

New public art in Houston brings cheer to a somber year

You can now take a gander to see 'Meander' and 'Yellow Glow'



Molly Glentzer | December 15, 2020 Updated: December 21, 2020, 11:22 am



A cyclist rides on the White Oak trail through Francesca Fuchs' "Yellow Glow," an artwork commissioned by the MKT developers for the underpass at N. Shepherd and 6th Street.

Photo: Marie D. De Jesús, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer



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Public art serves many good purposes, but heading into a somber winter, projects that lift moods are especially welcome.

Francesca Fuchs' "Yellow Glow" and Falon Mihalic's "Meander" cheer up those who encounter them while mirroring the landscape in intriguing ways. Unrelated yet complementary, both new works also embrace Houston's relationship with concrete and can be seen during a bike ride or a hike around the Heights and downtown.

Fuchs' "Yellow Glow" turns the underside of the North Shepherd overpass between 6th and 7th streets into a refined environment of columns with bands of soft yellow paint that fade to gray at the top and bottom. They suggest that bright sunlight might somehow have found its way into that drab space, washing the columns with an elusive flash of light. Commissioned by Radom Capital and Triten Real Estate Partners, the developers of the adjacent M-K-T retail center, "Yellow Glow" is a gift to the city along the Heights Hike and Bike Trail.

Fuchs, who leads the painting program at the Glassell School of Art, primarily produces delicately hued, small-scale canvases of domestic objects. This is her second monumental outdoor work. The first, a mural, created a subtle trompe l'oeil effect of imaginary columns on the facade of Lawndale Art Center in 2018. "Yellow Glow" is painting-as-sculpture, playing with three-dimensional perspective in ways that make me wish every underpass in town could be so transformed.

In some ways, it started with the gray base. Fuchs appreciates the various tones of gray authorities use to cover graffiti that appears on the columns supporting Houston's vast system of freeways. And most people think of the columns vertically, she adds. "I wanted to go horizontal and make it so they're somehow dissolving."

Street art, while colorful, also tends to look chaotic. Fuchs' project is timelessly meditative. She liked the idea of creating public art during the time of COVID-19 and applied for the MKT project because she wanted to make a big gesture outside instead of small pieces in the studio.

The scale of "Yellow Glow" is larger than anything she's done, including the Lawndale mural. But as with her small paintings, Fuchs still aimed for a simplicity of means. "I'm just doing this through color," she says, "but the subtlety of what's happening will be experienced differently from different directions.

A crew with a lift gave the columns a base coat of a very particular shade of custom gray that extends from the ground to the beams. Fuchs based the gray on the natural color of the columns but did a lot of testing in her studio to achieve a certain "shift" that creates subtle variations as daylight changes. She and an assistant rolled on the bands of yellow, then brushed in the fading effect.

More Information

"Yellow Glow" fills the underpass at N. Shepherd and 6th at the Heights Hike and Bike Trail, near the M-K-T retail development. To see it by car, exit 6th going north on Shepherd.

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"It's quite painterly at the end of the day," Fuchs says. She starts to call herself "the lady of the invisible," then thinks better of it. But she does want to catch viewers a bit unaware. "I enjoy my pieces not being overt," she says. You have to be there and say, 'Is this something?' and then, 'Oh, this is something.'"