



ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: SHARIF BEY

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The first of its series, this blog will shine a light on a Pittsburgh artist you should know.

“

People think nothing grows there. They think nothing grows in Beltzhoover. ”

— Sharif Bey

Meet Sharif Bey, a Pittsburgh-born ceramics artist and sculptor. For Bey, the idea of growth plays a major role in the creative process.

Born in Beltzhoover, Bey attributes his interest and success in the arts to Pittsburgh arts programming in the 1980s. Growing up, he spent much of his youth doing programs through the Carnegie Museums, attending the [CAPA school](#), taking courses at the [Manchester Craftmen's Guild](#), and after officially deciding to become a ceramics artist at age 15, he attended Slippery Rock University where he earned a B.F.A in ceramics. From there, he earned a M.F.A in studio art at the University of North Carolina and a Ph.D. in art education at Pennsylvania State University.

S., Justice. “Artist Spotlight: Sharif Bey.” *Visit Pittsburgh*, 2 Jan. 2020.

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"The Three White Birds". Photo Provided by the Artist.

The artist, whose work is sometimes functional, sometimes wearable, but almost always massive, is inspired by the cultures of West Africa, but Bey says that his upbringing within the Pittsburgh arts community is what has made the biggest impact on his work. He comes from a family of welders with "a lot of creative energy," and being able to travel in the summers and experience the city's arts programming "opened up a world of new aesthetic trajectories," he says. His work now is all about "being open to serendipity and reconfiguring broken things." Bey views new circumstances (both in art and in life) not as limitations, but as opportunities to challenge assumptions and create something new.

The exhibition at the Pittsburgh Glass Center will showcase Bey's first time working with glass as a medium. He says the differences between working with clay versus glass are striking. "Clay is easy to think through. Something that takes minutes with clay could take weeks with glass." He also says that glass gives transparency that is solid and strong in a way that is difficult if not impossible to get with clay.

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"W.A.S.". Photo Provided by the Artist.

Speaking with Bey must be a lot like working with glass. There is a sense of that strong transparency in everything he says. He speaks passionately but matter-of-factly about his memories of Pittsburgh and what it means to him to be returning with his work.

“ [It is] everything to be able to come back under these circumstances. I’m still a Pittsburgh artist, ”

— Sharif Bey

he says, though seeing the city changing so extensively since his youth is bittersweet. He mentions that although he is happy to see how well the city has been prospering recently, he misses the

Pittsburgh he used to know. But change comes with the territory for a clay sculptor like Bey, who always stays open to changes and allows himself to go with the flow when working.

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"Sleeping Giant #1". Photo Provided by the Artist.

He commends Pittsburgh institutions like the Glass Center which he calls "a museum dedicated to process." He explains how such an institution has the potential to bring huge amounts of engagement between people who may never otherwise meet. He sees the opportunity for The Glass Center and his exhibition to be a common denominator and provide a platform for dialogue.

ABOUT THE **Author**



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You can find Justice exploring Pittsburgh's local shops and cafes, or at events like Handmade Arcade. He is a performer, a professional binge-watcher, and a fashion enthusiast.

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