

SOUL OF THE BLACK BOTTOM

Home, identity, and displacement are concepts that affect us all in different ways.

ARTIST

EL Seed



Soul of the Black Bottom by eL Seed, at Market and Preston streets in West Philadelphia. Photo by Steve Weinik.

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LOCATION

Market and Preston Streets



NEIGHBORHOOD

West Philadelphia



COMPLETION DATE

November 18, 2017



About the Project

Home, identity, and displacement are concepts that affect us all in different ways. A new mural from internationally-renowned artist eL Seed explores these themes through his trademark “calligraffiti” style, brightening a West Philadelphia wall and opening up a conversation. This mural is the culminating project of a collaboration between our Art Education program and Al-Bustan Seeds of Culture, a West Philadelphia-based nonprofit committed to presenting and teaching Arab culture through language and the arts. Building on Al-Bustan's ongoing (DIS)PLACED initiative, through which the nonprofit is working with Syrian refugees and other asylum-seekers, high school students in our after-school program created the site-specific mural—this brings up questions, such as what does it mean to create site-specific art when you've lost your home? And how can we come together to help people feel connected?

The mural's name, *Soul of the Black Bottom*, comes from the neighborhood's history of demolition and displacement. Most of the original “Black Bottom” neighborhood was razed to make way for urban renewal in the 1960s, with thousands of residents displaced as a result, ranging in estimates from about 4,500 to 15,000 people. “Soul of the Black Bottom” is written in Arabic on the right side of the wall, while the following W.E.B. Du Bois quote appears in Arabic on the left side of the wall and on the brick wall:

“I believe that all men, black and brown and white, are brothers, varying through time and opportunity, in form and gift and feature, but differing in no essential particular, and alike in soul and the possibility of infinite development.”

- W.E.B. DU BOIS, *DARKWATER: VOICES FROM WITHIN THE VEIL*, 1920

Incorporating elements of graffiti and Arabic calligraphy, eL Seed is known for his unique style. His work is bright and contemporary, combining traditions to create complex, contradictory compositions. His art appears on the walls of many cities, from Paris, London, and New York to Doha, Jeddah, and Melbourne, in addition to his home country Tunisia.

Partners

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Major support provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, with additional funding by the City of Philadelphia.

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