitors can bring their own Bluetooth devices or borrow gallery equipment to fully immerse themselves in this audible art experience.



(L-r): Eubie Blake Executive Director Derek Price; Paris Brown, Baltimore Times Publisher; and William Sylvester, art collector.
Photo credit: Steward Beckham, Jr.

“This exhibit is about more than seeing—it’s about feeling the soul of each work through sound,” said Derek Price, Executive Director, during his welcoming remarks. “Baltimore is a city of deep artistic heritage, and COLAB represents the best of our local and global voices coming together.” The evening opened with a buzz of anticipation as attendees mingled among the featured works. A ceremonial “Pouring of Libations” in tribute to African American Ancestors was officiated by Kibibi Ajanku, a noted multimedia and textile artist. Guests were encouraged to join in by calling out the names of dearly departed family members as well as names of icons of African American culture. Known as Baltimore’s High Priestess of Indigo, Ajanku also has work in the exhibition.

To the surprise of the audience, the evening followed with rousing renditions of jazz standards by celebrated visual artist and McArthur Fellow Joyce J. Scott and award-winning vocalist and activist Lea Gilmore. Accompanying Scott and Gilmore, classical and jazz pianist Aaron Hill is one of the musicians who selected music for COLAB.



(L-r): COLAB contributor Aaron Hill, jazz artist/ producer; Yemonja Smalls, abstract artist; and Sean Jones, COLAB music curator and Peabody Conservatory professor. Photo credit: Steward Beckham, Jr.

Attending the event were many of the exhibition's visual and performing artists, including Baltimore-based contributors like Megan Lewis, Jeffrey Kent, Gregory Banister, and Philadelphia's Richard Watson. Artists from as far away as Philadelphia and Chicago were on hand to add even more color to an evening that at times resembled a family reunion.



COLAB contributing artist Richard Watson from Philadelphia connects with the COLAB Playlist via Spotify. Photo credit: Steward Beckham, Jr.

Curator Hilary Pierce, envisioned the exhibition as a dialogue between generations, genres, and geographies. "COLAB showcases the scope of African American art over 50 years," Pierce explained. "We feature everyone from mid-century icons like Jacob Lawrence, David Driskell and Sam Gilliam to rising local talents like Ziggy Sayeed, creating a powerful intergenerational conversation."



COLAB Curator Hilary Pierce and COLAB contributing artist, Robin Holder, New York artist. Photo credit: Steward Beckham, Jr.

The auditory element of the show is no less remarkable. Music collaborators include jazz legends like Terri-Lyne Carrington; Dianne Reeves; Marcus Miller; and Marin Alsop; genre-bending performers such as Michele Blu, and celebrated DJs like Neci Williams; and Dmitre Powell. Sean Jones, Professor of Jazz at the Peabody Institute and COLAB's music curator and advisor, emphasized the project's innovation:

“The music doesn’t just accompany the visuals—it interprets them, expands them, gives them voice,” said Sean Jones.



(L-r): Performance artist and COLAB contributor Michelle Blu debuts an original composition for the COLAB opening. Photo credit: Steward Beckham, Jr.

Several of the musical pieces were debuted during the reception, with live sets that brought the exhibition themes to life. From soulful improvisation to electronic beats layered over spoken word, the performances added dimension and intimacy to the experience. Many of the visual works are on loan from prestigious private collections, including those of the Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African American Art, George Ciscle, and Goya Contemporary; and Galerie Myrtis. The exhibition is also supported by contributions from Hotel Revival; Schmitz Press; Shine Creative; Maryland Arts Council; Bromo Arts District; Adrian Harpool Associates; Trinacria Baltimore; Nancy by SNAC; Art Collector’s Athenaeum; and other community partners. The assembly of so many talented individuals filled the center with a creative spirit that perhaps actually brought forth the spirit of Eubie Blake and his old COLAB buddy, Noble Sissle.



Baltimore artist, Gregory Bannister, with his work entitled “Row Houses in Baltimore,” which serves as the identifying image for the COLAB exhibition. Photo credit: Steward Beckham, Jr.

Whether you are a seasoned art lover or a newcomer to creative culture, COLAB promises an unforgettable journey through sound and sight—a tribute to the enduring power of collaboration. To get a jump start on the experience: Access the COLAB Playlist FREE on Spotify at Colab Art and Music From Baltimore and Beyond at Eubie Blake Cultural Center.