

Tampa **Art** Programs



Artist:	Natalie Blake
Title:	<i>The Gift of Gathering Remembrances</i> A three-paneled ceramic mural. Each panel measures approximately 6' x 15' and is comprised of 18" square hand carved tiles.
Location:	Trio at ENCORE!®, 1101 Ray Charles Blvd. The artwork is located on the west facing wall overlooking historic Central Avenue.
Commissioning Agencies:	Banc of America Community Development Corporation, Tampa Housing Authority, Trio at ENCORE! LP, City of Tampa, Art Programs Division



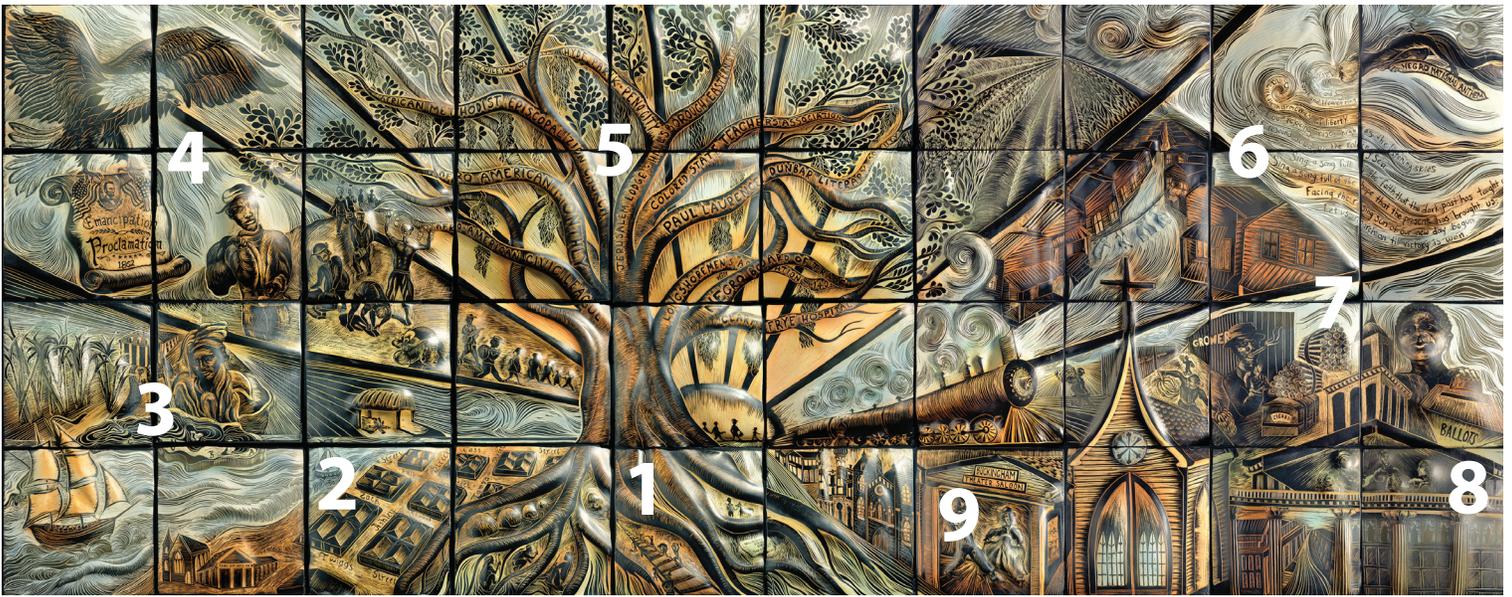
Background:

Artist Natalie Blake was selected from a national call to artists to create an artwork for Trio at ENCORE!, a new mixed use multi-family building neighborhood in downtown. The subject for Blake's series is the historic African American business district known as Central Avenue and its surrounding neighborhoods. Natalie worked with the committee, researched photographic archives, and sought community input. This gave her the foundation to create *The Gift of Gathering Remembrances*, a three-panel ceramic mural.

