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## MetroRail commissions art for new light-rail stations

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Southwest Glass employee Stan Kincannon of Cleveland works on the display of artwork by Dixie Friend Gay at the Burnett Station on Metro's Northline light rail Wednesday, Aug. 7, 2013, in Houston. (Melissa ...

Photo: Melissa Phillip, Staff

A pleasant breeze wafted high above the industrial landscape just north of downtown Wednesday on the platform where MetroRail's Burnett Transit Center has taken shape.

From this almost otherworldly concrete perch, with its gleaming white canopy of curved steel and glass, the skyline glimmered through a veil of colorful blooming coral vine, cypress vine and passion vine.



No gardening was to be done, however. The plants appear on panels by Dixie Friend Gay, one of 22 artists commissioned by MetroRail's Arts in Transit program. Gay, who also has done an installation featuring a flock of oversized butterflies for another station, said she chose vines because they were an organic reflection of the many man-made veins - a tangle of railroad tracks, freeways and city streets - below the station.

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Along all three of Metro's new lines, artists are creating a vibrant sense of place, cultural diversity and community with installations digitally printed and encased in the glass wind screens at the center of each station. Under less enlightened circumstances, that space could easily have been plastered with advertising.

It may be art, but it has a practical application, too.

"Most studies find that when art is present it functions as graffiti abatement," said Sara Kellner, the Houston consultant who manages the Arts in Transit program.

She has worked on the project since its inception in 2006, leading a meticulous selection process that involved people in each community served by the new lines as well as nationally recognized art experts, Metro staff and elected officials. On the platform below each panel, another art element in Lithocrete, a glass-concrete aggregate, reflects the work above.

"We did our absolute, dead-level best to make sure the community could be very engaged in the process," Kellner said. "Ultimately, everybody wanted high quality."

People also wanted images of nature. Harrisburg Avenue, where the East End Line runs, was once shaded by magnolia trees; so some in that community wanted to see magnolias. In other areas, they wanted to honor cultural heritage or history. A little of all of that is in store.

## ***Preview of installations***

The public will be able to see the result in December, when the North Line opens, extending MetroRail's existing Red Line 5.3 miles. It will have eight stations between the University of Houston-Downtown and the Northline Transit Center.

Next year, the East End Line will extend the show with nine stations from downtown to the Magnolia Park Transit Center, and the Southeast Line will have 11 stations between downtown and the Palm Center Transit Center.

An exhibit opening Thursday at Architecture Center Houston offers a preview of each installation, plus images of three new sculptures - by Houston artists Paul Kittelson, Jesse Lott and Floyd Newsum - that are also part of the program. Renderings of each station, along with artists' statements, can also be found posted online at [www.ridemetro.org](http://www.ridemetro.org).

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## More Information

A Study in Glass and Steel: Art on the Rails

When: Opens 5:30 p.m. Thursday; continues 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays and 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Fridays, through Sept. 20

Where: Architecture Center Houston, 315 Capitol, Suite 120. Parking is available at Hobby Center Garage.

Admission: Free; 713-520-0155, [www.aiahouston.org](http://www.aiahouston.org) or [www.ridemetro.org](http://www.ridemetro.org)

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On Wednesday, Kellner and Metro spokeswoman Margaret O'Brien-Molina checked out panels that were recently been installed along the North Line. The project's artists have unearthed a lot of forgotten history, with a big assist from members of the community who supplied resources and stories, Kellner said.

The north side has always been a place where immigrants came to Houston. A century ago they were European. More recently, they've been from Africa and South America.

### ***'A big team of heroes'***

Artist Leticia Huerta found commonalities between all those cultures in textile designs, the theme for her installation at the Melbourne Station. She also created the blue tile-inspired panels at the Quitman station that convey a message about the value of education.

"Oh, these look good!" Kellner said when she saw Rolando Briseño's portraits at the North Line terminus, a few blocks north of Crosstimbers.

Each of Briseño's panels features a significant character in the neighborhood's history - ranging from Tejano icon Lydia Mendoza to Medal of Honor recipients, educators, doctors and judges.

"The artists have been amazing - super troupers. It's unusual for most of them to be involved in projects for so long. A lot of them had not done public art, and none of them had done transportation before," Kellner said.

"For me, the real community heroes are the people who pulled this off - including the staff at Metro, public officials, community volunteers, artists and all the guys working out there in 97-degree heat to install it," she said. "It's a big team of heroes."

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