

Art World

10 New Murals Will Pop Up Across New York This Summer Thanks to a New Professional Development Initiative for Black Artists

The first piece will be unveiled in Brooklyn this weekend in celebration of Juneteenth.

Taylor Dafoe, June 18, 2021



Helina Metaferia, *Headress 21* (2021). Courtesy of the artist.

SHARE

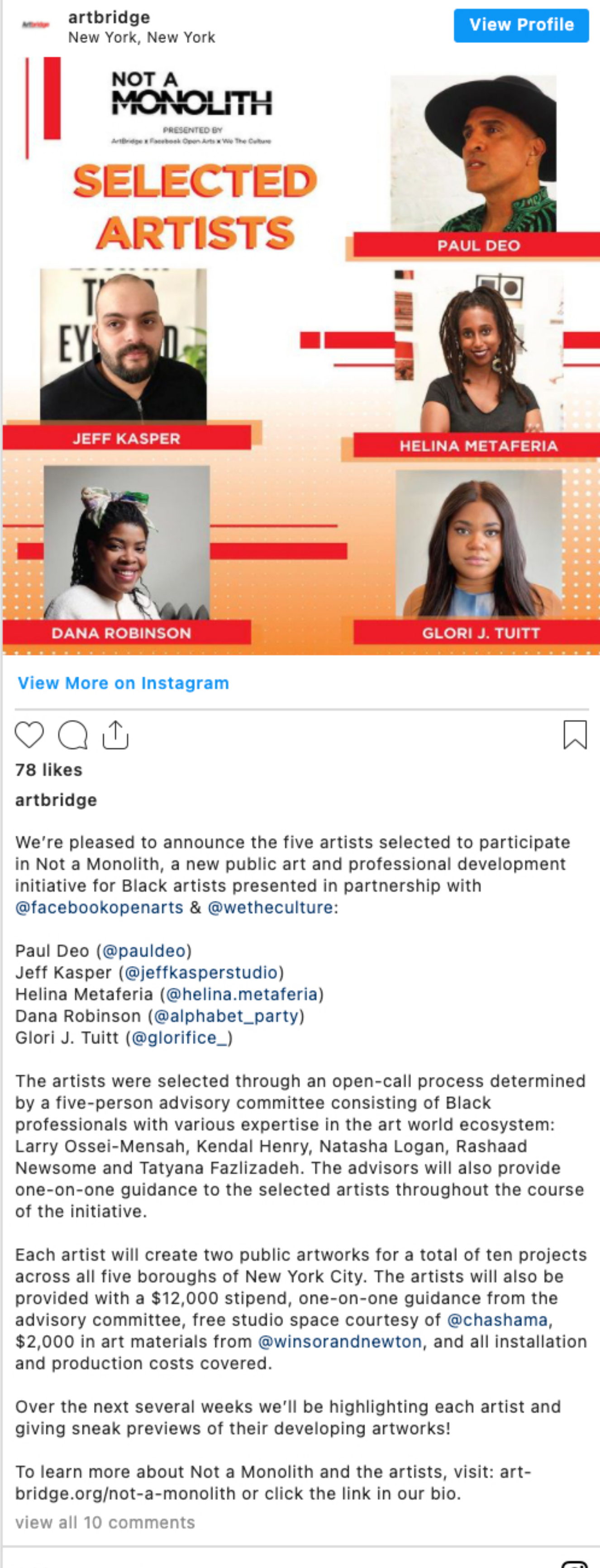


This weekend, on Juneteenth, a new mural celebrating the labor of Black women activists will be unveiled in Brooklyn.

The work of Harlem- and Brooklyn-based artist and activist [Helina Metaferia](#), the mural depicts a fellow young creator, [Wildcat Ebony Brown](#), atop a picture of a plinth; collaged throughout the scene are archival photos of civil rights-era protests and pictures culled from old Ethiopian and Kenyan travel magazines. A small text reads, "Where would democracy be without Black women?" It will be located at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Art in Fort Greene.

The idea, Metaferia told Artnet News, is to "amplify the people in my life that are doing amazing work yet are often chastised in the media. [It's about] reclaiming that image and offering another perspective on these activists in a way they can essentially get their power back."

The piece will be revealed this weekend amid a flurry of other events scheduled for Juneteenth Jubilee 2021, a free outdoor event co-sponsored by arts organizations [The Blacksmiths](#) and [The Wide Awakes](#) that Metaferia—a member of the latter group—helped organize.

