

Client Spotlight: Maya Freelon

Durham Small Business Opportunity Loan Fund

In Durham, Maya Freelon is making a big name for herself in the art world.

The award-winning visual artist has created unique sculptures and exhibits using a variety of media, and she's been recognized for her work by some of the leaders of the art world including Complex Magazine and the International Review of African American Art. She's been commissioned to create visual art for companies such as Google and Cadillac, and she's had art displayed in many galleries including the North Carolina Museum of Art, the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building, and CAM Raleigh.



But in 2020, Freelon came to a major hurdle in the road, as the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt on her livelihood. For Freelon, the pandemic brought with it unsure times. "I take pride in sharing my artwork around the world," says Freelon. "I rely on art sales, commissions, exhibitions, and speaking engagements to make a living, and the pandemic brought that all to a stop. It was the first time in my career that I questioned whether I could continue being a full-time artist."

As Freelon navigated dealing with the pandemic as an artist, she was connected to Carolina Small Business Development Fund (CSBDF) through a community listserv. Working with the team at CSBDF, Freelon received grant capital from the Durham Small Business Recovery Fund, a grant program offered by Duke University and administered by CSBDF.

Two years later in 2022, Freelon returned to CSBDF and received her first small business loan through the Durham Small Business Opportunity Loan Fund, a partnership between CSBDF, the City of Durham, and Durham County that provides affordable capital to Durham-based small businesses that are recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.



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“It was my first business loan, and CSBDF took the time to explain the process and how to create a strong application,” says Freelon. “The entire process was easy to understand and streamlined. I was able to use the loan to hire assistants, pay for new equipment, and to continue to promote my artwork globally.”

The Durham Small Business Opportunity Loan Fund is offered to Durham-based business with fewer than 50 employees and less than \$5 million in annual revenues. The partnership has supported nearly 60 businesses and has dispersed over \$1.5 million in loans, with 74% of awards going to minority-owned firms and 52% to women-owned firms.

“The Durham Small Business Opportunity Loan Fund is a vital tool for Durham-based small business owners,” said Reggie Jones, Director of Business Solutions at CSBDF. “This partnership between CSBDF, the City of Durham, and Durham County has helped many entrepreneurs in Durham navigate the effects of the pandemic while allowing them to continue growing and expanding their businesses.”

For Freelon, the loan from CSBDF allowed her to continue doing what she loves to do while shining a light on the community that was there to support her. “It makes me proud to represent Durham, North Carolina wherever I go,” says Freelon “I’m happy to know I live in a community that has my back through good times and uncertainty just the same.”