



Elizabeth "Lee" Kelley (LEFT) in front of Jason Pickleman's *Mont/Rose: Area* in the Brown Line's Montrose Station. BELOW: Jim Bachor's installation in the Thorndale Station.



# Station to Station

THIS SUMMER, ELIZABETH "LEE" KELLEY IS HELPING TRANSFORM THE CTA INTO A CITYWIDE CANVAS FOR LARGE-SCALE PUBLIC ART.

BY BRIAN JUSTICE

Her business card reads "Project Coordinator" for the Chicago Transit Authority, but Elizabeth "Lee" Kelley is actually a doyenne of the city's art scene. An art historian with a master's degree from the University of Chicago and a PhD from the University of Louisville (not to mention an art-savvy spouse in local sculptor Terrence Karpowicz), Kelley is currently managing the CTA's \$3.5 million initiative to increase public art in 15 recently rehabilitated Red Line stations. As she prepares to unveil several of the artworks, Kelley shares with *Michigan Avenue* some of her favorite pieces, her passion for the neighborhoods she's come to know through her work, and the function of public art for the CTA.

"After coming to Chicago to get my master's, I went to Louisville to get my PhD, but I loved the city and wanted to come back and be in a vibrant place to finish researching my dissertation. I also wanted to work first, so I got a job directing an outdoor sculpture exhibition at

Navy Pier. Then I met the director of the city's public art program and said, 'I've been researching my dissertation, and to avoid losing my mind I'd really like to do something. Do you need an intern?'

'I'll work for free.' He hired me for a six-month project. Eventually I got his job and was with the city for 12 years. That's when I first became involved with public art in CTA stations.

"Art on the CTA works differently from other public art in Chicago. It needs to be colorful and lively and perk up the surroundings, and it's intended to enhance the transit experience. Artists must consider the location of the station—the neighborhood, the cityscape, the community it serves, the architecture, and the way people use that station—and the artists' challenge is to represent their personal aesthetic in a very public location and for a very broad audience.

"I used to live in Streeterville and now I'm in Bridgeport, which is emerging as the new hip  
*continued on page 66*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATRINA WITTKAMP (KELLEY)



LEFT: The Bridgeport Art Center's gallery shows work by the more than 100 artists with studios in the building. BELOW: Just a few blocks away, Pleasant House Bakery specializes in savory pies and unique sweets.



*continued from page 64*

place to live or open a business. It has an old-fashioned small-town friendliness, but it's quickly becoming the new artists' community in Chicago, like Bucktown and Wicker Park in the 1990s. And the sounds are magical. Every night I'm lulled to sleep by distant train whistles and in the mornings I wake up to singing birds.

"I really appreciate the **Bridgeport Art Center** on 35th Street. They have outdoor sculpture exhibitions in the east courtyard, and there are more than 100 artist studios. Also, Project Onward is there, which is a studio program for professional artists with mental and developmental disabilities. They host Portrait Slams each month—on-the-spot portraits at ridiculously reasonable prices, starting at \$20. Each artist has an original, intuitive style, and I love talking with the artists as they work.

"**Pleasant House Bakery** is a tiny storefront owned by Art and Chelsea Kalberloh Jackson, classically trained chefs. Art was the chef at Bijan, and they opened this spot that's like Welsh miners' fare: meat pies, bangers and mash, Scotch eggs, and unbelievable fish-and-chips. But my favorite restaurant in the city is **Bruna's**—it's one of the oldest Italian restaurants in Chicago, here since 1933. The décor is cozy and timeless, and there's a portrait of Brunna herself above the door of the dining room. It's like my second kitchen.

"I haven't been in every single CTA station, but almost. One of my favorites is the Brown Line's Montrose Station. The art there is by a local artist, Jason Pickleman. It's titled *Mont/Rose: Area* and it's made up of 318 cast aluminum letters, simultaneously bold and subtle, that use the neighboring street names—broken at odd lengths, stacked, and repeated—to create new word combinations.

"I already knew Lincoln Park, Lincoln Square,

Lakeview, and Rogers Park, and through the Red Line projects I'm getting to know even more neighborhoods, such as Edgewater, Uptown, Chinatown, Bronzeville, Englewood, Roseland, and Austin. There is a fabulous soul food place, **MacArthur's Restaurant**, on West Madison, with amazing fried chicken and peach cobbler. I thought it was my secret, but lo and behold, it's a regular place for President Obama.

"I am fascinated with Theaster Gates's vision and commitment to the Greater Grand Crossing area. **Dorchester Projects** is a cluster of buildings he's transformed into art and community spaces, and it's having a ripple effect on the neighborhood. There are layers of depth, of community organizations and artists, in every neighborhood in Chicago. Theaster exemplifies that.

"Four of the Red Line projects are large-scale marble, glass, and tile installations, and those artists' designs are being translated into mosaics by fabricators in Germany, Mexico, and Canada. Jim Bachor's involves applying those materials to an irregular surface, which is a real challenge. He studied the neighborhood and created an elaborate design that truly represents everything going on there, with detail and a wild sense of humor. That installation, at Thorndale, causes me great panic, and also great feelings of joy.

"The artists have to remember that people will see their work every day for years. These are transit stations. People have to move through quickly and efficiently. The art needs to be appreciated at a glance, but also be greater than the sum of its parts. You have to engage your audience but not compete with way-finding. You don't want people to stop to take a closer look at the art and not find their way to the stairway." **MA**

## LEE'S CHICAGO

*Local places that get Lee Kelley's creative juices flowing.*

### BRIDGEPORT ART CENTER

"The center of the arts community."  
1200 W. 35th St., 773-247-3000;  
bridgeportart.com

### PLEASANT HOUSE BAKERY

"Welsh miners' fare, and unbelievable fish-and-chips."  
964 W. 31st St., 773-523-7437;  
pleasanthousebakery.com

### BRUNA'S

"My favorite restaurant in Chicago—it's like my second kitchen."  
2424 S. Oakley Ave., 773-254-5550;  
brunasristorante.com

### MACARTHUR'S RESTAURANT

"Fabulous soul food."  
5412 W. Madison St., 773-261-2316;  
macarthursrestaurant.com

### THEASTER GATES'S DORCHESTER PROJECTS

"An art and community space that is transforming the neighborhood."  
6900 block of South Dorchester Avenue;  
theastergates.com