

The African American Coalition of Reading International Artist Ed Terrell Mentors Emerging Artists

By Rachel Loeper | Photos by Kim Stimeling



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ED TERRELL, PRESIDENT and art director of the African American Coalition of Reading (ACOR) Gallery, remembers when Nathaniel Davis first walked into the gallery. The ambitious young African American artist knew he wanted his art to be available to the public to see and purchase.

Terrell, a warmly solemn man, mentored the younger artist, helping him to see what was appropriate for a gallery and teaching him the basics of matting and framing his work.

"There is a marketplace, but it is a hard road for young artists to learn how to approach it," says Terrell. "I didn't have formal art training, and now I can help others who are self-taught. I don't advise artists on how to change their style, but I try to help them mold their works so they are marketable."

ACOR, located in Suite 240 in the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts, is a non-profit organization. ACOR's mission is to promote the arts within the African American community by encouraging young artists and by providing mature artists the tools that they need to become professionals.

Years ago, when Terrell was growing up in Reading, he had no such mentor. Driven by a longing for self-awareness, Terrell left Reading on his artistic journey, traveling through Spain, Senegal and Gambia. While abroad, Terrell found a welcoming artistic community. In addition to selling his artwork, he worked as a musician, an interior decorator, and the director of a Gambian nightclub.

"There aren't many artists out there who paint the interior of themselves," Terrell says. "I'm talking about contemporary surrealists, who wake up in the middle of the night because of a vision that they have to put on canvas. These kinds of self-taught artists approach another dimension of thought."

Under Terrell's leadership, ACOR has worked on murals with the Olivet Boys & Girls Club, the Daniel Torres Centro Hispano Center and the Council on Chemical Abuse. The ACOR Gallery regularly displays the work of Reading elementary school students. On ACOR's Guest Wall, any approved artist may show his or her work free of charge.

By guiding emerging artists, Terrell is providing an avenue for African American artists that was not open to him. He says that racial discrimination was among the most difficult obstacles he's had to overcome in his art career.

Terrell cites travel as one of the most important influ-

ences on his artistic development. However, after years in exotic locales throughout Europe, Africa and Asia, he returned to Reading. For this itinerant artist, it wasn't a decision so much as a necessary response to tragedy.

In India, Terrell met a Norwegian artist named Maria and the couple later married in Israel. As the couple began a new family abroad, Terrell had no intention of returning to Reading until necessity called him back. His wife died giving birth to their son Rupa, now 11 years old, and Terrell returned to the city of his own childhood to raise his son among supportive family. Rupa, named by his mother for an Indian holy man, is now in sixth grade at Agora Cyber Charter School.

ACOR began in 2002 and Terrell became president in 2003. He facilitated the opening of the ACOR Gallery in the GoggleWorks in 2005. All member artists volunteer their time to support the gallery.

ACOR was founded by Pottsville-based artist Frederick Toone Bacon. At 83, Bacon still shows his work and was recently recognized by the Berks Arts Council with a Lifetime Achievement Award. Bacon's *Angels Watching Over Me* and *Climbing Up* woodprints, which can be viewed and purchased at the ACOR gallery, are both hard and soft, strong and vulnerable, simple and complex, the works of an artist who has seen much of life.

ACOR artist Shirley Newton is a sculptor specializing in freestanding wooden dolls. Her sculptures are collages of found objects, including things

she's found in the house she's lived in for 40 years. Like her dolls, her sculptures *Moving On* and *Soup and Salad* have a strange way of inviting viewers in with whimsy, and keeping them interested with a surprising and dark weighty element.

When asked what motivates him, Terrell cites the excitement of discovering new artists and helping them on their path, and that necessary element for artists – the inspiration provided by the act of creation.

African American artists in Berks County can now find an artistic home.



Ed Terrell

African American Coalition of Reading (ACOR)

GoggleWorks Center for the Arts, Suite 240
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610.898.7684 • acor-pa.org
Free admission