

# HYPERALLERIC

## SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

### PUBLIC ART TO EASE THE ANXIETY OF WAITING

by Ilana Novick



Marley Freeman, “Venuses Balcony” (2020), installed at Nassau St between Gold Street and Navy Street, Brooklyn (artwork courtesy the artist and Karma, New York; photo by Nicholas Knight)

Installed in over 500 bus shelters and 1,700 wifi kiosks around the five boroughs, Art on the Grid softens, just a little, our long waits, for the bus, for the pandemic to be over.

For the past few months, art, like everything else amid the pandemic, has largely had to be experienced outdoors. Fortunately, the Public Art Fund, always working in public space, was uniquely prepared for this moment. For their exhibition Art on the Grid, 50 artists created work reflecting on the pandemic, the ongoing protests against anti-Black racism, and themes of reconnection and renewal. The curators installed those works in over 500 bus shelters and 1,700 wifi kiosks around the five boroughs, transforming each display into a canvas.

Lingering at a bus stop generally indicates something has failed — my time management, the infrastructure of New York City transit — but I was surprisingly moved by Andrew Kuo’s “Ideal Map of New York City” (2020), which envisions New York not as a grid, but as a series of nested squares, mostly in pastels. Its legend, instead of indicating historical landmarks, pinpoints locations such as “where you can feel safe and be yourself at no emotional cost,” and “where every type of help is available to anyone who wants it.”

On a bus shelter near Cadman Plaza, the usual travel posters and ads for oat milk gave up their real estate to a person in a red cowboy hat, with a bob sharp enough to make knives jealous, carrying a lantern. An urban cowboy to light our way through coronavirus? Better. It was a painting, “Untitled” (2020) by Nina Chanel Abney.

Oto Gillen's "Path, July 22, 2019," (2020), is either the opening to a leafy cave, a portal to a new dimension, or perhaps just the inside of a tree. Decoding it on Grand Street was remarkably soothing.

*Art on the Grid* also features several artists with newly reopened exhibitions, like Jordan Casteel. I adore her portraits, but if you're not ready to head back to a museum, you can improve your bus waiting experience with her portrait, "Minnesota" (2020), pictured here in Williamsburg. The subject's eyes are hidden with a hat, but his concentration is palpable, his hunched position so familiar I felt a sympathetic back ache.

The exhibition is set to end on September 20, just as museums are beginning to reopen. I wish it would stick around. The work softens, just a little, our long waits, for the bus, for the pandemic to be over.

*Public Art Fund's 50 Artists: Art on the Grid continues through September 20 across the five boroughs. The exhibition was curated by Nicholas Baume, Daniel S. Palmer, and Katerina Stathopoulou.*