



# Street Art Murals & Graffiti History are Muse for Three Hamptons Photographers

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by Pat Rogers

Catching the making of a street art mural can be a rare occurrence. Three Hamptons photographers were given such a chance when they were invited to witness and document a group of street artists painting murals on an enclosed rooftop of a building in New York City, owned by a graffiti collector.

Instead of making photographs of artists welding spray cans, each of the trio created photography or photo art mixing the experience with the street art created. Also couching their photography within a historical aspect of graffiti, Guy Pierno, Ann Brandeis and Kat O'Neill each created a body of work that reveals something unique about street art tradition through photography uniquely their own.

Taking up the cry that graffiti is fine art and not vandalism, the three photographers are presented their work, along with art made by street artists [CES](#) and [YES2](#), at the White Room Gallery in Bridgehampton. "Up on the Roof" is on view from April 2 - 24, 2016. CES and YES2 were two of the street artists invited to make art on the NYC rooftop. The exhibition also includes documentary footage of the process presented as video art. During the opening reception, [CES](#) and [YES2](#) created new pieces live on canvas and surfboards that became part of the exhibition.

## Guy Pierno

Photography by Guy Pierno is the most traditional of the trio, meaning his eye was attracted to make images that put the murals front and center of his compositions. Combined with architectural details the artist reacted to in making his murals, Pierno's photographs capture the subtle choices made as street artists incorporate the specifics of the arena they are making their outdoor paintings. For instance, in one photograph, Pierno captured the roll of the roof as it merged with the half-wall to highlight the way the paint makes use of the uneven surface to appeal seamless in the mural's composition. In other photographs, Pierno included lines of windows that create a linear top for the mural below. His compositions also sought to capture the distinctive visual language used by graffiti artists. This could mean the bubbles made by the artists as background for the main composition or other distinctive styles of the artist or the street art tradition.

"I tried to be as realistic as possible to capture the wind, sand and water that these guys are going up against," he said during an interview at the gallery. "I wanted to capture their talent. What you see right now, it will never look like this again. The weather changes everything."

Pierno created his photographs using a wide-angle lens to create landscape-long images to simulate traditional street art murals painted on subway cars, train tressels and long brick walls.

Using a Rolleiflex to make medium format slides allowed him to capture the depth of the saturated color and the vibrancy of the murals created on the rooftop, he said. In making his compositions, he also sought to impart some of the fun the artists had making the work. For instance, he framed one mural to visually capture and compliment the phrase “Summer fun...”



“Crash Daze by CES” by Guy Pierno. Photography, limited edition, 24 x 64 inches.



“Summer Fun Cartoon Man YES2” by Guy Pierno.

## Kat O’Neill

Photographer Kat O’Neill took a different tack when making her images. After photographing the murals thoroughly, she collaged details of the street art or images of murals in their entries with images that channel the ways graffiti has made its way into pop culture such as clothing design and fashion advertisements. In one work, *Subway Style 1*, O’Neill includes graffiti history through the collaging of tagged trains with long horizontal presentations of her photography.

Other works are presented as broken circles with distinctive zig zags dividing the frameless work set on metal. Often accented with painted circles (to conjure the shape of spray can and sometimes images of spray cans themselves), the circular works accentuate the vivid colors, lines, patterns and writing O’Neill captured with her lens.

Along with creating compositions that reverberate with color and pattern, narration has a strong presence in O’Neill’s work. She is a storyteller (produced playwright and fiction writer) and the photographs on view vibrate with implied stories or those waiting to happen. Some of her photo works borrow a page from text art through their bold titles: *You Should Have Tried Harder* requires no further explanation for the sultry look in the model’s eyes as she gazes boldly back at the viewer. Her body is partially secreted by a horizontal bar filled with excerpts from street art, casting a fashion ad look to the work.



“Subway Style 1” by Kat O’Neill. Mixed Media, 30 x 10 inches. Limited Edition on metal.



“Life Iz Art” by Kat O’Neill. Photography printed on metal, 30” round.



“You should have tried harder” by Kat O’Neill. 24 x 20 inches. Limited Edition on metal.

## Ann Brandeis

Photographer Ann Brandeis weaves narration and fantasy to create worlds that might have been. Her photographs are collaged with digital images to conjure stories capturing different experiences of street art. In *NYC*, Brandeis anchors the composition with a photograph of a street art mural from the rooftop experience but transports the experience to channel the energy and impact street art has when created in a public sphere. In this image, Brandeis highlights the physical features street artists react to when making their work by adding an image of a half wall and open air vista to sandwich the graffiti mural. The image is dominated by the skylight of New York City with a strong dose of fantasy added for atmosphere.

In another work, *The Beginning*, Brandeis portrays the experience of the graffiti artist; in this case writing on trains in a live train station. Making use of imagery of a Paris train station, Brandeis incorporates the murals made on the rooftop collaged onto an image of a moving train with a graffiti artist applying the final touches on a mural unseen by the viewers. Through the use of imaginative storytelling, Brandeis can imply not only the experiences of making graffiti in public but aims to capture something of a subgroup of secreted artists who make work out of the public eye for the sake of expression versus commerce.

In this way, Brandeis also aims to equalize the street art and graffiti art traditions with fine art traditions by revealing some of the ways the genre sprung into existence and evolved. “Some people think graffiti is vandalism but it’s not,” she said during an interview at the gallery. “It’s art and it should be treated as such.”

Brandeis’s art inspired by the rooftop mural experience also aims to grab some of what New York City is like in 2015, when the rooftop mural was made and her photo art series was created. “New York City glows and it’s a place where art is taking place on a roof....It looks like it’s real but not quite,” she said. “I try to play these ideas out in my work and see what might happen.”



“NYC” by Ann Brandeis, 2015. Archival pigment print, 44 x 36 inches.



“The Beginning” by Ann Brandeis. Transfer printed and painted on canvas, 20 x 20 inches.

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**BASIC FACTS:** “Up on the Roof” remains on view through April 24, 2016. The White Room Gallery is located at 2415 Main Street, Bridgehampton, NY 11932. [www.thewhiteroom.gallery](http://www.thewhiteroom.gallery).

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