

VENICE SELF GUIDED WALKING TOUR OF MURALS AND PUBLIC ART

This self-guided walking tour includes almost two dozen murals, historic and modern architecture and contemporary and controversial public art. Covering approximately three miles, the tour is on level ground and is wheelchair and stroller accessible. Suggested time: a leisurely three hours.

An abbreviated tour with half the walking is possible, using bus part way each way (note instructions). Free parking is available at SPARC (Social and Public Art Resource Center), 685 Venice Boulevard (310-822-9560). The tour can also be done by bicycle or roller-skates. Bicycles and skates can be rented at the beach. This tour can be taken any day of the year. Note, however, that SPARC and the VENICE POST OFFICE with its historic mural showing Abbot Kinney, founder of Venice and his dream city Venice-of-America, are both closed on Sunday.

Begin your tour at SPARC, an historic art deco building erected in 1929 and once used as the Venice Police Station and City Jail. Enter SPARC (M-F, 10-5; Sat, 10-4) and visit the unique gallery converted from an original cellblock. Before leaving, stop in to see the folklore shop.

Leaving SPARC, turn left. Around the corner of the building are two frescoes. Unlike most murals, frescoes are painted directly into wet plaster, the ancient technique used by Michelangelo and Da Vinci, and revived in the 20th Century by the Mexican mural masters. The street-facing mural, *The Fifth Sun, El Quinto Sol* is public art in the life of the city. The parking lot-facing mural, *City of Angels* is by the fresco workshop that Vigil led in the summer of 1992.

Step next door to your right when leaving SPARC's front door, to the Mission-style building, once Venice City Hall and now BEYOND BAROQUE. A center for literary and performing arts, poetry readings and special events, BEYOND BAROQUE also houses a unique bookstore with small press editions, used books, and other information of literary interest. There is a small gallery upstairs (T-F, 10-5, Sat, 12-5).

Leave BEYOND BAROQUE. If you wish to take a bus at this point, the stop for RTD #33 is just a few steps west (the direction you are heading after leaving SPARC) on Venice Boulevard. Or you may wish to walk west on Venice Boulevard to the next bus stop at the corner of Abbot Kinney Boulevard if you want to see Tokyo Station, described below. The #33 bus will let you off at the traffic circle by the VENICE POST OFFICE, where you will resume the walking tour.

By foot, turn right out of BEYOND BAROQUE, heading west toward the ocean along Venice Boulevard. The first traffic light you come to is Abbot Kinney Boulevard. Turn right onto Abbot Kinney Boulevard. On your right side, set in from the boulevard behind building # 1639, you will see TOKYO STATION with its Japanese-style roof. Since this is now a private dwelling, simply notice the building's exterior. The station got its amusing name because it was built so distant from the existing city that residents said it was "almost as far away as Tokyo."

Back on Venice Boulevard, one block past Abbot Kinney Boulevard, veer right on Grand Boulevard. This street was the original "Grand Canal", one of Venice's original seven miles of canals which you will see depicted in the mural in the VENICE POST OFFICE. Along Grand Boulevard note the many cottages. These were summer residences in Venice's heyday, also visible in the POST OFFICE mural. At #517 Grand Boulevard note the folk art installation on the front lawn of the "Temple of Wisdom."

Continue on Grand Boulevard to Windward Circle, site of the original outdoor lagoon, the heart of Abbot Kinney's Venice-of-America. The spot where you are standing, the one undeveloped corner now used as a postal annex parking lot, was the site of Abbot Kinney's house. Note that all the streets converging at the lagoon were originally canals. Visualize that there were boats and gondolas on these waterways.

Three buildings of note surround the circle, all designed by architect Steven Ehrlich. Opposite you across the circle is the ACE MARKETPLACE. The pulleys on the facade of the building represent the pulleys on the dredge boats used to dig the canals. Clockwise at the three o'clock position, the three story building with colonnades is the semi-reconstruction of the old Antlers Hotel. Clockwise at eight o'clock is the roller coaster building paying homage to the 1911 "Race through the Clouds," the first roller coaster on the West Coast originally located nearby.

