

Tampa **Art** Programs

**Artist:**

Natalie Blake

Title:

The Gift of Gathering Remembrances

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

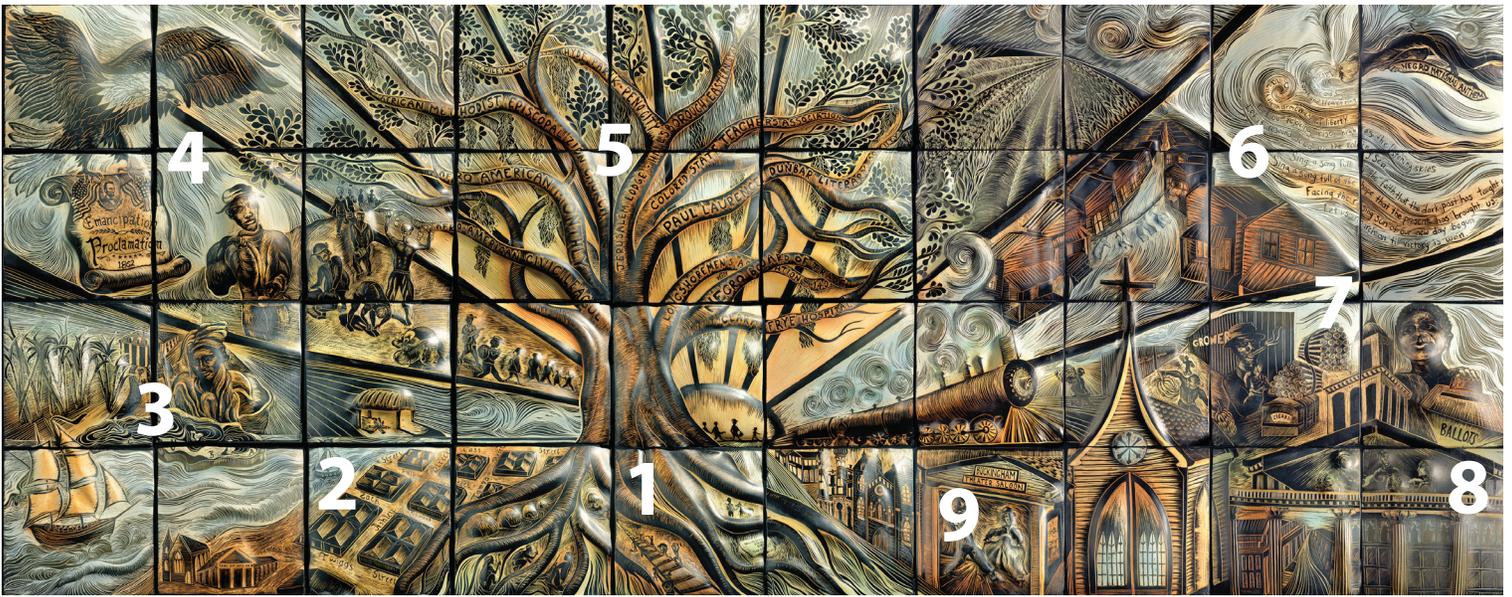
**Background:**

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”

This panel, dating through 1920, features the sun peaking up over the horizon, bringing a sense of the beginning during the time that the African American community began to flourish in the Tampa region. Highlights in this panel includes the freedom of slaves, organizations that served as the roots of the community, the first African American Settlement also known as “the scrub”, and the formation of black businesses along Central Avenue.

1) In the roots of the tree are several small images of the chickees of the Seminole Indians, and images of Seminole Indians hiding the mangrove roots. There is a tiny caravan symbolizing the mode of transportation in the era of railroad building.

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) Adjacent to the plantation house with sugarcane is a portrait 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.

4) At the top left corner, the symbol of the America, the Bald Eagle, holds the Emancipation Proclamation, issued in 1862 and enacted on January 1, 1863. Freed slaves are seen walking out of oppression, behind the tree and into the sun, towards their new era.

5) The great tree represents the efforts of many pioneers of this community, shaping its roots and culture during this era. Some organizations featured include: The Afro-American Civic League formed in 1915 to improve the lives of the community, and published the Afro-American Monthly.

