

When it comes to traveling, I can be an extreme *locavore*. I crave works by local authors, I seek regional folklore, and I hit the streets for everything from food to art.

Yes, art. Some cities have great street art. There's the transient kind: chalk art on Paris pavements. There's the illegal kind: tagging in Chicago. And there's the illegal kind that becomes economically as well as visually valuable: Keith Haring's career may have ended with a silver triptych for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, but it started on the city streets and walls.

London's Camden Town Market and one side of Green Park can become ad hoc art galleries, with paintings leaning against walls like young girls at a party, hoping to be asked to dance. Hong Kong's jade market is an indoor bazaar, with cheap trinkets and hand-carved antiques vying for attention. And established art institutions themselves can be fascinating studies. In New York alone, the Guggenheim can command hours of exploration.

But there's another kind of art that happens around the physical art, as spaces reveal secrets not only about their cities, but also their people. What you think of the Louvre's glass pyramid is one thing; watching visitors interact with it is something else entirely.

The best time to observe this is after hours, when the school groups have gone home and folks are feeling sociable and relaxed. For years now, museums have had late-night

openings. As part of its "Phillips After 5" program, the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, offers live jazz. And neighborhood art walks are becoming more common, too. Want to see a Los Angeleno enjoying an out-of-car view of his city? Join him on LA's Downtown Art Walk.

While Kansas City may not be a huge place, it has too much character—and too much art—to frame in just one walk.

The biggest, most popular and most populated is the First Friday walk in the Crossroads Arts District. It can be a huge social event, especially in nice weather, but don't be intimidated.

In the gravity well of First Fridays, Leedy-Voulkos Art Center (2012 Baltimore Ave.) is the center of the universe, and its gallery director, Holly Swangstu, is its calm heart. An artist herself, Swangstu engages visitors with the gallery's art and with KC's art scene. She doesn't just feel that this is part of her job; she truly loves it. And that's typical of First Friday friendliness—as far from snobbish museum tours as you can get.

If you're not big on crowds, then take a stroll on the smaller side: Art walks are springing up all over. Kansas City, Kansas' art walks, which typically take place on the second Friday of each month, are smaller and more manageable. Even better, the art on display is usually more manageably priced.

Keep an eye on the West Bottoms, Columbus Park and the River Market neighborhoods, too. Many artists and galleries are migrating their studios to the former, and the latter holds Saturday evening "Wine Walks" during warmer months. No matter your chosen loop, sign up for mailings when you find a gallery or artist you like, and let your inbox tell you what's coming up.

Looking for something even more intimate? Kansas City's restaurateurs bring the local to walls as well as tables. Room 39 (1719 W. 39th St., Kansas City; 10561 Mission Road, Leawood) regularly hangs art by regional artists; so does Cafe Trio (4558 Main St.).

The practice adds a certain richness to the *locavore* movement: Eat local. Drink local. View local. And be grateful that you're in a city that's too rich in art to have just one flavor— and wise enough to take it one beautiful day at a time. ■

ESSAY BY SEÁNAN FORBES

"While Kansas City may not be a huge place, it has too much character—and too much art—to frame in just one walk."

