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Hope and Renewal

As part of a museum initiative, painted murals enliven four neighboring communities

Neil Hamilton, the Cleveland artist who created a free-standing mural for Quincy Park in the city's Fairfax community, says, "Gardens are symbols of rebirth. I took the subject for my mural from the numerous gardens you see in Fairfax. They are symbolic of the strength and renaissance of this community."

Last summer the Cleveland Museum of Art launched an engagement plan called Community of Relationships in four surrounding neighborhoods: Fairfax, Hough, Glenville, and East Cleveland. Funded by the Cleveland Foundation, the initiative featured activities in support of Parade the Circle and the Chalk Festival. Artists from Burkina Faso traveled to Cleveland to work in approximately 100 parade outreach workshops at sites within a one-mile radius of the museum. A few months later, Cleveland mural artists Neil Hamilton, Anna Arnold, Ed Parker, and Jerome White created preliminary drawings at the September Chalk Festival and then over subsequent weeks painted large-scale murals.

The museum worked with Fairfax Development Center, the cities of East Cleveland and Cleveland, and Glenville Development Center to choose mural locations in community centers and garden settings. The artists met with community members to develop themes.

Hamilton's mural describes the lushness of a futuristic garden from the viewpoint of a family walking toward the light-filled landscape. The tropical garden invites and enlivens the senses with a waterfall, vibrantly colored butterflies, flowers, and a hummingbird. The figure of a shaman watches over the paradise. Installed in the center of Quincy Place (8111 Quincy Avenue), it will serve as a setting for community celebrations and picnics, encouraging gatherings essential to the emotional bond between neighbors and friends.

Similarly, Anna Arnold's boldly colored mural tells a story of family and community through images of the storyteller of Hough. Arnold drew inspiration from her own family's journey to a new city and community. Her grandmother served as a symbol of history and wisdom to direct family members in decisions about their lives. In Arnold's mural, an older woman with raised hand talks with community youth and families about the experiences and values that provide hope and endurance for the future. She painted her mural in the art room at Thurgood Marshall Recreation Center (8611 Hough Avenue) in Hough with help from neighborhood youths.

Bound for Glory, by Jerome White, is the backdrop for a new Glenville park planned at the corner of Superior Avenue and East 107th Street. It features an African American youth traveling the Underground Railroad and bound for glory to Ottawa, Canada. As destinations for slaves fleeing the South, cities had code names. Cleveland's code name was "hope," while the city of "glory" or "freedom" was Ottawa, located beyond the United States's northern border. The past guides our communities through the present and into the future.

The fourth mural takes its theme from the name of the community center it adorns: Martin Luther King Civic Center in East Cleveland (14801 Shaw Avenue). Artist and East Cleveland resident Ed Parker provides a panorama of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life journey—from youth to his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech to winning the Nobel Peace Prize. The mural also depicts other seminal heroes in the pursuit of freedom: Rosa Parks,

Bound for Glory Jerome White's Glenville mural is inspired by the stories of slaves making their way north toward Ottawa via the Underground Railroad.

Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Cleveland's Reverend Dr. Otis Moss. At the end, the dream continues with the presence of President Obama, the first African American U.S. president. Silhouettes of families, emblematic of community unity, border the mural.

All four murals, with their visual beauty and uplifting messages of renewal brightening their neighborhoods, exemplify the potential of the museum's deepening relationships with these communities. 🏛≣