



# CHALK IT UP

Artist and educator Carrie Bennett loves painting and the energy of a crowd. Thankfully, the muralist doesn't have to choose between them.

BY **NILA DO SIMON**  
PORTRAIT BY  
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Artist Carrie Bennett is looking to change Fort Lauderdale's landscape, one mural at a time.



**Even though she's concentrated** on painting, Carrie Bennett can still hear the crowd murmur. It doesn't matter how quiet the comment is or how focused she is on the piece; the muralist and live-art painter can hear, if not feel, the positive feedback.

"There's no better compliment than overhearing someone say, 'I needed to see that today,'" she says.

It's these whispers that fuel Bennett during her live painting. The Lighthouse Point resident has become a fixture in the local art scene for more than a decade, participating for nine consecutive years at the Street Painting Festival in Lake Worth and organizing the inaugural ChalkLit festival in downtown Fort Lauderdale in January 2018. Globally, she was selected to participate at the International Street Art Festival in Wilhelmshaven, Germany, only one of four Americans with the honor.

Creating art in front of an audience motivates Bennett. In that setting, she is the lead singer of the band and the star athlete leading the team to victory. All eyes are on her, and Bennett thrives off that energy.

"I prefer doing live art," she says. "It creates an engagement and excitement that can never be replicated in the studio."

Born in Boynton Beach, Bennett says she's always had an artistic inclination. Despite sports like volleyball calling her name (she earned an athletic scholarship from Furman University in South Carolina), she dabbled in art unconsciously, sketching teammates' faces on bus rides to matches and taking art classes here and there. She majored in studio arts at Furman

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University, and upon returning to South Florida after graduation, Bennett parlayed the concentration into a career as a live-art painter and art educator. For the past 15 years, she has taught students from kindergarten through eighth grade at St. Coleman Catholic School, where she says some of the children are better artists than she was at their age.

Besides her performances, the 37-year-old also has public art pieces that can be found all over Broward County, from the *Florida Panthers Art Mural* in downtown Fort Lauderdale and a new painting inside the upper level of BB&T Center—both commissioned by the hockey team—to an origami-inspired mural at a Riverwalk parking garage. No matter the setting, there seems to be two common denominators with Bennett's work: dimension and color.

"I knew from the beginning that I was going to go big by creating murals for the public to see," she says. "I don't need to take a 10- by 10-foot mural home with me."

Vibrant, bold and full of energy, Bennett's pieces are also a celebration of life. "I like to use all the crayons in the box," she says. Case in point: The Riverwalk garage mural, which bursts with color, has turned an otherwise lifeless parking garage into a talking point with its own identity.

On January 19, art and literature lovers can see Bennett at ArtLit 2019: A Day of Heroes, where she serves as a consultant for the event. An offshoot of ChalkLit, ArtLit combines chalk and canvas art plus the written word, and will take place at the Pompano Beach Library and Cultural Center.

So, what is it about chalk—a highly soluble and messy medium that allows the artist little time to reflect on its beauty—that Bennett likes? "I don't need to keep it," she says. "I like walking away from it and allowing people to enjoy the work." ■





Carrie Bennett spearheaded the inaugural ChalkLit festival in 2018, which featured artists creating works that include pop culture references, such as Spider-Man. Throughout the festival, guests were invited to make their own mark with chalk.

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