

## LiFT Art Salon: Gallery 72

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**BLOG POST**  
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Clint and Nasim Mahboubi Fluker co-founded LiFT Art Salon in 2014 as a monthly gathering of young Atlanta professionals, artists, and social activists to mobilize the arts as a community development tool. This place-based salon follows the example of politicians, academics, and activists who worked collaboratively under former Atlanta mayor Maynard Jackson's administration (1974–1982) to support regional arts institutions. This new blog series features reviews and retrospectives of LiFT gatherings. For more information, visit **LiFT Art Salon**.



Atlanta rap artist Jack Preston takes the stage at Gallery 72, Atlanta, Georgia, October 18, 2015. Photograph by Clint Fluker. Courtesy of LiFT Art Salon.

In collaboration with **ELEVATE**, Atlanta's annual city-wide art event, **LiFT Art Salon** sponsored an October 18, 2015 gathering to discuss hip hop, technology, and fine art. **Fahamu Pecou**, Emory Institute of Liberal Arts (ILA) graduate student and **ELEVATE** 2015 curator, placed Atlanta hip hop production company, **Organized Noize**, at the heart of this week-long arts celebration: "Organized Noize Productions and the **Dungeon Family** collective become

highly visible examples of the ways [in which] Atlanta's history, politics, and the arts converge ... [They are] responsible for some of the most prominent aural and visual aesthetics that have come to define the South." <sup>1</sup>



The crowd at LiFT Art Salon awaits the next performance, Gallery 72, Atlanta, Georgia, October 18, 2015. Photograph by Clint Fluker. Courtesy of LiFT Art Salon.

Building on Pecou's vision, LiFT's ELEVATE event, "The South Got Something to Say," featured hip hop in a multi-media environment that engaged artists, activists, and academics in dialogue about innovative Atlanta projects. <sup>2</sup> Held in **Gallery 72**, attendees enjoyed a visual art exhibit featuring Atlanta-inspired pieces by the LiFT art collective <sup>3</sup> and graffiti artist **SKIE**, a

live musical performance by local rap artists **Jack Preston** and **Small Eyez**, and a salon-style dialogue between the LiFT team and **Digital Good Times** on racial dynamics in Atlanta's technology scene. Together, these events introduced Gallery 72 as a vibrant canvas to a new audience.

LiFT's visual art curator, Shady, envisioned her exhibit transforming Gallery 72 to resemble the underside of a bridge covered in graffiti. Shady describes using a traditional gallery space as a blank canvas in political terms: "The opportunity to interrogate spatial relationships, not just culturally and artistically, but also physically and architecturally, through the transformation of the exhibition space ... reveals a movement toward new operative frameworks and political objectives where traditionally exclusive spaces include more diverse audiences." <sup>4</sup>



LiFT artist **Tim Short** discusses his artwork with two event attendees, Gallery 72, Atlanta, Georgia, October 18, 2015. Photograph by Clint Fluker. Courtesy of LiFT Art Salon.

Atlanta artist and Gallery 72 curator, **Kevin Sipp**, shares this commitment to politically-motivated and activist-oriented art. Sipp is former curator of the **Hammonds House Museum** in historic **West End, Atlanta**. Known primarily as an exhibition space for black artists and for its "permanent collection of more than 350 works dating from the mid-nineteenth century by artists from America, Africa, and the Caribbean," <sup>5</sup> Sipp draws inspiration from Gallery 72's design and history. Though the gallery's glass walls and sleek

exterior create a modern look and feel, the 72 Marietta Street building, donated to the city by **Cox Enterprises** in 2010, has a rich history as former home of the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*.<sup>6</sup>



**LiFT attendee Mikey P** interacts with a series of beat machines from different eras of hip hop, Gallery 72, Atlanta, Georgia, October 18, 2015. Photograph by Clint Fluker. Courtesy of LiFT Art Salon.



**The LiFT Team** (from left to right: Jordan Streiff, Shady Patterson, Miriam Denard, Clint Fluker, and Nasim Mahboubi Fluker) at the live podcast recording with the Digital Good Times crew, Gallery 72, Atlanta, Georgia, October 18, 2015. Photograph by LehBo. Courtesy of LiFT Art Salon.

According to Michael Kahn of **ArtsATL**, the lobby of the building was reimagined following *AJC*'s departure to "be a catalyst for a renaissance of the once prominent Atlanta thoroughfare."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the building-as-gallery pays homage to Atlanta's notorious weather. The building features aluminum panels against a bright yellow and green backdrop that resembles the pollen that coats the city each Spring, as well as the building's historic connection to print journalism: "The serpentine ribbons snake up the façade, masking the intensity of the bright yellow-green wall. The twisting form alludes to the conveyors used in the production of newspapers."<sup>8</sup>



Main entrance Gallery 72, Atlanta, Georgia, September 19, 2014. Photograph by Flickr user Burnaway. Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

For Sipp, the building's history is central to his vision for the gallery's mission: "I enjoy the fact that Gallery 72 is in the old *AJC* building, because I appreciate the convergence of literature, journalism, and the visual. We need to nurture the idea of reviewing, critiquing, and writing about visual art. It is important, because art movements are rarely reported on in real time. For this reason, I enjoy curating in a building that was once used

for journalism." <sup>9</sup> After the LiFT event, Sipp reflected, "I like the fact that we are a space that is trying to show innovative work of both established and new artists. That's what I like about the LiFT Art Salon. They are doing a great job of giving people that exposure and creating a space for intergenerational exchange." <sup>10</sup> LiFT's "The South Got Something to Say" salon documented just that: a new generation of Atlantans interested in working together to explore how the arts can be used to transform a gallery space, a building, or even an entire city.

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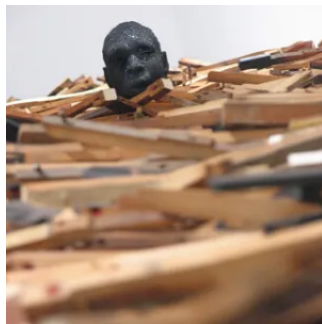
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1. Fahamu Pecou, phone interview with author, November 12, 2015, Atlanta, Georgia. Transcription by author. See, "**ELEVATE 2015**," City of Atlanta Office of Cultural Affairs, <http://www.oaatlanta.com/?programs=elevate>.
2. "The South Got Something to Say" refers to Andree 3000's acceptance speech at the 1995 Source Awards. "**Outkast winning Best New Rap Group at the Source Awards 1995**," YouTube video, 5:36, posted by The Max Trailers, October 12, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwLG7aSYM3w>.
3. The LiFT art Collective consists of six young artists who contribute original art to the LiFT Art salon each month. The collective includes, **Gerald Lovell, Julian Plowden**, Doriane Sewell, **Jurell Cayetano**, Tim Short and Annisa Wedderburn.
4. Shady, phone interview with author, November 12, 2015, Atlanta, Georgia. Transcription by author.
5. "**About Us**," Hammonds House Museum. <http://www.hammondshouse.org/about-us.html>.
6. Michael Kahn, "**Review: Gallery 72, former home to the AJC, sparks new life into Marietta Street**," ArtsATL, May 1, 2014, <http://www.artsatl.com/2014/05/review-gallery-72/>.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Kevin Sipp, phone interview with author, November 12, 2015, Atlanta, Georgia. Transcription by author.
10. Ibid.