Continuing clockwise stands the VENICE POST OFFICE. Open every day except Sunday, its lobby features a 1941 mural by Edward Biberman entitled *Kinney's Dream*. Abbot Kinney, who made his fortune in cigarettes in the 1870's, founded the city of Venice in 1905 along the Pacific Shore in a swampy area with little population. He originally envisioned his Venice-of-America as a flourishing center for performing arts, educational activities, Italian architecture, and a network of canals recalling European Venice. Biberman's mural depicts amusement concessions (always more popular than the cultural attractions), gondolas, and drilling rigs for the oil that was discovered a number of years after the city was founded. In the mural you will also see some of the summer cottages you passed on Grand Boulevard

Turn left out of the POST OFFICE and lead west toward the ocean on Windward Avenue. Crossing Pacific Avenue, you come to a line of original Venice colonnaded buildings with capitals designed by Italian artist/sculptor Felix Peano, replicating colonnades in Venice, Italy. At #64 Windward Avenue step out into the street to get a better view of the facade, which is the mural *Hi-De-Ho and Penny Lane* by Art Mortimer (1979) depicting a \$64 bill with a street scene. At #52 Windward Avenue you will see the Town House, originally Menotti's Buffet (1915), with the name still visible on the original tile floor. The 1915 murals in the basement depict landscape scenes of early Southern California, including some romanticized canal views.

Across the street at #21 Windward Avenue is the 1904 Venice Beach Hotel, a jazz club now, which in the heyday of the city, was called the St. Charles Hotel. Three murals adorn this building. The *St. Charles Painting* by Terry Schoonhoven (1978) on the east side is a mirror reflection of Windward Avenue toward Pacific Avenue. *Lost Art* by Rip Cronk (1990) on the facade is a trompe l'oeil that includes arches, windows, and bricks. Notice the lady in the upper floor window. Most visitors to Venice walk right by this mural without ever noticing it. On the hotel's west wall is Rip Cronk's *Venice Reconstituted* (1989), a parody of Botticelli. This mural shows Ocean Front Walk with familiar locals such as turbaned roller-skating musician Harry Perry, sidewalk pianist Berry "The Lion" Gordon, the artist himself on the gold wall, and the controversial Aztec Indian boy - controversial because it was the Gabrielino Indians who were native to this area, not Aztecs. This mural, sponsored by SPARC, appeared in Steve Martin's film "L.A. Story" and in the movie "White Men Can't Jump." As you continue your tour up Ocean Front Walk keep your eye out for turbaned Harry Perry who is frequently seen skating along the walk with his electronic guitar.

You are now standing on Speedway. From here you can look south and see *Morning Shot*, the blue mural of the Doors' rock star Jim Morrison, painted by Rip Cronk in 1991.

From the hotel, turn north on Ocean Front Walk (ocean to your left, East Coasters!). Two blocks north, turn right onto Horizon Avenue to see the mural on the north wall of the SIDEWALK CAFE by Scott Dosch (1990). Sidewalk Cafe depicts the typical activity inside this historic and very popular eating establishment.

One block further, at Westminster Avenue, look north for a good view of Venice Beach, another mural by Rip Cronk (1990) on the south-facing wall of the tall Beach House Building. In this trompe l'oeil painting the artist is spray-painting Venice across the sky.

At the next corner, Clubhouse Avenue, you see two murals side-by-side, both by Rip Cronk. *Rip Tide* on the left and *Ocean Swell* on the right (both 1990) are photorealistic depictions of waves and whitecaps,

the latter accented with red and gold motifs. Behind you, on the north-facing wall of Clubhouse Avenue, is *A Forest Scene* by Scott Dosch (1992). Painted entirely with spray cans, this somber scene of a grove of trees was sponsored by the Venice Beach Artist Fellowship.

At the next corner, Wavecrest Avenue, enjoy the mural on the north-facing wall of the tall BEACH HOUSE BUILDING. This Rip Cronk painting, *Homage to a Starry Night* (1990) is a tribute to Vincent van Gogh, made to resemble his painting "Starry Night".

