



Tribute to Sister Norma Pimentel 421 12th Street

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: McAllen Street Art
Where: Downtown McAllen and outward
When: Primarily Ongoing
Hours: No curfew

McAllen Street Art

Some of McAllen's urban street areas gain human warmth with art.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

With COVID19 still discouraging indoor exhibitions, a tour of local public art seems in order. Ten murals were listed on Explore McAllen's website as "must see." So I did, and found myself questioning the City's selections. There is much more out there. As street art breathes life into walls, passersby should be moved to reflect on what they see. Sponsored through business interests or created as personal expression, street art reveals the vibe of its community. What concerns does our community have? What is its state of mind?

Street art abounds in the South 17th street area starting at Brujeria Ultra Discotheque, 101 S. 17th. Street art must be coherent to be an effective tool for inspiring, energizing, or motivating. "#MuralOn17th" is comprised of five visually unrelated sections by a group called The Network Crew and appears to promote McAllen, but the individual images carry different conversations. Each section feels like it originated separately as a smaller artwork for an indoor business location and was just enlarged to fit the larger scale. The Chamber of Commerce website recommends this mural for visitors' Instagram opportunities, so there you go. Its lack of visual unity discourages the fuller emotional effect expected from a municipal theme. But sightings quickly got better. On the opposite wall, a "Tribute to Kobe and Gianna Bryant" by Alexander Gonzalez has a sincere impact, and at 311 S. Bicentennial Blvd, "Wakanda Forever" memorializes the late Chadwick Boseman as superhero Black Panther. Several other works in the downtown area also successfully pay tribute to sports and popular figures.

Law Enforcement has its moment at The Boys and Girls Club on 2620 W. Galveston. This excellent memorial depicts Officer Edelmiro Garza, DPS Trooper Moises Sanchez, and Officer Ismael Chavez - three local law enforcement officers who were killed in the line of duty within a two-month span.

On 16th at Chicago four works speak of human emotions and demonstrate the importance of street art placement. Located about mid-block – this is an alley – is a panel portraying a large pair of luscious lips. Glossed in candy colors that meticulously drip from alluded passion, they are seductively open. Filling a space between two walls, with blue skies and palm trees on the other side, this struck me as a more engaging welcome to McAllen than “#MuralOn17th” work. Fine linear embellishment links this street artist to other works in the area. Across the street, “Scram”, a humorously aggressive pop image rising from a low vantage point, is its counterpart. Opposite, as if taking the command seriously, a Dali-inspired face directs a fearful glance at Chicago street. Another painting in this area consists of text and imagery; text beginning with “What is Love Baby Don’t Hurt Me” continues and surrounds a figure supporting a boom box; what may seem the plea of a wounded lover, the head is round and bears the coloration of the planet earth. An ecological statement? Perhaps the news casts are just too hard to deal with? It offers another positive aspect about street art: as it breathes life into its wall, it stimulates conversation among the community. Passersby are persuaded to reflect on what they see and become aware of what’s going on.

As a voice for political engagement, there is a tribute to Sister Norma Pimentel at 421 S. 12th. Sponsored by the Law Offices of Alex Martinez, Sister Norma Pimentel and President Trump face off, the latter appearing to threaten by pointing his small finger. He is grouped next to caged children and a weeping Lady Liberty; immigrating children run from him into the Sister’s arms. She is shown flanked by a symbol of the Catholic faith.

Even without an overt political message, street art is still inherently politically charged because the work protests the privatization of the public environment. The mere act of creating street art already has an effect on the world we live in. In contrast to traditional art, which can stimulate us to think about the world, street art takes it one step further by actually inserting the art into our world. It might seem very obvious, but it’s worth mentioning that by placing works of art in the street or other public areas, street art changes the streets we live in. Street art literally changes our world.

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