



OUTDOOR RENAISSANCE

FOR ONE OF THE BEST FREE ART SHOWS IN THE WORLD, ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS LOOK UP.
BY SHIRA LEVINE

While strolling the industrial-hip streets of Oahu's Kaka'ako District in search of a cup of coffee, I come upon a familiar face and stop in my tracks. Before me is a portrait of a man, classic but for the fact that the magnificent painting stretches across the entire facade of a building on the unassuming corner of Ward Avenue and Kapiolani. I learn later that it's titled *Hapa*, which in Hawaiian means "part" and refers to anyone with a mixed ethnic background. The artist, Kamea Hadar, is an Israeli/Japanese painter raised in Hawaii and schooled in Paris at the Sorbonne. The *hapa* man is President Barack Obama (who went to high school just three miles from this very location).

"President Obama is a symbol of someone who is *hapa*; he represents the philosophy and the beauty of not only being mixed race, but promoting racial equality," says Hadar, also a co-creator of the annual international public art event Pow!Wow! "Public art is as important as a project that hangs in a museum for hundreds of years. Art can be impermanent and still important. We don't need to hold on to it forever. The sun damages public art; it fades. When people realize that they start to pay attention."

Corporate, government and nonprofit-sponsored urban frescoes are frequently commissioned to fine artists. Post-industrial cities like Detroit, Baltimore and Pittsburgh are home to murals spon-

sored by banks and retail chains aiming to brighten neighborhood blight through local art and culture. Not that the clandestine installation of self-expression has ceased. The work of Shepard Fairey and Brazilian twins Os Gemeos couldn't be so commonly appreciated without the (in their time) renegade installations by Keith Haring, Kobra and JR, who then paved the way for Swoon and Banksy. Commissioned or not, art in public spaces often challenges, enlightens and reflects counterculture ideas and emotions, giving voice to the ignored, illustrating history and tradition, and inspiring conversation among community members and tourists alike.

"Works that exist outside the traditional museum context are no longer precious, contained, bound by the space of the museum or the physicality of the frame," says Lizzy Dastin of the Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles. "They become a natural extension of everyday life, rather than a cultural break from it. This physical accessibility regarding space is attractive. Street art is becoming more participatory. The

artists themselves are accessible on social media, giving viewers the opportunity to engage with them directly."

Our favorite destinations for haute graffiti? New York City never disappoints. Urban art aficionados also treasure Philadelphia, the birthplace

of outdoor expression. San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New Orleans, Seattle, DC and Austin are also home to some spectacular curbside fine art—worthy of attention beyond an Instagram selfie, and free to discover solo, with the help of an app, or, in some communities, on guided walking and biking tours.

From top: Mural by Os Gemeos on the Bowery in NYC. LA street scene. Artwork in Valparaíso, Chile.

