

Don't Blink: Art happens before your eyes

Almost two months ago, on my commute to work, I spotted a ladder, a freshly primed wall and a very chill artist on Cypress Street directly below Billy Taylor Park Bridge. I was curious, so I slammed the brakes and popped a U-ie. I met the artist, Elijah Faris, and we exchanged numbers. After hearing about his goals for the fresh wall, I pitched the idea of him working on a cover for this issue of *Motif*.

As the weeks went by, I saw this mural take shape. For what seemed like forever, there was nothing but penciled circles and faces barely visible to anyone passing in a car. Then suddenly, Ray Charles was there on the wall making one of his iconic expressions! Day by day, pencil faces had grown flesh and life. I stopped again to speak with Eli; we joked about the many things people have yelled out their car windows at him.

He told me that most of what people say are along the lines of, "Cool mural," "Looking good" and "Nice job." As I sat beneath Eli's ladder, sketching him as he painted, we spoke about how most people won't give artists actual constructive criticism. We stepped back and looked at the mural from across the road and brought up some criticisms of the piece.

"You nailed it with Ray Charles, don't change a thing."

"This eye is smaller than that one."

"That shading is really close to being right, perhaps a small tweak."

Elijah poked fun at me. "Look at you! A real artist making actual constructive criticisms!"

We went to get drinks and pulled pork sandwiches at Black Sheep later that day, and I was humbled by Eli after I pulled out a sketchbook and challenged him to a "scribble drawing" session. He excelled at the drawing exercise, and my art paled in comparison to what he learned during his traditional training at RISD (he probably has had a lot more practice than I have, too).

A few days after we had drinks together, the freshly primed wall was finished with a wonderful mural of musical faces. As seen from left to right are James Brown, Sarah Vaughn, Bill Osborn, Ray Charles, Sissiereta Jones, David Hector, Sammy Hector (aka DJ Daddy Long Legs), Etta James and Billie Holiday. In my mind, this mural happened like a real life time lapse — it started then it was over, and I'm sorry for anybody who missed it happening.

Eli has already been commissioned to create a new mural in the same location on an adjacent wall; if you missed the evolution of the first one, make sure to watch the progression of the second one — just don't blink or you will miss it.