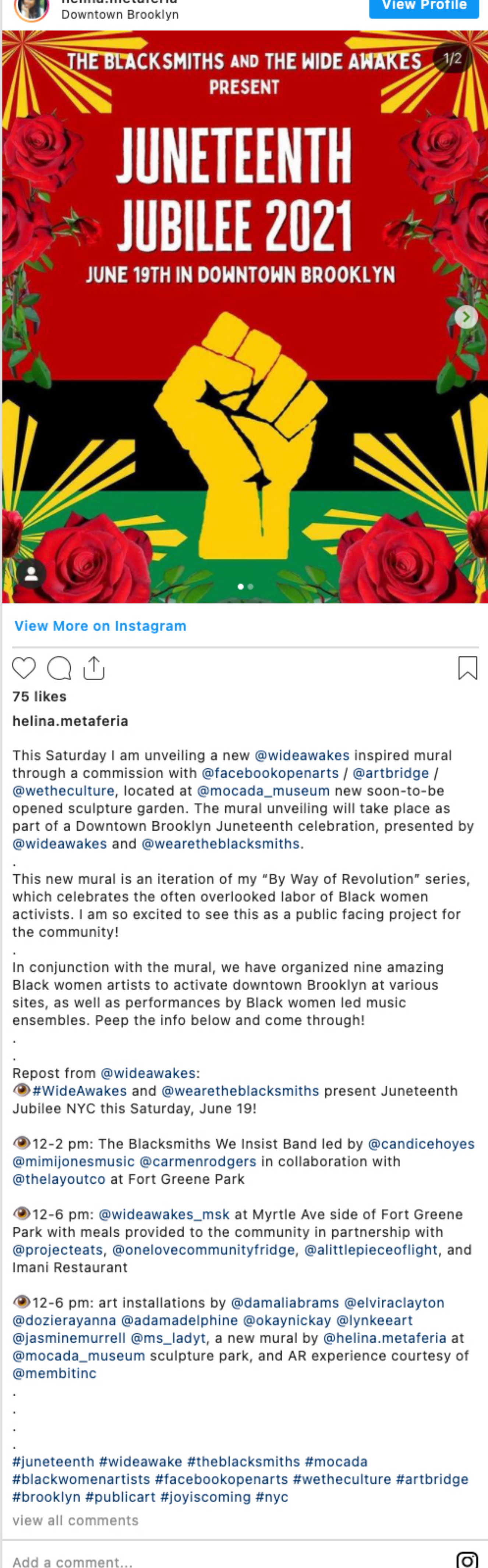


Metaferia's mural is the first of 10 public artworks set to appear across New York's five boroughs this summer through [Not a Monolith](#), a new professional development initiative for Black artists organized by ArtBridge, an initiative that works to transform New York City's many miles of construction fencing and scaffolding into a venue for art.

Through the project, five New York artists have been commissioned to create two new artworks each. [Paul Deo](#), [Jeff Kasper](#), [Dana Robinson](#), and [Glori J. Tuitt](#) join Metaferia as the Not a Monolith fellows.

That title "Not a Monolith" harkens back to the impetus behind the initiative: "to showcase a multitude of Black identities that are more complex, nuanced and abundant than than media's traditional representations," ArtBridge's website notes.

The artist cohort was selected this spring by an advisory committee comprised of artists Rashaad Newsome and Tatyana Fazlalizadeh; artist and curator Kendal Henry; curator and critic Larry Ossei-Mensah; and producer Natasha Logan. Each fellow has been granted professional mentorship from the committee moving forward, as well as free studio space, art materials, and a \$12,000 stipend.



"We were looking for artists who are bringing fresh ideas and engaging with a broader community," said Ossei-Mensah, noting that the committee was equally drawn to makers who have and haven't worked with public art before. "For me it was a question of, how do you utilize public art as a meeting point for conversation?"

Ossei-Mensah has long been an advocate of putting art in the real world rather than the white cube. Concurrent to his work with ArtBridge, he curated an installation of billboards and kiosks across Pittsburgh—a city officially celebrating Juneteenth for the first time this year—by local artist Mikael Owunna. The project opened this week.

"This traditional idea of art being experienced only in galleries and museums is a myopic approach," the curator said. "Particularly when you're thinking about Black and Brown communities—you have to bring the conversation to them. And I don't think the art world has always done a good job of that."

"In the past there have been very few opportunities for Black and brown voices to build in the arts," said Metaferia. "Now, I'm hoping there are more experiences like this."

"We'll benefit as artists and makers," the artist went on, "but more importantly communities will get to see art—especially socially engaged works—in a new context at a time when it's really needed."