Two blocks north, at #909 Ocean Front Walk, you will see the remaining portion of a classical view of the Santa Monica Bay by Terry Schoonhoven (1988) in *Landscape with Musicians*. Here, as with many other outdoor murals, life span is often cut short due to fading from the sun, erosion by natural elements, graffiti, or building alteration/demolition.

For a brief side trip, turn right and walk east to #17 Brooks Avenue. Here you will find the *Samson* mural by Tracy Lee and Arnold Vest (1991), commissioned by the owner of the building at the time the USSR was dissolving and major global transformations were occurring. On the other side of the street, at #26 Brooks Avenue, you will see two older pop art murals which mirror another mural at #48 Brooks Avenue up the block. This is a unique example of a single mural concept spread out over three walls several buildings apart.

At # 801 Ocean Front Walk, a block north at Park Avenue, *Endangered Species*, a SPARC sponsored mural by Emily Winters (1990), depicts the Venice Beach community and raises the issue of the misuse of technology.

Continue north on Ocean Front Walk. Past Paloma Avenue, you will see Charlie Chaplin's Gingerbread Court (1913). No one knows why it is called after the famous silent film star because he never lived in Venice. What is known is that his first movie "Kid Auto Races at Venice," was filmed in Venice in 1914.

Continue north three blocks to # 201 Ocean Front Walk. Here, at the corner of Ozone Avenue, you will find the ISRAEL LEVIN SENIOR ADULT CENTER. On its walls is the SPARC mural *Marc Chagall Comes to Venice Beach* by Christina Schlesinger (1991). This painting pays tribute to the Eastern European shtetl culture celebrated in Chagall's paintings, while acknowledging Jewish contribution to Los Angeles life. The Yiddish poem at the corner was written and translated by Dora Bayrack, a much-published poet who attends the Center. The Hebrew inscription from the Torah at the other end is, fittingly for a senior center, the fifth commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother."

Walk east on Ozone Avenue. When you reach Pacific Avenue, turn left and walk one block north to Navy Avenue where you turn right. Continue on Navy Avenue and, straight ahead of you on the south side of the street, look up over the parking entrance to see the metal sculpture *Harmonic Arch* by Guy Dill. This sculpture and the building it adorns, the VENICE RENAISSANCE, date from 1989.

Continue to the corner of Main Street and turn right. As you walk south on Main Street, along the VENICE RENAISSANCE, notice the capitals on the columns along the way. These are recreations of Felix Peano's original capitals that you saw on Windward Avenue. At the south corner of the building, perhaps best seen from diagonally across Main Street, is the *Ballerina Clown* by Jonathan Borofsky (1989). This sculpture is unusual, with its continually moving parts, and controversial, for its zany depiction of a ballerina with a male clown head.

You are now standing across the street from the bright red VENICE FIREHOUSE (NE corner of Main Street and Rose Avenue), the original fire company of the Venice/Ocean Park area dating from 1909. You can see the entranceway for the horse-drawn firefighting carriages.

A few steps farther east on Rose Avenue you can view the rose murals at the ROSE CAFE. This site was formerly a Gas Company dispatch office.

Return to Main Street, cross to the west side and head south to see the complex on modern buildings that used to be home to the internationally renowned Chiat/Day advertising office. Venice-based architect Frank Gehry designed the two buildings flanking the three-story *Binoculars* by artist Claes Oldenburg (1991). In the lens of each is a conference room. You may wish to step into the lobby to see the unique security desk which is fashioned from a sprawling natural tree trunk.

One block south, at Sunset Avenue, turn left and see the Earth Crew mural (1991) at Gold's Gym. Be sure to see both the north and south facing walls. Full of evocative imagery, this lively spray-painted mural makes many points. But, overall, it is an urgent plea to respect Mother Nature. Return to Main Street. If you would like to end your walking tour here, you can board RTD#33 on the west side of Main Street heading south, which continues down Venice Boulevard and back to SPARC.