

ESSENCE

Artist Derrick Adams Has Opened The Doors For Black Creatives To Experience Baltimore

THE ARTIST'S "THE LAST RESORT ARTIST RETREAT," IN PARTNERSHIP WITH TIFFANY ATRIUM, HOSTED ITS FIRST 5-DAY SYMPOSIUM, FOCUSING ON GROWTH, SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT.

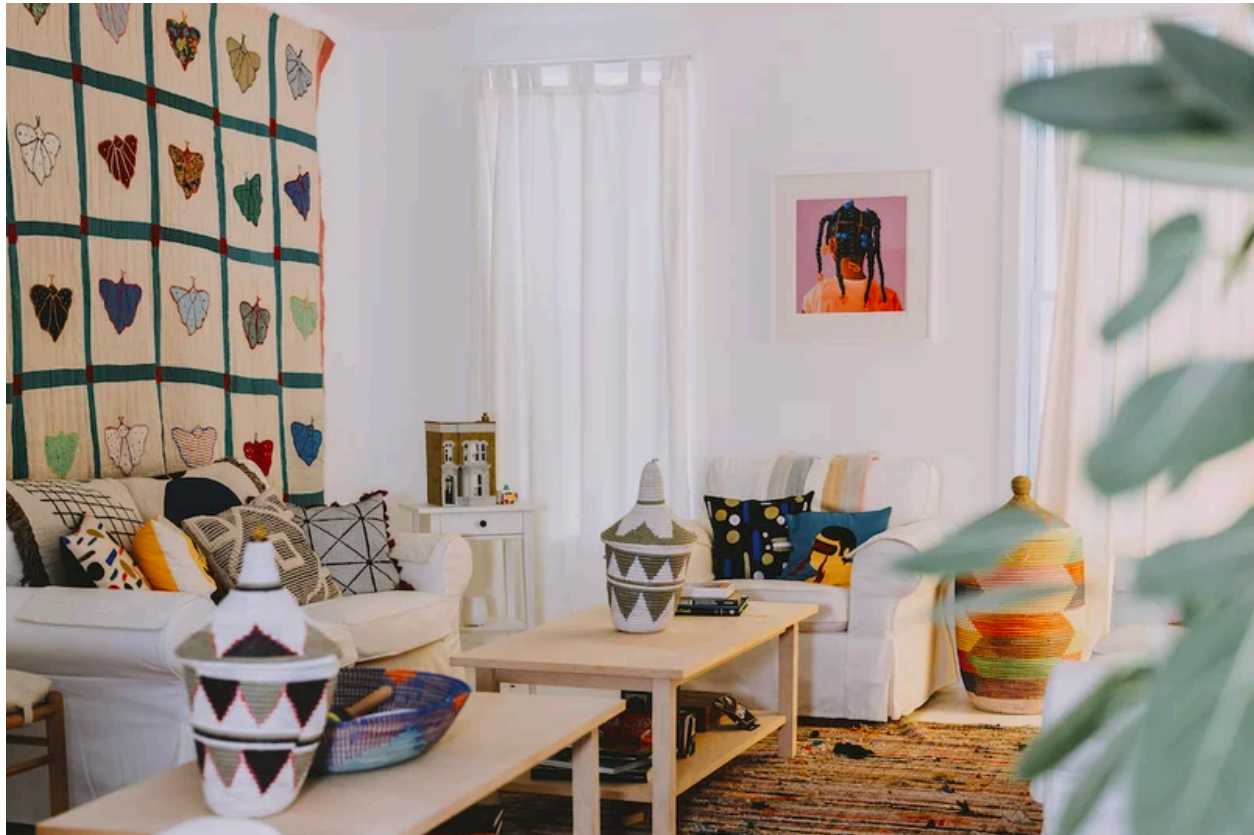
BY COREY STOKES · [UPDATED JANUARY 12, 2024](#)



This past November, multidisciplinary artist and Baltimore-native Derrick Adams officially welcomed the first guests to a dream realized: [The Last Resort Artist Retreat](#). Set in Charm City's historic Waverly neighborhood, TLRAR for short, was designed to be a place of relaxation for Black creatives to come rest, reflect and fellowship with like-minded individuals. Upon entering its grounds, with its ivory expanse, you can see how Adams's own art practice, highlighting Black leisure, shows up throughout the space. Once inside the home, you're immediately met with

works from famous artists like Sanford Biggers and Faith Ringgold as well as talented Baltimore-born creatives like Charles Mason III and Devin N. Morris.

What started as a personal escape from the hectic New York City hustle and bustle, eventually turned into a place of intention for Adams. “I realized this space was too special to just keep for myself, so I started inviting friends from New York to stay, giving them an opportunity to really experience Baltimore,” he says.



In time, the goalpost shifted once more into establishing a physical space of respite for Black creatives. Thanks to Adams’s ongoing partnership with luxury jewelry house Tiffany & Co. and support from its social impact platform, Tiffany Atrium, TLRAR was able to receive its first group of cohorts in November 2023.

Through a monthlong residency, the artists in TLRAR’s program are able to enjoy the art of relaxation, something they are definitely in need of, a fact that Adams is all too familiar with. Practitioners in all mediums are welcome, and the group of creatives range from those engaged in literary art to movement-based to visual art and more. Along with room and board,

participants are also provided with therapeutic services, stipends and other support around physical and mental well-being. “There is no expectation [for the artists] to create,” says Adams.

At the end of the year TLRAR hosted its inaugural Lift As You Climb, Black Leaders in Art & Culture Symposium in conjunction with Tiffany Atrium. The event brought together the group of cohorts and other cultural leaders across the country to explore the intersection of creative practice, connectivity and navigating the arts and culture field. Led by Tiffany & Co.’s Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Stephanie Oueda Cruz, and TLRAR’s Executive Director, Thomas James, the five-day programming centered around growth, sustainability and impact.



ESSENCE was able to attend a portion of the symposium for a chat with Adams and to fellowship with the other guests that included writer Kleaver Cruz and Tocarra A.H. Thomas, Director at New Orleans' Joan Mitchell Center. "I've been a part of similar programs but this is the first that includes a group of all-Black artists," said Cruz as we sat around the dinner table for a meal prepared by Chef Que of local eatery Creole Soul.

Cruz, who recently spoke to ESSENCE about his first published book, *The Black Joy Project*, believes the intention behind connecting with other artists that look like him is important. "My work as a writer can be isolating, so it's nice to be able to look at other artists and find commonality in our practice."



Understanding the importance of networking for creatives, Adams wanted to equally prioritize fellowship alongside rest within the retreat. “As a Black person, being social and being creative is the same,” he says. During his early years in New York, the mix of the city’s social scene and Adams’s growing art practice fashioned the perfect concoction for success. He now wants to recreate that same magic in his hometown. “If you [network] with awareness and in a casual way, you won’t be tired.”

Still, Adams’s vision for fostering the creative community in Baltimore doesn’t stop at TLRAR. With a recent grant from the Mellon Foundation for \$1.25 million, Adams will open The Black Baltimore Digital Database, which will work with local residents to digitize their history while still maintaining ownership. Adams has also warmed up artist Mickalane Thomas (our November/December cover photographer) to the city, and mentioned her interest in creating a space similar to TLRAR for Black women.

Adams hopes to be able to take a back seat in the day-to-day programming at the retreat. Thanks to a growing team led by James, this could soon be a reality for the artist, who recently purchased the neighboring house to be his personal residence when he’s in town. “I can’t wait to look over the fence from my home and watch from the sidelines,” says Adams. “When I come here and I’m not the center of attention, then I’ll know that this is a success.”