



Midtown Center Mural Sparks Debate

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Black Community Passionate About CD Legends and Legacy

It shows how much people still love the CD.

These are the words of artist, Cal Bonner, as he sits in his tattoo and lifestyle shop, Visions Ink, in Burien and describes what the last week has been like since his latest piece of art was revealed to the community. Since then, Bonner has received everything from praise to scathing criticism over his creation.

The artwork in question is a mural of Central District legends that Bonner selected and painted based on those people who personally impacted or inspired his life. The end result is a mural that has struck a chord deep within the community among those who agonize over a changing Central District and fading memories of the past.

One thing the for sure, is that no one is challenging the actual art itself or Bonners artistic skills. However, feedback from the community regarding the content has been swift with many wondering why many lifestyle, political, and religious legends were not included and others calling for the removal of those who were included in the mural. All of which has put Bonner in a dizzying position of having to defend his art to the community that he grew up in and loves.

The Directive

According to Margo Jones, of A Personal Point of View, who serves in the capacity of Creative Director for the Imagine Africatown Midtown Center Activation project. Bonner was given the artistic freedom to create his vision based upon things in the neighborhood that held value to him.

I want the public to be clear on exactly what Cal and I discussed when he was commissioned to do the art and the creative direction he was assigned. I asked him, growing up in the Central District, what and who inspires you? We then narrowed it down to the fact that music and athletics played a big role in his foundation and was a huge influence of his art and creativity. said Jones.

A Point of View is working in conjunction with Africatown Preservation & Development Association for the activations and art projects in the Midtown Center. Africatown commissioned Bonners work through A Point of View.

Based upon the project description and Bonners passion for athletics it is no wonder that the end result was comprised almost all of athletes or coaches that he has interacted with in his personal life.

Unfortunately, when the art was unveiled and hit the internet, neither the project description or Bonners methodology was passed along and all many of his critics heard was CD Legends Mural and assumed that Bonners creation was based on direction from Jones or Africatown and not just who Bonner believes is legendary and that had some type of impact on his life which ultimately was inspiring to him.

Beauty is in the eye?

The common issue with pieces of art that evoke such emotion is that there are often heightened sensitivities on both sides.

Those that support Bonners art appear very combative around negative feedback, perhaps forgetting that art is subjective, and beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Those who find Bonners creation as lacking tact or missing the mark fail to realize that he was not commissioned to paint a portrait, he was given the artistic freedom to create a mural that pays tribute to those that inspire him.

Both sides might be well served by just looking at the mural for what it is, a piece of art, no more, no less.

Bonner has said that the way he designed the mural, more panels can be added to represent additional community members over time. However, the community will need to find a way to determine who is added in the next phases and the resources to make it happen.

Backlash is not uncommon

Bonner is not the first artist to face a swift backlash from the community for their art.

This past summer, Africatown also commissioned artist, Melvin Freeman, who created murals comprised of photos sourced from community members and organizations. Upon unveiling his mural, some felt that there were many impactful community members that were not present in Freemans creation and highly criticized the piece. The end result being that Freeman decided to add additional panels to the mural so more photos could be included. Freeman's amended mural is up as well as a new one depicting Earl Lancaster.

Community members time and again have shown that they are very passionate about the neighborhoods legacy and literally leaving no man or woman who has contributed to the Central District over the years behind.

Africatown seeks to inspire through art

According to Africatown, nearly \$300,000 has been directed to community artists to tell and celebrate the visual history of the Central Districts past. The majority of this

art has been or will be installed in the Liberty Bank Building (opening early next year) or at Midtown.

Africatown points out that the installations at Midtown are temporary with the goal being to get the community involved in the upcoming Midtown redevelopment where the developers, Lake Union Partners, have also committed to the inclusion of numerous pieces of art that will celebrate and commemorate the Black community's legacy in the Central District.

Africatown is committed to giving artists from our community a platform, particularly those who may be younger and not as directly connected into the art world opportunities. said K. Wyking Garrett, President and CEO of Africatown Community Land Trust.

We are just getting started and working hard to direct over one million dollars towards community artists over the next few years to tell our stories of our past, present and future. We value our rich shared legacy and our artists, which are both too often overlooked. added Garrett.

A healing message

The negative reaction from some in the community may very well reinforce the fact that a level of healing needs to take place from mental trauma that stems from the effects of gentrification.

There are literally tens of thousands of people who directly or indirectly called the Central District home or considered the Central District to be the cultural epicenter of the Black community not only in Seattle but in the Pacific Northwest.

The systemic and rapid gentrification of the Central District has inflicted mental and emotional scars on community members who literally saw their neighborhood as they knew it disappear before their eyes and in less than one generation and is now almost unrecognizable in both architecture and racial makeup.

According to Jones, it is hard for the community to embrace the positive as many are still suffering from open emotional wounds.

A healing needs to needs to happen in the community says Jones.

The way people are so disgruntled and wounded from the past makes it hard for us to praise and appreciate the actions of goodness that are happening, and I feel that healing these wounds is an important next step that we need to act upon. said Jones.

See it for yourself and get involved

For those looking to view Bonners mural up close and personal, you will have an opportunity this Sunday, December 30th, as Africatown honors Earl Lancaster of Earls Cut & Styles 30 year business anniversary. The event is from 5pm - 11pm at Midtown Center on 23rd and Union. Space is limited and free tickets are available by [clicking here](#).

Africatown is hopeful that now that the community is engaged and excited around

the issue of art, that community members will match action with their passion and engage in the selection process for future artists and projects. To stay up to date on upcoming events surrounding the selection of future art projects please text the word ART to 206 309 6324 to be registered for updates.

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