

Brandan “BMike” Odums | Biography

Brandan “BMike” Odums is a New Orleans-based visual artist who, through exhibitions, public programs, and public art works, is engaged in a transnational dialogue about the intersection of art and resistance. From film to murals to installations, Odums’ work encapsulates the political fervor of a generation of Black American activists who came of age amidst the tenure of the nation’s first Black president, the resurgence of popular interest in law enforcement violence, and the emergence of the self-care movement. Most often working with spray paint, Odums paints brightly-colored, wall-sized murals that depict historical figures, contemporary creatives, and everyday people. In his otherwise figurative work, Odums departs from realism to play with color – blending lavender to paint the skin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King and robin’s egg blue for Harriet Tubman, for instance – suggesting an ethos of boldness that unites the subjects of his work and surpasses race, time, or any other aspect of physical reality.

After graduating from the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA), where he studied visual art, Odums began working as a filmmaker, creating original content through 2-Cent Entertainment LLC and directing music videos for hip hop artists like Curren\$, Juvenile, and Yasiin Bey (Mos Def). Founding 2-Cent in 2005, Odums led the collective of then college-age Black creatives in documenting and analyzing New Orleans’ changing sociopolitical landscape in the years following Hurricane Katrina through DIY satire and interviews that garnered national attention and coveted awards, including an NAACP Image Award.

Odums began experimenting with graffiti in 2012, attracted to the medium because of its decidedly temporary nature. After painting a series of murals of Black revolutionaries in the Florida Housing Development in New Orleans’ Ninth Ward, other young creatives began to flock to the location, adding their own words, images, and even movement. This underground, guerilla art hub, which Odums named #ProjectBe, is the subject of the documentary “Strong Light” by Patrick Melon.

After the Housing Authority of New Orleans shuttered the Florida Housing Development, Odums created Exhibit Be, a public art exhibition housed in a dilapidated apartment complex on New Orleans’ West Bank (this time with the owner’s permission). The largest single-site public art exhibition in the American South to date, Exhibit Be was a collaboration with over 40 artists who covered the facades of the four buildings with five-story murals and created indoor installations and found-object sculptures that spoke to the spatialized racial violence that had led to the site’s unoccupied state. The exhibition culminated in a three-day festival at which Christian Scott, David Banner, Dead Prez, Erykah Badu, Tank and the Bangas, and Trombone Shorty performed.

In 2016, Odums established Studio Be, a 36,000- square foot gallery and the final part of the Be Trilogy. Studio Be features “Ephemeral.Eternal,” his first solo exhibition that includes over a dozen original murals, several room-sized installations, and reconstructed murals salvaged from #ProjectBe before the Florida Housing Development’s demolition in 2014. The studio is open to the public 4 days a week, and welcomes hundreds of visitors from near and far weekly. Studio Be was named one of the 50 best things to do in the world by TimeOut global travel blog.

As a public artist Bmike has collaborated with important organizations, brands, and public figures including, Nike, Cadillac , Red Bull , Starz, Spotify , OnStar , Bleacher Report, Complex , Revolt TV, Amnesty International , Colin Kaepernick’s Know My Rights Camp, Ava DuVernay’s ARRAY, Common’s Imagine Justice, New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival , Boys & Girls Club, and more.

As a public speaker Bmike has been featured on the Atlantic , Aspen Institute , TED, TEDx, he has given lectures at Princeton , Harvard, Stanford , Tulane University, NC State University, LSU, Xavier University , and more.

From Palestine to New York City’s Times Square to the San Carlos Apache Reservation in Arizona, Odums’ public murals capture his audience with the reminder that they, too, have the opportunity and the obligation to create bold histories.