

# FLAUNT

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## A TAP CARD TO THE FUTURE | EMBRACING SOUTH LA'S NEW CRENSHAW CORRIDOR K LINE VIA ART, COMMUNITY, AND A TOUCH OF FASHION

BY MADDIE DINOWITZ



Left to right: Stevan wears **adidas x GUCCI** jacket, shirt, and pants. Sekayi wears **ALEXANDER MCQUEEN** jacket and pants. Expo/Crenshaw Station. *At The Same Time*. Rebeca Méndez. Courtesy Of Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro).

I haven't met a subway I liked, and I haven't met a subway I didn't like; here's to say that commuting often feels like clockwork. When I enter Los Angeles' brand new Metro K Line, though, any of those typical feelings—that unremarkable transience, that isolation—instantly vanish. Metro

Art, Metro's award-winning art program, commissioned 14 artists to create original integrated station artworks that resulted in massive murals that engulf the walls. Powerful photos stretch above the tracks. Spaces typically filled with banal constancy spark curiosity and reflection. I've entered an underground art gallery.

For nearly seven years, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) has been chipping away at its vision to create nice new stations in Los Angeles' Crenshaw District, Inglewood, Westchester (Westchester is part of the City of LA), and surrounding areas. The new K Line will aim to do more than alleviate traffic and drivers alike—this development paints a bigger picture in benefiting South LA communities. Maya Emsden, the Executive Officer who leads the agency's Metro Art department, shares on the scope of this vision with me, urging Angelenos to embrace Metro and tap into the deep culture that exists in the Crenshaw Corridor.

Artworks for the K Line have been commissioned by Metro Art following the recommendation of a panel of curators and art professionals within the Crenshaw community. I had the pleasure of conversing with two artists, Shinique Smith and Rebeca Méndez, who were selected out of thousands of applicants. For Smith—who describes her contribution as “creating moments of utopia from nothing”—the creation of a piece of art within Crenshaw meant bringing the outside in. Quite literally stepping outside of the station and into the community, Smith collected items from the neighborhood: scraps of clothing, bits of a napkin from a local restaurant, a piece of a poster. The artist worked to create a collage that would be later translated into a bold mosaic representing the cultural complexities that lie just above the train tracks. Mirrors are peppered within the mosaic glasswork, allowing riders an opportunity to see themselves within the piece—each individual encouraged to recognize their role in this space.

To honor the station that features her work's namesake, Smith incorporated words from MLK himself. “Once I was allocated to the Martin Luther King Jr. Station, I chose some words from Martin Luther King to employ as the line is the heartbeat that holds all the pieces together,” Smith tells me. “Writing language, mantras, prayer... these words manifest around us all the time. And if they're consciously used, they can affect change. And Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. believed that and achieved that with his words. So, I drew inspiration from his words ‘Only light, only love.’”

As Smith demonstrates, culture and homage to the area are intrinsic to the the K Line's planning and ethos. This saw the teams work alongside LA County to additionally create affordable housing and address displacement within the surrounding area. Directly across the street from the new Fairview Heights Station is a county-owned development with 50 units for those who have recently come out of homelessness, and 51 units for residents earning less than 80% of the area median income. Efforts like these define the Metro of tomorrow, where the physical connectivity of the city is imperative to economic equity.

The work of another commissioned artist, Rebeca Méndez, echoes the Metro K Line mission of inclusion and finding common ground. Méndez shares that as she was seeking out inspiration for her artwork within the Expo/Crenshaw Station, she similarly found herself looking outside the confines of the underground stop—well, she found herself looking up, to be exact. Once exiting each station, Méndez felt drawn to the sky, seeking comfort in the idea that all subway riders could find commonality in being under the same atmosphere.

“No matter how idiosyncratic our neighborhoods are, we share something in common,” says Méndez. The artist explored this idea further; she camped outside on her rooftop, gazing and photographing thousands of shots of the ever-changing sky—what she calls an “emotional timepiece”—researching meanings behind times and dates, immersing herself to fully grasp the intricacies behind our atmosphere. “The more you start looking at the sky,” the artist shares, “the more you start actually seeing the complexity of the multiple kinds of clouds that we get. All of that diversity was there. So it became a metaphor for the diversity of the people in Los Angeles. It is constantly changing, and it’s constantly becoming other.”

Méndez’ process came to life as she strung together atmospheric slices at 15-minute intervals to create a 24-hour time-lapse from morning to night—a translucent blue and white mosaic entitled *At the Same Time*. To supplement the panoramic piece within the station, a second mosaic invites riders to find similitude with another commuter—the Arctic Tern, the longest distance traveling bird in the world. Méndez offers riders a view of celestial sunbeams against a wing of the special creature.

The voices of the Crenshaw community, the people that make up these neighborhoods, have been conjured in these artworks. As the backbone of the the K Line project, this major project not only opens the door to a multitude of urban opportunities, but re-conceptualizes the once colorless experience of riding the metro. Metro acknowledges this is a complex place of movement and purpose—not a museum. These artworks represent the people that make it special, as well as history. They also offer something new each time someone passes, even if it’s only a mere glance while running to catch the next train.





Left to right: D-LO wears **ETRO** coat and pants, **GUIDI** shoes, and **HUBLOT** watch. Sekayi wears **ETRO** top and pants, **SANTONI** shoes, and **HUBLOT** watch. Stevan wears **ETRO** top and pants and **HUBLOT** watch Martin Luther King Jr. Station, *Only Light, Only Love*. Shinique Smith. Courtesy Of Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro).



Martin Luther King Jr. Station, *Only Light, Only Love*. Shinique Smith. Courtesy Of Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro).





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