

Tonika Lewis Johnson

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BIOGRAPHY

Tonika Johnson is a photographer, social justice artist and life-long resident of Chicago's South Side neighborhood of Englewood. She is also co-founder of the Englewood Arts Collective and Resident Association of Greater Englewood, which seek to reframe the narrative of South Side communities, and mobilize people and resources for positive change. Tonika's art often explores urban segregation, documenting the nuance and richness of the black community to counter media depictions of Chicago's violence. As a trained photojournalist and former teaching artist, Tonika's artistic legacy has gained citywide recognition in the last five years. In 2017, she was recognized by Chicago Magazine as a Chicagoan of the Year for her photography of Englewood's everyday beauty. Her Englewood-based photography projects "From the INside," and "Everyday Rituals," were exhibited at Rootwork Gallery in Pilsen, the Chicago Cultural Center, the Harold Washington Library Center and at Loyola University's Museum of Art (LUMA). LUMA also exhibited her Folded Map project in 2018, which visually investigates disparities among "map twins"—Chicago residents who live on opposite ends of the same streets across the city's racial and economic divides—and brings them together to have a conversation. An excerpt of the project was also displayed at the Museum of Contemporary Art within The Long Dream exhibition. Since 2018, Tonika has transformed Folded Map into an advocacy and policy-influencing tool that invites audiences to open a dialogue about how we are all socially impacted by racial and institutional conditions that segregate Chicago. In 2020, she formalized Folded Map into a nonprofit organization, where she serves as Creative Executive Officer. In 2019, she was named one of Field Foundation's Leaders for a New Chicago and, most recently, appointed as a member of the Cultural Advisory Council of the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events by the Chicago City Council. In 2021, Tonika was selected as the National Public Housing Museum's Artist as Instigator. In that role, she worked on her latest project: Inequity for Sale, which highlights the living history of Greater Englewood homes sold on Land Sale Contracts in the 50s and 60s. Most recently, Tonika was recognized as Landmark Illinois 2022 Preservation Influencer.

WEBSITE: www.tonikaj.com

GRANTS/AWARDS/ FELLOWSHIPS

- 2022 – Preservation Influencer – Landmark Illinois
- 2021 – Public Humanities Award – Illinois Humanities
- 2021 – Arts 77 Award – Chicago Dept. of Cultural Affairs & Special Events (DCASE)
- 2021 – Artist as Instigator – National Public Housing Museum
- 2020 – North American Cartographic Information Society – Imaginative Cartography Award
- 2020 – American Planning Assc. – IL Chapter Planning Advocate Award
- 2020 – Streetwise Newspaper – 20 Most inspiring People of 2020
- 2019 - Leaders for a New Chicago Award Recipient
- 2019 - Images & Voices Of Hope (ivoh) Fellow
- 2018 - Propeller Fund Grant
- 2018 - Oppenheimer Grant
- 2018 - The Chicago Community Trust Grant
- 2017 – Chicago Magazine's Chicagoan of The Year
- 2017 – City Bureau Photography Fellow (Summer)
- 2016 - City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) Individual Artists Program (IAP) Grant
- 2013 - Magnum Foundation's SEE POTENTIAL Project Fellow Chicago, IL

EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 (Fall) – Belonging, Chicago Justice Gallery, Featured Artist, Chicago, IL.
- 2020 (Fall) – The Long Dream, Museum of Contemporary Art, Featured Artist, Chicago, IL
- 2019 (Summer) – Envisioning Justice Exhibition, Sullivan Galleries at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- 2018 (Summer) – Folded Map, Loyola University Museum of Art, Featured Artist, Chicago, IL
- 2018 (Spring) – Everyday Englewood, Loyola University Museum of Art, Featured Artist, Chicago, IL
- 2017 (Oct.) - Alter Call: The Architecture of Black Sacred Space, RootWork Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2017 (August) - Shoot Your Shot: Evolution of Chicago's Street Art + Culture, RootWork Gallery, Chicago, IL

- 2017 (April – June) – From the INside, Harold Washington Library Featured Artist, Chicago, IL
- 2017 (Feb.) – (New Work) Everyday Rituals, RootWork Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2017 (Feb-April) – Chicago: Places, People & Possibilities, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL
- 2016 (Oct. 15) – From the INside, First Annual Englewood Art Fair, Featured artist, Chicago, IL

