



**Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney**  
*Councilmember*

202101620

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## MOTION

WE MOVE that City Council allocate \$8,000,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act to close the funding gap for the creation of the Robert O’Neal Multicultural Arts Center (“ROMAC”) at the Regal Cinema and adjacent sites in the West End neighborhood. The ROMAC will be a center for performing and visual arts education and programming for the West End community and for the entire City of Cincinnati.

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## STATEMENT

The closure of the popular Arts Consortium in the West End neighborhood left a void for the education and performance of music, dance, theatre, poetry performances, and exhibits in the West End, as well as a community space for community events. The ROMAC at the old Regal Cinema not only fills the void left by the Arts Consortium but celebrates through its namesake the tireless community work and contributions of legendary contemporary artist Mr. Robert O’Neal. Mr. O’Neal for whom ROMAC is named, believed all of us are creative and everyone has the ability to create and appreciate art. He lived his life advocating for others using his art to stir change and bring communities together. ROMAC will be the headquarters of community history for BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color) and will give voice to the art of BIPOC.

Talking Points:

**Why:**

- Historically there has been a gap in the support, preservation and promotion of the African American history, Black art, BIPOC creatives, and women in the arts.
- From 1972 - 2009 the Arts Consortium of Cincinnati filled this gap and was the area's leading African-American arts center and one of the oldest such arts institutions in the U.S.
- When it closed its doors 11 year ago, due to lack of funding and dislocation many artists were left without resources and opportunities. During a time when needed the most, this gap widens.

**What:**

***ROMAC FILLS THIS GAP in a time when it's needed the most.***

- Legendary Contemporary artist, Robert O'Neal (for whom ROMAC is named after and legacy is founded on,) believed all of us are creatives and everyone has the ability to create or appreciate art.
- He lived his life advocating for others using his art to stir change and bring communities together.
- His teachings and grassroots strategies were employed to bring people and art together as a catalyst for social change and reform. They are still relevant and to this day have immeasurably valuable.
- Robert O'Neal's teachings and mission handed down and inherited by his daughter, Toilynn O'Neal should be essential to insure that equity, accessibility and preservation of art created by BIPOC occurs.
- ROMAC will be the headquarters of community history for BIPOC and will give voice to the art of BIPOC.

## **HOW:**

- The ROMAC will be an institution that embodies Robert O'Neal's values ,passions for the community and educates on the stories, journeys and diversity of BIPOC in our REGION.
- ROMAC will empower and elevate emerging artists and professional artists.
- ROMAC will address a major gap in our region's progressive arts community that is challenged to provide equity and a hub for BIPOC artists and creatives.
- ROMAC will be a headquarters for BIPOC artists and creatives of all ages to learn, showcase and grow.
- ROMAC will preserve and promote Cincinnati's African American art and cultural history through exhibitions, collaboration and programming.
- ROMAC will be an incubator site focused on the 'business' of art, providing resources, support, professional development and mentoring for BIPOC creatives and entrepreneurs.
- ROMAC will be the Town Square for sustainable, and impactful community engagement with BIPOC. Instead of being at the table for these conversations, ROMAC will set the table, the menu, the atmosphere and lead the conversation around BIPOC artists and creatives.
- ROMAC will be the resource for larger cultural institutions who wish to partner, learn and mature in their efforts to bring real sustainable diversity and inclusion plans to their teams. —And Robert O'Neal's legacy will live on.

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## Robert O'Neal

Cincinnati Artist and Activist (1940 -2018 )



Born in northern Kentucky, Robert O'Neal spent most of his life in Cincinnati, Ohio. At an early age his creative skills were cultivated under the tutelage of his older sister Loretta. In his junior year at Withrow High School O'Neal received a scholarship to attend the Cincinnati Art Academy during his summer break. He later graduated from the Gebhardt Commercial Arts School. Married to his wife Julia for 48 years, they raised four children. Influenced by his love for the creative process, his daughter Toilynn O'Neal Turner followed in his foot-steps pursuing a career in the arts holding administrative positions at the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Arts Consortium and Saint Ursula Academy. Robert O'Neal is an amazing talent whose visual reference is rooted in the urban issues of Cincinnati's most challenging neighborhoods. The cultural movements of the 1960s led O'Neal to establish himself as a community activist and artist.

O'Neal organized the United Self Expressionists, a group of local artists known as US. They created a body of works reflecting the experiences surrounding their community. During the 1960s, the Model Cities Program, an element of the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty, originated in response to urban concerns. O'Neal

became head of the Culture and Recreation Task Force of the Model Cities Program in Cincinnati. This project led to the creation of the Arts Consortium of Cincinnati in the West End, an organization that cultivated hundreds of African American artists and educated the youth of the inner-city. O'Neal held the honorary title of Over-the-Rhine Mayor serving as an advocate for the homeless. For most of his life he suffered from Rheumatoid Arthritis which led to his participation in a March on Washington for disability rights. Years later he served on the Disabilities Advisory Committee for the Ohio Arts Council.

His teaching career included stints at the Arts and Humanities Resource Center where he worked with senior citizens, the Very Special Arts Ohio Program and the Cincinnati Recreation Commission. In line with his passion for grassroots initiatives, O'Neal also assisted in the founding of WAIF Community Radio. In 1994 he was honored by Applause Magazine Image Makers and was one of 25 African American artists featured at the prestigious Clossons Gallery in downtown Cincinnati.

Robert O'Neal was known as the "Master Face Painter" . He perfected the art of face painting beyond heart ,stars and rainbows to putting actual masterpieces on the faces of children and adults. His creative repertoire earned him a taste of local celebrity at tri-state festivals.