Description:

"The Gift of Gathering Remembrances" tells a story of the formation, change and growth of a historically rich Tampa neighborhood: Central Avenue. In each panel, the artist uses the sun as its origin, to identify each era that is depicted.

The mission of the City of Tampa's public art program is to promote the involvement of artists in projects throughout the city that enhance the physical environment and celebrate Tampa's unique character and identity. The public art program falls under Art Programs, a division of the Department of Economic Opportunity.



“Dawning Sun: Building the Bedrock of the Future Central Avenue. Circa 1820-1920”

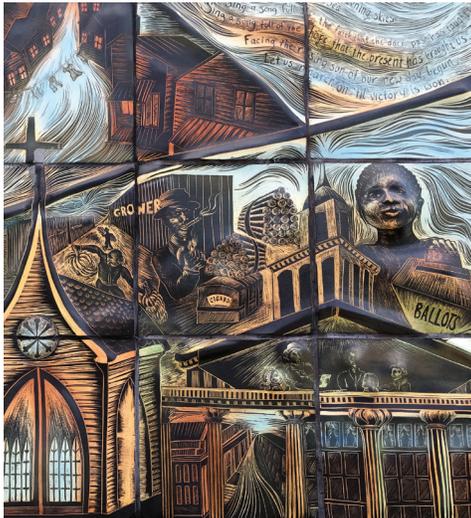
The first panel depicts early African American life in and around Tampa. Starting with the pre-Civil War days, when the vast majority of the black population was enslaved, the panel moves on to Emancipation, the beginning of self-sufficient African American communities in the late 19th century, and concludes with the establishment of the Central Avenue business district in the early 20th century.

- 1)** In the roots of the tree are several small images of chickees, the traditional shelters of the Seminole Indians, and images of Seminole Indians hiding the mangrove roots. There is a tiny caravan symbolizing the mode of transportation available before the railroad. The railroad itself, built largely through African American labor, birthed the blues and spirituals – the foundation for jazz.
- 2)** This map of downtown was inspired by the survey map of Tampa drawn by John Jackson in 1853. As Rowena Ferrell Brady states in her book *Things Remembered*, “A considerable part of the downtown area... was owned at times by African Americans.”
- 3)** Cattle and other goods were transported back and forth from Cuba during the mid to late 1800s. This portrait is of the counselor and interpreter Abraham, who met with the President of the United States in Washington before serving as “sense bearer” to the chief Micanopy, during the Second Seminole War. He is a symbol of those slaves that were given higher rank and kept in important positions as translators, ambassadors, liaisons and advisors to white leaders.
- 4)** At the top left corner, the symbol of the United States of America, the bald eagle, holds the Emancipation Proclamation, issued in September 1862 and enacted on January 1, 1863. Freed slaves are seen walking out of oppression, bending over to remove ankle chains to break free, and then walking down behind the trunk of the great

- tree and in front of the sun towards their new era of freedom.
- 5)** The great tree represents the efforts of many pioneers of this community, shaping its roots and culture during this era. In the late 1800s, fraternal organizations were a part of the African American community, gaining momentum and strength in the first two decades of the 20th century. Additionally, churches were central hubs for the African American community in the early 1900s. Some organizations featured in the great tree include: The Afro-American Civic League formed in 1915, the Paul Laurence Dunbar Literary Society, Longshoreman’s Association, Florida State Teachers Association, the Negro Board of Trade, Clara Frye Hospital, Jerusalem Lodge.
- 6)** The next “wedge” depicts the Scrub, one of the first African American neighborhoods in Tampa that endured well into the 20th century. The wind of change ‘goddess’ appears from the upper right hand corner, blowing the Negro National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing”, written by James Weldon Johnson.
- 7)** The Industrial Revolution began to find its way to tiny Tampa, a city that was about to grow to the tens of thousands. The railroad prompted that population explosion, and brought wealth to African Americans as well as a wave of foreign-born immigrants, including Afro Cubans, to Ybor City.
- 8)** On the bottom right the Hillsborough

County Commission opens up in the inner halls to a group of five men, three black and two white that were elected and served on the county commission. “After congressional enactment of Military Reconstruction beginning in 1867, Federal law first permitted blacks to vote during constitutional convention elections held in late 1867. Florida’s new constitution of 1868 granted suffrage rights to adult male blacks. For a time in 1871-1872 Black comprised the commission majority.” – Rowena Brady, *Things Remembered*.

