



Artists recently updated the art in the maze of passageways and courtyards that make up the alley, which has entrances on South Adams Street and East College Avenue. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY TALLAHASSEE DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITY

# Artists gussy up Gallie Alley maze with fresh look

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Guest Columnist

Manhattan has Tin Pan Alley. Seattle has Post Alley. Tallahassee has Gallie Alley. Lately, the alleyway might be more aptly coined “gallery” alley given its recent multi-mural makeover. The alleyway’s history is as storied as downtown. Its tradition for art is similarly longstanding.

“It’s an incredible block that I

think often times we take for granted,” said Elizabeth Emmanuel, CEO of the Tallahassee Downtown Improvement Authority (TDIA). “The economic impact it brings is significant for downtown.”

The maze of passageways and courtyards that make up the alley has entrances on South Adams Street and East College Avenue.

Its name is derived from the former Gallie Hall opera house

built in 1873. As the years have worn on, its passersby have evolved from horses and wagons to foot-traffic from delivery workers and businesspeople who use it as a clandestine shortcut.

This is not the first time Gallie Alley has sported a new look. In 1987 it was paved with bricks to make it safer to walk and drive on. TDIA sponsored a project

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Tallahassee Downtown Improvement Authority (TDIA) Intern Anne Marie Yatsula paints a squid in Gallie Alley as part of TDIA’s community mural project on Nov. 16, 2020. The project has given the alley a facelift with murals with uplifting messages and Tallahassee-centric pieces created by local artists.

TORI LYNN SCHNEIDER/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

# Gallie

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with Florida State University students to paint a mural of a storefront façade in the mid-2000s.

Since then, many artists who have passed through town have left their mark, some who created a “cult-like affinity” for certain symbols says Emmanuel. Among them is a squid and a logo for the hip-hop collective Wu Tang Clan — both of which she says were preserved in this latest project.

Emmanuel says the project came together quickly. When businesses in the downtown district are fined for vandalism, it is up to the business owner to clear the citation and abate graffiti.

In late October last year, a code violation came across her desk and sparked the idea. Over the COVID-summer, Gallie Alley became inundated with tags and graffiti, and Emmanuel started work with the city’s Resilience Office to better support business owners and refresh Gallie Alley for a new decade.

“Since 2020 was a tough year, we wanted to do something that spread community pride and give an uplifting feel to the area,” says Emmanuel, who brought together thirteen artists from AIGA, a professional association for design, and the community. “This was an exciting way to get people outdoors and exploring.”

Murals were painted by Eric Thomas, Alina Bachmann, Nipa Eason, Matthew Forrest, Renee Mirowitz, Lindsey Masterson, Brandon G, Cody Paddack, Noelle Stillman, Jordan Welniak, Cesarae Jensen, Ellice Cothorn and Vanessa Guirey.

Access Tallahassee prepped and cleaned the space as part of their Access Day of Action in early November before the artists created their designs with paints supplied by Sherwin-Williams. Merchandise will be sold by TDIA featuring many images from Gallie Alley with all proceeds going towards the artists.

The artists were asked to depict uplifting images and messages that were Tallahassee-centric. For Ellice Cothorn, this meant looking to her own life and reflecting on what might resonate with fellow Tallahasseeans.

Cothorn is a BFA art major at FSU and had never painted a mural before. After eight hours, her first mural was complete with the words “Thank A Woman Today” at its center surrounded by feminine faces. The words reflect the mentorship she’s received from her mother, an animator and one of her biggest inspirations.

“I grew up with mostly women taking care of me and my mother is an artist,” says Cothorn. “I’ve always been appreciative of the women in my life, so I wanted to send my love towards them. I hope people feel that this community cares about them, too, and I hope the ideas the murals present feels relevant to them.”

The Gallie Alley murals are artist Noelle Stillman’s first big project since arriving in Tallahassee six



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months ago. Stillman is pursuing her MFA in art at FSU and believes that “art is a public service.” Her first mural was for the city of Oldsmar, Florida, in 2016, and since then she has continued advocating for equal and open access to the arts via public art projects.

She chose to honor the cormorant bird for her mural as she frequently sees them in local parks and behind her home near Lake Alberta. Cormorants do not have oil on their feathers so they must spread their wings in the sun to dry out fully. Stillman’s depiction captures the cormorant in vibrant color with a glowing sun radiating behind its wingspan.

“Gallie Alley is a great reflection of the collaborative grassroots spirit that Tallahassee has,” says Stillman, who has immersed herself in the city’s arts scene. “It shows the city’s support for having a vibrant contemporary culture.”

When artist Nipa Eason pitched her idea to TDIA, she took a more abstract approach to capturing the city in an image. Eason is the creative director at Salter-Mitchell PR and her artwork, “Southern Magnolias,” was recently chosen as part of the “Art of the Box” program for beautifying Tallahassee’s traffic control boxes.

Eason’s Gallie Alley mural interprets a topographical map of Tallahassee. It represents both the hills and the rippling waters that make the area wholly unique in the Panhandle’s landscape.

“We’re the capital and whatever decision making happens here tends to affect the whole state, and sometimes the whole country,” says Eason. “The map was able to show how our community impacts the world around us.”

To learn more about Gallie Alley, please visit [tallahasseedowntown.com](http://tallahasseedowntown.com).

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)). This article is part of COCA’s Creativity Persists collection which highlights how our community uses the arts to stay connected and inspired during the COVID-19 pandemic.*