

OVERTOWN

Purvis Young's Gibson Park wall murals will be restored

■ A mural by legendary Miami artist Purvis Young will be restored as part of the renovation of Gibson Park.

BY THEO KARANTSAKIS
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The ballplayers, children and soldiers who once stood guard outside the Overtown library were no match for weather and time.

Legendary artist Purvis Young of Overtown spent eight weeks in 1984 painting a row of murals called *Everyday Life* that faced the football field at neighboring Gibson Park.

The paint peeled after a few years, and in 1991 the city of Miami paid Young \$6,000 to restore the art work.

"We're going to put shellac on it so it will hold," Young told *The Miami Herald* in 1990.

But after two decades of hurricanes and a hot sun, the once vivid blues, blacks, reds and oranges are barely noticeable.

Fungus, rot and dark-brown well-water stains have nearly destroyed the art.

Young died in April, so Miami city leaders — who broke ground last month on a \$10 million project to renovate Gibson Park — scrambled to find someone capable of restoring the murals' lost luster.

Only one name made the list: Addonis Parker.

"Purvis lives through his art," said Parker, 38, a long-time friend of Young and owner of Art Forever Studio in Liberty City. "That needs to be respected."



THEO KARANTSAKIS FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

PRINCE OF PEACE: Miami artist Addonis Parker restored this mural of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 2007 in Liberty City. Now, he'll preserve the work of his friend, Purvis Young at Gibson Park in Overtown.

'Purvis [Young] lives through his art. That needs to be respected.'

— ADDONIS PARKER,
local artist and friend of Purvis Young

Parker is a self-taught artist who, like Young, feels compelled to paint the plight of his neighborhood.

"We share the same mission of exposing social injustice through mixing paint to make the world a better place," Parker said.

Young's first public art project, a couple blocks from the library, was called *Good Bread Alley*.

Channeling a sense of injustice over I-95 being built through Overtown a few years earlier, Young painted and mounted hundreds of masterpieces in the 1970s near Northwest 14th Avenue along rows of boarded up buildings.

"He would paint non-stop for days and produce

masterpieces the way you would press a button on a copy machine," Parker said.

Young sharpened his skills at the library where he read art books about Rembrandt and van Gogh. He chose its walls to give something back to the community.

"He was a quiet man who loved the library," said Lavette Moore, a library assistant at the Overtown library who knew Young her whole life.

Today, Young's paintings fetch thousands of dollars at auction houses throughout the world.

"Purvis told me it troubled him that he couldn't afford to buy his own

work," said Parker, who wants to get into the mind of Purvis Young before he starts painting.

Young died penniless. "Purvis understood the culture of Overtown," said Miami Commissioner Richard P. Dunn II, who remembers watching the documentary *Purvis of Overtown* in 2006 inside his art studio. "The positivity he depicted must be continued through his art."

The murals at the library are a treasure that can't be carted off by the highest bidder.

The art was placed there by Young so it could be enjoyed by the community for free.

"I count 4,627 wiggles, scribbles and images on the eight walls," said Parker, who has painfully studied and analyzed each square inch of the project.

Parker, who has painted murals throughout Miami, said this will be a work-intensive job.

"But since it is for the community, the amount will be substantially less" than what he would normally charge.

Site preparation gets under way next week, and in early December the existing Gibson Park buildings will be demolished. Restoration of the library mural will happen at the same time.

"We haven't agreed on a contract amount just yet," said Joseph Cerrone, project manager for Recreational Design & Construction of Fort Lauderdale. "We want the Purvis Young murals to be the cherry on top of this magnificent project."