



South Florida Outings: Clematis Street Murals in West Palm Beach

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

There is a serious affair with art going on along a few blocks of Clematis Street in downtown West Palm Beach. Right next door to a landmark indoor mural at a police station, another mural adorns a construction site for a new train line primed for art, and beyond that there's an empty lot that is blowing up with installations.

A Canvas ahead of Its Time at Police Headquarters

Muralist Andrew Reid got the jump on the current South Florida mural craze a long time ago, preceding Miami's [Wynwood Walls](#) and West Palm Beach's [CANVAS](#) Mural Project project by a good 20 years with his indoor mural at the West Palm Beach Police headquarters.

With major commissions he painted in the 1990s still up in various restaurants, stores, and buildings, the New Zealand-born Reid continues to produce and propose radical new designs for public and private spaces.

Spanning the block between Clematis and Banyan, the West Palm Beach police station sports a grand mural Reid executed in 1995. He tagged along with officers and learned about the different jobs and division of labor in the department before designing the large work, which he painted on canvas in his studio and then installed in the station's lobby.



Mural by Andrew Reid at West Palm Beach Police Station.



Detail of Andrew Reid Mural at West Palm Beach Police Station.

Clear influences for his work include [WPA murals](#) of the 1930s that present an exhaustive narrative, as well as [Thomas Hart Benton](#), Russian propaganda muralists, [Picasso](#) and [Diego Rivera](#).

“Propaganda—both good and bad—started with muralists around the world,” [Reid](#) said during an April 2016 interview at his Little River, Miami studio. “It’s meant to tell a story with a certain point of view. I get very involved with the community when I do these murals and by the time I start there is only one truth.”



Andrew Reid with his mural at West Palm Beach Police Station.

The Clematis Street police station mural shows male and female, black and white officers, police dogs, officers at desks, a grinning child doffing an officer’s cap, and even officers on an airboat, one of the signature Floridian forms of police transport.

Reid currently has another mural proposal in the works for the police station: a radiating mandala shape studded with police emblems with a defiant fist clutching a badge in the center.



Proposal for new WPB Police Station Mural by Andrew Reid.

Mural by Smog Adorns Brightline Site

The new and still under construction Brightline Train Service unveiled a new outdoor mural early this year created by local West Palm Beach street artist Smog. Located on the 500 block of Clematis Street outside the Brightline construction site, the mural was curated by the creator of the CANVAS project, Nicole Henry of [Nicole Henry Fine Art](#).

The mural was unveiled in January 2016 as part of Art Palm Beach Week at an event attended by West Palm Beach Mayor Jeri Muoio and other city officials.



Brightline Train Station Mural by Smog.

The 24-foot long mural depicts a woman train passenger looking out the window at a man with a

bouquet who is eagerly awaiting her arrival as another Brightline train passes. The artwork symbolizes the personal connections that the Brightline service will make possible. The vibrant and colorful piece adorns the fence around the station construction site.

“Led by the Downtown Development Authority and the Art in Public Places program, art has become such an iconic element of West Palm Beach,” Julie Edwards, Brightline’s chief marketing officer, noted in a [press release](#) that has been posted to the [Brightline website](#). “We wanted to help support the arts community and add to the collection of amazing and creative outdoor artwork. While our station is under construction, we are so pleased to bring this incredible new visually appealing addition to Downtown.”

Smog, who has been painting since the age of 12, is known for his own style of photorealism and use of illusions and 3D characters.

“It’s an honor to be the first artist selected by Brightline,” Smog was quoted as saying in the same press release. “I am so glad they are giving me—a local artist—the opportunity to display my art. I was inspired by the connections that Brightline will help people make.”

Scheduled to open in 2017, the Brightline West Palm Beach train station will serve as a transportation hub for the community with express train service initially connecting West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami. Future planned expansion will connect Brightline to Orlando.

With an eye to adding more artistic flair to the new rail line, conceptual designs for train cars have been unveiled. The initial concept calls for silver trains accented in red, orange, green, blue and pink. The [designs and branding](#) were conceived by New York’s [Rockwell Group](#), headed by architect David Rockwell.



Brightline Trains by Rockwell Group, NY.

Art Lot Murals With Swings and Snails

Also on Clematis Street near Rosemary Avenue, there’s a happening little, formerly empty lot owned by billionaire West Palm Beach developer Jeff Greene.

The lot was unused for years while the street it’s on became a destination for pop-up art galleries, craft cocktail joints and a lone, long-running rock club, Respectable Street Café. The lot’s status changed when the artist Emo, aka [Eduardo Mendiata](#), painted a mural along one wall, a free flowing landscape graphic with swirling trees and bold graphic lines.



Clematis Street Mural by Emo.

Originally from Union City, New Jersey, Eduardo Mendieta has been living in West Palm Beach for the last 20 years. Starting at a young age he was interested in both graffiti and the fine arts. Now 40, he has been showing in various locations throughout South Florida, and has been featured in such publications as Palm Beach Times, FreePress Magazine, and Closer Magazine.

In work on view throughout South Florida, Mendieta reveals a consistently flowing graphic style, rich with bold strokes and washes of color. He has also contributed a mural to the stairwell at the Banyan Street parking garage.

Then last fall Sybille Welter, the [Art in Public Places](#) coordinator for the City of West Palm Beach, took notice of the lot.

"I had my eye on the empty lot on Clematis that is owned by Jeff Greene," Welter said in a March 2016 interview at Cabo Flats restaurant in West Palm Beach, where some of Mendieta's paintings were on view. "I wanted to put something there to draw people to that interesting block. It's not near the water but there's something definitely happening there."

"I had a project coming to town called *Musical Swings* where a giant swing set produces different notes when you swing on it and I knew it would be perfect for the site," she continued. "The piece is by an artist collective and had already gotten a Knight Foundation grant, then Art in Public Places kicked in some money and we got help from the Downtown Development Authority."



"Musical Swings" in the Art Lot.

"The lot had been sitting empty for years," she said. "The artist Emo had already painted a mural on one wall, an abstract landscape, then he added more to it to complete the three sides. It's been a real success, a cheery, interactive piece that has been drawing all ages."

The Swings departed after a few months, then a giant pop art fiberglass *Big Red Snail* and *Big Fuchsia Rabbit* by Cracking Art Group moved in courtesy of Paul Fisher of [Paul Fisher Gallery](#). The critters are selfie heaven for passersby.

What comes next is not known at this point, but the lot has become a main attraction that people cruise by frequently, just to see what weird and wonderful thing might be there.



"Big Red Snail" by Cracking Art Group in Clematis Art Lot.

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