9) The row of buildings is a select representation of early endeavors of the African American community that established businesses, churches, and educational institutions that would be the foundation for cultural prosperity in the 1920s and beyond.





“Noonday Sun: Central Ave in its Heyday. Circa 1920-1967”

This panel has as its focal point the sun at center left of the mural. Radiating outwards are many of the accomplishments and inspirations of Tampa’s African American community, as well as, people in service of of that community. Highlights include a vibrant Central Avenue, depicted in its mid- 20th century heyday with imagery of its rich music scene, stylized depiction of the Central Avenue businesses, as well as an African American man casting a ballot.

- 1)** The Avenue Sandwich Shop opened its doors along Central Avenue in the late 1930s and is featured alongside the Clara Frye Memorial Hospital, which opened in 1938.
- 2)** The three major night clubs/restaurants along Central Avenue that lit up the night were: the Blue Room, the Apollo Ballroom, and the Cotton Club. Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, the Ink Spots, Clyde McPhatter, James Brown, Ella Fitzgerald, and many other legends performed in these clubs. At 813 Short Emery Street, Ray Charles made his first recording titled “Found My Baby There.” Also featured here is the Jackson House, a boarding house that hosted several musicians and performers during segregation.
- 3)** Hank Ballard wrote the song “The Twist” after seeing the dance on Central Avenue. This led to Philadelphia’s Dick Clark and Chubby Checker making the dance and record an international hit.
- 4)** Helping Hand Day Nursery was founded in 1925 and offered quality assistance to the community, especially working mothers. The angel girl symbolizes the strength of those who ran the nursery. The woman featured here is looking for a voting voice and serves as the pivotal backbone of the community, representing African American women during this time. She holds a slice of Lemon Meringue Pie Cake, a nostalgic recipe from the era. Next to this woman

- is an image of a bewildered looking young man surrounded by the flowing fabric of the American flag. The man is adjacent to the Tampa Urban League, an organization that helped hundreds of African Americans.
- 5)** The International Longshoremen’s Association Local Union # 1402 was founded in 1935 in the Odd Fellow’s Hall on Central Avenue in Tampa. James Lovell was the first president, followed soon by Perry Harvey, Sr, the namesake of the adjacent city park.
- 6)** Martin Chambers sits on the signature turquoise-colored concrete block walls of Central Park Village. Chambers was shot while fleeing a Tampa police officer who was investigating a nearby burglary on June 11, 1967, later dying from his wound. His death sparked three days and nights of rioting along Central Avenue, which brought damage and destruction to many businesses along the avenue, with some never reopening. Some positive change did occur following the riots, including vocational training for young African Americans still facing the final days of Jim Crow segregation in Florida.
- 7)** Other key businesses on or right around the corner from Central Avenue were: McCarthur’s Photography Studio, Kid Mason’s Place, and the Central Life Insurance Company (Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune – who founded Bethune-Cookman College and was an advisor to

- First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was President of Central Life.
- Little Savoy was a club owned by Charles Vanderhorst, aka Charlie Moon. Vanderhorst had his hands in both legal and illegal ventures, and though he was arrested and accused multiple times of operating gambling parlors and bolita games, he also offered money and food to anyone who needed a helping hand. He was shot dead on Central Avenue and his safe was robbed, which led to several new businesses mysteriously popping up on Central Avenue. Bolita was a favorite and serious pastime on Central Avenue. The balls rolling down the street with the sun’s shadows cast on the dirt have no significance in the numbers except the number 67, the year Martin Chambers was shot and race riots brought change to Central Avenue as it moved into its next era.
- 8)** A pulpit leans towards the fisheye view of the neighborhood as one of the arms that kept the community intact and strong. The Scrub remained home to some of the principal housing of the African American community until the early 1950s when most of the homes there were torn down and replaced by Central Park Village in 1954.



