

# Black United Fund Mandala Mural

© 2016 Linda Dalal Sawaya, lead artist, with Anne Mansfield

## BUF Mandala Mural commentary and elucidation

- The outermost ring is called the Binding Ring, which surprisingly is painted only after completion of the inner rings of the mandala. In the Black United Fund mandala, the binding ring reflects rising energy of sunlight emanating outward.

- The next band is called the Ring of Fire, which represents a protective zone and burning away of ignorance; it also symbolizes transformation and is painted in sunrise colors with Northwest trees around the circle in the four seasons of the year, beginning in the top right quadrant. Black crows fly through the skies as Native American creator symbols.

- Next is a blue Transition ring which symbolizes the regional rivers and movement between endings and beginnings. There is written names of the people and events depicted in the Ring of Life.

- The Ring of Life comes next and is a metaphor for the journey of life, which we enter at a dark point and find our way through the unknown into self-knowledge. The twelve vignettes present a short history of Alberta Street and honors lives of the black community.

- Vignette 1 begins with a Native American maiden ready for marriage; beside her are fishermen at the fish platforms at Celilo Falls on the Columbia River and a camas flower, a high protein food staple for Native Americans.

- Vignette 2 depicts Indian Chief Emma Luscier, with male and female Native Americans net fishing along regional rivers.

- Vignette 3 includes Russian and German immigrants who came to live and farm in the area.

- Vignette 4 features African American community leader Louisa M. Flowers and the all-black Willamette Orchestra of which Beatrice Morrow Cannady was a member.

- Vignette 5 illustrates Chinese gardeners with artist, dancer and educator Thelma Johnson Street.

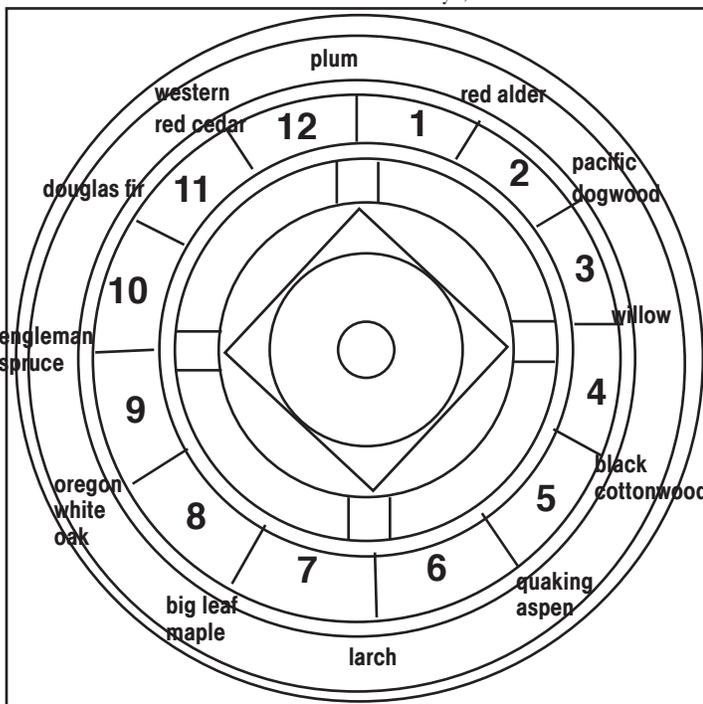
- Vignette 6 features Beatrice Morrow Cannady, one of the first black women to graduate from law school in the U. S., a founder of Oregon's NAACP, a musician, and an editor of *The Advocate* newspaper painted alongside a thriving Alberta Street of the 1940s.

- Vignette 7 brings attention to the 1948 Vanport Flood and activist Vanport survivor Lizzie Phillips Weeks with one of her children.

- Vignette 8 highlights the protest marches, fires, and demonstrations



BUF mandala mural © 2016 Linda Dalal Sawaya, with Anne Mansfield



BUF mandala legend © 2016 Linda Dalal Sawaya, with Anne Mansfield

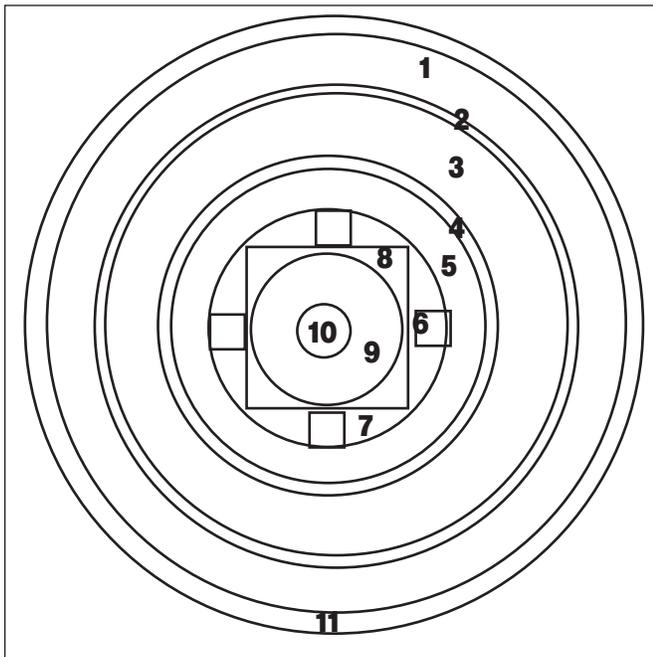
by community members in the 1960s and 1970s; and Wm. Hilliard III, the first black editor of *The Oregonian* newspaper.

