



“Art in the Margins” with Josh Johnson kicked off in March and is a partnership between 621 Gallery, Lee Berger Media Productions, and The Greater Works Network on Roku TV. LEE BERGER MEDIA PRODUCTIONS

Johnson firmly believes in saying yes as a way of manifesting change, no matter the when or where. So, when he ran into the network executive for Roku TV’s Greater Works Network in his local supermarket, he was ready with a pitch. “Art in the Margins” was born right there in the produce section.

“The show itself highlights Black and marginal artists,” says Johnson. “One of the things that I have seen most palpably from my line of work in social justice, and in the art world, is that both of these things can sometimes be exclusive. When we talk about access, I’ve tried to make the arts more inclusive by including marginal artists in the conversation.”

The series kicked off in March and is a partnership between 621 Gallery, Lee Berger Media Productions, and The Greater Works Network on Roku TV. Episodes are released every Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. both on Roku and online and feature guests from across art mediums.

Johnson hosts the show, researching guests and always asking the question that still remains at the top of his personal list as an activist to answer: “how does social justice relate to the arts?”

**Combining the arts and social justice**

“It’s inextricable,” says Johnson. “The arts of the time serve as a vehicle for the social justice matters of the time, and the social justice matters of the time serves as the content for the arts. The lenses of art and social justice are only separated in the viewer’s mind, but the artists and social justice advocates realize that you can’t get one without the other. Both of these things are key components of the culture.”

Johnson is a Tallahassee native who has spent his career researching and advocating for access in culture. He earned his BA in Political Science and MA in Global Securities from FAMU and is a teacher, adjunct professor and political consultant. He is a dogged advocate for criminal justice and environmental reforms, and has an underlying philosophy stemming from a college job, coincidentally, in another supermarket.

# A BIGGER PICTURE

*Josh Johnson launches ‘Art in the Margins’ into the world*

**Amanda Sieradzki** Council on Culture & Arts

Josh Johnson continually finds intersections between activism and the arts. His career wends and winds between running for the Florida House of Representatives Democratic Primary in 2016 to now serving on 621 Gallery’s Board of Directors. After launching a successful social justice podcast this past year, he was poised for a new venture.

“If something fell off the shelf, we were told not to pass it up, but to pick it up,” says Johnson. “I’ve taken that with me everywhere I’ve gone. If I see something’s fallen, I can’t pass it up, I have to pick it up whether it’s in the arts, education, or political worlds.”

He says he fell serendipitously into the arts world, but states that the audience for both the arts and social justice are largely the same — creative, curious and progressive people who crave and make change.

**If you go**

**What:** Art in the Margins with Josh Johnson

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays

**Where:** Roku TV’s Greater Works Network

**Contact:** For more information, visit <https://watch.greaterworks.network/live-stream/> or <https://watch.greaterworks.network/video-on-demand/>.

**Connecting with guests at 621 Gallery**

He loves the environment at 621 Gallery, from the history of the building to the surrounding Railroad Square Art Park, and pre-COVID, could always be found at live shows and gallery openings.

“These jumps have not been grand chasms for me because I always have a lens of access, and if you’re coming from a lens of access, innately it will put you in different spheres,” says Johnson of his wide-reaching experiences. “I believe in saying yes, especially if something is worthwhile and I know we really fought for something and tried for something.”

Johnson describes the “Art in the Margins” show as a renegade

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Josh Johnson hosts an “Art in the Margins” show that kicked off in March and is a partnership between 621 Gallery, Lee Berger Media Productions, and The Greater Works Network on Roku TV. LEE BERGER MEDIA PRODUCTIONS.

# Johnson

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movement at its start, but it quickly gained momentum as the partnership with Berger built an infrastructure for filming and releasing episodes. Outfitted with three cameras and 16 lights, 621 Gallery serves as the backdrop for each interview and music is provided by Artisan P and DJ Proof.

Backstage, Johnson gets a chance to connect with his guests. Before Eluster Richardson's interview, they spoke about what it means to be a working artist for so many decades. As Richardson described life as a pyramid — broad at the bottom and narrow at the top — Johnson took notes for his own teaching philosophies.

"To be elite at your craft, you have to intrinsically accept the fact that as you get higher it becomes easier to knock you off and it becomes easier to fall," recalls Johnson of their conversation. "I had never heard of it put like that and I thought that was brilliant."

## Shining a light on the artists

Even though he is hosting the show, on camera Johnson strives to minimize his role altogether. He opts to wear all black versus some of his more colorful wardrobe selections, and instead allows one lapel pin to be a standout accent piece. The pins have all coincided with the guest's individual qualities and artistic styles.

Johnson wore an ornate, crystal rooster to symbolize artist Quia Atkinson's mastery of color. For Chef Shac, he elected to wear a button that said, "Make It Scream, Make It Burn," which is the title of a collection of rambunctious, colorful and exciting essays that he felt mirrored Shac's own work.

An upcoming episode will feature muralist Chris Clark, who Johnson has termed "the lion of the arts." He wore a turquoise lion pin to match that sentiment and is looking forward to viewers tuning in and continuing to expand their definitions of the arts in the Panhandle.

"Each of these episodes have been individual gifts," says Johnson. "The only reach that I'm concerned with on the show is from my guests' eyes to the camera and whoever's watching eyes are back on the TV. I want people to be exposed. I've never lost sight of that."

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).*



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