“Future Sun: Dissolution into Solution. Circa 1967-future”

In this panel, the rays of the sun are represented by banners emanating from and powered by the sun’s energy. The banners symbolize the weaving together of new life into the future. Each banner supports an aspect of the community that has held together some semblance of the dissipated energies of Central Avenue. The unique and incredibly important components of this disjointed place are important to preserve and document.

1) In the top right-hand corner of the panel, a group of hands are seen encircling the sun. These hands represent energy transferred to and among the community. This imagery celebrates the diversity that has made up the community after desegregation in the 1960s and into the 21st century. These hands will have to work together, with the energy of love, in order to succeed in the future.

2) Below the sun, a row of tiny Scrub houses are split by the straight, unhindered line of a highway. This depicts the interstate which was constructed on top of sections of Central Avenue, thus creating a division through the center of the community. Several factors contributed to the dissolution of Central Avenue, including the construction of the highway, the riots around Chambers’ death, and the end of segregation and Jim Crow laws. Black businesses shut down or moved to other parts of town.

3) Below the Scrub is a sign that reads “Central Park Village.” This is a representation of the Scrub being torn down and replaced by Central Park Village in 1954. It became a new community for some of the African American population. Within the neighborhood the community was strong. Women stuck together to help raise each other’s children, while also pursuing jobs and adult education.

4) At the bottom-center of the panel, viewers will see Pery Harvey, Sr. Park. One

of the hangouts for Central Park Village teens was the skateboard park nicknamed the Bro Bowl. Kids from all races and all ages found this neutral territory in a world where adults were still setting up racial boundaries at home and within community institutions. The Bro Bowl, Kid Mason Community Center, and the pool near the Meacham School were some of the best places for children and young adults to come together as a community.

5) Essie Mae Reed a loyal mother, grandmother, social worker, political figure, human rights advocate, child advocate, friend, neighbor, and undaunted and tireless supporter of the community, lived in Central Park Village for many years. She was an icon of ‘can do.’ In the mural she is depicted with the Brownie girls, as she raised funds for their troop uniforms and held dinner socials to raise money for the Boys and Girls Club.

6) The Longshoreman’s Association and the growth of the maritime industry continues and is depicted by the red cargo ship and the ILA worker standing on the bank of the water holding one of the “banners” emanating from the sun.

7) Tampa Union Station sits just south of the former Central Avenue business district. Built in 1912, it still serves as a public transportation hub for the city. The iconic minarets of the Tampa Bay Hotel are also depicted. The Tampa Urban League banner indicates that the organization

closed its doors in 2006 after 84 years. Also featured is St. Peter Claver Catholic Church. St. Peter Claver remains a pivotal institution for education and social wellbeing in the community.

8) The Greater Mount Moriah Primitive Baptist Church, one of many important churches in the Scrub/Central Avenue area, was built in 1940 just to the north of the notoriously overcrowded “44 Quarters” section of the Scrub. Past Mount Moriah is a little swimming pool next to the Meacham School that all the neighborhood kids enjoyed. The Kid Mason Community Center is a wonderful hub for the community’s children.

9) The latest development in the series of ventures to reside on these acres, is ENCORE!. The true definition of mixed community, ENCORE! brings new challenges and new life to the echoing grounds from long ago. The skyline of Tampa, embraces the Encore development as it closes the “hole in the donut” in Tampa’s downtown community.

The history of Central Avenue through art continues into Perry Harvey, Sr. Park, across the street from Natalie Blake’s murals. The artwork at the park is unique and contextual. The artworks work together in an attempt to tell the full and complex story of the abundant contributions of the African American community and Historic Central Avenue. Also explore online at www.tampagov.net/arts