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# A Kaleidoscope of Hidden Worlds

Fullerton and Lake Shore Drive



Renee Robbins design for the Fullerton Underpass.

CHICAGO (July - August 2017) In collaboration with the Chicago Public Art Group, Chicago-based artist Renee Robbins is transforming the pedestrian underpass at Fullerton and Lake Shore Drive with two monumental murals, each 14 feet tall x 110 feet long. The project, titled ***A Kaleidoscope of Hidden Worlds***, considers the complex relationships between humans, nature, and the cosmos. It's supported through the generosity of Fullerton Mural L3C and residents of Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood.

Moving between the real and imagined, Robbins' work brings together microscopic and telescopic views; she positions hybrid floral and faunal forms within a space that simultaneously evokes the deep sea and the cosmos. By creating associations between things that are seemingly disparate, such as plankton and stars, Robbins' work sparks a curiosity about the universe. Responding to biodiversity, her art suggests our place within the natural world while creating a sense of wonder for all living things.

Inspiration for this site-specific work involved research on the local ecology. Themes include the symbiotic relationships between species as well as camouflage behaviors inform the design. The composition's sense of movement draws from cycles in nature, such as growth and decay, changing seasons, and rising and receding tides. Design motifs were inspired by spirals, which

repeat in different natural systems, including DNA helixes, flower structures, hurricanes, and galaxies. Robbins' use of wave patterns mimics those present in water, light, and planetary motion. The artist's layering of numerous extraordinary worlds—often hidden from view—encourages viewers to take a closer look at their surroundings.

The South Wall composition moves from micro to macro as pedestrians travel from west to east through the underpass. It begins with neutrinos or subatomic particles and then layers molecular diagrams of the colors Cadmium Red, Cadmium Yellow, and Ultramarine Blue. The scale increases with patterns derived from diatoms and microscopic images of butterfly wings. Weaving in and out of the composition are trails of different species of fireflies, all flirting for attention in a dazzling spectacle. At the end of the centrally placed forest image, the composition zooms out to the cosmos with a large circular shape set amidst the celestial whirlpool. Forms in the work can be viewed as multiple things, giving a sense of the familiar but also creating mystery through abstraction.

The parade of images on the North Wall envisions the world underneath Lake Michigan just out of reach. In a similar way to the South Wall, the scale of the composition moves from small to large as pedestrians walk through the underpass toward the lake. Many of the shapes and patterns are inspired by local aquatic species that inhabit the unique ecosystem around Chicago's Morgan Shoal, a geological area containing the remnants of a reef and also the site of the 1914 *Silver Spray* shipwreck—a former passenger vessel, which is the same length as the mural walls. The painting considers the past, present, and future of our local ecology and offers a kaleidoscope of biodiversity. You can see Robbins and her team in action, painting the mural, from July to August 2017 with a mural reveal date to be announced toward the end of August.

**Renee Robbins** is a Chicago-based visual artist who layers biomorphic forms to create detailed otherworldly environments. Her mural in downtown Chicago, "X Marks the Milky Way", is featured in the Wabash Arts Corridor. She has exhibited widely, including exhibitions at Lois Lambert Gallery, Santa Monica, CA; Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, IL; Firecat Projects, Chicago, IL; and the Alden B Dow Museum of Science and Art, Midland, MI. The Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago will host a solo exhibit of her paintings in 2018. Robbins received her MFA from Michigan State University and has been working in Chicago since 2007. [renerobbins.com](http://renerobbins.com)

**Chicago Public Art Group** is an internationally recognized coalition of professional artists working to produce high quality public artwork with community involvement. The artists create mosaics, sculptures, murals, and park designs. For the past half century, CPAG has produced nearly 900 projects throughout the Chicagoland area. [www.chicagopublicartgroup.org/](http://www.chicagopublicartgroup.org/)



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