Photo/Arts-based Community Engagement

● **2020 (August 08) - *Envision Englewood Initiative*** – In an immediate response to the looting and Black Lives Matter uprisings at the start of summer during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, Englewood Arts Collective (EAC) launched an initiative to evoke empowerment and healing energy in Englewood through a few artistic public activations titled #EnvisionEnglewood. The #EnvisionEnglewood campaign started with a Juneteenth billboard and a follow-up pop-up activation event in partnership with R.A.G.E.—a “So Fresh Saturday” where EAC gave away over 1000 PPE and 100 art kits and posters of the billboard. This visual messaging campaign culminated in an activation event on August 8th, where EAC partnered with R.A.G.E. again to organize and transform an abandoned “hotspot” known for violence into a vibrant, collaborative “art amusement park.”

● **2020 (November 09) – *We, Women*** – As an invited photographer to the national “We, Women,” social impact photography art project, Tonika photographed and interviewed additional “Map Twins,” for her Folded Map project and hosted a large-scale, public projection of the video and photographs in Englewood her home neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side. This event coincided with the opening reception of the Folded Map’s debut exhibition in Englewood at the Englewood Branded apparel store. More than 150+ people attended with majority being first-time visitors to Englewood.

● **2019 (April 16) - *Ain't You Heard – What Happens to A Dream Deferred*** was an evening of storytelling through performances, curated large-scale projections, and memories collected at Woods Academy, one of the 16 schools closed in Englewood since 2002. Inspired by Langston Hughes' poem, Tonika and Paola Aguirre organized the event in partnership with Resident Association of Greater Englewood, Borderless Studio, and Creative Grounds. It included curated visual projections depicting Black life during the Great Migration through historic photos of Chicago and the South; a "memory station" asking participants to share their stories related to their journey and belonging in Chicago, plus performances by Tonika and rapper Roy Kinsey. The event was supported by the curators of Dimensions of Citizenship: Architecture and Belonging from the Body to the Cosmos, the official U.S. entry at the recently concluded 16th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale.

● **2018 (September 14) – *Englewood Pop-Up Projection Party***

On Friday, September 14, during and after Englewood's 2nd Critical Mass night bike ride, Roll N Peace DaRemix, Tonika Johnson hosted a large scale, site specific projection party in Englewood to celebrate Black culture on Chicago's South Side in partnership with Blvck Vrchives, Borderless Studio, and Exposure for Concerned Black Photographers. The video montage, curated by Tonika, included old family photographs from Englewood residents and historic images of neighboring south side communities.

2020/2022 PRESS

Mar. 21, 2022 – WBEZ, “An Englewood artist highlights the pain and plunder that contract buying inflicted on Black...”

Feb. 22, 2022 – NBC 5 Chicago, “Artist Immersive exhibit invites Chicagoans to walk through Englewood”

Dec. 21, 2021 – Crain’s Chicago Business, “Artist maps Englewood homes where Black residents were denied...”

Nov. 17, 2021 – Block Club Chicago, “Black Chicagoans Were Cheated Out of Owning Homes..”

Dec. 10, 2020 – CBS This Morning, “Mapping Inequity”

Nov. 4, 2020 – Block Club Chicago, “Find your Map Twin with Free Folded Map Action Kits”

Sept. 20 2020 – ABC 7 News, “Chicago Justice Gallery exhibit explores Segregation, Inclusion through Eyes of Youth”

Sept. 15, 2020 – CBS News, “COVID-19 & Folded Map Project sheds lights on the disparities in Chicago”

Aug. 12, 2020 – Associated Press, “Chicago Artist: Disinvestment led to Unrest”

Aug. 10, 2020 – Al Jazeera, “Folded Map Project brings Chicago’s residents together”

July 24, 2020 – Chicago Tribune, “South Siders & North Siders together bring paint, plants, & hope to a Chicago Block”

Aug. 2, 2020 -- Reuters, “Chicago Artist tackles Urban Segregation”

Feb. 11, 2020 – WTTW Chicago Tonight, “Folded Map highlights Chicago Segregation”

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

● Oct.- May 2019 - Photographer for Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights portrait series

● May 02, 2018 - Photographer for Chicago Reader story, “Oldest black-owned nightclub in city faces uncertain future”

● July 24, 2017 – Photographer for WBEZ’s Every Other Hour “In Verse” photo-poetic-crime reporting series

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2014

Changing Worlds

● Academy for Global Citizenship, Chicago Photography Teaching Artist (Dec.- March 2015)

● Pilsen Elementary Community Academy, Chicago Arts & Literacy in Action Afterschool Program Teacher (Oct.-Dec.)

