

# 4X4 GATEWAY MURAL NETHER, 2022

COMMISSIONED BY  
NORTH EAST HOUSING INITIATIVE  
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Through an extensive community engagement process including community meetings, community surveys, and interviews, artist Justin Nether created the first mural for the 4x4 community. This mural is located at the “back gateway” of the community on an end unit property NEHI currently owns, located at 3444 Elmley Avenue. This space will serve as a community land trust model home and stewardship workshop popup.

Below is a description written by the artist to shed light on the deep meaning and purpose behind this commissioned piece:

The mural deals with the present reality, past, and questions of the future for the 4x4 neighborhood. Directly adjacent and partially beneath the 4x4 neighborhood lies Laurel Cemetery, established in 1852 as the first non-religious cemetery for Baltimore’s African American community. Laurel Cemetery quickly became a popular place of burial for people across Black Baltimore’s socioeconomic spectrum, including the graves of 230 Black Civil War veterans, members of the United States Colored Troops. After a decline in the cemetery’s condition due to financial instability of the company that managed it, politically linked developers eventually finessed zoning to allow for the private sale of the land for \$100. The developers claimed that they relocated the cemetery, but residents of the 4x4 have found remains and parts of tombstones as the grass has receded for the past couple decades.

The right side of the mural wall pays homage to the former Laurel Cemetery’s location. In addition to collaborating with the community and local artist Terrel Brown who is from the 4x4, Nether also consulted with Professor Elgin Klugh who runs the Laurel Cemetery Memorial Project. They selected three historic photographs that together pay honor to the history of the cemetery.

Working from top to bottom is a photograph of Rev. Harvey Johnson, a preacher well known to Laurel Cemetery. Harvey Johnson was born into slavery right before the war, traveled to Baltimore after it concluded, and became a beacon of enlightenment as a reverend for the Black community in the post-war period. Below him is a historic photograph of an unidentified Civil War soldier representing the 230 Black veterans buried at Laurel who gave their lives fighting for freedom. At the base of the mural is a portrait of the legendary Baltimore activist Lillie May Carroll Jackson who was a pioneer in the efforts to save the cemetery and halt the sale.

The rest of the mural depicts the current architectural look of the 4x4 focusing on the porches, the mosaic neighborhood sign, and flowers. As there has been a desire to rededicate the land of the former cemetery as a memorial park, on the left side of the mural depicts a girl from the 4x4 planting flowers and vegetables, reestablishing and in a way spiritually cleansing the history of the land.