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WHAT'S GOING ON: HOW A COLLECTOR HAS GROWN BOTH A FRIENDSHIP HIS ART COLLECTION

By Temple Hemphill

Collecting **Robert Lewis Clark's** artwork is a family affair, chuckled **Malik Nevels**. "My mother saw the [first] piece I bought and then bought a piece. Then my brother bought a piece…Then, I purchased three smaller prints from [Clark] and gifted them to my mother-in-law."

Nevels, Chief Operating Officer at TASC (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities) met Clark in 2006. Their friendship grew alongside Clark's blossoming visual arts career. Around 2010, Nevels purchased Clark's *Beautiful View* and since added three more of his pieces, including *Untitled, 44*, and his most recent purchase, *Good Times*.



Good Times is inspired by the work of professional football player turned artist **Ernie Barnes's** famous dance hall painting, *The Sugar Shack*. To create *Good Times*, Clark stretched canvas over the hood of a Jaguar and then painted the images using mixed media. Next, he painted people over the lyrics to the title track to Marvin Gaye's 1971 mega album "What's Going On."

Nevels reminisced about his early days and recalled grooving to Marvin Gaye's soulful lyrics. Nevels also recalled regularly watching the TV show "Good Times" and seeing *The Sugar Shack* flash in its opening. When you mesh these "cultural and spiritual connections" to what he considers to be Clark's unique use of acrylic and vivid colors, purchasing the piece was a *must*.

Clark shared more about the creative process for *Good Times*. He went without a cellphone for four years. During his drives, he'd see the damaged car bumpers that sometimes cluttered expressways. He decided to collect car parts in preparation for a future art show that would bring awareness to texting and safe driving. He found the Jaguar hood at a junkyard. Little did he know the hood would become the foundation for *Good Times.*



Later, Clark came across *The Sugar Shack* while scrolling the Internet. He described, "I love this image. It shows so much energy and motion and such a good time. I was listening to Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On." It's a mellow, positive song...I decided to use the images of people dancing. It's like they're at a house party, and I love house music." Bingo! *Good Times* was born.

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Clark and Nevels became friends in 2006, the same year Clark decided to become a full-time artist. Previously, he worked for 10-years as a newsprint technician. Clark deeply appreciates the support he's received from collectors like Nevels. His work is also sought after by professional athletes, Chicago-area celebrities, and other art lovers.

Clark's pleasant personality and passion for art make supporting his work easy, added Nevels. He also owns work produced by Clark's gallery-mate, **Roger J. Carter**, and cherishes a Peter Max piece gifted to him by his mother, an avid art collector. And, he has an eight-foot sculpture produced by an unknown artist that is a big (yes, pun intended) talking piece.



Nevels offered a couple of tips about how art collectors can support artists like Clark. For starters, "Get in early." Grow with them. He also suggested, "Have a deeper understanding of how they [artists] interpret the world and … leverage that interpretation to produce art." With any luck, you might stumble onto a pot of gold.

Nevels concluded, "I truly believe that in 20, 30, 40 years from now, we'll be reading about Robert."

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To read and see more about Clark's artwork, visit www.agapecollective.com/kulture-museum and IG@robertlewisclark.

If you know who created the sculpture mentioned in this article, contact Malik Nevels at maliknevels@mac.com. A Starbucks card is negotiable. 😊

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