Together with the Tampa Bulletin, black owned newspapers were a vital link for the community and a bedrock for Black owned commerce. “Paul Laurence Dunbar Literary Society was organized in 1910 by African American letter carriers to sponsor literary discussions and presentations, as well as to encourage scholarship within the African American community.” - *Things Remembered*, Rowena Ferrell Brady

Also featured are: the Longshoreman’s Association, Negro Board of Trade and Clara Frye Hospital.

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 was the instigator of that population explosion, and brought wealth to African Americans as well as a new kind of industrialized labor to Cubans and Blacks in 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 Black 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) This 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 twenties and beyond.





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

This panel depicts the noon day sun at center left of the mural. Radiating outwards are many of the amazing accomplishments, inspirations, trends created, and people in service of their community. Highlights include the vibrant scene of Central Avenue through the 1960s with imagery of the 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 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 Emory 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” song 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 holding a slice of Lemon Meringue Cake Pie, a nostalgic recipe from the era. Next to this woman is the Tampa Urban League, an organization that helped hundreds of African Americans.

5) The International Longshoremen’s Association Local Union # 1402 (ILA Local 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 concrete block signature turquoise colored walls of Central Park Village. “Martin Chambers, 19, was shot and killed June 11, 1967 by a Tampa police officer following a near-by burglary. Martin died from a single gunshot, and Chambers’ death began three days and nights of civil disturbances that changed Central Avenue in many ways. It was the beginning of the end

of Central Avenue as a vibrant business and entertainment district on the ‘Chitlin Circuit.’” – Fred Hearn

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, whose president, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, was an advisor to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and founded Bethune-Cookman College.

Little Savoy, a club owned by Charles Vanderhorst (aka Charlie Moon) a notorious entrepreneur who gave to the poor while also (allegedly) operating in the underworld and its bolita (illegal gambling) numbers games. 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.

8) A pulpit leans towards the fisheye view The Scrub, which remained some of the principal housing of the African American community until the 1950s, at which point it was torn down and replaced by Central Park Village in 1954. The arched yellow and turquoise sky with yellow sun heads towards Ybor City off in the distance.



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

The third panel depicts the sun rising in the sky. A grouping of hands encircles the sun representing energy transfer to, and among the community. This imagery celebrates the diversity that has made up the community after desegregation and into this century.

Instead of “pie” shaped wedges of the suns rays in the other murals, this panel presented itself with banners emanating from the core energy of the sun. The banners symbolize the weaving together of new energy into the future. Each banner supports some aspect of community that has held together some semblance of the dissipated energies of Central Avenue. The unique and incredibly important components of this disjointed time, while the community found its feet again, are important to preserve and document.

1) A grouping of hands encircles the sun representing energy transfer to, and among the community. This imagery celebrates the diversity that has made up the community after desegregation and into this century. These hands will have to work together with the energy of love in order for the future to succeed.

2) A row of tiny Scrub houses are split by the straight unhindered line of a highway. This depicts I-275 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, some of which include: the imposition 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) The Scrub was torn down, and Central Park Village, which opened in 1954, became a new community for some of the

African American population. Within the neighborhood, the community was strong, with women sticking together to help raise each others’ children while they pursued jobs and adult education. Chinese and Hispanics were also part of the community, as many worked in Ybor city.

4) One of the hangouts for Central Park Village teens at Perry Harvey, Sr. Park was the skateboard park nicknamed the Bro Bowl. Kids from all the races and all ages, found this neutral territory in a world where adults were still setting up racial boundaries in the home and 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 make community.

5) Essie Mae Reed a loyal mother, grandmother, social worker, political figure, human rights advocate, and tireless supporter of the Central Park community and lived there for many years. She was an icon of ‘can do’ and represents many of the strong women in the neighborhood. 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 industry continues and is depicted by the red cargo ship and the ILA worker standing on the beach holding one of the “banners” emanating from the sun.

7) Tampa Union Station now sits on one edge of the former Central Avenue. Built in 1912, it still serves as a public transportation hub for the neighborhood. The iconic Minarets of the original Tampa Bay Hotel are 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 well being 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 Mt Moriah is a little swimming pool next to the Meacham School that all the neighborhood kids enjoyed. Meacham, renowned for its education, will become a state of the art school in the new ENCORE! community. The Kid Mason Community Center is a wonderful hub for the community’s youth and children.

9) The next development in the chain of developments to reside on these acres, is the ENCORE! development. 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.