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Addonis Parker: Earthy Addonis

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Addonis Parker

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He's a giant, and not just because he stands six feet eight inches. For more than a decade, Addonis Parker, owner of Art Forever

Studios in Liberty City, has concentrated on improving the world through paint and brush.

From teaching art to at-risk youth, to completing large-scale mural commissions (such as his 55-foot-tall sunset on a public housing project), to participating in museum shows that celebrate black history and culture, Parker is a man on a mission to "do something historical."



At age 38, he still walks with the easy gait of a college ballplayer. The day we meet, he stands outside the Culmer Library in front of a historic Purvis Young mural in Overtown's Gibson Park. He has just met Dorothy Jenkins Fields of Miami's Black Archives for the first time and they're getting acquainted on the former site of Good Bread Alley, where the houses were once so close that tuberculosis ran through the block like a bug in a rug.

Miami District 5 Commissioner Richard Dunn and Mayor Tomás Regalado have just broken ground on a \$10 million urban renewal project for the park, and Parker has been tapped to restore Young's mural, which is faded, water-damaged, and moldy. Parker points to a brush stroke and says, "See, this looks like just a smear, but this was his expression. You don't paint over the artist's work; you leave as much as possible. That's how you restore."

He has applied the same ethic to maintaining his credibility. This past June, he took criticism for painting an Arthur Teele memorial called *The King Has Fallen* at NW 54th Street and Sixth Court. Teele, a Miami commissioner, committed suicide while under federal investigation. The mural showed a chessboard. "Sometimes you're in a game you don't even know you're playing. Teele may have been uncouth or in question, but so many others only get a slap on the wrist while we [African-Americans] always get the rough end of the mop."

As for why the native Ohioan is so committed to his adopted Miami home, he says, "I come from humble beginnings. I was poor. When I was 8 years old, living in Ohio, I had a friend whose mom was on drugs real bad. I know it sounds hard to believe, but at 8 years old, he was an alcoholic. He was kinda slow, he smelled real bad, and he was drunk all the time. All the kids used to make fun of him, and I never did anything to help him. When I landed in Liberty City later in life, it reminded me of what I should have done as a child. You have to become the change you want to see."

Parker's commitment to South Florida is evidenced by a litany of awards and commendations, including a Community Icon nod from former Miami Mayor Manny Diaz. In addition to other projects, Parker is working on opening a gallery in Fort Lauderdale's Sistrunk neighborhood. His next goal is to join 100 kids and paint a mural.

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