

CASE STUDY

ST!LL BLOOM!NG

Exhibition & Cultural Program

Art Gallery of Burlington · Community Generator Program

Francesca Durham | Curator, Program Lead & Cultural Strategist

More Than an Exhibition: Architecting a Blueprint for Belonging

THE CHALLENGE

In Halton, the stories of the Black diaspora have often been treated as temporary, exhibited for a month and then packed away. There was no permanent infrastructure to hold these narratives, no digital archive to preserve them, and no central hub for the community to call home. The realization was clear, for culture to truly thrive, it needed more than a gallery wall. It needed a foundation.

THE VISION

ST!LL BLOOM!NG was designed as a proof-of-concept. The goal was to move beyond a traditional curatorial credit and create a repeatable ecosystem. By connecting local artists with regional leadership and federal policy conversations, FD Creative set out to prove that cultural belonging can and must be intentionally designed into the fabric of a city.

OVERVIEW

ST!LL BLOOM!NG is a community engaged group exhibition featuring nine African and Afro-Caribbean artists exploring resilience, identity, and transformation through botanical and symbolic forms. Presented at the Art Gallery of Burlington, the exhibition expanded beyond a traditional gallery format into a multilayered cultural program integrating storytelling, public engagement, and strategic community partnerships.

SCOPE & LEADERSHIP

- Led end-to-end development of a public exhibition and extended cultural program
- Managed artist coordination, stakeholder engagement, and program delivery
- Secured sponsorship to fully fund artist compensation
- Developed and pitched a long term vision for cultural infrastructure supporting Black diaspora artists

PROGRAM EXTENSIONS

The following programs were developed beyond the core exhibition to deepen reach and extend artist visibility:

- Developed a digital catalogue and print publication to extend artist visibility
- Produced a podcast series via Be Inspired featuring participating artists
- Delivered private and guided tours for community members, schools, and stakeholders
- Programmed a Poetry Night featuring emerging poets through a low-barrier, lottery-based model
- Designed a multi-sensory opening reception, including collaboration with a local food artist featuring custom floral cookies as symbolic takeaways

STRATEGIC & INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT

- Engaged municipal and federal leadership, including Mayor of Burlington Marianne Meed Ward and the Hon. Karina Gould
- Developed and presented a forward looking initiative: "Building Cultural Infrastructure for Black Diaspora Artists in Halton"
- Positioned the exhibition as a platform for long term cultural development, not a standalone event

KEY OUTCOMES

Outcome	Detail
Artist Compensation	Full compensation achieved through a sponsorship funding model
Cross-Sector Engagement	Strong engagement across government, community, and arts sectors
Audience Reach	Expanded through programming, media, and digital platforms
Institutional Growth	Foundation established for future partnerships and long-term development

FUTURE GROWTH & PARTNERSHIPS

- Early-stage discussions with Mid West US College for a potential 2028 collaboration (symposium / exchange model)
- Ongoing development of a dedicated cultural hub for Black diaspora artists in the Halton region

IMPACT

- Advanced inclusive cultural representation within institutional spaces
- Created accessible pathways for emerging artists and cultural contributors
- Bridged local programming with a long-term infrastructure vision
- Demonstrated scalability from exhibition → program → ecosystem

KEY INSIGHT

This work demonstrates that exhibitions can function not only as cultural presentations, but as foundations for building sustainable artistic ecosystems, institutional partnerships, and community led cultural infrastructure.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE OUTCOME

The exhibition was only the beginning. Because ST!LL BLOOM!NG was designed as an ecosystem rather than a singular event, the ripples are still moving.

From Gallery to Government: The project transitioned into a direct conversation with federal leadership regarding Black cultural representation.

From Physical to Digital: A permanent digital archive and podcast series were established, ensuring these voices are never packed away again.

From Event to Hub: This project now serves as the architectural blueprint for a future Diaspora & Heritage Hub in the Halton region.

WHAT WE KNOW NOW

This project proved that when you lead with a human-centered system, institutions listen. The methodology is now in place to scale this work for other organizations and communities. At FD Creative, we do more than exhibitions, we build the structures that allow your community's legacy to take root and stay.

Francesca Durham · Architect of Belonging · ST!LL BLOOM!NG, Art Gallery of Burlington Feb-May 2026