- Charles Evans Hughes Elementary School, Chicago Digital Photography Teaching Artist (Jan.-June)

2013

Changing Worlds

- *Johnson Elementary School, Chicago Introduction to Photography Teaching Artist, (Jan.- June)*
- Hearst Elementary School Photography Teaching Artist, (April-June)
- Pilsen Elementary Community Academy, Chicago *Photography Teaching Artist, (Aug.-Dec.)*
- *Hearst Elementary School Arts & Cultural Connections After-School Program, (Aug.-Dec.)*

2013

Changing Worlds

- Tilden Career Academy High School Photography Teaching Artist, (June)
- Gregory Elementary School Photography Teaching Artist, (Feb.-May)

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

May 2020 – Present

Creative Executive Officer for Folded Map, NFP

Folded Map, NFP was organized exclusively to develop creative educational tools & interactive projects that help educate and engage the larger public in open dialogue about how we are all socially impacted by historic racial and institutional conditions that segregate the Chicago and our country.

2017 – Oct. 2018

Program Manager for Resident Assc. Of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.)

The Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.) is a grassroots organization whose guiding principle is that the key to improving Englewood is activating more residents to be involved with positive change. Today, R.A.G.E. boasts nearly 300 members however, in November 2010, R.A.G.E. was founded by a collective of 13 residents with Asiaha Butler at the helm. R.A.G.E.'s overarching mission is to convene residents, Englewood's public officials, business owners, and other organizations to strategize, build their power, promote healing, create community solidarity and tangible solutions while actively serving as a credible source for critical information about Englewood.

2013 - 2017

Program Manager for Growing Home, Inc.

Growing Home is an organic urban farm in Englewood that offers 25 hours per week of paid on-the-job experience and job-readiness training plus the support to conquer issues like criminal records, medical needs, child-care, and housing. Each year Growing Home, Inc. start 40+ people on the path to self-sufficiency and uses their unique model to impact neighborhoods with the greatest need. That's why its farms are located in Englewood, a community on the South side of Chicago that has been under-served for decades and has extremely high rates of unemployment and poverty, hundreds of acres of vacant lots, and a distinct lack of healthy food choices.

2011 - 2012

Co-Founder & Lead Teacher

MEDIA-N-MOTION MNM is free, 8 week, youth journalism program for youth in Englewood. During two, two-hour sessions each week for two months, Media-N-Motion created and implemented a news writing & reporting curriculum for three cohorts of 15 middle to high-school students. MNM utilized a variety of effective and professional teaching techniques and methods to assist students in attaining the performance objectives of Media-N-Motion. MNM's culminating project included a newsletter, written by the youth and a student showcase. Reporter Joel Hood wrote a feature article about Media-N-Motion in the March 02, 2011 issue of the Chicago Tribune titled "Journalism Program : A Study Of Perceptions by Joel Hood.

2010 - Present

Co-Founder of R.A.G.E.

Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.) is a resident-driven association established to build relationships with fellow residents, Englewood's public officials, business owners and organizations. R.A.G.E. is a grassroots organization that strategizes to address community problems, creates tangible solutions and actively seeks ways to keep fellow residents informed about the latest news in Englewood, Chicago. R.A.G.E. is the voice speaking out to empower, educate, uplift and motivate fellow residents and stake holders on many of the issues that face the community. R.A.G.E.'s main focus areas are Education/Youth Development, Economic Development and Civic Engagement & Empowerment in the Greater Englewood neighborhood.

2017 - Present

Lead Co-Founder of Englewood Arts Collective (EAC) is a united team of 14 professional Artists with deep connections to the Englewood community – they all live, were raised in, and/or currently work in Greater Englewood. The ultimate goal of the Englewood Arts Collective is to reflect the beauty of, enrich the community within, and help produce events and interactions that reflect the Englewood Chicago community in a positive way—reframing the mainstream narrative, from the inside out. They believe in: the power of a people when they tell their own story; the power of Art as a legitimate, viable conduit for positive change in communities; and the potential for Artists to be leaders and influencers of said change.

EDUCATION

- **Master of Business Administration – 2005**
National-Louis University – Chicago, IL
- **Bachelor of Arts in Print Journalism & Photography - 2003**
Columbia College Chicago – Chicago, IL