- Vignette 9 sheds light on demonstrations against Portland Development Commission and Emmanuel Hospital plans for “redevelopment” in the 1970s; and the first African American woman in the Oregon Senate, Avel Louise Gordly.

- Vignette 10 honors the work of “The Queen of Alberta”, Roslyn Hill, who first invested in Alberta Street’s revitalization in the 1990s; and Dr. Josiah Hill III, an environmental activist on the board of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility.

- Vignette 11 highlights the educational work of Black United Fund programs including Chess for Success, which increases achievement for African American and underserved children.

- Vignette 12 honors community activist Ron Herndon who led Albina and national Head Start programs for many years adjacent to a scene from present day Art on Alberta’s Last Thursday event drawing thousands of people every month.



## MANDALA LEGEND

<b>1</b>	<b>Ring of Fire</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Transition Ring</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Ring of Life (Through the Dark Forest)</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Transition Ring</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>The Wasteland</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Pathways</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Threshold</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Guardian Square</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Portal</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Place of Bliss</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Binding Ring</b>

- A Transition ring follows as a symbol of a flowing river: time to pause to allow a change in the flow of energy, creating space for what's to come.
  - The next ring is called the Wasteland, representing a place of emptiness, a world with little personal meaning, or living an inauthentic life. This is illustrated by tangled roots representing the roots of racism and the red line used on real estate maps so that people of color could not buy outside this imposed racist boundary.
  - Four Pathways of painted arrows offer movement towards the center of the mandala.
  - The next circle, the Threshold, is a symbolic point of no return, where one encounters demons. Here is painted dark water with four swimming sturgeons with fearful eyes. The Pacific or Oregon sturgeon is an endangered species and one that is dangerous to eat because of the toxins their bodies pick up from environmental degradation.
  - The Guardian Square appears next as a symbol of perfection on the material plane, protecting inner light; the Guardians in the four corners are: Heron, Owl, Coyote, and Bald Eagle, who live and thrive among us.
  - The circle within the Guardian Square is the Portal—an opening to the innermost domain of the spirit with hands of all races coming together and reaching towards each other creating connection and love—a call for peace and non-violence.
  - The last circle is called the Place of Bliss, a symbol of perfection on the spiritual plane, inner connectivity to the whole of life, and inner peace. The central symbol, Dwennimmen (ram's horns), comes from Ghana, Africa and represents strength, determination, and humility. It is a symbol of a balance of peace and power in the inner and outer worlds that is embraced by the African American community.
- Finally, the entire circular mandala is placed in a spacious night sky—holding its place in the Universe, for all to view and enjoy.

**Linda Dalal Sawaya**, lead mural artist is an Arab American artist who has worked on interior and exterior murals in Northern California and Oregon since 1992, and has painted mandalas since 2004. Feng Shui consultant, **Anne Mansfield** painted the trees and crows in the Ring of Fire, and has been working with mandalas since 1995. Mandalas are a universal art form that employ sacred geometry and occur in African, Native American, Asian, Arab, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and other traditions and cultures. The round shape of the mandala represents unity, the earth, connectivity, harmony, and wholeness. These are the healing qualities that our mandala mural intends to bring to the neighborhood and from there to the city and the world.

The inspiration for this mandala mural grows out of a commitment to show solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement at a time in our culture when this is essential for a thriving community and world. It has been an honor to work on this project and to honor the work of Black United Fund and the African American community of Alberta/Albina.

In painting this Mandala mural for **Black United Fund** building on NE Alberta Street in Portland, the process used is based on sacred geometry, combining historical research and intuition to create the design for this mural. Hundreds of hours were involved developing the drawing and the content, and making changes in 2015, before the mural was actually painted on site during the summer of 2016. If you have questions, please contact Linda Dalal Sawaya at her email address: [linda@lindasawaya.com](mailto:linda@lindasawaya.com) and see more of her work at [www.lindasawaya.com](http://www.lindasawaya.com)

Black United Fund Mandala legend © 2016 Linda Dalal Sawaya, lead artist

Thanks to **Black United Fund** for selecting the mandala mural for their building and for their work in the community: [www.bufo.org](http://www.bufo.org)  
 Thanks to **Alberta Artworks.org**, the administrative sponsor and fiscal agent for the Black United Fund Murals and to our mural sponsors